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by G. P. R. James**

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HEIDELBERG.

Vol. I.

HEIDELBERG.

A Romance.

BY

G. P. R. JAMES, ESQ.

AUTHOR OF

"THE SMUGGLER;" "ARRAH NEIL;" "THE STEP-MOTHER,"

ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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HEIDELBERG.

CHAPTER I.

The realities of the world are few and small; the illusions many and vast. Not a sense that we possess, and hardly a faculty of the mind, but serves to deceive us; wholly in some cases, and partially in all. Yet, strip nature and life of these deceits, and what would earth become?--what

our existence here? See a small fly stepping over the irregularities of a looking-glass and thinking the polished surface but a rough and rugged plain, and we have some idea of what the world would be, if we saw it as perhaps it is.

Amongst the sweetest and most friendly delusions, of all the many, is the landscape-painting of imagination. Love, himself, I believe, does not cheat us more, or more pleasantly. Let any traveller ask himself, when he sets eyes upon a scene which he pronounces, at once, most beautiful, how much of the loveliness is added by fancy. It may be a grand, an expansive view, over a wide and varied country; but what is the mind doing while the eye is contemplating it? Peopling it with villages--laying it out in corn-fields and vineyards--filling it with busy life and gay enjoyment; not distinctly, not tangibly; but still the associations rise up in a golden mist, and spread a lustre over all. It may be, on the contrary, a narrower scene: a cottage in a deep glen, with old oaks overshadowing, and the thin blue smoke rising up amongst the green leaves. There too, is imagination busy, with the thoughts of calm retirement from a troublous world, and still, quiet contemplation--the labourer's repose after his labour--the sweet domestic home--the tender joy of tongues and faces loving and beloved.

There is but one great magician left on earth, and that is Imagination.

Reader, I very often draw from my own heart and its experience--more often than the world knows; and even now, I can conceive the sensations of those two horsemen as they come at a foot pace over the edge of the hill, where the splendid valley of the Neckar, with its castled town and ancient woods, and giant mountains, first breaks upon the eye. See how the sunshine of the summer evening, softened by the light smoke of the city, pours through the long tall streets and over the high walls and towers of massive stone: see how it catches on each rocky point or prominent crag, as rounding the granite mass of the King's Seat, in its decline towards the west, it covers the brows of all his mountain peers with coronets of gold; and lo! where high raised above the town, upon its platform of stone, stands out the lordly castle in bright light and shade. The green, green Neckar, flowing along in the midst, winds on through the long waving valley, showing ripples of gold wherever, in the sunshine, the winds stir it or the rocks obstruct, and, at each calmer spot, serves as a mirror to the loveliness around; giving back the bright tints of hills and woods, and town and bridge, with a lustrous clearness no other stream can match. Even that boat, with its many coloured crew of peasantry, shines out upon the face of the river in red and blue, and white and brown, as if the very hues acquired a finer dye from the water that but reflects them; and the fishing eagle, swooping down upon his finny prey, strikes at it the more fiercely when he sees the image of himself rushing to seize it also from below.

On a fine summer evening then, in the year 1619, two horsemen, coming along the Bergstrasse, or mountain road, suddenly drew in their horses as they reached the top of that little spur of the mountain called the Heiligenberg, on which stands the village of Neunheim, and there paused, gazing, as if in wonder and admiration, at the scene presented to their eyes. For a moment or two neither spoke, for the height of every emotion is silent; and ere a word was uttered, a small party, which had followed, came up and took place behind them.

In those days great men drew their importance from the number of their attendants. 'Tis the same even now, but the display is made upon a different stage.

The horsemen who came first, however, were but accompanied by two ordinary servants, two grooms or horseboys, each leading a baggage horse heavily laden, and a page; small equipage for a man of station at that period. Nevertheless there was that about the appearance of each, which made the peasantry who passed them in numerous bodies, and in their holiday clothes, take off their broad-brimmed hats and give the strangers two looks ere they walked on. The reason why they did this was not very apparent; for the persons who thus attracted the attention of the good boors had nothing to excite admiration in their dress. It is true, indeed, gentlemen were not at that time, any more than at present, to be distinguished by their galligaskins; but still the apparel of the two was rather plain than otherwise, consisting of a common riding suit of dark cloth, with a small line of gold, and boots and breeches of untanned leather. Their horses, indeed, were fine, powerful, spirited beasts as ever were mounted; and though the dust, that dimmed their glossy coats, showed that they had journeyed far on a hot day, yet not a sign of fatigue was visible, and the outstretched leg, ready to start again, the high raised head, and expanded nostril, as they snuffed the air of the river, proved that they had no expectation of their day's journey being yet, near an end.

There might be, indeed, some reason assigned why the country girls took a second look before they went on, for the two travellers were both young and handsome men; the one very dark, and three or four years older than the other, who might perhaps be one-and-twenty, or thereabouts, and whose face, though bronzed by exposure to sun and weather, appeared to have been originally fair, if one might judge by the clear, deep-blue eye and the rich brown hair, and moustache of that peculiar hue which shows a golden gleam when the sun shines upon it. He was tall and well formed, long in the arms, broad in the chest, and spare in the waist and flank. The head and face were small, and the features delicate, though not effeminate; the chin somewhat projecting, and the eyes large and full, with a thick and strongly marked eyebrow. When at rest the whole countenance had an expression of gravity and decision beyond his apparent years, and there was something in his air as he sat his horse, a look of command and free thoughtful power, which seemed to bespeak one who, notwithstanding his youth, had been long accustomed to regulate his own conduct and act upon his own views.

The other was very different, yet still a handsome man, much darker in complexion, not quite so tall, with a keen sharp black eye, under a wide and somewhat projecting brow, marked gracefully by a dark, arching, and somewhat raised line of eyebrow. The lips were thin, and the line from the wing of the nose to the corner of the mouth strongly marked, so as to give the ordinary expression of the countenance a slight, a very slight touch of sarcasm; and yet there was a sort of sparkling joyousness about it whenever he spoke, which we may as well notice once for all, as it was the predominant look and was exceedingly winning, although the cast of the mere features was stern and determined.

As they paused and gazed, the face of the younger and fairer of the two was full of admiration, pure, simple, and high; too deeply felt to admit even of a smile. The other gazed over the landscape too, but then for a moment turned his eyes with a half laughing glance, withdrawn as soon as given, to his companion's face, as if he and his feelings afforded as much matter for thought and examination as the beautiful scene which had just presented itself.

At length, after a pause, of about two minutes, the younger exclaimed,--

"How beautiful! how enchanting! and bursting upon us thus, it seems like magic."

"Very lovely, indeed," replied his companion, with a smile; "and I doubt not we shall find still lovelier things within those old grey walls--at least let us fancy it; for fancy is the goddess that embellishes all things, and is, even now, doing wonders in your mind, Algernon, for the fair city of Heidelberg."

"I know not what fancy has to do with it," replied the other, gravely; "methinks never was there a congregation of more beautiful objects presented to the eye of man. Nature does everything here, William, we have no need of fancy. Look at that town, that castle, those lordly mountains, those green waving woods, the river gliding----"

"Like a golden lizard, you would say, amongst the stones," rejoined his companion, interrupting him. "In pity let us have some figure of speech to show that your admiration has not at least benumbed imagination. A simile, a trope, a metaphor, even a hyperbole will do. Can you not call them godlike towers? or figure me the mountains as giant Titans, with a bushy beard of oaks and beeches? What has become of all your flowers of rhetoric? You will never be able to keep pace with the doctors and poets of the university, if you go on in this dull style. Or is it that you have expended all the riches of your poesy upon the fair dames you left behind in Italy, and have not got a beggarly tester of fine words for the fair town of Heidelberg? or, again, are you afraid of the exchequer running low, and are hoarding your smart speeches with miserly avarice, to let love, like the miser's son, squander them by-and-by upon the lovely dames of the Electoral court?"

"Good faith!" replied the other, "I doubt much, my friend, whether I shall see anything in any court so lovely to my eyes as that fair range of mountains, out there upon the right, looking like sapphires on a sky of gold."

"Improved! improved!" cried his companion, dropping his rein and clapping his hands; "those sapphires and that gold come out most splendidly. The poor Haardt, with her stony rocks, would be grateful to you, doubtless, for thus enriching her; but let us on, I am for living loveliness. Of all the landscapes I ever saw, the most beautiful has been a rosy cheek and alabaster throat; the brightest waters in the world for me, lie in the deep well of a dark blue eye; and in all the sun-rises or sunsets that ever covered the sky with crimson, there is nothing like the warm blush upon a young face, or the dawning smile upon a rosy lip. Let us on, let us on, I say; pleasure is the pursuit of life; let grave thoughts follow us, they will catch us soon enough if we do not make haste and get before them."

"'Twere a good philosophy, could it but last," answered his companion, with a smile, touching his horse gently with the spur, and in a moment more they were winding on by the side of the Neckar towards the old bridge, which, like many another building there, was not destined to see the present day.

Perhaps the younger of the two travellers felt that his companion was right in what he had said regarding the ornamental powers of fancy, when they passed the gates of Heidelberg and entered the town itself. The sunshiny splendour of the valley was lost in the narrow streets and tall dark houses; but still the shade was pleasant, for the evening was hot; and there was something in the long lines of the quaint, many-storied buildings, with their ornamented gables to the streets and every here and there a gleam of sunshine breaking across through an aperture--something in the gay crowds of people, in the ringing laugh and cheerful buzz, even in the baskets of fruits and flowers that obstructed every turning, which did much with a young and enthusiastic mind, to compensate for the picturesque beauty of the valley which they no longer beheld; and still, at the end of many of the streets, the towers and walls of the castle were seen looking down from its proud rock, with the green branches and rugged crags of the mountain, towering up beyond.

"In the name of all that's sweet and savoury, let us get to our inn as fast as we can," said the elder of the young men. "My ears are cracked with the hoarse merriment of these overjoyous German throats; and my nose feels feverish with all the vapours of garlic and sauerkraut which it

has imbibed since we passed the gates.--What is the name of the inn, Tony?" he continued, turning his head to one of the servants behind, a merry-looking fellow, with a good deal of shrewd humour in his countenance.

"The Golden something, Sir William," replied the man; "but, by my faith, I forget what. We have passed through so many golden and silver vessels within the last month, that I am quite confounded by them. We rode upon a golden goose last night; the day before it was a silver moon; then we have had the cock of gold, the golden pitcher, the golden crown, the silver cross, the silver staff, and the silver star. We have had all sorts of fishes that ever swam in the sea, and all the beasts that ever went into the ark, besides a number of monsters."

"Hush, sir, hush; give me a reasonable answer, and a short one," replied the gentleman; "and remember what your master told you, about forgetting our names till you are permitted to remember them.--What was the name of the inn, I say?"

"It was the Golden something, sir," replied the man, undismayed; "and, if I must give it a name when I don't recollect the right one, I'll give it the name of the Stag, by way of a change. We have not been at a Stag for a week at least."

The other gentleman smiled; for he recollected, as soon as it was named, that the hostelry to which they had been directed was really the Stag; and he somewhat doubted that his servant had ever forgotten it. "Now, then, William, to find it," he said; "for this town seems full of signs. But here comes a man on horseback,--by his dusty boots a traveller like ourselves,--German too, by the cut of his cloak and the feather on the left side of his hat. We will ask him;" and, spurring his horse forward a little, he met, at the corner of the street, a well-dressed man about thirty years of age, who was riding fast at the moment, but who checked his horse, when the other saluted him courteously and, in very tolerable German, asked the way to the Golden Stag.

"Follow me," replied the stranger, "and I will show you; I am going thither myself:" and riding on, without waiting to see whether the strangers accompanied him or not, he took his way round the great church, and sprang to the ground at the steps of a large wide rambling house, which bore, in bas relief, upon a panel in the second story, the grotesque figure of a gouty stag, gilt, and ornamented with a collar and chain. In the centre of the house there was a large archway, with steps on each side, which were also brought round the angle and all along the front on either side of the arch, forming a sort of base to the whole building. A small door--that at which the traveller halted--entered from the top of the steps, and this was thrown open as soon as his approach was perceived from one of the windows on the ground floor. At least half a score of drawers and horseboys rushed out from various holes and corners about the building. His horse was taken with every sign of respect; and the low-bowing landlord, with night-cap in hand, the officious readiness of all the domestics of the establishment, and the reverend greeting of two men, whose badges and ribbons showed them to be the liveried attendants of some high family, convinced the travellers who followed closely, that their guide to the Golden Stag was a personage of some importance in the town of Heidelberg.

The one turned round to the other and smiled, somewhat superciliously perhaps; for the haughty contempt of other people's customs, and the national pride, which undervalues the distinctions and ranks of foreign countries, to exalt those of his own, were as much characteristic of the native of a certain island in those days as at present. That supercilious smile spoke the Englishman at once. Though it would be very difficult to analyze philosophically the sensations from which it sprang, perhaps it simply arose out of contempt for the deference shown to a man, who would venture to wear a feather in a different part of his hat from that in which the English generally placed it. I do not mean to aver that it was so; but, from what I know of my fellow-countrymen, I think it very probable. Strange to say too, the countenance, on which this smile appeared, was that of the elder, and, to all appearance, the more experienced and worldly of the two. The other smiled not, but, checking his horse to a walk, as soon as he was sure of the position of the Golden Stag, rode slowly up to the house and dismounted, with a calm and deliberate air.

By this time the stranger had disappeared, as well as the landlord and most of the attendants; but, nevertheless, the bustle of a new arrival soon recommenced; and, in five or ten minutes more, the two travellers were lodged in large, comfortable, but somewhat gloomy rooms, and had the most positive assurance of the landlord that an excellent repast was ready to be set before them the moment they thought fit to descend to the common room and partake of it.

The servants and the page busied themselves in opening portmanteaux and saddlebags. Ruffs, collars, velvet cloaks and laced doublets were spread out upon the large old comfortable beds. An abundance of cold water, together with the assistance of Italian essences and perfumery removed all traces of travel from their persons; and when, at the end of about half an hour, the younger of the two, with the page to show him the way, descended to the hall, it would have been difficult, perhaps, to find a more distinguished looking man within the limits of Europe. He was evidently very young--youth could be traced, in every gently flowing line, in the soft and rounded cheek, in the even, unfurrowed brow; but there was an air of stately dignity in his carriage; a calm, almost cold, firmness in the expression of his face, which showed that, from some cause--either an early initiation into life and the sad experiences of the world, or from a precocious appreciation of the realities of things--the mind was older than the man. This happens not unfrequently, and is somewhat strange in its effects; but still more strange is the result, when a triple combination

takes place, as was in some degree the case with him; and when the heart, too, remains young, after the judgment has become mature, so that its passions, aided by the energies of the corporeal frame, are placed in frequent antagonism, with a powerful and over-ruling intellect.

The page threw open the door of a large room below, which looked somewhat dark and gloomy; for the windows were small, the panelling was of black oak, and the sun was on the other side of the house. It was not solitary, however; for there, seated in one stiff tall-backed chair, and his feet, divested of all travelling incumbrances, on another, was the gentleman whom they had met in the streets of the town, and who had served as their guide thither. His hat was cast upon a small table, his sword lay beside it, his riding-boots had been drawn off, and some time had been bestowed upon his toilet, too; for his doublet and cloak had been changed; but yet the difference of appearance produced did not seem very remarkable to an eye accustomed to the most splendid courts in Europe.

To say truth, the young Englishman had not been very much prepossessed in the stranger's favour. The brief bluff answer he had given when addressed, the manner in which he had ridden on, with hardly a look to see that they followed, seemed to him to betoken a want of courtesy, with which, indeed, he was not inclined to quarrel, but which he did not greatly admire. The other did not move when he entered either, though certainly not unconscious of his presence; for the large, clear, grey eyes were raised and fixed upon the new-comer, with a firm, inquiring, almost insolent stare. It was unpleasant to the young Englishman; but he did not come there to seek disputes; and, turning to the page who waited at the door, as if for orders, he bade him tell the landlord to serve the supper as quickly as might be, and then he walked to the window, and gazed out at the varied scene which the streets presented.

In two minutes he was lost in a reverie, forgetting altogether that there was any other being in the room but himself; and, though the other guest rose, moved his hat and sword, and walked up and down with a heavy step, the sound these evolutions produced fell upon an unconscious ear which had no power to carry them to a mind far away, busied with other things.

In about five minutes the door again opened, a quick step was heard, and the other English traveller, entering, advanced to his friend, laid his hand upon his shoulder and exclaimed, in a gay tone.--"What, in the depth again, Algernon! On my life, nature must have intended you for an oyster. Leave you but a moment and you sink down into an ocean of meditation, fix yourself firmly to the bottom, and would remain there, I believe, for ever, with your shell half open, waiting for what Providence would send to fill your mouth withal. But, on my faith, I have no such patience; I am like the patriarch Isaac, and have a longing for savoury meats--likewise, for some amusement. This seems a wild boar of the forest. We must force him from his lair; and he will show sport, depend upon it."

Hitherto he had spoken in English; but now, turning to the stranger, with a low and somewhat extravagant bow, and yet with an air of courtly ease, he said, in French: "We have to thank you, Monsieur, for guiding us to this inn. I trust that the host will speedily give us farther occasion for gratitude, by setting before us an excellent supper.--I see he has laid three covers, from which I argue, that the enjoyment of the repast is to be heightened to us by your participating in it."

"It is my intention to sup before I go," replied the stranger, in very tolerable French, though with a haughty tone; but the other was not to be rebuffed; and, proceeding with great apparent good humour, but that sort of exaggeration of courtesy which is rarely without a touch of sarcasm in it, he soon engaged his German companion in more familiar conversation and broke through the husk of reserve, in which he had at first encased himself. His replies, when they became more frank and free, showed a mind not uncultivated, an intellect of some extent, and views in general just and powerful, though there was an alloy of haughty presumption and somewhat irritable self-esteem, which became ever more apparent, if not more offensive, as his reserve wore away.

In the midst of their conversation, the landlord and his satellites entered with the supper. Two of the travellers' servants came in to wait upon their masters; one of the attendants in livery, who had met their German companion at the door, took a place behind his chair, fluttering with ribbons and tags; and the three gentlemen applied themselves to the satisfying of an importunate appetite. After a few minutes the younger of the two Englishmen seemed to cast off his thoughtful mood, gave himself up to the gay leading of his friend, and laughed and jested likewise. The wine that was placed upon the table did not seem at all to his taste, and pushing it from him with a shudder, after the first drops had passed his lips, he pronounced it vinegar disguised.

"Come, come, mine host," he said, looking over his shoulder to the master of the inn, who had remained in the room, perhaps with a due calculation of the excellence of the beverage he had served, in its relation to the quality of his guests--for innkeepers, even then, were not unaccustomed to make their wine the measure, or arismetre, of those they entertained; "come, come, mine host, this is doubtless good wine in its way, for those whom it suits; but we have ridden far and want some more generous juice to refresh us. Let us have something super-excellent, the very *bride* of your cellar, as I think you call it here in Germany; and mind that it be at least a hundred and fifty times better than this or else it will not do."

"You speak good German, too," said the stranger, "and seem to know our customs well, even

to the tricks of our landlords. Were you ever here before?"

"Not in this good town of Heidelberg," replied the young gentleman; "but some three years ago, I passed through other parts of Germany on my way to the south. The reason why I speak French to you is, that my friend here does not understand the tongue of the country."

"'Tis a pity," replied the other, "the language is a fine one, and so, methinks, strangers must find the country. I have travelled too, myself, but never saw aught finer than this our valley of the Neckar."

"Most beautiful, indeed," rejoined the young Englishman; "so much so, that I judge one might while away a day or two here very well."

"Methinks one may, or pass a life here either," rejoined their companion, with a somewhat haughty and offended air. "The court of the Elector Palatine is, I believe, second to few in Europe."

"What is that, Algernon, what is that?" cried the other Englishman, who seemed to have comprehended part of what was said; "it is treason to friendship to talk a language in my presence which is unintelligible to my poor ears."

The other gentleman explained in French; and with a smile, slightly sarcastic, his friend turned to their companion, exclaiming: "Is this court so magnificent, then, indeed? We are ignorant of this part of Europe, sir, having been long in the far south, sporting amongst princes and lazaroni at Naples, jesting with priests, cardinals, and popes at Rome, discussing pictures, statues, and points of religion with painters, philosophers, and atheists at Florence, and masking and making music with fair dames and reverend seniors in the City of the waves. We have brought over a stock of vices and small-talk, I trust, that would decorate any court in Christendom; and, faith, if yours is such as you describe it, and fond of magnificence and merriment, velvet and volubility, we must go up and visit it; and, doubtless, shall be made much of, as our merits deserve."

"The access is not so easy as you may suppose, sir," answered the other sternly; "it requires something else than a man's own account of himself to gain entrance and esteem there."

"Ha! here comes our host with a very sagacious looking bottle," cried the younger travellers, who thought, perhaps, his friend was pushing his jests somewhat too far. "If those cobwebs have been spun round the neck by thinner legs than your fingers, landlord, the wine would be as sour as cider, or of an immortal quality."

"I will warrant you, sir," answered the host, putting down long-stalked glasses, "if ever you tasted better in your days, say my name is not Rheinhardt;" and he filled up to the brim for the younger traveller and his companion.

Before the former tasted it, however, he pressed their fellow-guest to join them and give his opinion of the wine; and, on his showing some reluctance, added: "Nay, nay, if you refuse, I shall think that you are offended with the light talk of my jesting friend there. You must bear with him, you must bear with him, sir, for it is an inveterate habit he has; and he could sooner go without his dinner than his joke, at whosoever's expense it is indulged. It is the custom of the country we come from last; for there it is so dangerous to speak seriously on any subject, that men take refuge in a jest as in a redoubt."

The stranger seemed satisfied with this explanation, joined in their wine, pronounced it excellent, forgot his haughty air; and, returning to the subject which they had left, began to expatiate once more upon the beauty, splendour, gallantry, and wit of the court of the Elector, Frederic V., when suddenly a loud explosion, which seemed to shake the solid walls of the old building, and was echoed for several seconds by the rocks and mountains round, interrupted his declamation, and made the two Englishmen gaze in each other's face.

Ere they could inquire farther, another roar, and then another, was heard; and, turning to their German companion, the elder exclaimed: "In the name of our fair lady Fortune! what is the meaning of this? Is the castle besieging the town, or the town the castle? Or have you imported Mount Vesuvius to warm you here from time to time with an eruption, and preserve the antiquities of the place in ashes, pumice-stone, and sulphur?"

"Neither, my good sir," answered their fellow-traveller, who had remained totally unmoved; "it is but the guns of the castle firing in honour of the Elector's birth-day, the nineteenth of August; for on this day and hour, now three-and-twenty years ago, our noble prince was born in the good town of Amberg. There is a grand banquet at the castle to-day; but, ride hard as I would, I was too late for it, and so must content myself with going to the reception in the evening, which, they say, will be one of unusual magnificence."

"Faith, then, I think we will go there too," said the elder of the two Englishmen; "doubtless we shall see collected all the beauty of the Court Palatine."

"If you get admission," rejoined the other drily.

"Oh, that is beyond all doubt," was the bantering reply: "your prince can never be such a barbarian as to refuse the pleasures of his court to two such proper young men as ourselves, especially as we have the honour and advantage of your acquaintance."

"I fancy you will find him sufficiently, civilized to do so," said the other sharply; "and my acquaintance, sir, can only be beneficial to those of whose name and station I am informed. I may as well at once give you to understand, knowing this court, and being connected with it, that you will not be admitted unless you be properly introduced."

There was a degree of arrogance in his tone, more than in his words, that at once amused and offended the younger of the two gentlemen; and, after his companion had exclaimed, "Then must we die without benefit of clergy," he turned towards the other gentleman, saying, with a grave smile,--

"We have a bad habit, sir, in England, of proving the strength of our own convictions by laying wagers on any subject of dispute. If such were the custom here, I would ask you what you will bet that I and my friend here will not go up to the castle this very night, and, without any introduction whatsoever, without naming our names, stating our rank, or disclosing our pursuits, receive kind hospitality from the elector, and pass the evening with his court."

The personage whom he addressed replied first with a laugh, and then said: "Perhaps you may find your way in, for the attendants are not likely to drive back a well dressed man; but if the elector's eye falls upon you, that of his chamberlain, or any of his high officers, you will soon be expelled, depend upon it, unless you divulge your names."

"Not so," replied the other; "I will go straight to the elector; I will refuse to divulge my name, and yet I will pass the evening there; on all which I will stake a hundred crowns. You yourself shall be the witness, as you say you are going; but, of course, it is understood that you do and say nothing to impede my proceedings."

"Done!" cried the other, striking his hand on the table; "I take your wager. Methinks I should know this court better than you can."

"I have known many courts," answered the young man, with a good-humoured laugh, "and never yet found one in which impudence and a cool face could not make its way. So now let us be friends and shake hands upon our wagers, which shall be decided as soon as you are ready."

The stranger took his hand, not very cordially, and replied: "We must wait a little; the banquet will be scarcely over yet. I would fain know, too," he added, "who are to be my companions in entering the elector's court."

"Oh! make yourself perfectly easy," replied the elder of the two young men; "you shall seem to know nothing of us from the moment you pass the gate; nay, with this sweet world's simple versatility, shall turn the shoulder coldly to those with whom you have climbed the hill the moment you have reached the top. The truth is, honourable sir, my friend and myself have resolved not to reveal our real names while travelling in these foreign lands. As a matter of course, we have each packed up with our saddle-bags and portmantles, a fresh and well-conditioned name for the nonce. He is called Algernon Grey: I have been known for some months past as William Lovet. We do not ask you to believe that our godfathers and our godmothers, at our baptisms, were at all familiar with these appellations, either nomen or prenomen; nevertheless, it is a whim we have, and we request our excellent friends to humour us therein. Those who would do us reverence, tack esquire to the end of each name, to designate the lowest rank of gentlemen in England qualified to bear arms; but we are not particular, and even when that title is omitted, the bare name does very well without."

"So be it then," said their companion, gravely. "You will have to ride, Master Lovet, as perhaps you know, for it is somewhat difficult to find carriages here that would drag you up that hill! But you make your boots large," he continued, playing upon an expression commonly used in Germany at that time, to express a man who stood upon little ceremony--"But you make your boots large, and therefore your hose will escape soiling. I go to get mine on;" and rising, he left the room.

The younger traveller, whom we shall henceforth call by the name he thought fit to assume, was inclined to fall into a fit of musing again; but the other leaned over the table, saying: "Ask the fellow's name, Algernon. He seems a sullen and discourteous dog, unwilling, or unable, to understand a jest."

"Good faith! you began like a young haggard, William," replied his companion, "dashing straight at your game, without waiting to see its flight. All men are not ready to jest with every stranger. He may have good qualities, though he seems haughty enough;" and turning to one of the attendants of the inn, he asked, in German, the name of the gentleman who had just left the room.

"That, sir, is the Baron Oberntraut," replied the man, with a low reverence; "he is the only son of the master of the horse to the elector, and a captain of cuirassiers."

"What! the same who distinguished himself so much in the campaign of Juliers?" cried the

young gentleman.

"The same, sir," answered the man. "He was very young then; but he did great things, I have heard."

"By my honour! he has some reason to be proud," observed Algernon Grey; "but come, William, let us get ready too. Order the horses round, Tony.--I suppose they are not tired with our short march."

"Tired, sir!" replied the man. "Lord bless you! with the oats they have got into them since they came, they'd take the castle up there as if it were a five-barred gate. I heard Hob say that Barbary had eaten a peck and a half, while you were changing your cloak!"

"If that were the first lie he ever told, it might be worth repeating," said William Lovet; "but let us go, Algernon. I am all on fire for the beauties of the fair Elizabeth's court; and if I can find out which is this Oberntraut's mistress, on my soul I will plague him."

CHAPTER II.

"Who is that, who is that?" cried the small shrill voice of a little deformed boy, who stood as near to the gate of the castle as the soldiers would let him--and, to say the truth, they had suffered him to approach somewhat nearer than their orders warranted, in respect for a tall, beautiful, well formed girl, his sister, who held him by the hand.

"Which do you mean, Hans?" asked his fair companion. "That one, in the black and gold doublet, and the cloak lined with crimson? That is the young Baron of Oberntraut, the Great Captain, who defeated the Austrians on the other side of the Rhine."

"He does not look to me like a great captain," said the small sharp voice proceeding from the narrow and protuberant chest. "I thought he would have been all in armour, as the soldiers were once, when I saw them ride through the streets."

"Is that a Frenchman?" asked one of the lower order of students, who was leaning in studied, not to say affected negligence, with his arm round the neck of one of his fellows. "Do you see how he wears his hat? and in what a jaunty way he has thrown his cloak all upon his left shoulder, as if he wished to keep the hilt of his sword warm?"

"Oh, he may keep it warm enough in Heidelberg, if he like," rejoined the other student to whom he spoke; "we'll give it work, if it want it; but which do you mean, Frederic? for there are two of them--the black cock or the white one?"

"The fair one," replied the former speaker; "the one in the philimot and gold; he is a proper man, Carl, and, I should think, ready enough to use his rapier, if one may judge by his look."

"Oh, looks are nothing," replied the other; "but I should think he is no Frenchman. More likely an Englishman, come, like the rest of them, to flutter at our court."

"Come away, wife, come away," said a jolly, fat citizen, with an ace-of-clubs nose and a beard tolerably sprinkled with grey, to a pretty woman, some twenty years younger, who stood beside him, holding the hand of a little boy about four or five years old--"It is full time for us to be getting home; don't you see the sun is nearly down--one half behind the hills there? and it will be dark before we reach the door. There, come along; you are a great admirer of fair men, I know; but, methinks, you should have had enough of them to-night; so let us homeward, if you would not have yon gallant kiss his hand to you, as a reward for your staring."

While this conversation and much of a similar kind had been going on amongst the numerous groups, which had assembled round the outward Burgthor, or castle-gate, of the fine old palace of the Electors Palatine, the party of three gentlemen and seven servants, which had slowly wound up the long and steep ascent from the town to the castle, had reached the flat at the top, and were passing over the drawbridge, which then existed at the Burgthor, into that wide extent of ground, which was inclosed by the great wall of the fortress. Whether it was that the presence of Oberntraut, who was well known to the soldiery, procured them free admission, or that the guards had only orders to keep out the ordinary citizens of the place, the whole party were suffered to proceed, without opposition, and rode on to the bridge-house, while fine strains of martial music, wafted by the wind from the great court of the castle, and the sound of many a gay and musical voice from the gardens round, told that the revelry of the Elector's birth-night was still going on with undiminished spirit.

Under the arch of the bridge-house, two of the guards crossed their partizans before the horses, and Oberntraut, anxious to show that he kept his word, in not throwing any impediment in the way of the two Englishmen, turned his head, saying in German, "You must dismount here, being visitors; I ride into the court, as one of the Elector's household."

The soldiers instantly raised their halberts to let him pass with the two servants, who had accompanied him from the inn. At the same moment, one of Algernon Grey's attendants sprang to his stirrup, to aid him in dismounting; and, giving his sword to his page to carry, the young gentleman and his friend disencumbered themselves of the large riding boots of the day--which, be it remarked, easily covered shoes and all--and passing between the guards, with a confident air, as if there could be no earthly doubt of their admission, walked on, under the archway of the great square tower, into the wide court-yard.

The scene was a very brilliant one, which was now presented to their eyes. Crowds of attendants, belonging either to the household of the Elector Palatine himself, or to those of the great nobles of his court, were scattered thickly over the wide space before them--sometimes standing in groups of eight or nine together--sometimes moving hither and thither, with quick or sauntering pace; and every colour of the rainbow, in its very brightest tints, was to be seen displayed in the gorgeous costume of the day. Neither was there any lack of lace and embroidery, plumes, sword-knots, and fluttering scarfs; and, around this gay flower-bed, rose up, in the faint evening light, innumerable and irregular masses of building, of every period and of every style, the remains of which can still be traced, slowly mouldering away under the hand of time, and presenting to the thoughtful eye a sad picture of the end of all great designs; a bitter lesson to man's presumptuous hopes, a dark but chastening admonition to joy, prosperity, and power.

On the right hand, under a wide arcade supported by graceful columns, was a large and skilful band of musicians, making the air ring with the sounds of their instruments. Upon the left, in darkness, such as time casts upon all man's doings, was a pile of architecture, the light and graceful lines of which betokened a very early period of construction. Nearly in the centre of the court rose up a fountain; the sparkling jets of which caught and reflected the rosy light which had spread over the sky above. Farther on, to the right, appeared a vast mass in the Italian taste, covered with rich and splendid ornaments--statues, arabesques, and pilasters--and pierced with innumerable windows, from which bright lights were shining, showing that the sun's decline was felt within. In more than one other place, too, on both sides and in front, a taper, or a lamp might be seen passing slowly on from room to room across the various casements, affording a sort of mysterious interest to a fanciful mind, as the eye of the young Englishman rested on the dark piles to the west, from which the sunshine had for several hours departed.

Grouped together near the fountain, and held by grooms and stable boys, were a number of horses, richly caparisoned; and near them was seen the form of the Baron of Oberntraut, slowly dismounting and speaking to his two servants, as if waiting to give time for his late companions to come up.

"That is civil and honourable of him," said Algernon Grey, as they advanced towards him.

"A good deal of self-confidence in it," answered the other; "he feels so sure of winning his bet, that he wishes to prove to us that it is done by no unfair advantage."

"Still the worst side of everything!" rejoined his friend, with a grave smile, and moved on. But as soon as Oberntraut perceived them within a few yards, he himself advanced towards a flight of steps before one of the principal buildings, where an open door and a blaze of light, displayed a low arched hall, crowded with attendants. His step was slow and stately, but though, before he had reached the top of the steps, the two Englishmen were close to him, he took not the slightest notice of them, and passed on.

Several other persons were, at the moment, advancing in the same direction; and Lovet whispered to his companion; "Follow the stream, follow the stream." Algernon Grey did so, and found himself guided by the rest to what seemed the great staircase of the castle. It was not indeed so magnificent, either in its proportions or its decorations, as the splendour of the exterior might have led a traveller to expect; but what it wanted in architectural beauty was supplied by extrinsic decoration of great taste, consisting of flowers and shrubs and branches disposed in such manner as to mingle the harsh lines of the grey stone pleasantly and symmetrically with the graceful bends of the green foliage. An object had been sought and attained very much neglected in those times, namely, the perfect lighting of the staircase; for, although the day had hardly closed, the lamps were already gleaming along the balustrades, not with a harsh and overpowering glare, but with a tempered brightness, which showed all that could please and captivate the eye and yet left a dim indistinctness, not disagreeable, over the rest. Five or six persons preceded the young Englishmen in their ascent, some speaking together, some silent and lonely; but all turned to the left on reaching the top, and passed through a guarded door, round which a number of attendants were standing, into a small ante-chamber, where a single officer appeared leaning his hand upon a table.

No questions were asked of any of those who went before Algernon Grey and his friend; and he with calm and grave deliberation followed, neither looking to the right nor the left, nor taking the slightest notice of a whispered inquiry, which he heard running amongst the servants, as to who and what he was. William Lovet, in his ignorance of the language, was also ignorant of all

such perils to their enterprise; and, with a gay and well-assured look, followed close upon his companion's steps, adjusting the glittering tie of his sword-knot and thrusting his rapier a little further back.

The moment they entered the ante-room, Algernon Grey marked that the Baron of Oberntraut paused for an instant at the opposite door, as if to see whether the officer on duty would stop them, or require their names. The latter immediately advanced a step or two; but then, to the surprise of all present, he gave the two gentlemen a lowly salutation, and drew back to the table again.

A slight smile curled Algernon's handsome lip; and, with a tone of dignity, he said aloud, addressing the officer: "Will you be pleased, sir, to inform the Elector Palatine personally, if you can have his ear for a moment, that two English gentlemen of befitting rank, who for reasons of their own decline to give their names, crave his gracious permission to witness the splendours of his court this night, and to tread a measure in his hall with the fair dames of our own fair princess. We ask it with loyal hearts and true, well aware of what we do, and not venturing to request aught unbecoming of him to grant, or us to receive."

The officer bowed, and, turning towards those without, said: "Keep the door!" and then, advancing towards the inner chamber, seemed to answer quickly a question of Oberntraut, who had lingered near the entrance, and then passed on.

"Now are your hundred crowns in peril, Algernon," said William Lovet; "a fair new saddle-cloth embroidered in gold, a silver bit and gilt stirrups, together with an ear-ring of nineteen carats and a ruby, to say nothing of a new kerchief to Madge, Marianne, or Margery, all hang upon the chance of the fair delivery of a simple message by an ante-chamber officer of an Elector Palatine. Heaven save the mark! if the pretty maid with the brown eyes, who was likely in the course of time and by the concatenation of circumstances, to have that kerchief at your hands, now knew upon what a rash cast you have risked it, would she not fret and scold at the probable result of the bet at the Golden Stag?"

"She would be silly so to do," replied Algernon Grey. "I have no fears of money going out of my purse to-night; the good man will deliver his message aptly enough, I am sure; and the message, of which you understood not a word, was just the bait to catch the young Elector with his notions of chivalrous gallantry. Hark, what a buzz comes through the doorway. Methinks half the palatinate must be here; and see how the figures glide about across and across--now in blue and silver--now in green and gold--now in black and pearls, like painted shadows in a showman's box. But here comes our messenger, and with him a very grave and reverend personage with a beard of an ell long. Let us advance to meet him, as if we knew his inward dignity at once by his outward shape."

With the same stately carriage which he had lately assumed, Algernon Grey took a few slow steps forward, to meet a somewhat corpulent gentleman, whose hair and colouring seemed to bespeak a hasty and choleric temperament, and then made him a low bow. The officer, who had been in waiting in the ante-chamber, pointed with his hand to the two Englishmen, saying: "These are the two gentlemen;" and the other, who followed, returned their salutation, scanning them for a moment with his eye ere he spoke.

"It is the Elector's pleasure, sirs," he said at length, "that I introduce you to his presence;" and once more he gazed at them from head to foot, in a somewhat haughty and supercilious manner.

But Algernon Grey was not to be provoked out of his caution; and, with a very slight inclination of the head, he replied: "The Elector is gracious; we are at your command."

There was nothing more to be said; and therefore the Electoral officer wheeled his large person round, and, with a somewhat more civil gesture than he had hitherto used, led the way into the chamber beyond. It was filled with numerous persons of both sexes, dressed in the gorgeous costume of the day; and certainly the court of the mightiest monarch in Europe could not have displayed greater splendour of apparel, or greater beauty of person, than appeared at that of the Count Palatine. People of all nations and all languages were there; and amongst the busy crowds which moved hither and thither, every hue of hair, every shade of complexion was to be seen; from the fair-haired, blue-eyed children of the north, to the dark Transylvanian, and the swarthy Moor. Through all the throng the chamberlain of the Elector cleared a way for himself and the two who followed: the rotundity of his person acting as a sort of human wedge, which left a vacancy behind it; and many a head was turned to gaze upon the young strangers; it being remarked that they looked neither to the right nor the left, as if they did not wish to recognise or be recognised by any one, should there, by chance, be found an acquaintance amongst the varied multitude.

Although the immense masses of the castle, as they had seen it from the outside, had impressed them with a strong idea of its vastness, yet, from some cause or another, Algernon Grey had expected to find the Elector and his fair wife in the room beyond the ante-chamber. Indeed its extent was so great, its decorations so sumptuous, and the groups it contained so numerous, that it might well have been supposed the audience-hall of a great prince. But everything in the castle of Heidelberg, at that period was upon so magnificent a scale, that no acquaintance with other palaces enabled a visitor to judge of what was to be his reception here.

It contained, in those days, a suite of ten splendid saloons, one opening into the other and each covered with lavish ornament. Through the whole of these, till at length they reached what was called the silver chamber, the two young Englishmen were led, before they found the object of their search.

Two pages, one stationed on each side of the wide door way, held up the curtains of white velvet and silver, which hung from huge rings above; and as Algernon entered, a more quiet scene than those he had just passed, but still a very striking one, presented itself to his eyes. At the farther side of the room, perhaps at a distance of forty or fifty feet, standing a little in advance of two chairs of state, were seen Frederic and the Electress, both in the pride of youth and beauty. The features of neither were perfectly regular, but the face of each had its own peculiar charm of expression, the one beaming with graceful kindness and dignified good humour, the other sparkling with wit, imagination, and soul. Strikingly, though not regularly handsome, certainly they were; and seeing them standing there, clothed in similar colours, of the same age, slightly contrasted complexion, with only that difference in height which might well exist between the husband and the wife, one might have been tempted to think that no two people had ever been more fitly matched, had but the countenance of Frederic possessed more energy and determination of character. Elizabeth stood on her husband's right hand; and on his left were seen first a page, holding his sword, and then a group of the glittering nobles of his court; but on the right of the Electress, were assembled twelve or thirteen of the fairest flowers of Christendom, all robed nearly alike in white and silver; their marble brows and glossy hair bound with garlands, as it were, of diamonds and pearls. In other parts of the room--near the windows--near the doors--under the arches on either side, were several other groups conversing in a low tone; but the middle was vacant, at least when Algernon Grey entered; and he was advancing after his guide, towards the young sovereign before him, when suddenly, from a group on his right, a glittering courtier of about his own age started forward, and held out his hand.

The visitor, however, placed his finger on his lip, saying in a low tone, "Not a word, Craven,^[1] we are to be as strangers here."

The other instantly drew back again, with a smile; but William Lovet nodded to him gaily, and then followed his friend.

This little interlude had not caught the Elector's eye, for at that moment the Baron of Obertraut passed before him, and bowing low, took his place amongst the gentlemen on the left.

Elizabeth, however, saw it, and smiled, and then whispered a word in her husband's ear. Frederic's eyes were immediately turned upon the young Englishmen, who were now within a few paces; and a look of pleasure came over his countenance, while he replied in a low tone to what his wife had said.

The next moment the chamberlain interposed with a low and formal bow, saying, "These are the gentlemen, your Highness; I know not how else to introduce them to you, as they do not think fit to grace me with their names; but your pleasure being that they should have admittance, I have obeyed you in bringing them to your presence." This said in a grave and formal tone, he drew back upon the prince's left.

"You are welcome, gentlemen," said Frederic. "Though you deny your name--and we will let that pass unquestioned--we must, as sovereign of this land, inquire what brings you hither: having due regard for the safety of our subjects, to the fairer part of whom, methinks, you might prove dangerous."

While he spoke, a playful and good-humoured smile curled his lip; and Algernon Grey answered in a respectful but yet gay tone; "I must reply to your Highness with one of our English players,--

'A roving disposition, good my lord.'

Such was the evil cause that brought us to the fair Palatinate. Being there, we heard that this day your Highness held a high revel, and, longing to see the wonders of this court, we ventured hither, craving leave to tread a measure with any fair dame who will so honour us."

"I fear me much," said Frederic, in the same tone of courteous jesting, "that you are two perilous young men."

"He, my lord, is perilous young," replied Lovet, pointing to his companion; "God send that I may have a good title to the same character for the next twenty years; but, I doubt me much, it is passing away from me."

"We are all upon a road where there are no inns," answered the Elector, somewhat more gravely; "but what I fear is, that you bring danger with you, and I doubt much that I must order you into confinement, unless you can find bail and surety."

"Nay, my good lord, I will be their bail," cried Elizabeth of England gaily; "and to make all sure, I will put them in gentle ward, so that they commit no offence while in your dominions.--

Here, Agnes," she continued, "and you, my fair Countess of Laussitz, you shall be their warders, and remember, that, throughout this whole night, whether in the dance or at the table, in the halls or in the gardens, you lose not sight of your several prisoners for a moment. Stay," she continued, "although my good lord is inclined to treat them thus severely, I will be more gentle, as becomes a lady, and let each choose into whose captivity he will fall. What say you, sir?"

"By your Highness's gracious permission," replied Algernon Grey, to whom her words were addressed, "as there can be no want of gallantry in a choice where I know neither, I will surrender myself to the lady you first mentioned."

"That is you, Agnes," said the Electress; "come forward and take possession of your prisoner."

As the princess spoke, a young lady, who stood a little behind, advanced with a light step, but with some slight timidity of manner, and a cheek more flushed than it was the moment before. The timidity, however, appeared but to add new grace to that which, even before, seemed perfect; and Algernon Grey gazed upon her in evident surprise and admiration, feeling himself right happy in his choice.

It is very difficult to convey in language any just idea of those various distinctions and shades of beauty, which the eye seizes in a moment, but which escape from words; and it would be almost doing injustice to the fair girl, who now approached the princess's side, to attempt a detailed description. To give some idea, however, of her person, as the portraits, still existing, represent her, it may be enough to say, that she was certainly not above the middle height, but with every limb so exquisitely formed, that she looked taller than she really was. Her rich brown hair, with chestnut gleams upon it, fell in profuse abundance down her neck, in the fashion of the day. Her eyes were neither blue, nor brown, nor grey, but of that soft and soul-speaking hazel, so rarely seen and yet so exquisitely beautiful; while the long dark eyelash and arched brow lent themselves to every shade of expression, from deep and pensive thought to light and sparkling gaiety. The features were all small and delicate, the skin pure as alabaster, with a sunset glow upon the cheek. And the slightly parted lips, showing the pearly teeth beneath, seemed tempting love and promising return. The small, fine hand, the beautifully formed foot and ankle, the graceful neck and swelling bosom, the very turn of the head, all seemed like the dream of a sculptor in some moment of inspiration. And to crown all, was that breathing of the soul through every feature and through every part, which invests each movement with some new charm.

Algernon Grey gazed upon her, I have said, with a look of admiration and surprise; and the keener and shrewder eye of William Lovet, too, ran over her face and figure, but with a very different expression. It lasted but for a moment, and then he turned his gaze upon his friend, marking well the gleam of surprise that sparkled on his countenance. A slight smile curled his lips; but, when Algernon Grey advanced and took her hand, at the Princess's command, those lips moved; and, had any one been near, he might have heard him say, in a low tone, "This will do, methinks."

Another eye, too, marked the whole proceeding; but, in this instance, the brow became clouded, the moment the young Englishman's hand touched that of his fair companion; and, setting his teeth hard in his lower lip, the Baron of Oberntraut turned away his head, as if not to expose the discontent which was too plainly written on his face.

"I am ready, may it please your Highness," said William Lovet, advancing as soon as Algernon and his partner had drawn back, "to submit myself entirely to your high commands; but I do beseech you to lighten my chains by making them of roses, and bidding my fair gaoler issue her orders in French, English, or Italian, as I fear my purse is very empty of German coin; and if she have none other, the exchange would be much against me."

"Fear not," replied the Princess; "we all speak French here. Come, fair Countess, take your prisoner, treat him well, but watch him carefully; and, to amuse his sad hours of captivity, show him all that is worth seeing in our humble court."

The lady, to whom she spoke, was in the first rank of those on her right; and William Lovet had no cause for dissatisfaction with his fate for the evening. The lady was tall and fair, but sparkling with beauty and youth; and a merry mouth, a sleepy and love-languid eye presented to his imagination all those qualities best suited to his taste. He was speedily in full career of jest and gallantry with his fair companion, and seemed at first to make more progress with her than Algernon Grey could boast with his partner for the night.

After a pause of a few moments, the Elector turned to the Marshall of his household, and asked if any more guests were arriving or expected. The reply was "None;" and waving his hand, the Prince said in a gay tone; "Then, let us break off our state, and, for an hour or two, enjoy ourselves with the rest. Lords and ladies, to your several pastimes; and, according to a proverb, which I learned in England, let us all be merry and wise."

Thus saying, he drew the arm of the Electress through his own, and moved towards the doors of the hall. His departure was a signal for the dispersion of the court; the ceremonial part of the evening's occupations was at an end; and--ranging through the long suite of rooms which had been thrown open, going forth into the gardens and terraces--in general brightly illuminated by painted lanterns--some seeking the dance, some conversation--each endeavoured to amuse

himself as best he might upon that night of festivity and rejoicing.

CHAPTER III.

The fate that hangs over the death-doomed race of man appalls us not. We wander where generations have grown up and bloomed, borne fruit, and passed away, without a homily in our hearts; we tread upon the very graves of a thousand races, we walk over the huge burial place of the world, and give not a thought to the fellow dust that sleeps below. Strange and marvellous insensibility! whence does it spring? Is it from mere levity that we thus rise above the deep thoughts of our inevitable doom? Or is it from a high sense of loftier destinies, an intimate conviction of the imperishable elevation of one part of our mixed nature? Or is it indeed--more likely than either--that while we see the spring of life still gushing forth and pouring out stream after stream as each river is dried up, a consciousness steals over us that we are but the parts of one beautiful whole undergoing everlasting change to the glory of Him who made it all? We behold creation full of life: the herb, the flower, the beating heart, the pliant fin, the soaring wing, the thought-stored brain, all speak of that strange mysterious fire which warms the universe, bursting out wherever eye can reach or fancy penetrate, unextinguished, unextinguishable but by the will that called it into being. We see, and know it; and, instinct with the divine essence, rejoice in the light that is granted, for the time that it can be enjoyed, while the promise of its permanence and the hope of its increase shade over *the one dark moment* with a veil of gold.

Amidst buildings, that are now ruins, through scenes that are in a great part desolate, over terraces and amongst parterres, now no longer to be seen, was kept up, throughout that night, revel and merriment and joy, without a thought given to the ages passed away, or to those who had been denizens of earth and partakers of all earth's pleasures, upon that same spot for unnumbered centuries before. The present hour, the present hour! the joy of the existing short-lived moment! the taste of the ripe fruit, without the cloud of the past or the sun of the future! were then, are still, and may be for ever hereafter, the sole occupation of the gay and happy spirits, such as the guests there assembled.

It was too much so indeed; for, in those young days of bright domestic happiness, Elizabeth of England and her joyous, lighthearted husband drained to the dregs the joy-cup of prosperity and power; and, educated in the ideas of, though differing in views from the queen of James the First, the Electress was strongly tinged with those notions of freedom bordering upon levity, which were entertained by Ann of Denmark. Not that I mean for one moment to cast a stain upon a name, with which history has dealt justly, I believe, in dealing tenderly; but it is undoubted, that the Electress, if sufficiently reserved in her own manners, and perfectly pure in her own conduct, gave great encouragement, in the court of her husband, to that abandonment of ordinary and conventional restraints, which can only be safe amongst the high-minded and the chivalrous, and not always even then. She held with Ann of Denmark, that women had as much right, and might be as safely trusted with the entire and unwatched direction of their own actions, as men; that those harsh restrictions and suspicious guardianships, which have grown up out of a complicated and artificial state of society, might well and wisely be dispensed with; and that the sole cause of there being any danger to woman herself, or to the world in general, from allowing her the same freedom, which man monopolizes, was the early restraint, which denied experience, as the guide of reason and the demonstration of principle.

Thus a degree of freedom--I will not call it license, for that is a harsh term, and implies according to modern acceptation, much more than I mean--reigned in the electoral court; and, although more than seven hundred guests were there assembled on the night I speak of, in addition to the noble part of a household numbering constantly more than a thousand members, no one, unless from some private and peculiar reason, thought it in the least necessary to watch the proceedings of others, whether male or female. Doubtless the Electress was right in many of the views she maintained, abstractedly speaking; but unfortunately it happens, that to every theory, however just in itself, certain small practical circumstances oppose themselves, affecting its application most momentously. I will illustrate, in some degree, what I mean. Formerly, in the silver mines of Spain, as at present in the soil of Illyria, I believe, a certain mineral was to be found very much resembling silver in colour--weighty, bright and fluid. Taken in its native state, it is innocuous and very inefficient; but add a few drops of a certain nearly colourless acid to it, and it becomes a valuable medicine; add a few drops of another acid, and it becomes the most virulent of poisons. Now the small circumstances, for which no allowance is ever made, are the few drops of acid, which in the furnace of the world render the most innocent theory possible, either highly beneficial, or terribly pernicious. I speak not, of course, of principles, for they are fixed; but merely of theories at first sight indifferent.

However, such as I have stated, was the Court of the Elector Palatine in the year one thousand six hundred and nineteen, and in the month of August in that year: a period pregnant with great events, when the fate of the Palatinate--nay, the fate of Europe--nay, immeasurably more, the progress of society and the march of the human mind throughout the whole world, hung trembling in the balance; and yet there they were, the gay, the lighthearted, the enthusiastic, the moveable, all, apparently, creatures of impulse alike, enjoying with less restraint, than the world had often seen before, the happiness of the present hour. Music and the dance, gay conversation, light jest and playful wit had excited heads and hearts alike. The heat of the saloons had become oppressive; the glare of the lamps and tapers had dazzled and fatigued the eyes; the moving objects, the brilliant dresses, the beaming jewels, the straining race after pleasure, had become fatiguing to many; and some forty or fifty pairs, hand in hand, or arm in arm, had wandered out to seek the refreshing coolness of the gardens, to repose the mind, and invigorate the body in the fresh night air of August, or else to tell the tale of love and seek its return, under the broad green foliage of the trees, or the twinkling eyes of the deep blue sky of night.

Algernon Grey and his fair companion stood side by side in one of the deep windows of the hall where they had trod one dance, and he marked the disappearance of many, who had been for some time in the same chamber, by doors which led he knew not whither. Had the lady remained as timidly distant as when first they met, perhaps he might have asked no questions in regard to a subject which only excited a slight and passing curiosity; but a change had come over them both.

It was seldom that Algernon Grey felt embarrassment or hesitation in addressing the brightest or the fairest in the world. From a period, generally reckoned within the round of boyhood, he had acted for himself, except in some matters of deep moment; and, in regard to those, the arrangements which had been made for him by his friends, had, by fixing his fate, in several of its most important features, irrevocably placed him beyond the circle of many events most fraught with emotion for the heart of youth. But yet, there is something very impressive in great beauty, especially in its first early dawn. With the mature woman, there are a thousand avenues opened by her own experience, to approach her fearlessly, if honestly. But the mind of a very young girl, like the first bud of a rose, is hedged in by thorns, through which we must force our way. In one of the German editions of a fairy tale, called the "Sleeping Beauty in the wood," the knight, who is destined to deliver the lady, has first to cut his path through the forest before he can even approach the castle in which she lies slumbering; and he never would have succeeded, had it not been for an enchanted sword given him by a kind friend. I cannot help thinking, that in the allegory, the Sleeping Beauty meant the confidence of a young and inexperienced heart; and the sword which none of the trees could resist, a high and noble spirit, possessed by one who sought to approach it. With such a sword Algernon Grey was armed; and, although he found some difficulty in choosing his path, fortune befriended him at length. After two vain efforts which produced nothing in reply, but those common-places, which showed that the lady was accustomed, more than her years would have induced him to expect, to courts and the world, he hit upon a happier theme, which obtained a longer answer and touched deeper feelings. He had spoken of the Electoral court, he had spoken of the fair Palatinate, he had spoken of the Elector and Electress. Her replies were courtly, but from the surface. He then spoke of England, of his own land, of the qualities of the people, their truthfulness, their energy of character; and she warmed in an instant. She often longed to see it, she said. She told him that it was the cherished vision of her lonely moments, the hope of her heart, the only eager and anxious desire she had; and when he expressed his surprise that the distant island from which he came, could have awakened such interest, she asked with a smile:--

"Do you not know that I am an Englishwoman? I have never seen England, I have never known it; but yet I am an Englishwoman."

"Indeed," he said, instantly changing the language in which they had been speaking to his own; "of English parents, you mean? I can well conceive the land of our ancestors possesses a deep interest for any one born afar, but yet, fair lady, you must be somewhat of an enthusiast, also, to say that it is the only hope of your heart?"

"Perhaps I am," she answered with a smile, "but yet there is something more in the thought of England, than the mere clinging of the heart to the place of a long ancestry. Her very insulated situation seems to impose upon her children, as a duty, to limit, in a degree, their wishes and their feelings to the bounds of her sea-washed shores. There is an interest in her solitary grandeur amongst the waves. Then too, she has ever been the island-throne from which a long race of mighty kings has shaken the destinies of all other lands, and ruled or changed a world. History is full of England. It seems, to my eyes, as if hers were the pervading spirit of all past chronicles--as if, like an awful spectre, her image was always present amidst the festivals and feuds of other states. Calm, grand, and sublime, she treads the waters of earthly strife; and, while others are contending for petty trifles amongst themselves, losing one day, winning another, the power and glory of England marches on, if not unchecked, only the greater for each temporary reverse. Freedom is her birth-right, home joys and rural peace her ornaments; arts, arms, and poetry, the coronet on her brow. Oh! it is a glorious land, indeed, and let them call us proud, if they will! Thank God! we have something to be proud of."

Her eyes sparkled, her colour rose, her whole face beamed with animation as she spoke; and Algernon Grey gazed at her with an admiring smile. Perhaps he might fear that under the monarch then on the English throne, their country might lose, for a time, that high position in

which her fancy placed it; but, at all events, the few words then spoken broke down at once all cold barriers of reserve between them; and from that moment they went on pouring forth the thoughts of their hearts to each other, as if long years of intimacy had linked their minds together.

"Whither are all these people wending, that I see depart?" asked Algernon Grey, at length, as he marked the gradual thinning of the rooms. "I trust this bright evening is not coming to a close?"

"Oh, no," she answered, "not for hours. They are going to the gardens, I suppose, or anywhere they like. This is a free and liberal place, fair sir, where each one does as he thinks fit, and others mind him not."

"I would fain see these same gardens," said her companion, "if they be within the bounds of my imprisonment."

"Come, then," she said, "why should we not? These rooms are very warm, too; and we shall find fresher air without. Through that door, and then down the stairs, will lead us out by the library-tower, amongst the flowers and the green trees."

As she spoke, they moved towards the door, to which she pointed; and they had nearly reached it, when the Baron of Oberntraut crossed their path, and suddenly paused before them.

"I have lost my bet, sir," he said, in a somewhat sharp tone, "and will send you the amount to your inn to-morrow."

"Oh, it matters not," answered Algernon Grey; "it was a foolish wager of mine, and I can hardly call it fairly won; for I suspect, by a smile I saw on your Prince's lip, that he remembers having seen me in my own land, though I was but a mere boy then."

"I always pay my debts of all kinds, sir," replied the other; and then, turning to the lady, he asked her to tread a measure with him, when the dance began again.

"I cannot, noble sir," she replied coldly; "I have a task assigned me, which I must perform. You heard the commands I received."

"Commands right willingly obeyed," answered Oberntraut; and, turning sharply away, he left them.

"He is in an ill humour," said Algernon Grey, as, passing through two or three rooms nearly deserted, they reached the top of a small staircase, that led down towards the gardens. "He reasonably enough made me a bet, that I would not obtain admission here, without announcing my name or rank. I unreasonably preferred it, and, against probability, have won."

"He is more wounded," answered Alice, "at his judgment having been found in fault, than at the loss of the wager, be the amount what it will. He is a liberal, free-hearted gentleman, whom success, high birth, and flattery have rendered somewhat vain; but yet, from all I hear and all I have ever seen, I should judge that at heart there are few nobler or better men now living."

Algernon Grey mused for a moment; he knew not why, but her words gave him pain; and they passed out, in silence, into the gardens, then newly laid out by the famous Salomon de Caux. Nothing that profuse expense and the taste and science of the day could effect, had been left undone to render those gardens a miracle of art. Mountains had been thrown down; valleys had been filled up; streams had been turned from their course; and terrace above terrace, parterre beyond parterre, fountains, grottos, statues, arcades, presented a scene somewhat stiff and formal, indeed, but of a gorgeous and splendid character; whilst, sweeping round, as if covering them with a green mantle, came the mountains and forests of the Neckarthal. There were lamps in many places, but such artificial light was little needed; for the moon, within a few days of her full, was pouring a flood of splendour over the scene, which showed even minute objects around. So bright and beautiful was it, so white was the reflection from leaves and gravel walks, and the fresh stonework of the garden, that, had not the warm air told the presence of summer, Algernon Grey might have fancied that snow had fallen since he entered the castle gates.

Numerous groups of persons were wandering hither and thither; and the very colours of their clothing could be seen under the beams of the bright moon. Among the very first of the gay parties, which passed the young Englishman and his companion, as they walked along the upper terrace, towards the broad flight of steps that led down into the lower garden, was his gay friend, William Lovet, walking with the lady who had been assigned as his guide through the night. Right merry they both seemed to be; and we may as well follow them for a moment or two, to show the contrast between Lovet and his fellow-traveller.

"Love and constancy," cried Lovet, with a laugh, just as they passed Algernon Grey, "two things, dear lady, perfectly incompatible. The very essence of love is in change; and you know, in your heart, that you feel it. It is but that you wish to bind all your slaves to you by chains of iron, while you yourself roam free."

"Chains of brass would suit such an impudent man as you better," answered the lady, in the

same gay tone; "but I can tell you, I will have no lovers who will not vow eternal constancy."

"Oh! I will vow," answered Lovet, "as much as you like; I have got a stock of vows, which, like the fountain of the Nile, is inexhaustible; and ever goes on swelling in the summer; I'll overflow with vows, if that be all; I'll adjure, protest, swear, kneel, sigh, weep, and vow again, as much as any true knight in Christendom. You shall believe me as constant as the moon, the sea, or the wind, or any other fixed and steadfast thing--nay, the moon is the best image, after all; for she, like me, is constant in inconstancy. Still hovering round the planet of her love, though she changes every hour; and so will I. I will love you ever dearly, though I vary with each varying day."

"And love a dozen others every day," answered the lady, laughing.

"To be sure," he cried; "mine is a large and capacious heart; no narrow peasant's crib, which can contain but one. Fie on such penury! I would not be such a poor pitiful creature, as to have room but for one fair friend in my bosom, for all the riches of Solomon, that great king of innumerable wives and wisdom super-excellent. For me, I make it an open profession; I love the whole sex, especially while they are young and pretty."

"You are laughing at me and trying to tease me," exclaimed the lady, piqued and yet pleased; "but you cannot do it, and never shall. You may think yourself a very conquering person; but I set no value on love that, like a beggar's garment, has fitted thousands in its day, and must be patched and ragged."

"Good as new, good as new!" cried Lovet, "without break or flaw. The trials it has undergone but prove its excellence. Love is of adamant, polished but not broken by use. But you dare me, dear lady--you defy me, methinks. Now that is a bold and courageous act; and we will see the result. No fortress so strong but it has some weak point, and the castle that fires off its ordnance at the first sight of an enemy, is generally very much afraid of being taken by surprise. The little traitor is busy at your heart, even now, whispering that there is danger; for he knows right well that the best means of reducing a place, is to spread a panic in the garrison."

In the mean while, the very name of love had only been mentioned once, between Agnes and Algernon. Their minds were busied, especially at first, with aught else on earth. He certainly thought her very beautiful; more beautiful, perhaps, than any one he had ever seen; but it was rather as an impression than a matter of reflection. He felt it, he could not but feel it; yet he did not pause upon the idea. For her part, neither did she think of his personal appearance. His countenance was one that pleased her; it seemed expressive of a noble heart and a fine intellect; she would have known him out of all the world, if she had met him years afterwards and had only seen him then but once. Yet, had she been asked to describe his person, she could not have told one feature of his face. When they reached the bottom of the flight of steps, they paused and looked up to the castle, as it stood upon its rock above, with the enormous masses and towers standing out dark and irregular in the moonlight sky; while the hills swept in grand variety around, and the valley opened out beyond, showing the plain of the Rhine flooded with moonlight.

"This is, indeed, magnificent and beautiful," said Algernon Grey. "I have seen many lands, and, certainly, never did I think to behold in this remote and untravelled part, a scene which eclipses all that I ever beheld before."

"It is very beautiful," answered Agnes; "and although I have been a tenant of that castle now many a year, I find that the fair land in which it lies, like the society of the good and bright, only gains by long acquaintance. To me, however, it has charms it cannot have to you. There dwell those I have loved best through life, there all who have been kind to me in childhood: the protectors of my infancy, the friends of my youth. It has more to me than the scene and its beauties; and when I gaze at the castle, or let my eye run along the valley, I see through the whole the happy home, the pleasant place of repose. Faces of friends look out at me from every window and every glade, and loved voices sound on every breeze. They are not many; but they are sweet to my heart."

"And I, too," answered Algernon Grey, "though I can see none of these things that you can see, behold much more than the mere lines and tints. As I entered the court but an hour or two ago, and looked up at the various piles that crowded round, some in the freshness of a holiday youth in his best clothes sent home from school, some in the russet livery of age, and some almost crumbling to their earth again, I could not but picture to myself the many scenes which those walls have beheld; the loves, the hopes, the pleasures, the griefs, the disappointment, the despair, the troublous passions, the calm domestic joys--even the pleasant moments of dreamy idleness, and the phantasm-forming hours of twilight--all that the past has seen upon this spot seemed to rise before me in tangible forms, and sweep across in long procession with smiles and tears alternate on their cheeks; and all the while the musicians under the stone canopy, appeared in their gay and spirit stirring tones to read a curious comment on the whole."

"What might their comment be?" asked the lady, gazing up in his face with a look of interest.

"They seemed to say," he answered, "Joy thou too, young heart! All is transient, all are shadows. Taste thy morning in its prime. Be thy noontide firm and strong, strew thine evening path with flowers, embrace the right, eschew the wrong, and fear not when the coming hours

shall gather thee to join that train which sweeps along."

"Why, it is verse!" cried Agnes, smiling.

"Not quite," he answered, "but so fancy made their sounds, words; and the cadence of the music added a sort of measure."

"'Twas sweet counsel and good of that kind dame, Imagination," rejoined the fair girl, "and yet, though the command was to be gay, your words, fair sir, are somewhat sad."

"Let us be gay then," he replied.

"With all my heart," she cried: "but what shall we be gay about?"

"Nay, if we have to search for a theme, better be as we are," answered the young Englishman, "nature is ever best; the mood of the moment is the only one that is worth having, because it is the only one that is true. It will change when it is time. But you are by nature gay, is it not so?"

"Oh, yes!" she answered, "I am gay as a free bird. Nay, good Dr. Scultetus, the court chaplain, would persuade me often I am light--but methinks not that; for I have felt many things long and deeply."

"And amongst them, love?" asked her companion.

"Oh, yes!" replied she, in a frank yet playful tone, "I have loved deeply and truly."

Algernon Grey was silent for a moment. He would have given much to have asked, "Whom?" but he did not venture, and the next instant the beautiful girl went on in a tone that reproved him for the question he had put.

"I have loved my parents," she said, "deeply and well--though one of them I cannot remember--I have loved my friends--I do love my princess."

"It was not of such love I spoke," he answered, gazing down at her earnestly.

"Then, I know no other," she replied, "do you?"

"Oh, yes, many," he said, laughing; "there is a warmer, a more sparkling, I might almost call it, a fiercer kind of love, which every man, who has mingled a good deal in the world, must have seen in its effects, if he have not experienced it in his person.--But I am not in a confessional," continued he; "and so I shall say no more."

"And yet you would put me in one," she answered gaily; "but certainly when I go there, I will have a more reverend father-confessor; for methinks, you are given to asking questions, which I may not be inclined to answer."

Her companion paused in meditation during a moment or two; for her words raised a certain degree of doubt in his mind, as to whether she belonged to the Protestant or to the Catholic party, who, at the time I write of, lived together in the various towns of Germany, rather enduring than tolerating each other. It seemed a night of frankness, however, when questions might be easily asked, which would be impertinent at a graver and more reserved moment; and he demanded, at length, in a light tone: "Pray, tell me, before I say more, are you one of those who condemn all Protestants to fire and faggot here and in the other world, or of those who think the power of the Pope an intolerable burden and the doctrines of that church heretical?"

"Oh, I understand you," she said, after a moment's thought; "you would ask of what religion I am, and laugh a little at both, to put your question in a form not uncivil to either. But if you needs must know, I will tell you thus much--I was born a Protestant."

"*Born* a protestant!" Algernon Grey exclaimed; "that seems to me a new way of becoming one."

"Nay, I don't know," she answered; "I believe it is the way one-half the world receive their religion, whatever it may be."

"Right," he said, "right! You are right, and I was wrong--not only their religion, but half their views. You were born a Protestant, and so was I; but I must say, happy are those whose reason, when it becomes mature, confirms the principles they have received in their youth. So it has been with me; and, I trust, with you also."

"Nay, I do not know that my reason is mature," replied the lady, with a smile: "but everything I have thought and read leads me to think that I cannot be wrong. It seems to me that the religion, which was taught to fishermen by its Divine author, to be preached to all the world, may be well read, and studied unadorned, by the descendants of the world that then existed: it seems, to me, that if priests married they were as likely to be as good priests, and better men; it seems to me, that when our religion teaches to confess our faults one to another, there was no thought of setting apart a particular order of men to be the registrars of all our wickedness, but rather to correct that stubborn pride which hardens us in evil, by inducing us to deny our guilt. Moreover,

I think that the habit of bowing down before pieces of stone and wood, of praying to sinners like ourselves when they are dead, and of kissing solemnly a piece of ivory on a cross, is something very like idolatry.--But I know little of all these things. I read the Bible, and am convinced myself; and yet I cannot make up my mind to think that good men, with faith in a Saviour, will perish eternally because they judge differently. Now you have won from me an account of my faith; but pray do not tell any one; for half our clergy would think I was part papist, and the other half part fool."

"You have thought of these things deeply, at all events," replied Algernon Grey, "and that is something, where so few think at all."

"Oh, one cannot help thinking of these things here, where one hears little else from morning till night; but I have thought of them, too, for other reasons," she said more gravely. "One has need of consolations in this world, at times. There is but one true source from which they flow; and before we drink at that source, it is needful to ascertain if the stream be pure. Still we are very grave," she continued: "Heaven help us! if they did but know in yon gay saloons of what we two here are talking in the gardens, they would open their eyes with wonder, and perhaps their lips with laughter."

"Well, then, we will change our tone," continued Algernon Grey; "come, let us range along those higher terraces, where I see a long line of arches, tall, and slim, and one beyond another, like the fragment of a Roman aqueduct striding across the valley."

"Gladly," she answered; "the air will be cooler there, for it is higher; and we shall have it all to ourselves; for the gay world of the court will linger down here till the trumpets sound to supper. I love the high free air and solitude. One draws a finer breath upon the mountains, and I often wish I were an eagle to soar above their jagged tops and drink the breath of heaven itself. But here comes your gay companion, and the fair lady of Laussitz."

"Who may she be?" inquired the young Englishman.

"A very pretty lady, somewhat gay," replied his companion; "but you must forgive me, my good captive, if I tell you nought of the ladies of this court. In truth, I know very little; for I hear much that I do not believe, much that I cannot be sure of; and, though I see sometimes what I would not see, yet I would fain judge all charitably, and put no harsh construction on other people's acts."

As she spoke Lovet and the fair countess passed at some little distance; and certainly, to all appearance, he had made some progress to intimacy in a marvellous short space of time. She might be fatigued, it is true--it might be but an idle habit she had gained; but still, the arm that was passed through his let the fair hand drop till it met her left hand, which she had raised, and the round but taper fingers of either were intertwined together. The head, slightly inclined over the left shoulder, drooped somewhat forward, as if the eyes were cast upon the ground, while the ear was raised to catch his words. There was a languor in her figure and in her air, an ill-assured step, a certain feebleness, as if some powers of mind or body were failing. It was his voice spoke as they passed. "Nay, nonsense," he said; "these are all idle nothings, bugbears set up to make the grown children of the world good boys. Come, fair one, come; do not assume a pettish anger that you do not feel. Love was made for such a heart as yours, and such an hour for love," and, bending down his head, he added somewhat more.

"How dare you," said the lady in a low voice, "on my life, you are too bold; I will leave you, I will, indeed."

But she did not leave him; and, for more than an hour afterwards, they might be seen wandering about those gardens, arm in arm, affecting solitary places.

It is strange how often good and evil take nearly the same forms--how that which is bright and pure seeks the same scenes with all that is most opposite, but finds a different treasure there; as the bee will draw honey from the aconite, whence others will extract the deadly poison. In the bland innocence of her heart, the bright being by Algernon Grey's side led him on to the most lonely parts of the garden, wandered with him where there was no eye to watch them; and, mounting one high flight of steps after another, passed along the whole extent of that grand terrace, raised upon its stupendous arches, the encumbered remains of which may still be seen overhanging the valley of the Neckar. But there, at the verge, they paused, gazing forth on the moonlight scene around; marking the manifold gradations of the shadow and the light, as mass after mass of wood and castle, mountain and rock, city and plain, faded off into one gentle hue of grey mingled with gold. A thousand were the images called up in the minds of each, by the objects that their eyes beheld; a thousand were the associations and the allusions to which they gave birth. Wide and erratic as is ever the course of fancy, soaring into the heights of the highest heaven, and plunging into the deepest depths below, never, perhaps, had her wing seemed more untiring, more wild and eccentric, than with those two young hearts on that eventful night--eventful in every way to themselves, to those around them, to Europe, to the world, to the march of society, to the enlightenment of the human mind, to the eternal destinies of all man's race.

To what fundamental changes, in everything that affects man's best interests, did not that nineteenth of August give rise!

The destiny that hung above them, without their knowing it, seemed to have some mysterious influence upon the minds and characters of both. The barrier of cold formality was broken down between them; each poured forth the thoughts of the bosom as to an old familiar friend. Agnes felt herself irresistibly impelled--carried away, she knew not how or why--to speak to her companion as she had never spoken to man before. She fancied it was, that she had, for the first time, found a spirit congenial to her own; and certain it is, that there is a magic in the first touch of sympathy, which awakens sleeping powers in the heart, develops undiscovered stores of thought and feeling, and brings to light the bright things of the soul. But surely there was something more in it than this. Upon that hour, upon that moment hung the destinies of each; though neither had one thought that such could be the case, though of all things it seemed the most improbable, though he was a wandering stranger, purposing but to stop a few days in the place; and she seemed fixed down to it and its associations for life. Yet so it was; and had aught been different between them; had she remained in the mere timidity of the young girl, or in the cold courtesy of new acquaintance; had he maintained the usual proud and lofty air which he assumed in general with women, how different would have been their late through life! The varied scenes through which they were to pass, the distant lands which they were destined to visit, would never have beheld them together; and that night would have been but a pleasant dream, to be recollected amidst the dull realities of life.

It was otherwise, however. She was so young, so gentle, so bright, so beautiful, that her society acted as a charm, waking him from a sort of dull and heavy torpor which had been cast over his heart by an event that had taken place in his boyhood--a counter-spell, which dissipated one that had chained up the current of his youthful blood in cold and icy bonds. He gave way to all he felt, to all the pleasure of the moment. Their conversation freed itself from all ceremonious shackles; both seemed to feel that they could trust fully in each other, and spoke, as feeling dictated, with no reserve and no misunderstanding. The flight of thought became gayer, too, naturally and easily; and as Agnes gave way to the high and buoyant spirit of youth, her young fancies soared and twinkled, like the wings of a lark in the sunshine; while Algernon Grey, with a firmer and more steady flight, seemed like a spirit beside her spirit, guiding her on, higher and higher, into the world of space open to the human mind.

Suddenly, as they thus rambled on together, through the remote parts of the gardens, they heard the sounds of distant trumpets, blowing clear and loud; and Agnes, with a start, turned to her companion, saying: "That is the call to supper. Our evening is coming to an end; do not think me too strange and free, if I say that I am sorry for it."

"Nay," answered he, "why should I think you so, when I, with far more cause, feel the same most deeply. We may, perhaps, never meet again, fair lady; but I shall always remember this night as one undimmed in its brightness, without a spot to chequer it, without a shade, or a regret. I do think you free and at ease; more so, perhaps, than I expected: more so than many would have been, older in the world's ways than yourself--but not too free; and I can well conceive that the long sojourn in a court like this has removed all cold restraint from your manner."

"Oh, no," she said, "it is not that! I never mingle with the court when I can help it. The ease I have shown to-night has depended, partly on myself, partly on you."

"Let me hear more," he answered; "I do not clearly understand you."

"Well, then," she said, "I am habitually free and at ease; because I am sure of myself--because I feel that I never mean wrong; and do not know that I have any thoughts I could wish to conceal. Let those who doubt themselves fear to show their heart as it is; thanks to wise friends and careful guidance, mine has no part that may not be open. Then, as to your share: you have treated me in a manner different from that which most men would assume to most women. I could scarcely lay my finger upon one of all that court, who, sent with me, like you, throughout this night, would not have tried to please my ear with tales of love and praises of my beauty, long, stupid, and insignificant as a cricket on the hearth. Had you done so, my manner might have been very different."

Her companion did not reply for a moment or two; but then said, with a smile: "It seems to me that there must be something both vain and insulting in supposing that a woman will willingly listen to tales of love from a man who has known her but a few hours--he must think her very light and himself very captivating."

"We poor women," she answered, "are bound to gratitude towards your sex, even for forbearance; and therefore, it is, I thank you for not having held me so lightly."

"I am far more than repaid," he rejoined, as she guided him down the steps into the lower garden, saying that they must hasten on, and that was the shortest way.

Passing round under the high banks formed by the casting down of a great part of the hill, called the Friesenberg, they had crossed one half of the gardens and were walking on at a spot where the shadow of one of the great towers fell deep upon the green turf, when suddenly a tall figure seemed to rise out of the earth close beside them, passed them, and disappeared. For an instant the lady clung to her companion's arm as if in terror; but then, the moment after, she laughed gaily, saying: "This place has so many superstitious legends attached to it that they cling

to one's fancy whether one will or not. If I ever see you again, I will tell you one about this very spot; but we have not time now; for in ten minutes after that trumpet-sound, the Elector will be at table."

We will not go on to visit the banquet that followed, to contemplate its splendour, or criticise the ceremonies there observed. It were an easy matter to describe it, for we have many a dull relation of many a gay feast of the time; but, in this work, I have not in view to paint the mere customs and manners of the age, except incidentally, but rather to show man's heart and feelings undisguised, and exhibit their true proportions, stripped of a gaudy but disfiguring robe of ceremony.

CHAPTER IV.

How often an aching head or an aching heart is the follower of a gay night like that of the nineteenth of August, those who have much mingled with, or much watched, the world well know. In the commerce of life we are too apt to reverse the usual course of all reasonable traffic, and purchase with short present pleasure a vast amount of future grief and care. The bargain is a bad one, but made every day; and even at the table, in the ball-room, and in many another scene, this same losing trade is going on, with the bitter day of reckoning on the morrow.

How is it with Algernon Grey, as he sits there in the large gloomy chamber, with his head leaning on his hand, his eyes gazing vacantly forth through the narrow window? The servants come and go; and he notices them not. The table is laid for breakfast, but the meal remains untasted. Busy sounds rise up from without and float through the half open casement; the gay and cheering laugh, the light song, the chattered conversation, the cry of the vender of early grapes, the grating noise of wheels, or that of horses' feet, and through the whole a lively hum, indistinct but merry to the ear. Nevertheless, he hears not a sound, buried in the deep thoughts of his own heart.

Is it that the brow is aching? or that languor and feverish heat reign in those strong and graceful limbs? Oh, no. The whole frame is free from pain; fresh, vigorous, and fit for instant action. Is there any word, spoken the night before, any deed done, that he would recall, yet cannot? Not so. He has nought to reproach himself with; conscience has no accusing voice.

What is it then? He communes with his own heart; and a dark overshadowing cloud comes between him and the sun of happiness. It is a shadow from the past; but it extends over all the present, and far and vague into the future.

The first thing that roused him, was the entrance of his gay friend, William Lovet, who came to share the meal with him. Nevertheless, Algernon did not perceive his approach, till he was close to him, and laid his hand upon his shoulder, saying:--

"Heaven and earth, Algernon! what has made thee so moody, man? There must be something in the air of this foul city, that--with such a bright vision as that of last night to gladden your way--one stain of care should be found upon your brow."

His friend roused himself instantly, and answered gaily, though not without an effort: "I must think sometimes, William; it is a part of my nature. One little drop of thought fell into my clay when it was kneading. Thank your stars that none such entered into your composition.--But let us to breakfast, my appetite tells me that the hour has somewhat passed."

"Appetite," cried Lovet, taking his seat; "tell not the bright-eyed Agnes of your having so coarse and vulgar a thing. She will think your love forsworn and all your fidelity false and fickle, if you do more than eat one slice out of that partridge breast, or drink aught but sour Rhenish throughout the day. But seriously, and upon my life, with solemn earnestness, I do declare, never was such a glorious chance as has fallen to the lot of each of us. Had we culled the whole court, I fancy, we could have found nought more charming; and we must stay here at least a month, to profit by Dame Fortune's favours."

"A very sweet companion I had," answered Algernon Grey, coldly; "but no vows did I make, no fidelity did I swear, my good friend."

"Heaven and earth!" cried Lovet, "did one ever hear of such a thing as a man travelling with another upon equal terms, and yet leaving him all the hard work to do? Swear! why I swore till my joints ached and my teeth were sadly damaged; and as to vows, two Dutch barks, broad in the bow, broad in the stern, and deep enough in the hold to hide ten Dutchmen upon an elephant, would not hold one-half of the cargo that I landed safely at yon lady's feet last night. Let me see,

what is her name? I have it somewhere, written from her own sweet lips--Countess of Laussitz!--Matilda, too, by the mark! A good name, a marvellous good name, is it not, Algernon? Musical, pretty, soft, soothing, loveable. But never go anywhere without tablets! See what service mine have been to me! Many a fair prospect is spoiled by a mistake in the name. Call Matilda Joan, or Louisa Deborah, and you are ruined for ever;--Matilda, Countess of Laussitz! Charming! Sweet! Bless her soft eyes and her sweet lips; they are worth the best diamond in the Mogul's turban. And so you positively did not swear fidelity, nor vow vows? The lady must have thought you marvellously stupid."

While he had been speaking he had not failed to do justice to the good things on the table. Nor had Algernon Grey shown any lack of appetite, applying himself more stoutly to eat his breakfast than to answer his companion's light raillery. At length, however, he replied: "She did not seem to think so; or, perhaps, she was too courteous to express it; but, at all events, my evening spent with her was a very pleasant one, though neither love, nor vows, nor sighing, had any share therein."

"And yet, methinks, you went into very sighing places," answered Lovet, laughing; "you affected the groves and solitary terraces, as well as others, whom you wot of; and then linked arm in arm, with eyes cast down and sweet low voices, if something warmer than a prologue to a mystery, or a descant on the moon, did not enter into your gentle communion, methinks you must have been worse than Hecla; for, though it be all ice, they say, yet there is fire at the heart; and that girl's eyes and lips were enough to set any one's blood in a flame, even if it were naturally cold as a toad's. Come, come, Algernon, no such reserve between us; let us speak freely of our loves, and we may help each other."

"On my life! William, I have none to speak of," answered his companion, warmly. "You may make love to whom you like, for you are free; but with me it is very different."

"Nonsense," exclaimed the other; "the circumstances are the same in both cases, only the position is reversed. If I am free, she is married; did you not see her husband there?--a fat, white-faced man, not so high as a musketoon. But what is that to me? The love of a month does not trouble itself about matrimony; and my great grandmother's starched ruff is, of all things, the emblem that I hate; for she dared not even kiss her daughter for fear of its crumpling. Why should you heed, either? A little pardonable polygamy is an excellent good receipt for keeping the taste fresh by constant variety. Heaven help me! if all my wives were counted throughout the cities of civilized Europe, I fear I should have to transfer me to Turkey, and lodge next door to the Sublime Porte."

Algernon Grey smiled, whether he would or not, at his friend's account of himself, but still he answered seriously: "The case is this, William; whatever I may judge I have a right to do myself; there is one thing, I am sure, I have no right to do, which is, to make a young, gay, happy heart, unhappy, sad, and old,--ay, I say *old*; for the touch of disappointed love is as withering as the hand of Time. No, no, I have no right to do that!"

"Good faith! you are most scrupulously wrong, my noble cousin," answered Lovet, "and do injustice both to yourself and others. Man, and woman too, were born for pleasure; changing, varying, at each step we take. It is a sort of duty in my eyes to give every human being brought in contact with me whatever joy I can afford them; and I should as much think of refusing a poor fellow a good dinner, for fear he should not have one to-morrow, as fail to make love to a pretty lady who expects it; because I cannot go on loving her all my life. Every woman has a pleasure in being made love to, and I say, Out upon the niggard who will not give her a share of it when he has the opportunity. Every man to his own whim, however; for, after all, these are nought but whims, or the effects of a most pragmatistical education. But follow your own course, follow your own course, and go on picking the bare bone of a very musty morality, fancying it all the while venison and capon. Perhaps, after all, you are nought but a true and devoted knight and lover; and the thought of the rare beauty you left four or five years ago in England, like a certain composition of salt and nitre in a pickling-pan, may be preserving you, uncorrupted as a neat's tongue, sound and safe, but somewhat hard and shrivelled withal. Well, she is a glorious creature, it must be confessed; and I, being your cousin and hers too, may venture to confess, without suspicion of flattery, that rarely have I seen beauty equal to hers. The bud has burst into the rose since you left it, and though there may be a thorn or two, the flower is well worth gathering."

Algernon Grey mused and answered in a thoughtful tone, as if arguing with himself. "Taste is a strange thing," he said, "marvellously strange! Who can give reason for his likings and dislikings? --and yet there must be some course of reasoning below them all. Or is it instinct, William, that teaches us instantly to appreciate and seek that which is suitable to ourselves? There are several kinds of beauty--"

"True, noble cousin," answered Lovet, in a bantering tone.

"Ay, but two very distinct classes into which all minor differences perhaps may be arranged," his friend continued.

"Perhaps so," rejoined the other; "let us hear more of the two ranks."

"Why there is first," replied Algernon Grey, "that sort of beauty which dazzles and surprises--brilliant and commanding, I think men call it--the bold firm eye, the Juno frown, the look of fiery passion, sparkling as a diamond but as hard, bright as a sword but oftentimes as ready to wound. With me it alarms rather than attracts, rouses to resistance instead of subduing."

"Go on," said Lovet, in a quiet but meaning tone, "I understand."

"Then there is the other sort," his friend continued, "that which wins rather than triumphs; the gentle, the gay, more than the keen and bright; yielding to, rather than demanding love; the trusting, the confiding look, instead of the ruling and commanding; the lip where smiles seem to find their native home; the soft half-shaded eye full of veiled light, speaking at times the sportiveness of innocent thought, under which may lie, concealed against the time of need, higher and stronger powers of heart and mind."

Lovet had become graver as his companion went on; and when he ended, replied with some warmth, "Ay, indeed, such beauty as that might well win love for life, and he would be a fool who found it and let any idle obstacle prevent his purchase of so rare a jewel; but it is a dream of your fancy, Algernon. Imagination has laid on those delicate colours, and you will never see the original of the portrait. Each man has in his own heart his own image of perfection, always sought for but rarely found. If once he meets it, let him beware how it escapes him. He will never see its like again. I am no enthusiast, as you well know--I have seen too much of life; but here--all levity as you think me--did I find once the creature that fancy early drew as the companion of my days, and had hope of winning her love, I tell you, Algernon, there is not that consideration on the earth I would not cast behind me for the great joy of making her mine for ever: no, not one--rank, station, wealth, the world's esteem, all cold and formal dogmas, devised by knaves and listened to by fools. I would bend all to that. My own habitual lightness, the sneer and jest of gay companions, the censure of the grave and reverend, the fear of outcry and invective, and all the idle babble of the world, would weigh but as a feather in the balance against the lifelong dream of happiness which such an union would call up."

When he had spoken--and he did so with fire and eagerness altogether unlike himself--he leaned his head upon his hand, and fell apparently into profound thought for several minutes. Algernon Grey, too, mused, and his meditation lasted longer than his companion's, for he was still in a deep reverie when Lovet started up, exclaiming, "But it is all in vain!--Come, Algernon, let us not think--it is the most irrational waste of time that can be devised. We are but Fate's monkeys. She keeps us here in this cage of earth and throws us what crumbs she will. Happy is he who catches them quickest. What are you for today? I am for the castle to worship at my little shrine, unless I hear from my saint to the contrary before the clock strikes eleven."

"Some time in the day I must go up, too," replied his friend; "in courtesy, we must both do so to show our thankfulness for our kind reception; but before I go, I must away into the town to seek out worthy Dr. Henry Alting, this renowned professor, to whom my uncle, his old friend, sent me a letter by your hands."

"Then, you may as well publish your name at the market-cross if there be one," answered Lovet; "it will be given out from the chair of philosophy this morning, and over the whole town ere noon."

"No, no," replied the other, with a smile, "my uncle humours my whim--he is Astrea struck and loves all wild exploits. In his letter, I am but called his young kinsman, Master Algernon Grey, and the good doctor will be ignorant of all the rest."

"Well, well, I care not," answered Lovet; "it is no affair of mine. I transformed myself into William Lovet to please you, and though, certainly, the plan has its conveniences for every one but the staid and most line-and-rule gentleman who devised it, yet I am ready to appear in my own feathers to-morrow should need be."

"Perhaps, thinking you will appear to more advantage, Will," replied Algernon Grey, with an effort to be gay; "however, there is no fear. Our borrowed plumage will last as long as we may want it, if we take care not to soil our own feathers underneath."

"Now, *corpo di Baccho!*" cried Lovet, "I admire you again. That last morality in metaphor was worthy of a saint in orange tawny velvet, or my fair cousin, Algernon. I have hopes of you, whenever you begin to deal in tropes and figures. At least, you are not dull then, which is something. That glorious trio, wit, wisdom, and wantonness can then claim some share in you, and there is a chance of the man who has thrown away his youth and his youth's powers in cold asceticism, trying to warm his age with the fire of profligacy. It is a common case and will be yours, Algernon, for the man who commits not youthful follies, is sure in the end to take up with reverend vices.--But do you agree to my plan; a month here,--but one poor month; and if I win not my fair lady in that time, I shall be right ready to slink away like a cur that has been kicked out for attempting to steal a marrow-bone. You can attend lectures in the mean time, and learn from the skull-cap of old bald-headed Scultetus, to carry yourself evenly on slippery places."

"Well, stay what time you like," replied Algernon Grey. "If I find cause, I can go on a stage or two and wait for you. At present, I will forth to find out this renowned professor. Should you be gone ere my return, leave tidings of your doings for my guidance."

Thus saying, he left him, and as he went, William Lovet gazed after him till the door was shut. Then a somewhat bitter smile curled his lip, and after a moment's thought, he muttered, "Limed! limed! or I am much mistaken.--Ay, ay, I know the sort of beauty that you have so tenderly described.--A month! Stay but a month, and if I judge her right, and know man's heart, you are plunged in beyond recall."

CHAPTER V.

Preceded by a Knecht, as he was called, of the inn, in a close-fitting jacket, wide brown breeches, and blue stockings, Algernon Grey walked through the narrow and tortuous streets of Heidelberg towards the residence of a man then renowned for his wit and wisdom, though we know not at the present day upon what this fame was founded. Although it was the custom in those times for gay gallants to ruffle through the streets with a long train of servants, badged, liveried, and armed, no one accompanied the young Englishman, except the man to show him the way. At that hour of the morning--it was now near eleven--few persons were to be seen abroad; for the student was busy at his book, the shopkeeper labouring in his vocation. Those who did appear, were all in their particular costume, distinctive of class and station. You could have laid your finger upon any man in the whole town and named at once his occupation from his dress. Nor was this custom, which assigned peculiar garments to each peculiar class, without many great advantages, besides the mere picturesque effect. But it is in vain to regret that these things have passed away; they were parts of the spirit of that age, an age fond of distinctions; and now in the fusion of all classes, which has taken place, where no distinctions are suffered to remain but that of wealth, the keeping up of peculiar costumes would be an idle shadow of a thing no longer existing.

Amidst close rows of tall houses--the narrow windows of which displayed no costly wares--and, here and there, through the rows of booths erected before the doors, in which the tradesmen were then accustomed to display their goods for sale, Algernon Grey walked on for about five minutes, from time to time asking a question of his guide, who never replied without humbly doffing his little cap, and adding, "Honourable sir," or "Noble gentleman," to every sentence. It was another trait of the times and the country.

At length the man stopped at the open door of a tall dull looking house, and informed his companion, that he would find Dr. Alting on the second floor; and mounting the long, cold, broad steps of stone, Algernon Grey found his way up to the rooms of him he sought. A fresh, sturdy, starched servant wench, who instantly caught his foreign accent, and thereupon made up her mind not to understand a word he said, was at length brought to introduce him to the presence of her master; and following her along a narrow passage, the young Englishman was ushered into a room, such as the general appearance of the house had given little reason to expect. It was wide, handsome, overhung by a fine carved oak ceiling, and furnished all round with large bookcases, richly carved, containing the treasured collection of a long life in every shape and form, from the enormous folio to the most minute duodecimo.

At a heavy oaken table, near one of the windows, sat two gentlemen, of different age and appearance. One was a man with white hair and beard, whose sixtieth summer would never come again. He was dressed in a long loose gown of some black stuff; and, on his head, which probably was bald, he wore a small crushed velvet cap. His face was fine and intelligent; and, from beneath the thick, overhanging eyebrow shone out a clear and sparkling eye.

The other was habited in a coat of buff leather, not very new, but laced with gold. His cloak was a plain, brown broad-cloth, a good deal fresher than his coat; and on his legs he wore a pair of those large funnel-shaped boots, which seemed intended to catch all the rain or dust that might fall or fly. His heavy rapier lay along his thigh; but beyond this he was unarmed; and his hat with its single feather rested beside him. In age he might be about fifty. His strong black hair and pointed beard were somewhat grizzled; but there was no sign of decay in form or feature. His teeth were fine and beautifully white; his face rough with exposure, but not wrinkled; his frame was strong, tall, and powerful; and the bold contour of the swelling muscles could be seen through the tight sleeve of his coat. His face was a very pleasant one, grave but not stern, thoughtful but not sad; and, as he turned sharply round in his chair at the opening of the door, a faint recollection of his features, as if he had seen them before, or some very like them, came across the young Englishman's mind.

With his usual calm self-possession, Algernon Grey advanced straight towards the seat of the gentleman in black, and, with a few words of introduction, presented a letter. Dr. Alting rose to receive him, and, for a single instant, fixed his keen grey eyes upon his visitor's face with a look the most intent and searching. The glance was withdrawn almost as soon as given; and then,

courteously putting forward a seat he opened the letter and read. The moment after he took Algernon's hand and shook it heartily, exclaiming, "So, sir, you are a kinsman of this good lord, my old and much respected friend. Ever to see him again is beyond my hopes; but it is something to have before me one of his race. What, if I may ask, brings you to Heidelberg? If you come in search of learning, here you can find it amongst my reverend brethren of the University. If in search of gaiety and pleasure, surely, above there, in the castle, you will have your heart's content; for a more merry body of light young hearts were seldom ever collected--good faith," he continued, turning to the gentleman who had been sitting with him when Algernon entered, "they kept their revel up full long last night. As I sat here at my studies--it must have been past midnight--the music came down upon me in gusts, almost making even my old sober limbs tingle to go and join the merry dance, as I did in boyhood. It must have been a splendid scene."

"This gentleman was there," replied the other; "I saw him for an instant; but I stayed not long; for that music has another effect on me, my good old friend; and I betook me to my tower again, more in the spirit of the gloomy anchorite than yourself, it seems."

"I passed the night there and part of the morning, too, I fear," said Algernon Grey; "for it was two before we reached our inn."

"I trust you had a happy night of it, then," answered Dr. Alting; "such scenes are the property of youth; and it would be hard to deny to the young heart all the brief pleasures of which life has so few."

"A far happier night," answered Algernon Grey, "than many of those have been which I have spent in more powerful courts and scenes as gay. There happened to me that which, in the chances of the world, rarely occurs, to have a companion for the night whose thoughts and feelings were wholly congenial to my own, a lady whose beauty, dazzling as it is, would have fallen upon my cold heart only like a ray of wintry sunshine on a frozen world, had it not been that, unlike every one I ever saw, a high pure spirit and a rich bright fancy left her beauty itself forgotten in their own transcendent lustre."

"You are an enthusiast, my young friend," said Dr. Alting, while the stranger fixed his eyes on Algernon Grey, with a gay smile; "what might be the name of this paragon?"

"The princess called her Agnes," answered the young Englishman; "and more I did not enquire."

A merry glance passed between the good professor and his companion; and the latter exclaimed, "You did not enquire! That seems strange, when you were so captivated."

"There is the mistake," said Algernon Grey, laughing; "I was not captivated; I admired, esteemed, approved, but that is all. Most likely she and I will never meet again; for I shall wander for a year, and then return to duties in my own land; and the name of Agnes is all I want, by which to remember a happy night of the very few I have ever known, and a being full of grace and goodness, whom I shall see no more."

"A strange philosophy," cried Dr. Alting; "especially for so young a man."

"And so you wander for a year," said the stranger; "if it be not a rash question, as it seems you are not seeking adventures in love, is it high deeds of arms you are in search of, like the ancient knights?"

"Not so, either," answered Algernon Grey; "although I am willing enough, should the occasion present itself, to serve under any honourable flag, where my religion is not an obstacle, as I have done more than once before."

"Ah!" said Dr. Alting, "then you are one of those--those very few, who will suffer their religion to be an obstacle to any of their plans."

"Assuredly," answered Algernon Grey. "The strife at present throughout the whole of Europe is, and must be ever more or less for the maintenance of the pure and unperverted religion of the Gospel against the barbarous superstitions and corruptions of the Romish church; and, whatever may be the pretext of war, whoever draws the sword in a papist army----"

"Is fighting for the Woman of Babylon," cried Dr. Alting, eagerly; "is setting himself up against the Cross of Christ, is advancing the banner of the Dragon, destined sooner or later to be thrown into the pit of the nethermost hell;" and, taking the young Englishman's hand, he shook it heartily, exclaiming: "I am glad to hear such sentiments from the kinsman of my noble friend."

"He entertains them as firmly as yourself, you well know," answered Algernon Grey; "they are common to all his family; and, for my part, humble as I am, I shall always be ready to draw the sword in the defence of right, whenever the opportunity is afforded me."

"It is coming, my dear sir, the time is coming," cried the old man. "Great events are before us; and I see for the first time the prospect of the true faith becoming predominant in this land of Germany; thence, I trust, to spread its holy and beneficial influence throughout the world. You have heard, doubtless you have heard, that in the very heart of this great empire, the people of

Bohemia have raised the standard of freedom of conscience. Even now they are in deliberation to choose them a new king, in place of the papist tyrant, who has violated all the solemn pledges, by virtue of which alone he held the crown. If their choice be a wise and good one, if it be such as I believe it will be, if the head of the Protestant Union,--in a word--if the Elector Palatine be chosen King of Bohemia, doubtless the spirit of the true faith will, from that moment, go forth with irresistible might, and shake the idolatrous church of the seven hills to its foundation. I look to it with confidence and trust: I look to every gallant spirit and faithful heart to come forward and take his share in the good work; and, with the name of the Lord on our side, there is no fear of the result."

The conversation proceeded for some time in the same strain. With eager fire, and with sometimes a not very reverend application of the words of Scripture, Dr. Alting went on to advance his own opinions, becoming more eager every moment, especially when the probability of the Elector Palatine being chosen as their king by the states of Bohemia was referred to.

The gentleman who was with him when Algernon Grey entered, took little part in the discussion, remaining grave and somewhat stern in look; though, from the few words he uttered, it was evident that his religious views were the same as those of his two companions. He smiled, indeed, in turn at the different sorts of enthusiasm of the old man and the young one; and once Dr. Alting shook his finger at him good-humouredly, saying: "Ah! Herbert, you would have men believe you cold and stoical, and, for that purpose, in every affair of life you act like no other man; but I know the fire that is under it all."

"Fire enough, when it is needed," answered Herbert; "but only when it is needed, my good friend. If troops spend all their powder in firing salutes, they will have none to charge their cannon with in the day of battle; but as you are not expected to put on the cuirass, it is just as well that you should keep up men's spirits, and fix their determinations by your oratory. Only let me be quiet. You won't find me wanting when the time comes."

"I trust none will be wanting," said Algernon Grey; "but yet I cannot help feeling, that in this light-minded world, many whom we count upon rashly, may fall from us readily."

"Too true, too true," said Herbert, shaking his head.

"I will not believe it," cried Dr. Alting; "with such a prince, and such a cause, and such an object, every man, who has a particle of truth in his nature, will do his duty, I am sure; and let the false go--we can do without them."

"You must add the weak, too, my reverend friend," said Algernon Grey, rising to depart; "but still, I do think, and I do trust, that there are enough both firm and true in Europe, to accomplish this great task, unless some sad accident occur, or some great mistake be committed. We shall see, however; and in the mean time, farewell."

Dr. Alting shook hands with him warmly, asked where he could find him, how long would be his stay in Heidelberg, and all those other questions which courtesy dictated: but perhaps the reverend doctor felt, in a degree not altogether pleasant, that his young friend, if not so learned a man as himself in books and parchments, had another sort of learning--that of the world--which he himself did not possess.

The gentleman who had been called Herbert seemed to feel differently; and, when the young gentleman was about to depart, he rose, saying: "I will go with you, and perhaps may show you some things of interest." Then bidding adieu to Dr. Alting, he followed Algernon Grey out of the room, and descended the stairs with him in silence. Under the shadow of the doorway they found waiting the Knecht, who had guided the young gentleman thither; but Herbert dismissed him, saying to his companion: "I will be your guide back. Shall we stroll along to the church, or visit some of the fortifications? Both are somewhat in your way it would seem."

"Nay," answered Algernon, "with the church I have little to do, except when my opinions are drawn forth by such a man as our learned friend; but I will go whithersoever you choose to lead me."

"Well, then, we will stroll along and take things as they come," answered Herbert; "we can scarcely go amiss in this town and neighbourhood, for each step has its own particular interest, or its own beauty. It is a place I never weary of."

As he spoke they turned into one of the narrow streets that led up towards the hills, and were crossing the castle-road, in order to take a path through the woods, when Algernon Grey's quick ear caught the sound of a voice calling to him. Looking round, he saw a gentleman coming down with a hasty step, followed by two or three servants, and instantly recognised the Baron of Oberntraut. A feeling--I might almost call it a presentiment: one of those strange, inexplicable foresights of a coming event, which sometimes put us on our guard against approaching evil, made him say to his companion: "Oh! this is the gentleman with whom I had a bet last night, I will rejoin you in a moment;" and he advanced a step or two up the hill.

The next instant Oberntraut was by his side.

"I wish to speak a moment with you, sir," he said.

Algernon Grey bowed his head and was silent.

"We had a bet last night," continued the baron, with a flushed cheek but somewhat embarrassed air; "my servants are carrying down the amount to your inn."

"Thanks," answered Algernon Grey; "they will find some of my people there, to whom they can deliver it."

"I always pay my debts, sir," said Oberntraut; "but I rather think there is another account to be settled between us."

"Indeed!" replied Algernon Grey, calmly; "I am not aware of it. What may it be?"

"Oh! sir, you assume ignorance!" rejoined the other in an insulting tone: "in a word, then, we do not suffer foreign gentlemen to come hither, win our money, and court our ladies, without making them pass through some ordeal. Do you understand me now?"

"Perfectly," answered the young Englishman, with a slight smile; "such words are not to be mistaken; and let me assure you, as I wish to see everybody pleased, I will not disappoint you; but, at the same time, we may conduct a matter of this sort without warmth, and with all courtesy. I know not how I have aggrieved you; but that I ask not: it is quite sufficient that you think yourself aggrieved, and I will give you such opportunity of redressing yourself as you may wish for."

"I thank you, sir," replied the other in a more moderate tone; "when and where shall it be?"

"Nay, that I must leave to you," answered the young Englishman; "I will make but two conditions--that it be speedily, and that we embroil no others in our quarrel. I have but one friend here, and as he has been somewhat too famous in our own country for rencontres of this kind, I would fain spare him any share in an affair of mine."

"Be that as you like," replied the baron; "on all accounts we shall be better alone: the place must be one where we shall have no interruption.--Let me think?--Yes, that will do.--Will you meet me to-morrow on the bridge, each with a single page whom we can leave behind at our convenience? I will lead you to a spot secure and shaded from all eyes, where we shall have good turf and space enough."

"Agreed," answered Algernon Grey, "but why not this very day? I am quite prepared."

"But I have a few hours' journey to take first," replied the baron; "no, in your courtesy let it be to-morrow; and the safest hour will be just before nightfall. Come a little earlier to the bridge, for we have some small distance to go,--with our swords alone--is it not so?"

"As you will," said his companion. "Be it so then--in the grey I will not fail you--good-morning, sir;" and, turning round, he rejoined his new acquaintance Herbert, with an easy and unembarrassed air.

Herbert was not entirely deceived, however. He had been standing where the young Englishman left him at about five paces' distance, where the greater part of their conversation was inaudible; but he knew one of the parties and his character well, and divined the other rightly. The last words of Algernon Grey too, which, detached from the rest, had seemed to the speaker insignificant, had been uttered in a louder tone, and Herbert had heard him say distinctly,--"In the grey I will not fail you--good-morning, sir." The expressions were nothing in themselves; they might refer to any trifling and accidental arrangement; but Herbert's eyes had been fixed upon the face of Oberntraut, who stood fronting him, and he read the look that it wore, if not with certainty, assuredly not wrongly.

As the two separated the baron doffed his hat and plume to Herbert with every sign of high respect; and the other returned the salutation, though but coldly. For a moment or two, as Algernon and his companion walked up the hill, nothing was said; and then the younger gentleman began to speak lightly of indifferent subjects, thinking that longer silence might lead to suspicions. Herbert answered not, but went on musing, till at length--as if he had paid not the slightest attention to the words which had been falling on his ear for the last two or three minutes--he broke forth at once with a dry laugh, saying: "So, you have contrived to manufacture a quarrel already."

"Nay, not so!" answered Algernon Grey; "if you mean with the Baron of Oberntraut, let me assure you there is no quarrel of any kind between us. I know of no offence that I have given him, and for my own part I may safely say that I have received none. There was a bet between us which I won, and he seems perhaps a little nettled; but what is that to me?"

Herbert looked down thoughtfully, still walking on, and after a while he paused, asking as abruptly as before,--"Have you many friends in this place?"

"Nay, I have been here but eighteen hours," answered the other: "happy is the man who can boast of many friends, take the whole world over and pick them from the four quarters of the globe. I have none who deserves the name within these walls, but the one who came with me."

"Well," replied the other, "should you require one, on occasion of import, you know where to find one who has seen some hard blows given in his day."

"I thank you much, and understand you rightly," said Algernon Grey; "should I have need of such help, depend upon it, I will apply to you and none other. But at present, believe me, I have none."

"What! not '*in the grey*'?" asked Herbert, with a laugh; and then, whistling two or three bars of an English air, he added, "Will you spend an hour or two with an old soldier to-night, my young friend?"

"Willingly," replied Algernon Grey, smiling at the suspicions in which he clearly saw the invitation was given. "When shall I come? My time is quite free."

"Oh! come an hour before twilight," answered Herbert, "and stay till the castle clock strikes ten--Will that suit you?"

"Right well," said the young Englishman, "I will not fail by a moment, though I see you doubt me. But where am I to find you, and who am I to ask for?"

"I have deceived myself, or you are cheating me," answered Herbert bluntly, and speaking in English; "but come at all events. You will find me at the castle--ask for Colonel Herbert, or the English Ritter. They will show you where I lodge."

"Be sure I will be there," rejoined Algernon; "I did not know you were a countryman; but that will make the evening pass only the more pleasantly, for we shall have thoughts in common, as well as a common language; and, to say sooth, though this German is a fine tongue, yet, while speaking it badly, as I do, I feel like one of the mountebanks we see in fairs dancing a saraband in fetters."

"You speak it well enough," answered his companion, "and it is a fine rich tongue; but at the court, with the usual levity of such light places, they do not value their own wholesome dialect. They must have a dish of French, forsooth; and use a language which they do not half know, and which, if they did, is not half as good a one as their own--a poor pitiful whistling tongue, like the wind blowing through a key hole without the melody of the Italian, the grandeur of the Spanish, the richness of the German, or the strength of the English."

"Yet it is a good language for conversation," replied Algernon Grey, willing to follow upon any track that led from the subject of his rencontre with Oberntraut.

"To say things in a double sense, to tickle the ears of light women, and make bad jests upon good subjects," rejoined Herbert, whose John Bull prejudices seemed somewhat strong; "that is all that it is good for.--Now look here," he continued, as they reached a commanding point of the hill, "did you ever see a place so badly fortified as this? There is not much to be done with it that is true; for it is commanded by so many accessible points, that it would cost the price of an empire to make it a fortress. Yet if the Elector would spend upon strengthening his residence against his enemies, one-half of what he is throwing away upon laying out that stupid garden, I would undertake to hold it out for a year and a day against any force that king or emperor could bring against it."

"Something might be done, it is true," answered the young Englishman; "but it could never be made a strong place, domineered as it is by all these mountains. If you fortified them up to the top, it would require an army to garrison them."

"Ay, that is the mistake that will be committed by engineers to the last day, I believe," answered Herbert, who had his peculiar notions on all subjects. "They think they must fortify every commanding point. But there is another and better method of guarding them. Render them inaccessible to artillery, that is all that requires to be done, and then they need no further defence. On the contrary, they become ramparts that will crumble to no balls. There is no escarpment like the face of a rock. Now this same mad gardener fellow, this Saloman de Caus, who is working away there: he has filled up half a valley, thrown down half a mountain, and the same labour and money, spent in another way, would have rendered every point inaccessible from which a fire could be opened on the castle.--But, look there! Horses are gathering at the gates, and men in gilded jackets. The prince and his fair dame, and all the wild boys and girls of the court are going out upon some progress or expedition--I must hasten down as fast as I can, for I want to speak with one of them before they go.--Remember the hour, and fail not. Can you find your way back?"

"Oh, yes! no fear," answered Algernon Grey, "I will be with you to-night;" and waving his hand, Herbert hurried down towards the castle.

CHAPTER VI.

"Tony," cried the page, standing in the gateway of the Golden Stag, and turning half-round towards a sort of covered half-enclosed shed or booth in the court yard, where the English servant, who had accompanied the two travellers on their journey to Heidelberg, was cleaning a pair of his master's silver stirrups, "here's a man inquiring for my lord, and I cannot make out a word that he says."

"What does he want?" cried Tony from the shed, rubbing away as hard as if his life depended upon making the stirrups look brighter than the groom had been able to render them.

"I can't tell," replied the boy; "but he seems to want to give me a hundred crowns."

"Take them, take them," rejoined the man, sagaciously, "and ask no questions. I'll tell you what, Frill, always take gold when you can get it. It comes slow, goes fast, and calls no man master long: a very changeable servant; but a very useful one, while we have him; and there is no fear of his growing old in our service. Don't let the man know you can speak French, or he might put you to disagreeable interrogatories. Pocket and be silent; it is the way many a man becomes great in this world."

The advice was given in that sort of bantering tone, which showed evidently that it was not intended to be strictly followed; and the page, taking the crowns, held them up before the eyes of the man who brought them, saying: "For Algernon Grey?"

"Ja, Ja!" said the German servant; "for Algernon Grey;" and, adding a word or two more, which might have been Syriac for aught the page knew, he withdrew, leaving the money in the boy's hands.

As soon as he was gone, Freville or Frill, as he was familiarly termed by the household, walked back to where his companion was at work, and quietly counted over the money upon the loose board which formed the only table of the shed.

"I must give this to some one to keep, till my lord's return," he said; "will you take care of it, Tony?"

"Not I," replied the servant; "I repeat the Lord's Prayer every morning and evening; the first time, to keep me out of temptation by day; the second, to defend me against it by night--I'll have none of it, Master Frill; it is a good sum, and too much for any poor man's pocket, especially where the plaket-hole is wide and the bottom somewhat leaky."

"I will take it up to Sir William, then," said the boy; "for I won't keep it myself. It would be risking my lord's money sadly. Even now my fingers begin to feel somewhat sticky, as if I had been handling the noses of horse-chestnut buds."

"Get you gone, for a graceless young villain," answered Tony; "what have you to do with the noses of other men's children; you will have enough to do with your own, if I guess right; but, as to the money, methinks it is quite as safe in your pocket, as Sir William's."

"Why, you don't think he would keep it, Tony?" said the page in an inquiring tone.

"As to keeping it," answered Tony, "that's as it may be. He never could keep his own, therefore why should he keep other people's; but between you and I, Frill--" and he dropped his voice as if he did not wish to be overheard--"our young lord is not likely to gain much by Sir William's company. We did very well without him; and though he may not choose to pick my lord's pocket of hard gold, he may take from him what gold will not buy. I have a strange notion, somehow, that it was not altogether for love he came. If it were, why did not he come long before? But I remember him well, when he was a boy; and he was a cunning devil then; as full of mischief as a pistachio-nut. Why he hung the buttery hatch with a wire like a bird-trap; and the moment old Jonas put his hand out, it fell and nearly chopped off his fingers."

This was a jest just fitted to the meridian of a boy's understanding; and he burst into a fit of laughter at the anecdote.

"Ay, ay," continued Tony, "it would have passed as a wild lad's fun, if we had not known that he had a spite at Jonas, who, one day, when he was thirsty, refused him a cup of hypocras that he wanted, and would only give him a jug of ale.--But who in the name of silks and satins, is this peeping about the court on the tips of his toes, with rosettes and sword-knots enough to swallow him up? It is a page of the court, I do believe. To him, Frill, to him! Speak French to this one, for he looks as if he had been dieted on comfits and spiced wine; and nothing will go down with him, depend upon it, unless it be garnished with French tongue."

Following the suggestion of his companion, Frill advanced, and the two pages met in the midst of the court-yard, where they stood bowing and complimenting each other, with an extravagance

of courtesy which had nearly overpowered good Tony with laughter.

"My heavens! what a pair of monkeys," he exclaimed. "Take away their cloaks, and stick a tail through their satin breeches, and you have got the beast as perfect as at a puppet-show. Look at that little monster Frill, if he has not wriggled himself into an attitude in which he cannot stand while I count four. There, 'tis all over; and now he twists to the other side.--What does he want, Frill?" he continued, raising his voice; "talk to him, boy, and don't stand there grinning like a cat-ape."

"He comes down from the castle," answered Frill, turning round, very well satisfied with the graces he had been displaying, "to ask my lord and Sir William to join the court in a progress to Schönau."

"Tell him Master Algernon Grey is out, and Heaven knows when he will be back again," exclaimed Tony, who was wearied with the courtly air of the pages. "What does the devil's foal say now?" he continued, when Frill had rendered the reply he dictated, and received a speech and a low bow in return.

"He says I must tell Master William Lovet then," replied the page; and conducting the other youth ceremoniously back to the threshold of the gateway, he took leave of him after some farther civil speeches on the one part, and directions on the other.

"There, go and tell Sir William," said Tony, when the boy rejoined him, "and lay the money on the table in our lord's room.--And hark you, Frill, you may as well keep an eye on Sir William's doings; I've doubts, Frill, I have doubts; and I should like to know what he is seeking; for I can't help thinking there's more under his jerkin than God's will and a good conscience."

"If I thought he meant my lord any harm," answered the boy, boldly, "I'd drive my dagger into him."

"Pooh! nonsense; prick him with a needle or a cobbler's awl," answered Tony, "you'd only let him bleed and make him more feverish towards spring time. No, no, my boy, he'll give no cause for offence; but a man may do more harm sometimes with a simple word than a drawn sword--I'll watch him well, however; do you so, too; and if you find out anything, let me know.--Now, away with you, away with you, and tell the good man above; for if he do not make haste, he will not be in time, and then your young bones are likely to suffer."

The page turned to obey, but he had scarcely reached the archway, when William Lovet issued forth, descending from above, and called loudly for his horse.

The page's communication, however, seemed to make an alteration in his purpose; and after pausing for a moment or two to think, he re-entered the house, ordering everything to be prepared for him to join the train of Frederic and Elizabeth, as soon as he heard them coming down the hill.

William Lovet was a very different man in the solitude of his own chamber and in the company of his cousin. He now waited some twenty minutes, expecting almost every moment to hear the approach of the cavalcade, which was to pass before the windows; but he showed no impatience, no lover-like haste to join the lady at whose suggestion he doubted not the invitation had been given. Sitting at the table, with his hat cast down and his sword taken out of the belt, he leaned his head upon his hand, and seemed buried in meditation. His brow was contracted, and heavy with apparently gloomy thought; and his hand played with the curls of his long dark hair unconsciously. Like many men of strong passions, who set a careful guard upon their tongue when any other human being is near to hear and comment on their words, but feel painfully the restraint then put upon themselves, he was apt, as if for relief, to suffer the secret counsels of his heart to break forth at times, when he felt perfectly certain they would reach no other ear but his own. And this was one of those moments when the workings of strong purposes within him, forced him to give way to the dangerous habit. It was no long continued monologue that he spoke, no loud and vehement outburst of passion; but broken fragments of sentences--as if a portion of his thoughts would clothe themselves in words, and were suddenly checked before they were complete--came forth muttered and disjointed from his lips.

"It must do this time," he said; and then he fell into thought again, continuing, in about a minute after, "If it do not, means must be found to make it--the time is very short--In another year he goes back--To think of his having wasted full four years amongst all that could tempt a man!--He must be a stone--but he is touched now, or I am mistaken--I must get this woman to help me--make her a tool when she thinks herself a conqueror! Ha! ha! ha!" and he laughed aloud. "I will never leave it till it is finished.--It may cost a good deal yet; for he is not easily led, that's clear.--Example, example! That has been always wanting. We will accustom his mind to it--break him like a young colt that first flies from the hand, but soon suffers every child to pat him.--Ay, he is in the high road, if he do not take flight and dart off; but surely, in the wide world of accidents, we shall find something, which, improved by skilful management, will keep him here till that same glittering web of golden threads, called love's net, is round him--then let the poor stag struggle, and pant, and toss about, he will not easily break through, and the prize is mine."

His farther thoughts were interrupted by a knock at the door. "Come in," he said; and then

exclaimed, in surprise, as the very object of his contemplation stood before him, "Why, Algernon, you have become mighty ceremonious."

"Nay," answered Algernon Grey, laughing, "I thought you were not alone; for I heard one voice speaking, at least; and with a gentleman of your pursuits, one can never tell how inopportune a visit may be."

"Pshaw!" cried Lovet; "'tis a bad habit I have from my mother. We rash and thoughtless folks, unlike you calm and cautious ones, cannot keep the secrets of our bosom in the safe casket of the heart. We must speak out our thoughts, whatever they may be; and, if we can find no other man to tell them to, we tell them to ourselves."

"The safest confidant by far," answered Algernon Grey. "What now, boy?" he continued, turning to the page, who had followed him into the room, and was waiting at hand for an opportunity to speak.

"May it please you, noble sir," replied the page, "a man, with a badge upon his arm, brought hither a hundred crowns, whence or why I could not make out, for he had neither French nor English; but he said Algernon Grey well enough; and so I laid them in your chamber."

"I understand," replied his master; "what more?"

"A page from the court, sir," answered the boy; "a very gallant youth, full of fine essences and rich conceits, with satin in abundance, and no lack of ribands----"

"On my life! he must have been your counterpart, Frill," exclaimed his master, laughing; and, turning to his companion, he added: "This boy has been studying Sydney or Lilly, or some high-flown writer. Well, most delicate Frill, what said your delicate friend?"

"He brought a message, noble sir," replied the page, "inviting Messieurs Algernon Grey and William Lovet to join the cavalcade of the court, going joyously to Schönau. They were to pass by the inn in half an hour."

"And, pray, how did this ingenuous youth deliver himself?" asked Algernon Grey.

"Oh! with marvellous fineness, my lord," replied the page, "with every courteous invention that his genius could suggest."

"But the tongue, Master Frill, the tongue?" cried Algernon; "if you could not understand one man, how could you understand the other?"

"He spoke French, my lord, with the utmost perfection," replied the boy.

"Come, Algernon, you are wasting time," exclaimed Lovet; "order your horses and your people, or you will be too late."

Algernon Grey mused for a single instant, and then replied: "I do not go, William."

"Nay, not go!" exclaimed his friend. "Why, you cannot help yourself, unless you would be called the Great Bear of England. In every country of the world such an invitation from the prince is considered a command."

"What reply did you make, Frill?" asked the boy's master.

"I said what Tony told me," replied the page, namely, "'Master Algernon Grey is out, and Heaven knows when he will return.'"

"I shall not go, William," repeated the young gentleman, in a thoughtful tone; "I have my own reasons, and assuredly I do not ride to-day."

"Then you are either going to fight a duel, make love, or, in the silent and tender solitude of your chamber in an inn, give yourself up to sweet meditation of your lady's ankles," replied William Lovet, resuming his usual bantering tone. "Methinks, I see you, sitting with the indicator digit of your dexter hand pressed softly on the delicate cheek of youth, the eyebrow raised, one eye to heaven, the other to earth, with a slight poetical squint upon your countenance, and your bosom heaving sighs like a pot of hot broth.--Come, come, Algernon, cast off these humours, or turn anchorite at once. Live like other men, and don't go about the world as if your grandmother's brocade petticoat were hanging for ever over your head, like an extinguisher, putting out the flame of youth, and health, and strength, and love, and life. Look about you; see if you can find one single man, of your own age, bearing willingly about upon his shoulders scruples enough to cram a pedlar's pack full of wares, as flimsy and worthless as any it ever contained. Be a man, be a man! Surely, your boyhood is past; and you have no longer to fear the pedagogue's rod, if you stray a little beyond the tether of your mother's apron-string."

Algernon Grey smiled calmly, but merely nodded his head, saying: "I shall not go, Lovet, and all the less for a laugh. If I could be turned from my purposes by a jest, I should think myself a boy, indeed. You will find that out at last, good friend. But, hark, there are the trumpets; get you gone, and good fortune attend you. Call out his horse, Frill, that he may not imitate my sullen

boorishness, and keep the princely party waiting."

"Well," cried Lovet, shrugging his shoulders, "most reverend cousin, I will wish you a good morning. In your solemn prayers and devout outpourings of the heart, remember your poor sinful cousin, and especially petition that he may never see the evil of his ways, nor let one pleasure slip from him that fortune offers to his lip. It is a devout prayer; for if I did not enjoy myself I should do something much worse; and the devil would not only have me in the end, but in the beginning. Adieu, adieu! Here they come; I hear the clatter;" and running to the door he closed it sharply behind him, while Algernon Grey, without approaching too near, turned to the window and gazed out into the market-place.

The next instant a gay and splendid train swept up, preceded by two trumpeters in gorgeous liveries. Magnificent horses, many-coloured apparel, gold and embroidery, graceful forms, and joyous bearing, rendered the party one which any young heart might have been glad to join; but the eye of Algernon Grey ran over the various groups of which it was composed, seemingly seeking some particular object, with a curious and inquiring glance. It rested principally on the various female figures of the princess's train; but almost all the ladies wore the small black mask, or loup, then common at the court of France, and sometimes, though not so frequently, seen in England. The heat of the day and the power of the sun gave them a fair excuse, in the care of their complexions, for adopting a mode most favourable to intrigue; and, whoever it might be that the young gentleman's eye sought for in the cavalcade, he could not ascertain, with any certainty, which she was.

The etiquette of the court prevented the train from stopping for any of the expected party; but, before it had defiled towards the bridge, the horse of William Lovet dashed forward from the gateway; and, after a low reverence to the Elector, he fell back and attached himself to the side of one of the ladies in the train, who greeted him with a playful nod.

Algernon Grey seated himself at the table, leaned his head thoughtfully upon his hand, and remained in that position for nearly a quarter of an hour.

"No," he said, at length, "no, I will not risk her happiness or my own--I will not do it again--it has been once too often."

He rose as he spoke, and after giving some orders to his servants, strolled down to the river's side, and there, hiring a rude bark, many of which were moored to the bank, he directed the boatman to let it drop slowly down the stream. The hours passed dully, though he was not one of those to whom the silent commune of the heart with itself is wearisome. But there was a cause why that calm meditation, in which he had often found true pleasure, was not now a resource. He tried to cast it off, to fix his mind upon subjects foreign to that upon which his heart was resolved to dwell; and the struggle to escape from an ever recurring object of thought is always heavy labour. Still the hours flew, though with a flagging wing; and when he calculated that the time of his promised visit to Colonel Herbert at the castle was approaching he returned to the town, and making some change in his apparel, walked slowly up the hill.

The sun was indeed declining, but when he reached the gates of the castle, which stood open, the clock in the bridge tower struck seven, and showed him that he was earlier on the way than he had proposed to be. "Well," he thought, "it matters not. The great and the gay are all absent, and I can stroll about the gardens and courts till the hour comes. Doubtless they will give me admission."

He found no difficulty in gaining entrance, and a servant, of whom he inquired for the lodging of Colonel Herbert, courteously accompanied him across the court-yard, saying he would point it out. Entering the building at the further angle of the court, they passed under the arcade of three stages near the Knights' hall, and then through a long stone passage, to the foot of a flight of steps in the open air, above the highest of which, on a level with his own breast, Algernon Grey saw a wide stone platform, like that of an enormous rampart, surrounded by a balustrade flanked by two small octagon turrets. The tops of the mountains on the other side of the Neckar appeared above the balustrade, the clear blue sky was seen over head, and the evening song of one of the autumn-singing birds made itself heard from the castle gardens, rising clear and melodious over the dull hum which came up from the city below.

"I am half an hour before my time," said the young gentleman to the servant, "and if you will just point out to me which is Colonel Herbert's lodging, I will wait here till the hour appointed. I may as well pass the minutes in this pleasant place as any where else."

"This is the Altan, sir," replied the man; "the view from it is greatly admired; and if you turn to the right at the end, it will lead you by the only passage there to a door in the first tower--you see it there. The English knight's lodging is above, and you cannot miss your way. You might, indeed, go round by the arsenal; but the sentinel will not let you pass, unless I am with you."

"Oh, I shall find it easily, I doubt not," answered the young Englishman; and adding thanks, and a substantial token thereof, he mounted the steps and walked slowly forward to the parapet, while a crowd of the beautiful objects which only nature's treasury can display, rushed upon his eyes in dream-like splendour. Hardly had the first feeling of admiration been felt, however, when a slight exclamation of surprise uttered close to him made him turn his head towards one of the

two small octagon turrets which stood at either extreme end of the Altan.

The door was open, and he beheld coming forward a female figure which it required but one look to recognise. There was a well-pleased smile upon her countenance, bland, frank, and simple. She saw her agreeable companion of the night before; she remembered with satisfaction, and without one agitating thought, the pleasant hours she had spent with him, and advanced gaily and gladly to meet him, only conscious of friendship and esteem.

Algernon Grey was better read in the world than his companion Lovet believed--aye, even in its most difficult page, the heart of woman.

Nevertheless, though he marked the lady's manner, and instantly drew conclusions from it, those conclusions were not altogether just. He saw that straightforward well-pleased look--the free and unembarrassed air, and he said within his heart,--"She at least is in no danger. It is for myself I must beware."

The courtesies of life, however, were not to be omitted; and, though with a grave look, he met his fair companion with the usual salutations of the morning, proposing to himself to speak a few words, and then withdraw. But there are as strong attractions as those of the magnet for the needle; and, once by her side, resolution failed.

"I am very glad to see you," she said, with the same beaming look; "I had come out hither for a solitary walk upon the Altan while the court is absent, and little thought of having a companion who can enjoy this scene as I do."

"How comes it you are not with the gay party?" asked Algernon Grey; "I thought all the world had gone."

"But you and I," answered the lady, "and one whom you have not seen, but whom you should know before you leave this place; for a wiser or a kinder being does not live than the Electress Dowager, Louisa Juliana. No, I stayed to read to and amuse her; for she has been ill lately--what with some anxiety and some sorrow. She would not let me remain longer, or I would gladly have done so; for she has been as a mother to me when I most needed a mother's care--and what can I ever do to repay her?"

"Love her," answered the young Englishman; "that is the repayment from noble heart to noble heart. But this is indeed a splendid view! What a confusion of magnificent objects present themselves at once to the eye, with the sun setting over yon wide plain and those golden hills beyond."

"Ay," answered Agnes, following with her eyes the direction in which he pointed, "and those golden hills hide in their bosom, as in a rich casket, a thousand jewels. There is not a valley amongst them that is not rich in loveliness, not a hill or craggy steep that does not bear up some castle or abbey, some legend of old times, or some deep history. Can you not mark, too, the current of the glorious Rhine, the King of Europe's streams, as he flows onward there?--No? Beside those towers, you catch a glistening of the waters as they pour forward to revel in the magnificence beyond."

"I see," answered Algernon Grey, "I always love the Rhine, with its vine-covered hills and castled rocks and its storied memories. Its course seems to me like that of some fine old poem, where, in even flow, and amidst images of beauty, the mind is led on with ever varying delight till in the end it falls into calm, solemn, contemplative repose."

"I know little of poetry or poets," replied Agnes. "Some, indeed, I have read, especially some of the Italian poets, and they are very beautiful, it is true; but I fancy it is better to know the poem than the poet, the work rather than the writer--at least so it has been with all those I have seen."

"It is true, I believe," said Algernon Grey, "our thoughts are generally more poetic than our actions, almost always than our demeanour; invariably, I may say, than our persons; and when we remember, that the highest quality of the human mind places before us in a poem only that which mature and deliberate judgment pronounces to be the best of its fruits, it is not wonderful that the man should seem less, when we can see him near, than the poem gave us cause to expect."

In such conversation as this, of an elaborate and somewhat didactic turn, the young Englishman thought himself perfectly safe. He fancied he could discuss poetry and poems, beautiful scenery, the grand works of nature or of art, with the loveliest being ever eye beheld, without the slightest danger to himself or others. Unwarned by the fate of Beatrice and her lover, or of Abelard and his pupil, he fancied that on such cold and general themes, he could discourse in safety, even with the fair creature beside him; but he forgot, that through the whole world of the beautiful and the excellent, in nature and in art, there is a grand tie which links with the rest the heart of man: that sympathy is love, in a shallower, or a deeper degree: and he forgot, moreover, that the transition is so easy, by the ever open doors of association, from the most cold and indifferent things to the warmest and the dearest, that the heart must be well guarded, the mind well assured, before it ventures to deal with aught that excites the fancy in companionship with one who has already some hold upon the imagination.

Insensibly, they knew not well how, their conversation deviated from the mere objects tangible

to the senses, to the effects produced by those objects on the mind. From the mind they went to the heart; and Agnes, for a time, went on to talk with glowing eloquence, of all those feelings and emotions, of which it was evident enough to her companion, she spoke by hearsay rather than by experience. Her words were careless, brilliant, even, perhaps, we may say light, in its better sense, for some time after their discourse took that turn. She jested with the subject, she sported with it--like a child who, having found a shining piece of steel, makes a plaything of it, unknowing that it is a dagger which, with a light blow, may cut the knot of life. Suddenly, however, from some feeling, undefined even to herself, she stopped in full career, became thoughtful, serious, more avaricious of her words. A deeper tone pervaded them when they were spoken; and she seemed to have found unexpectedly, that she was dealing with things which at some time might have a more powerful and heartfelt interest for herself, and that she had better escape from such topics, treating them gravely, whilst she was obliged to treat of them at all. Her conversation, in short, was like a gay pleasure-boat, which quits the shore in sunshine and merriment, but, finding itself far from land, makes its way back with earnest speed with the first cloud that gathers on the sky.

Her altered manner called Algernon Grey to himself; and, as they turned back again along the Altan, he said, anxious to fly from a danger which he felt had its fascination too, but yet mingling with the adieu he was about to speak such a portion of feeling as might pass for ordinary gallantry; "I must now leave you, I believe, for the sun is so low, that it warns me of my engagement to spend this evening with a countryman of ours, named Colonel Herbert, whom I have made acquaintance with this morning--indeed, it is past the hour."

"Oh, I will show you the way," answered Alice, with a smile; "I am going thither, too; but do stay for an instant to look at that star rising over the Odenwald. How clear and calm it shines! How round, and full, and unvarying! It must be a planet; and I cannot help thinking often, that woman's true sphere is like that of yonder star. There may be brighter things in the heavens, twinkling and sparkling with transcendent light; but her fate is like that of the planet, to wander round one sole object, from which she receives all her brightness, in constant, tranquil, peaceful watchfulness, calm but not dull, and bright but not alone--now come."

CHAPTER VII.

In a large circular room, with a massive column in the midst, from which sprang the groins of the numerous arches which formed the vault, sat the stout soldier Herbert, with his two companions, Algernon Grey and the fair Agnes. The chamber itself, notwithstanding its unusual form, was comfortable and highly decorated. The floor, somewhat unusual in those times, and in that country, was of wood; the stone column in the centre was surrounded by a richly-carved oak seat, furnished with cushions of crimson velvet; and the heavy mass of the pillar, which rose above, was broken and relieved by four groups of armour gathered into the shape of trophies. Seats and bookcases, and those articles of furniture which are now called *etagères*, all likewise of oak, ornamented with velvet and fringes of a crimson colour, occupied the spaces between the windows; and on the one side, midway from the pillar to the wall, was a table covered with clean white linen, supporting various baskets of rich and early fruit, with wine and bread, but no other viands.

On the other side was also a table, on which were cast negligently some books, a pair of gauntlets, two or three daggers from different lands, and a number of objects, valuable either for their rarity or for the beauty of their workmanship. A fine picture stood on the ground, leaning against a chair, at one point; an antique marble vase, richly sculptured, was seen at another; a lance appeared resting on the shoulder of a statue; and the mask of a satyr, from some Roman building, was placed in the gaping vizor of a helmet which stood at the foot of a bookcase. The whole was lighted by crescents hung against the column, which shed a soft and pleasant lustre through the wide room.

The host and his guests were seated at the table where the fruit was spread, and they seemed to be enjoying highly their simple and innocent meal. Herbert himself was gayer in manner than he had been in the morning; Agnes gave way to the flow of her young bright fancies with as little restraint, or even--less, perhaps, than when she had been with Algernon Grey alone; and the young Englishman feeling that, for that evening at least, it was useless to struggle against the fate that had brought them together, yielded his spirit to the pleasure of the moment, and resolved to enjoy the cup which he had not sought to taste.

It must not indeed be supposed that the conversation was all of a bright or cheerful character; for it went on, in its natural course, from subject to subject, resembling in its aspect a rich autumn day, where glowing sunshine and sombre masses of cloud alternately sweep over the

prospect, giving a varied interest to the scene.

The conversation of Herbert himself was not in general of a very cheerful tone; it was occasionally pungent, shrewd, and keen in the remarks, but that of a man who, having mingled much with the world--partaken of its pleasures, shared in its strife, and known its sorrows--had withdrawn for several years from any very active participation in the pursuits of other men, still watching eagerly as a spectator the scenes in which he had once been an actor.

The connexion between him and Agnes had somewhat puzzled Algernon Grey at his first entrance. Their evident familiarity, their affection one for the other, had perhaps pained him for an instant--it was but for an instant; for, though she gave the old soldier both her hands, and kissed with her glowing lips his weather-beaten cheek, it was all done so frankly, so candidly, that the young Englishman felt there must be something to warrant it--that there was nothing to be concealed. He then asked himself more than once, what the relationship could be? but it was not till he had been there nearly an hour, that the fair girl, in addressing Herbert, called him "My dear uncle."

Algernon Grey asked himself why he should have felt pained at her familiarity with any man, whether her near relative or not?--but it was a question which he could not or would not answer, and he hurried away from it to other things. "I knew not," he said, "that this fair lady was your kinswoman, Colonel Herbert, though we spoke of her at good Dr. Alting's this morning."

"You gave me no reason to know that it was of her you spoke," answered Herbert, with a smile.

"Yes, methinks I did," said the other gaily: "I told you I had been at the court revel last night, and had passed the hours with a lady whom I described right well."

"Oh, let me hear, dear uncle! let me hear!" exclaimed Agnes; "I should so much like to hear a stranger's description of myself,--you must tell me all he said."

"That is because you are vain, my child," answered the old soldier; "you would not like to hear it, if you thought he had blamed you:--Nay, I will not tell you a word."

"Then I will divine for myself," cried Agnes; "and you shall see whether I am vain or not. He said he had met a wild romantic girl, not very courtly in her manners, who had talked to him all night on themes which might have suited a painter or a chaplain better than a court lady; that she danced better than she talked,--dressed better than she danced,--and had a sovereign objection to love-speeches."

Algernon Grey smiled, and Herbert replied, tapping her cheek with his fingers, but looking round to their young companion: "You see, sir, in what these women's vanity consists--dancing and dressing! But you are wrong, Agnes, altogether. He said not a word of your dress,--he took no notice of your dancing,--he did not object to your prattle,--and he told me nothing of his having made you love-speeches."

"Neither did he," cried Agnes, with her cheek glowing at the conclusion which her relation had drawn; "we heard many a one passing around us, but he made none. That was the reason I liked his conversation, and I told him so."

"You tell too readily what is in your heart, my child," said Herbert; "and yet, good faith, I would not have it otherwise. But of one thing you may be sure, that the man I would ask here was too much a gentleman to say ought of a lady which was not pleasing to my ear. What he said came to this: that you were a good girl, and unlike most others he had met. Was it not so, Master Grey?"

"Somewhat differently expressed and coloured," answered Algernon Grey; "but, at all events, the substance was no worse;" and, willing to change the theme, he went on to say, "That good Dr. Alting seems a zealous and enthusiastic man. It is strange that in the commerce with the world of a long life he has not lost more of the fire which generally burns brightly only in youth."

"He has seen little of life," answered Herbert, "knows little of the world, or he would not entertain such high hopes from such doubtful prognostications."

"Then you think his expectations regarding the result of this election will be disappointed?" asked the young Englishman.

Herbert mused gravely, and then replied: "I know not what portion of his expectations you allude to, or whether you mean all. If the latter, I say some of them will certainly be verified: Frederick will be elected, of that I entertain no doubt. These stern Bohemians will never choose a drunkard and a knave, and with that exception there is no other competitor of name. Then, again, that there will be the grand--perhaps the only opportunity that ever will be seen of rendering the pure Protestant faith predominant in Germany,--nay, more, of breaking the Austrian chain from the neck of the captive empire. I do not at all deny, that the opportunity will be there, but will there be men to seize it? That is what I doubt. Will there be men who, having stretched forth the hand to take the golden occasion, will not, when they have clutched it, suffer it to slip from their grasp? That is the great question; for to fail is worse than not to undertake. The head on which

the crown of Bohemia now falls should be one full of those rare energies which lose no chance, and which command success; there should be experience or genius, and, above all, indomitable firmness of character and activity of mind. He should be a man of one grand purpose,--cautious as resolute, watchful as enterprising, leading not led, obstinate in preference to wavering,--with the whole powers of heart and mind bent to the attainment of a single object;--with neither eyes, nor ears, nor thoughts for aught but that. The path is upon a glacier, with a precipice below: one slip is destruction. Now, good as he is,--brave, intelligent, noble, sincere, devoted,--is the Elector endowed with powers that will bear him up through dangers and difficulties such as the world has seldom seen?"

"Often, where princes themselves would fail," answered Algernon Grey, "wise counsellors and great generals render them successful."

"He must be a wise prince, to choose wise counsellors," said Herbert. "Have we any here?-- Besides, if you would calculate the results of the strife about to spring up, look at the materials of the two parties. This is, in truth, a struggle betwixt the Protestants and Papists of Germany. Now, there is something in the very nature of the two religions which gives disunion to the one, consolidation to the other. The Papists are all agreed on every essential point; they are all tutored in the same school, look to the same objects, have in the most important matters the same interests. The least attack upon their religion is a rallying cry for them all; their wills bend to its dictates, their banners unfurl at its call, their swords spring forth in its defence. They are one nation, one tribe, by a stronger tie than common country or common origin. They are one in religion and the religion is one. But what is the case with the Protestants? Split into sects, divided into parties, recognising no authority but their own individual judgments, they hate each other, with a hatred perhaps stronger than that which they feel towards the Romanists; or are cold to each other, which is worse. There is no bond between them but the worst of bonds--a common enmity to another faith. No, no, the whole tendencies of one party are to division, the whole tendencies of the other to union, and union is strength."

"Nay, my dear uncle," cried Agnes, "to hear your arguments, one would think you a Papist."

"Hold your wild tongue, you unreasoning child," answered Herbert, good-humouredly; "my arguments go to quite a contrary end. Were there not innate truth unimpeachable in the doctrines of the Protestants, there would not be one sect of them left by this time, so potent are the means arrayed against them, so feeble are the earthly bonds that hold them together. Were it not for the power of truth upon their side, the first blast of wind would blow them from the earth; but great is truth, and it will prevail, however weak be the hands that support it, however strong the arms raised to crush it."

"Yours is a gloomy view, nevertheless," rejoined Algernon Grey; "but we must still trust to the vigour of truth for the support of a just cause. Many will doubtless fall away in the hour of need. Of that I am aware; but if they carry with them only their own weakness and the divisions of the party, their absence will but give strength."

"Well, let us talk of it no more," answered Herbert, "the book of fate has so many pages unopened that who can tell what may be written on the next? That casque which you see there, crowning the arms on this side of the pillar, was worn by the good and great Coligni. Did he think when he last carried it, that the day of St. Bartholomew, then so nigh, would see his massacre and that of his companions? Did he think that the king, who then leaned upon his shoulder, promising to act by his counsel in all things, would command his assassination? or that the gallant young prince, whom he appreciated in most things so justly, would abandon the faith for which they had both shed their blood, and be murdered by one of the base instruments of the religion he adopted? He must be a madman or inspired who ventures to prophesy even the deeds or events of to-morrow."

"And this, then, was the casque of Coligni?" said Algernon Grey, rising and approaching the pillar; "one of the greatest men, undoubtedly, that ever lived, whose spirit seemed to revel in misfortunes, and whose genius appeared, even to his enemies, but the more bright for defeat."

"Ay, fortune was only constant against him," answered Herbert, following with Agnes, "he went on with still increasing renown and disaster, till his glory and his reverses were closed by his assassination."

"The body perished," said Agnes in a sweet low tone, "and with it all that was perishable. The immortal remained, the fame that calumny could never sully, to this earth; the spirit that triumphed over every reverse, to heaven, from whence it came."

Herbert laid his hand upon her shoulder, gazing at her with a well-pleased smile. "You may well speak proudly of him, my child," he said, "for your noble kinsman has left a name which the world cannot match. There are some strange things here," he continued abruptly, turning to Algernon Grey. "Do you see this ancient cuirass shaped almost like a globe?"

"Ay, and that ghastly hole in the left breast," cried Agnes, "what a tale that tells! Without a word one reads there that by the wound then given when the lance pierced through the strong iron, a gallant spirit was sent from earth on the long dark journey. What tears were then shed! How the bride or the young widow wept in inconsolable grief! How brethren or parents mourned!

What ties were broken, what long cherished hopes all blasted, what bright schemes and glad purposes then all passed away like a dream!"

Algernon Grey fixed his eyes upon her, while she spoke with a look of sad and solemn earnestness. It was intense and thoughtful, yet full of admiration, and lasted till she ceased; but Agnes saw it not, for her eyes were raised to her uncle's face, and her whole spirit was in the words she uttered.

"It is the pleasant part of life, I fear," he said at length, "which thus passes like a dream. The painful things remain--ay, and grow too. With the bright days pass the bright thoughts; with the light season flies the light heart. Man has but one summer; if it be clouded, let him not look for sunshine. Winter will surely come."

"Ay, on this earth," answered Herbert, "there is another climate hereafter, where winter is not. Still you are in some sense wrong. Each season has its sunny hours for those who seek them. Youth looks forward to age with apprehension, age to the state beyond. Neither know rightly what is in store. All they are sure of is, that there are deprivations coming of things which they fancy treasures; but still each step of life shows that the most prized jewels of the former were but tinsel and false stones. What will the last stage show of all the rest? That cuirass was young Talbot's, slain in the wars in France; that gap let in his death-wound. A noble spirit passed away to a nobler world; a kind young heart mourned, and went to join him. These are brief tales, soon told. Why should we think more of man's life and death than of the opening and the fading of a flower? His immortality itself makes his life the less worth thought, but as he uses it."

"These gauntlets, too," said Algernon Grey, "they seem less ancient than the cuirass, but yet are not of our own times."

"They are those of a king," answered Herbert; "one whom men esteem great; but like most of the world's great men, with many littlenesses--Francis the First of France."

"All that was great in him," replied Algernon Grey, "belonged to the spirit of a former time. He had a touch of the old chivalrous honour, and compared with others of his day, with our own Harry, and even with his more famous rival, the Emperor Charles, he stands out bright as knight and gentleman, if not as monarch."

"Compare him not with Harry," said Herbert, "that king was a brutal tyrant. He might have been better, indeed, had not men stupidly abolished polygamy, for I dare say he would have been contented to let his wives live, if the laws of society had not made them a burden to him; and so, like most men, he committed great crimes with a pretext, to escape from smaller faults less easily excused." He spoke laughingly, and then added, "But still he was a base, bloody tyrant, an ungrateful friend, an ungenerous master. No, no, Francis was too good to be likened to him. No, compare him with the man whose sword hangs yonder--with Bayard, and then how small the king becomes, how great the simple gentleman!"

"He was noble, indeed!" exclaimed Agnes; "and it is a consolation, too, to see that men admire him more for his gentler than his sterner qualities. Would that they took his lesson more to heart; for of the great men, as they are called, of this world, how few are there whose renown does not rise on deeds of blood and rapine, how few whose monument is not raised on violations of all justice and equity; the marble their fellow-creatures' corpses, and the mortar ruin, devastation, wrong, watered with blood and tears."

Algernon Grey gazed upon her again with the same sad and thoughtful look; and Herbert replied, "Too true, my child; but yet"--and he smiled somewhat sarcastically--"I have rarely known the lady who did not love these sanguinary gentlemen more than the humble man of peace. It is you, and such as you, who spur us on to war."

"War must be, I fear," answered Agnes; "and Heaven forbid that any gentleman should be a coward, trembling for so light a thing as life; but if, when driven unwillingly to strife, men would, like that great hero you have mentioned, soften the rugged trade by the virtues of the Christian and the knight, protect, defend, support, rather than oppress, injure, and trample down, the warrior would be worthy of all love, and great men would become great indeed. As it is, one turns with horror from the blood-stained page of history, where grasping ambition rides in the tinsel chariot of a false renown, over the crunching bones of whole generations slain. The world's greatness is not for me; and, all woman as I am, dear uncle, I would rather be a nun, mewed in a cloister, than the wife of one of these great men."

She spoke with a fire and energy which Algernon Grey had never seen in her before; but some of her words seemed to affect Herbert more than might have been expected. He walked suddenly back to the table, and seated himself, leaning his head upon his hand, with a sad and gloomy look. Agnes paused a moment, and then drew gently near, laid her hand upon his, kissed his furrowed brow, and murmured, "Forgive me! I did not mean to pain you; I thought not of what I said."

"It is nothing, it is nothing," answered Herbert; "it will pass, dear child;" and almost as he spoke, a servant, dressed in a different livery from that of the court, entered, saying: "The Dowager Electress, madam, has sent to tell you she is ready when you like to come."

"I will be with her directly," answered the fair girl; and turning to Herbert again, she added in a sad tone: "I have given pain enough here, for one night at least.--Farewell, countryman," she continued frankly, holding out her soft white hand to Algernon Grey, "I do not know whether we shall ever meet again; but, methinks, you will remember this night, so unlike any you have probably ever passed."

Her words were free and unembarrassed; but Algernon Grey had deeper feelings in his heart, and he merely replied, "I will," at the same time, however, he bent his head and pressed his lips upon the hand she gave him. It was a common act of courtesy in those days, marking nothing but a feeling of friendship or respect; and Agnes, receiving it as such, drew the light veil, which had fallen upon her shoulders, over her head, and left the room.

For a single instant Herbert remained seated in the same desponding attitude. Then rousing himself, he turned to his guest, saying: "Come, taste the wine again. It is but sour stuff this Rhenish wine at the best, but this is as good as any."

"It is better than any that I have ever tasted here," answered Algernon; "and I do not dislike these wines. One does not feel as if one were drinking molten fire, as with the heady grape of Burgundy, after which the blood seems to go tingling in fever to the fingers' ends. One more glass, then, to the health of the fair lady who has left us."

"Yes, she is fair," answered Herbert, thoughtfully, after drinking his wine,--"Beautiful as her mother, and as good--more gay, but not less thoughtful.--Now, my young friend," he continued, "there is one thing puzzles me in you. That you should think the child lovely does not surprise me, for she is so: I know it, and am accustomed to hear others say so; but she sets so little store by her beauty, that it gives me no pain. There is a difference between admiration and love. It is evident enough that the blind god has nought to do in the case between you and her; but yet you have more than once gazed at her long, and with a sad and serious countenance, as if there were deep thoughts regarding her silently busy at your heart. If you mind not telling them, I would fain hear what those thoughts were."

"I caught myself so gazing," said Algernon, with a smile, "not long before she left the room. It was when she spoke of the horrors and evils of war; and that theme connected itself in my mind with what had passed before. I asked myself, if these bright scenes are destined to be visited by strife and pillage and desolation, what will be the fate of that young fair being, and many others like her. Hardships and rude alarms and the daily peril of life is what men are habituated to from boyhood; but what can woman do at such a season? She can but sit still and weep, awaiting her destiny, whatever it may be. The clang of the trumpet, or the roll of the drum, gives her no inspiring occupation to while away the hours of suspense; and, the rude captor's prey in a town taken by assault, death, and worse than death, may be her portion.--Such were the thoughts which moved me on this last occasion. If I stared at her so rudely at any other time, I have forgotten the cause."

"It will be long, I trust," answered Herbert, "very long, before the storm rolls hither, even at the worst; and till it comes, here she is safe enough. But yet, methinks, good friend, your thoughts take a gloomy turn, and somewhat strange for the youth of the present day. With nine men out of ten in every court of Europe--France, England, Germany--we should have nought but gallant speeches, courtly discourses of small hands and beautiful feet, and eyebrows marvellously turned, or lectures upon bravery, what colours suit with what complexions, what ribands and what laces best harmonize, what dress becomes the gay and young, the tall, the short--with an intermixture of sighs and smiles, and some slight touch of roses and other flowers, to give an Arcadian glow to the whole. But here you have been as grave as a judge over a long cause which makes his dinner wait; speaking with all calm solemnity, as if you had never been taught to laugh.--Why so sad, my friend? Time enough for sadness, when real sorrow comes."

Algernon Grey's brow became graver than before; not that he looked hurt, or pained, but there was a sort of stern and serious earnestness upon his face, as he replied with brief, slow, pointed words: "Most men have some sad secret in their bosom."

"So young!" said Herbert, musing. "Nay, I think not most men; though some few may."

"Have not you, yourself?" asked Algernon Grey, fixing his eyes upon him steadfastly, "and none can say what will be the hour for the poisoning of all life's streams;" and he paused and fell into thought.

"I knew not that the lady was your niece," he continued after a time; "nor certainly did I expect to meet her here. I seek not dangerous companionships; and, methinks, her society might well be so to any one whose heart is not a stone. However, she is too free and happy, too tranquil in her thoughts and her soul, to be easily won; and I do trust, when she is won, that she may meet a person well worthy of her."

"Oh, she will do well enough," answered Herbert. "Women always choose ill; but, perhaps, she may not choose at all; and I believe the gross amount of happiness would be on that side, from all I know of men.--We are strange beings, Master Grey--boys unto the last, we covet eagerly each glittering toy we see; and then misuse it, when we have it safe."

These last words gave a different turn to the conversation; and it wandered wide, and lasted long. Before it came to an end, the trumpets of the Elector's party were heard in the courtyard; and Herbert smiled somewhat cynically, but made no observation. Shortly after, the castle clock struck ten; and Algernon Grey took his leave and returned towards his inn on foot, pondering upon the character of the man he had just left, and striving, as we all do when we meet with one unlike the generality of our acquaintance, to plunge beneath the surface and discover the hidden things of mind and heart. These reveries were not so profound, however, as to prevent him from remarking that thick clouds were driving over the sky, while the stars shone out and disappeared at intervals, as the grey vapoury veil was cast over them, or withdrawn. The wind, too, had risen high; and the night was very different from that which had preceded. When he, at length, reached the inn, some drops of rain were falling; and his heart felt sadder, certainly, rather than lighter, from the visit he had paid.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was a night of storms and tempests. As is not unusual in hilly districts, thunder, as well as rain, was brought up by the gusty wind. The house, though in the midst of the town, seemed to rock with the violence of the blast. The panneling cracked; the arras waved over the door; the rain poured down in incessant torrents; and when Algernon Grey looked forth from his window, as he did more than once during the long night, he beheld the livid lightning flaming along the streets, reflected as by a mirror from the wet and shining pavement of the causeway. Quick upon the flash came the pealing thunder, as if one of the granite mountains had been riven by the bolt of heaven, and rolled in crashing fragments into the valley below.

It was late ere he retired to rest; and for more than one hour he continued pacing up and down his chamber in deep thought, reproaching himself for weakness in having given himself up to fascinations, which he now found might soon become too strong for all his resolution to resist. It is a painful moment when a firm and determined mind first discovers in itself that weakness which is in all human nature, when it has to accuse itself of having yielded, even in a degree, to temptations which it had resolved to oppose; when it learns to doubt its own stability and vigour, and is forced, from experience of the past, to attach a condition, dependent upon its own strength or feebleness, to every resolution for the future. It is a painful moment, a moment of apprehension and dread, of doubt and sorrow; and Algernon Grey, more than once, said to himself, "No, I will not go thither again--whether William stays here or not, I will go forward."

He was weary, however, and when he did retire to rest, sleep soon visited his eyelids; but the form which had troubled his waking thoughts, visited him with more calming and pleasing influence in his dreams. Agnes wandered with him, Heaven knows where; no longer bringing with her hesitation and doubt as to his own course; but smiling with all her youthful grace unclouded, and spreading sunshine around her, even to the very depths of his own heart. As so rarely happens, he remembered his dream, too, when he awoke; and it seemed as if imagination was but an agent of Fate, to bind him in those bonds against which he struggled fruitlessly.

It was late ere he unclosed his eyes. The sun was far up in the sky, but still not showing his face unto the earth; for the storm had sunk away into dull heavy rain; and the pattering torrents, which fell from the gutters into the streets, told how heavy was the descending deluge. Large undefined wreaths of white vapour were wound round the brows of the hills; and the eye could not penetrate either up or down the valley beyond a few hundred yards from the spot where the observer stood.

William Lovet was in an ill humour; for he had engaged himself to ride again with the court that morning, if the day were fine. But still his spleen took a merry form; and though his jests were somewhat more bitter than usual, he jested still. Often did he look at the sky, and still the same grave blank presented itself till the hour of noon. Then the expanse grew mottled with slight feathery flakes; the flakes separated themselves wider and wider from each other, drew into distinct masses and left the blue sky visible here and there. The sun shone out over the valley and the plain; but the clouds upon the higher hills looked only the more black and menacing. However, about half-past twelve o'clock, a page came down to the inn with a billet for Master William Lovet, sealed, perfumed, and tied with floss silk of a rose colour, after the most approved mode of tender epistles of a period somewhat antecedent. William Lovet took it eagerly; but yet he could not make up his mind to open it without some slight touches of his own sarcastic humour. He hung the silk upon his little finger, held the note up to Algernon Grey with a gay smile, and then carried it to his nose and to his lips, exclaiming: "Perfumed with sighs, and flavoured with kisses! Verily, verily, Algernon, you are like an anchorite at a feast, with delicate dishes and fine wines before you, and yet you will not taste--But I must read the dear contents. Witness all ye gods, that I have sworn no constancy. Of all the silly nations in the world, the

Lotophagi were the most foolish; for after baring once tasted their favourite food, they could relish no other. Now my unperverted palate can feast on every sweet thing that is offered it."

While he had been uttering the last words, he had cut the silk and opened the letter; and, having read it through, he turned to his friend, saying, "The expedition is put off till after dinner; but at two we set forth. Do you come, Algernon?"

"Not I," answered Algernon Grey; "I have no invitation."

"That will be soon procured," replied Lovet; "but faith, I will not press you. For the future, you shall follow your own course; for I see it is all in vain to hope for anything like the fire of youth in you. I did think, indeed, when I saw you and that lovely Agnes Herbert together, some spark might be elicited; especially when my fair friend told me that she is as cold as you are: for you see, Algernon"--and he laid his finger on his breast, with a laughing look--"by striking flint and steel, two hard, cold things together, men make a fire--but now I give you up. Continue to live on in sanctified decorum, and bring back a virgin heart to England with you. Were you in witty Venice, the ladies of the place would present you with a coral and bells."

"And I would give them in return a veil and a pair of gloves," answered Algernon Grey.

"Oh, they wear masks," cried Lovet.

"I know they do," said his companion, "and I am not fond of masks."

"Well, well, I must have dinner quick, and ride up to the castle," was the reply. "Every one to his own course, and happiness of his own kind to each."

The dinner was obtained. William Lovet equipped himself in his bravery; and Algernon Grey remained at the inn, pondering over the rencontre that was before him. To few men, even of the most gallant and determined, are the hours preceding a meeting of this kind the most pleasant in life. And, though perhaps no man ever lived who had a smaller sense of personal danger than Algernon Grey, yet they were peculiarly painful and disagreeable to him. Bred, like almost every man of noble family at that time, to arms, he had been in his boyhood inured to peril and accustomed to look death in the face; but still, educated with very strict notions in regard to religion, he could not free his mind from a belief, that to slay a fellow-creature in such an encounter was a crime. The habits of the day, the general custom of society, had their effect upon him, as upon all others; but still a conscientious repugnance lingered in his mind and produced that gloom which no feeling of apprehension could create. There was no alleviating circumstance either--there was nothing to excite or to carry him forward. He had no personal quarrel with his adversary; he had neither animosity nor anger to stimulate him; and, as I have said, the intervening hours were very dull and painful. He wrote some letters and memoranda, however; more to occupy the time than for any other reason. He ordered his horse to be ready, and the page to accompany him. He examined his sword-blade, and tried it on the ground; and at length, when the sun was approaching the horizon on its decline, he mounted and rode slowly out, with a calm, grave air, telling his servants to have supper prepared against his return. Not the slightest suspicion was entertained of his purpose; and the page rode gaily after, looking round at every thing they passed, and wondering whither his master was bound.

When they had approached the river, however, it presented a very different scene from that which had been seen from its banks for several weeks before. The green Neckar, so clear and glassy, was now a turbid torrent, red, swollen, and impetuous. The waters had risen in the course of the day and night several feet, and were dashing against the piers of the bridge and the walls of the curious old castellated houses, which then bordered the river, in impotent fury. Many of the rocks, which in ordinary weather raise their heads high above the stream, were now either entirely covered, or washed over from time to time by the waves, which a strong south-west wind occasioned in its struggle with the angry current of the stream. As the horse of Algernon Grey set his foot upon the bridge, a heavy rumbling sound from the east and north, low but distinct, and peeling long among the hills, told that the dark clouds, which were still seen hanging there, were pouring forth their mingled lightning and rain into the valleys of the Odenwald. But the moment that Algernon Grey had passed the slope of the bridge, he saw before him that which engrossed his whole attention. The Baron of Oberntraut was waiting for him under the archway of the opposite bridge-house, although the time appointed had hardly arrived; and, quickening his pace, the young Englishman rode on and joined him. Their salutations were perfectly courteous; and Oberntraut remarked, in a calm indifferent tone, "We are both a little before our time, I think; but the river is still rising, and this road by the bank has sometimes enough water on it to wet our horses' pasterns. With your good leave, I will show you the way. The stream has not yet come up, I see."

Thus saying, he turned to the right at the foot of the bridge, ascending the river; but it may be necessary to say that, at the time I speak of, the right bank of the Neckar presented a very different aspect from that which it now displays. No houses were to be seen between Neunheim on the one hand, and the old religious foundation of Neuburg, now called the Stift, on the other. The road was not elevated as it is now; but ran low, within a few feet of the ordinary level of the stream. The woods upon the Heiligberg, or Holy Mountain, and the other hills towards Neckarsteinach came sweeping down to within a few feet of the road; and, here and there, a path, large or small, according to the necessities of the case, led away up to the north, wherever

a village was situated in any of the dells, or a small piece of level ground, terraced upon the face of the mountain, had afforded the peasants an opportunity of planting the apple or plum tree. The vine was not seen, unless it were a small patch in the neighbourhood of Neunheim, or of the Stift Neuburg.

Along the low horse-road, which served as a towing-path for the boats, the Baron of Oberntraut led the young English gentleman, at a slow and quiet pace, till they were within about a third of a mile of the latter place. There the hills receded a little, leaving some more level ground, still apparently thickly wooded; and, at a spot, where stood a boatman's hut, with two or three rude barks, moored to the shore, the entrance of a by-way was seen, which narrowed within view, till the space was not larger than would admit the passage of a single horse. At the entrance of this path the Baron drew in his rein, saying to his companion: "We will leave the horses and pages here, if you please, and proceed for a couple of hundred yards on foot."

Algernon Grey consented, of course; and orders were given to the two youths to lead the horses after their masters, as far as they could up the path--which, indeed, could not be done for more than three or four yards--and then to wait there.

"If you will excuse me," continued Oberntraut, "I will precede you."

Algernon Grey merely bowed his head, without reply, till the other had gone on forty or fifty yards, when he said: "The sun is going rapidly down, if not gone already behind the hills; and I think if we do not hurry our pace, we shall not have light."

"Oh, it is the wood makes it so dark here," answered his companion, in a gay and somewhat self-sufficient tone; "we shall have more light in an instant; and the twilight lasts long here."

Thus saying he walked forward; and in less than two minutes led the way out upon a small green meadow, of not more than a quarter of an acre in extent, the second crop of grass from which had been lately carried away, leaving the turf smooth and short.

"This place seems made for the purpose," said Algernon Grey, drily.

"It is often used for such," answered Oberntraut, advancing into the midst, and throwing off his cloak.

Algernon Grey followed his example, drew his sword, and laid the belt and sheath with the cloak.

"Our weapons are of the usual length, I suppose," said Oberntraut, speaking through his teeth; for there was more bitterness in his heart than he wished to appear.

"I really do not know," answered Algernon Grey; "but you had better measure them;" and he laid his by the side of his adversary's. There was a considerable difference, however; the English blade was not so long as the German by at least two inches; and when the Baron observed it, his cheek flushed and his brow contracted; but his heart was noble and just, though somewhat impetuous and fierce; and, after a moment's pause, he said: "I cannot fight you with this disparity; we must put it off till another day. It is my fault, too; I should have sent you the measure of my weapon, or asked the length of yours."

"It matters not," answered the young Englishman; "your sword is a little longer than mine; but my arm is somewhat longer than yours; thus the difference is made up; and nothing of this kind should ever be put off for slight punctilios. Besides, my stay in this country must be short; and I may not have another opportunity of gratifying you. With thanks, then, for your courtesy, I say we must go forward as the matter is."

"Well, well," answered Oberntraut; "if such is your opinion, I am ready."

"We had better move the cloaks out of the way," answered Algernon Grey; "I see the light will not fail us."

"Oh, no fear of that," said the Baron; "these things do not take long."

The young Englishman smiled; and, the field having been cleared, advanced, with ceremonious courtesy, and saluted his adversary. Oberntraut returned the compliment; and their swords then crossed.

The great school for the use of that weapon with which both gentlemen were now armed, was, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the low, fallen land of Italy, where Algernon Grey had passed several years. In point of strength, the two adversaries were very equally matched; for, though the young Englishman was somewhat taller and more supple, yet Oberntraut was several years older, and had acquired that firmness and vigour of muscle, which is obtained long enough before any portion of activity is lost. The latter was also very skilful in the use of his arms; but here Algernon Grey, from the schools in which he had studied, was undoubtedly superior. He was also superior in perfect coolness. There was no angry passion in his breast, no haste, no impetuosity. He came there to defend himself, to oppose an adversary, but neither eager nor fearful. He felt as if he were in a hall of arms with baited weapons, merely trying his skill. He was

anxious to disarm his opponent, not to hurt him; and in the first three passes Obertraut was taught that he was pitted against a complete master of the rapier. At first this discovery served to make him more cautious; and he used all his skill; but it was all in vain. He could not approach his adversary's breast; wherever his point turned, the blade of Algernon Grey met it; and more than once the Baron felt that he had laid himself open to the riposte, but that, from some cause, his adversary had not seized the opportunity. Repeated disappointments, however, rendered him irritable and incautious. He watched, indeed, his opponent's defence, thinking to learn what he called the trick, and overcome it by another sort of attack; but, whenever he changed his mode, Algernon met it with a different parry; and the clashing sword passed innocuous by his shoulder or his hip.

The light began to wane perceptibly, and as cool and perhaps cooler than when he began, the young Englishman recollected his adversary's words, and thought, "These things take longer than you imagined, my good friend, with a man who knows what he is about."

A slight smile curled his lip, at the same time; and thinking that he was mocking him, Obertraut renewed the attack with tenfold fury. Algernon Grey gave a momentary glance to the sky; the rose had died away from above; heavy clouds were driving over in detached masses; a drop of rain fell upon his hand; and he saw that, in two or three minutes, the air would become quite dark.

"I must wound him," said he to himself, "or in this dull twilight I shall get hurt; he is too keen to be disarmed; I must wound him, but slightly."

At the same moment Obertraut made a furious pass; the young Englishman parried the lunge, but, though his adversary's breast was left unguarded, his heart smote him, and he would not return it, lest he should touch some vital part. The Baron pressed him close with pass after pass; and step by step the young Englishman retreated. Then suddenly changing his mode, Algernon assumed the attack, drove his adversary before him in good guard, and then, in the Italian manner, took a bound back and stood in defence. Obertraut, following the method, of which he had some knowledge, sprang forward and lunged. Algernon parried and returned; but at the same moment the Baron's foot slipped on the wet grass, the sword's point caught him on the right breast close to the collar-bone, and passed out behind the shoulder. He staggered up, raised his weapon, let it fall, and sank slowly on the ground.

However cool and self-possessed a man may be--though he may think himself fully justified in what he has done, though he may have been acting in self-defence, though the act may have been inevitable--yet no one can inflict a real and serious injury upon another without feeling a certain degree of regret, if not remorse, unless his heart be as hard as adamant. It is at such moments that the strange link of consanguinity which binds the whole human race together is first known to us; it is then that we feel we are brothers, and that we have raised a hand against a brother's life.

The moment that the deed was done--and it was evidently more than he had intended to do--Algernon Grey felt a pang shoot through his heart, and he said internally: "Would that he had not driven me to it, would that he had not provoked it!" but, casting down his sword at once, he knelt by Obertraut's side, and, raising his head and shoulders on his knee, exclaimed in kindly and eager tones: "I hope you are not much hurt!"

"A little faint," said Obertraut, slowly; "not much--I shall be better presently, and able to go on."

"Nonsense, nonsense!" exclaimed Algernon Grey, vehemently, "to go on in combat against a man with whom you have no quarrel, who has never injured, insulted, or offended you, who was friendly disposed towards you? My good friend, I will draw the sword against you no more; I have had enough of it."

"Methinks, so have I," said Obertraut, faintly, with a light smile passing over his face. "You are a master of the science;--that pass was splendid."

"It was the turf!" cried Algernon Grey; "had you not slipped, I should have hardly touched you."

Obertraut pressed his hand, saying, "If you could stop the bleeding--it is soaking through all my doublet;--you had better call the page."

"I will try to staunch the blood first," answered Algernon Grey; "no time is to be lost--five minutes more and we shall not see the wound;" and, opening the vest and shirt of his opponent, which were now both drenched in blood, he tore his handkerchief in two, making each half into a sort of compress, as he had often before seen the surgeons do, when hurried on the field of battle. He fixed one on the wound before, the other on the aperture behind the shoulder, and with the Baron's scarf and his own, bound them tightly down, stopping the flow of blood, at least in a degree. Then, after gazing at him for a moment or two, he said, "I will leave you only during an instant, and send the page for a litter or something to bear you to the town."

"No, no," answered his former adversary; "send up to the Stift Neuburg, they will take me in and tend me well. Then a surgeon can be brought;--but remember, whatever happens, this is not

your fault; it was my own seeking--my own doing,--no one is to be blamed but myself. Methinks the bleeding has stopped."

Algernon Grey hurried away, found the path without difficulty, and ran down towards the road; but the moment his own page saw him coming, he threw the reins of the horses to the other and sprang to meet his master, exclaiming, "Away, my lord, away, or you will not be able to pass. The river is rising rapidly; the water is already upon the road."

"Mind not me," exclaimed Algernon Grey, "but hasten with all speed up to the building there upon the left. Fly, boy, fly! and give notice that there is a gentleman lying wounded in the wood. Beg the people to send down bearers instantly to carry him up thither."

The boy gazed at him with a look of surprise and consternation, and seemed about to ask some question, when Algernon Grey exclaimed, "Away! inquire nothing; his life depends upon your speed."

The page instantly darted off to execute the commission, when suddenly a sound was heard as of the feet of many horses coming at a rapid pace round the wood and the rocks beyond. The boy paused and drew back for an instant; and a part of the splendid train of the Elector and his Princess swept along, with their horses' hoofs splashing in the water, which was now two or three inches deep on that part of the road. The boy then ran on, and Algernon Grey advanced a step or two to catch some stragglers of the party and bid them send a surgeon quickly from the town; but, ere he reached the broad road, two or three cavaliers dashed past like lightning, without noticing him; and the next instant a shrill piercing shriek broke upon his ear.

CHAPTER IX.

The court of the Elector, Frederic the Fifth, was, as I have in some degree shown, one of the gayest as well as one of the most splendid in Europe. Nay, the merriment and revelry that reigned therein, puzzled the stern Calvinistic ministers not a little, how to excuse a degree of levity in the Prince and Princess, which they undoubtedly thought most unbecoming in the heads of the severe Puritanical party in Germany. They would have censured and interfered, beyond all doubt, if they had dared; but the ministers of a sect whose religious teachers have little real power beyond that which the fanaticism of their disciples affords, are rather apt to grow sycophantish in the case of great personages, whose countenance and protection are necessary to the support of their authority, if not to their existence. It thus happened, that Scultetus and his brethren, as the good man's own writings show, were exceedingly lenient to the amiable lightness of the Elector, and contented themselves with very severe and menacing sermons before the court, while they seized every opportunity of apologizing for the gaiety of the prince and his consort, on the score of youth, prosperity, and habit.

Thus day after day, some new party of pleasure, some sport, some revel--interrupted only by occasional wild bursts of fanaticism, which had their interest and excitement also--kept up the thoughtless spirits of the court of the Palatinate, and sometimes afforded opportunity for pursuits not quite so innocent.

On the evening of which we have just been speaking, a large party, though somewhat less in number than that of the preceding day, issued forth from the gates of the castle, crossed the bridge and took its way along the same road which was afterwards pursued by Algernon Grey and the Baron of Obertraut. I will not pause to describe the amusements of the afternoon, nor to tell how the cavalcade was led through paths and by-ways which had seldom seen ought so gay before. Schönau, which they had visited on the preceding day, was merely passed through, to the renewed admiration of the good peasants; and then by a narrow road, which naturally separated the party into pairs, the glittering troop reached a little village with a curious contradictory name, called Alt Neudorf, or Old New Town. The look of the village seemed somewhat desolate to the eyes even of the fair Electress, who was naturally inclined to any wild expedition; but the whole party were soon agreeably surprised to find a house and garden in the midst of the place, decked out with flags and banners and pieces of tapestry, as if for their reception, while well known servants of the court appeared at the doors, in quaint dresses, to receive the princely personages, and a rich collation of cold meats, fine wines and fruits, was spread in a large room hung like a royal tent and carpeted with dry moss.

During the ride thither, William Lovet had maintained his place by the side of the fair Countess of Laussitz; but he seemed in a less cheerful and amiable humour than the day before; and directing her eyes by his own towards the person of a lady who rode near, he said, as they approached the village:--

"You told me she would not be here."

"Why what difference does her presence or absence make to you, servant?" asked the countess; "do you hate her so that you cannot bear her sight? You are as dull and sullen as if you had been crossed in love by her."

Lovet saw that he had shown his ill-humour too far, and replied, with a more smiling air, "I thought women were better politicians, Beauty. Can you not divine why I am vexed? It is not that I am displeased to have her here, but not to have her somewhere else. On my good cousin's stay in this country depends my own by your fair side; for I have sworn to keep him company for a year. If he goes I must go, and how could I live without you for twelve months?"

"But what has that to do with Agnes Herbert?" asked the lady.

"What! were those bright eyes only made to pierce my heart and not to see?" cried Lovet. "Have you not perceived that love caught him by the hand that very first night; and now he is struggling to free himself. Had she remained behind, he would have seen her, as he did last night; and another link would have been added to the chain which keeps him here, and me at your small feet. You must help me, bright one, to rivet this young girl's chain around his neck. I, too, must find a moment during our ride today to prompt her, even at the loss of some part of my sunshine."

In the train of the Elector there were more persons than William Lovet not altogether contented with the events of the day. Critical moments were approaching, when decision was necessary, and when each decision, even upon a small and apparently trifling point, might influence the destinies not only of the Palatinate, but of the whole of Germany; and, more remotely, of the whole world. There were some men at the court of the Elector who took this wider and more comprehensive view, and were anxious to see all his acts well weighed, and his whole thoughts directed to the consideration of questions so great in magnitude. At the same time there were others of a narrower scope, who were anxious to fix his opinions in favour of that party to which they belonged, or of that particular course which their party advocated. The levity and revelry of the court, of course, interfered with the purposes of each; and, on the present occasion, two or three of the young sovereign's counsellors, frustrated in former efforts to obtain his ear, had followed the cavalcade in the hope that some opportunity would occur of enforcing each his separate opinion. The two most influential persons present, as politicians, were the celebrated Louis Camerarius and the Viscount Achates de Dohna, lately the Electoral Ambassador at Prague.^[2] Very different, indeed, were the two men, and very different their views; but, without attempting to paint the characters of each, it may only be necessary to say that, upon this occasion, Camerarius sought eagerly to keep the ear of the Elector entirely to himself, filling it with flattering prospects of greatness to come; while Dohna only endeavoured, from time to time, to place before the eyes of his master, by a few brief words, the dangers and difficulties of an undertaking, to which his more flattering or more interested courtiers were hurrying him too eagerly forward.

It was not till the collation was over, nor even till the party had passed through the small village of Ziegelhausen, that either the one or the other found any opportunity of advancing his particular notions. Then, however, on the narrow way, which varied in width at different places, the Elector rode a few steps in advance, calling Camerarius to his side; while the Princess Elizabeth, with some ladies and gentlemen, followed, having Dohna on her left hand, between her and the river. The pace at which they proceeded was at first slow; and the wind, as I have said, blew strong up the turbulent stream. Thus, when the prince and his counsellor raised their voices, the sound was distinctly carried to the party behind. Once or twice, just as they quitted Ziegelhausen, the horse of Dohna was seen to prance and curvet, as if either it or its rider had become suddenly impatient; and at length the voice of Camerarius was heard by the whole group round the Princess, saying, "They cannot pretend that your Highness had any hand in it. The whole affair is of Bohemian manufacture."

Dohna struck his horse sharply with the spur, was in an instant by the prince's side, and answered aloud, "So is the gold chain round your neck, Counsellor Camerarius."

Then, reining in his horse, he fell back to the side of the Electress, leaving Camerarius a little confused. The latter was too old a courtier, however, to suffer his anger and shame to be apparent; and merely saying, "The viscount seems angry this evening," he went on with his flowery discourse.

"Should such a choice be made," he said, "it can but be looked upon as the call of Heaven. That a mixed population of different creeds and sentiments should unite in placing on their throne a prince, not only strong by his own power and his high qualities, but who is also the head and main stay of the great Protestant Union of Germany, must be the result of some supreme directing power, superior to the mere wisdom of man."

Dohna was at the prince's side again in an instant. "How long will the Union last united?" he said; "has it ever been united? Has it ever acted in harmony? Throw that out of the calculation, except as an element of discord."

Camerarius gave him a furious look, the Elector was silent, and Dohna let them again pass on,

resuming his conversation with the Electress.

The next words that were heard were from the mouth of Frederic; though several sentences had been spoken in the mean while, which did not reach the ears of those behind.

"They are, indeed, a determined race," he said; "ready to shed their best blood, rather than submit to the tyranny of the Roman church."

"They have shown themselves, for ages, your Highness," answered Camerarius, "resolute and vigorous in support of any cause they undertake."

Dohna spurred forward again: "I know them better than any one," he exclaimed, "and I will not conceal that, though they are headstrong and obstinate, fierce and passionate, they are ready to abandon any leader on the first grievance, and refuse him all vigorous support, unless he square his conscience to their prejudices."

This time he did not seem disposed to withdraw; for the road was wider; and Camerarius, trusting he had produced some effect, was unwilling to pursue the subject farther, in the presence of such an opponent. They were now passing the Stift Neuburg, and, casting his eyes forward, he exclaimed, "We had better hurry our pace, my lord; the water there seems rising rapidly over the road."

"Quick, quick!" cried Frederic, shouting to those behind; "spur on, or we shall be cut off by the river."

A couple of hundred yards farther, the road was found covered with the water; and the Elector suddenly drew in his horse with an air of hesitation.

"Is that the spirit to win, or keep a crown?" murmured Dohna to himself; and, striking his spurs into his horse's side, he exclaimed aloud, "This way, your Highness, this way! I will show you the path. The water is not two inches deep;" and, riding hastily on, he soon reached a spot where the causeway rose again above the level to which the river had risen. Those who were immediately behind, followed at once; and, though the whole of the electoral party had separated into distinct groups, another and another passed without fear or danger.

We must turn, however, here, to the last personages of the cavalcade, and follow them from Ziegelhausen.

In that village Agnes Herbert had lingered behind; for her horse had fallen lame; and she had called one of the attendants of the court to examine the beast's foot, when she suddenly found an English gentleman, William Lovet, by her side. As soon as he perceived what was the matter, he sprang to the ground, and before the attendant could interfere had examined the horse's hoof, and extracted a stone which had fixed itself firmly between the frog and the shoe; then remounting, with a bound, he said, with a graceful inclination of the head, "That is soon remedied. He will go well now; but do not hurry him."

Agnes went on; and Lovet kept close to her side, saying, "I am mistaken, or I have had the honour of seeing you before. My noble cousin Algernon was your prisoner during a night of sweet captivity."

Agnes bowed her head, answering, "I was obliged to obey the electress, even in a jest."

"I will not tell him," replied William Lovet, with a smile, "that you consented only from duty."

"His demeanour made the duty a pleasure," answered Alice.

"Ah, well may you say so," said Lovet, looking down thoughtfully; "he is a great winner of good opinions. Most men gain upon others by concealing all that is evil within them, Algernon by showing all that is in his heart, having nothing that is not noble to conceal;" and then, merely to break the discourse for a time, he pointed down the valley, saying, "What a beautiful scene this is! I know not whether it be more splendid, as when I saw it first, sleeping calmly in the evening sunshine, with the Neckar as placid and clear as a lake, or now, with yon red and stormy sky, fading away into the night, and the tempestuous waters of the river below, foaming and fretting among the rocks and shallows."

"The Neckar is terribly swollen," replied the fair girl; "I never recollect to have seen it such a torrent, except in winter;" and, gazing down the dark mass of rushing waters, all turbid and confused, whirling in eddies near, and dashing fiercely over the dark rock beyond, a feeling almost of awe crept over her.

"It is very fine, indeed," rejoined Lovet; "and I can appreciate it better now than I could some time ago; for the society of my cousin has taught me to look upon the beauties of nature with a different and more marking eye than heretofore. There seems a grand harmony between his heart and everything that is lovely--except, indeed," he added, "the loveliness of your sex, fair lady; for I never knew him, that I remember, bestow ten words, even upon the fairest of them, in my life."

Agnes thought--"He has bestowed more on me;" but she did not reply: and William Lovet continued,--

"Not that he is a woman-hater," he said, "for he is courteous and kind to all; but, on the contrary, I believe he has formed so high an estimate of woman's excellence, that he never finds his fancy fulfilled."

"If excellence is like other rare things," answered Agnes, "methinks it would take more than ten words to draw it forth."

"Ay, but he is very quick in his judgment," said her companion. "He, like many another man, imagines that nature has written much upon the countenance, that she tells much in the voice and manner; and that, unless both be well tutored by long experience, a keen observer will read the book aright, and know much of the contents from the first page.--I have seldom known him wrong, I must confess."

"Such keen-sightedness may, perchance, be a dangerous quality," the lady replied; "I mean, even for his own peace."

"Oh, no, he is ever on his guard," replied Lovet, in a frank tone; "he never spends any time on one whom he does not think worthy of esteem; but, with a courteous nothing, some filigree words of *haut-pas*, commonplace, meant to cover very little reverence, retires into himself again."

Agnes ran rapidly over in her own mind all that had passed between her and Algernon Grey, and asked herself, "Has he done so with me?" The answer was evident; and she would fain have fallen into thought; but she did not wish to show, or to admit even to herself, that the matter was one worthy of much meditation; and she inquired almost immediately, "Does he deal thus with men?"

"Oh dear, no," answered Lovet; "there, knowing that he is safe, all the fine fancies of his mind, and all the generous feelings of his heart, become apparent. It were worth your while to overhear him pour forth, in words of impassioned eloquence, sentiments that are worthy of a better age than ours. You would find him a very different being from what he has seemed. You must not think him, indeed, a cold and formal egotist, wrapped up in the contemplation of his own fancied excellence. I know, with women, this is often his character, though his person and his manners have great captivation for them too."

Agnes replied not; but looked forward on the road before, saying, "It is growing very dark, we had better ride on faster. My horse goes easily now;" and, shaking the rein, she put her jennet into a quick canter. In a moment after, a boy, dressed as a page, ran out from the wood, and, catching the rein of Lovet's horse, exclaimed, "Oh, sir, help here; there is a gentleman badly hurt-dying, I am afraid."

"Is it your master?" demanded Lovet, reining in his horse; while Agnes paused, listening with eager ears beside him.

"No, no," answered the boy; "it is the other gentleman."

"Then the other gentleman must take care of himself," answered Lovet. "Let go the rein, boy," he continued, in a sharp tone; "the stream is rising fast. Come on, come on, fair lady, or in this increasing darkness we shall get into mischief--come on, come on!" and he dashed forward along the path.

Agnes paused for an instant, and then exclaimed, "Run up to that large building, my good boy; they will give you speedy help."

Then, seeing the danger of farther delay, she struck the jennet with the whip, and the beast darted on through the water upon the path. Lovet was now some thirty or forty yards in advance, and she saw his horse swerve away from some object in the wood near the boat-house. He kept him steady with the spur, however; and Agnes, as she came to the same spot, turned her head to see what had alarmed the beast. She just caught sight of some horses and a page gathered together in an opening of the road; but at that moment her jennet shied violently away at the unexpected sight. She tried to keep his head forward with the rein, but the beast reared and struggled against it; his feet passed the limit of the road; and, in a moment, horse and rider plunged over into the midst of the rushing stream.

A loud and piercing shriek rang upon the air; Lovet turned his head and looked. Then, muttering between his teeth, "Ha! we must find another," he dashed on till he reached a spot where the road was free of water.

At the same moment, however, that the heartless exclamation passed his lips, the tall, powerful form of Algernon Grey appeared from the wood. The young cavalier cast a rapid glance over the dark and foaming surface of the stream. He saw a horse's head and neck rise above the water, and a woman's form, still keeping the seat, but evidently with a great effort, holding fast by the mane and the saddle. Another loud scream met his ear, and, with the rapid calculation of a quick, clear mind, he darted to the spot where the rude barks were moored, sprang into the first he could reach, cast it loose, and, with a vigorous effort, pushed it forth into the stream.

In the mean time, the horse, with the instinct of self-preservation, turned itself in the struggling waters and endeavoured to breast the current, striking violently with its fore feet to keep its head above the torrent, and rolling fearfully under its fair burden. Agnes still clung to it, uttering shriek after shriek; but, whirled round by the eddies, in spite of all its efforts the animal was carried further down. A black looking rock still raised its round head partly above the waves; and as they were carried near, though the strength both of rider and beast was failing, the poor animal, by a violent effort, got its fore feet upon the rock, straining to clamber up. The attempt was fatal to the jennet: the water by the side was deep: there was no hold for its hind feet: the fore feet slipped; and back it rolled into the overwhelming torrent.

With heart failing and strength gone, Agnes loosed her hold and addressed one brief prayer to Heaven. But at that moment, a strong arm was thrown round her, and she felt herself dragged out of the water into something which yielded and swayed under the pressure of her weight. She saw the struggling agonies of the horse; she saw a human figure, and a boat half sinking with the water which had poured into it as it heeled in receiving her; and then, with her brain whirling and her heart sick, she closed her eyes and pressed her fingers upon them.

At the same moment a hand grasped hers warmly, and a voice she knew, said: "You are safe, you are safe! God's name be praised!"

CHAPTER X.

Agnes Herbert left her hand in that of her deliverer. For more than a minute she made no reply; she asked no question. The voice was enough; she knew who it was that had saved her. But she knew not as yet the perils which still hung over both him and her. At length he let go her hand; and she heard a noise in the frail skiff, which made her instantly open her eyes. Then it was she perceived the full danger of their actual situation. Even in the grey twilight she could see that the edge of the small boat was within an inch of the surface of the boiling stream, that the bark itself was half full of water, while Algernon Grey was busily employed in baling it out with his hands, as the only means he had of freeing it even in a degree.

"Oh, thank you, thank you," she cried; "for how much have I to be grateful!"

"Speak not of that, sweet lady," answered the young Englishman; "but for pity's sake, watch every thing with a keen eye as we are carried down the stream; for I cannot--dare not even attempt to reach the land. Tell me the moment you perceive a rock; for, with all this water in the boat, the least touch would sink us."

"Here, take my velvet cap," cried Agnes, "it is better than nothing;" but, ere Algernon Grey could use it twice to bale out a part of the water, his fair companion cried: "A rock, a rock!--There, on the right!" and Algernon, rising cautiously, took the short pole, which was the only implement the boat contained, and watched eagerly in the bow, till they neared a spot where one of the rude masses of granite still held its head above the current which dashed and whirled around it. Then lightly touching it with the pole he kept the boat off in deeper water; and in another instant, scarcely able to keep his feet, found himself whirled round in the vortex, formed by the impeded torrent the moment it was free.

Oh, what a terrible period was the passage down that stream. At each instant some new danger beset them--now the rocks--now the shallows--now the rapids--now the eddies: no means of approaching the shore; and reasonable doubts, that any effort to do so would not lead to immediate destruction! The sky became darker and darker every moment; and, though by the aid of Agnes, afforded to the best of her power, a considerable portion of the water in the bark was cast back into the stream, still the fragile lightness of the skiff, and the depth to which it had sunk, rendered it little probable that those it contained would ever reach the land in safety. The close falling night, the roaring of the torrent, the howling of the wind blowing strong against them, the agitated surface of the stream, now tossing them to and fro, now whirling them round and round, might well have daunted a strong heart inured to peril, much more that of Agnes Herbert. Algernon Grey felt for her terror, as well as for her danger; and ever and anon he said: "Let us trust in God, dear lady!--Fear not, fear not! There is a stronger arm than mine to protect you.--It is now that faith in Heaven is a comfort indeed."

But still, with eager eye, and steady nerve, and skilful hand, he watched and guided as well as he could, the boat along the troubled surface of the river.

Night fell; not a star was to be seen; the clouds swept thick and dark over the sky; but still, from time to time, a momentary light was afforded by a broad sheet of summer lightning, which

for an instant cast a blue glare through the valley of the Neckar. The mountains were seen and lost; the rocks, the trees, the woods stood out and disappeared like phantoms in a dream; and at length, walls and towers became, for one brief moment, visible; and then all was black again.

"We must be near the bridge," said Agnes; "do you not hear the water rushing more fiercely? Heaven help us now! for, if we strike against the piers, we are lost."

"Sit quiet there," answered Algernon; "I will go into the bow; and be assured, dear lady, I will live or die with you. Only remember, if I am forced to swim, lie quiet on my arm; for, if you clasp me, we both sink."

"I will not stir," she said in a firm tone; and Algernon Grey went carefully forward.

He heard the roar of the river, evidently dashing in fury against some obstruction; and then he thought he caught the tones of human voices speaking above. Then came a broad sheet of lightning; and he saw the bridge, with its manifold arches and its towered gates close at hand. He had but time to stretch forth his arm, and, with a violent effort, keep the boat from the pier, when it shot in fury through the vault, and issued forth at the other side.

"We have to thank God again," he said, regaining his balance, which he had nearly lost; "that danger is passed; and, if I remember right, the stream is clearer below."

"Much, much," said Agnes. "The rocks cease as soon as the mountains fall away; but there are many sand-banks."

"We must watch still," replied her companion, "but the stream seems already less rapid."

The fearful rushing sound of the swollen Neckar diminished shortly after they had passed the bridge. They could even hear, or fancied that they heard, the hum of human voices from within the town. Lights were seen in various windows, and cheerful images of happy life came thick before their eyes, as they were hurried on, along the course of that dark headlong stream, with many a peril still before them.

"That must be the boat-house at Neunheim," said Agnes, at length, after a long silent pause; "they have got a fire there, though the night is so sultry."

"They must be caulking their boats, I think," replied Algernon; "and from the distance of the fire I should judge we are in the mid-stream. I will call to them as we pass--perchance they may hear and help us."

A moment or two after he raised his voice and shouted aloud; but no one answered--no form darkened the light in the hut, as if one of the inhabitants had come out to see who called. Rapidly the boat hurried past, and all was silence. The river was less turbulent, but seemed hardly less swift; the noise subsided to a low whispering murmur, as the tide poured through the widening banks; and faintly marked objects--willow, and shrub, and decayed oak, which were hardly distinguishable from the banks or the sky--seemed to move away with the speed of lightning.

At the end of about half an hour, during which the two had not raised their voices above a whisper, Agnes said aloud, "There is a star! There is a star! The sky must be clearing. Do you not think it is lighter already?"

"Assuredly, dear lady," replied Algernon Grey, "the moon must soon rise; last night she was up by this time. See, there is a glow upon the clouds round what seems a hill-top there to the right."

"It is the Heiligberg," answered Agnes. "I have seen a gleam like that when the moon was coming up in the east. Oh! Heaven send that she may disperse the clouds and give us light."

Algernon Grey turned his eyes to the sky, and he found cause to hope. The clouds were breaking fast; the stars gleamed faintly out here and there; and the edges of the vapoury fragments looked white and fleecy. Alice gazed in the same direction; and for five minutes both were silent. Then the boat grated heavily with a sudden shock, and stood fast in the midst of the stream. The two voyagers were nearly thrown down by the concussion, but Algernon exclaimed, "Fear not! fear not! We are on a bank, but no harm can happen; the water must be very shallow here. Let us sit calm till the moon rises; she must be even now just behind those hills. It is growing lighter every moment."

He was right in his judgment; and in less than ten minutes the sky was clear or nearly clear of clouds. The moon, indeed, could not yet be seen; but her pale silvery light spread over the whole heavens; and everything around, to the eyes so long accustomed to utter darkness, appeared to stand out as if in the broad beams of day. Upon the left, the bank seemed somewhat steep and rugged, and no landing-place could be discerned; but to the right was a piece of low sedgy ground, which the young Englishman doubted not was partially overflowed by the swollen stream.

"Do you know where we are, dear lady?" he asked; "I can see neither house nor village."

"I cannot tell," answered Agnes. "I should think we must have passed Edingen by the time

which has elapsed. Do you not think we could reach the land? Oh, let us try; for wherever it is, we shall be better there than on the bosom of this dreadful river."

Algernon Grey smiled upon her with that warm heart-springing look we only can give to those we have cherished or protected. "It is only dreadful now, this same fair Neckar," he said, "because we came too near it in an angry mood. To-morrow it will be as calm and sweet as yesterday."

"And would be so," answered Agnes, "if it flowed over our graves. It will ever be dreadful to me, from this night forth."

"Not so to me," replied her companion, "for it has afforded me a great happiness. But I will try to push the boat off the bank and guide it to yonder low ground on the right. Little will do it, if we can once get afloat again."

His efforts were not in vain, though it required all his strength to force the little skiff from the firm bed into which the rapid current of the stream had carried it. As soon as it was free, however, he perceived an increase of the water in the bark; and, judging rightly, that the sudden shock upon the shoal had seriously damaged it, he saw that not an instant was to be lost. Resting the end of the pole upon the sand-bank, as the boat swung round, he gave it a vehement impulse towards the shore. It drifted on with the current, but took an oblique direction, which Algernon Grey aided, using the boat-pole as a feeble sort of rudder; but still the river was deep and swift, the bank some yards distant, and the water in the bark gaining fast.

"The boat seems sinking," said Agnes, in a low, sad tone.

"Fear not! fear not!" replied her companion, cheerfully; "in a quiet stream, such as this is here, I could swim with you three times across without risk. But we are nearing the bank!" and, sounding the water with the pole, he found the bed of the river, and pushed the boat to shore just as she was settling down.

It was a low swampy piece of ground that they touched, covered with long sedge and bulrushes growing upon overflowed land. Algernon Grey sprang out at once, and finding water still up to his knees, he leaned over into the boat, and took his sweet companion in his arms.

"I must carry you for a little way," he said, "and now we may, indeed, thank God with our whole heart for a great deliverance. You shall walk as soon as we reach dry ground, dear lady, for you are wet, and I fear must be cold."

"Oh, no," she answered, "either terror or the sultry air has kept me warm enough. But how can I ever thank you for all you have done."

She lay in his arms: her heart beat against his; her breath fanned his cheek when she spoke. What were the feelings of Algernon Grey at that moment? He would not ask himself; and he was wise. He gave up his whole thoughts to her, to cheer, to soothe, to protect her, to remove from her mind not only the impression of the past peril, but also all feeling of the embarrassment and difficulty of her actual situation, left to wander, neither well knew whither, with a man, a young man whom she had known but a few days, in the darkness and solitude of night.

He felt his load light and his burden a pleasant one, it is true, as he bore her on for more than a hundred yards through the marsh. He would have willingly had her lie there far longer--perhaps for life; but still as soon as they came upon the dry sandy ground, he set her gently down and drew her arm through his.

"Now, sweet comrade," he said, gaily, "we must fight our way to some village where you can find rest for the night. Do you not feel weary? Terror is a sad sapper of human strength."

"Not so tired, perhaps, as I might expect to be," answered Agnes, "considering that I had a long ride before this terrible event took place.--Alas, my poor jennet, that bore me so often and so well, I shall never see you more!--Yet I am wrong to speak so: my whole thoughts should be gratitude."

"We have both much cause for thankfulness," replied Algernon, "and see, dear lady, the beautiful moon, to guide us on our way, is rising over the hill, half hidden by the woods, half seen through the tree tops. How quickly she wanders on along her blue way. But we must take a lesson from her, and speed forward likewise. What path shall I choose? for I have no knowledge of this land."

"And I very little of this part," said the lady; "but one thing is clear; by bending our course towards the hills again, we shall at all events approach the town."

"That must be far," answered her companion, "and those small limbs of yours will hardly bear you thither to-night; but let us to the right at all events; as likely to find a resting-place there as on any other path;" and bidding her rest upon his arm for support, he led her on.

Theirs was a strange ramble through the wide fields and plains that stretch out between the foot of the Bergstrasse and the Rhine; and yet not without deep interest to both. Each had at

heart feelings of many a varied character sufficient to fill up long hours of dull life, and each was disinclined to dwell upon the most thrilling emotions of all; but yet,--however they might fly to other subjects, how anxiously soever they might strive to withhold their thoughts from anything that might agitate or overpower,--still those emotions presented themselves in vague and indistinct forms, mingling with thought, seizing hold upon fancy, and giving a tone and colour to all that was said, without either of them being aware that they deviated from the ordinary course of conversation between persons of their birth and station. The scene, too, and the season, the hour, the atmosphere, the circumstances, the events that had lately taken place, the prospects of the future in their very indefinite obscurity, all had an influence, and seemed to combine to nourish a growing passion in their hearts. The moon rose bright from behind the trees upon the mountain tops, shining like the bright pure vision of young and innocent love. The clouds, which at the outset of their stormy and perilous course had swept like the evils of life over the whole sky, had now vanished as if by magic, leaving but here and there a fragment whirling upon the wind, to obscure the twinkling stars with its light veil. In the south-west, some half way up the heaven, shone a lustrous planet, beaming calm, steadfast, serene, like the undying light of hope; and, while opposite stretched in grand masses the hill-slopes of the Bergstrasse, beneath that star appeared the wavy outline of the Haardt mountains, still coloured with a purple hue, as if the rays of the departed sun had not yet entirely left them. Above, and to the south and east, all was bright and silvery with the light of the risen moon. The stars themselves were there extinguished in the flood of splendour; but on the borders of the sky the twinkly lights of night looked out, like gems on the robe of their queen; and, from time to time, a bright meteor crossed the expanse, bursting from space, and dying ere it reached the earth, like the light thoughts of many a great mind, which perish in the brain that gives them birth.

The air was warm, and yet stirred by a strong breeze. There was a certain languor in it, a love-like, luxurious softness, disposing to gentle thoughtfulness; and a sweet perfume rose up from some of the shrubs of the field, mingling harmoniously with that bland air, and rendering its softening powers still greater. Over the wide plain which they traversed, the moon's beams fell bright, but not clear; for a thin vapour, too light to obstruct the view, and only serving to diffuse and generalize the light, rose up from the drenched fields in the warm air.

Rescued from death, and brought safely through innumerable perils by him on whose arm she leaned, the heart of Agnes Herbert might well dwell fondly on the thought of one whose words, whose manners, and whose look had before captivated her fancy, if not touched her heart. All the terrors she had felt, all the dangers she had passed, all the services he had rendered, all the kindness and tenderness he had shown that night, mingled strangely in memory with the words and the conduct of the two preceding evenings, with the interest she had previously felt in him, and with the account given of him by his companion and friend. But she, like himself, would not pause to think of such things--at least she would not scan them; and gladly she joined in conversation upon any topic, which would lead her mind away from that on which it lingered.

Many and varied, too, were the subjects with which he strove to entertain her, to wile her mind away from the thoughts of her situation, and to lighten the minutes of their long and devious course, as they wandered on in search of some human habitation.

"How bright the night has become," said Algernon Grey, after a pause. "Thus very often, when we least expect it, the storms that hang over some part of every man's career, are wafted away, and all is clear again."

"And but the brighter for the storm," said Agnes.

"Ay," he rejoined, "I fear me much, sweet lady, that we should never enjoy the sunshine but for the shade. It is in the varieties of creation and the constant changes of the world's life, that the grand harmony of the whole consists. Let the tone of an instrument be ever so sweet, what effect would it produce upon the ear, if it had but one note? How poor is a concert with but two or three instruments! But in the succession and combination of many notes and many tones, how grand, how beautiful is the melodious harmony!--Skies ever blue, and pastures ever green," he continued, changing to a gayer tone, "would, I believe, become very dull and wearisome, notwithstanding all the verses of pastoral poets."

"So men think, I have been told," answered Agnes; "and that they choose their wives of tempers that may give them some variety."

"Yes, but there may be pleasant varieties, too," answered Algernon Grey, "even in one character. The storm is, in itself, a grand thing; but no man, methinks, would unroof his house to let it in; and, besides, dear lady, all things have their fitness. The drums and trumpets of an army are fine enough, mellowed by the open air; but who would think of enjoying a full choir thereof in a narrow room? After all," he continued, "in most classes of society this same marriage may be called a matter of fate rather than of choice, arranged by friends, or fixed by circumstances. Man little knows how rarely in life he is a free agent, and, above all, how rarely in this respect. Then again," he continued, "even when man or woman is truly said to make a choice, do they ever know that which they choose. We walk about with vizards, my sweet friend; ay, even up to the steps of the altar; and the real face is seldom seen till the ring is on the finger."

He spoke very seriously; but Agnes replied with a laugh: "Perhaps, if it were not so, no one would marry at all; and yet," she added, in a graver tone, "if I thought I did wear one of these

same masks, I would never rest till I had torn it off; for I would much rather never be loved, than lose the love I had obtained."

"A far happier fate!" answered Algernon Grey; and then changing the subject suddenly, he said, "How is it our discourse ever gets so grave? With this fair scene around us, and such a joyful escape as we have both had, methinks, we ought both to be more gay. It wants but the nightingale's song to make this moonlight night complete in beauty."

"Ah! but the dear nightingale," answered the lady, "is penurious of his melody here; and in the month of June, or, at the latest, this last month, all his sweet notes come to an end. I know not why; for the people give the nightingale another flower; but, in my mind, he is always associated with the violet. His song is so sweet, so tranquil, so fragrant I may call it, so unlike the gay and perfumed rose, the flower of summer sunshine, whose blushing breast seems to court the gaze he shrinks from, that I can never fancy he would love the rose; while the calm violet, pouring forth her sweet breath in the shade, is his true image."

As she spoke, a distant light seemed to glimmer on the plain; but in a different direction to that in which their steps were bent; and they paused for a moment to remark it.

"It moves, it moves," said Algernon Grey; "it is but an ignis-fatuus. How many of them are there in this world. Each man of us, I believe, has his own, which he follows blindly. Love here, ambition there, avarice elsewhere, the desire of worldly honours, the gewgaw splendours of pomp and state, the miserable false light of fanaticism, the dull foul lamp of superstition, are all so many Will-o'-the-wisps, leading us ever from the broad, straightforward way. So will not we, fair lady; but by your good leave, go upon this path, which will conduct us somewhere. Here are tracks of wheels, I see, with the moonlight glistening on the pools the storm has left--but your step seems weary. Do I go too fast?"

"Oh, no," she answered; "yet I confess, a little rest, a roof over my head, and a cup of cold water would not be unpleasant. The thought of a village and all its quiet comforts which that light afforded, has made me feel more fatigued since I saw it."

"Oh, yes," answered Algernon Grey, "there is something very sweet in human associations, which we know not till we are deprived of them for a time. The mind of man, I am sure, was never intended for solitude; for the very thoughts of home-happiness and quiet converse with our fellow-creatures--ay, even of their proximity, though they be strangers to us, makes the heart yearn for all the warm companionships of society when we are deprived of it."

"But I have society," said Agnes, simply, "when you are with me."

Algernon Grey made no reply, but changed the subject to courts and courtly festivals, and then went on interweaving, as he was well able, lighter with graver conversation, and striving, not without success, to interest and occupy his fair companion's mind. The arts, then almost at their height, or at least very little declined, were one theme. Poetry furnished another. War, the chase, the pursuits of men of his own day, the habits of the world, the differences between countries, then marked out more strongly than at present, all passed under light review, and sometimes speaking gravely, sometimes jesting lightly, he gave that variety to all he said which he himself had praised. Whether from weariness or from thoughtfulness, I know not, but Agnes grew more silent as they went on. Certain it is, that the words of William Lovet often came back to her mind. "He does not speak thus to every one," she thought; and she asked herself whether it was merely to cheer the way for her, that he thus put forth his powers, or that he really esteemed and held her highly. If the first, she was bound to be grateful, though, to say sooth, she would rather have believed the latter. Either conclusion, however, was pleasant to her--ay, very pleasant--almost too much so; for she grew frightened.

It lasted but an instant; and indeed then, with the happy sophistry of woman's heart, she quelled her own alarm. "Surely," she thought, "one may esteem and like without fear or danger. Am I such a vain fool as to believe that every man who may see something better in me than the light coquettes of a court, must therefore love me? Am I such a weak fool that I must needs love, unasked, the first man who seems to treat me as a rational creature? I am silly indeed even to let my thoughts rest on such a matter. I will think of it no more. I will act as if such idle fancies had never crossed my brain, but as the heart prompts, and as nature leads."

She became more cheerful upon her delusion; but the way was long and wearisome. The soft ground loaded the tired foot; the turnings of the road disappointed expectation; and, though the bright moon still shone out to guide them, no village could be distinctly seen; for the thick orchards and small woods, which then occupied a large part of the valley of the Rhine, cut off the view from those who wandered in the low ground. The lady's garments too, fitted for the ride of the morning, were all unsuited to her long night ramble, and fatigue seized upon poor Agnes, and well nigh overpowered her. Twice she sat for some minutes by the road-side to rest; and, whenever the wetness of the swampy ground gave fair excuse, Algernon Grey took her in his arms and carried her; but still she was well nigh sinking from pure exhaustion, when a village clock struck clear and loud the hour of eleven. No great distance could exist between the musical bell and the ears that so gladly heard it; and with renewed hope and strength they let themselves be guided by the sound through the trees, till the tones of laughing voices came upon the air.

"There must be a village close at hand," said Algernon Grey, "and happily some Fair or merry-making seems to have kept the good peasants up and waking. See there are cottages!" and the moment after they entered the long street of a small hamlet with the church at the further end, and beyond, rising high above the houses, the tower of some old castle built upon a mound.

The cottages were all dark and silent, and the merry voices they had heard seemed to go on before them singing in chorus.

SONG.

Bruise the grape! draw the wine!
Oh the fruit of the vine!
It was given to console for the flood:
To bring light to the eye,
And to raise the heart high,
And to warm the old world with new blood.

When shut up in the ark,
Noah swam in the dark,
And no dove had returned to his breast;
He dreamed a glad dream,
That he saw a red stream
Flow forth from the cluster when pressed.

"We are weary," he said,
"We are cold, and half dead,
But there's comfort beneath this grim sea:
When we touch the hill top
The vine shall spring up,
And its warm juice shall set the heart free."

Bruise the grape! draw the wine!
Oh, the fruit of the vine!
It was given to console for the flood:
To bring light to the eye,
And to raise the heart high,
And to warm the old world with new blood.

Thus sung the peasants as they walked along, and Algernon Grey exclaimed, with a smile, "Their song gives good council, sweet lady. Though I saw last night that you were no wine drinker, you must now even consent to take some of the juice of the grape, whose qualities these good men celebrate. The inn where they have been tasting it cannot be far, and you will at length have rest and refreshment."

"Rest, rest," said Agnes, "is all I need;" but Algernon would not believe that food too was not wanted.

At length a light was seen streaming forth from a door not far from the church; and a good stout country girl, throwing forth into the midst of the street some torn and scattered flowers, which had decked the little hall of the hostelry for the country festival, appeared at the door. It was a glad sight for poor Agnes Herbert, and she drew a long deep sigh, while Algernon Grey inquired if they could have refreshment there, and rest for the night.

The girl seemed hardly to comprehend him, but called the bustling landlady, who gazed at the two gaily dressed, but worn and travel-stained strangers, for a moment with looks of doubt and wonder. Agnes, however, in few quiet words, explained her situation, using, as far as she knew it, the jargon of the country; and the good woman's whole manner was changed in a moment. Instead of doubt and suspicion of her guests, which she had before displayed, she was now all motherly tenderness towards the young and beautiful creature before her, although she was not without some embarrassments, also, as to the accommodation of her unexpected visitors. Situated in a remote and distant village, where a traveller very rarely staid for the night, she had neither room nor bed prepared; and, though plenty of supper, she said, was to be obtained in a moment, and as good wine as any in the Circle, she did not see how she could get two beds ready, although her daughter would willingly give up her own for the young lady's convenience. Algernon Grey relieved her from a part of her difficulties by telling her that he could sleep very well where he was, and that the table or the bench in the large room, where she had received her guests, would form a bed good enough for him, if she would prepare a room for Agnes as soon as possible. With this latter injunction she promised to comply; but there were two obstacles to its literal fulfilment, namely, first, the good landlady's determination that her guests should partake of a supper before they slept; and secondly, that the hostess herself, and all her people were boors of the Palatinate, who are not celebrated for the quickness of their evolutions.

In vain did the young gentleman hurry her; in vain did Agnes protest that she wanted rest before all things; half a dozen dishes, dressed in various strange manners, were placed on the table before them, as they sat by a dim and comfortless lamp, the mistress of the house observing sagely, that it could do them no harm on earth to eat some supper after so many adventures, and that, in the mean time, the lady's bed could be prepared.

After having discovered that they were in the village of Shriesheim, Agnes Herbert and Algernon Grey were left for more than half an hour alone in the dinner-room of the little inn; and deeply did the fair girl feel his conduct during that time; for although, with kindness and every gentle attention, he pressed her to take some food and drink some wine; though, with cheerful

gaiety he strove to amuse and cheer her, yet there was no token of respect that he did not show, to diminish or remove any embarrassment springing from her position with regard to himself. He made her smile; he even made her laugh; he awakened her fancy, to lead her thoughts to gay and happy images: he rendered his conversation light, playful, and sunshiny, but took care that it should be sufficiently reserved to place his fair companion at her ease, and to make her almost forget that she was not with him in one of the saloons of the palace of Heidelberg. Her weariness somewhat decreased as she sat and listened; and, to tell the truth, by the time the landlady returned to conduct her to her bedroom, Agnes Herbert was more disposed to remain where she was, and listen to sounds which fell with dangerous softness on her ear.

Nevertheless she rose instantly, and held out her hand to her companion, bidding him farewell for the night. He took it, and pressed his lips upon it, wishing her good rest, and fair dreams.

Agnes gazed upon him with a smile as he did so, saying, "Methinks it is I ought to kiss your hand, and thank you again and again for all your acts of kindness in every way, all of which I have felt, from the saving of my life to the soothing of my mind; but I must leave others to do it who are more capable--I have no words."

CHAPTER XI.

One of the first cares of Algernon Grey, when Agnes had left him for the night, was to send off a messenger to the castle of Heidelberg, to announce, even at that late hour, that the lady was in safety. It was with difficulty, indeed, that any one could be procured to undertake the task; for Germany is a country in which there are some things that people will not do even for money. But a man was at length found to walk the distance, and to set out at once. The young Englishman's next thought was how to obtain horses for the following morning; but it was not till the messenger had departed that this occurred to him; and when it did he felt some doubt as to whether a woman's saddle could be obtained for the lady.

The good hostess undertook the task, however, without making any difficulty, naming a neighbouring farmer's horse for himself, of whose qualities he was very willing to run the risk, and saying that their minister's daughter had a nice ambling pad, which she would lend very willingly to bear that pretty lady to the castle.

This being settled, and pure water having been procured to wash away from his face and neck the traces of all he had lately gone through, Algernon Grey was left alone in the hall, to find repose as he best could. But for a long time he sought no rest, at least for the busy brain and anxious thought. During the three or four hours last past, his mind had been fully occupied, at first with perils and dangers, and with a sweeter and not less engrossing task at an after period; but now, suddenly reverting to still earlier events, he turned to inquire what might be the result to the adversary whom he had met in the wood, of his sudden departure from the scene of strife. Apprehensions crowded upon him for the fate of the Baron of Obertraut. The page, he feared, might have seen him hurry to the rescue of Agnes, and, thinking only of duty to his master, might have neglected to fulfil the orders he had received, in his anxiety to trace and assist him. The wounded man might have been left to bleed to death on the meadow, and, though he felt that he was not to blame, yet Algernon Grey would have given a king's ransom to be sure that his opponent had met with proper aid and treatment.

Thought, he knew, was fruitless, upon this subject at least; and yet he continued to think upon it for some time, till the image of Agnes Herbert began to mingle with these waking reveries, and with it a new source of anxiety; she was so beautiful, so gentle, so full of every grace and quality which he had dreamed of as perfection in woman, that he could not but think of her with tenderness. He would not believe that he thought of her with love; and yet he dreaded his own sensations. Once more he made strong resolutions to quit Heidelberg and the Palatinate immediately--to see her no more--to wander far--to forget her. Poor youth! he had some experience of the world, but he had not learned how completely all human resolutions are the sport of circumstances; he had not yet learned that if in our weakness or our passions we do not break them voluntarily, there are a thousand little incidents over which we have no control, which step in between us and their execution. His determination was firm and strong, however; his conviction of the right course was not in the least shaken; and, making up his mind at length to accompany Agnes back to the castle, letting her see no change or difference in his manner, but to leave her there and to depart the next day, he seated himself near the table, bent his head upon his arms, and gradually sank into sleep.

In that strange, mysterious state, when a dull heavy curtain falls between the mortal senses and all their external objects, when life alone remains, and the spirit is cut off from all

communication with the rest of creation, while fancy yet from time to time--ay, and memory too--wakes up with strange caprices, to deal with past and future things;--in that great mystery of sleep, which none have solved, notwithstanding the laborious idleness of their efforts, images, not new perhaps, presented themselves to his eyes, but surely arranged in novel and fantastic forms. Neither was it remembrance of the things last past that called up the visions to his eyes; he saw not his adversary lie bleeding on the grass; he saw not the drowning horse, the sinking girl; no fierce engulfing stream rolled before his eyes; no whirling bark bore him onwards through the darkness of the night. Yet Agnes was with him in his dreams. Bright, as in her festival beauty she had led him through the castle halls, she now guided him through gardens of sweet flowers, stopping here and there to pluck them, and wind them into coronets for his brow. Then came another form across them, beautiful but fierce like a young tigress, and aimed a dagger at his heart, when William Lovet grasped her hand and plunged it in her own bosom.

The vision passed away, more profound sleep succeeded; and when Algernon Grey woke on the following morning, the early light was shining through the uncurtained windows of the room. His toilet was necessarily brief; but the matutinal peasantry were all astir before it was finished. A substantial breakfast was soon laid out for him and his fair companion; and, after waiting for a few moments, he sent up to inquire if she were ready. Agnes had been long up, and immediately joined him in the hall, refreshed with sleep, though somewhat pale with the terrors and fatigues of the preceding day. All her cheerfulness had returned, but yet it is an invariable law of human nature that no great emotions can be felt without leaving some permanent effect behind. The scenes she had gone through, the agitation she had felt, even the feelings she had experienced while wandering through the fields at night with Algernon Grey, had made their impression, never to be erased. I will not attempt to look into her heart, for she would not look into it herself; but yet there were external signs and indications, which, to any experienced and observing eye, would have told the change. There was a deeper tone in her manner; there was more soul and spirit in her look; there was a thoughtfulness even in her gayest smile. All spoke of the heart, and of newly-awakened sensations therein; and it seemed to Algernon Grey, as she advanced, and, raising her eyes full of deep thankfulness to his face, placed her hand in his, that she had now all which had been previously wanting to render her beauty well nigh divine.

The meal passed gaily over; they spoke of the adventures of the past day with the pleasant gratulation of dangers ended. They spoke of their morning ride back to Heidelberg with the sweet anticipation of pleasure to come; and, when breakfast was done, they mounted the two horses which had been procured for them, and, with a youth on a third to bring those which they rode back, they set out, with the bright morning sun shining on their way. The clouds and storms of the preceding day were all dispersed; and, in one bosom, at least, was a gay and cheerful heart, unburdened with anticipations of evil, or regret for any act in the past. As they rode along at the best pace which their horses could command, Agnes poured forth to her companion's ear all her bright and sparkling thoughts, lighted up by that purest of enjoyment, which the expectation of giving pleasure to others affords to a fine spirit. She talked of the joy her uncle would feel in clasping her in his arms again, after he had thought her lost for ever; of the calm, but hardly less heartfelt satisfaction of the Princess Dowager in seeing her once more; and, although in Algernon's bosom many a bitter and painful thought arose, many a struggle, when he fancied that the last hours of their companionship were passing away for ever, he would not suffer any appearance of his own gloom to bring a shadow over her young happiness.

Thus fled the time; till, once more turning along the course of the Nectar, the town and the hills, and the laughing valley, and the proud castle, appeared before their eyes; and, crossing the bridge, and threading the narrow streets, they began to ascend the hill. For one moment they paused as they went up, to breathe their horses and to gaze over the scene; and Agnes, before they proceeded, let fall her rein, and, clasping her hands, exclaimed, "I never thought to see all this again."

Her eyes were raised to heaven in thankfulness, and then turned with a momentary glance to Algernon Grey. From an impulse she could not resist, she held out her hand to him, saying, simply, "But for you--but for you!"

They rode on more slowly, and, as they entered the court-yard of the castle, Algernon Grey said, "I must here leave you, dear lady, I believe; but be assured, that to have rendered you service in a moment of peril has been a happiness which will brighten many a future hour."

"But you will come with me to my uncle?" replied Agnes, with a start, and a look almost of alarm. "Oh, come, I beseech you; it is but fit that the deliverer of his child--of one that he loves as his child--should take her back to his bosom. Oh, come."

"If it will give you pleasure," replied Algernon Grey, with a faint smile; for he could not resist the temptation to linger still for a moment beside her, and he felt himself weak.

At the farther angle of the court there were a number of gentlemen and officers collected together, talking in the morning air; and, when Agnes and her companion rode up, several of them sprang forward to assist her in dismounting; but she paused till Algernon Grey was by her side, and then suffered him to lift her from her horse. Returning courteous, but brief answers to the congratulations, which showed how much anxiety had been felt for her fate during the preceding night, she looked round to her companion, saying, "Now I will lead the way to my uncle. I know he would never forgive me, if I did not bring you to him at once."

But, at that moment, a tall, elderly man, dressed in a military garb, advanced and laid his hand on Algernon Grey's shoulder, saying, "I am sorry for the task, sir, but I am commanded to arrest you, wherever I may find you, in the Elector's name. I have sought for you all through the town this morning. Give up your sword."

Algernon Grey merely smiled, replying, "I have no sword to give up, sir. May I know my offence?"

"Your fatal encounter with the Baron of Oberntraut," replied the old officer; "his father last night formally charged you with the murder of his son; and the Elector issued instant orders for your apprehension."

Agnes had turned deadly pale; and she raised her hand to her head, and thought deeply for a moment.

"Where is the Elector?" she exclaimed, at length; "I will see his Highness myself.--This gentleman saved my life; he rescued me, when all others abandoned me; he perilled existence a dozen times for a person whom he hardly knew--and is this his reward?"

"Fear not, dear lady," replied Algernon Grey; "this can have no bad results--a little inconvenience, but nought else. I met the Baron of Oberntraut, as one honourable gentleman meets another, when called by him to the field; I met him without provocation on my part, without anger or animosity, in a place of his own choosing, on a quarrel of his own seeking. I spared him as long as I could; and, though I deeply grieve to hear that he is dead, I will ever maintain, that the wound I gave him was only in defence of my own life."

"He was supposed to be dying, though not dead," replied the old officer, "when the news came last night. This morning we have no intelligence."

"Where is the Elector?" asked Agnes again; "can any one tell me where I shall find him?"

"He was in the Princess's cabinet a few minutes ago, fair lady," said a young gentleman, stepping forward; "I do not think he has come forth yet."

With a quick step, a flushed cheek, and an eager eye, Agnes hurried away; and, at the same moment, the old officer whispered to a page who stood by: "Run and tell old Oberntraut, he may want a word or two." He then turned to his prisoner, saying: "As I know not what may be the Elector's pleasure, sir, concerning you, it may be as well, that I should take you to his presence as speedily as possible. We can wait for him in his audience room, till he comes forth from the Princess's apartments. Have the goodness to follow me." Thus saying, he led the way to the castle, up the stairs and through a gallery above; and then opening the door, he conducted his prisoner across a sort of waiting-hall, which displayed numerous doors on either side. At one of these, as he crossed, Algernon Grey beheld his fair companion of the night before, standing with a page by her side. Her beautiful head was bent down; her eyes fixed upon the ground; and she moved not in the least, though the sound of steps must have reached her ear. The old officer then opened a door on the opposite side; and the young Englishman followed into a small room containing but one chair. There they paused for about ten minutes, left entirely alone; and, at the end of that time, the old chamberlain, who had so unwillingly introduced Algernon and his cousin to the Elector's presence on the night of the nineteenth of August, passed through with a hurried step. As he went, his brow gathered into a heavy frown; and he glanced at Algernon Grey, with his teeth set and his fingers clasped tight upon the sheath of his sword. A moment after a bustle was heard without; and the door being thrown open, the Elector entered with a stern brow, accompanied by several of his officers, and followed by Agnes Herbert and the chamberlain. Without noticing in any manner the young Englishman, the Prince advanced towards the chair, but did not sit down, turning as soon as he had reached it, and looking round.

"May it please your Highness," said the gentleman who stood by Algernon's side, "I have, according to your commands, arrested Master Algernon Grey here present, and crave your further orders concerning him."

The young gentleman took a step forward before the Prince could reply; and with a calm and well-assured countenance demanded, almost haughtily, for what offence his liberty had been abridged. The proud spirit of the free islander, the source of so much that is good, and alas, too often the source of so much that is disagreeable, showed itself for a moment in his tone and manner, though he took care to use all courtly terms and titles of reverence, and in the end softening his lofty bearing, professed himself ever willing to abide by the laws of the land in which he sojourned, adding, "But knowing my innocence of all offence, I claim fair and equal justice, and a full inquiry, ere I am punished in any shape."

"Justice and fair inquiry you shall have, sir; fear not," answered the Elector, somewhat offended by his bold tone. "It is fortunate that we have been in England, and know that noblemen of that country fancy themselves equal to the princes of other lands, or we might think your bearing somewhat strange.--My lord of Oberntraut, you laid a charge against this gentleman yesterday late at night--a most serious charge. We had not at that hour time to inquire fully; but will now hear you further."

"I charged him, your Highness, with the murder of my son," exclaimed the old chamberlain,

coming forward, "the cool deliberate murder of my only child."

"What is he dead, then?" inquired the Elector, with a look of stern grief.

"Not yet, sir," replied the other, "but he is dying. I saw him an hour ago--his voice could be hardly heard--his eyes were faded and dull, and his strong limbs, which have so often served the state, were feeble as an infant's; but this man, I say--this stranger who comes here, it may be as a spy into your court, seeks a quarrel with one of your best servants, lures him at nightfall into a remote place, and there, having left the two pages behind that no eye may see, slays a man, who, as we all know, in fair honest fight and deeds of arms, had no superior--scarce, indeed, an equal. It is of this I charge him, your Highness--it is for this I demand his punishment. Justice I will have by one means or another, and if by honied words, which he can well use, he should escape the arm of law, let him look well to himself, for I and mine will do ourselves right at last."

"Hush! hush!" exclaimed the Elector; "you injure a good cause by such rash threats.--What would you, lady? I am glad to see you safe.--I will speak with you presently.--This is no scene for you."

"Pardon, your Highness," answered Agnes, with the bold bearing of strongly roused feelings; "it is a scene in which I must bear a part whether I will or not. Listen to me for a moment. To this noble gentleman I owe my life, and I must raise my voice against his enemies. As I followed your royal lady here last night, my horse, frightened at some object in the wood, plunged over the bank into a torrent against which no living thing could struggle. He perished there, poor beast! Your Highness's servants saw it. They can tell you all."

"I have heard, I have heard," answered Frederic, bowing his head.

"All abandoned me," continued Agnes.--"Your followers--some of them stout soldiers--the gentleman who rode by my side, those who went before and they who followed--not one would venture on that frightful stream to aid a drowning girl, when this noble man, almost a stranger, in a frail bark, not stronger than a toy, which sank ere we reached land, came, found, and saved me. Many a time that night he perilled life for me--for one without a claim upon his goodness. Ay, at the very moment when this old lord declares he had just committed cool deliberate murder, he risked life, and all life gives, on the first generous impulse of his heart. Is this likely, noble prince?--Is this possible? Oh, no! the same high heart that bade him venture on that dark stream, at the scream of a dying girl, be you sure has ruled his actions whatever they were, in his dealing with a proud adversary. Believe it not, believe it not! or else believe that honour is a name, truth falsehood, and noble self-devotion but a murderer in disguise."

She spoke eagerly, vehemently, and her beautiful countenance, lighted up with the roused energies of her heart, beamed like that of some reproving angel, till in the end the emotions that she felt overpowered her, and the light went out in tears.

"My lord and prince!" cried the old lord of Oberntraut, his bitter rage taking the form of scorn under the restraint, such as it was, of a formal sense of courtesy towards a woman. "It is easy to understand and to forgive a lady pleading for her lover. But let us have done with such trash now. Love tales are not for such occasions!"

"Sir, you imply, if you do not assert, a falsehood," said Algernon Grey, sternly; "the very name of love has never been mentioned between this lady and myself. When I pushed off the skiff to save her, I saw not even who she was. But I will beseech you, dear lady, to leave us. In the justice of this noble prince I will fully rely, and, by staying, you only expose yourself to wrong constructions from the fury of a rude old man."

The lord of Oberntraut laid his hand upon his sword, and partly drew it; but one of the attendants held his arm, whispering a caution in his ear; and Agnes replied, "I go then, but only to call a better voice than mine to advocate the same cause."

"Now, Master Algernon Grey," said the Elector, "what have you to say to this charge brought against you? Speak, if you will; but if you do, I need not, I think, remind you that the truth is ever best, and in this case more especially, as it must undergo full inquiry before judges who will not be deceived."

"It is my habit, sir, to speak the truth," answered the young Englishman; "and if the Baron of Oberntraut be still living, I require that his statement be taken from his own lips. He is a brave and noble gentleman, and will not belie even an adversary. Let his statement be compared with mine, and they will be found to tally, I am sure. I declare then, in this presence, that he fixed a quarrel on me for I know not what: that he himself led me to the spot, made all the arrangements, attacked me first, I passively parrying his thrusts till the last moment, and then only lunged in self-defence. He will tell you, too, that I did all in man's power to staunch the blood and give him help; and I should have returned to remain with him, after having sent my page for aid, had not that lady's cries called me to another task, and the swollen Neckar borne us both far away. Let his own boy be asked if he did not hear him give me directions on the road he followed, invite me to dismount, and lead the way himself. This is my simple tale, and, unless a gentleman and a soldier may without shame refuse such invitations, I have done no wrong in yielding to his."

"In this land, sir," answered the Elector, sternly, "a gentleman and a soldier not only may

without shame, but must, refuse such invitations; for, by my own law, now of some four years' date, all such encounters are prohibited most strictly."

"Then his be the blame," replied Algernon Grey, "for leading a stranger unacquainted with the law your Highness names, to violate it. Gladly would I have avoided that which I personally do not approve, but which habit not only sanctions but requires."

"My noble prince, this tale must be false," exclaimed the old lord of Oberntraut; "you know my son right well, and that he is not one rashly to violate your Highness's laws."

Frederic smiled; and, notwithstanding the sad importance of the occasion, a light murmur, somewhat like a laugh, ran round the court, to hear so peaceable a character given to the young baron. But the Elector immediately exclaimed, "Silence, gentlemen. This is unbecoming! I am sorry, sir, to show severity to any one of your land," he continued, speaking to Algernon Grey; "but, at all events, till your adversary's state is better known, and till we are sure what the termination will be, you must endure confinement as best you may; I will myself inquire of those who have tended his wounds, whether they are mortal or not, and, when they shall judge it necessary, will cause his own account to be taken from his lips. Fear not: you shall have justice; but at present you must retire. My good lord of Helmstadt, will you see him conveyed to the great tower, near the English building. Let him have the vacant rooms on the third floor; and I will afterwards put him in ward of some inferior officer."

"Look that you hold him safe, Helmstadt!" exclaimed the old lord of Oberntraut; "for I call Heaven to witness that I will require blood for my son's blood, if not from him, from those who hold him."

"Silence, sir!" said the Elector, "and quit my presence;" and waving his hand, as signal, to the lord of Helmstadt, then chief marshal, to remove his prisoner, the Elector turned to the Chancellor, Christopher of the Green, by Wegersberg, and spoke to him for several minutes, in a low tone.

CHAPTER XII.

In the large round room I have described in a former chapter, with its column in the midst, decked out with arms and banners, just as it had appeared when Algernon Grey first saw it, sat Colonel Herbert, the English Knight as he was called at the castle, at the same hour when his visitor was brought before the Elector on the charge of murder. His brow was grave and thoughtful; his eyes bent down, as if he were considering some subject deeply. Nevertheless, it must be said that his mind was not affected by any immediate apprehensions for his niece, though he was not yet aware of her return to the castle; but Algernon Grey's message of the night before had reached him duly, showing that she had been rescued from the great peril which she had encountered.

The first news of the preceding evening had represented her as lost to him for ever. When her horse had plunged over, the greater part of the train of the Prince and Princess had, as I have shown, galloped quickly forward. William Lovet had followed immediately after the accident; and the small party of servants and attendants, whom Agnes and the Englishman preceded, saw the accident as well as he did; but not one of them ventured to make an effort for the lady's deliverance. All that they thought fit to do, was to hurry on as quickly as possible, and to inform the Elector of what had occurred, very naturally believing the case to be a hopeless one, and the lady lost beyond recovery. Frederic, for he was in truth a kind-hearted and an amiable prince, at once stopped the cavalcade, and eagerly consulted with those around him what was to be done. But all agreed, that long ere assistance could be rendered, the lady must have perished, so that it was in vain to attempt aught for her deliverance. Elizabeth of England, though not more hopeful than the rest, urged immediate search, or exertion in some way; but her voice was overruled by those who felt that no exertion could be successful; and one old man even ventured to say,--"It is all in vain. The Neckar will have its dues; a certain number are drowned in it every year; and if it had not taken this one, it would have taken another."

In deep, stern, solemn bitterness of heart; with that feeling of despair which nothing can produce but the loss of the only one truly and entirely beloved, Colonel Herbert had passed the hours from the moment that the first news had been communicated to him till he heard a hurried foot ascending the stairs of the tower; and then he started up and gazed towards the door. He had not wept--his was too stern and powerful a nature for tears; but, concentrated in the heart's deepest recesses, the feelings which in other persons so often melt away like spring thunderclouds in falling drops, burned and seared, till all seemed desolate as a desert.

"They have found the body," he said to himself, when he heard the step; but his servant ran in with a face of joy, exclaiming, "The lady is saved, Sir Henry, the lady is saved; here a peasant has come from the country to bear the news to the castle."

"Where is he?" exclaimed Herbert; "bring him hither--quick!"

"Alas! sir," cried the man; "the hall-porter has let him go."

Herbert seized him by both the hands, and gazed earnestly in his face,--"Are you lying?" he exclaimed; "Are you lying?"

"No, Sir Henry, I would not lie for the world--on such a matter as this," the servant answered. "The hall-porter sent his boy; and before I would bear you the news I went up to inquire; but there I found it was beyond all doubt. The man had come on foot three or four leagues from a village down the river; and the gentleman, who saved the lady, had given him two gold pieces to bear the tidings. He fancied himself as rich as a prince, the porter said; and had gone to get himself drink in the town."

"Enough, enough!" answered Herbert; "a man would not give gold to spread such a report falsely. Leave me!" and, seating himself at his table again, he remained in deep thought, without one exclamation of joy, with scarcely the movement of a muscle, till the castle clock struck two; and then, retiring into his bedroom, he laid himself down and slept profoundly. When he rose on the following morning, a new train of somewhat anxious thoughts took possession of him. "Who was it that had saved his Agnes?" he asked himself. "Who was it that had borne her company through the past long night? Was it one who could be trusted? One who would respect the purity of her mind and heart, and guard her like a child from all that would sully as well as injure?"

He was still busy with these fancies, when his ear caught a light step on the stair; he knew it well; and, starting up, threw wide the door. In an instant Agnes was in his arms, and a few moments were given up to joy and gratulation. But the lady soon turned to a different theme. "I will tell you all hereafter," she said; "but at present you must come to the Elector to plead for and defend the saviour of your Agnes;" and with rapid and eager words she gave a clear brief account of all that had taken place since her arrival at the castle.

Herbert gazed upon her glowing countenance, as she spoke, with a thoughtful and inquiring look, and then said in a low voice: "So it was this Englishman, then, was it?"

"Yes," exclaimed Agnes, eagerly; "all others abandoned me; even his own cousin, who had been riding by my side, spurred on and left me. But for him, I must inevitably have perished."

"And he fought Oberntraut, too," continued Herbert, in the same tone, "and vanquished him,--that were no easy task. But I knew what would take place between those two--I saw it; but deceived myself as to the time, else I would have stopped it."

"Nay, come," said Agnes, laying her hand upon his arm; "if you come not speedily they will have sent him to prison."

"Stay awhile, my child," answered Herbert. "So this young man was kind to you?"

"Most kind," replied Agnes, somewhat surprised at her uncle's manner: "nothing that could be done to make me comfortable was left undone by him."

"He has seen much of the world--been in courts, and camps, and corrupt foreign lands," said Herbert, musing. "Where slept he at the place of your last night's rest?"

"In the hall below," answered Agnes.

"And doubtless, by the way, he cheered and comforted you?" continued her uncle.

"With the kindest courtesy," replied the lady.

"And with tales of love?" said Herbert.

"Not one word," cried Agnes, with the warm blood mounting into her cheek; "nought that could be so construed for an instant. What is it that you seek to know?" she added, pressing her hand upon his arm, and looking full into his face. "Why do you speak so strangely? I have nought to tell--not a syllable to say that your ear would not be well pleased to receive. If you seek to know how my deliverer treated me--it was as a kind and gentle brother towards a sister just saved from danger,--somewhat colder, perhaps; than a brother might have been, but still as tender, as considerate, as feeling. He aided, supported, cheered, strengthened me, with more reverence than was needed, perhaps; but yet I thanked him for it, for it set me at my ease; and through those long hours I walked, hanging on his arm as if it had been your own, with the same confidence and trust, and to the end was not deceived; for not one word, nor act--and I am sure I may say thought also--was there which could give me even a moment's pain.--Surely you do not doubt your Agnes?"

"No, no, my child," cried Herbert, throwing his arms round her; "I wished but to be sure that this young man was what I thought him.----Now let us go, I am ready to plead his cause for you,

and I trust I shall not plead it vainly. I saw the challenge given, and though I was not near enough to hear the words, feel sure that it came from Oberntraut. Come, Agnes," and, with the lady leaning on his arm, he walked quickly from his own tower to that part of the castle where the apartments of Frederic and Elizabeth were situated. He was there informed that the Elector was still in the small hall, as it was called; and, hurrying thither, he threw open the door. The figure which his eye first sought did not appear; for Algernon Grey had already been removed. But the Elector was still standing at the farther end of the room, conversing with the gentlemen around him; and Herbert advanced at once towards the Prince, bowing low as he approached.

"Ah, Herbert, is that you?" exclaimed Frederic, when he saw him; "I wish to speak with you a moment alone.--Gentlemen, I need not detain you longer. Stay you, fair lady: I have counsel for your ear also."

At the hint thus given, the room was instantly cleared of all persons but the Prince, the English officer, and his niece; and, as soon as the door was closed, Frederic exclaimed: "What is it, Herbert? there seems an angry spot upon your brow. The affair of this young nobleman, I will warrant. Well, that will be easily explained."

"You mistake me, noble Prince," answered Herbert; "I may be deeply grieved to find that a noble gentleman, who has not only just saved this dear child's life at the hazard of his own, but through a long night, when she had no one else to protect her, has treated her with that mingled respect and courtesy--that tenderness, united with reverence, which none but the noble heart can feel or show--should have fallen under your indignation; but anger, on my part, towards the Prince I serve, is out of the question."

"You have heard the cause?" said Frederic, interrupting him; "this sad duel with young Oberntraut."

"Oh, yes, your Highness, I know all that," replied Herbert; "I saw Oberntraut seek the quarrel, and give the challenge."

"Then you are sure it came from him?" inquired Frederic.

"I heard not the words which were spoken, sir," answered Herbert; "but there are looks and gestures as good as any words, and from them I feel quite sure that the challenge came from him, who has fallen, it seems. Besides, it was he who stopped my young friend, calling him from my side, and, as he did so, I marked the frowning brow and flashing eye--the lip that quivered with scorn and anger, and the impatient gesture of the hand. It must have been hard to bear that demeanour of his, and yet the other's was calm and grave, as if resisting passion rather than yielding to it. Let the matter be inquired into, my Prince; and if it be as I say, surely you will not visit the faults of Oberntraut on the head of Master Grey, even by imprisonment."

"For his own safety, Herbert," replied the Prince, putting his hand upon his arm, "he must endure confinement for a while. If this young lord recovers we can easily settle all differences between them, and quiet down the old man's rash heat; but if he dies, you know old Oberntraut, and are well aware he would move heaven and earth, and take any means, lawful or unlawful, for revenge. In that case, we must get this young gentleman out of the Palatinate as secretly as may be. In the mean time, however, he must be a prisoner; for a chance-meeting between him and the old man might be fatal to one or both."

"I trust your Highness will take care then," answered Herbert, "that all shall be done to make his imprisonment light."

"As light as may be," replied the Prince. "I have been forced to put on a stern face, and use harsh words, in order to satisfy my court that I show no unjust favour to one of my fair lady's countrymen; but, at the same time, I never dreamt of dealing hardly with him, and I was but even now thinking of giving him into your custody, my good friend. Then you can attend to all his wants and wishes,--but you must be responsible to me for his safe custody, and you shall swear, upon your honour, that by no indulgence you grant him, shall he be seen beyond the walls of his present prison at any time when old Oberntraut is within the castle-gates."

"Then the youth must be mewed up altogether," answered Herbert, "unless we bring him out to walk at night, for that fierce old wolf is here from sunrise till evening close."

"All that you must arrange as you can," answered the Prince. "I would not, for half my dominions, have those two meet---- But will you accept the custody, and give the promise? for I must now go."

"Well, well, since it may be no better," rejoined the English officer, bluntly, "I must even take what your Highness is pleased to grant: I give you my honour then, sir, to observe the orders you have given, but I must have a soldier or two to keep guard, for we cannot prevent him, I suppose, from seeing his friends."

"During the day," answered Frederic, "but not after nightfall. You can take a guard if you think it necessary. Come to me in half an hour and you shall have an order for his custody. We must hear the tale of your strange adventures, fair lady, at some other time,--for the present, fare-you-well!"

Thus saying, the Prince quitted the room by the door on his right side; and, drawing Agnes's arm through his, Herbert returned towards his own lodging, saying: "You shall be his little gaoler, Agnes; and, as he has dealt nobly and truly by you, so you shall repay his services by kind services in return."

END OF VOL. I.

HEIDELBERG.

Vol. II.

HEIDELBERG.

A Romance.

BY

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"THE SMUGGLER;" "ARRAH NEIL;" "THE STEP-MOTHER,"

ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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HEIDELBERG.

CHAPTER I.

In a large and stately chamber of one of the older parts of the castle at Heidelberg sat a lady of the middle age, about half an hour after Algernon Grey had been removed from the presence of the Elector. The room was a long parallelogram, tapestried all round with richly worked hangings, representing, in glowing colours and somewhat warm designs, the loves of Vertumnus and Pomona. Few specimens of that now abandoned branch of needlework could compete with those which were there displayed. The flowers and the fruit seemed to stand out from the background; the rich clusters of the grape and apple, the leaves of the trees, and the very birds upon the branches, all seemed to project into the chamber, and gave it the air of an arbour: while the forms of the garden goddess and her changeful lover were displayed with a truth and energy which, though not all offensive to the less delicate eyes of those days, would be judged rather indecorous in our own. This fine suite of tapestry had not been treated with much reverence by the hands that hung it up; for over each door, and there were three in the walls, a piece of the same size had been cut out and bordered with gilt leather--much to the inconvenience of the legs of Vertumnus in one instance, and to the waist and arms of Pomona in another--for the purpose of nailing the slips so detached to the door, the opening and closing of which were thus greatly facilitated. The ceiling above was of dark oak, richly wrought in pentagons, which, rising one above the other, diminishing as they came forward and ending with a spot of gold in the centre, took the shape of stars to the eye below, before it had time to trace out the elaborate workmanship; and from the central pentagon hung a large rich gilt lustre of twelve lights. Chairs covered with crimson velvet, tables with spiral legs and inlaid tops, a small mossy carpet for the feet in one corner of the room, a lute, a number of books, amongst which were several huge folios, and a quantity of very fine rare porcelain, made up the furniture of the chamber, which, though the light was by no means strong, even on a summer morning, had an air of comfort and calm state about it, which was pleasant and impressive to the eye.

There is a general harmony in all things, which we seldom see violated--or rather, perhaps, I should say, things naturally fall into harmony, and are never long in adapting themselves harmoniously to each other. The man and his dress, the room and its tenant, the church and the worship there celebrated, have all their peculiar fitness to each other; and so it was in this instance; for the lady, who was there seated, was exactly what one would have expected to find in that place. She was a woman of a grave and thoughtful aspect, tempered by a kindly look about the mouth, though the brow was firm and thoughtful, and the eyes clear and very bright. The

lightness of youth was gone; and, if she could not exactly be called graceful, she was dignified; and yet there was the ease of high birth and high education, which is in itself a kind of grace, and the dignified carriage was softened by an occasional touch of homeliness of manner the most remote from vulgarity or coarseness. She was large in person, though not very tall; and the fine cutting of the mouth, the dimpled chin, and the small, though somewhat aquiline nose, displayed some pretensions still to that beauty, which courtiers had celebrated in her younger days. Her dress was very peculiar, consisting of a gown of black velvet, covered down the front and on the arms with embroidery of the same sombre colour; and, from the neck to the bosom, she wore a tucker of the most magnificent white lace. Above this, round the neck, was a large frill of plain white muslin; while springing from the shoulders was a sort of black silk wimple or hood, much in the form of a cockle-shell, stiffened with whalebone, and ready to receive the head and neck, ruff and all. The coif consisted of a piece of black velvet trimmed round with lace, fastened to the hair behind, and brought over the head in a peak upon the wide-extended forehead, from which the hair was drawn back, so as to leave the whole brow completely exposed.

Such was the dress and appearance of the Electress Dowager, Louisa Juliana, sister of the famous William, Prince of Orange, one of the most remarkable and clear-sighted women of her day; and I have thought it fit to dwell thus far upon the mere description of her person and habiliments, inasmuch as portraits of this Princess are very rare, and no description, that I know, exists.

At the moment I speak of, she had just seated herself in a great chair, and taken up a book; while one of her waiting-maids, who had run forth from her dressing-room by the door on the left hand, was thrusting another large pin into the black velvet coif to fasten it more securely to her hair, a precaution which, it seems, she had neglected while actually at her toilet. When she had done, the Electress looked up, inquiring, "Have you sent to my cousin, the Lady Agnes?"

"Eldrida is gone, may it please your Highness," said the maid with a low reverence, and withdrew.

The reader will remark that the Electress Dowager applied the name of cousin to the person of whom she spoke; but it must not be thence inferred that they stood in a very close degree of consanguinity to each other, for the lady to whom she sent was no other than Agnes Herbert; and it was common in those days, for high personages, either as a mark of reverence or love, to give the name of cousin to others of inferior station in no degree related to them.

For about five minutes Louisa Juliana continued to read with a somewhat careless and inattentive air, as if she were merely seeking to occupy a short space of time with the semblance of some employment, while her thoughts were really busied with other things. At the end of that period a light tap was heard at the door--not the great entrance which issued forth on the corridor and the stairs, but that of the dressing-room--and the next instant Agnes Herbert entered and approached the chair of the Princess. She had changed her dress since her return; and though, perhaps, her face was a shade paler than it had been before all the adventures of the preceding day, yet her exceeding loveliness was not diminished, even if the character of her beauty was somewhat changed.

The Electress rose partly from her seat as soon as she saw her; and when Agnes bent, almost kneeling at her feet, she cast her arms round her and pressed her warmly to her heart.

"Welcome, welcome, my sweet child," she cried; "I thought that fate, after taking from me so much and so many that I loved, had deprived me also of my Agnes. Oh, my dear girl! you cannot fancy the anguish of my heart during many a long hour last night. Seeing what I suffered, they came to my bedside at one this morning, and told me that, by some miracle, you had been saved. I would scarcely believe the tidings, loved one; and till I heard just now that you had returned, a shade of unbelief would linger in my mind."

"I should have been here ere now, your Highness," answered Agnes, "as bound in duty and in love, had not a matter of importance called me to the presence of the Elector. My deliverance was, indeed, a miracle, though yet one should scarcely say so, when it was brought about by that which should be as frequent as it is seldom, the gallantry and devotion of a gentleman and a courtier."

"Nay, sit you down here, my Agnes, and tell me all your marvels," said the Electress; "for as yet I have heard nought of the story. Indeed, I believe all in the castle are as ignorant as myself."

"Not now," replied Agnes; "in different forms, part truth and part falsehood, it has spread, I find, far and near. But I will tell you all, noble lady, exactly as it happened; for it is a pleasant task when one has nought but gratitude and praise to speak;" and, with more minute details than even she had indulged in towards Herbert, the fair girl proceeded to relate to her high friend all that had occurred since she had left her on the preceding day, till the moment she had left the Elector's presence. I have said "all;" but there were two things which she omitted: William Lovet's praises of his cousin, and the keen questions which her uncle had put to her on her return. For some reason, she knew not what herself, she spoke not on these two themes, but all the rest was told.

Louisa Juliana listened with thoughtful, earnest attention; her countenance did not vary much,

for she was habituated to command its expression; but still there were particular parts on which she seemed to ponder more than others. All Agnes said of her escape from the imminent peril of death, and of him who had delivered her, she seemed to mark peculiarly; but, at the story of his arrest and what had followed, she took apparently but little heed, merely saying: "It will be found that Obertraut provoked it."

When the young lady had done, she laid her hand upon her shoulder and kissed her brow, thanking her for her tale, and adding, "This is indeed a noble and a generous man, my Agnes; and I must see him and tell him what I think, for your sake, my sweet cousin."

"But he is in prison," answered Agnes; "and, I fear, may not be enlarged for a long time."

"I must see him, nevertheless," replied the Electress, thoughtfully, "on many accounts, dear girl--" she paused, and seemed to meditate a moment or two, after which she added, "I had heard of his being here before, Agnes--nay, you yourself told me of his demeanour the other night, but it is not that alone; a hint has reached my ears, that he has more objects than one, that he is not merely a traveller for pleasure; and this calm and thoughtful character in one so young bespeaks, methinks, a brain burdened with weighty matters. My son, I can see, judges the same--he denies not that he knows him, and that he is not exactly what he seems--I must see him, Agnes; and that, too, as speedily as may be."

"But how, dear lady?" inquired Agnes Herbert.

"Oh, that will be easy," answered the Electress; "your uncle has him in custody, you say; well, you shall be his turnkey for the night, and bring him forth to take the air upon the walls, or in the gardens; then lead him out beneath my windows, which shall be open; and, when you hear my little silver bell, conduct him hither by the small staircase in the tower.--I must know more of his errand, Agnes; and, if it be what I think, I may find cause for a long conference. The fate of my son and his whole house, the fate of Germany, nay, perhaps of Europe, is now in the balance, and I would fain prevent any fresh weight being thrown into the wrong scale. Wait till night has fallen, and I will ring my bell some time before ten.--Tell Herbert you have my commands."

"Which shall be obeyed, depend upon it, madam," answered the young lady, and then remained silent, as if waiting to receive any further directions.

"And so you are doubtless very grateful to this young cavalier, my Agnes," said the Princess, at length.

"What would I not do to show my thankfulness!" cried the fair enthusiastic girl.

"Anything in reason, child," replied the elder lady; "but let not gratitude carry you too far in your young fancies. The saving of a life may be paid too dearly by the peace of the heart."

Agnes smiled gaily. "Oh, no fear of that, noble lady," she answered: "he is no love-maker; and if I could thank him for anything more earnestly than for his chivalrous deliverance, it would be for his kind, calm, brotherly treatment throughout yesternight, without one word or look that the vainest heart could construe into gallantry."

"Strange conduct for so young a man! Strange gratitude for so fair a girl!" replied the Electress, laughing. "Yet be not too sure of yourself or him, dear child. Love may be heaping up the fuel before he sets the flame to the pile. Mark me, my Agnes, and do not let your cheek glow so warmly. I do not tell you not to love: that were both vain and dangerous: I only say, know him better before you do. All I have heard of him speaks well, and marks him out for no ordinary man; but yet it is right, when gratitude is so warm in a young heart, to take care that it lights up no other flame without our knowing it. Yours is a rich fancy, my Agnes, and an ardent spirit; and my good cousin Herbert is not so careful as a mother."

"Oh, he is more careful than you deem him," replied the young lady, with a faint smile at the remembrance of his questions; "he interrogated me as strictly this morning as a grand inquisitor; would know all my companion's words and acts towards me, even to the smallest trifle."

"But asked you nothing of your own, I will warrant," said the Princess: "that is his character, my child. All the English are theoretical, and he has his system, good as far as it goes, but often carried too far, and often inapplicable. Because he met with one woman in life who was an angel, if ever one dwelt on earth, and has known few others, his rule would seem to be to trust all women, and to doubt all men. But my advice, my Agnes, to every young being placed as you are, would be, to doubt yourself and ever to fly danger!"

"And do *you* doubt me, dear lady?" asked Agnes, almost mournfully.

The Princess cast her arm round her, exclaiming, "No, dear girl! No! I would doubt myself sooner; but what I have said was yet in kindness, Agnes. This same gratitude often leads on along a flowery path into a wilderness. Sweet smiling blossoms strew the path at first, and as we gather them we go forward farther than we know; till, frightened at the growing desolation round, we would turn back and then find the way shut with thorns and brambles. I say, beware, my sweet child, till you have known him longer, better, nearer. Then if he seek to win your heart, and you can give it, let it be so; for I am not one to undervalue the worth of true and honest love. It may

have its pains; but I do believe that woman's life, at least, is not complete till she has known its blessings."

"But why should he seek to win my poor heart?" asked Agnes. "Why should I fancy that he ever will? He has never said one word that should justify me to myself for dreaming of such a thing. Doubtless he has seen many brighter, better, fairer than myself, and will see many more. As yet I have done nought to win his love, though your Highness thinks I know he has done much to win mine; but there is a vast difference between gratitude and love. I am too proud to love unsought, believe me; and till he either tells me so, or I have accomplished something worthy of love from him, I will not even fancy that he can feel aught but courteous kindness to me."

"Poor child!" said the Electress, "you are a scholar of the lowest class in this same school of love, I see. You have done nought to merit love! Have you not made yourself to him an object of eager, anxious thought and apprehension, when, whirling in the torrent, he rushed to save you? Have you not given him cause for the display of gallant daring and fine enthusiasm? Have you not wakened through the livelong night the tender, soft emotions of the heart for one protected, soothed, supported? What is this but to merit love from any man? You much mistake, my Agnes, if you think men's hearts are won by that which will win woman's. Man's is a different nature, a calling unlike ours: his task to strive with danger for himself and others, to shield the feeble, and love those he shields. Ours to suffer and to shrink, to seek protection from a stronger arm, and pay with our whole hearts the price of man's support. Overwhelm him with benefits, give him wealth, distinction, a kingly crown if you have it to bestow; save him from death, or pain, or misery, still you will twine no bond around his heart so strong as that which binds it to the object of his care or pity. But enough of this, my child, I would but warn you; for every woman carries a traitor in her bosom, ever ready to yield the citadel unless well watched. Bring this brave gentleman to me, as I have said, to-night. When I have seen him, I will tell you more."

Agnes retired, but she went not straight to her uncle's tower. It was her own chamber she first sought, and there, for well nigh an hour, with her fair face resting on her hand, she remained in deep and seemingly painful meditation. I will not pause to inquire what were the busy thoughts that crossed that young and inexperienced brain; what the emotions which filled that pure warm gentle heart. For a time her reveries were certainly bitter ones; but then she seemed to cast them off with some strong resolution; the clouds passed from her brow, her sparkling eye looked up, and rising with a gay laugh, she cried, "No, no; I will not give it another thought!" and with a light step, hurried to Herbert's tower.

CHAPTER II.

In the custody of the Grand Marshall, Algernon Grey was removed from the presence of the Elector, and passing across the hall where he had seen Agnes waiting, he was led into one of the open galleries which ran along the great court on one side, and thence by innumerable small passages, scarcely large enough for two persons to thread them abreast, to the door of a chamber which opened upon one of the landing-places of a tolerably wide staircase.

The door was low, scarcely of the height of the young Englishman's head, and covered with large bars and bands of iron, as well as heavy-headed nails. When it was opened, it displayed on the right-hand side a small ante-room, with a high window, opposite to which was another low-browed arch with a door, and beyond that a third door equally solid and strong with the first.

The Lord of Helmstadt, as they passed, pointed towards the arch on the left, saying, in a courteous tone: "There will be your bedroom, and here your servants can remain, if, as I trust, it be the Elector's pleasure that your usual attendants should be admitted to you." As he spoke, he led the way towards the third door; and, turning the heavy key that was in the lock, opened it, motioning the young Englishman to go in.

Algernon Grey did so in silence, and with no very pleasant anticipations; but he was agreeably disappointed in finding himself in a room bearing very little the aspect of a prison, cheerful in itself, and commanding that same unrivalled view, which he had beheld before from the castle grounds. In shape, the chamber was an exact half-moon; the large round tower in which it was situated being cut by a partition, which left this segment as a sort of wide saloon; while the other half was again divided into two, the one portion being appropriated to the purposes of a bedroom, and the second and lesser part serving as an ante-room, except a small space which was separated from the rest to contain the staircase.

The furniture of the room was costly and convenient. Nothing was wanting that could contribute to the comfort of its denizen; and Algernon Grey drew from the aspect of the whole

place an augury that it was not the Elector's intention to show any very great severity towards him. The hangings, the tables, the velvet chairs, however attracted but little of his attention; for he walked at once forward to one of the three large windows, through which the full torrent of light was streaming into the room, though not indeed the sunshine; for it was yet morning, and that side of the tower looked to the south and west.

"A glorious prospect," he said, turning to the Marshall; "methinks a day or two's sojourn here will be no great infliction. Nevertheless, I protest against the right of any one to place me in confinement for that which I have done. Endurance, however, is a serviceable quality; and the Elector's will must be obeyed; but I do trust that I shall not be left here without some attendants within call; and that my servants and baggage may be brought up from the inn, where I left them, little anticipating imprisonment."

"I will take the Elector's farther commands," replied the Lord of Helmstadt. "Of course some persons will be appointed to attend upon you; but whether your own servants, or not, I cannot say.--I must leave you alone for a time, greatly grieving that such a chance should have befallen so gallant a gentleman. We all know John of Oberntraut well; and there is not a man in all the court who doubts that he has provoked this affair; but the Elector has been very strict in such matters lately, and of course he cannot show favour even were he inclined."

Thus saying, he withdrew; and Algernon was left alone. For an instant he gazed round the room, while the key grated heavily in the lock, and then laughed in a light cheerful tone. "Here I am a captive," he said; "well, though unexpected, it is no great matter. A few short hours, a few short days, what are they from the sum of life; and, forgetting that I have lost my liberty, I will think myself a prince hospitably received, well lodged, and only, like the slave of the Harem, not suffered to go abroad. What an idle thing it is for a man to fret and wear himself with vain regrets over the loss of that shadowy thing, the portion of freedom that is left him by the usages of the world. In courts and cities, with the stiff bit of the law beneath his jaws, he is trained and curbed up by the habits of the land to go through his taught paces, like a horse in the manege, curveting here, and passaging there, with hardly a natural step in his whole allure. Here, with no eyes to watch me, with no form of restraint or customary ceremonies, I can have more real freedom than in a king's halls, although yonder door be locked and bolted. What is it that makes imprisonment painful? Either the anticipation of farther evil as its dark termination, or the prospect of its indefinite, perhaps interminable, extent. In a few days I shall be free. They dare not do me wrong. I have nothing farther to apprehend. Why should the locking of that door jar upon my ear, when the hand that turns the key is on the outside? Had it been my own hand, ere I lay down to sleep, it would have been nothing--no, no, I will bear it lightly. Man doubles all the evils of his fate by pondering over them; a scratch becomes a wound, a slight an injury, a jest an insult, a small peril a great danger; and a light sickness often ends in death by the brooding apprehensions of the sick.--What a magnificent scene! Methinks, I could contemplate that view for ever; and, forgetting all the world, live here an anchorite in the midst of a great city, worshipping God in the grand temple of his brightest works."

Vain, oh! how vain is it in man to strive, by the mere power of intellect, to quell or overrule the natural affections of the heart. The stoical philosophy would have broken down instantly, had not its teachers skilfully applied emollients to its harsh sternness, teaching not alone to bear the evils that fate inflicts, but often, also, to fly from them--ay, to fly, even though the place of refuge was the tomb: for, after all, the magnificent-miened crime of suicide, was but a cowardly flight before a conquering army of the world's ills.

Vain was all the reasoning of Algernon Grey; and silently and slowly the solitary moments, as they passed, sapped the foundations of the tall edifice of lofty thoughts which he had so confidently built up. First he began to find the time go slowly; he felt delight in the beauty of the scene, it is true, but it was all still: nothing moved: the very air had fallen away, so that the leaves of the trees stirred not on the branches; and the green Neckar looked like a sheet of solid glass. He could not see into the streets of the town; the thickness of the walls excluded the garden below; the sky overhead was without a cloud; the glowing heat of the day kept the birds quiet; and the light changed so slowly, that the creeping on of the shadow here and the sunshine there was imperceptible to the eye. The prospect was beautiful; but it became monotonous; and a storm or cloud would have been a relief.

He began to turn his eyes towards the door, and wished that some one would come. The knowledge that it was locked became oppressive to him; he felt that his philosophy was failing, and he determined to find or make an occupation. He had not yet seen the bed-room; and, walking through the door, which communicated with it, he examined the furniture it contained, looked out of the high window over the roofs of some of the buildings and against the walls of others. A pigeon, seated upon one of the gables, took flight at that moment, and whirled up into the free air. Algernon Grey knew then how much he had felt the loss of liberty; for to witness the bird's flight was joy to him; and yet it woke melancholy associations. As he saw it spreading its pinions lightly in the clear sky, sweeping round in a gay circle, and then darting away to meadow or to corn-field, he thought how beautiful a thing freedom is, how terrible is its loss.

The bird disappeared; and walking slowly back into the other chamber, he seated himself in the window and gazed out; but bitter thoughts took possession of him; and the mind rambled on from one sad train of images to another. He thought of human life, its griefs, its cares, its changes. He viewed it all darkly, both its accidents and its ordinary course. "What is it," he said,

"but a gradual development, filled with many an evil and many a danger, a short maturity and a long and sad decay? Scarcely have we touched our prime, when some failing power, some slackened energy, some corporeal, or some mental weakness, warns us that we are on the descent, and that all is thenceforward downward, downward to the grave. Thenceforward the game of life is all loss. One after another we cast the dice for a new stake; and fate is ever the winner against us; till, bankrupt in body and in mind, we go to bed, and sleep--forgotten. Then, too, how often, even in the days of our highest energies, comes something to bar us from the treasures that we covet; some small but fatal obstacle, over which all our hopes fall prostrate; the eternal stumbling-block of circumstance that gives the ever-flying good time to escape us. Often!--Nay I should have said ever; for that dark inscrutable hand of fate, still mingles with the cup of joy, even when sparkling most brightly in the hand of youth, the bitter drop that soon pervades it all."

He turned his mind to other things. "Well, it matters not," he thought, "there is surely one unalloyed pleasure, at all events,--to do good, to save, protect, befriend." Then, for an instant, his fancy rested joyfully upon the events of the night before. He thought of Agnes Herbert--of having saved her from destruction--of having rescued her from the dark waters of that turbulent stream--of having given back to life that creature, so full of all life's brightest energies; and, for a moment, he was happy. She rose before him in her young beauty, sparkling with graces, heart beaming from her eyes; love and happiness upon her lips; her clear, fair brow, like the expanse of heaven; and the soul of loveliness in every look and every movement. The vision was too bright; and, clasping his hands together, he fixed his eyes upon the ground, murmuring bitterly through his closed teeth: "Yet she never can be mine!"

Deep, deep and gloomy were his meditations after; and more than one hour passed by, ere he moved a single muscle; till, at length, he heard a step, and a voice speaking without; and, starting up, he strove to clear his brow, brushing back the hair from his forehead, and looking grave, but not so sad. The key was turned in the door; and the next moment, two faces, which he knew well, presented themselves, those of Herbert and William Lovet.

Herbert stayed not long. "For the first time in life, Master Grey," he said, "I have petitioned to be a gaoler; but I have so much to thank you for, that I might well undertake that office on your behalf, to soften, as much as possible, your captivity, which will not be long, I trust. My thanks and my plans of all kinds must have greater room than I will now give to them, as your cousin is here to talk with you; but I will see you again, ere the day be over, and, in the mean time, provide for your comfort, as far as may be. So fare-you-well for the present;" and, shaking him warmly by the hand, he turned to Lovet, saying: "The guard without knows your person, and will give you exit when you require it. You can come hither as often as you like during the day; but after sunset the gates of the tower, by the Elector's orders, must be closed against all visitors."

"Thanks, colonel, thanks," answered Lovet, and gazed after him to the door, ere he spoke to his cousin. The opening of his conversation was as strange as usual; for he began with a loud burst of laughter.

"Caged, Algernon, caged!" he exclaimed. "Well, upon my life, a mighty pretty dungeon, and convenient! Velvet chairs, upon my life; and a ravishing prospect, as poets would call it. Good soup, a bottle of rich wine, and bread not too brown, and, methinks, you are comfortably provided for. On my life, I am greatly indebted to the Elector."

"You seem to enjoy his bounty towards me, certainly," answered Algernon Grey, with a slight touch of bitterness; "may I know, William, whether it is from kindly sympathy with my pleasures, or from personal satisfaction, you derive your merriment?"

"Oh, personal, personal!" exclaimed Lovet. "That celebrated cardinal, the son of a butcher and master of monarchs, bright Wolsey, was a frank and sincere man; and when he wrote 'ego et rex meus,' he only did what every other man would do, if he were not a hypocrite, namely, put himself first, that is to say in the place which he occupied in his own consideration. I love you second to myself, dear Algernon.--Don't tell sweet Madam de Laussitz, or her deep sleepy eyes would flash with indignation, to think that I loved any thing or any body, but her fair self. However, can you deny that I have great obligations to the Elector? Here he has caged my bird, just as I thought it was about to take flight, and that I should be obliged to follow. It answers my purpose just as well as if you had fallen in love with all the ladies of the court together, and stayed philandering in orange bowers. As to yourself, from what I know of you, the Elector's prison will be much more pleasant than Cupid's chain; and, on my life, he has put the jewel in a very snug casket. Here you are, like a poor simple Catholic girl's new crucifix, wrapped up in cotton, and laid upon a shelf, all safe and sheltered; while I, like the same poor maiden, go wandering at large in my worldly vanities."

"Take care, William," answered Algernon Grey, "that your vanities don't get you into worse than this."

"Heaven and earth listen to the man!" exclaimed William Lovet, laughing. "Think of his preaching decorum to me! Did I not tell you long ago, Algernon, that your vices were much more serious ones than mine? Here, instead of bowing down and worshipping the embroidered hem of some fair lady's petticoat, the very first thing you do in a strange country is, to go and cut a poor man's throat. Now, I will ask you fairly and candidly, which is the worst, to amuse an hour or two

in giving and receiving pleasure; or to spend your time like a wild cat in a holly bush, scratching your neighbour's heart out?--The thing won't bear an argument, cousin of mine. I am the moral and well-regulated young man; and you are the reprobate."

"I only cut another man's throat, as you call it, William, in defence of my own life," replied Algernon Grey; "but, of all men, you should be the last to find fault with such a transaction. Methinks I have heard of some six or seven of such affairs upon your hands."

"Ay, but I never begin with fighting," answered Lovet; "when driven to such extremities, I can't help it. I always commence with love and affection; and, if it end with hate and naked rapiers, it is no fault of mine. And so you pinked this Oberntraut! Why, you deserve thanks for that, too. Really it was a public service; if he die, there will be one bubble less upon the stream of the world; and, if he recover, the bleeding and the lesson will do him an immense deal of good. 'Tis a pity it was not in the spring; for that is the time, the doctors say, to let blood."

"Pray, do not jest upon the subject, my good cousin," answered Algernon Grey; "I went unwillingly on a quarrel not of my own seeking; I did what I scarcely judged right to save my honour; and I bitterly regret that I was forced to wound a gentleman, who was too skilful a swordsman to be disarmed. Let us talk of other things."

"Pooh!" said Lovet, "he's a coxcomb, and deserved it. If you had not done it, I would have done it for you.--But to talk of other things, as you say. The Elector can certainly mean you no harm by assigning you so pleasant a place for imprisonment. When you have got up your clothes and a few books, you will be as comfortable here as at the inn with a sprained ankle--more so; for you will want the pain. Then, my dear Algernon, you will be out of all temptation, which is a great thing in your case. Here you can neither drink, nor swear, nor game, nor make love; in short, you are now physically in the state, to which you voluntarily reduce yourself morally, and are cut off from all the little pleasures of life by that door, instead of a puritanical spirit.--I could myself be very comfortable here but for one thing. I have often thought, as I like to try every sort of emotion in this world, that I would make myself a voluntary prisoner for a few days, only I could never determine upon the gaol."

"And pray what is the one thing wanting in this sweet place?" asked Algernon Grey; "the one thing I want is liberty; but, I suppose, that is not what you mean?"

"Oh, dear no," cried Lovet, "I mean woman's company; I should require something sadly to play with, to teaze, to irritate, and to amuse myself with, as I would a petted child, and then to soothe her with soft caresses, and look into her liquid eyes, half full of tears, half light. Liberty! Pooh! liberty is nothing. I would sell myself for a sequin to a Turk, if he would but engage to imprison me in his harem. But, on my life! if I were shut up in a prison for any of my small misdemeanours, I would get some fair girl or another to come and entertain me at any price, were it but the gaoler's fat daughter."

Thus went he on for well nigh an hour, with gay, light, apparently thoughtless talk; but yet it was all calculated to produce a certain impression; and it must not be denied that, in a degree, it did so. He never mentioned the name of Agnes Herbert; he never alluded to her in the most remote manner; he spoke not of his cousin's gallant conduct on the preceding night; he seemed to be ignorant of all that had taken place, except the duel and the arrest. But yet his conversation turned Algernon's thoughts to Agnes, and made him long for her society. His words called up a pleasant dream of how she might cheer the hours of imprisonment, how, under other circumstances, she might make the sad and weary day the sweetest and the brightest of life. Algernon gave himself up to the dream too. As he had no substantial source of pleasure, he fancied he might as well console himself from the stores of imagination; and on Agnes his thoughts rested, fondly, tenderly, even while his cousin remained with him.

Lovet marked well the effect he produced; the meditative look, the occasional absence of mind, the random answer, and a sigh that once broke forth; and, when he thought he had succeeded sufficiently, he rose to go.

"Well, Algernon," he said, "what shall I send you up?--clothes, books, and an instrument of music by the hands of a pretty maid, if I can find one. They tell me, you must not have your man; but the category did not include the fair sex; and, unless they are barbarians, they will let you have a femme-de-chambre, though they exclude a valet.--Come, come, do not look so grave. I must go and pay my devotions, but first will despatch all that you may require.--Leave it to me, I will make a good selection, never fear; and your little coxcomb, Frill, shall carry them all hither, and see if they will let him stay to tend upon you. Whatever be their rules and regulations, if they view him justly, he can fall under none of them; for Heaven only knows what class the little devil belongs to; I am only certain that he is neither man, woman, nor child.

"Well, send him at all events," answered Algernon Grey; "it would be convenient if they let him stay. Send a lute, too, if you can find one in the town."

"A lute!" exclaimed Lovet. "On my life! the man will fall in love at last, if it be but by twanging catgut to his own sweet voice. To think, that two pieces of white board, strung with the entrails of a tame tiger, should give a reasonable creature, full of intellect as he thinks himself, the best consolation in adversity, is a sort of marvel--a lute! Heaven bless the mark!--Well, you shall have

a lute, if it be but to make you commit a folly for once in your life and sing soft ditties to a certain spot in the ceiling.--Adieu, cousin, adieu! I will see you again to-morrow."

"Bring me news of this young baron's state, if you can get them," said Algernon Grey.

"Happy for him, I am not his physician," answered Lovet; and thus saying he left the room. When he was gone, the prisoner relapsed into thought again; but he had found out--or at least his cousin's words had suggested--a new source of pleasant meditations. They were dangerous ones, it must be owned--those sweet alluring fancies which lead us along far, much farther than we know of, with steps as light as if the foot rested upon clouds. It was weak, but it was very natural so to give way. For long, long hours there was no occupation for his mind. The choice, if it could be called a choice, was between dark and gloomy broodings over a bitter point in his fate, together with sad anticipations of the future, on the one hand; and, on the other, an unreal dream of happiness, which could hardly, by any possibility, be verified, but which yet presented itself to fancy every moment, when thought was left free to roam, unrestrained by a powerful will. Is it wonderful that he grew weary of the struggle? Is it surprising that more and more he gave way to the bright deceptions of a warm eager heart and quick imagination? Is it to be marvelled at, that in the dull hours of solitude, he turned from the gloomy pictures presented by reason and memory, to gaze upon the glowing pageantry of fancy and hope? Ah, no! And so constituted mentally and corporeally, so situated in the past and in the present, few, very few men on earth would be found to resist more than he resisted, to do otherwise than he did. He yielded his heart to the only comfort it could receive, he yielded his mind to the only thoughts that were bright; and, though his stern resolve to do all that was right maintained its place, yet the traitors of our peace were busily undermining in secret the defences of the castle in which he trusted. He made Agnes Herbert the companion of his thoughts. He saw her with the mind's eye; the tones of her sweet voice came back to his ear melodiously; the glance of her clear soft eye, with all its tempered brightness, seemed upon him again; the very memory of her grace and beauty brought sunshine with it, as sometimes, when we shut our eyes in the darkness of the night, resplendent scenes come back to sight, all vivid and distinct, as if they were painted in light upon our closed eyelids. He made a happiness for himself where none other was to be found; and if it was a weakness, be it remembered he was but man.

Nothing was, indeed, wanting to mere corporeal comfort, except freedom. A well-served table was provided for him; one of the Elector's servants attended to all that could lighten his captivity; his clothes, some books, and a lute were brought up in the course of the day; and a small hand-bell was placed upon a table that he might have the means of summoning attendance when he needed it. His page, indeed, was not admitted; and no one visited his chamber after the hour of dinner, but once when he rang. His thoughts, however, had by this time chosen their own course. He read little; he touched not the instrument of music; but, seated near the window, he gazed out; and thought while, wandering slowly round to the west, the bright summer sun presented the scene beneath, in the same warm light of evening which had flooded valley and plain and gilt mountain and castle, when he had seen it from the Altan with Agnes Herbert. Her image mingled with the whole, and the prospect was not the less sweet to his eyes for the associations with which memory enriched the view.

CHAPTER III.

The sun set; the beams of the departed orb spread up from behind the mountains of the Haardt over the whole wide expanse of the cloudless heaven; and, from the golden verge of the horizon to the glowing crimson of the zenith, a broad sheet of varied colouring stretched unbroken, hue melting into hue, so that the eye could not detect where one tint blended with another. It changed, too, with each passing minute; the golden verge grew red; blue mingled with the crimson overhead; then came a shade of grey; and then looked out a star, like hope to cheer the heart on the departure of some bygone joy. At length the twilight succeeded to the warm sunset; and stream, and valley, and mountain, and plain grew faint and soft under the prisoner's sight; while his chamber became full of shadows; and many of the bright fancies, which had cheered the day, passed away with the declining light, as if they had been the creatures of the sunshine.

His thoughts were becoming gloomy, when suddenly he heard the key turn in the lock, and then a light knock at the door.

"Come in!" he cried; and the next moment it was opened. But Algernon Grey could scarcely believe his eyes; for in the dim light he saw a woman's form and garments; and heart, more than sight, told him who it was.

Starting up with a quick and joyful movement, he advanced to meet her; but Agnes only entered a few steps, and that with an air of timid hesitation.

"My uncle has sent me to you," she said, giving him her hand, as he came near; "and I am very glad indeed to have any means of showing my gratitude for all that you have done for me. It is but little that I can do, but still a walk in the quiet evening air will refresh and calm you; and I trust," she added, laying the tips of her small taper fingers on his arm, "that it may tend to soothe the indignation which, I am sure, you must feel at the treatment you have received."

"Indeed, dear lady," answered Algernon Grey, "I feel none."

"Then I feel it for you," answered Agnes, warmly; "I should feel more, indeed, did I not know that it is all weakness, rather than injustice. They fear that fierce old man and his rash son, otherwise this would not have taken place; and for that reason it is that I am obliged to take this unfit hour to give you whatever little liberty I can. But you must promise me," she added, in a timid and imploring tone, "to return when it is time. My uncle told me to exact such an engagement. He could not come himself; for he has been all the evening with the Elector on business of importance, planning new defences to the place; and so he made me your gaoler--sad, yet pleasant task. But you will return, will you not?"

Algernon Grey took her hand again and pressed it in his own. "Whenever you wish it," he replied.

"Nay, not when I wish it," answered Agnes; "that would never be; for, could my wishes avail aught, you would not be here at all."

"Well, then, when you ask me," said the young gentleman.

"No, not so either," she replied; "I should never have the heart to ask you. Even in my youngest and most thoughtless days, I could not make a prisoner of a poor bird. How much less, then, of one who has saved my life. I value freedom too much to do so. It must be for you to decide. You shall return when it is right, and you shall be the judge."

"I will then," answered Algernon Grey; "and now let us forth, for I confess I feel the air of imprisonment very heavy; and the lock of yonder door, which my fair turnkey has left unguardedly open, is a chain upon my spirits."

"No, not unguardedly," replied Agnes; "but I was quite sure that, for my sake, you would not take a step beyond without permission, when I came to see you. Oh, I know you right well, noble sir. Your conduct to me last night was a whole history; I need no farther insight."

"Indeed," said Algernon Grey, taking his hat from the table as she moved a step or two towards the door; "if you knew my history, it is a strange one; but still I think you read it right, if you judge that in nothing I would abuse your trust."

"I am sure of it," she said, leading the way into the ante-room.

Two guards were seated there on duty; but the lady's presence seemed a passport; and they made no opposition to the prisoner's exit, only rising as he and Agnes passed.

The moment that the top of the stairs was reached, a change seemed to come over the fair girl's demeanour. So long as she had been in the apartments of the prisoner, a timid sort of hesitation seemed to hang about her, restraining her words and even her movements; but the instant she had passed the door of his prison, her heart and spirit were unchained again.

"Not down there, not down there," she cried; "you are ignorant of the castle and its manifold turnings and windings. I will lead you through it, and try to cheer you as we go. Here, turn to the left;" and taking her way along a narrow passage, through the tall windows of which streamed a pale and uncertain light, she walked on, till a short staircase of five or six steps led them down to a broad balcony, running along the face of the western part of the building, and looking down into the court. Here she paused for a moment, and Algernon Grey took his place by her side, gazing thoughtfully at the number of servants and officers who were still crossing and recrossing the open space below, like so many ants on their busy labours.

"This castle and the sights that it presents," said Agnes, after a moment's meditation, "always make me more or less thoughtful at every moment when one has time for thought. There, on the right, is what they call the Rupert's building, the oldest part of the castle, it is said; and I know not why, but I cannot look at its ornamented windows, and rich arches, without thinking of all the changes that have taken place in this small spot since it was raised. See, how busily they go along, and how gaily too, as if there had never been any others before, or would come others after."

"And they are right," answered Algernon Grey. "Why should men lose the happiness of the moment by thinking of its short duration? A certain portion of life only is given to each human being; and, so to enjoy that portion that our acts shall stain no part with regret, and shall lay up no store of vengeance against us for the future, is, methinks, the wisest policy, as well as the truest religion."

"And do you think so, too?" Agnes, turning suddenly towards him with a bright smile; "I am glad of it; for sometimes I am inclined, when I have heard a grave discourse of worldly vanities and mortal pleasures, to think myself no better than a butterfly or a bird, because I am so happy in my little day of sunshine. We have men here, who speak so hardly of the brevity of mortal existence, that I cannot but think that they feel dissatisfied so small a portion is allowed them."

"When I hear such men," answered Algernon Grey, "and there are many of them all over the world, they leave a very different impression on my mind from that which they expect to produce. They can have very little confidence in an everlasting future, who dwell so mournfully upon the shortness of the present. To enjoy God's blessings, and, from the heart, to thank Him for all, is to honour Him by the best sacrifice we can offer--at least, so it seems to me; and we may be right sure that, when we can thank him from the heart, we have not enjoyed amiss."

"I think so too," answered Agnes; "at all events, I know one thing, that though I would strive to bear all misfortunes without repining, yet, when I am happy, I ever feel the most grateful sense of the goodness and mercy of God. But let us come on; and mark that building there, that one with the stony escutcheon on the front; you can scarcely see it, I think, in this dim light; but some day I will tell you a story about it. It is too sad a one for to-night. Let us pass down here; and then, turning to the left again, I will lead you through the chapel."

As the way was now broader than before, Algernon Grey drew his fair companion's arm through his own, turning as she directed him; and, but for that light touch and that sweet companionship, his walk might have been gloomy enough; for the light faded rapidly as they went on. The long dim passages seemed damp and chilly, even in that summer evening. The moon had not yet risen, but there was sufficient light in the sky to throw deeper shadows from the columns of masonry upon the faint grey gleam, which still illuminated one side of the halls and corridors in the neighbourhood of the western casements. Agnes, however, was near him; her hand rested gently on his arm; her eyes were turned to his from time to time, as if seeking the expression which gave point to his words. And Algernon Grey was happy; for he felt as if the dreams he had been indulging were realized; and yet he knew at his heart, that the realization was little better than a dream likewise. But he would not give way to sad thoughts; for he remembered that he should have time for plenty of them in his captivity; and the new philosophy, to which he had given way, taught him to enjoy.

"Shall we see our way across the chapel?" said Agnes, at length, pushing open a small door at the end of a long passage after descending a few steps, and looking into a wide and splendid aisle beyond.

"Oh yes," cried Algernon Grey, "there is plenty of light;" and, taking a step forward, he led her in. The air was very dim; but yet he could see that, except the architectural decorations, the building was destitute of all ornament.

There is something, however, in the very atmosphere of a place destined for the purposes of prayer, which brings a feeling of awe and solemn meditation upon the heart. Here the petitions of thousands have ascended day after day to the throne of grace. Here the Almighty has promised to be present in the midst of the two or three who seek Him faithfully; here have been all the struggles, that bare themselves before the Almighty eye; here the consolation and the hope derived from the pure source of Almighty beneficence. A crowd of grand associations, of mercies sought and benefits received, rush upon the mind and fill it with devotion.

Algernon Grey felt it strongly then, as--with that fair being by his side, whom he had protected, comforted, saved--whom he loved, in spite of reason, in spite of resolution, in spite of every effort,--he walked slowly up the nave, till he stood with her before the altar.

Then what thoughts were they that came thick upon his mind? What memories, what visions--dark and bright mingling together, black as night and brilliant as the dawn? Whatever were the emotions in Agnes's heart, her hand slowly fell from his arm; and he suffered it to drop. How or why, he knew not; but by an impulse, gentle, yet irresistible, he took it; and there they stood for a moment before that altar, hand in hand. He felt his fingers clasping upon hers more tightly; and, afraid of himself, of his own heart, of his own fate, he drew her arm once more through his, and led her with a deep, heavy sigh, to an open door, through which a faint gleam was streaming.

There was a lamp in the passage beyond; and, by its light, they passed through the northern mass of the building, and mounted the steps to the Altar. The stars were now shining forth in exceeding splendour; each bright spot in Charles's wane twinkling like a living diamond in the deep blue sky; and the small pole-star glistening high above, fixed and immovable, like a constant mind, while the others whirled round it in never-ceasing change.

"Ay, this feels like freedom indeed," said Algernon Grey. "I know not how it is, dear lady, but the sensation of liberty is never so strong upon me, as in one of these bright clear nights. During the day, there is a sort of oppressive bondage in the world and the world's thoughts and doings--in the busy multitudes that float about--in the very hum of tongues, and the sight of moving masses of mankind, which seems to cramp and confine the spirit within us. But here, with that profound, unlimited vault above, the wide air all around, and the far-off stars twinkling at immeasurable distances through space, the heart has room to beat; and the soul, upon the wings of thought, wanders unfettered through the infinite creation."

"I love not crowds either," answered Agnes; "and yet it is pleasant to me that I have my fellow-creatures near--perhaps it is a woman's feeling, springing from her weakness; but still I would rather not be free, if I were to be all alone on earth. Not that I do not often love solitude and to be afar from the multitude; but still, a wild ramble over a mountain top, or a gallop over a wide open moor, is enough for my small range; and, like the lark, after I have taken my flight and sung my song, I am ever ready to fold my wings and sink to earth again."

The image pleased her companion; he thought it very like her; and in such conversation passed more than an hour, till the round edge of the yellow moon was seen rising above the fringed forest, and spreading new lustre over the sky.

"Here comes our fair and bountiful companion of last night," said Algernon Grey; "I will see her rise into the sky before I go; but then, to show how moderate and discreet I am, and to encourage you to give me some more hours of liberty hereafter, I will tell my fair gaoler that I am ready to return to my prison."

"Strange," said Agnes, looking up in his face with a smile, and leaning a little more heavily upon his arm, "strange that it is I who must ask the prisoner to remain at large for a while; but you know not that you have a visit this night to make, to one, who will thank you on Agnes Herbert's account, for all you did last night."

"Your uncle," asked Algernon Grey.

"No," replied Agnes; "it is to a lady, a kind and noble one. The Electress Louisa, she is anxious to see you, and bade me bring you to her whenever I hear her bell ring. It will not be long first; there she sits in that room, where the lights are shining through the open windows; and when she thinks that the bustle of the day is fully over in the castle, she will give us notice."

"She loves you much, I doubt not," answered Algernon Grey. "'Tis strange to find here one of my own fair countrywomen, domiciled in a different land, and so linked with a foreign race. There can be no relationship, surely, between you and this Palatine house?"

"The Electress calls me cousin," answered Agnes with a smile, at the half-put question; "but it is a far and not easily traced relationship. Mine is a strange history, my noble deliverer; but, doubtless, every one's is strange, if we knew it all--yours, you say, as well as mine?"

"Most strange," answered Algernon Grey; "and if we meet often, I must tell it to you--Yes, I will," he repeated in a low murmur, as if speaking to himself; but then added, "not now, not now, I cannot tell it now."

"Whatever it is," said Agnes, "I am sure it will show nought but honour and high deeds on your part--I have had proofs of it; and as you, like other men, have mingled in the world, your story will be, doubtless, one of action; while mine is more the history of my race than of myself, for I have done nought and suffered little in this life. Spoiled by kind friends; supported, protected, and left to follow my own will--often, perhaps, a wayward one--reverses, as yet, I have not known; no strong emotions, either of grief or joy, have visited my breast; and the part of life already gone has lapsed away like a morning dream in pleasant but faint images, scarce worthy the remembrance. You shall tell me your history, if you will; but I cannot promise yet to be as sincere, mine being, as I have said, the history of others rather than my own."

"I will tell mine, nevertheless," answered Algernon Grey. "It were better that one, at least, should know it."

As he spoke, they heard a bell ring; and Agnes exclaimed, "That is the signal of the Electress. Now come with me;" and, leading the way into the castle again, she ascended a long spiral staircase in one of the small towers, and then, proceeding along a well lighted corridor, she passed the top of a broad flight of steps exactly opposite to a large door surmounted by a gilt coronet. A few steps farther on, entered a small room on the right, where, to the right again, was seen another door apparently leading into the chamber, one entrance of which they had already passed. Here Agnes paused and knocked; and a sweet voice from within instantly answered, "Come in, dear child." The lady then opened the door, and, beckoning Algernon Grey to follow, advanced into the room, which I have already described as the scene of Agnes's interview with the Electress Dowager in the morning.

With a calm and stately step, and his fine thoughtful eyes bent forward on the face of the Electress, Algernon Grey came after his fair conductor at the distance of a few steps. Louisa Juliana gazed at him steadily for an instant, and then bent her head with a dignified air, as Agnes presented him to her.

"Be seated, sir," she said, pointing to a chair near; "and you, my sweet cousin, come hither beside me. Here is your accustomed place."

Algernon Grey took the seat she assigned him; and, leaning his arm with easy grace over the back, he turned towards the Electress, whilst she proceeded to say, "I have first, sir, to offer you my thanks for your gallant, I might almost call it, heroic conduct last night, in saving the life of my sweet cousin here, who is as dear to me as if she were my child. Accept them, therefore, I beg; and believe me, it is with pain I find my son has thought himself called upon to deprive you

of your liberty for a less fortunate event."

"I merit no thanks, your Highness," answered Algernon Grey; "I have but done that which any man of good breeding, not a coward, would do in similar circumstances; nor can I even claim the lady's gratitude; for when I went to give her aid, I really knew not who she was. I will not deny, indeed, that the pleasure of the act was more than doubled, when I found who was the object of it; but surely, a thing which affords such great satisfaction to the giver, deserves no thanks from the receiver. 'Tis done for his own pleasure; and his own pleasure be his reward."

"It would be a harsh doctrine on any other lips but yours," replied the Electress Dowager, while Agnes shook her head with a smile; "nor can I admit," continued Louisa Juliana, "that every man of good breeding, not a coward, would do the same. I fear much, my noble young friend, that, pick all the world, you would not find ten such. We have a sad proof of it--you were the only one who went to her rescue."

"I was more near than any one," answered Algernon Grey; "so, still, that is no title, lady; however, I am well pleased it has been as it is."

"The men, who do best service," answered the Electress, "are always those who require least thanks. I have found it so through life.--But now I have other things to speak of."

Agnes rose as if she would have withdrawn; but the Electress stopped her, saying, "Stay, stay, my child; you shall be of our counsel; I know that I can trust you."

Agnes reseated herself in silence, but looked somewhat anxiously to the face of Algernon Grey, with feelings upon which we must pause for a moment. She was a very young diplomatist. She had not learned the art of that craft, as it was practised in those days--I trust less in the present--and she was not aware, that to deceive a friend or benefactor, to lead one who has aided and assisted us, into a dangerous and difficult position, is a stroke of skill, and not a mark of baseness. A sudden doubt came over her, lest the questions which the Electress was about to put--lest even the visit to her apartments might be painful and unpleasant to him who had ventured life to save her; and, though she saw not how she could have escaped from such a task, she was very sorry that she had undertaken it. After one brief glance then, she withdrew her eyes, and remained gazing at some objects on the table, till the voice of the Electress, speaking after a somewhat long pause, roused her, and she listened.

"You have come from England, sir, very lately, I think," said Louisa Juliana, fixing her eyes upon Algernon Grey.

"Not so, your Highness," replied the young gentleman; "I have been absent from my native land, now, for a long time, frequenting the various courts of Europe, and studying the manners of other nations. On my way back, I received letters at Genoa, which made me resolve to remain some time longer out of England; but I have not seen aught of it for more than five years."

"Methinks you are very young," said the Electress, "to be such a traveller. Doubtless you have forgotten all about the court of England."

"Oh, no," replied Algernon Grey; "I may be older than I seem; but certainly was not young enough when I departed, to forget aught that was worth remembering."

"'Tis a strange court," continued Louisa Juliana; "and yet, to say truth, all courts are strange. Do you know the king?"

The question was somewhat abrupt; but the young Englishman replied immediately: "Oh, yes, I know him well, without being one of the minions or the favourites of the court."

"And, doubtless, have been trusted by him?" rejoined the Electress, in a sort of catechising tone--"he is a wise and witty monarch."

"I know not any mark of trust that he has ever given me," replied Algernon Grey; "and his courtiers give him right good cause to be witty as well as to be vain. I have always remarked, that where there is much of this lip-service there is little real loyalty, and that downfalls are preceded by the most servile adulation of power. I trust it may not be so in our day."

"You doubt it," replied the Electress; "and I think it may be so; for I always doubt it, too. This court is full of flatterers as well as yours. They would persuade my son that he is a god, as they persuade your monarch that he is a Solomon. Fortunately, fate holds out no offer to King James of another crown; and even if it did, he would never stretch forth a hand to reach it. Here we are in a different position. The diadem of Bohemia, which beyond all doubt will be offered to the Elector in a few days, will find, I fear, a more ambitious candidate, and one who may not calculate so well the means to the end."

Algernon Grey was silent; for he felt that the subject was a difficult one to speak upon; but, after waiting for a few moments, the Electress added: "What say you, is it not so?"

"Really, your Highness, I cannot answer," replied her visitor; "I have never spoken with the Elector on the subject--I have only seen him once."

Louisa Juliana gazed at him steadfastly, and then said, with a smile: "Come, come, Master Grey, let us be candid with each other. Thus stands the case. The Elector is wealthy, powerful in his own dominions, doubtless, a wise and warlike Prince, but at the same time to grasp and hold a crown requires a ruthlessness which he does not possess. What is the Palatinate pitted against the empire? What can give even the seeming of success to such a struggle, except potent and immediate foreign aid.--Will your king give it, Master Grey?"

"Really, your Highness, I cannot tell," answered Algernon, a good deal surprised at the lady's tone.

"Methinks not," continued Louisa Juliana. "He is a wise, but most pacific king; wasting in subtleties those powers of mind, and in pageantry and revelling those vast material resources, which are most needful to keep a turbulent and energetic people under even wholesome rule, which, wisely employed, would be successful, but which, thus foolishly squandered, will leave a debt that nought but the best blood in the land can wipe out.--Forgive me, Master Grey, that I thus speak of your sovereign; but see, what does he do now in my son's case? What energy, what activity does he display in behalf of his own child?"

"But small, I fear, madam," answered Algernon Grey; "but, perhaps, if he see danger menace, he may do more.--However, I know so little of the court of England, that I have no right to form a judgment."

Louisa Juliana shook her head: "You are a diplomatist," she said; "and for so young a one, a wise one; for I have heard that the chief skill of that intricate art consists in three negatives: 'Not to know more than enough; not to say more than enough; and not to see more than enough.'"

"Indeed, your Highness does me wrong," replied the young Englishman; "I belong to no such base craft; for I cannot hold the task of deceiving to be aught than dishonourable, the task of concealing aught but pitiful. I am no diplomatist, I can assure you; not even of that better kind, who, like the great Duke of Sully, make it their boast to frustrate dishonest craft by wise honesty."

"Then you are greatly mistaken here," rejoined the Electress Dowager; "for every one thinks you have been sent over by King James to see how the land lies, and give advice or promise of assistance accordingly."

Algernon Grey laughed: "Your Highness will pardon me," he said; "but I beseech you to believe me, when I tell you, that, a mere boy when I quitted the court of England, I am recollected there by friends and enemies, kings and statesmen, but as a mere boy still."

"Hush!" cried the Electress, raising her hand; "some one knocks. See who it is, my Agnes. I thought we should be free from interruption."

Agnes Herbert ran lightly to the great doors, opened them partly, and, after speaking a few words to some one without, closed them and returned, saying in a low voice; "The Elector, madam, with the counsellor Camerarius, is coming up, and has sent forward a page to say he wishes to confer with you."

"He must not be found here," cried the Electress, looking at Algernon Grey; "quick, take him into my dressing-room; then, when you hear that they are all arrived, lead him down by the great staircase and away out upon the Altan.--Quick, Agnes, quick!--Adieu, Master Grey; we will talk farther another night."

With a sign to him whom we now may well call her lover, Agnes ran to the small door to the left of the Electress, exactly opposite to that by which they had entered, and threw it open. All was dark beyond; but Algernon Grey, though he was not fond of such secrecy, followed the fair girl with an inclination to the Electress Dowager; and, drawing the door gently to behind them, Alice took his hand, saying:--"I will guide you; but we must open this other door a little, to know when they pass;" and, advancing a step or two, she opened a chink of the door, which seemed to lead out upon the great corridor at the top of the stairs.

In a few moments, the sound of footsteps reached them, and a voice speaking, which Algernon Grey recollected well as that of the Elector. They heard the great doors thrown open and closed again; and then the young Englishman whispered:--"We can go now, I think."

"Hush!" replied Agnes; "there is some one going down the steps." The next instant a round, fat, but somewhat cracked voice was heard to exclaim:--"So you have caged the birds, Joachim.--Now let us wait here and watch till they take flight again; and I will instruct thee in the sciences of courts."

"More likely to instruct one in the science of pottle pots and great tuns," answered a younger voice.

"It is the fool and the page," whispered Agnes, "waiting on the landing five or six steps down. How shall we get out?"

"Cannot we go by the staircase which led us hither?" rejoined Algernon Grey.

"We must cross the top of the great staircase," answered Agnes; "and they can see up to the very door. We had better wait where we are.--Hark! they are speaking in the other room; we must keep as still as death."

Algernon Grey made no reply, but remained standing close beside her; and in the silence they preserved, a great part of the double conversation that went on, in the chamber of the Electress Dowager, and on the landing of the stairs was distinctly audible to the ears of the young pair. A part, indeed, was lost, or conveyed very little meaning; but what was heard, for some time made a strange medley of ceremonious courtesy and broad vulgarity, questions of policy and absurd jest. Sometimes this extraordinary cross reading turned epigrammatically, sometimes gave the most curious counter-sense; and it was difficult to ascertain at all times whence the voices proceeded, so as to know whether the reply was addressed to the sentence just heard before, or to one that preceded and had been lost.

"I know right well, counsellor Camerarius, what are your opinions, and on what they are founded," were the first words audible. But immediately a merry but coarse voice said:--"Eleven bottles of sack a day, a gold chain and a fool's cap are no things to be lightly respected, Master Joachim."

"But hear me, your Highness," said another voice, "you, I know, are always amenable to reason, and you must not prejudice me, nor suppose that I am biassed by ordinary motives."

"If what a fool thinks were to guide men of reason," said another tongue; "a fool's cap and bells would be as good as the crown of Bohemia."

"We must discuss this question, dearest mother, without passion or prejudice," was the next sentence; "great interests are at stake, your son's, the Protestant religion, the liberty of Germany,--"

"The great tun of Heidelberg brimful of wine," exclaimed the juicy tongue of the jester, "would not drown the gabbling of a page; he would still shout from the bottom of the vat and make empty bubbles on the top, as full of noise as a petard.--"

"Nothing more is wanting to shatter the whole constitution of this empire," Camerarius was heard to say, "than disunion amongst the Protestant princes, the fall of that kingdom which has first raised the voice against tyranny, oppression, and superstition, and the rejection of a preferred crown by the only sovereign prince who is qualified to guide the march of events by power, talent, and influence."

"Give me reason and a good supper," said the page.

"But have you an offer thereof?" asked the Electress.

"If I had the rule, you should have none," said the jester, "but a good whipping and a book to read."

"The sceptre of Bohemia."

"A fig for your bauble."

"A coxcomb against a page's feather."

"At the feet of your Highness's son, with all the advantages, which--"

"The König's-stool and the Heiligberg upon your head for a mad ape; you have untrussed my jerkin and let my fat out."

"No motives of personal ambition, no hope or expectation of renown, nay, not even the voice of an oppressed people would induce me, dearest mother."

"Though the gods and goddesses were to come down upon earth to wash themselves in the fountains of the gardens, you would still be an ass and drink deep to the increase of your carcass, and the perdition of your soul."

"Notwithstanding which, the voice of the people of Bohemia is not to go for nothing; and, when added to that, is the maintenance of the Protestant religion in merely its just rights and liberties--"

"A whoreson varlet with legs like a blacksmith's tongs; feet like the ace of diamonds, and shoulders vastly too intimate with his ears."

"Those who could advise the prince to give a decided refusal to such an appeal--"

But here Algernon Grey called off the attention of his fair companion from the curious conversation which they overheard, by gently touching her hand and saying:--"Methinks, we must listen to this no longer, sweet lady."

"How can we avoid it?" rejoined Agnes in a whisper. "To close either of the doors now, would

be worse than to risk and go boldly down the stairs."

"Then let us go boldly," answered Algernon Grey. "It were better to risk anything personally, methinks, than to overhear what is evidently not intended for our ears."

"You are right," said Agnes, "you are right--I only feared--but no matter for personal fears; they shall not stop me from doing what I ought. Let us come, then;" and advancing a step, she opened the door upon the corridor and went out.

There was a large lamp suspended opposite to the door of the Electress Dowager, casting a full light upon the stairs. In the corner of the landing, leaning with one leg cast over the other, was a fat, short, red-faced man, dressed in the motley garb of the fools of those days; while, opposite to him, lolling against the balustrade, was a lad of some sixteen or seventeen years of age, habited in the splendid costume of the Electoral pages. Advancing straight towards them, and descending the stairs with a calm countenance, Algernon Grey passed on side by side with Agnes Herbert. The page moved and drew himself up, doffing his bonnet as they went by; but the jester, with the usual license of his calling, remained in his corner unmoved, shutting one eye and fixing the other keen grey orb upon the lady with an inquisitive stare. The moment she and her companion had passed, however, he stuck his tongue into his cheek and winked knowingly to the page, who replied merely by a low laugh.

"What will come of it, Master Joachim?" asked the jester, after a pause.

"Nay, I know not," replied the youth; "love and marriage, I suppose."

"Nay, love won't come," said the jester; "for he is there already; and marriage may come, or may not, as the gods will have it; but, if I were pretty Mrs. Agnes Herbert, I would take that long fellow to the buttery, and give him a toast and two or three bottles of Burgundy wine. She is afraid of doing so, for fear of being found out; but, methinks, it would be the seal of matrimony, which Heaven send her speedily; for the walking about in the passages of this old castle is somewhat like to chill the little god, Cupid's brother, who is known to be rather aquish."

In the mean while Agnes and Algernon Grey walked on and passed through the lower part of the castle, and upon the Altan again. There she paused with a momentary hesitation; for she felt how sweet a thing liberty must be to her companion, and she could not find it in her heart to say that it was time to return to his prison. Did any personal feelings mingle with her reluctance? Was she unwilling to part with him so soon? Who ever felt a joy that was not grieved to lose it? and Agnes Herbert had been very happy by the side of Algernon Grey.

He saved her the pain of speaking, however, by divining her thoughts ere they were told.

"Methinks, dearest lady," he said, "that it must be time for me to return, and for you to go to other occupations, though your kind heart will not tell me so. Let us on towards my tower, however. My heartfelt thanks are due for the alleviation you have given me, and I would not for the world mingle one pain with the pleasure you must feel in such an act."

"My only pain," replied Agnes, walking on beside him, "is, that you must return at all. The Electress Dowager, I think, may call for me again, or I would say, stay longer."

They were not long ere they reached the foot of the stairs leading up to the place of Algernon's imprisonment--it seemed to him, indeed, marvellously short--and there he stopped to bid her farewell for the night. True, he might have done so as well above; but there the guards tenanted the ante-chamber; and feelings which he would not own to himself made him unwilling to have witnesses to his parting with her.

"Farewell, dear lady," he said, pressing her hand in his; "if you could tell the relief and pleasure you have afforded the poor prisoner, your heart would, I am sure, rejoice.--Nay, I feel that it does, though you cannot know from experience how tedious the hours of captivity are. Thanks--a thousand thanks--for the solace of the free air, rendered trebly bright by your sweet company."

"You have no thanks to give," she answered, leaving her hand in his; "do I not owe you everything? and, surely, a few hours from the life you have saved is but a poor offering for a grateful heart to make. To-morrow night, at the same hour, I know I may promise to come again, and perhaps my uncle will come with me. Till then, I must bid you adieu. Sleep well; and pleasant dreams be yours."

He still held her hand for a moment--he still gazed upon that fair and beaming face by the pale light of the lamp that hung upon the staircase, and sensations he could hardly master rose in his bosom. They frightened him, and, breaking suddenly the spell that held him, he turned and mounted to the chamber, where sat the men on guard. There, came another adieu, colder in seeming but not less warm in truth; and, entering, he himself closed the door. He heard her hand laid upon the key; but it did not turn, and the next instant her sweet voice reached his ear, somewhat trembling in tone, as she said to one of the guards--"Here, come and lock it--I cannot."

"Why, it goes as easy as a wheel," answered the man, advancing with a heavy foot; and the next moment the door was locked.

Agnes trod her way back with a slow and thoughtful step towards the corridor of the apartments of the Electress Dowager; but at the foot of the stairs she met her uncle Herbert, and the keen eye of affection soon discovered that, from some cause, he was agitated, though he endeavoured to maintain his usual equable mien.

"What is the matter?" she said, clinging to his arm; "you are disturbed--I see it in your eyes."

"'Tis nothing, my Agnes," he said, "nothing. So you have given your prisoner his little holiday. How did he comport himself?"

"He enjoyed it much," answered Agnes: "in his calm and serious manner, he showed as much pleasure as I hoped he would feel."

"Ay, but to you, my child," asked Herbert, "was there any difference this night?"

"Exactly the same as ever," replied the beautiful girl, with a gay smile; "banish all fears and doubts. Indeed, indeed, you may. I thought they were gone for ever; for I know that such things linger not in your heart; and when once you trust, you trust implicitly. You may trust here--on him--on me; for not one word has ever passed our lips that the whole world might not listen to."

"'Tis well," said her uncle, thoughtfully, "'tis well--I do trust."

"Nay, but all is not well, I am sure," rejoined Agnes; "something has troubled you."

"Nothing but the words of a fool," answered Herbert; "and I am a fool for being troubled by them. Yet something must be done to set this matter right. Listen, dear one; I met, just now, that mischievous idiot, the Elector's droll.--How is it that men of common sense can find delight in the malicious drivelling of a lackwitted knave like that? He spoke with mockery of my Agnes--said he had seen her taking love's walk, which is a crooked one, forth from the bedchamber next the Dowager Electress' hall, down to the pleasure gardens, and bade me look well to my pretty bird, as he called you. What more he said, I need not repeat. One cannot strike an idiot, or I had felled him."

Agnes laughed gaily. "Nay, nay," she said; "he has but proved himself more fool than ever."

"Laugh not, Agnes, in your young innocence," answered Herbert; "no woman's name must be lightly spotted. You know not that the slightest foul mark upon a pure reputation remains for ever, breeding doubts and suspicions impossible to be removed. I'll tell you what, my child, I must have done;--for it shall never be said that with my will you ever did aught you were ashamed to acknowledge. I know that the Princess bade you bring him to her, though why you passed through that room I cannot divine; but now you shall go to the Electress Dowager, and tell her the history; you shall petition for leave to speak the exact truth of how and why you were seen coming from that room with the prisoner. You will obtain it, I doubt not; but if she should refuse, I must speak to her myself; for this may rest as a stain upon you, my child; and it must not be. So well do I know you, Agnes, that I say boldly and fearlessly, do anything you will, provided it be that which you can explain to the whole world, when it becomes necessary. But, at the same time, I warn you, dear one, never do aught that you cannot explain; for diplomacy is not a lady's trade; and, if it be dangerous in the hands of a man, it is fatal in those of a woman."

"I will go to the Electress, at once," answered Agnes; "for although, so far as I am personally concerned, I would scoff at all idle rumours, yet were they to give you pain, it would be no matter to be scoffed at."

"Go, Agnes, go," rejoined Herbert. "It is better, both for you and for me; when you have once the power of explaining all, I care not for aught else. Idle rumours affect me not, Agnes; and fools may talk and babble as they please; but doubtful circumstances, unaccounted for, must not affect you, my child."

"I go, then," replied Agnes; and, mounting the stairs, she hurried to the apartments of the Electress Dowager.

CHAPTER IV.

There was a lamp lighted in the chamber to which Algernon Grey returned. He found the room neatly ordered, as if care and attention had been bestowed upon it; and, in a few minutes after his return, a servant entered, bearing materials for a meal such as prisoners seldom taste. The man set it down and retired in silence; but Algernon Grey left the supper untouched. For nearly a

quarter of an hour he strode up and down the room in deep thought; and then, breaking off suddenly, he said, "I will go to bed and sleep. What need of troubling my mind with things that may never occur? Am I to cast away every enjoyment of this mortal life, for fear of their remote consequences? No, I will guard my heart firmly; I will rule my conduct strictly; but I will not debar myself of my sole solace, for fear it should become too sweet. I will go and sleep, and these gloomy visions will take their flight before the morning."

Accordingly, proceeding into the other room, he undressed and went to bed. Neither did sleep refuse to visit his eyelids; for there are few things more wearing and wearisome than the dull lapse of solitary hours to an active and energetic mind; but his slumber was not calm; it was not of that soft and balmy kind which visits the pillow of careless childhood; nor was it chequered with those light gay dreams which hover over the bed of hopeful youth. Visions he had many; but they were all more or less dark, all more or less troubled; and the same forms and features were in each. Two female figures were ever present, and one was Agnes Herbert. But, as I have already touched this theme, I will not pause here to enter into the details of all that imagination and memory suggested to the sleeping brain. Suffice it, that he slept without repose; and that agitated feelings, running masterless in unreasoning slumber, wore both body and mind, even during the hours of rest.

He woke on the following morning languid and unrefreshed; and, if he had lain down somewhat gloomy in his thoughts, the next morning found him sadder and less tranquil still.

The heavy hours rolled slowly on, and nothing occurred throughout the morning to break the dull monotony of his imprisonment. The servant brought in the meals, arranged the rooms, and showed towards him every sort of civility and attention. But still it was not there that Algernon Grey could find companionship, and but few words passed, the young gentleman still speaking first, and receiving but brief and insignificant answers in return. The sight even of a human face, it is true, was pleasant to him; but yet it seemed each time that the man came and went as if his momentary presence and quick departure but added to his heaviness of heart.

He longed for somebody with whom he could converse--any one, it mattered not whom; and he looked eagerly for his cousin's promised visit; but that day William Lovet came not. It is true his conversation had a great deal in it more irritating than pleasant to the ears of Algernon Grey; but yet there was something in companionship, something in old associations and mutual habits of thought which he fancied would be a relief; and he felt disappointment as the moments flew, and he saw him not.

Perhaps there might be a desire to fly from other ideas--to rid his mind of reflection upon matters on which he did not wish it to rest; but as evening came on, and with it that change of light which, without diminishing the lustre of day, softens and saddens it, thought would have way; and Agnes Herbert was again the theme, resolution contending with affection, and an honourable spirit with a warm and ardent heart. He asked himself, "What am I feeling? What am I doing?" And to both--though seemingly very simple questions--he found it difficult to reply. The difficulty existed in the subtlety of man's heart; for skilful, indeed, must he be, and well experienced in the ways of that dark and intricate labyrinth, who can find the path to the arcanum at once. And yet he remembered his sensations towards Agnes when he had stood with her in the chamber adjoining that of the Electress; when her hand touched his; when, bending down his head to hear her whispered words, he felt her warm fragrant breath fan his cheek like that of the spring wind. Could he not have thrown his arms around her, and clasped her to his beating breast, and pressed warm kisses on those sweet lips, and asked her to be his--his for ever? Could he not at that moment have poured forth, as from a gushing fountain, the full tide of first and passionate love, bearing all before it on its fierce and eager course? He felt that he could; he felt that he had escaped a great peril; and he asked himself: "Should he risk the same again? Should he madly run into the same strong and terrible temptation? If he did, was it not improbable that any circumstances would arise anew to strengthen and support him; that any means of escape, that any happy accident would present itself to enable or lead him to fly from the immediate danger?"

"It is madness to put it to the hazard," he thought. "No, I will not go!--I will frame some excuse, not to pain her kind and gentle heart; and, even if I do show her want of courtesy, it is better than to show a want of honour."

He paused and pondered long. He thought of what he should do, and what he should say; he considered how he might best act, so as to avoid the perilous society, without wounding one whose sole wish was to give him pleasure. Vain thought! Idle considerations! as they always are with man. We raise an imaginary scaffold, and then build upon it. Comes firm reality and knocks it down beneath our feet; the whole structure falls; and happy is it if our best hopes and brightest happiness are not crushed in the ruins. The last two hours--they were hours of meditation--had passed rapidly--far more so than he had imagined. He had not heard the sound of the clock; he had not marked the rapid decline of the sun and the steady advance of night. He saw, indeed, or rather he felt, that darkness spread through the chamber in which he sat; but he had rung for no lights, and he changed not his position. He remained fixed with his eyes bent upon the ground, his arm resting on the back of the chair, and the left hand playing with his empty sword-belt, not raising a look even towards the window, where the glowing heaven shone in, radiant with the last smile of day.

In about a quarter of an hour after the key was turned in the lock, and some one knocked lightly at the door. He knew that it was Agnes's hand: he felt sure of it before he saw her; and, advancing quickly, he gave her admission, saying in a mingled tone of joy and sadness: "Welcome, welcome, dear lady, you are punctual to your hour."

"Not quite," answered Agnes; "but I was detained a little. Your time of freedom shall not be abridged, however; for we can stay out the longer--Now, will you come?"

There was a struggle in Algernon Grey's heart; his lips would scarcely utter the words he had resolved on; and, perhaps, had he not seen, as they stood together at the door, that the ante-chamber was for the moment vacant, the restraint which the presence of others always more or less imposes would at once have turned the balance against resolution. As it was, however, after a pause he replied: "Nay, dear lady, you will think me churlish and morose, I fear, when I say, it is better for me not to go, and, with deep gratitude and heart-felt thanks, decline your kindness."

"But why?" exclaimed Agnes, gazing on him with surprise; "surely, I should think it would be a relief."

"And so it is," he answered, "a sweet and joyful one; but that momentary relief, dear lady, makes me but feel the bitterness of imprisonment more painfully when it is over. Believe me, it is better I should stay."

His words, as so frequently happens with words which do not fully express all the speaker thinks, had quite the contrary effect to that which he intended. They made Agnes Herbert but the more eager to comfort and to soothe him, to lighten his hours of solitude, to banish the dark thoughts that seemed to oppress him; and she answered: "Nay, come! Do not give way to such gloomy fancies. I will take no denial. You surely cannot refuse a lady, when she asks your company in a walk through the free air. I fear you hold my gratitude as little worth; but this is the only means I have of showing it. I would willingly come and sit with you and cheer you through the day, if my uncle could come, too; but the Elector has besought him to hurry forward the new defences of the castle and the town; and every instant of his time is employed. Besides, you must come to-night; for I have got news for you of various kinds; and I cannot stay here to tell them."

Algernon Grey smiled faintly; but his resolution gave way; and taking Agnes's hand, he pressed his lips upon it, answering: "You are very kind--too kind; but I must not make you think me ungrateful for such kindness; therefore I come." At the same moment the guard re-entered the ante-chamber, and Algernon Grey followed the lady through it, and descended the stairs with her.

Grown somewhat bolder by custom, the lady led him at once across the great court, and thence into the gardens of the castle. "Now," she said, with a gay laugh, "if you had the will to be refractory, who could stop you from breaking prison? Not this weak hand, I fear."

"But these gardens are all walled round," answered Algernon Grey, "and hemmed in with the defences and outworks. Methinks it would be no easy task to make one's escape hence."

"As easy as to sail upon a lake with a light wind and a summer sky," answered Agnes gaily. "The ground is all pierced over which we tread, with subterranean passages leading hither and thither, some to the mountain, some down into the town.--Did you not see those two obelisks just now with two half-open doors by the side? Well, they lead straight into the city; and the first night, when I was wandering with you through these gardens, you must have remarked a man appear so suddenly that he startled me. He was some one belonging to the castle, who had come up by the vaults.--But I must not tell you all these secrets, lest, finding so many doors of his cage open, the captive bird should take wing and fly away."

She spoke gaily and lightly; and Algernon Grey replied, "No fear, no fear, dear lady; you have a stronger hold upon the poor bird than wires or bars--the chain of honour. No gentleman could so misuse your trust. But you seem yourself to be well acquainted with all these secret ways; though, doubtless, they are not much trod by lady's feet."

"Oh, I have them all in my little head," she answered, "as if upon a map. My uncle has shown them to me all; for he has a strange sort of superstition, that some time or another the knowledge may be needful to me. I know not what he fears or fancies, but so it is; for gloomy thoughts frequently possess him, and I do not wonder at it. But now I will tell you my news, and first a silly story about myself; for women, they say, always like to talk about themselves before all things. Do you know our adventure last night alarmed my uncle for his poor child's reputation?"

"How so?" exclaimed Algernon, with a start and feeling of more apprehension than the lady's words might seem likely to produce; "what adventure, sweet lady?"

"Oh, our adventure in escaping from the apartments of the Electress Dowager," Agnes replied. "Do you not remember passing the fool upon the stairs, and the page? Well, they saw us come forth from the room on the left; and that fool is as malicious and insolent as he is drunken. He met my uncle a few minutes after; he thought fit to jest with my poor name. But I only laughed when I was told; for, methinks, when the breast is clear and the heart quiet, one may well treat a fool's ribaldry with scorn. But my uncle took it up more seriously, and insisted I should ask permission of the Princess to tell the whole, in case of need. I related to her all that had

happened to us, how we had overheard in the neighbouring chamber part of her conversation with her son, and how we had determined to confront the fool and the page upon the stairs rather than listen to more. She said we had done well, and gave the permission I asked for."

"Did it end there?" asked Algernon Grey; "or has this knave been busy spreading his scandal?"

"Oh, yes," answered Agnes, "he has; and perhaps it is lucky I obtained leave to speak; for early this morning the Elector sent for me, and, with a grave brow, told me I had been seen the night before leading the English prisoner down from his mother's lodging. I answered simply enough, 'I know I was, your Highness. The fool and the page both saw me.' He then asked me what it meant; and I replied, that I had her Highness's permission to tell him, if he asked, that it was by her commands that I had brought you thither and led you away again."

"What more, what more?" said Algernon Grey, as the lady paused.

"Why, this intelligence seemed to throw him into a fit of musing," continued Agnes; and, at length, he said, "'So, she has discovered him, too, and his errand;' and then he asked me if I knew who you were; I answered, 'I had been told your name was Algernon Grey;' and thereupon he laughed and shook his head; but inquired no further, saying, 'If it were by his mother's orders, it was well.' Nevertheless, I could see that he thinks you some great man, and that you come here upon some secret mission of deep moment. So, henceforth, I shall call you 'my lord,' and be very ceremonious."

"Nay, nay, not so," answered Algernon Grey, thrown off his guard; "give me none of such formal titles, sweet lady; from your lips they would sound very harsh to me."

"Then call me not 'lady' any more," she answered; "none but the servants here do that. I am the child of the castle, and to those who know and love me, I am only Agnes."

Algernon Grey felt his heart beat fast; but he had a habit of flying away from such emotions; and after a single moment's pause, he said, "I must clear your mind of one impression. The Elector is quite wrong; and so, I fancy, is the Electress Dowager. Because, for an idle whim, I and my cousin have pledged ourselves to each other to go through Europe for a year under false names, they fancy here, I find, that we have some concealed object, and that I, who never meddled yet with the intrigues of courts, am charged with some secret mission. I give you my honour--and by this time, I hope, you know it is to be trusted--that I have no such task to perform; that I have no state secrets of any kind; in short, that I am but a simple English gentleman, travelling hither and thither to while a certain portion of dull time--"

"Which you heartily wish were over," answered Agnes gaily.

"Not so, upon my life," answered Algernon; "although I deeply love my country, yet there are matters therein sooner or later to be brought to issue, which make me long to go on wandering thus, till life and the journey find their close together, and never more to set my foot on British shores. But here come sad thoughts again, and I will not indulge them. You hinted that there was more to be told me. I hope the rest of the tidings is less bitter; for it is painful for me that your great kindness, Agnes, should have brought discomfort upon you or your uncle."

"Oh, to me it is none, and with him it is past; but the rest of my news will, I am sure, be pleasant to you. You have heard of an unfortunate duel that was fought," she said, looking up in his face with a smile which the twilight did not conceal, "between an English gentleman and the Baron of Obertraut. You have been sorry for the young baron, I am sure, and will be glad to hear that to-day he is much better. His wounds, indeed, seem not to be mortal, as was at first thought; and these terrible faintings, from several of which they fancied he would never revive, proceeded solely from great loss of blood. I hear he was up this afternoon and seated in a chair."

"This is good news, indeed," answered Algernon Grey. "Believe me I did not seek to wound him, and perilled my own safety to avoid it; till, at length, in the half-light--for it was then growing dark--I was obliged to return his attack, seeking to touch him but slightly. He slipped, however, and was thus more sharply hurt. You too are pleased, if I judge rightly," he added, gazing down upon her with an inquiring look; "for methinks that a part of the young baron's wrath against myself is a sort of retribution for one pleasant evening that I enjoyed too much with you in these same gardens."

"I trust not," said Agnes, eagerly; "I trust not. He should have known better. He is a noble, brave, and upright man, generous, and kind in many things; but still--" and there she paused, as if unwilling to speak farther.

Two or three minutes of silence had passed, and the hearts of Algernon Grey and Agnes Herbert were perhaps both busy with feelings somewhat similar. At length a wild strain of music rose up from the town below, and they paused on the edge of the great terrace to listen to it.

"A party of young students singing," said the lady. "Do you love music?"

"I must not say better than aught on earth," replied Algernon Grey; "but yet if I were to ask for any sort of consolation in hours of grief and heaviness, I would choose some sweet voice to sing my cares away. I made my cousin send me up an instrument; but I know not how it is I have not

had the heart to use it."

"Oh, I will sing for you some time or another," answered Agnes; "I learned from a famous Italian musician who was here, and who said I was no bad scholar."

"It would be, indeed, a great delight," said Algernon; "but I fear I must not hope for it as a solace of my imprisonment, if your uncle is so busily occupied."

Agnes looked down thoughtfully for a moment and then laughed: "I do not know," she replied; "I do not know; we shall see. I trust your imprisonment will not be long; and you told me once you were going away very soon. I must lose no opportunity of showing my deep thankfulness for what you have done for me. It is little, indeed, that I can offer. Some men have mines of gold and precious stones, and some but a garden of poor flowers; but were I a prince, I would not value less the tribute of the poor man's blossoms, if given with a willing heart, than that of the great vassal's ore. I do hope that you will feel the same, and accept all I can do, though it be but small, as a testimony of what I would do had I greater means."

We need not pursue their conversation farther: for nearly an hour more it went on in the same strain; and if the resolutions of Algernon Grey faltered for a moment now and then,—if a tenderer word would fall from his lips,—yet still, considering the feelings that were at his heart, he exercised great power over himself. I know not whether it were better or worse for Agnes, that he did so; for certainly the calmness of his manner and the careful tone of his language aided her in deceiving herself as to that which was in her own breast. She laughed to scorn the thought of love between them. She was grateful, deeply grateful; and if there was aught more in her bosom, she fancied it was but a feeling of compassion for one whom she thought wronged by unjust imprisonment. She could hear him talk as calmly of his departure, she said to herself, as she could listen to a sermon or a lecture. She could speak of it herself without one emotion. Was this like love? Oh, no. She had a deep friendship for him; well she might have; but that, and gratitude, and compassion, were all. Agnes knew not what she would have felt had she been called upon to part with him at that moment. As it was, she went on gaily, like a child treading the verge of a precipice and gathering flowers upon the edge of destruction. And when the time of his short liberty was at an end, she was sorry for it; for it had been a sweet and pleasant time to her. They parted at the door of his chamber, each with a sigh; and Algernon Grey paced up and down his solitary room, and, as the moon rose solemnly over the hills, opened his window and gazed forth as if his thoughts would be more free with the wide expanse of heaven and earth before him. The moment after, he heard the sound of an instrument of music; and turning quickly round to the right he saw the light streaming forth from an open casement, which, as far as he could calculate, was near those of the Electress Dowager. He could not see into the room; but the sweet sounds issued forth upon the night air, as a skilful hand swept the strings; and a moment after a voice, the sweet, clear, rounded tones of which he knew right well, poured out a flood of melody, rising and falling on the ear like the notes of a nightingale in the spring eventide. The music was not exactly gay; but yet, every now and then, a cheerful tone enlivened the graver strains; and partly from memory—for he had heard the song before—partly from the exceeding clearness with which every word was pronounced, he distinguished each verse as it was sung.

SONG.

The moon is on high, but she's hid by a cloud,
The prospect looks gloomy and drear,
And still through the night may she weep 'neath the shroud;
But daylight is coming, and near.

The heart is bowed down 'neath the cares of the hour,
And the eye may be dimmed by a tear;
But the heart shall rise up in the morn like a flower;
A brighter day's coming, and near.

We have trusted and hoped, been oppress'd, and have grieved;
But joy will return, never fear:
There's a trust and a hope that is never deceived;
A brighter day's coming, and near.

Each life has its joy, and each life has its pain;
But the tempest still leaves the sky clear;
And for honour and truth, which are never in vain,
A brighter day's coming, and near.

CHAPTER V.

Another night passed of agitating thought, with but little sleep and many troublous dreams; and for more than one long hour Algernon Grey remained in deep and intense thought, pondering

over the present and the future. I know not how or why--for there are many mysteries in man's nature, which the skill of philosophy, as yet, has not been able to unravel;--but certain it is, that at one particular portion of the night, unless sleep deaden the reflective powers and still the imagination, or active exertion occupies the thoughts with tangible things, dark and gloomy images come crowding upon the mind and seem to triumph over the powers of reason, with a supernatural influence, like that which has been attributed to spectres from the grave. All that is sad and horrible in man's general fate, all that is grievous or perilous or worthy of regret in the history of the past, in the aspect of the present, and in the prospect of the future, marches by in long and black procession; and the oppressed heart is fain to exclaim at this sight of human ills, "What! will the line last to the crack of doom?"

The couch of Algernon Grey was not without such apparitions; and--alas! that I should say it--the thought of her who had just quitted him in all her beauty, in all her sweetness, in all her grace, but rendered the wild phantoms of fancy more terrible. He felt, he could not deny, in that hour of the opening of the heart's secrets to itself, that he loved her, eagerly, ardently, with that first passionate love of enthusiastic youth; that to win her he would willingly have sacrificed rank, name, station, aught on earth but his own sense of right. But still, at the same time, came a voice from his own breast, like that of fate, repeating: "She cannot be thine! She cannot be thine!"

"What should he do?" he asked himself; "how should he act?" He could not reject her gentle kindness offered in simple innocence by a grateful heart. Flight was his only resource; but he was a prisoner and had no power to fly. Chained down to the sole society most dangerous to his peace, it seemed as if he were tied to the stake to endure to the utmost the fiery ordeal of temptation. Then again, he strove to cast the thoughts from him, and gained a brief interval of sleep; but visions all coloured by the same gloomy hues either disturbed repose, or made him start up again to think of the same themes and wrestle with the same dark adversaries.

At length the day dawned; and, rising quickly from his bed, he hurried to the window, opened it, and gazed forth. Oh, how sweet was the fresh aspect of the morning to his wearied eyes, as calm and reinvigorating to the mind as the gentle breath of the early summer day to the heated cheek it blew upon. The golden light spread through the valley and over the hills, sunk in amongst the deep woods, and threw out the masses of the dark trees from a soft background of luminous mist; while, here and there, a woodman's fire or cottage chimney sent up wreaths of faint blue smoke, rolling in graceful lines amongst the leaves and branches.

The day went on in its usual course: many hours of solitude, broken only by the entrance of a servant or the guard. Algernon Grey found no means of relieving the tedious passing of the time. He tried to read, but he could not. He turned from the instrument of music he had asked for, with a sickened feeling, as if sweet sounds would but increase the bitterness of meditation. Thought, devouring thought, consumed the moments; till towards evening, when the guard threw open the door, and to his surprise he saw his old and attached servant Antony enter and approach him. The man's face wore a mingled expression, as if he was striving to keep up his usual appearance of gaiety, when in truth his heart was sad; and his master would not suffer one who, he well knew, loved him dearly to see how bitterly circumstances made, him feel his imprisonment.

"Well, Tony," he said, in a cheerful tone; "so they have given you admission at length."

"Yes, my lord," replied the man; "they have come down from their high flight, now that they find their heavy bravo will not do.--I hope your lordship has not fancied I have been negligent; for I have been up here twice a day, and the page as often. The little devil would have stabbed the guard, I believe, to get entrance, if I had not stopped him; but we two are not enough to storm the castle, and we should have only got ourselves in limbo too. However, to-night they let me in to carry you these letters, which a courier brought just now from England; so there are now four of us; and, if you like, methinks between us all we can contrive to get you out."

Algernon Grey shook his head with a smile, and taking the letters, he read the addresses with a listless, uninterested look.

"No, no, Tony," he said; "they would only catch us again, before we had gone far.--But what was that you said of the young Baron of Oberntraut?"

"Why, the fellow you fought with, sir," answered the servant, "if you mean him, is getting better hourly. He was out in the garden up there to-night, by the bank of the river, sitting in a chair. You have not hurt him much, it seems. Pity you did not send your sword through his maw. The bleeding will do him good, however; for he is mighty pale, and won't affront an English gentleman again, I warrant. I saw him myself when I rode up to get tidings. There he was, sitting all white and colourless in a great gilt chair against the wall of the house, like a wax-candle in a sconce."

While the man had been speaking, his master had slowly approached the window, opened one of the letters, and was reading the first lines as his servant concluded. For a moment or two the subject of the epistle seemed to produce no great effect. He smiled slightly, ran his eye down to the bottom, skimming carelessly the contents, and then turned the page. The next moment, however, he seemed to be stirred by strong emotions; his brow contracted, his eye flashed, his lip quivered, and the hot angry blood rose in an instant into his cheek and overspread his forehead with a fiery glow. Straining his eyes upon the sheet, he read on; and, when he had done, held the

letter open in his hand for several minutes, gazing sternly up into the air. He uttered not a word; but the servant could see how his heart beat, by the quivering of the paper in his hand. Then, throwing it down upon the table, he tore open the other hastily and read it likewise. The contents did not seem to mitigate his agitation, though they mingled a degree of scorn with the expression of his countenance. This time some portion of his emotion found vent in a few brief words: "So, so!" he cried. "So bold and shameless--and shall I be restrained by such scruples?--Nay, nay, this is too bad--England, farewell! You shall not feel my foot for many a day!"

"Ah, my lord," said the man, "things seem going on at a fine rate, truly; methinks, when one takes a part so boldly, the other may well choose his part too. Faith, I would let them whistle for me long enough, before I went."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Algernon Grey, turning upon him sharply.

"Why, my noble lord, I have had a letter, too, by Hob, the courier; and I dare say the news in mine and yours is all the same."

"And has it become the common scandal then?" said Algernon Grey thoughtfully. "So young, so fair, so haughty, and yet so shameless! Leave me, Tony, leave me, and come up to-morrow early. Doubtless they will give you admission, if all goes well--I want nothing more to-night--leave me, I say."

"Well, my lord, if I were you, I would not take it much to heart," replied the man, lingering for a moment ere he departed. "There's not much love lost on either side, I believe, and never was; and you will be just as well quit of a bad bargain."

Algernon Grey waved his hand for him to leave the room, but answered not; and when the man was gone, he strode up and down the wide chamber for full half an hour with quick and agitated steps. Then, casting himself into a chair, he laughed aloud, exclaiming, "I am a fool!--Why should I grieve? Why let such idle passion tear me?--I love her not--have never loved her--I contemn, despise her--have ever scorned her pitiful pride, and but strove, against my nature, to bend my affections to my duty.--Let her take her course.--Nay, indeed, she has taken it."

The door opened suddenly, and then, for the first time, he perceived that night had fallen, as the light from the ante-chamber poured in; and he saw the form of Agnes, without distinguishing her features, standing in the doorway, like a graceful shadow.

"Will you come to-night?" said that sweet, musical voice; and, starting up, Algernon Grey snatched his hat from the table, replying, "Most willingly, fair Agnes."

As they walked on, through the courts, along the Altan, out into the gardens, over the terrace, Agnes saw that a great change had come upon her companion. Far from seeming to have received any evil news from his native land, it appeared as if some heavy weight had been taken from his mind. His manner was light and cheerful; his words gay and full of unusual fire--somewhat wild and absent, indeed, at times; but still, the whole tone was sunshiny and very unlike the gloomy mood of the preceding night.

The difference made Agnes thoughtful. She asked herself, "Is it his nature to be thus variable?" But she would not believe it. There was something in her breast that would not let her think the slightest ill of him beside her. The picture of his character was already drawn by the hand of affection upon a woman's heart; and, when such is the case, stern, and hard, and continued must be the wearing power that can ever efface the lines. A new light seemed to break upon her; and at length she said, "I think I can divine that you have heard how much better your adversary is. It is said they will bring him into Heidelberg to-morrow."

"Yes, I have heard it," answered Algernon Grey, "and am exceedingly rejoiced to find his wound will not prove dangerous."

Agnes was satisfied; his new gaiety was accounted for; and, as they wandered on, she gave free course to all her own thoughts, as they sprang up from the deep well of the heart unobstructed to the lips. Once, indeed, she was a little frightened at her own feelings and at his manner. Not that he said aught to alarm or agitate her; but there was a tenderness mingled with the frank and rapid outpouring of all the ideas that seemed to cross his brain, which startled and moved her. But women have always some veil ready to hide agitating truths from their own eyes; and Agnes dismissed the thought ere it had possessed her mind for a moment. Carried away by the quick and sparkling current of his conversation, her brain seemed to whirl as the mind followed him; and he, in the turbulent emotions produced by the tidings he had received and the struggling love within his bosom, suffered himself to be hurried rapidly on, he saw not, he knew not, he cared not whither. Their perilous course in a frail bark some few days before down the furious torrent of the Neckar was but an emblem of the voyage of their two hearts along the troubled stream of love that night. Time flew on more rapidly than either of them knew; the castle-clock striking ten roused them as it were from a dream; and, returning to his prison, Algernon Grey, as before, parted from Agnes in the ante-chamber. The moment he had entered his own room, and the door was closed, he cast himself into a seat, leaned his folded arms upon the table, and, as if utterly exhausted, let his head fall upon his arms; and there, for three long hours, without a change of attitude, he remained plunged in the chaos of wild, unformed,

unregulated thoughts. An attendant came in, but he took no notice of him. He placed supper on the table, and invited him courteously to take some. He replied not, for he heard not; and the man, thinking that he slept, retired.

At the end of the time I have mentioned, the prisoner started up, brushed back the rich brown curls from his broad forehead with a bewildered look, and, taking a light, retired to bed and slept, strange to say, profoundly.

The sun had risen high; an attendant had twice entered the large room; and all the world was busy with the ordinary affairs of life, before Algernon Grey awoke from one of those deep, dreamless sleeps, which sometimes succeed to the exhausting conflict of passions in the human breast. For a few moments he could hardly tell where he was; he could with difficulty recollect the circumstances in which he was placed, or the events of the preceding day. But, as they rushed at length upon memory, a shadow came over his face; and again the question recurred, "What am I doing? Whither am I hurrying?" The gloom of the preceding days came over him more darkly than ever, and he passed a full hour in anxious thought.

"No, no!" he exclaimed at length; "whatever be the temptation, I will not do such wrong to her young and innocent heart as to seek its love, while there is no chance, no hope of our ultimate union. I will rather see her give her hand to another, and live on in loveless, cheerless solitude myself. Yet, if I am kept here, if I linger near her in this constant companionship, with her beauty and her grace before my eyes, her sweet voice sounding in my ears, her high yet gentle thoughts mingling with and softening my own, how can I so guard myself as never to betray the secret of my bosom?--how can I restrain myself so as not to tell my love and seek hers in return? Men have tried the same before and have ever failed. I have no such confidence in my own strength, and I will not risk it; I will fly--whatever it cost to tear myself away, I will fly."

The hours went by; and a little before noon the prisoner received a brief visit from Herbert. The news he brought was so far satisfactory, as it showed Algernon the prospect of his speedy liberation. His adversary had been removed into Heidelberg the day before, had not suffered in the least by the exertion, had passed a good night, and pronounced himself quite well. But the duration of the old officer's stay was so short, that no other information could be communicated. After dinner Algernon's servant appeared again, but he brought no tidings; and when his master inquired, with some surprise, what had become of his cousin, that he saw him not, the stout servant answered, with a laugh, "Oh, sir, he is woman-hunting; some fair lady here has him always at her heels; but, though Heaven forbid I should say I love him much, yet I do believe he has striven to serve you, in this matter at least; for I know he has been twice with the Elector and once with the Electress about your affairs."

"And why love you him not, Tony?" asked his master. "I have seen, it is true, that you have less reverence for him than pleases me; but I would fain know the cause."

"I have known him from a boy," replied the man drily; "and, though he never did aught to injure or offend me, yet there are certain things that one sees, and hears, and knows, which, do what a man will, make up in the course of time an amount of love or disliking very difficult to be changed. I own I love him not; and, to say truth, I have found few that do who have known him as well; but it is no affair of mine, and, if you love him, I have nought to do but to be his humble servant."

"I trust you will show yourself so," replied his master; "first, as he is my kinsman; next, as he is my friend."

"I will, my lord," replied the man; "unless I can some time show you that he is not your friend; for that's a point I doubt."

"You are prejudiced," answered Algernon Grey; "and I thought not to see one, who wants not sense, recollect the follies of a boy, long, long years afterwards.--Now leave me."

"It is not only follies I remember, good lord," replied the servant gravely; "I never accused him of follies. It is not head he wants, it is heart. For ten long years I saw him in your father's house, a child, a lad, almost a man; and I know him well."

"Leave me," said Algernon Grey sternly; and the servant withdrew. But, if the truth must be told, his young master was more inclined to share his sentiments than he would admit. For some years he had not seen his cousin, ere he joined him on the continent. He had remembered him only as the companion of his boyhood, elder by several years, but still bending to share all his sports and pastimes; devising pleasures for him, and breaking the dull ceremonies of a stately household. After they met again, however, he had seen much that pained and displeased him; and he felt sorry, not without good cause, that he had entered into one of those wild and romantic engagements with him, to travel together for a certain time under feigned names, which had been rendered common at that period by the publication of the most popular, but, at the same time, it must be said, the most idle romance that ever was written--"The Astrea." He turned his mind, however, from the subject as soon as possible, after the servant had left him; and now he tried to read and pass his time with any other thoughts than those of Agnes Herbert. All those who have made such efforts know how vain they are. She was ever before his eyes, ever present to his fancy; and he gave up the attempt, asking himself whether, if she came again that night, he

should go as before, or steadily refuse such dangerous companionship.

He was saved the struggle, however; for about five o'clock Herbert again presented himself, followed by a guard, and, taking Algernon's hand warmly, he said, "Come, my young friend, your imprisonment is drawing near an end. The Elector has sent for you, and, doubtless, it is to give you freedom; for this young Oberntraut is recovering fast. Come with me, and we shall soon hear more."

Algernon Grey followed willingly enough; and the English officer led him, by several of those passages and staircases through which he had passed with Agnes on the first night of his imprisonment, to the eastern part of the castle, where Frederic's own apartments were situated. At length, crossing an ante-chamber full of guards and attendants, they entered a hall where the Elector was waiting with his court. There was but a small attendance of the Palatinate nobility, it is true, not above fifteen or twenty persons being present; but Algernon Grey saw several who had surrounded the Prince on the first night of his presentation, and amongst the rest the old Baron of Oberntraut.

The worthy chamberlain's countenance, notwithstanding the reports made of his son's health, did not seem more placable than when last the young Englishman had seen it; and that of the Elector bore a somewhat grave and embarrassed look. As the whole party were assembled not far from the door, Algernon Grey had not much time for observation before he stood within a step of the Elector, and to his surprise found Frederic's hand extended towards him. He took it instantly, and bent his head over it; and the Prince, in a tone of much kindness, at once began the conversation, saying:--

"I have been grieved, sir, to be forced by the laws and customs of my country to subject you to the inconveniences of imprisonment till such time as the results of your duel with one of my officers, the Baron of Oberntraut, could be fully ascertained. We have an edict here repressing such encounters; but as you are a stranger to our laws, though amenable to them while in these dominions, I must say the fault was more his than yours. The Baron may now, however, be considered well; and I am willing to pass over the offence on both parts; in his case considering all that he has already undergone, and in yours, your ignorance of our laws. I have sent for you, therefore, to tell you, your imprisonment is at an end, and to reconcile you with the family of your late adversary. Henceforth, I trust, you will be friends, not enemies."

Algernon Grey was about to reply that he had never entertained the slightest enmity towards his opponent, when the old Lord of Oberntraut took a step forward and said, in a sharp tone, "I came here, noble prince, to seek reparation, and not friendship; and I beseech your Highness----"

But at that moment he was interrupted by a low voice from behind, saying, "Will you allow me to pass, my Lord the Count?"

The gentleman thus addressed made way; and the next instant the Baron of Oberntraut himself came forward, ghastly pale, and apparently somewhat feeble, but yet walking with a firm step and an upright head. The moment he stood before the Elector he held forth his hand frankly to Algernon Grey, saying, "I, at least, sir, entertain no such feelings; I come here to ask your friendship, and to thank you for a lesson you have taught me, which will make me a wiser man to the end of my life. I have been somewhat spoiled by success and flattery, sir, and needed a check, such as this wound has given, to teach me that no man can always have his way in the world. You are the most skilful swordsman I have ever seen; you dealt nobly and honourably with me, and in this presence I declare that the whole fault, from first to last, was mine. I sought the quarrel, urged it on, led you to the place of the encounter; and I do believe that, exposed by my rash anger to your cooler skill, my life was often at your mercy had you chosen to take it. I thank you, therefore, for the wound you gave, and trust you will forget the past, and take my offered hand."

"With my whole heart," answered Algernon Grey, pressing it warmly; "and I do assure you, Baron, that only the defence of my own life would have induced me to injure you. I could not help it, however; for you are not an adversary to be trifled with. Indeed it was more accident than aught else, which gave me a momentary advantage. Had not your foot slipped on the wet sward, the chance might have been against me, and I should have been lying still enough by this time."

The young baron smiled, with a look of great pleasure at this testimony to his skill; and the Elector, calling the old Lord of Oberntraut into one of the deep windows, said, "My lord, I intreat-nay, I command, that you let your anger drop, and cease all vain pursuit of revenge. This is no ordinary man you have to deal with. I know him, though he believes I do not, and am aware not only that he is one of the high nobles of England, but also that he is sent hither on a secret mission of deep importance to my welfare."

"A spy, sir, you would say?" murmured the old lord, in a low bitter tone.

"Hush, sir!" cried the Elector, his brow growing dark; "no more of this, if you would merit the continuance of my favour. I am not so powerless that I cannot make my commands respected by my own court. You hear what your son has said. He exculpates him of all blame. No serious injury has been done; and I insist that you yield to reconciliation."

"As the boy is satisfied," replied the chamberlain, doggedly, "and in obedience to your

Highness, I submit;" and turning towards Algernon Grey, he added, "By the commands of my Prince, sir, I am ready to let this matter drop; but I must advise you not to try such things again with--"

"Hush, hush, my father!" cried his son, "I will proclaim to all the world that there never was a more noble gentleman than he who now stands before you; and as you have hated him solely as my adversary, I do beseech you now to love him as my friend."

"Well, sir, well," replied the old lord, "I have nought to say; let the matter be passed and forgotten;" but it was evident that his ill-will was but little diminished, and his angry pride unpacified.

"Now," said the Elector, with a courteous smile, "this all being settled, and animosities healed, we will part for the evening--and you, noble sir," he continued, turning to Algernon Grey, "though I will only call you by the name you are pleased to assume, will, I trust, grace our court by your presence tomorrow at the hour of eleven. We have there matters of some weight, which we wish to make known to all friends and well-wishers, either of the Elector Palatine, or his lady, the pearl of England; and we trust, that you may be ranked in both classes."

"I will not fail, your Highness," answered Algernon Grey; "but I fear it must be my audience of leave-taking."

"Not so, not so," replied the Elector; "we shall find means to keep you with us, I do not doubt. However that may be, farewell for the present;" and, passing through the opposite door with a large part of his train, comprising the old Baron of Oberntraut, he left the hall.

As soon as he was gone, Algernon Grey's late adversary once more grasped his hand, saying, "You must not go, my friend; the Elector has need of swords such as yours; ay, and of hearts and heads such as yours, too. If there is chivalry in your nature; if there is high spirit and generous enthusiasm--and I know there is--you will give him aid in his hour of need. I may be tied down to this spot by many things; but if you go with him, I know there is a better arm and better brain than any I could bring."

"Nay, not better," answered Algernon Grey, "though equally devoted to any good cause.--But I know not what you mean, on what expedition he is bound, or what enterprise is before him."

"I cannot tell you," answered Oberntraut in a low voice; "and I cannot entertain you, as I could wish, at my own lodgings, on account of this sickness; but if you inquire for me to-morrow, ere you come hither, I will let you know more.--Now I must return; for, to say truth, I am tired. I never thought to know the day when I should say that a short walk and a brief conference were too much for my strength; but so it is, and I must go and lie down once more, and rest."

The party broke up soon; but ere Algernon Grey quitted the hall for the purpose of returning to the place of his imprisonment, in order to see that all his effects were carefully carried down to the inn below, a gentleman approached, and, after shaking hands with him, said something in a low voice.

"This evening, if you please," answered Algernon Grey; "but what is it, Craven?"

His friend replied in a whisper; and a dark cloud immediately came over Algernon Grey's countenance.

"I know it all," he answered; "all that you can tell me, Craven. Come and see me, if you will. Right glad shall I be to spend an hour with you; but mention not that name again. Much is, doubtless, false; much is, doubtless, exaggerated; but much must be true that should not be so; and my own course is decided." Thus saying, he turned to Herbert, and, after a few words, walked back with him to the tower where he had been confined.

CHAPTER VI.

The fair Princess of England, now in the pride of youth and beauty, in the full sunshine of prosperity and power, with one of the fairest portions of the earth for her dominions, with admiration, flattery, esteem, love, almost adoration, rising up like incense before her, but with so sad and dark a fate for the future, sat in her silver chamber, surrounded by all the beauty she could collect from her husband's dominions. There were only three men present, two old German noblemen, and, strange to say, our acquaintance William Lovet. The hour was nearly the same as that at which Algernon Grey was summoned to the presence of the Elector before his release;

and every face around was full of satisfaction, as the Princess and her countryman talked somewhat lightly of the imprisonment of Lovet's kinsman, and the prospects before him; using the French tongue.

The Englishman stood before the chair of the Electress, with his hat and plume dangling from his hand, his head slightly bent, his ear turned to hear the Princess's words, and a slight sarcastic smile upon his finely-turned lip.

"Good faith! your Highness," he said, in answer to something the Princess communicated, "I know not well whether to rejoice or be sad at the tidings you give me."

"Sad!" exclaimed Elizabeth, with a look of much surprise; "have you not been urging his liberation?"

"That was a duty," answered Lovet, with the same meaning smile; "but there may be unpleasant duties, madam."

"Are you his friend, his kinsman?" exclaimed the Electress.

"Both," answered Lovet; "but yet, friendship may have unpleasant duties too. I urged his liberation, not because I thought it best for him, but because it was what he had a right to demand."

"Is he so wild and rash, then," demanded Elizabeth, "that, like a lion, he must be kept in a cage?--But you are jesting; I see it on your face."

"Good faith! not so, lady," answered the Englishman; "but all men do not know what is best for them; and my cousin is one of them--a rare keen judge for others, and not for himself.--Now, look around, your Highness. What do you see?"

"Too many things for a catalogue," answered the Princess; "vases, statues, hangings of blue and silver, many fair ladies, and--"

"Stop there, I beg," said Lovet. "All these bright things make me judge that it were wise for any gay and courtly gentleman to stay amongst them; but these same things--nay, their very beauty"--and he ran his eye over the circle round the Electress, calling forth a well-pleased smile on many of the faces near--"have quite the contrary effect on my good cousin, making him seek to fly such sweet temptation; and, like a wandering friar, or our good friend St. Anthony, resist the devil, love, Hymen, and the rest, by solitude and maceration."

The Electress laughed and he proceeded; "We are of different judgments, he and I; while I am free, I stay even where I am; no sooner is he at liberty than he flies, depend upon it.--But if I could have a private word with your Highness, I might tell you more, and say things worthy of your ear."

Elizabeth gazed round the circle for an instant, and then said, speaking English, "There is no one who understands our native tongue."

A momentary hesitation seemed to come over William Lovet; and he paused for an instant, ere he replied. It was seldom that such a thing happened to him; for he was ready and quick at repartee, and had, as is the case with many a shrewd and intriguing man, a habit, as adept as nature, of veiling his direct meaning in figures which implied more than was actually said. He rarely found a difficulty in making his hearers easily comprehend all that he meant, while he guarded against an accurate report of anything that he had instigated, requested, or desired, by rendering the expressions in themselves so unmeaning, that, when repeated to an unprepared ear, their sense, if they had any, seemed very different from that which the circumstances at the moment gave them. In the present instance, however, his task was one of some difficulty; for he sought to convey to a mind, naturally shrewd and acute, and accustomed to deal very much with hyperbole and metaphor, a false idea in the general, while all the particulars were in themselves true.

So long did he remain silent, that the Electress at length said in a tone of impatience, "Well, sir, what would you say?"

"Good faith! your Highness," he answered in a frank tone; "I do not know well how to begin. I must not forget that it is my cousin I am speaking of; but yet I wish to give you such an insight into the matter that you may judge fairly of it by yourself. From various circumstances, which it is little worth while to speak of, this good cousin of mine has conceived a horror and fear of woman's love."

"I can conceive the circumstances," answered the Electress; "his history is not wholly unknown to me, Master Lovet."

"Then you have the whole affair," answered her visitor, catching gladly at the admission; "I need say nothing more. You have seen with your own eyes, know right well, must have heard and marked the attractions which your court possesses for my poor cousin Algernon. Within two days he took fright at his own sensations, and was for flying as fast as possible; but a duel, a knight-

errant-like adventure, imprisonment, and the devil to boot, I believe, have detained him here even till now; and Love's chain, I doubt not, is round and round his heart by this time. Nevertheless, he will snap his fetters as soon as his limbs are free; and as I have promised, by an oath more binding than a marriage vow, to go with him wherever he goes for the next year, you may well judge that I am not very anxious to see his prison doors unlocked."

Elizabeth meditated for a minute or two, and then answered, "I should have thought the mission which brought him hither would detain him somewhat longer at our court."

"There are two objections to that supposition," replied Lovet: "first, that whatever object he had in coming hither--of which I know nothing; for he has his secrets as well as I have mine--must be attained by this time. Depend upon it, your Highness, if he had any object at all, it was but to examine, to see, to inquire, and nothing more. He must have seen enough of your court, must have heard enough of coming events, for a quick mind like his to have formed its own conclusions."

"That is one objection to my view," replied the Electress; "what is the second?"

"A very simple one," said William Lovet, "namely, that the court of the Count Palatine is very soon to become, if what men say be true, the court of a great king. Heidelberg is about to lose its splendour, and those who stay there may study or may sing amongst nightingales and professors, with sweet voices and deep learning; but no courtly auditory, and but small company."

The Electress smiled. "Such things may be," she said, in a grave pondering tone, seeming to consider each word; "but yet, my good sir, as all things must come to an end, so must this gentleman's visit to our court. Only I would rather--whatever my husband's decision may be upon matters which have been bruited about somewhat too largely--I would rather, I say, that a noble gentleman of my own land, supposed to be sent hither expressly by my father, should not take his departure immediately that the Elector's resolution is made public."

Lovet saw his advantage, and exclaimed at once, "Heaven forefend! it would be most detrimental!"

"Highly so," rejoined the Electress. "Rumours, true or false, assign to this young gentleman a high place in the world's esteem; the confidence of his own sovereign in the task of watching here the proceedings relative to the Bohemian crown, and of acting according as circumstances shall seem to need. It will certainly, as you say, be most detrimental, if, immediately after the Elector's decision is known, he were to withdraw himself instantly from our court, from any private motives such as you mention. Men would instantly say, that the step we were about to take was disapproved of by the crown whence we have the best right to look for assistance and support. Little, indeed, have we had hitherto; but such an act on the part of your friend would be fatal. We all know what is the effect of high countenance in the outset of a great undertaking; and I need not tell you, that my father's lukewarmness in this cause has already created difficulties, and disheartened our followers."

Lovet laid his finger on his temple, and seemed to consider deeply the subjects brought before him. But, if the truth must be told, this thoughtful mood was assumed; and he answered the next moment with a sudden exclamation, as if some bright thought had struck him, "Were it not better that you took him with you to Bohemia? His appearance at Prague, with all the rumours going before him which your Highness has mentioned, would give hope and confidence, would raise the spirits of the people, would depress and keep in check the adverse party, and would add an ingredient tending to strengthen union, which is all that would seem wanting to complete success."

"But would he go?" exclaimed Elizabeth. "The same motives that made him eager to quit Heidelberg, would surely withhold him from Prague."

"When we set a trap for a linnet," said Lovet, "we take care to conceal the wires. 'Tis needless that your Highness should say, that either the Lady Agnes goes with you, or the fair Countess of Laussitz."

The Princess smiled; for she not unwillingly mixed herself with the small policy of her husband's court, and took some pleasure in the cunning parts of diplomatic intrigue. She made no answer, however, and Lovet proceeded:--

"If ever there was a gallant and chivalrous spirit in this world it is my cousin Algernon's. To serve a lady with his sword, or his heart's best blood, would be the pride of his life, provided he did not fear that by so doing he would bind himself in somewhat too strong a chain. At your first call, the spirit of his race and his name will rise to defend your cause before the world. A Lady, his Princess, the love of all hearts, the admiration of all eyes, would find a right willing servant, and one who in the camp, or court, or counsel, could do great deeds. Ready and willing, I take upon myself to say, he would be, if one fair lady's name was not mentioned in your train."

The Princess mused, and seemed somewhat embarrassed. "I have always intended," she said, "that if we go--of which I as yet know nothing--Agnes should go with me; I have told her so. She would look upon it as a slight if I did not take her. She has been to me almost as a sister, since I have been here--but yet I will speak with her; for much must be sacrificed for a great object."

"Nay, your Highness, speak with her not," answered Lovet, laughing; "leave her not behind. Once he has promised you the service of his sword, he will not break his word, nor withdraw from the contract; but there is no need, in naming those who are to accompany you, that all shall be mentioned at the first. Omit some names, which may be added afterwards as you may think fit. Heaven forefend that a high princess shall not have right and title to change her mind seven times a day, as well as a washerwoman's daughter!"

"I understand," answered Elizabeth, laughing, "I understand; but you think, then, he will not take flight if he finds that this fair dangerous little friend of mine is one of the train, after all?"

"No fear, no fear," replied Lovet; "once promised, he is yours for life or death; and good faith! to say the truth, 'tis fair this lady should be of the party. When he once finds her sweet companionship fixed upon him beyond the possibility of escape, he will yield himself gaily to his fate, put on the Celadon, and humanize himself a little, which is all that he wants to make him perfect in his way. Never was statue, or hewn block of stone, from Lot's wife down to the works of Praxiteles, more cold or uncomfortable as a companion than my good cousin Algernon, solely from his lamentable fear of giving way to the fire in his own heart. For my part, I think a little honest love gives the crowning touch to all excellence. With the virtue which the old Romans attributed to the fine arts, it softens manners, purifies the heart and spirits, elevates the character, and takes from us that touch of the wild beast, which is always to be found in what my great-grandmother, who was a Lollard,--Heaven keep her from purgatory!--used to call 'the natural man.'"

"I believe it does, sir," answered the Electress, amused, and even pleased, with the strange picture his conversation displayed of many qualities apparently very opposite, and not knowing that all which seemed good was thrown in to make the dish suit the palate of the person to whom it was presented,--"I believe it does; but it must be, as you say, honest love to do so."

"Well, beautiful princess," replied Lovet, with a low laugh that he could not suppress,--one of those light, demoralizing, satanic laughs, which attack virtuous principles, unassailable by any argument--"I only speak of honest love. The thought of nought else could ever enter into my good cousin's heart; he is as pure and innocent as what Will Shakspeare calls a sucking dove; and that love, when he finds he cannot escape from it, will be a chivalrous bond to your court and service for ever."

"And your own love, Master Lovet," asked the Princess; "You don't suppose I have been blind to your devotion to a certain fair lady? What of your own love?"

"Oh, immaculate and high," answered Lovet, with his sneering smile; "the pure conception of enthusiastic devotion--a passion, like the flame on Vesta's altar, burning for ever with a holy light--no smoke, high Princess, no red and fiery glare, but blue and thin and cold, like the flame of spirits on a sponge--quite spiritual, quite spiritual, I can assure you"--and he laughed again in bitter mockery of the romantic character of the age, which could conceive that love can be separated from the fire that is its life. "Surely, surely, bright lady, if others may be permitted to play Strephons, I am not to be blamed if I *Celadon* it a little, though the languishing eyes of the Countess of Laussitz do look as if they would wake the terrestrial Eros, rather than the celestial."

In spite of herself, the Princess could not but smile; but, putting on a grave look the moment after, she replied, "Well, well. Far be it from me to lay any restraint upon gallant and noble devotion to the fair; it is the high moving power to all great actions; and on it am I ready to rest for support myself, should need be; but remember, Master Lovet, I will have no scandals in my court; that is an indispensable condition to your sojourn with it."

"Scandal, your Highness! Heaven forbid!" exclaimed Lovet; "I would not have a scandal for the world. Always consider what such a thing would imply; I declare the very thought of it would spoil my breakfast, had I not made one good meal before I came out. The consequences would be frightful: first, I should lose your Highness's favour; next, I should have to cut the throat of a little fat, small-eyed husband--work for a pork-butcher, but not for a cavalier with clean hands; and last, I should have to marry the fair dame myself, which would certainly put an end to all our fine Platonics. No, no, by that fair hand I swear, you shall have no scandal by any act of William Lovet."

"Well, Sir William," answered the Electress, "you will recollect that false names do not cover well-known faces; that your reputation is not quite so clear and bright as a new crimson velvet cloak, laced with gold; and that, knowing the person and his ways, I have my eye upon him. As to the other matter, I will think of what you have said concerning your noble cousin, and will act after due deliberation. We must not lose him on any account, if it be possible to keep him; but, ere I decide on aught, I must speak with his Highness; for these are matters, in regard to which a woman's judgment is not worth much."

"Oh, a woman's judgment for ever!" cried William Lovet; "in love, war, wine, and policy, there is nothing like a woman's judgment--But now I will take my leave; for I see these fair ladies around marvelling sadly at our long conversation in an unknown tongue--though, Heaven help us! what we should have done on many great occasions I know not, if certain wise gentlemen of antiquity had not thought fit to build a high and very impious tower of Babel, and been cursed with strange languages, which have proved very serviceable to their posterity. However, if we

talk farther in one of our Babel dialects before these bright dames, their sweet wits will find or frame treason in it; and I shall be impeached to the Elector for talking something more soft than German to his lovely Princess. Thus, then, I humbly take my leave; and, if you follow my sage advice regarding my good cousin, I will so play my part as to insure that he is bound hand and foot to promote your great and glorious undertakings."

CHAPTER VII.

About an hour after his liberation, Algernon Grey sat alone in his chamber at the Golden Stag, absorbed in deep meditation. The servants came and went, bringing down from the castle all those parts of his baggage which had been carried up during his imprisonment, but he took no heed of them; and even Frill, the page, obtained little notice, though he endeavoured strongly to attract attention by eloquent speech and graceful demeanour. The great question on which man's fate turns so frequently throughout life: "How shall I act at this next step?" was then before his eyes; but his mind wandered back into the past, and, scrutinizing what had occurred during the last three days, Algernon Grey could not free himself altogether from the reproaches of his own heart. "I have been weak," he said, "I have been wrong; I have yielded to circumstances, where I should have resisted them; I have been tender in tone and manner, where I should have been cold as ice. Better, far better, that she should think me rude, discourteous, unkind, than that she should have hereafter to say, that I did her wrong and sought her love secretly, when I could not ask it honourably. Even now it is far wiser to encounter any sort of reproach than give good cause for dark, well-founded accusation. I will go--that is determined. To-morrow's sunset shall not find me in Heidelberg."

His thoughts ran on from that starting point into the future, and he asked himself, "What was before him; what was the path he should pursue; what was the end to which it would lead?" The prospect was dark and gloomy: no light shone upon it; no variety appeared to cheer it, but one wild waste of life spread out before him, overhung with clouds, and bearing nought to shelter or console. He felt like one of those anchorites of old, who voluntarily quitted the sunshine and the richness of cultivated nature, to plunge into the gloom and sterility of the desert. He felt that, at that moment, there was beauty and brightness around him, all that could charm the eye or captivate the heart; that gaiety and pleasure, the exercise of the mind, the sport of the fancy, the kindling of passion, the ecstasy of love, the wild enthusiastic delights of a free heart revelling undisturbed in the enjoyment of the best gifts of Heaven, were ready for his grasp, if he chose to seize them, with but one obstacle--but that obstacle, to his mind, insurmountable. He felt that he was about to fly them all, voluntarily to resign everything that his heart longed for; with the parched mouth and thirsty lip to renounce the cooling draught of the deep well of happiness open before him; and to speed on through the arid desert of existence, with no one to support or cheer, with not one spring of the sweet waters of comfort to give him hope along his desolate course. Barren, barren spread out the years before him. As he looked through the long sunless vista, it seemed as if an open tomb was all that closed the far perspective to receive him at the end of his weary journey, and afford the dull sleep of death and corruption. "May it come soon!" he thought, "may it come soon!" and, with his hands pressed upon his eyes, he remained pondering bitterly over his sad, strange fate.

"Ah, Algernon," cried a voice, as the door opened, "you look marvellous joyful over your emancipation. One would think you had been in a dungeon a whole year, to see your intemperate gaiety at the recovery of your freedom. But I knew how it would be, and I told the Electress the result. I urged her strongly to keep you in your soft bondage, telling her, that to set you at liberty was but to restore you to the slavery of a most perverse education.--But how goes it, my good cousin?"

"Well, I thank you, William," answered Algernon Grey, rising and shaking off his gloom, determined to encounter Lovet's keen jests with a careless tone. "Faith, you are quite right, my cousin. The cheerful society that you afforded me every day in prison made captivity so sweet, that I could have staid in it for ever."

"See the ingratitude of man!" cried Lovet, laughing. "I have given him up one-third of my whole time, and yet he is not satisfied, although, by the code of love and gallantry, as he well knows, the other two-thirds were not my own to give; they were pledged, pawned, impignorated, and I might as well have stolen a jewel out of Madam de Laussitz's ear, or taken any ring off her finger but one, with as much right and justice as I could have taken one minute more than I did to bestow upon my kinsman's affairs. Did I not thrice see the Elector? Did I not twice see the Electress? Did I not make love to seven of her ladies? Did I not bow nine times to nine old gentlemen? Did I not fee a page for an audience? And actually embrace a chamberlain--the most disgusting task of all--entirely to obtain his liberty? although I knew the first use he would make

of it would be to work his own unhappiness and my disappointment."

"Nay, William, nothing of the kind," replied Algernon Grey. "We are all upon the search for happiness, you and I alike; and each must seek his in his own way. I thank you for all the trouble you have taken; but birds when they are free will use their wings; and so will I to-morrow. I have not been so long accustomed to a cage as to love its neighbourhood."

"Stay, stay," cried Lovet. "Your pardon, my good cousin! I am not on the search for happiness; that is a wild-goose chase, always beginning, never ending; still disappointing, offering fruition nowhere. Pleasure, pleasure is what I seek--the honey that is in every flower. If we exhaust one, why let us fly on to another. The bee for ever, Algernon! That industrious insect is my emblem. Good faith! I will ask the heralds if I may not put it in my arms. Like it, I seek the sweets of life, wherever they are to be found; and the wild thyme, or the cultivated rose is all the same to me."

"But a spendthrift-bee," answered Algernon Grey; "for you lay up no store for the future, but consuming all the honey that you find, and building no waxy cells for future years. After all, the emblem is not a pleasant one; for were you as thrifty as the best, our master, Fate, would come and smoke you in the hive."

"I will give him no cause," answered Lovet, gaily; "for I will eat my honey while I have got it, and hoard none to tempt his ruthless hands. But a truce to bantering, Algernon; I have really laboured hard to set you free, thinking that a much better way of spending my time than piping to you in prison, like Blondel to good King Richard. But now what is it you intend to do? I have trusted and hoped, that a few hours' quiet reflection, in an airy room up three pair of stairs, would turn the fresh must of your young properties to good sound wine, and teach you that where you have all before you that can make life happy, it is needless to go, like a drunken man with a purse full of gold, and flip the ducats with your thumb-nail into a draw-well."

"What do you mean?" asked his cousin; "I intend to throw nothing away that is good. Base coin is as well in a draw-well as anywhere else."

"Nay, nay, be frank," exclaimed Lovet; "I mean that you do not surely intend to quit this place so soon as you have once threatened."

"I see no reason why I should stay," answered Algernon Grey.

"What! not love?" cried the other. "Nay, my good cousin, do not look detected! Can you suppose, that I have not seen, that I do not know? By every sign and token, from an untied collar, to a hat put on wrongside before--from a sigh in the middle of a well-turned sentence, to an answer made as irrelevant to the purpose as an old maid's comment on last Sunday's sermon, you are in love, man--up to the neck in that soft quagmire, love. And, good faith! I must own, too, that, considering your inexperience of such things, and the resistance of your nature to all sweet influences, you have not chosen amiss--bright eyes, sweet lips, a cheek like a ripe peach, hair bright and glossy as the sunshine on a bank of moss, a form that might have made Helen envious, and false Paris doubly false."

Algernon Grey seated himself at the table again, and leaned his head upon his hand, with his eyes thoughtfully bent down, and a red spot in his cheek. He would not, he could not say that he did not love; but he was pained that his clear-sighted cousin had divined the truth.

In the mean time Lovet proceeded, seeing clearly that Algernon did not listen; but trusting that a word or two at least would fall through the inattentive ear upon the mind, and produce, perhaps, a more lasting effect than if they were listened to and answered.

"Stay, Algernon, stay," he cried; "stay and be happy. Cast not away from you, for vain fantasies, joy that is seldom afforded to any man more than once in life--opportunities which neglected never return, and once lost, leave unceasing regret behind them. Stay, and make her yours."

"Make her mine!" exclaimed Algernon Grey. "How?"

"Oh! a thousand courses are open," answered his cousin. "Shall I point them out?"

Algernon waved his hand and shook his head, with a bitter smile; "I see none," he answered.

"Well, listen," replied Lovet. "This Herbert, this uncle, is a soldier to fortune--a man of no rank or position to bar the path to one of your name and station. Troublous times are coming on; and over this fair Palatinate will, ere long, roll a sea of disasters, which will break bonds, shake ties, and, in a wide chaos of confusion, leave opportunities which a wise lover would profit by."

"Nay, nay," cried Algernon Grey, starting up and raising himself to his full height, "no more of such a theme; you do not understand me, William."

"Right well, my cousin," replied Lovet, with one of his sarcastic smiles; "but I thought it best to put the worst case first, and set your shrewish puritanism in arms, by displaying the path that any other wicked worldlings would take. The fair lady's heart is, doubtless, more than half gone already; and though, perhaps, like all these proud beauties, she might start a little at first from

the thought of such unconditional surrender, yet that said little tyrant Love would compel obedience to his commands. Then, however, there is another course to take. The high-stilted course, in all respects suited to your stiff and magnificent ideas."

"Ay, what is that?" cried Algernon Grey, turning quickly toward him, and betrayed, by a sudden gleam of hope, into a greater display of his feelings than he could have desired.

Lovet suppressed the smile, that half curled his lip, ere his cousin saw it; though he knew well that even to have raised up for a moment a vision of happiness before his cousin's eyes, was so much gained for his own plans. "The matter, methinks, is very easy," he answered; "you have nought to do but first to make her yours beyond recall; and then, being much too virtuous to remain in an unhallowed union, give her the deepest proof of your tenderness and love by breaking this boy-marriage of yours with the Lady Catherine. What right have fathers and mothers, uncles and aunts, or grandfathers and guardians either, to pledge a boy of fifteen by a vow at the altar to an engagement for life, the very nature of which he does not understand? It is both absurd and wicked; there may be many doubts whether it is lawful--"

"None, none," cried Algernon Grey; "it has taken place a hundred times. Poor Essex and myself are in the same sad case."

"Ay, but he is worse off than you," answered Lovet; "for he, like a fool, went back and took her home, while you have wisely staid away with the broad sea between you. Now, though the lady and her good friends may very likely, as the matters stand, hold fast by an engagement which secures to her high rank and large possessions as your wife; yet, if she finds you entangled irrevocably with another, she will soon consent to that which you desire, and on a joint petition to the peers this baby-matrimony will be soon annulled."

"She will not consent," said Algernon Grey, bitterly; "at least her friends will not;" and then he added, fixing his eyes upon Lovet, "and is it you, William, who can wish that I should thus treat your own fair cousin?"

"Oh," answered Lovet, with a laugh, "it will not break her heart. I know her well--better than you do, Algernon; and I advise you for the happiness of both. This is no common case of perfidy. What does she know of you to make her love you? or give one sigh because you love another? Do you think, my fair cousin, that your great qualities are so apparent, or your fine person so attractive, that one short sight of you at the altar at the age of fifteen, tricked out in a white satin doublet, purpled with blue, and laced with gold, is quite sufficient to make her die of love for you? or, what were more marvellous still, to preserve a holy constancy of maidenly affection during seven long years of absence? Pooh, pooh! she is not of that spirit at all, I can tell you. If she thought of you at all, when last she saw you, it was but as a pretty, well-dressed doll; and doubtless, had they left you with her then, she would have stuck a new farthingale round your neck better to her taste, or put you into a cradle and tried to rock you to sleep. She has got other notions now; but, for aught we know, you may not be the object of them."

"Perhaps not," replied Algernon Grey, setting his teeth hard; "perhaps not, Lovet--I have reason to think so!--But now mark me, my good cousin, and you know that I am firm in keeping my resolutions; I have seen a fair and lovely creature here, beautiful, kind, innocent, high minded. I would as soon pollute that creature, if I could, as I would destroy the beauty of her face; I would as soon bring wretchedness into her heart, as I would break those lovely limbs upon the rack--so, once for all, no more of this. I shall leave Heidelberg to-morrow."

Lovet paused, and thought for a moment, laying his hand upon his brow, with a studied air of meditation: "I thought it was on Saturday next," he said, "that the Elector went."

"That the Elector went!" repeated Algernon Grey; "I know not what you mean, William."

"Pshaw, my good cousin," answered Lovet; "you do not suppose that I am not aware Frederic has been urging you to go with him in this expedition to Bohemia. I do not mean to say that you are making your love for Agnes Herbert an excuse to me for a rash consent to the Elector's wild and unprofitable scheme; but you will not deny, that, tempted by the prospect of renown in arms, and strange adventures in a distant country, you have taken advantage of the offer, thinking at the same time to divert your mind from what you judge dangerous thoughts, and quit a society that you love too much."

"I will deny it altogether," answered Algernon Grey, calmly. "The Elector has never mentioned the name of Bohemia in my hearing; I was not aware he had accepted this thorny crown, or that he was going either soon or late."

"Why, it is all over the castle and the town," cried Lovet; "and if he have not asked you, he will do it, be you sure. Craven goes with him--"

"And the Princess?" demanded Algernon.

"She goes, or follows immediately," said his cousin, "like a true dame of romance, she tells me, with but two ladies and two waiting women, some half-dozen antique gentlemen, and a troop of horse."

Algernon Grey mused, calculating whether it was probable that Agnes would be one of those selected to accompany the Electress. At length he asked, in a somewhat hesitating manner, "Did you hear the ladies' names who go with her?"

"Oh, yes," answered Lovet; "one was the Baroness L[oe]wenstein, whom you saw the other night; the other a Countess, with a hard name I do not recollect, and would not utter if I did; all I know, alas! is, that it is not Laussitz.--But be prepared, my fair cousin: for, depend upon it, the Elector will ask you; and, if you are not mad, you will plead some other occupations; for nothing will come of this rash scheme but disaster and hard blows. He is a gallant Prince, it is true, and will, doubtless, have to aid him a brave and manly chivalry; but the odds against him are too great. Spain and Savoy, and Burgundy, the imperial power and three-fourths of the empire, papal gold and intrigue, and Italian mercenaries enough to conquer a new world; while France negotiates, England hesitates, and Holland takes care of itself. You had better frame some excuse; so with that warning I will leave you; for there is a pair of soft violet eyes looking for me as I ride up the hill."

Algernon Grey smiled. It was not at his cousin's allusion to the Countess of Laussitz, but rather, that Lovet should think he could be deterred by such arguments as had been used. The reader may inquire if Lovet thought they would deter him. It would seem not; and even Algernon Grey became suspicious as he meditated.

"I will make myself sure," he said, after pondering for some time. "It is more than probable she will remain with the Electress-mother; and if she do, this adventure is as good as any other to fill up a space of time.--I will go up and take leave of her and her uncle to-night; for, perchance I may not see them at the court to-morrow."

His heart sank as he thought of that leave-taking; and he shrank from the task, which he felt it would not be courteous to leave unperformed. Minutes and hours passed by; and it was late in the evening before he went; but at length he set out on foot, and, taking his way by what is still called, I believe, the Burg-weg, he reached the gates of the castle, and obtained admission. As usual, the courts and passages were filled with a moving multitude; but Algernon Grey walked straight on, noticing no one till he reached the tower in which Colonel Herbert's lodging was situated, and, mounting the stairs, he knocked at the heavy oaken door. A voice said,--"Come in;" but it was not that of the English officer; and the moment after he stood before Agnes Herbert, who sat writing at a table alone. She started up, when she saw him, with a joyful smile; and, giving him her hand, congratulated him on his liberation. But, after a few brief sentences had been spoken, her manner became more grave; and she said, "You were seeking my uncle; but he has just gone forth, leaving me to copy this paper for him."

"I came," said Algernon Grey, in a calm and firm, but, in spite of himself, a very sad tone, "to bid him adieu, as I thought it more than likely, from his busy occupations, that I might not see him at the court to-morrow morning."

"Adieu!" said Agnes. "Are you going soon, then?" and as she spoke her face turned deadly pale.

"I must go, I fear, to-morrow," replied Algernon Grey, "as soon as I have taken leave of the Elector and the Electress. The hour named for receiving me is at eleven. Will you be there?"

"I think not," answered Agnes, in a voice that trembled slightly.

"Then, dear lady, I will bid you farewell now," said Algernon Grey, using a strong command over every word and every tone. "Believe me, I am deeply grateful for all the kindness you have shown me, and shall remember the days I have passed here, though several have been days of imprisonment, as amongst the brightest things of life."

He had intended, when he went thither, to explain to her his situation; and had Agnes uttered one word, which could have led to the subject, it would have been done at once. But for a time she remained silent; and he felt that to obtrude such a topic would be but too plainly to indicate the feelings of his heart towards herself.

When she did reply, she merely said, "You are generous to express any gratitude to me. I have but shown you common kindness, while all the debt is on my side. I, too, shall recollect these hours with pleasure, as having enabled me, however poorly, to show the thankfulness that is in my heart for the noble and gallant conduct which delivered me at a moment when a terrible death seemed certain. I do not think my uncle will be present, either, to-morrow; but I know he will grieve much not to see you before you go; and if you like to give him such satisfaction, you will find him at the fort, called the Trutzkaiser, where he is causing some alterations to be made."

She spoke quite calmly, though her cheek still remained colourless. At one or two words, indeed, her voice trembled; but there was no other emotion visible.

Algernon Grey took her hand, and pressed his lips upon it, saying, "Farewell! Agnes, farewell!"

"Farewell!" she answered; "may you ever be as happy as I am sure you deserve!"

He shook his head sadly, withdrew, and closed the door.

The moment he was gone, Agnes sank into the chair where she had been sitting, covered her eyes with her hand, and seemed to gasp for breath. The next instant, however, she raised her head high, cast back the glossy hair from her face, and exclaimed, "This is nonsense, this is folly! People, with their idle warnings, have put such vain imaginations in my head. But they are gone, and that is over;" and, drawing the paper to her, she strove to write again.

CHAPTER VIII.

Once more the courts of the castle of Heidelberg were crowded with horses and servants; once more guest after guest was arriving, not now for the purposes of revelry and mirth, but for the more serious object of hearing the decision of the Prince upon a question destined to affect the course of his whole life.

Amongst the rest who rode in, followed by their servants, were the two young Englishmen, with whom this history has been so busy. There was no hesitation now as to their admission; and, following some gentlemen, who had dismounted in haste before them, they were soon in the hall, where the Elector was receiving his court. No ladies were present, but a door was open on his left, through which the sweet tones of woman's voice were heard; and Algernon Grey remarked, that several of those present, though not all, after having spoken for a moment with the Prince, passed on, and entered the chamber to which that door led.

Through the greater part of the crowd--for the hall was already nearly full--seemed to reign a sort of joyful enthusiasm. Every countenance beamed with high thoughts; every voice spoke in gay tones; and nothing but satisfaction seemed to be spread around by the tidings, which were now general throughout the whole. If one or two of the noblemen, indeed, who stood immediately round the prince, bore a graver and more sedate aspect, it might well be attributed to courtly ceremony; and Frederic's own face, though there was nothing like thoughtless merriment upon it, was cheerful and serene, as if well and fully contented with the determinations to which he had come.

After waiting for a few minutes till several others had passed, Algernon Grey and his cousin approached and saluted the Prince.

"You have come somewhat late, gentlemen," he said; "but, nevertheless, I am right glad to see you here; and I trust you, sir," he continued, speaking to Algernon, "will understand the motives on which I have acted towards you, and, in your generous nature, will forgive and forget any pain I may have felt myself called upon to inflict."

"Entirely, sir," replied the young Englishman; "and I do assure your Highness, that I come to take my leave of you with a heart free from all rancour towards any one in your court."

"Ere I receive your farewell, sir," replied Frederic, "I will beseech you kindly to pass into the Queen's chamber, on the left, where your own fair Princess may have something to say to you;" and he pointed with his hand to the door which has been mentioned.

Algernon Grey bowed and walked on, followed by Lovet, who whispered, ere they reached the reception-room of the Princess, "You hear! she is queening it already. Mind that you give her, the Majesty."

The next moment they had the whole scene of Elizabeth's saloon before them; and, although it would seem that there had been a certain degree of preparation, to produce a greater effect, yet assuredly there was enough to move even cold hearts to enthusiasm. There sat the young Princess of England, still in the first freshness of early life, without one charm impaired, one grace lost. Her eyes were lighted up with the fire of enterprise and courage--her lip smiling with warm hopes--her whole form breathing energy and courage. Even in the hand, which--stretched forth on the small table before her--grasped a roll of papers, might be seen the firm, unconquerable, yet mild, spirit within. Around and behind her stood a number of the ladies of her court,--all beautiful, all radiant with the same enthusiastic light which beamed in their sovereign's face. Scattered through the room, with one or two a little advanced, and one close to the table at which the Electress sat, were all the first men of the Palatinate, young and old: some with white hair, and faces scarred and seamed; some in the prime of vigorous manhood; some with the faintly traced moustaches, showing the first step of adolescence; and, mixed with these, were nobles and princes from several other lands, ready to peril life and fortune for the fair being before them.

The buzz of conversation spread around; gay smiles were on every face, the expectation of

grand events in every breast; and the rich crimson hangings of the room, the gay dresses, the gold, the varied hues, the lace and jewel sparkling in the sun, rendered the scene, to the eye, as bright and impressive as a knowledge of the occasion, and anticipation of the results of that meeting, made it matter of deep interest to the thoughtful mind and feeling heart.

Algernon Grey paused for a few minutes near the door, gazing over the various groups, and meditating upon all he saw, while the Princess spoke in a low tone with the gentleman at the table. He was a fine looking old man, with a keen eye and a powerfully built frame; and, ever and anon, he bowed his head with a grave smile, and answered something in the affirmative to what the Electress said.

At length the young Englishman saw her eye rest upon himself and Lovet; and as soon as her conversation with the other seemed brought to a close, he was about to step forward, when Elizabeth raised her voice, and, looking round, said aloud, in a peculiarly clear and silvery voice, "Princes and noble gentlemen, you have heard from my lord and husband the decision he has come to on the petition of the wronged Bohemian states, that he will take upon him the crown of that country, of which his own acts have deprived Ferdinand of Grätz, now emperor. I have no voice to tell the many mighty reasons which induced him, without aught of personal ambition, to accede to the wishes of a brave and indomitable nation, who sought in him both a ruler and a defender. Nor do I think it needful that I should. I will only ask, who would refuse the task? Who would reject the cry of the oppressed? Who would not become the defender of a brave nation struggling merely for its just rights? However, it is not to be denied that there are difficulties and dangers in the way, that mighty powers are opposed to us, that every effort of the oppressor, that every means which subtlety and despotism can employ, will be used to frustrate the efforts made for the maintenance of the privileges of the German princes, for the establishment of religious and political freedom amongst the members of this great confederation. I speak of these things as a woman; and, doubtless, my husband has explained them to you as a man. He has asked your aid, and, if need should be, your swords to support him, and, in supporting him, the freedom of the whole Germanic empire, princes and people alike, in maintaining the rights of every class, and freedom of faith, as the birth-right of our citizens. I appeal to you as a woman; I can use no such strong arguments; I ask you, who will support with counsel and in arms Elizabeth Stuart? On your chivalry, on your gallantry, on your devotion I rely. I will found my throne upon the swords of such as those who now surround me; and if the hands that bear those swords be willing, as I believe they are, that banner has not yet been raised upon earth which can prevail against them."

She spoke eagerly, warmly, but without effort. It seemed as if the words sprang from the heart to the lips, born of the feelings, and uttered without thought. Her cheek glowed; her lip trembled with emotion; her eye flashed; and, when in the end it became dim with glittering dew, as the last sounds vibrated on the ear, an enthusiastic murmur burst from the crowd, and almost every one took a step forward to express his devotion to her cause.

There was one, however, who was before the rest, a strong and gallant looking man, of seven or eight-and-twenty years of age, whose hair and beard, notwithstanding his youth, showed here and there a line of grey.

"Who is that?" asked Algernon, speaking to a gentleman near, as the other advanced straight towards the table.

"That is Christian of Anhalt; Christian, the younger; his father stands there behind--what is he about to do?"

"Madam," said Christian of Anhalt, bending low, "I will beseech your Majesty for a glove."

With a look of some surprise Elizabeth drew the glove from her hand, and gave it to him.

Deliberately, but quickly, he fastened it beneath the jewelled clasp which held the feather in his hat; and, pointing to it with a proud smile, exclaimed,--"In court, and camp, and battle-field, I will bear this token of my service to your Majesty, till death lays my head beneath the turf--so help me, God!"

Craven, who had stood near, merely touched the hilt of his sword with his finger, and said, "Madam, this is yours, and with it my whole heart."

"And ours, and ours, and ours," cried a number of voices round, in every tone of enthusiasm.

Elizabeth spread forth her hands, as if overcome by the burst of energetic love which her words had called forth; and then, pressing her fingers on her eyes for a moment, remained silent. The next instant she raised her head, showing the traces of tears.

"Thanks, thanks!" she cried; "I now am well assured. Yet will I not spare one noble cavalier, who has a gallant heart to fight for a lady's service; for they can wield swords in case of need; and we shall have to think of marching armies and rude shocks of war, where men are in their place. From these, and worse than these, if need may be, I will not shrink myself; but, by my husband's side, will encounter weal or woe until the last. Ladies, however, I will dispense with, as much as possible; for I have no right to take them from their softer duties, to share those tasks fate has allotted me. The Countess of Löwenstein has her husband's good leave to follow him to

war, as war will be perchance, and my sweet friend Amelia of Solms follows me for my love. Though my train will thus be small, yet, with such princely nobles round me, I shall want no kind tendance; and, as friends and brothers, in them will I put my trust, in them my highest hope. On Saturday next, our departure will take place. I beseech all, who can prepare in time, to be ready then, and all others to follow. Methinks, I am very nearly sure of all my husband's countrymen. I see several of my own present. One has at once promised me his aid. What say the others?--Will you not go, my lord?" and she fixed her eyes directly upon Algernon Grey; "will you not support Elizabeth Stuart, with a still young, but often tried sword? Will you not follow her, where great deeds are to be done?"

"I say, like my friend Craven, madam," answered Algernon Grey, lightly touching the hilt of his weapon; "this is your Majesty's, and with it my whole heart. I go with you, of course; for it shall never be said that honour called me, and I refused to follow."

"And you, sir?" continued Elizabeth, turning to Lovet; "we know your reputation; you are a knight, brave, skilful, though fanciful, we have heard. What says your fancy to our expedition?"

"Why, may it please your Majesty," answered Lovet, with a smile, "my fancy, like a young and feeble child, is in leading-strings to my noble cousin here. We have a compact that will not let us separate, like a leash between two greyhounds. Henceforth, the noose of the leash is in your hands. You may slip us at any prey you will; and I warrant that we dash forward as far, or farther, than the rest. I could have wished a few things altered, it is true; when, methinks, the state of Bohemia, and your Majesty's prospects, would be both much improved."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Elizabeth; "what may they be?"

"Why, first, and as the principal,--for the others are not worth naming,--Lovet answered, "more women in your Majesty's court. Depend upon it, bright eyes are great inducements to great deeds--a soft sort of whetstones for sharp swords, but yet they are so; and, besides, you do not consider the unanimity which a number of ladies give to any counsels."

"Methinks, you are jesting," answered the Princess; "at all events, slanderous men have said that ladies bring rather discord than unanimity."

"Discord amongst themselves," said Lovet; "but, if there be enough of them, unanimity amongst men. It all depends upon the numbers. With only two in your whole court, and some five or six hundred gentlemen, all in love with them together, as in duty we are bound to be, the wind of our sighs will toss about your banners in a strange fashion, even if we do not turn our swords against each other's throats, in order to reduce our numbers to the number of the fair. I do beseech your Highness, supply us somewhat more bountifully with objects of adoration. I frankly confess I am an idolater, and must have my share of gods and goddesses."

"Well, well," replied Elizabeth, "that is a fault that may be amended. Is there aught else you would cavil at, Sir William?"

"Nought, madam," answered the Englishman, "unless it be that I do believe you will have so many gallant hearts all armed in your defence, that the task will be too easy, and each man's mite of honour not worth the having."

"There is a quality in glory," replied the English Princess, "that expands it to embrace all who truly seek it. It is the heart and will to do great deeds that truly merit honour. It were a poor and pitiful thing, indeed, if it could fall down at opportunity. The world may praise the fortunate man; even princes may raise, and courts may applaud; but true honour is the diamond which, though only admired when brought forth and cut, is of as high value even in the dark mine as on an emperor's crown. Fortunate or unfortunate, with opportunity or none, the man who, with a brave heart, arms himself in this our righteous cause, shall still have glory for his meed; and times to come, when his name is written, be it in tale or history, or the mere record of the family-book, shall add, as a mark of ever-living honour, 'He was one of those who drew the sword for Frederic of Bohemia, and Elizabeth, his queen; he was one of those who fought for a nation's freedom from oppression; he was one of those who aided to establish right against wrong, and set men's hearts and consciences at liberty.'"

Elizabeth paused, with the marks of strong and enthusiastic emotions visible upon her countenance, and a murmur of applause ran through the assembled nobles, while one turned to the other; and, though perhaps each might use a different mode of expression, there can be little or no doubt that but one sentiment found utterance,--"Who would not fight for such a being as that?"

After a brief silence, the Electress resumed:--"A thousand thanks, noble gentlemen, to all of you. Had there been a doubt or misgiving in my heart, your words would have removed it; and now I will beseech you, as you go hence, speak once more with my noble husband, and give him, or rather his master of the horse, your names, and the number of followers you will bring with you: not that we may count our strength, for we have no apprehensions, but that lodging and provision for our train may be fully provided by the way: Farewell! And once more thanks! deep, heartfelt thanks!" Thus saying, she rose and retired through the door behind her, followed by her ladies.

Slowly, and conversing as they went, the gentlemen there assembled returned to the hall, where they had left the Elector and his court; and each, passing before him, spoke to him a moment in turn. When at length Algernon Grey approached, the Elector addressed him with a smile, as if quite sure that his purpose had been changed.

"Well, sir," he said, "are you still determined to bid us farewell?"

"For a brief space, your Highness," replied Algernon Grey. "I understand you do not take your departure till Saturday next."

"Not till Saturday week next," said the Elector; "but I hope then you will bear me company; for my fair wife, who reckons much upon her eloquence, counted fully on winning you to our cause."

"I will go with your Majesty," replied Algernon Grey; "and will but take my leave for a short time, in order that I may make preparation for serving you more effectually. I have with me but a few servants now; but I think, ere long, I may be enabled to swell your force with a small troop of followers not inexperienced in the trade of war. Some have served with me in this Venetian business; and though they returned to England, when there was no longer employment for their swords, yet they will gladly join me again in such a cause as this."

"But if you go back to your own land, you can never be here in time," said the Elector. "Remember, there is but ten days."

"England will not see me for many a year, my lord," answered Algernon Grey; "but I can make my arrangements better elsewhere than here. I will be ready to accompany your Majesty on the day named. My followers can join me at Prague; and though you may not see me till the very day, do not doubt of my coming, I beseech you."

"I will not," said the Elector, earnestly; "I will not. When such a man has given his word, it is better than the bond of other people. How many men, think you, will you have with you? We will have food and lodging ready for them all."

"Not so, your Majesty," replied Algernon Grey; "I defray my own followers, wherever I be. Lodging, indeed, it may be necessary to find; for the peasantry of the country--ay, and the citizens of the town, have a grand objection, it would seem, to receive strangers in their houses, especially if they be soldiers; and therefore, in this, perhaps, your Majesty's officers must interfere, otherwise it may be difficult to find quarters at once. The number, however, will be about from forty to fifty. Their arms, their clothing, and their food, must be my affair; the rest your Majesty shall provide."

"Leaving little but thanks to furnish," answered Frederic. "However, be it as you will, my noble friend; I am neither poor enough, nor wealthy enough, to take so generous an offer amiss. Farewell for the present; and if you should want aid in any case, two words to our chancellor will be enough to bring it."

CHAPTER IX.

The next ten days in the world's history are like those minutes of the night, where the hour strikes just as the eyes are closed to sleep, and a period passes by unnoted, except by those who dream. There are many such pauses in all annals, where no event marks the passing time on the recording page; and yet how full of interest to many are these unstoried lapses in the march of time. How many gay scenes, how many sad ones, how much of comedy, how much of tragedy, have been enacted in the days not chronicled? How many events have taken place in narrow domestic circles, which, spreading wider in their influences, like the ripples round a stone cast into a clear lake, have carried, almost imperceptibly, the floating fragments of great things to the shore of fate?

I have said that these ten days passed over unnoted, except by those who dream; but one of those was Algernon Grey, who, at the small town of Mannheim, passed the intervening space between his leave-taking of the king of Bohemia, and his return to Heidelberg, busied, to say the truth, more with deep thoughts than important arrangements. His letters were soon written, his courier soon despatched, and all those measures taken which were necessary to call a lordly following to accompany him on his expedition, and to insure rapid supplies of money to meet even more than his own probable expenses. The rest of his time was given up to meditation; for he had left Lovet at Heidelberg, agreeing at once that the short distance which separated them could be considered no infringement of the engagement into which they had entered.

Close rooms in narrow inns have neither a very wholesome nor a very pleasant character. Such as the small fortress, that Mannheim was in those days, could alone afford, offered no great inducement to remain within doors; and the greater part of Algernon's time was spent in wandering by the glistening waters of the Rhine; and, while the current hurried rapidly by, in drawing images of life and human fate from the bright ripples, as they danced and fled beneath his eye. However those images might arise, the train still led him on to the place which he had lately left, and to one fair dreamlike form which rose before him as a remembered vision of delight. All that had taken place immediately before that hour, all the joys and sorrows he had known, would have been but as phantasms, had not still enduring and immortal passion stamped the whole with the mark of reality, and told him that the bitterness was true, and only the dream of happiness that was false.

Few scenes could have been worse chosen to chase such sombre thoughts, to wake him from those dreams of the heart which he believed he had indulged too long. The merry crowd, the gay, enlivening multitude, the ever shifting scenes of busy life might have led on thought after thought to occupy each hour, and banish vain regrets. The grander scenes of nature, the towering mountain, the deep valley, the profound, dark lake, the tempest and the storm, the forest, with its solemn glades and innumerable trees, might well have possessed him, even though it were at first but in part, with other images, and weaned him, if I may so call it, from the engrossing topic which now mastered all his mind. But that calm, grand river, flowing on in its meditative majesty, with sunshine and brightness on its peaceful waters, and none to break, even for a moment, the monotony of solitude, seemed to counsel thoughts of peace, and joy, and love, and spread, like a charm, over the young wanderer the powerful, passionate calmness in which it itself flows on. Agnes Herbert, she whom he loved beyond all power of forgetfulness, was ever present to his heart and mind. He thought of her in her sparkling beauty, as he at first beheld her, in scenes of revelry and joy: he thought of her in agony and helplessness, as he had seen her in the whirling waters of the dark Neckar: he thought of her in calm serenity and high-minded meditation, as they had wandered together over the moonlight terraces, amidst gardens, and woods, and flowers. And he loved her, oh, how he loved her! How his heart yearned, how his bosom panted to return and press her in his arms; but that a dark and irrevocable barrier stood between, and mocked the eager longing of his love.

The common things of life seemed nothing to him; the ordinary events of the day, the meal-time and the sleeping hour, scarcely broke the lapse of the long, only dream. It was ever, ever Agnes, that was present; and when his eyes, worn down by weariness, were closed to waking things, she came upon the wings of the night, and visited his spirit in his sleep. He felt--he could not but feel--that to his peace, at least, her presence was less dangerous than her absence.

Thus passed day after day, till the last of his sojourn at Mannheim came; and then, to his surprise, by a boat towed up the Rhine, some eight or ten of his old followers, whom he expected not for weeks, presented themselves at the landing-place. His messenger had proved speedy and intelligent; and all those whom he had found in London, he had urged to hurry into Germany without delay.

The activity of preparation which followed, gave some relief to their young lord's mind; and on the same night he set out to return to Heidelberg, at which place he arrived some two hours after dark, taking his way direct to the inn where he had formerly lodged, and where he had left his cousin.

The town, as he passed through, showed a gay and animated scene; for whatever portion of monotony had existed therein, while the streets presented nothing but their usual population of citizens and students, was now removed by the appearance of numerous parties of military retainers, whose arms here and there caught the light, as they passed by the unclosed windows, from which the beams of taper or lamp were streaming forth. All those inventions which give to our streets of the present times, a light little less powerful than that of day, were then unknown. No gas displayed the face of house after house in long perspective; no lamp at every corner of the street showed the wanderer his way; no lantern, even, swung across with awkward chains, afforded a dim light to horseman or driver, as he paced slowly along in the midst of the tall and narrow streets. But, nevertheless, every here and there a faint beam, straying through the dull small pane of greenish glass in some still uncurtained casement, fell upon the gay, laced cloak, or brilliant cuirass, which appeared for an instant in the midst of some military party, and was then lost again the moment after, bequeathing the light to the wearer's successor in the ranks.

Round the door of the Golden Stag a great number of persons of different classes were assembled; and some of them seemed to be engaged in the pleasant occupation of wrangling with the host, or his servants, in regard to accommodation for the night. No vain and ridiculous attempt had been made at that time to regulate the ordinary dealings of one man with another, by the incessant intervention of the police, which at all times aggravates the confusion which men pretend it is established to diminish. The interests of each individual were left to adjust themselves with those of others by the natural course, with this safeguard, that justice was always to be obtained promptly when injustice or wrong was committed; but there was no endeavour to make men walk in a straight line, if they liked a crooked one, provided that crooked line did not trespass upon the comfort or rights of any one else. A few disputes might, and did occur, as was the case at the door of the Golden Stag; but they very soon came to an end; for, knowing that the innkeeper was as much the lord of his own inn as the baron of his own castle, men satisfied themselves with grumbling, when they were told there was no room for them, and

sought another lodging with the more haste, because accommodation seemed to be scarce.

As soon as the worthy host perceived Algernon Grey, however, he and his drawers bowed down to the ground. The young gentleman was assured that his old apartments, according to his orders, were kept quite ready for him; and, although his entertainer viewed the numbers of his swollen train with some degree of apprehension, yet great care was taken to say nothing before the crowd, which could give any disappointed gentleman cause to suppose that such a party was received without previous notice of its numbers.

When the horses had been delivered over to the care of hostlers and horse-boys, under the superintendence of the young Englishman's servants, and Algernon Grey and his host were ascending towards the rooms above, then poured forth the difficulties. Where he was to put the train; how he was to accommodate them; what room he could find for so many; where he was to get beds even of an inferior description, were mighty puzzling questions for the worthy landlord, with his house quite full. Nevertheless, all was at length arranged. The ante-chamber was filled with truckle-beds and mattresses on the floor; the room by the side of Algernon's own bed-room received five of his companions; and two more obtained lodging in the rooms previously appropriated to his servants.

This being all arranged, he descended to the public hall, where Lovet, he was informed, was profoundly engaged with his supper. He found him surrounded by half a dozen German gentlemen, with whom he had made acquaintance, eking out very good French, of which they could understand a part, with very bad German, of which they understood not quite so much. They comprehended, however, that he was laughing at everything and everybody--himself amongst the rest--and, smoothing their beards, and curling up their moustaches, they seemed to derive a considerable portion of grave amusement from his merriment, which, to say the truth, directed several shafts among themselves, although they were utterly insensible of the point.

"Ah, Algernon!" exclaimed Lovet, starting up and laying down his knife; "I thought you were as treacherous as a Chloe, and had vanished from my sight with some swan of the Rhine. Welcome back to Heidelberg; but have you heard the news?"

"No," answered Algernon Grey; "are there any changes?"

"No," answered Lovet, "none that I have heard of. The Elector and his party, numbering, with ourselves, some six hundred horse, set out to-morrow a quarter of an hour after daybreak. The Electress follows somewhat later with a body of chosen cavaliers to guard and accompany her. All the world is so full of enthusiasm, that if any man were to say 'Come with me and conquer Turkey, let us sack Hungary, or pillage Russia,' they would all go without asking whether the way lay either north or south. Good faith! I am as enthusiastic as the rest; and, like one of a flock of sheep in a dark night, I am all agog to jostle shoulders with my fat companions on whatsoever road the great bell-wether leads."

"And what road is that to be?" asked Algernon Grey.

"Heaven only knows!" exclaimed Lovet, sitting down to the table again; "I have asked no questions. All I know is, that we make straight for a place with an inconceivable name, something like Waldsaxon, a town in the upper Palatinate. I sent on all your spare horses, as they arrived, together with three or four I had purchased for myself, telling the grooms to find the road the best way they could, and so they are probably now in the heart of Austria."

"Nonsense, nonsense, Lovet," cried his cousin; "where have the men gone to? If we are to make a rapid march, as doubtless will be the case, we must have the means of remounting; and a mistake would be no jest."

"Assuredly not," answered Lovet; "and, as I have scarcely time to finish my supper, before soft devotion calls me hence, sit down and take some food, and I will tell you, most noble cousin--- Here, bring platters and knives, fellows; more wine, more meat, more everything Well, cousin mine, looking on a fair picture of the country, I sent the men on half way to a place called Altdorf, bidding them there wait for our coming, and take especial care to get themselves dead-drunk, if it were possible, for the three consecutive days after their arrival. You will mark the policy, wise Algernon; for, as a man must get drunk sometimes, and always will get drunk in his master's absence, it was much better that they should do it by command than in disobedience; and, fixing on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday for the operation, I left them Friday for lassitude, and Saturday for refreshment; so that, by the time we arrive, they will be as brisk as larks, and the horses, if they have got drunk, likewise.--This partridge, stewed with sour cabbage, is the only excellent thing I have found in Germany--with one exception, cousin Algernon, with one exception. I beseech you, take a wing thereof; for I would fain share with you as far as possible; and of the other good, which fortune sends me, I cannot even spare a sigh--much less a merry-thought.--What will you have in the way of wine? Here is Burgundy, for which I sent a man express into the heart of France; and here is the juice of the Rhinegau, with some drops from the bishop of Bamberg's cellar, of which he was plundered when last the quarrelsome men of this country fought about they knew not what."

Algernon Grey sat down, and, after musing for a minute or two, joined his companion in his meal. The conversation went on in the same tone in which it had begun: Lovet evading, under

cover of his habitual jesting replies, any direct answer to unpleasant questions. Upon some points, however, Algernon Grey pressed him hard, asking if the Electress had made any change in her arrangements; and, when he said, laughing, "I am not one of her counsel, cousin mine," pursuing the inquiry by demanding, "Has she made any that you know of, William?"

"Oh, a hundred," answered Lovet; "she goes in a carriage instead of on horseback, they tell me: her gown is to be green instead of pink--but, good faith! I must away. I shall see you, doubtless, ere you go to sleep, though strong repose to-night will be needful; for we shall have busy days before us; and, if the devil has not grown old and lazy, there is work ready carved out to occupy every minute of the next two years. What a happy thing it is, Algernon, that there is a devil; were it not for him the waters of the world would stagnate and get all over duck-weed, like a standing pool. Nay, do not look grave, grim cousin! Adieu! adieu!" and away he went, leaving Algernon Grey to make his arrangements for the following morning as best he could.

Habituated, however, as the young Englishman had been from his very boyhood to command and direct, no great difficulties attended his course. He found that the principal court of the castle was appointed for the assembling of all gentlemen of noble birth, who were to accompany the Elector towards Prague; and that all who brought military retainers to his aid were to direct their followers to meet in the market-place, and to join the royal party in order, as it descended from the palace. All his commands were soon given. Three of his servants were, by this time, well acquainted with the town of Heidelberg. Everything was prepared over night; and, after waiting for the return of his cousin till the clock had struck eleven, Algernon Grey retired to rest.

He had ordered himself to be called at half-past five on the following morning; but, somewhat before that hour, picking his way through the beds in the ante-chamber, Lovet knocked hard at his door, shouting, "Up, Algernon, up! The people are swarming to the castle like bees to a hive. Let us go with them, or we may get stung;" and away he went again to finish his own preparations. In about three quarters of an hour more, the two cousins were riding up the hill, followed only by the servants necessary to hold their horses; and, passing a number of gentlemen not so well mounted as themselves, they reached the gates, where their names were demanded and compared with a list in the porter's hands. On giving those which they had assumed, instant admission was afforded to the two gentlemen themselves; their servants and horses being left with a crowd of others without. In the court some forty or fifty persons were found assembled; and, assuredly, no want of enthusiastic hope appeared amongst them. All were cheerful, all were full of busy activity; each man encouraged his neighbour, each man strove to excite in others the same glad expectations that were sporting wildly in his own bosom.

Lovet seemed, during his cousin's absence, to have made a very general acquaintance amongst the principal personages of the electoral court. Hardly a face presented itself in the grey light of the early morning, of which he did not seem to have some knowledge; and to every third or fourth man he spoke, or gave some sign of recognition. He appeared indeed to have become extremely popular; his jests, whether delivered in exceedingly bad German, or good French, were laughed at and enjoyed; and, as the two cousins passed on, it was evident, as so frequently occurs in life, that the worthy and the high-minded was regarded with cold doubt; while the one certainly the least estimable was met with pleasure and regard. It must not be denied that Algernon Grey in some degree felt this difference: not very painfully, it is true; but still he thought, "This is, in some degree, my own fault. I have suffered circumstances with which the world has nothing to do to affect my demeanour to the world,--I must change this and be myself again. The time was when I could be as gay as Lovet, though in a different way. I will see whether those days cannot return."

As he thus thought, he saw the powerful form of the Baron of Oberntraut crossing the courtyard towards them; and, instantly advancing to meet him, he grasped him warmly by the hand.

"Ah, my good friend," said the young Englishman, "I rejoice to see you well enough to ride with us."

But Oberntraut shook his head: "Alas!" he said, "I am not to be one of the party. It is judged dangerous for me to undertake so long a journey; and, if I am not summoned to Bohemia, it would seem the intention of my Prince to confer upon me a charge here, honourable but somewhat inactive, I fear; and yet, when I consider what is likely, what dark clouds are gathering in the horizon, and what the policy, though not the honour, of the Catholic league may induce them to do, I think I may find work for myself yet. Nevertheless I envy you, who are going at once to busy scenes, and trust I shall be permitted to follow soon; but still, before you set out, let me make you known to one or two of those you may most esteem amongst your companions. Follow me for a moment; there stands Christian of Anhalt, and with him one or two others of the best."

The young baron's tone had, as the reader may have perceived, undergone a complete change. The quick and fiery spirit, the daring and energetic character, remained unaltered, as the whole of the rest of his life proved; but the first check he had received in life had worked most beneficially in subduing the arrogance which had been generated by long-continued success and a sense of superiority to most of those around him. With a generous heart and an intelligent mind, he felt, even towards Algernon Grey himself, very different sensations from those which any ordinary man would have experienced. He entertained something like a sense of gratitude towards him for the better sensations which he had been the means of producing; and he felt a

noble anxiety to show, that so far from regarding the young Englishman's conduct with any lingering rancour, he looked upon it rather with admiration and respect.

Following him across the court-yard, Algernon was soon introduced to several of the most distinguished of the friends of the young king of Bohemia; but, while speaking with the elder prince of Anhalt, a voice from the steps summoned two or three of the principal noblemen, by name, to the presence of the Elector; and, in a few minutes after, the same tongue called upon Master Algernon Grey, and several other foreign gentlemen, to present themselves for a moment.

Conversing with his friend Craven, Algernon was conducted to one of the great halls in the building of Otho Henry, where, in the midst of much bustle and some confusion, he found Frederic the Fifth booted and spurred for his departure, with a number of gentlemen standing round, and the Electress-Mother, with one or two ladies of the court, at a little distance. Elizabeth of England was not present; and over the group around Louisa Juliana, the young Englishman's eye roamed in vain, seeking the form of Agnes Herbert. At that parting moment his heart longed for a few words more, for one last sight of that fair face, for the sound, if but for an instant, of that melodious voice.

As he approached, Frederic was turning as if to speak with his mother, but, his eye lighting upon Lord Craven and the rest, he paused to speak with them, separately, for a moment or two. His principal object in calling them to his presence seemed but to conciliate regard by an act of courtesy; and to each he had something kind and graceful to say, with that winning manner which is always powerful to obtain regard, but not always to command obedience.

"Ah, my unknown friend," he said, when Algernon's turn came, "I was sure you would not fail me; and, when I heard of your arrival last night, it gave me great pleasure, but no surprise. What men can you count upon from England?"

"I have only fifteen with me at present, sir," answered Algernon Grey; "but I think I can promise that the number in Prague, ere a month, will be fifty; and those not only men fit to bear arms, but to train others should need be; for they have been taught in a good school, and practised in some sharp encounters."

"Thanks, thanks," replied the king of Bohemia; "that is a most serviceable addition to our force--wait and we will go down with you. You will ride near us, that we may have some conversation with you as we go."

He then turned to his mother, and, taking her in his arms, embraced her with every mark of strong affection. "Farewell, my dearest mother!" he said, while the tears rose in his eyes: "God protect you and me! Under Him, it is to you I look for the safety of this fair land I am leaving."

The Electress did not reply, but held her son warmly to her heart, and then, wringing his hand hard, pressed her overflowing eyes upon his shoulder. After a few moments, Frederic gently disengaged himself and took a step away--turned for another embrace--and then, bursting from her, strode across the hall, followed by the crowd of gentlemen around.

The Electress gazed after him with a sad and solemn look, then clasped her hands without lifting her bended head, and exclaimed, "There goes the Palatinate into Bohemia."

The Elector paused not to listen, for he felt his emotions overpowering him; and, doubtless, the sound of many feet drowned the words ere they reached his ears. As soon as he appeared in the court, a shout, not like an English cheer, but sufficiently expressive of gratulation, welcomed his approach; and a number of voices exclaimed, "Long live Frederic, King of Bohemia."

The Elector raised his plumed hat and bowed, exclaiming the next moment,--"To horse, gentlemen, to horse! There are too many sweet ties and dear memories here. We must break away;" and, crossing the court on foot, he passed for the last time through the deep archway of his hereditary castle, followed by the crowd of noble and enthusiastic gentlemen who had assembled to accompany him. Beyond the gate tower he sprang upon the back of a magnificent horse, which two grooms, running in haste, led up to the farther side of the drawbridge.

His followers hurried to mount; and, in a moment after, the cavalcade was descending the hill. The fresh and fiery chargers were eager to dash on; some reared and plunged; some pulled hard at the rein; but, strange to say, the horse of the young King, though unquestionably the finest and most powerful animal of the whole group, full of life, vigour, and activity, stumbled at the first step and well nigh fell. Never, even in the augury-loving days of the old Romans, was there a time when omens of any kind were more eagerly watched, or produced a deeper impression on the minds of men; and it was easy to see a grave and distressed look spread over the countenances of many of the young monarch's followers, as they marked this untoward accident.

"That is unfortunate," said the younger Christian of Anhalt, who was riding near Algernon Grey.

"Nay, rather fortunate that the horse did not fall," replied the Englishman; "but do you really put any faith in such indications?"

"Not I," answered the Prince; "but omens often make misfortunes, though they don't predict

them. The courage of half a score amongst us is already cooled by that horse's stumble; and I have heard of a battle lost by the first look of a comet's tail. Heaven send us no more such auguries, or we shall reach Prague with cold hearts."

"Mine is cold enough already," answered Algernon Grey, who had determined, during the expedition before him, to throw away the reserve which had so long overshadowed him, and cultivate, by frankness, the regard of those who were to be his companions for many months; "mine is cold enough already, though, Heaven knows, not cold in the cause of your noble Prince."

"Ay, and what has chilled it?" asked Christian of Anhalt.

"Many things," answered Algernon Grey, with a faint smile; "some treachery, some disappointment, some burdensome bonds, formed by good, misjudging friends, which can neither be broken nor shaken off."

"A bad case," answered Christian of Anhalt; "but, methinks, were I you, I would never suffer things that cannot be mended to weigh down my light free heart, but would rather throw them back upon fate's hands, and be merry in spite of fortune."

"A good philosophy," answered Algernon Grey; "and I am resolved to try it; but yet you may one day find it difficult to practise what you teach."

"Nay, not a whit," replied his companion. "We may learn philosophy even from the brute beasts; they sigh not over the morrow or the yesterday. It is only because we make curses of powers that were given for blessings, and use our memory and our foresight, not for warning and precaution, but for regret and despair."

"Excellent good," cried Lovet, who was riding but a step behind. "The same doctrine I have been preaching to him for the last two months! Me he would never listen to; now he will be all docility; for a prophet is no prophet in his own country; and a cousin's counsels like the ale of the servant's hall, always taste pricked to the master of the house."

"There is some difference between your sage advice, William, and our noble comrade's," answered Algernon Grey.

"Not a bit," cried Lovet. "Enjoy the present; forget the past; let the future take care of itself. Such is the cream of the morality of each; and you only think otherwise because a stale pie tastes fresh upon a clean napkin--But here we are coming to the square--On my life, a mighty fine body of men, and in good order, too. There must have been a shrewd head to marshal them."

CHAPTER X.

The morning was fair, but sultry; the pace at which the cavalcade proceeded was, for several miles, very quick; and the exhilarating effect of rapid motion would probably again have raised the spirits of all, had it not been for a certain oppressive feeling in the air, which rendered the application of the spur necessary, even to strong and high-blooded horses, at the end of five miles. Algernon Grey felt the influence of the atmosphere as much as any one. In vain he endeavoured to shake off the gloom which hung over him, to laugh and talk with those around, to give back to Lovet jest for jest; the thoughts which he wished to banish would return and struggle to possess him wholly. We all know we must all have felt the influence of particular states of the air, not alone upon our corporeal frame, but also upon the very energies of the mind; when, without losing in the slightest degree our power over the intellect, we cannot command that finer and more supple element in our complicated nature--whatever it be called--which gives birth to the feelings of the moment. Reason is vain against it; resolution is useless; we may govern the external display, but we cannot avoid the internal sensation; and a lustrous brightness, or a dim cloud, spreads over every subject of contemplation from some hidden source of light and shadow within us. Who can say, "I will be merry to-day?" The man who does so is a fool; for not the brightest gifts of fortune, not the sunshine of all external things, not every effort of a strong determination, not the exercise of wit, wisdom, and philosophy, will enable him to succeed, unless the spirit of cheerfulness be in his own heart. He may say, indeed, "I will be calm;" and many a man has been so, in the midst of intense sufferings--to the eye of the world. Many a man, perhaps, has been so even in his own opinion; but I much doubt whether some one of the many modifications of vanity was not, then, putting a cheat upon him.

With Algernon Grey the effort was vain; he felt depressed, and he struggled against the depression; but the enemy conquered, and, foot by foot, gained ground upon him. First, he gave way so far as to think of Agnes Herbert, to dwell upon the recollection of her beauty and her

excellence. Then he strove to cast his eyes forward into the future, and to think only of the coming events; but what a sad contrast did they present to the images just banished! war, and strife, and the fiery turbulence of ambition, and the low, mean intrigues of courts, and cold pageantry, and idle revelling; in place of beauty, and love, and hope, and sweet domestic peace! It was too painful to rest upon; and his mind turned to her he loved again; but the same bright visions, in which he had indulged for a moment, would not now come back at his bidding. He thought of Agnes, it is true; but at the same time he remembered that he was leaving her for ever; that he was voluntarily casting away the early joy of first love, the only refuge in which his heart could now find peace, the sweetest light that had ever dawned upon existence, all that imagination could have pictured of happiness and contentment. And deep, deep, to his very heart, he felt the sacrifice; and his spirit writhed in the torture which he inflicted on himself.

"Should he really never see her more?" he asked himself; "or should he see her again, but as the wife of another?" There was agony and despair in the very thought; and yet, what could he do? how could he act to prevent it? how could he shut out that terrible but too certain conviction? It was impossible to change his hard fate. It was impossible even to dream that it would be changed; and in the end he gave himself up to dull and heavy despondency.

His feelings had been grave and sad even when he came to Heidelberg. He had believed that he was destined to go through life unloving and unloved, linked to one whose reported conduct was, to say the least, light, whom he only remembered as a proud haughty child; whom he only knew by the evil rumours which had reached him. But since that time a light had arisen on the darkness of such feelings, to go out as suddenly as it had been kindled, and leave the night tenfold more gloomy than before. He had learned to love, but without hope; and what state can be more terrible to a young and passionate heart?

On such things he pondered as they rode along; and they soon absorbed his whole attention. He marked not with any degree of accuracy the road they took; he hardly saw the houses, or the trees, or the mountains as they passed. He marked not the fleeting hours, or the changes of the light and sky. But there were others in the train whose eyes were more busily employed; and amongst them were those of his own servants, who, with less to occupy their thoughts, felt, or seemed to feel, the fatigues of the way and the oppression of the sultry atmosphere far more than their lord.

"It is mighty hot, Tony," said Frill, the page, wiping his brow with a delicate kerchief; "and methinks the folks are riding exceedingly fast, considering the sultriness of the temperature, and the capability of their quadrupeds."

"Ay, goodluck, it is hot," answered the servant; "but the quadrupeds, as you call them, Master Frill, can bear it quite as well as the two-legged beasts perched upon them. There thou art now thyself, mounted upon the tall roan, with thy red-heeled riding boots sticking out from under thy cloak, like a small Cornish crow upon the back of a big sheep; and losing much moisture from thy brow and temples, while the good beast has hardly turned a hair. Now, I will warrant thee, Frill, thou art thinking in a miserly spirit of the world of essences and perfumed soap it will cost to cleanse thee of all this dust; but I will console thee, Frill; I will relieve thy mind. Thy conscience shall be spared the small sin of pilfering odours out of our lord's saddle-bags."

"I have no need to pilfer, Tony," answered the boy; "I leave that to you. I have got all I want in my own saddle-bags, and ask nothing but a little fair water."

"That thou shalt have in abundance, Frill," replied his companion; "and sooner, perchance, than thou thinkest; for, if yon great leaden cloud lie not, thou shalt have water enough within an hour as to spare thee all future washing for the day, and make thee forswear such liquids for a month to come."

"It looks marvellous like it," answered Frill, eyeing the heavens with a somewhat rueful look.

"Like it, but not marvellous, friend Frill," answered Tony: "thunderstorms will come in most countries of the world; and rain will fall; and wind will blow; and grass will spring up with its universal evergreen; and pages will say flat things in pleasant tones, and think themselves mighty wise in their estate."

"Do you judge it will thunder, Tony?" asked the youth, in a tone which made the older servant fancy he was somewhat apprehensive.

"Ay, that it will," replied Tony; "it will thunder to your heart's content. I should not wonder if we saw half a dozen of those gay lords struck with the lightning. I have seldom seen so great a bellyful of thunderbolts as that one up there."

"If it do, Tony, there's a good creature, just catch the bridle of my horse; for I doubt if I have strength to hold him. Saw you not how he plunged and passaged just as we were setting out? I wrang my two arms nearly off to keep him in."

"Oh, I will put to a stronger arm in case of need," answered Tony. "I thought your horse and all would have been over into the valley, at which I should have rejoiced with sincere friendship as an honourable and distinguished death for one so young. But here I must take care that you do not die in a by-road, like a pilgrim's donkey, and so I'll stop your beast's capering if he should be

riotous. But mark you, Master Frill, how our friend with the hawk's eyes is plying our lord, his cousin, with sweet talk. Now I will not give the value of a goose's egg for anything that he says; but yet be you certain, good friend Frill, that he says nothing without an object. It would be worth something to know what that object is; for then one could watch his working for it."

"Can he be wishing to get our lord killed," asked Frill, "if he puts him upon such expeditions as these?"

"Not so, master page," answered Tony; "first, because he did not put him upon this expedition. I heard him arguing reasonably enough one day against his going."

"Ay," answered Frill; "but I saw a boy in the streets of Heidelberg driving a large old boar, and when he wanted him to go on, he pulled him back by a string round his hind leg."

"A savoury comparison for our noble master," said Tony; "but yet there may be some truth in it;" and, scratching his head with one finger thrust under his broad hat, he meditated for a moment or two. "No, no," he continued at length, "he could gain nothing by it; that's not his object. He is but his cousin by the side of the woman. The title dies with our lord, if he has no children; and the estates go to the Howards. It would be worse for him, rather than better, if he died; for I know he borrows money from time to time. It can't be that, Master Frill."

"I'll tell you what, Tony," replied the boy, "I think you might get something from old Paul Watson, who joined us with the rest at Mannheim. He was bred up in the Lady Catherine's household, and Sir William is always down there, I hear."

"Get something from Paul Watson!" cried Tony. "Get juice out of a stone! Why, I do not believe he has ten words to give to any man; but I'll try, notwithstanding. He knows a good deal, I dare say, if he would but speak; for these silent fellows use their eyes, if not their tongues.--Let us ride up to him and see what he will say. On my life, I wish the storm would come down; for this heat is unbearable."

Thus saying, he pushed on his horse at the side of the cavalcade, till he reached the spot where a well-equipped body of armed men was moving along in the Elector's train. The difference of their accoutrements and the figures of their horses, combining great bone and strength with agility, marked them out for English soldiers; and, drawing in his rein by the side of a man, some fifty years of age, with grey hair and moustache, Tony commenced a conversation, saying, "Well, Paul, I have not seen you for more than nine months; how has it gone with you since?"

"Well," answered the man, scarcely looking round.

"And what have you been about ever since?" asked Tony.

"Many things," replied Paul Watson.

"You have been down at the Lady Catherine's, I hear," continued Tony, "in your old haunts, Master Watson. I dare say you enjoyed yourself mightily."

"Yes," answered his companion.

"Was Sir William down there then?" continued Tony, with a careless manner.

Paul Watson nodded his head.

"I wonder what is his object in going about with our lord here, after letting him wander so many years by himself," said Tony, musingly.

"Don't know," replied Paul Watson.

"What was he about so long down there?" was Tony's next question; and to this he got the only satisfactory answer he had yet received.

"Making love to the lady," answered his companion, with a grin and a sort of gasp, as if the number of words, though they would be spoken, half choked him in the utterance.

"Oh, ho!" cried Tony, his eyes lighting up with intelligence; but he had no opportunity of inquiring farther; for one of the Elector's officers, riding along the line, motioned him to fall back, saying, "Keep the order, keep the order!"

Tony obeyed; for although he might have liked to inquire farther, yet the man's few words gave him the key to many a secret. Frill, who, notwithstanding a certain portion of page-like affectation, was a shrewd, clever youth, had remained in his place, thinking it much better that Tony should go on alone, trusting to obtain from him any information he might acquire by one means or another, after his return.

"I would not come with you, Tony," he said; "for if Paul will but speak little before one, he will speak nothing before two. What has he told you?"

"Little enough," answered Tony; "but now take care of your beast, Master Frill; for here comes down the storm."

A large heavy drop or two fell, as he spoke, spotting the dust upon their horses' coats; and, the next instant, a broad flash of lightning shot across the whole sky, changing the lurid mass of cloud, which by this time had crept up over the zenith, into one wide expanse of flame. At first the thunder followed slowly after the flash, leaving a long interval between; but, ere many minutes were over, the roar was almost incessant. The sky scarcely for an instant was free from lightning; the crash of the thunder, echoed from mountains to woods, was really terrific; and that storm, which accompanied Frederic on his way to claim the crown of Bohemia, is recorded by all annalists as the most tremendous that ever visited the Palatinate. To describe it is impossible; but we may comprehend what was its intensity, when we learn that men accustomed to every kind of danger felt overawed by the strange and terrible phenomena they witnessed; and, to use the words of the chronicler, "thought that the end of the world had come." The fierce flame of the lightning half blinded both horses and men; the fierce livid streaks of fire shot incessantly down from the sky; and, darting amidst the forests, rent many of the strongest trees to atoms. Balls of flame passed hissing through the air, and exploded with a sound like the discharge of large ordnance; while the continued roll of the thunder deafened the ear; and every now and then a crash, as if mighty rocks had been cast down into an echoing vault, broke through the less intense sounds and seemed to shake the very earth. The rain, too, came down in torrents, now and then mingled with hail; but, far from mitigating the fury of the storm, it seemed only to aggravate its rage.

At first the horses plunged, and darted hither and thither, and a scene of indescribable confusion took place in the cavalcade; but, after a time, they seemed cowed into tranquillity, and, with drooping heads and hanging ears, plodded on, while torrents of rain streamed off their coats.

For seven hours--from nine till four--the war of elements continued, without the slightest abatement; and then another hour was passed, with the thunder roaring at a greater distance, and the lightning streaming more faintly, after which succeeded dull heavy rain. Still, throughout the whole, the young King of Bohemia pursued his way; spurring on, wherever it was possible, as fast as the weary and discouraged horses would go. Once only he paused, in a small town, to take some refreshment and rest; but in three-quarters of an hour he was on the way again, and drew not a rein till just as night was falling, and a faint streak of yellow light was seen to the westward under the dull canopy of cloud. Just at that moment, some towers and steeples were seen, at the distance of about two miles; and Christian of Anhalt, pointing on as he rode by Algernon Grey, exclaimed, "Thank God! there is our resting-place. This has, indeed, all been very unfortunate."

"It has, truly," answered the young Englishman; "and the more so, if you have formed a right judgment of the superstitious feelings of your countrymen."

"It is of that, alone, I speak," answered the Prince. "Who minds a heavy shower of rain, or a thunder-storm, as far as he is personally concerned? But yet half of the people here are already drawing evil prognostications from a stumbling horse and the usual result of a month of hot weather. When the priests and the ladies arrive, too, it will be worse; for, if men are too much given to superstition, women and clergymen know no end of it--always excepting our fair Queen, whose own high soul is her omen of success. I wonder where our quarters are marked out. You are in the same inn with me, I hear. My father lodges with the King, in the town-house. Where they are to put us all, in this small place, I know not--especially after the Queen and the rest have arrived."

"Does she come hither to-night?" asked Algernon Grey, in some surprise.

"Yes; but it will be late," replied his companion. "She comes by the other road; it is further round, but less hilly, and relays of horses are prepared for her. Here! Herr von Alfeld," he continued, addressing a gentleman who was riding by, "know you where my quarters lie?"

"One of the inns in the market-place," replied the officer to whom he spoke, "is marked for you, the Lord Craven, and two other English gentlemen, with your trains. I will tell you the name;" and he looked at a paper in his hand, but the light was too faint to enable him to see; and, after a moment's thought, he said, "It is the Star, excellent sir--I remember now; it is the Star, on the left hand of the market."

He then rode on; and in a few minutes began the scene of hurry and confusion inevitably produced by the entrance of a large and long expected party into a small town, notwithstanding every precautionary measure to provide for their accommodation. The rain had just ceased; all the inhabitants were at their doors or windows; the innumerable signs which hung from house to house across the narrow streets--for the most part crowned with garlands--shook showers of large drops upon all who passed below; boys and girls ran beside the horses, shouting and screaming; horse-boys and drawers rushed out of inns and taverns; torches and lanterns flashed here and there; and the young king's harbingers, who had been sent on the preceding day, coming forth to conduct the different parties to the quarters prepared for them, aided to banish everything like order from the cavalcade. Frederic himself, and the part of the train immediately attached to his person, of course found no difficulty; but all the other gentlemen dispersed, eagerly seeking their lodgings, and calling loudly to their men to follow; while every innkeeper

who had a single chamber unappropriated stove to mislead some of the stragglers into his house, assuring them that there was the place engaged for them.

"Come on, Grey, with me," said Christian of Anhalt, between whom and Algernon had sprung up a feeling of friendship, which went on increasing to the end of their lives. "Call your men together, as they are strangers, and bid them follow close, with your cousin. My people can take care of themselves, as they have good broad German tongues in their heads. I can find my way to this Star, for I have been here before. The market-place is straight on, where the King is going."

Algernon's orders were soon given; Lovet rode up to his side, the servants and his little band of soldiers came close behind, pushing through the crowd with a quiet regularity which excited the admiration of the young Prince of Anhalt, and in a few minutes they were in the midst of the market-place, which was large and commodious considering the smallness of the town. The town-house was directly opposite, and innumerable lights were running along the front from window to window, showing that the Prince was already within; but as Christian of Anhalt was looking around to discover the sign of the Star, a man in a citizen's dress, with a long grey beard, came up to the side of his horse, saying, "This way, Highness. Here are your quarters at my inn."

"What is it called?" asked the Prince. "Is it the Star?"

"No, sir, the Golden Cup," answered the landlord.

"That will not do, then," replied Christian: "ours is the Star. It must be there, Grey, on the right--come on;" and, without waiting for the remonstrances of the host of the Golden Cup, he pushed his horse forward, and soon saw a golden star hanging from the face of a large house covered all over with grotesque paintings in fresco.

"Now, noble lords, now, what is your pleasure?" asked the landlord, who was standing at his door with two serving-boys.

"Meat, drink, lodging, and a fire to dry our wet cloaks," answered Christian of Anhalt, springing from his horse, and walking into the passage, followed by Algernon Grey and Lovet.

"Meat, and drink, and fire, you shall have, noble gentlemen," replied the good man; "but lodging I cannot give, for the whole house is taken by the king's harbingers for--"

"For us," added the young Prince, interrupting him, and entering a hall on the right, from which a cheerful blaze broke forth. "Quick, my good host, set what you can before us, and especially good wine; and send one of your boys to take care of our men without. Here, Grey, let us dry what Scultetus calls the outer man while they bring us something to warm the inner one.--What, in the devil's name, do you stand for, host? Do you want us to use cold iron that you stay gaping there?"

The host ran out alarmed, and, after a moment or two, some of the servants brought in several dishes of smoking viands, with three flasks of wine. But, as the party of travellers sat down, Algernon Grey, marking the scared looks of the attendants, whispered to the Prince, "I think there must be some mistake here. Are you sure that Herr von Alfeld is to be depended upon?"

"By my life, I know not," replied Christian of Anhalt; "but, right or wrong, I sup before I move. Ho! drawer, where is your master? Send him here!"

"He is gone, noble sir, to seek one of the harbingers," replied the lad, in a humble tone: "he thinks there is some mistake."

"There can be no mistake about this stewed hare," cried Lovet, "unless it be a cat disguised, and even then it smells too savoury to be inquired into. Shall I help your Highness?"

"With all my heart," replied Christian of Anhalt: "cat or devil, I will eat it, if it be tender. Out with those corks, knaves! Now, success to our expedition, and long live Frederic, King of Bohemia! This inn is mighty quiet, it must be confessed. I thought to find the hall tenanted by a score. I fear we have got into some reserved chase, and are poaching upon a private larder; but no matter, so that hunger be satisfied and the wet kept out."

With such light talk passed away about half an hour, at the end of which time the landlord reappeared with a tall personage whom the Prince of Anhalt recognised as one of Frederic's attendants; and, saluting him with a gay laugh, he exclaimed, "Well, William of Waldhof, if we are in a wrong nest it is all Alfeld's fault: he told me that the Star was to be our quarters, as my English friend can witness."

"He mistook, noble sir," answered the other: "he should have said the Golden Cup. But it matters not, my prince, for the present. This inn is for the Queen's ladies, who cannot lodge in the town-house; but they are not expected for some hours, so finish your supper, in Heaven's name, and then at your convenience betake yourself to the inn just opposite. I will go and see that all is ready for you, and put your men in possession; for I passed, I think, some forty of them at the door."

"Thunder and devils!" cried Christian of Anhalt, turning to the host, "what left you them at the

doors for?"

"I had no place for them, your Highness," answered the man, in a humble tone; and William of Waldhof stepping in to quiet the prince's anger, the latter sat down again to the table, from which he had started up, and recommenced his meal with a degree of hunger which was not easily satisfied. Wine, and meat, and game disappeared with wonderful celerity; for neither Lovet nor Algernon Grey had tasted anything since they left Heidelberg, and the distance was considerably more than fifty miles: a long journey, in those days of evil roads and tortuous paths. Christian of Anhalt drank deep, and Lovet did not fear to follow his example, for he loved the wine-cup, though, to say the truth, it had little effect upon him. On the young Prince it worked more potently: not that he got drunk; for he could talk and reason sensibly enough; and even his corporeal faculties, which usually give way sooner than the mental in men accustomed to deep potations, were not at all weakened. He crossed the room steadily, to fetch something that he wanted from a small pocket in his cloak; and though he showed, towards the end of the meal, an inclination to fall asleep, yet by no other sign did he betray that he had been drinking. At length, however, as he finished the second bottle of strong old wine which had gone to his own share, he rose, saying, "I must have a nap before I go farther. Any man who is awake, rouse me in an hour. If we all go to the land of dreams together, doubtless some one will come to turn us out when the ladies arrive. So, good night for the present;" and, lying down on a bench at the farther side of the hall, he was soon deep in slumber.

Had Algernon Grey given way to the strong temptation of drowning the memory of many cares in the sparkling juice, which but raises the spirits to depress them more terribly afterwards, he might perhaps have found the same thoughtless repose; but he had avoided the wine, as was his custom; and, after seeing the young Prince sinking to sleep, he turned to Lovet, saying, "We must see for these horses you sent on, William. Doubtless they will be needed early to-morrow. Know you where they are to be found?"

"Not I," answered William Lovet; "how could I tell the names of inns in a place which seems to consist of little else? I bade the German fellow you sent with them to do the best he could for them; and, on my life, I think you had better stay till we get to the other place, and then send out some of the men to hunt. Here is a bottle and a half of wine still to be drunk, and I shall take my share, lest we do not find anything so good where we are going."

"No, no," answered Algernon Grey; "I like to be prepared. You stay and watch our young friend there, drinking the wine meanwhile; and I will go and see what can be done to find the means of mounting us all to-morrow. My charger will not hold out much longer over such roads."

Thus saying, he turned and quitted the inn, leaving his cloak to dry before the great fire. Wandering out into the streets, he had, in about three-quarters of an hour, discovered the small public-house, with its long range of stabling, where his fresh horses had been put up; and, giving what orders he thought necessary, he returned slowly towards the Star. The whole town was still full of bustle; people passing about in all directions, torches and lanterns flitting from house to house; and, as Algernon Grey came forth from the door of the stables, he thought he heard a rolling sound, something like the beat of a distant drum. On approaching the town-house, however, he saw several large heavy carriages drawn up before it, a number of horses, and ten or fifteen servants busily unloading a quantity of luggage. Concluding at once that the Queen had arrived, he hurried into the Star, the passage of which was deserted, and, turning to the right, opened the door of the eating-hall, and went in.

The large room had now only one tenant, and that was a lady, who, standing with her back towards him, gazed into the fire, with her left hand leaning on his own cloak, cast over the tall back of a chair to dry. Algernon Grey's heart beat; for, although being wrapped up in mantles, and with a veil over the head, the lines of the figure were difficult to discern, yet there was something in the graceful attitude into which it had fallen, with the one small foot crossed over the other, and the hand resting so lightly on the chair for support that it seemed scarcely to touch it, which impressed him at once with the certainty of who it was. At the first sound of his step in the room, Agnes turned round; and, with irrepressible joy in his heart and in his face--joy against which reason had no power--her lover sprang forward and took her hand.

There was equal pleasure in the countenance of Agnes Herbert, and she thanked him with bright smiles for coming to see her so soon; so that it was hard for Algernon to explain that he did not know she was to form one in the train of the young Queen; but yet he did it.

"I thought you must have known that long ago," replied the lady. "There was a doubt at one time whether I should accompany her or not; and as my uncle expressed no wish for me to stay, the Electress mother urged me to go, and, of course, I could not refuse."

"It is fated," thought Algernon Grey; "it is fated! What use of struggling against such events? I will do nought that I can regret or be ashamed of, but I will make myself miserable no more by a constant war with my own heart."

He remained with Agnes for more than an hour--for half an hour nearly alone; and, when the Countess of Loewenstein and two other ladies joined them, he still lingered, giving aid in all their arrangements, listening to the details--of which they were full--of the perils and discomforts of the way, and cheering them with gay and lively conversation full of hope and expectation for the

future. Only one of the four ladies there present had ever spoken with him before; but to her his present demeanour and conversation were altogether new and strange; it was different from anything she had seen or heard in him before, but not less pleasing. Her mind required soothing and cheering; it sought to revive hope and kindle expectation, but found within itself no resources to effect such an object; and as with graceful ease and varied powers he painted the coming times in the brightest colours, and showed the future prospect on the fairest side, she listened, half convinced that her uncle's dark apprehensions were vain, and that, with such men as the one before her to aid, direct, and support a noble and a holy cause, success could not fail to follow, and all would end in victory and peace.

At length, it was announced that the rooms above were ready; for, with a somewhat national spirit of delay, but few preparations had been made, under the idea that the Queen would not arrive till midnight; and Algernon Grey threw his cloak over his shoulder to depart, saying, "Rest must be very needful to you all, fair ladies; for it must have been a weary journey to you."

"Far more tiresome to all of us," answered Agnes, "than if we had come on horseback, as we should have done some five or ten years ago. I hate these carriages for travelling; they are well enough in a procession, or to go through a town; but, for a road, I think the old way is best."

"Had we come in the old fashion," said the Countess of Loewenstein, "we should have been melted, like sugar-candy, with all the rain that has fallen."

"Heaven forbid!" cried Algernon Grey, laughing; "for then there would have been a world of sweetness wasted on the high road;" and, seeing them to the foot of the stairs, he retired, leaving no unfavourable impression upon the minds of all.

CHAPTER XI.

I must now, for one brief chapter, quit the course of narrative I have been hitherto pursuing, and, instead of detailing, day by day, the actions and feelings of the personages in whom I have endeavoured to interest the reader, give a short sketch of the events of one whole year, dwelling principally upon the facts of general history; but, in the end, endeavouring to sum up, in a very few words, all those changes which have taken place in the relative position of Algernon Grey and Agnes Herbert.

As is well known to every one acquainted with German history, Frederic, King of Bohemia, pursued his journey on horseback on the following morning to the small town of Altdorf, riding but one horse from Heidelberg to that place;^[3] thence he went to Amberg, and thence again to Waldsachsen, joined on the road by many friends, and met at the latter town, which was then the last of the Upper Palatinate, by the deputies of the States of Bohemia. At Waldsachsen and Amberg some days were passed; but at length, in the middle of October, the young King, with a train almost swelled to the amount of an army, crossed the Bohemian frontier, and entered the town of Egra. From Egra he was conducted in triumphal procession, amidst the shouts and congratulations of the people, the boisterous joy of the rude nobility of the realm, and the wild enthusiasm of the Protestant party, to the gates of the fine old town of Prague. In the immediate vicinity of the city rises a hill, called the Weissenberg, or White-mountain; and beneath it is a splendid promenade, named the Star. At the foot of that mountain, which was destined to be the field where all the bright hopes then entertained were destroyed; and on the beautiful walk of the Star, soon to be drenched with the blood of many who then surrounded him in joy, and health, and high-souled expectation, the train of the young monarch halted, and was met by an immense concourse of the citizens, with the states and magistrates at their head. Two thousand horse escorted Frederic into the town; ambassadors from many other states were present; the nobility of the whole land assembled to do honour to their sovereign; and four hundred of the ancient Hussites, armed, after the fashion of the times of old, with hauberks of chain mail, with lances in hand, and double-handed swords on the back, formed a sort of body-guard, bearing in the midst the famous banner of the unconquerable Ziska, emblazoned with a cup soiled and dusty from the many fields in which it had led on his fierce followers to the slaughter, but raising high hopes of conquest and success by the memory of past victories, and invincible resistance. The air rang with shouts; drums and trumpets sounded around; confidence, resolution, enthusiasm, were in every heart; and thus, in the midst of *lætitiaë publicæ*, as the mincing Camerarius calls it, was Frederic conducted into the capital of the kingdom, over which he was to reign but one short year.

The coronation of the King and the Queen shortly followed; and for a brief period all was joy, and pageantry, and success; but the reverse was speedily coming; the day-dream was quickly to be dispelled; and all the evils that the monarch's mother had foreseen, gathered, like thunder-

clouds, around him.

At first, nothing could equal the popularity both of the King and Queen; her beauty, her grace, her kindness won all hearts; and the population, from high to low, almost worshipped her as she passed. The gentle demeanour of the King, too, conciliated regard. His light and happy spirit shed sunshine round; his dignified air and handsome person concealed the weakness of a character irresolute, though personally brave; and his happy language and easy eloquence covered, as is so frequently the case, the want of more important powers, judgment, and foresight, and discretion. Gradually, however, as events of great delicacy called for just and immediate action, the showy qualities were reduced to their right value in the minds of men; the great deficiency of more sterling abilities became apparent. Then followed doubt and regret at the choice that had been made. Selfish interests raised themselves up to struggle for temporary advantages under a weak and facile prince. Gloomy discontent followed disappointment; and apathy succeeded enthusiasm in his cause. Whenever such is the case, treason is not far behind. Still, all might have gone well, had a weak king been surrounded by wise friends; had his counsellors, firm against his enemies, moderate with his supporters, imparted that vigour and that discretion to his actions which his own character could not supply. Unfortunately, the exact reverse was the case. Camerarius was weak, though subtle, selfish, and interested; Christian of Anhalt the elder, though a brave and skilful soldier, was little more than a soldier; Dohna was suffered to take but little share in the management of affairs; and the Prince of Solms was not equal to the great emergencies of the time. The man, however, who contributed more than all the rest to the ruin of his sovereign's prospects, was he who had urged him most strongly to accept the perilous position which he occupied. Filled with the wildest spirit of fanaticism, fancying himself the prophet of a new reformation, Abraham Scultetus came with the King into Bohemia; utterly ignorant of the manners and customs of the people; unacquainted even with the relations of the different religious parties into which the population was divided. The oppression of the Austrian princes had caused the Roman Catholics of the kingdom to join with their Protestant brethren in snatching the crown from the head of a prince, whose own acts justified the States, under the express conditions which were made on receiving the sceptre, in declaring him fallen from the throne of Bohemia. But still there lingered a natural fondness in their minds for a sovereign of their own faith. These Roman Catholics formed a large part of the population, especially at Prague; the rest of the people were divided between the ancient Hussites, who were now comparatively few, and Lutherans, who were many. Of Calvinists, the number was exceedingly small. But Scultetus was one of the fiercest followers of the fierce and intolerant apostle of Geneva. Possessed with the blindest spirit of religious bigotry, he had done much evil, even in the Palatinate, where his sect was predominant; and he carried the same fiery elements of strife and confusion with him into the new kingdom which had fallen under his master's sway. His sermons were insults to the faith of almost all who surrounded him; his counsels were pernicious to the prince he served; and, after familiarizing himself in some degree with the habits of the citizens of Prague, he proceeded to open acts of intolerance, which bore bitter fruits ere long. The cathedral was stripped of its pictures and its statues; the great altar itself was removed; and relics and images--which many of the citizens of Prague revered, not alone as mementos of holy men, but as part of the possessions of their city--were destroyed in the night, at his instigation. The great crucifix upon the bridge of Prague was also marked out for destruction; but several of the most eminent Bohemian nobles interfered, to prevent this rash act on the part of the King; and the cross and statue were spared accordingly. The report, however, of the intention spread far and wide through Prague. It unfortunately happened that the young Queen had some time previously expressed her determination never to pass over that bridge again, till the indecent practice of both sexes bathing indiscriminately in the river near, was done away. The real motives, which she had frankly expressed, were supposed by an angry and rude people to be a mere excuse; the Jesuits dexterously contrived to point out the crucifix as the real object of her dislike; and an outcry was raised against the unhappy Princess, which spread wide amongst the Roman Catholic population of the town.

Having once obtained cause of complaint, the Jesuits never ceased to decry the monarch, to pervert all his actions in the public ear, and to attribute the basest motives, and even the most licentious conduct, to one who had openly confessed himself an enemy of their church. With the serpent-like subtlety of their order, they spread poisonous rumours and calumnious assertions through a thousand different channels amongst the people of Bohemia. Sometimes it was an open and daring, but perverted statement in print, such as the "Description of the spoiling of the cathedral church at Prague by the Calvinistic King;" sometimes it was a mere whisper, such as that which spread amongst the Lutherans, that it was the determination of the King and Queen to abolish every form of worship in Bohemia but that which they themselves followed. Doubts, fears, and enmities, took possession of the minds of the populace; and when the storms of war began to arise, and the young monarch required all the support of a united people, he found little but discord, disaffection, and suspicion.

In the mean while the relations of the new monarch of Bohemia with foreign powers were anything but satisfactory. True, indeed, his wife's uncle, the King of Denmark, the warlike King of Sweden, the Venetian Republic, and many princes of Germany recognised him at once as King of Bohemia. True, Bethlem Gabor, the Prince of Transylvania, promised the aid of his half savage hordes, in case of war; but James the First of England, on whose power to serve him much of his hopes had been founded, refused him even the title of King, treated him as a usurper, and would give no aid whatever in the preservation of the kingdom of Bohemia. He promised indeed to interfere, in case the Palatinate should be attacked; but Frederic had soon occasion to learn that

his father-in-law was as false and fickle, as he was vain and pusillanimous; and the only assistance he ever received from England, was afforded by the gallant enthusiasm of her young nobility in the cause of a princess whom they loved with chivalrous devotion. France, on the other side, temporized; for it was her policy to persecute the protestants amongst her own people, and to foment the divisions of Germany; and thus, in almost all instances, her interference in the affairs of the empire tended to weaken the Protestant League, and to give every facility to the Roman Catholics. Day by day and hour by hour, the storm approached nearer and nearer, menacing, on the one hand, Bohemia; and, on the other, the Palatinate. Large bodies of troops were raised in the Spanish Netherlands, in Burgundy, and Lorraine under the banners of the King of Spain; and at their head was placed the veteran, resolute, and skilful, but merciless Spinola; and on the side of Austria several generals of renown gathered together armies, ready to fall on Bohemia at the first sound of the drum.

In the mean time, in his capital of Prague, Frederic gave himself up alternately to revelry and devotion. The gallant manners of a refined court, the romantic tone, which it had acquired in the Palatinate, totally discordant with the rough plainness of Bohemia, were certainly reported, and perhaps believed to touch upon gross licentiousness; and, undoubtedly, in merriment--though there is no proof of its having been vicious--and in devout exercises--though they are not shown to have been hypocritical--Frederic passed much time which would have been more wisely expended in preparation for defence, or in active attack upon an enemy who no longer preserved even the semblance of amity. His acts also were weak and ill timed, his negotiations tedious and unskilful. From France, Denmark, and Venice, he received nothing but vague assurances of amity. From the King of Great Britain he obtained nought but the reproofs of a pedagogue, rather than the kind support of a father; and his embassy to Turkey only served to give his enemies a pretext for accusing him of leaguings with the infidel against the catholic emperor. Bethlem Gabor, indeed, not only promised, but prepared to espouse his cause; but history shows that so ill combined were the operations of the Transylvanians and Bohemians, that the Austrian troops had the opportunity of dealing with each separately, and paralyzing the one force before it could be supported by the other. On only one occasion after the accession of Frederic to the throne did the Bohemians and Transylvanians act in co-operation; and then, had perseverance and resolution been united to vehemence and activity, the imperial crown would in all probability have been snatched from the House of Austria; and the Emperor would have remained a prisoner in the hands of his enemies.

The star of Frederic was not destined to rise high, however. He possessed, it is true, more amiable qualities than his rival; but Ferdinand not only displayed consummate skill, prudence, and activity himself; but had agents and counsellors all equally shrewd, unscrupulous, and diligent. The Elector of Bavaria, nearly allied to the Elector Palatine, had, beyond all doubt, given his cousin reason to believe that his acceptance of the crown of Bohemia would not be followed by any act of hostility on his part; but he had been educated in the same school as Ferdinand, was a bigoted follower of the Roman Catholic religion, the chief of the German Roman Catholic League, and the politic claimant, under old and baseless titles, of a great part of the young King's Rhenish dominions. These were fearful odds against gratitude and kindred, in the mind of a prince educated by the Jesuits. He was soon engaged heart and soul in the cause of the Emperor, and used every means, just and unjust, to move the princes of the League to act against Bohemia and the Palatinate.

Again, George Frederic, the Elector of Saxony, affected for a time to hold himself neutral; but that unworthy prince, it would seem, from the first leaned to the House of Austria, and was soon won over completely to the interests of Ferdinand. In all probability, jealousy at the Elector Palatine's elevation to the throne of Bohemia had a considerable share in this decision; but at the same time it would appear that other means were employed to remove any hesitation from his course. Like many men of dissolute manners, he was greatly under the rule of fanatic preachers, who tolerated his vices upon the condition of governing his policy. The chief of these interested men was Matthew of Hoenegg, born an Austrian subject, the virulent rival and jealous enemy of Abraham Scultetus, of poor parentage and craving ambition. How he obtained it is not known, but a very large sum of money crowned his labours in some cause; and the Elector of Saxony pronounced in favour of the House of Austria. The Pope furnished considerable pecuniary means; the King of Spain ceased not his warlike preparations; the Elector Palatine was put under ban; and the princes of the Protestant Union acted in behalf of Frederic no farther than to give the Roman Catholic League a fair pretext for declaring war. The armies of the two rival religions were assembled at Donauwerth and Ulm, when France interfered to promote a treaty of peace which left Bohemia defenceless. The Protestant princes agreed to confine their operations in support of the newly elected King to the Palatinate, while the war was to be fought out in Bohemia and lower Austria;--and the unfortunate Frederic found himself suddenly exposed to the attack of the imperial troops and the army of the League, at a moment when his new kingdom was disaffected, Moravia and lower Austria overawed, and Lusatia, from which he expected strong reinforcements, invaded by the Elector of Saxony. The Danes remained neuter; Bethlem Gabor was inactive; the Swedes were engaged in war with Poland; James of England gave no assistance, and France had just consummated the ruin of the young monarch's best hopes by the disgraceful treaty of Ulm.

The money, which was necessary to raise and maintain armies, had been squandered in revelry and unreasonable liberality. The affections of the people were estranged by the incapacity and the indiscreet fanaticism of the King and his court. The anger of the great nobility of

Bohemia was excited by the sight of foreigners, raised to the highest authority in the army and the state. Apprehensions and rumours were busy in the city of Prague. Treason was not inactive. No army sufficient to defend the capital was at hand; and the small force under the command of the gallant Christian of Anhalt, which was intended to impede the enemy's advance, was at a distance from the capital, and totally incapable of contending with the immense body advancing upon Bohemia, under Maximilian of Bavaria, and the Austrian general Bucquoy. With haste and great apprehension, Frederic collected troops from every quarter that would furnish them, as soon as he heard that the armies of the empire and the league had entered lower Austria, and that town after town was submitting to the enemy; while Christian of Anhalt, with less than ten thousand men at his disposal, was retreating before a force of nearly sixty thousand. A considerable body of troops was raised sooner than might have been expected, considering the state of the country; but Counts Thurm and Schlick exerted themselves generously in this emergency in support of their young King, notwithstanding some mortification at seeing the Prince of Hohenloe placed high in command. Count Mansfeld, on the contrary, who was already actively engaged in opposition to Austria, would not submit to that indignity, and he remained with his forces inactive at Pilsen, even while the fate of Bohemia was being decided under the walls of Prague.

Messengers, in the mean time, were sent off with all speed to Transylvania urging Bethlem Gabor to advance to the support of his ally; and assurances were received that he would hasten with a large force to the aid of Frederic. That monarch, however, remained long in ignorance of the rapid advance of the Austrian and Bavarian troops; till at the end of October, the despatches of the old Prince of Anhalt roused Frederic to a sense of his really perilous position. He heard now, that no towns resisted, however strong were their fortifications; that the severities exercised in all places taken by assault had spread consternation every where, and that instant submission followed the appearance of the Bavarian banners under the walls of the Bohemian cities. Pilsen, indeed, promised to resist; and the works, strengthened by Mansfeld, were likely to set the enemy at defiance. Christian of Anhalt with his small force man[oe]uvred in retreat, before the victorious armies; and, by the most skilful movements secured his own force, and kept the enemy in some degree at bay, affording time to the court of Prague for preparation. One small body of Hungarians, too, were approaching rapidly towards the capital; and some appearance of union and zeal, though it was but a hollow semblance, showed itself amongst the citizens of Prague.

It was under these circumstances, that Frederic, on the 2nd of November, left his capital to see, with his own eyes, the state of his army under the Prince of Anhalt; and, no sooner had he arrived, than the General took advantage of a temporary enthusiasm, created by the Prince's presence, to defend the post of Rakonitz against the Austrian forces under Bucquoy. The appearance of the sovereign on the field, and the dauntless courage he displayed in the moment of danger, inspired his forces with fresh ardour, and raised him high in the opinions of the soldiery. Several times it became necessary to beseech him not to expose his person so rashly; but Frederic remained in the hottest fire, notwithstanding all remonstrance, and undoubtedly greatly contributed to give the Imperialists that check which they received at Rakonitz. Christian of Anhalt was well aware that no results of importance could ensue from this skirmish. But Frederic vainly flattered himself that it might afford a favourable opportunity for specific negotiations; and, having sent envoys to treat with the Duke of Bavaria, he returned to his capital, trusting that time, at all events, would be gained, and that, with an offer of peace before him, and Pilsen, with Mansfeld's strong army, on the left, Maximilian at all events would halt to consider his position, if not absolutely fall back. The Elector treated the proposal with scorn. Anhalt was obliged to retreat as soon as the Bavarians could co-operate with the Austrians; and the only advantage obtained by the combat of Rakonitz was the gain of a march or two upon the allied force; so that the Bohemian army arrived under the walls of Prague, and took up its position on the Weissenberg in time to have strengthened itself by entrenchments, if the discipline of the soldiery had been equal to the skill and devotion of their commander.

A turbulent multitude were already in possession of the Weissenberg, when Christian of Anhalt appeared there likewise. Provisions were procured with difficulty. No subordination could be maintained. The citizens were murmuring at the unruly manners of the soldiery. Nobody in the town seemed aware that the enemy was so near the gates; and in vain Christian of Anhalt endeavoured to rouse either the monarch's court, the magistrates of the town, or the officers of the army, to a knowledge of their true danger, and the necessity of providing every means of resistance. Such was still the case on the evening of the 19th of November; and here I will conclude this brief sketch of the political events which have necessarily interrupted the general course of my narrative.

It may be asked, what had become of Algernon Grey and Agnes Herbert during all this time? That question can be answered in very few words. Algernon had accompanied the court to Prague--had witnessed all the pageantry of the young monarch's triumphal entrance into his capital--had taken part in the early festivities of the time--and had been thrown by a thousand circumstances into the society of her he loved. Nor had it been possible for him to conceal from Agnes the passion which she had inspired. He had said nothing,--no, not a word,--he had done nothing, as far as he himself could judge, to show her that he loved her: and yet she did not doubt it. It was no longer a question with her,--she saw it, she felt it; and when at last she was obliged to confess to herself that she loved in return, a strange and agitating strife took place in her bosom for some time. But Agnes judged and acted differently from most women; and one bright

autumn evening she sat down to consider the character and conduct of Algernon Grey, and to draw deductions from that which she knew, regarding that of which she was doubtful. I will only tell the result. "He loves me," she said, "and he knows that I love him. But there is some obstacle, some difficulty--perhaps insurmountable. He is too honourable to trifle with my heart; he has not sought to mislead me. I cannot say that he has even sought to win affection, as some men do, to neglect it afterwards. Oh, no!--he has acted honestly; he has struggled with himself. I can see it all now; but I will trust in his honour, and while I veil my own feelings as much as may be, will believe that whatever he does is just and noble. I can live on in solitude, if I may love and honour him still."

Ere many weeks were past, Algernon Grey took leave of Agnes Herbert, to accompany the younger Prince Christian into Moravia, and never set his foot in Prague again till, after winning high renown in every skirmish and combat that took place, he accompanied Christian of Anhalt from Rakonitz in his retreat to the Weissenberg.

CHAPTER XII.

It was a dark and stormy night, that of the 19th of November, 1620, the eve of the twenty-third Sunday after Trinity; and clouds were rolling heavily over the sky, carried on by a keen and piercing wind which howled and whistled round the old battlements of Prague, and shook the lozenges in the long casements. Not a star was to be seen; the moon afforded not even that pale and uncertain light which she sometimes spreads over the general face of heaven, though her orb itself be hid beneath the vapoury canopy; and the only thing which chequered the darkness of the scene, was a light here and there in the windows of the straggling and irregular city--or a lantern, moving up from the lower to the higher town, caught through a break in the narrow and tortuous streets.

Such was the aspect on the side of Prague; but, upon the Weissenberg, a different scene was displayed. There, crowning the summit, was the camp of the Bohemian army; and, between the tents and waggons, glowed many a watch-fire, to warm such of the soldiery as had no shelter provided for them, while lanterns, hung up before particular pavilions, at some distance from each other, marked the quarters of the leaders of that inharmonious and disjointed force. Thus the whole crest of the hill was in a blaze of light; and a long line of fires ran down from the summit to the wide and beautiful promenade of the Star, marking the ground occupied by the wild Transylvanian horsemen. On the opposite side, towards Pilsen, a dark, black void extended; Christian of Anhalt having strictly prohibited any of the parties to pitch their tents beyond the brow on that side. This order, at least, had been obeyed, though not so with any other he had given; and, indeed, the whole afternoon had passed in wrangling insubordination, which required the utmost exercise of his authority to repress it, and restore order ere nightfall. About six in the evening, indeed, an event had happened which in some degree seconded his exertions. The troops had previously been left nearly without food, and totally without wine; but the strong remonstrances of the General to the court of Prague, and the liberal use of his own purse amongst the suttlers of the town, had at length procured a supply of meat and bread, and a moderate quantity of wine. The distribution was immediately made, and, while the soldiery were engaged in eating and drinking, measures were taken by their officers for restoring discipline; so that, by nine of the clock, a greater degree of order was to be seen in the camp, and this night promised to pass over quietly.

It was about that hour when Algernon Grey gazed forth from his tent for a moment over the impressive scene always afforded by the night encampment of an army. As he looked out, his eye ran over the several groups--rested upon the watch-fires--sped on, again, towards the Hungarian quarters, and then turned to the tents behind, and marked the different lines with a watchful and grave expression. From time to time he turned his head, and spoke a few words to some one within the tent, in broken and disjointed sentences--somewhat after the following form:--

"There must be twenty thousand, I think; that is to say without counting the Hungarians. How many do they count?"

"Twelve thousand," said a deep voice from within.

"Not so many, I should imagine," continued Algernon Grey. "Let me see--reckon ten men to a fire--there cannot be more than eight thousand, at the most. With such an army, one could do much, if there were but some bond between them, and we had something like discipline; and yet, and yet, I very much doubt the result."

"Where's your cousin? where's Lovet?" asked the voice again.

"He is gone into the town," answered Algernon Grey, turning back into the tent, and seating himself at a small rude table, by the side of the young Prince of Anhalt. "To tell the truth," he continued, "I am not sorry to be free from his presence: Lovet's spirit is too light to accord with mine in such moments as these. I must and do feel these things deeply, Christian. I cannot forget the scene that we witnessed here just twelve months ago, nor avoid comparing them with that which Prague presents even now; menaced by a superior army, with no proper preparations for defence, with your father's vast military skill fruitless to remedy faults of others, and the daring courage of yourself, and many like you, all cast away in the service of a prince unequal to the task he has assumed, and, I must add, little worthy of the crown which has been bestowed upon him."

"There has been a sad change, indeed," said the young Prince of Anhalt, in a gloomy tone; "and Frederic, I must own, has not shown himself fit for the crown he wears; but still he has not many serious faults; and there is one person, at least, worthy of every chivalrous exertion which noble-hearted men can make. I speak of your own fair Princess: faultless as beautiful, and brave as good. Would to God that she were our king! but yet we must all confess that Frederic has had a difficult game to play."

"True," answered Algernon Grey; "and he has played it badly. There never was, perhaps, a more united nation than these Bohemians when they raised the Elector Palatine to their throne. I mean, united heart and hand in that great act. Frederic owed his elevation not to a party in the State: the whole country was his party. You recollect the enthusiasm that awaited him wherever he appeared; in the castle of the noble, in the streets of the city, amongst the cottages of the village. There was not a man to be found unwilling and unprepared to draw the sword in his cause. But now, in one short year, how changed has everything become: the bond of union is broken; the united people is scattered into a thousand parties; and to what are we to attribute this? In a great degree to his own weakness, I fear, and his own mistakes. It is a curious thing to consider how the destruction of great parties is effected, and I fancy that it is a question on which Frederic never meditated, though it was that on which depended the stability of his power. The man who yields to the mere prejudices of the body which raises him to high station, will not maintain it long, it is true; but the man who resists the legitimate claims of that body is sure to fall very soon, for the disappointment of reasonable hopes is the seed of animosity, producing a bitter harvest. If it be dangerous to disappoint friends in their just demands, it is ten times more dangerous to encourage enemies, by endeavouring to conciliate them by any sacrifice of principle. Now Frederic has more or less incurred all these perils: in many respects he has yielded to the prejudices of the Bohemian people; and yet he has disappointed the reasonable hopes of many. He has given encouragement to enemies, by weak efforts to pacify and conciliate them; and, in short, he has forgotten the maxim or the motto of an old leader in this very land, 'A friend to my friends, an enemy to my enemies, a lover of peace, but no fearer of war.'"

"Ay, there has been his mistake, indeed," replied his companion. "His should have been the aggressive policy, as soon as a single sword was drawn against him; it was no time for temporizing when he had taken a crown from an emperor's head, and an emperor armed to recover it. Leading the whole Bohemian people, who would then have followed him like a pack of wolves, he should have marched straight to the gates of Vienna, and dictated the terms of peace in the halls of the Imperial Palace to him who has grown strong by impunity, and whose only rights are in tyranny. Then, when Ferdinand of Grätz was quelled, should have come the turn of Maximilian of Bavaria; and, ere the treaty of Ulm had time to get dry, the Catholic League might have been annihilated. The greatest mistake that men make, is when they do not discover whether it be the time for energy or repose. But yet, I see not how it is that he has disappointed the reasonable hopes and claims of the Bohemian people."

Algernon Grey smiled as the young Prince raised his eyes for a reply.

"We are friends, Christian," he said; "now, old and tried friends, or I would not venture to say to you what I am about to utter. The Bohemians had a right to expect that the highest posts in the State and army should be bestowed upon themselves instead of upon foreigners; but the reverse has been the case here. In the army what do you see?"

"Why, in Heaven's name!" exclaimed Christian of Anhalt, "I see that there is not one man amongst them so well qualified to lead a host as my father."

"Undoubtedly not," answered Algernon Grey; "but still the Bohemians have a right to complain that one of their own nobles was not selected for the task. Thurm and Schlick are both old and tried soldiers, with a high renown amongst their countrymen, and although as inferior to your father in every quality of a general as the meanest soldier is to them, yet, depend upon it, they themselves, and the whole Bohemian people have felt it a slight, not alone to the two counts, but to the whole of Bohemia."

"Very true," said a voice at the entrance of the tent; "quite just and right, my young friend," and an elderly man, of strong and powerful frame, with a grey peaked beard, and a broad-brimmed hat upon his head, entered and grasped Algernon Grey familiarly by the shoulder. "The placing me over these men has been one of the King's greatest faults. Heaven knows, I did not seek it; had he given me but a corps of ten thousand men raised in the Palatinate, I could have done him better service, than leading the whole rabble of Bohemia. But I have come to seek you upon other matters--faults that can be mended, which this cannot."

"I hope none on my part, my noble Prince?"

"No, no," said the old soldier; "you do your duty well, and I shall beg you this night to let me have ten of your stout fellows to throw out a little way upon the high road. There is no knowing how soon the Bavarian may be upon us; he will let no grass grow beneath his horse's hoofs, for he knows as well as I do that if he do not fight a battle very soon, and win a victory, his men must starve. Could we but have stopped him at Pilsen, the game would have been in our hands; but it could not be done without Mansfeld, and Mansfeld was jealous and would not act. But three days, but three days--it is all I could desire." And the old general leaned his head upon his hand, and fell into deep thought.

"He cannot be here till Monday," said Algernon Grey; "we gained two marches on him."

"To-morrow's sun will not set," answered the Prince, "without seeing him under this hill, and if I could but get the men to work, we might yet set him at defiance, and let his host famish at our feet till they vanished away like the spring snow. But these people will do nothing; all this afternoon has been wasted, so will to-morrow; not a redoubt will be ready, nor a line. However, we must not blame them so much; they are disheartened; they hear of nothing but disaster; they have little food themselves, and want their Prince's presence amongst them. Here he is scarcely ever with the army; his time is passed in revelry, devotion, pleasure, and preaching, turn by turn: now listening to the ravings of Scultetus, or looking into the eyes of Amilia of Solms, or tripping it in the dance, or listening to the drivelling of a jester. We must have him amongst us, my young friend, this very night, if it be possible; if not, very early to-morrow. I say not we shall lose the battle--God forbid!--but I say the only way to make them even stand to their colours is to give them their Prince's presence. Things look dark enough, and we must lose no chance. Frederic is fighting for a crown, and he must not mind the labours of a bloody day."

"He does not want courage, assuredly," replied Algernon Grey; "and I doubt not he will be here in the hour of danger."

"Nor I," answered the old Prince; "but for any moral effect he must, be here before. He must show the men that he will live or die with them: then there is no fear; for, if he once displays energy, the disaffected in yon town will fear to show their heads; and should we be driven from our position on this hill, the guns from Prague will still protect us, or the walls of Prague shelter us.--But, now, to what brings me hither. I have thought to-night that we must move the Queen to send her husband hither, and I have considered how this can best be done; with the King I have tried all means. The task must fall upon you, my young friend; you are her countryman, of high rank and station in your own land, have distinguished yourself in her husband's service, and for twelve months have exposed your person and employed your means in upholding his throne, without any reward but honour. You must go to her--must see her--must urge upon her the necessity of the case. He is now revelling, and will be so employed till twelve; get on your horse then at once, and see what can be done."

"But, indeed, General," said Algernon Grey, "I must have some authority for this; otherwise, in the first place, I may not obtain admission to the Queen, and if I do, she may look upon my interference as gross impertinence."

"Authority!" said the bluff old Prince, "here it is. I knew what you would say, and therefore wrote these few words, namely, 'Your Majesty will credit all that is said to you by Algernon Grey, on the part of your devoted servant, Christian of Anhalt.' The rest I must leave to your eloquence; and now, if you would save the army, away with all speed and use your best endeavours."

Algernon Grey cast down his eyes and meditated for several moments. "It is a delicate task," he said at length, "a very delicate task, General; first, to speak to a wife on the conduct of her husband; next, to speak to a subject on the conduct of her King; for, though she is Queen, still she is his subject; and more than all, to talk to one so placed as she is, of the faults of him whom she is bound to honour, and does love.--My noble Prince, I would fain not undertake it. If there be any one in all your camp whom you can trust with this same sad and perilous errand, I do beseech you put it not upon me."

The old Prince of Anhalt took him by both hands and grasped them hard: "Your very sense of the difficulty and importance of the bitter task," he said, "is proof enough that there is no one so fitted for it as yourself. I do beseech you, my friend, undertake it. If you would save this realm; if you would preserve the crown for the Elector Frederic; if you would rescue from ruin that sweet lady whom we all love and serve; if you would avert evils innumerable, massacre, torture, persecution, the overthrow of the pure faith in this kingdom, go about the task at once; make one last effort for our only hope of victory; and then, let the result be what it may, lay down your head in peace, knowing that you, at least, have done your best."

Algernon Grey wrung his hand hard. "I will go, noble old man," he said, "I will go; though it cost me one of the bitterest pangs that my heart has ever felt; though it may be the cause of much after-sorrow, I will go. It shall not be said that anything was wanting on my side, to support the part I have espoused."

"Thanks, thanks!" cried the old Prince of Anhalt. "Ho, without there! Bring up Master Algernon Grey's horse, quick!" "My lord," he continued, "God knows whether any of us here will

see the end of to-morrow. Ere you return I shall have lain down to take one sort of sleep, which, before the next day's sunset, may be changed for another kind. If we never meet again, remember I die grateful to you for this act and many others. A better soldier never lived than you have shown yourself under me; and old Christian of Anhalt, having seen some fields in his days, may be as good a judge of such things as many men. But, above all, I thank you for that which you are now going to do. I know how bitter it is, and that you would rather meet a hundred enemies with lance in hand than this fair lady, on such an errand as that which you go upon. But it is for the advancement of the cause--for its salvation, I might say; and I know that is enough for you. Do not bring me any message back, should be sorry to be refused with courtly words and if he comes, that will be sufficient answer."

"What is the pass-word at the gates, my lord?" asked Algernon Grey, as he heard a horse trotted up.

"The crown," answered the old General. "Now, away, away! What do you keep him for, boy?"

"Tell the Queen," said young Christian of Anhalt, who had caught his friend by the arm, "that if there be a battle to-morrow I will carry her glove into the midst of the enemy's host and bring her back news of victory, or not return at all."

"She will believe you, Christian," replied Algernon Grey. "Farewell for the present: I shall see you again;" and, turning away, he quitted the tent and mounted his horse.

"I and Frill will run beside you, noble sir," said the young gentleman's servant, Tony, as he held the stirrup; "I would not have any more horses out, for the poor beasts are tired, and I have a shrewd notion that they may be wanted to-morrow. Whither do you speed, sir?"

"To the town and to the palace," answered his master, briefly; and, riding on with the stout servant on one side of his horse, and the page on the other, he reached the gates of Prague in about a quarter of an hour.

Dull and gloomy was the scene under the archway, where, with nought but a wicket open, some half-dozen men, armed with corslets, salad, and partisan, kept guard by a large fire, which threw a lurid glare over the heavy masses of stonework. The towers of the gate rose high on either side; the dark arch frowned above; and through the aperture beyond appeared nought but a faint glimpse of a small irregular place d'armes, and a long, black-looking street leading into the town.

"Who comes here?" cried a soldier, as Algernon Grey approached; and at the same time a partisan was dropped to his horse's poitral.

"A friend," replied the young gentleman--"The crown!"

"Welcome, friend! Pass the crown," answered the soldier; and the gates were instantly thrown open to give him admission.

Taking his way slowly along the dim streets, Algernon Grey mounted towards the palace, and at length reached the open space before the vast old building called the Hradschin, where the court of Bohemia was then lodged. In many of the windows there was a light; but from one long line of casements a broad glare poured forth upon the night; and he could not but feel some bitterness of spirit as he thought that there Frederic was holding a senseless revel, when his friends and his soldiers were encamped without, waiting in privation and hardship the attack of a superior enemy.

Giving his horse to the servant with orders to wait there till he returned, and his sword to the page with directions to follow him, the young cavalier approached the gates of the palace, entered the first court, and mounted the steps on the left. Some guards before the gates demanded the pass-word; and the attendants within made many difficulties when they heard that he sought an audience of the Queen. One of them said at length, however, shrugging his shoulders and turning away, that the Queen was ill in bed. Algernon Grey, without losing temper, demanded to see any of her ladies. "The Princess Amelia of Solms," he said, "the Countess of Loewenstein, or any of them."

"I will go and see," answered the man, who, it seemed, did not know the visitor; and the young Englishman was detained in the entrance-hall fully ten minutes before he received any reply to his application. During that time a number of richly dressed servants passed and repassed, carrying large silver dishes, gilt flagons of wine, and plates of sweetmeats; but at length the attendant to whom he had spoken returned, and, in a much more deferential tone, requested him to follow. Leaving the page below, he accompanied his guide up one of the many staircases of the building, through a long corridor, down two or three steps, along another narrow passage, and then across a large sort of vestibule supported by heavy stone pillars. At the farther side of this hall the servant threw open a door, desiring Algernon Grey to enter, and saying, "One of the ladies will come to you in a moment, sir."

Algernon Grey gazed around. The aspect of the chamber was certainly not fitted to raise any very cheerful thoughts. There were splendid draperies and hangings, it is true, but of dull and cheerless colours; and the rest of the furniture, though richly gilt, was rude in its forms, and

antique in its fashion. One solitary sconce was lighted, projecting through the arras from a long limb of gilded iron; and as he marked the faint light striving to penetrate the gloom, and the rays losing themselves in the deep hues of the drapery, he thought, "Thus shine the hopes of Bohemia."

The moment after, he heard a door creak on the right-hand side of the room, and, turning round, saw the tapestry quickly pushed back.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Agnes!" exclaimed Algernon Grey, advancing to meet her, whom he had not seen for so many months; "this is, indeed, a pleasure."

The colour varied in the fair girl's cheek, spreading wide and fading away again, like the light of a summer sunset; but, without reserve or coldness, she came forward towards him, holding out her hand with a glad smile:--"How long it is since we met!" she cried; "and now we meet at a strange moment."

"A strange moment, indeed, and a terrible one, I fear; for we are on the eve of a great battle, Agnes," he replied. "The result is with God alone; but yet, as far as human foresight can calculate upon things always most uncertain, there is much reason to fear that the event will not be a happy one."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Agnes, gazing at him with a sad, but deeply interested look; "it is terrible enough to think of so many of our fellow-creatures meeting to shed their blood, without having to anticipate the disaster of defeat likewise. But they told me there were five-and-thirty thousand men, protected by the guns of Prague--a powerful artillery--a great and skilful general."

"The numbers I cannot justly estimate," replied Algernon Grey; "the guns of Prague can be of no service, Agnes, except as protection in case of defeat. The general, it is true, is most skilful; but his soldiers are insubordinate; his army full of incoherent parts; his officers divided in counsel, and each thinking he can judge better than his commander; the troops themselves depressed in spirits by want and fatigue, and a long, harassing retreat; the small force which has already fought the enemy having no confidence in, and no bond of union with, the new levies, which seem to me but heterogeneous masses, different in discipline and in character. It is all this that makes me dread the result. But I am sent to the Queen, dear Agnes, to urge her strongly upon some points of great interest to the welfare of her husband and herself. Good old Prince Christian of Anhalt chose me for this task, as her countryman; and, though it is a painful one to perform, yet it must be done."

"She knows there is some one here from the Prince of Anhalt," replied Agnes Herbert; "but she is ill, and in bed. She sent me down to say that she could see no one, were it not on business of life and death; and I came, not knowing who it was I should find."

"This is business of life and death, sweet friend," replied Algernon Grey; "and, if it be possible, I must see her. The King, I fear, is revelling; and, besides, the appeal must now be made to the Queen herself."

"He has a great banquet to-night," replied Agnes Herbert, with the colour somewhat mounting in her cheek. "I do not think, he believes the peril so imminent."

"He is wrong," answered Algernon Grey; "for he has had warning enough;--but speed back to the Queen, dear lady; tell her that I come on matters of deep moment; show her this letter from the Prince, and, if possible, obtain me an audience. At all events, return to me for a moment yourself, Agnes, for there is a word or two that I would fain speak before an event occurs which may change the whole face of every one's destiny in the army and in the court."

"Oh, yes! I will return," replied Agnes Herbert, with a quivering lip and drooping eyelids; "but I will go now and do my best to gain what you desire."

He took her hand and kissed it; then let her go; and, in a moment, he was once more alone. She was not long absent, however; for in two or three minutes the tapestry again moved back, and Agnes re-appeared, with a glad smile, saying, "The Queen will rise and see you. As soon as she is up, she will send some one to tell us."

"Then let me not lose the present moment," said Algernon Grey. "In some things, my conduct must have seemed strange to you, Agnes,--I am sure it has."

Agnes looked down, with a pale cheek, and made no reply.

"There are secrets in most men's history," continued Algernon Grey; "and there are some sad ones in mine, sweet friend. Events have taken place which shackle my spirit and heart more heavily than fetters of iron could my limbs. There is not time, at present, to tell you the whole tale; but, if I live beyond this next battle, all shall be explained."

"Indeed, I seek no explanation," said Agnes Herbert, laying her hand gently on his arm; "I have seen much of you; I know you, I think, Algernon, to the heart. My trust in your honour and your honesty is unbounded; and nothing shall ever make me believe that you are in the wrong, though you may be unfortunate. I am contented with this conviction, and ask no more."

"Nevertheless," answered Algernon Grey, pressing his lips again and again upon her hand, "if I live, I will tell you all, whatever be the result. But there is one thing you must promise me, dear Agnes, if you have in me that confidence you say."

"I have, I have," she answered eagerly; "and I will do anything that is right to prove it to you. Only say what it is you would have."

Her lover held her by the hand, and gazed into her eyes with a look of deep and tender interest, mournfully, yet not without happiness; for there is a bright consolation in mutual trust, which lights up the darkest hour of life with a gleam like the sunshine on a cloud. "What I would have you to do, is this, dear Agnes," he said: "the event of the battle is, of course, doubtful, and the consequences may be such as I dread to think of. The army, or a part of it, may be driven to retreat into Prague, there to be besieged by a superior force. What will follow then it is difficult to foresee. The town, at all events, will be in a state of turbulence and misrule. It may have to capitulate; it may even be taken by assault; but you must promise that, if I survive the battle, which I somehow have a presentiment will be the case, you will trust in me entirely, as if I were a brother; that you will follow my counsels, be ready to answer to my call at any moment, when I judge your escape practicable. I ask you to trust in me fully, totally, and entirely; and, on my word of honour as a man, a gentleman, and a Christian, I assure you, you may do so without any doubt or hesitation, whatever be the circumstances into which your compliance may throw us towards each other. In the hour of peril and of difficulty, Agnes--my duty done as a soldier--my only thought will be of you."

"I will, Algernon, I will," answered Agnes Herbert. "Under such circumstances our poor Princess will have enough to think of and to do, without caring for me; and I will not only trust to you, but will show you how I trust, by seeking your counsel, your aid, or your protection, whenever I find it needful.--But yet do not suppose that I shall give way weakly to fear. What you say certainly alarms me. I know that such views of imminent peril are not entertained here; and this is the first time that I have heard it clearly stated that danger is at the doors. It takes me, therefore, by surprise; but yet it does not terrify me as much as might be expected. I have a confidence that cannot be shaken; a rock of trust, whose foundations are sure; and, although I speak not about such things as much as many in this court, yet my reliance on the mercy and goodness of God keeps me calm even now, and will, I trust, do so should the evils fall on me that we anticipate. I am not so light and thoughtless as people have believed--perhaps, as I have believed myself; for I feel my courage rise against what some time ago I should have thought would overwhelm me. I can endure, if I cannot resist; and I feel full confidence that help will come when it is needed; that resolution will not fail; and that, if I have to depend upon you for support and guidance, no vain terrors, on my part, will shackle your energies, no weak hesitation or delay impede your actions, or frustrate your views."

"Noble--noble girl," cried Algernon Grey, pressing her hand in his; "methinks, with you by my side, I could dare and defy a world."

As he spoke, the same door by which Agnes had entered opened again, and a woman appeared, in the dress of a superior servant. She addressed herself to Agnes at once, saying, "Her Majesty sent me, Madam, to tell you that she is ready now to receive the gentleman you mentioned."

"Come, then," said Agnes, turning to Algernon Grey, "I will show you the way;" and, leading him through the same door, she passed a little ante-chamber, and then mounted a flight of narrow steps, which conducted to a small room with a door half open, entering into a larger one. All was perfectly still, but a bright light came from the inner chamber; and, making Algernon Grey a sign to stay there for a moment, Agnes advanced and went in. The next instant she appeared at the door again, beckoning him to come forward, and three steps brought him into a large room, containing a bed beneath a canopy of crimson and gold, with various other articles of rich furniture, on which the arms of Bohemia were frequently emblazoned. A large fire was burning on the wide hearth, and a single lamp on a table shed a faint light through the chamber, showing a large velvet chair before the chimney, with the form of Elizabeth of Bohemia seated therein, wrapped in a loose dressing-gown of satin trimmed with fur.

Algernon Grey advanced to the side of the young Queen, behind whose seat two German women were standing; and, bowing the head reverently, he took the hand she extended towards him, and bent his head over it.

A few moments passed in the ceremonious courtesies of the day, Elizabeth asking news of his health, and how he had fared in the camp, and the young Englishman answering with many professions of devotion to her cause and person. But then began the more difficult, but more important portion of their conversation, the Queen breaking off at length somewhat abruptly, as if impatient curiosity mastered her, and inquiring, "Well, what message has our our good cousin, Prince Christian of Anhalt, sent us, my lord?--something of importance, doubtless, or he would have chosen another hour and a less distinguished messenger!"

"It is for your Majesty's private ear," answered Algernon Grey; "and we have here many to listen."

"None but our sweet Agnes understands our English tongue, my lord," replied the Queen; "and I have no secrets from her, nor, perhaps, have you either."

"This is none of mine, your Majesty," he said; "but still I doubt not she may well be a partaker thereof, if you are certain that these two other ladies are not likely to gather the substance."

"Not a word of it," cried the Queen; "speak--speak freely."

Algernon would have felt great relief if the royal lady had but uttered one word which could lead naturally to the painful subject he had to discuss. Elizabeth, however, whose high courage with difficulty grasped the idea of danger, even when it was presented to her, was not one to foresee it when it was at all remote and uncertain; and, as she said nought which could fairly open the subject, he was obliged to plunge into it at once abruptly. "Your Majesty has read the letter of the Prince of Anhalt," he said (Elizabeth nodded her head). "From that you must be satisfied that nothing but the most immediate necessity," continued the young Englishman; "nothing but the most imminent danger, I might say, would have induced him to send me hither at such a time. But, Madam, the peril is imminent, the necessity is great; and though with deep pain I undertook the task, yet I would not refuse any thing that might be serviceable to your Majesty."

When first he began to speak, Elizabeth had remained with her head somewhat bent, and her eyes fixed upon the fire; but, as he uttered the last words, she turned quickly round, and gazed at him with a flushed cheek and quivering lip. "What is this that you tell me, my lord?" she cried, in a tone of great surprise. "I must have been kept in ignorance--and yet I cannot believe that there is such danger as your words imply, or that it is near. By looking far forward for perils, we often make them, and always needlessly disturb and agitate ourselves. The mariner who gazes at every distant wave, and strives to avoid it, thinking it will overwhelm him, will hold the helm with no steady hand, and, very likely, run his boat upon a rock, to avoid that evil which God's good will and a thousand accidents may carry wide away and never bring it near."

"Let me represent to your Majesty, firmly, though humbly," said Algernon Grey, "that this peril is not distant; this wave, this dark and terrible wave, is already rearing its crest over the prow of your royal bark. It is near at hand, and the only thing for those who love and serve you is to consider how it may be met or avoided. The enemy are marching rapidly on Prague, an immediate battle must ensue, and----"

"Have we not troops?" exclaimed Elizabeth; "is there not a royal army encamped on yon hill?--are there no walls, no cannon, around Prague?" And then, suddenly bending down her head, she pressed her hand upon her eyes for an instant, but continued, before Algernon Grey could answer, "What is it you would say, my lord? I do believe you love me; I know that there is not a bolder heart in Europe. Something must have gone strangely amiss to bring you here with such auguries of mischance. Surely the enemy is not near? When last I heard he was at six days' march. Or can the troops be unfaithful? Brave they have always shown themselves. Can the pestilential treasons which have been hatching in this town have spread beyond the gates to them?"

"No, madam, I trust not," answered Algernon Grey; "but you are deceived as to the enemy's distance. By the most skilful strategy the Prince of Anhalt has gained one march, or at most two, upon the enemy; the last tidings, however, show the Austrians and Bavarians in full march for Prague; to-morrow will certainly see them beneath its walls. A battle cannot be delayed beyond one day more--perhaps not so long. Now, let us see what we have to count upon in this battle. Under Buquoy and Maximilian of Bavaria march fifty thousand men, all veteran, subordinate, well-disciplined soldiers; without counting the force detached under Wallenstein and others to keep Pilsen in check. Forty heavy pieces of artillery accompany this force, and the cavalry is strong and numerous. Under the walls of Prague now lie for its defence some five-and-thirty thousand men, at the utmost computation, with ten small guns. This in itself is a sad disparity; but yet, under ordinary circumstances, it would by no means render the case a hopeless one. A handful of men has often defeated a host, but then that spirit must be with them which is better than all the ordnance that ever poured death upon the foe. Is that spirit amongst your Majesty's troops?"

He paused for a moment, for Elizabeth made a motion with her hand, as if begging him to cease and let her think; but, after a brief space, she said, in a low voice, "Go on, go on! I must hear all--spare nothing, my lord; say every word!"

"It grieves me, madam, but it is my duty to your Majesty," answered Algernon Grey. "The disparity, then, between the numbers of the two armies is rendered greater by the moral state of each. Your troops are faithful, I do believe; but see what a difference exists between them and the enemy: the latter are coming up with the force and energy of attack, and the prestige of victory; yours have, in great part, been waiting long, hearing of defeat, troubled with rumours of towns taken and their fellows butchered; receiving retreating troops amongst them, learning to look with apprehension for attack, rather than to rush with ardour to assail. Thus their courage has been lowered, their enthusiasm drowned, their resolution shaken."

"But how could this have been avoided?" exclaimed the Queen. "You seem to blame the measures that have been taken."

"I would reply, Madam, that it is with the future, not the past, we have to do," answered Algernon Grey; "but that from the past we may judge what is necessary for the present moment. I will, then, blame the measures that have been taken; for they have been suggested to his Majesty by civilians as ignorant of what is needful for the defence of a kingdom as any priest in a country parish. The defensive policy which has been assumed was not the policy for Bohemia. That policy was to attack as soon as the Emperor began the war--to prevent the concentration of his forces--to cut through his alliances--to gain friends and daunt adversaries by winning the first successes of the strife. That time has passed by: yet much may be retrieved if we can but win this battle; and the first means of so doing is to restore some moral tone to the soldiery. The army is faithful; but there is a great difference between being faithful and being zealous. The troops are not zealous. Time--delay--reverses--neglect--fatigue--privation--have all cooled them. His Majesty's own continued absence from the army has cooled them also. Forgive me, Madam, if I have seemed to speak irreverently, and even unfeelingly; but I will show you a reason for it presently. These men, fighting continually against superior forces, driven from camp to camp, and only making a stand where the ground greatly favoured them, subjected to all sorts of privations, and wearied to death with marches, have heard of feasting and pageantry at Prague, but no preparations for their support; have heard of preaching and long prayers, but not of levies and trainings, and forces in the field to aid them. They have seen the enemy every day--their King only once."

"Oh, cease! cease!" cried Elizabeth, clasping her hands together. "I have seen it; I have felt it. I have known right well that this is not the way to win or keep a crown. It is sad; it is--But, no, no; I must not speak such things: I must not even think them. He is my husband--good, noble, brave; but too lightly, too easily persuaded. I have been ill, too, myself--am little fitted for active exertion even now; but yet, tell me what you desire--tell me what Christian of Anhalt judges needful for the security of the present moment."

"The immediate presence of the King in the camp," answered Algernon Grey. "Let him show himself to the soldiery--let him take part in their labours and their dangers--let him command, lead, encourage, as he did at Rakonitz. Their enthusiasm in his cause will revive; their courage and their zeal will mount together. With that hill for our position, and these cannon for our support, we will win the victory, or die to the last man."

Elizabeth started up, and grasped his hand in hers. "He shall come," she said: "if I am a king's daughter and a king's wife, he shall come. Early in the morning he shall be with his troops, if my voice have not lost all power over him. And now go, my friend. Agnes, you lead him down. Yet, stay one moment. There is never any knowing what may happen in this life of change. Should the terrible disasters which our worst fears paint, befall us, all will be confusion here. My lord, I tremble for some of these poor things who have accompanied me to Prague. Let me provide defence for one of them. You will take care of my poor Agnes?--is it not so? You are her father's friend. You love her well, I know. You will protect her in the hour of need?"

"If I survive, I will protect her as a brother," answered Algernon Grey, "till I give up the charge to her good uncle at Heidelberg."

"Enough, enough," said the Queen. "Now go. You have spoken hardly, my lord, but kindly, I do believe; and I thank you from my heart for opening eyes which have been closed too long. Lead him down, my Agnes."

Algernon Grey bowed low, and withdrew.

END OF VOL. II

HEIDELBERG.

Vol. III.

HEIDELBERG.

A Romance.

BY

G. P. R. JAMES, ESQ.

AUTHOR OF

"THE SMUGGLER;" "ARRAH NEIL;" "THE STEP-MOTHER,"

ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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HEIDELBERG.

CHAPTER I.

There were a few murmured words at the door of that large room where Algernon Grey had waited to know the pleasure of the Queen of Bohemia; there was a soft pressure of the hand; and then, by an irresistible impulse, which mastered forethought, reason, and resolution, he drew the sweet girl, who stood beside him gently towards him, and pressed his lips upon hers. No human form was seen in the corridor; it was dim, nearly dark, lighted by one faint lamp; but yet, though none saw, his heart smote him; and he said, "Forgive me, Agnes, forgive me, dear one! such a moment, such events, may well excuse one token of eternal tenderness towards you who are so dear."

"I do forgive you, Algernon," said Agnes, very pale; "but oh, do not, do not!"

"I will farther ask your forgiveness hereafter," answered Algernon; "when my whole heart shall be laid before you. Then, I think, you will pardon me, when you see the terrible struggle which has agitated me so long."

"Yes--I am sure I shall find nothing to forgive," she replied; "but yet you must not do this again; for, if you do, I shall doubt--I shall fear."

"Fear not," answered Algernon Grey, raising her hand to his lips; "on my honour, on my truth, I will give you no cause to doubt or fear--No, no, Agnes, you cannot doubt me."

"Nor do I, nor do I," she said, laying her other hand upon his; "oh no, I am sure you are all that is noble and good.--Farewell, farewell!--we part in a terrible moment. Do not expose yourself rashly; but come back with victory, if it be possible, and if not, still come back to protect poor Agnes Herbert in the moment of danger and need."

He did not answer; but again and again he kissed her hand; and then, turning away, he strode along the wide corridor towards the head of the great stairs.

He thought he heard a low laugh from the farther end of the passage, but his mind was in no state to attend to trifles; and, descending rapidly, he found himself the next moment in the wide vestibule below. All the servants and attendants were absent. The two large chairs, in which the chief porters sat, were vacant; the broad table, at which the pages and daily waiters played at different games, displayed not a single figure learning the shortest road to vice and folly. Algernon Grey was walking quickly across, when he heard--proceeding from a door at the side--a well-known voice pronounce his name.

"What, Algernon!" cried William Lovet; and the young Englishman, as he turned round, could see the foot of a narrow staircase faintly marked beyond the doorway, near which Lovet stood; "what, Algernon! you here? You, a man of feuds and battle-fields, contemner of love and all soft delights,--you within the silky precincts of a court, where the star of beauty reigns supreme; and Eros holds one side of the house, while Bacchus holds the other! Wonders will never cease! I shall expect to see old Christian of Anhalt tripping it gaily with Amelia of Solms in some gay ball, or the Prince of Hohenloe twirling round upon his toes, with heels unspurred, and a soft simper on his bellicose lip. In fortune's name! what has brought you hither?"

"Business, my good cousin," answered Algernon Grey; "and that business none of mine. The secret is another's; therefore it must rest where it is--in my own bosom."

"Good," answered Lovet, "exceeding good. I would not add an ounce-weight to my camp-equipage, for all the secrets that ever yet were kitted. I am neither a great general nor a great

diplomatist, thank heaven and the stars that are therein! I can fight and make love, play a shrewd game at cards with a knavish adversary, rattle the dice-box hard and yet throw sixes; but I know nought of the trade of negotiation, thanks be unto God! Your taciturn virtue, with the hat over the left ear, the moustachio turned up at the corner, and the feather half hiding the right eye, tawny leather boots, a sober doublet, and a sword long enough for Don Pedro of Spain, give you all the qualities requisite for a profound ambassador; and the gods forbend, that I should meddle with the puddle, or stir the duck-weed of your stagnant diplomacy!--But whither away? You seem in haste, when every man this night is idling out his moments, what with cups of wine, what with huge sirloins, what with bright eyes and sweet smiles, thinking that this same perishable commodity, called Time, may be but scanty in the purse of the future, and that it is but wise to get the money's worth ere it is all expended."

"I am back to the camp with all speed," answered Algernon Grey. "Matters are not going on there as I could wish; and, moreover, it is late."

"Not too late to take a walk round the ramparts," said Lovet, in a graver tone than he had used. "It is well worth our while, my noble cousin, to look at what is going on there."

"It will occupy much time," answered his companion, somewhat struck by the change in his manner; "and, in the present state of affairs, we shall be challenged and stopped by every sentry that we meet with."

"Fear not," answered Lovet, with a slight smile; "I am profoundly intimate with every guard you will meet upon the walls; and I repeat, good cousin, that it is well worth while, for you, at least, who can report to your friend, the general, to see with a soldier's eye the preparations of the what they call the *Kleinseite* of the city of Prague; for, as we shall have a battle to-morrow or the next day, and as Christian of Anhalt, in case of reverse, may think fit to retreat into the town, it is quite right he should know what the city is like. It is a marvellous place, Prague, and mighty tranquil.--But come, tell your horses to go to the gate, mine are there already."

While he had been speaking, his cousin and himself had descended a second flight of steps, and entered the hall close to the great door of the first court. All was still emptiness; and the two gentlemen were left to open the wicket for themselves, without any one to assist them.

"'Tis a pity," said William Lovet, "that Maximilian of Bavaria does not know what is going on here; otherwise he might end the war at once, and might take the Elector himself in the midst of his banquet, like a fat carp in a stew feeding upon groundbait."

There was too much truth, as Algernon Grey felt, in what his cousin said; and, not at all unwilling to obtain some indication of the state of the popular mind in Prague, the young Englishman, when they issued out into the open air, called his servant Tony to his side, and told him to lead his horse down the hill to the gate by which he had entered, and to wait for his coming there.

"Take care where you go, my lord," said the man; "for the people are all as drunk as swine, and mighty quarrelsome to boot. Here is Frill has got into three disputes since you went in, and one regular quarrel, in which he would have got his costard broken had I not interfered and spoken them fair in a language of which they did not understand a word; so that the poor people were convinced, and had nothing to reply. I showed them how tall he was with my hand, and how tall they were, and I patted my stomach and shrugged my shoulders, and clapped one gentleman on the back till his leathern jerkin fumed like a dusty road; and, seeing that I was not a German, who are the bullies here in Bohemia, they walked away and left Frill in a whole skin, and me very glad to be quit of their company.--So I beseech you, my good lord, to be careful where you go."

"I will take care," answered Algernon Grey, briefly. "Go down, as I have told you;" and taking Lovet's arm he proceeded through two or three narrow streets, till they came to a low stoney lane, which ran at the foot of the inner wall. After pacing on for about a hundred yards, they found a flight of rude stone steps leading up to the platform above, without railing or balustrade; and mounting, they walked on looking over the parapet upon the low ground underneath. From time to time they came upon a heavy piece of ordnance, but no soldier appeared beside it; they passed several flanking towers, but no sentry was seen on guard; they gazed forth upon the out-works of the place, but from the Hradschin to the Moldau, neither fire, nor light, nor moving form showed any sign of preparation against attack.

"Now, let men say what they will," said Lovet, in his usual keen sarcastic tone, "this city of Prague is a strong and well-defended place; and so watched and guarded as it is, so harmonious and faithful within, and with a united and an enthusiastic army without, keen must be the courage, and overpowering the force, that will subdue it to an enemy. You can do what you like, Algernon, but if you would take my advice, you would do either one of two things: go to old Christian of Anhalt, tell him that Prague is in the most perfect state of defence, well provisioned, well watched, and well garrisoned, and that in case of defeat he may retreat into it in all security; or else, bring your men and horses to the gate, walk back to the palace, tell fair Agnes Herbert that you have come to conduct her in safety to Heidelberg, mount and away. You understand what I mean; as for myself, my course is taken."

Algernon Grey grasped him by the arm, and gazed in his face by the light of the moon. "You do

not mean to say," he exclaimed, "that such is the course you intend to pursue?"

"Oh no, cousin mine," answered Lovet, "two or three causes combine to prevent me; first, you know I have an old fondness for fighting, merely for fighting's sake; and I would just as soon think of leaving a good dinner untouched, as of going away when a battle is in preparation. Next, you see I have no one to take with me, for dear, sweet, insipid, tiresome Madam de Laussitz has gone back with her fat husband to set up virtue and dignity in their own patrimonial halls. Then thirdly, and lastly, having no object anywhere, I may just as well be here as in another place. Life is getting wonderfully dull to me, Algernon; and I do not even find the same pleasure in a battle that I used to do. However, it is a little more amusing than anything else, and therefore I shall stay and see it. If I am killed, the matter of the future is settled to my hand. If I survive, and the Austrians beat, which I suppose they certainly will, I shall set spurs to my horse, and give him such a gallop as he has not had since he was bitted. If the Bohemians, by any chance win the victory, I shall go on with them and help them to sack Vienna. I never saw a capital city pillaged; and it must be very amusing."

He spoke in the most ordinary tone possible; in which, perhaps, there was a slight touch of habitual affectation; but Algernon Grey, who could not view things so lightly, nor treat them so when he regarded them otherwise, pondered upon his words, and after a moment's silence, asked, "What makes you think it so positively certain that the Austrians will be successful? We have often known a battle won with a much greater disparity of numbers."

"Come with me and I will show you, Algernon," answered William Lovet; and, walking on till they came to the third tower from the gate, they passed the only sentinel they had seen, giving the word in answer to his challenge, and then issuing forth from the town, mounted their horses and rode on to the Star.

"Now let us send the beasts back," said Lovet, when they reached the foot of the Weissenberg; "and mounting by this little path on foot, we shall have a full view of this grand army, which is to do such mighty things to-morrow."

Algernon Grey followed in silence, after ordering the page to inform young Christian of Anhalt that he would be back in half an hour. For about three or four hundred yards, as they ascended, the army was hidden from their sight by some tall trees and bushes; but they could see the glare of the watch-fires spreading out into the sky, and hear the murmuring roar of many voices; for the wine and provisions had raised the spirits of the soldiery for a time, and they were wearing away the night in laughter and in song. No sentinel barred their path; no guard demanded the word; for, although strict orders had been issued by the general for extraordinary precautions to be taken, the demoralization of the soldiery, which had been collected on the Weissenberg to support the force under Christian of Anhalt, had become so great before his arrival, that no command was obeyed, except by the force immediately under his own orders; and the sentries, after having been placed, quietly retired to rejoin their comrades round the watch-fires, as soon as the eyes of the officers were withdrawn.

Turning the little patch of underwood, Algernon Grey and Lovet came suddenly upon a group of eight men, stretched out around a pile of blazing wood, singing, jesting, wrangling, with the wild countenances, long shaggy beards and hair, strange apparel, and various kinds of arms which designated them as some of the Transylvanian hordes of Bethlem Gabor. They stared up at the two fine, handsome looking men who approached, with a look of savage curiosity, but took no further notice, and the man who was singing even did not interrupt his music. It was a wild, rude air, but not without much plaintive melody; for, though the song seemed to be a bacchanalian one, yet the general tone was melancholy or seemed so to the ear of Algernon Grey.

"Speak to them, Algernon, speak to them," said Lovet, after they had watched them for a moment or two.

"They will not understand a word I say," answered his cousin. "Do you not see? These are the Transylvanians."

"Oh," answered Lovet, and walked on.

Without saying another word, he led the way along the rise of the hill, on which was spread out the force of the auxiliaries, and at length came to a small open space kept by a sentinel or two of Christian of Anhalt's own force, to prevent any tumult or quarrelling between the Bohemians and Transylvanians. Here the two gentlemen were challenged; but, giving the word, they passed on through the Bohemian bivouacs, where some greater degree of order and discipline was observable. From time to time, indeed, a scene of great noise and confusion presented itself; and once or twice blows were given, and even knives drawn, so that the constant interference of the officers was required to keep peace amongst a violent and easily excited people. In other places, however, the men were stretched out around their fires asleep; and here and there they were talking quietly, though with somewhat gloomy and discontented looks.

"Now, ask some of these fellows, Algernon," said Lovet, "how they like the prospect of tomorrow?"

"I do not speak Bohemian," answered Algernon Grey.

"But do not they understand German?" asked his cousin.

"Not a word," said Algernon, gazing in his face; "you would not persuade me, Lovet, that you have been so long amongst them without discovering that fact?"

"No," replied Lovet; "but I have discovered something more, Algernon: that the discord is not only in the tongues of this host, though Babel could scarcely match it in confusion of languages, but in the spirit, character, customs, views, and feelings, of those who compose it. It is, in fact, a mere mob of different nations, English, Scotch, Germans, Bohemians, Transylvanians, Silesians, Moravians, and Dutch, without one common bond between them, not understanding each the other's tongue, no man having a fellow-feeling for his neighbour, no zeal, no esprit de corps, and one-half of them not knowing what they are brought here for at all. Now I say, that if this corps beats the regular and well-disciplined Austrians and Bavarians, it must be by a miracle from heaven; for no human means will ever produce such a result--so now, good-night, cousin; I shall go to my tent and sleep; for as there is a chance of this being the last evening of my life, I have taken care to make it a merry one; and I am tired of amusement of different kinds."

"Good-night," said Algernon Grey; and they parted.

At the door of his tent the young English nobleman found his servant, Tony, and the page, Frill, conversing together in low tones; and, on asking if they had delivered his message to the young Prince of Anhalt, he was informed that Christian had gone forth to make a round through the camp, and had not yet returned. Algernon Grey perceived that there was a sort of hesitation in the manner of both his attendants; that Frill gazed at the elder servant, and the old man turned his eyes to the page; but, suspecting that both might entertain some apprehensions regarding the ensuing day, he did not choose to encourage any questions, and walked at once into the tent.

"Give it yourself, Frill, give it yourself," said Tony, loud enough for his lord to hear; "has the devil of impudence abandoned you, that you dare not do what it is your duty to do, when you dare do so much that you ought not?"

Algernon Grey had seated himself before the little table, and the next instant Frill entered the tent, and approached with a paper in his hand, saying, "This dropped from you, my lord, as you were dismounting at the foot of the hill. I found it under the horse's feet."

Algernon Grey took the paper from his hand, and looked at it for a moment before he opened it. He did not recollect its shape and appearance at all. It was folded as if it had been placed in a cover, in form like an ordinary letter, but without seal or address. There was the mark of a horse's shoe across it, so that the boy's story, of where he had found it, was thus far confirmed; and Algernon Grey unfolded it and held it to the lamp. The handwriting was not unfamiliar to him, for he had twice in his life received a letter in the same; but the tone was very different from that in which he had ever himself been addressed, although his relation with the writer might have justified the warmest language that woman can use towards man.

"A whole year and more has passed," so ran the letter, "and yet you have not returned, nor accomplished that which you undertook. I thirst to see you, to cast myself into your arms again.--I thirst in the midst of all these people, barren and insignificant to me, for the sight of him I love, as the traveller in the desert thirsts for the cool well. Yet come not, till it is accomplished; but strive, if you do love me, to accomplish it soon. Take any means,--take all means. Tell him, that I hate him; that I shall ever hate him; that his cold and precise nature can never assimilate with my fiery and impetuous disposition; that those who linked us to one another, tried to bind flame and ice together. Tell him, that I say I hate him. Tell him, if you will, that I love you. Require him to break this bond, as has been often done before; and let him know, if he persists, it shall be for his own wretchedness; that every hour of his union with me shall be an hour of misery; that every minute shall have its grief, or woman's wit shall fail me. If all this does not decide him, you must seek some other means.--I leave them to you, but the man's life cannot be charmed; at all events, do what you have to do speedily, my William, and then fly to my arms. I will not put my name, but there will be no need of guessing twice.--Farewell!"

Algernon Grey laid down the letter on the table, and gazed at it sternly for a moment, then raised his eyes to the page, who had retired to the other side of the tent near the entrance.

"Come hither, boy," he said; and as the youth, with a slow and faltering step, advanced towards him, his lord added, "you have read this letter?"

"A part, my lord," replied Frill, with his knees shaking. "Tony thought I had better read it, to find out whom it belonged to."

"You do not pretend to say," continued Algernon Grey, "that when you had read it, you believed it belonged to me."

The boy hesitated and turned crimson, and then murmured, "Tony thought it ought to belong to you, whoever it was sent to."

"Call him hither, and return yourself," said Algernon Grey; but the boy had not far to go, for the old servant was still waiting without. When he appeared, however, his air and manner was

different from that of the page; he seemed very grave indeed, but calm and firm, and while the boy slunk behind him, he advanced boldly to the table by which his lord sat.

"How is it," said Algernon Grey, "that you, an old and faithful servant of my house, I might say almost a friend, have induced this boy to deceive me regarding a letter which was never intended for my eye?"

"Because, my lord," replied Tony, "there were things in it never intended for your eye indeed, but which it is right and necessary you should see; and there are a great many things, never intended for your ear, that it is only just you should hear."

"Indeed!" said Algernon Grey. "In this, however, you have done wrong, though I doubt not that your intention was good. You should never attempt to deceive. You should have spoken to me boldly and straightforwardly, and I might have thanked you then for information which now is burdensome to me."

"Why, you forbade me, my lord, ever to say anything to you against your cousin, Sir William, again," replied the servant; "you thought I was prejudiced against him, that I had some hatred towards him, and so, when a means came of opening your eyes, I determined I would take it at any risk; otherwise I could have told you a great deal about this long ago."

"From what source came your information?" asked Algernon Grey.

"First from old Paul Watson," answered Tony, "who was killed at Rakonitz. When we were coming out of Heidelberg, just before the thunderstorm, he told me that your cousin had been spending all his time, before he came abroad hither, in making love to the lady Catherine, though he knew her to be your affianced wife.--Then, my good lord, when we first came to this place, and the king's courier went over to England, I got him to take a letter for me to my brother, who soon sent me plenty more intelligence, which I will show you, if we live over to-morrow."

"To what effect?" asked his master, in a low deep tone.

"To the effect that this has been going on for years," answered Tony; "and that there is many a strange and scandalous story in the country, which makes this woman no wife for you, my lord."

"And yet she is my wife," muttered Algernon Grey to himself. Then waving his hand to the servant, he said, "Leave me."

The page instantly withdrew; but Tony lingered for a moment or two, and then said, "I hope you will forgive me, my lord; for I see that this has made you very unhappy. I can't help thinking, however, that it is little worth while to vex one's self about such a woman, when there is more than one of the sweetest and the best who would be happy enough to be your wife."

A faint smile crossed Algernon Grey's countenance. "It is not her conduct makes me unhappy, my good friend," he answered; "it is long since anything that she could do has had such an effect. I have known her thoroughly for some time; but that a man, my near relation, my pretended friend and old companion, should take part in bringing disgrace upon my name, and enter into such black schemes as these"--and he laid his hand upon the letter--"does grieve and astonish me; does shake my confidence in human virtue and honour, and makes me doubt whether friendship is anything but a mere shadow, honesty but an idle name."

"No, my lord, no," cried the servant; "it all comes of your shutting your eyes to your cousin's behaviour, even from your boyhood. You thought everybody was prejudiced against him--that we hated him without cause; but, bless you, my good lord, we knew him from his youth, and had plenty of opportunities of seeing what you never saw. You great noblemen are, doubtless, clever and more learned than we are; but we poor people have got our eyes and can't help making use of them. I never saw Sir William do anything from a good motive; I never saw him do anything straightforwardly; I never heard of any act of kindness; and you may judge what we think, when we have watched for the whole of the last year, day and night I may say, for fear you should have a shot in the head, or a blade in the heart, that did not come from the hands of a fair enemy."

"No, no," cried Algernon Grey, waving his hand, warmly; "there, at least, you do him wrong. Passion may mislead, but he is incapable of such acts as that; and, had he been so inclined, he has had plenty of opportunities."

"Not so many as your lordship thinks," answered Tony; "for there has been always some one near at hand. However, I think that is all nonsense, too; for it seemed to me there was more to lose than to gain by killing you; but the other men would fancy it, and there is never any harm in being too careful. He will be in a fine fright when he finds the letter is gone; for I do not doubt that it dropped from him, although it was under your horse's feet that the boy found it."

"Give me some paper from that roll," said Algernon Grey, "and the yellow wax there--Nay, it matters not. Here are persons coming--Begone now, my good friend; and remember, not one word of this to any other being, till I have myself well considered how to act."

As he spoke Christian of Anhalt entered the tent, and the old servant bowed and retired.

CHAPTER II.

Before daybreak, Algernon Grey was up and dressed; but, to say truth, it was no pain to him to rise, for he had not closed an eye all night, and was more weary of tossing to and fro on the sleepless couch, than if he had passed the hours by the side of a watch-fire. As soon as his buff coat had been cast on and looped, and his sword-belt thrown over his shoulders, he lighted his lamp, and read over again the letter that had been placed in his hands the night before. A smile of some bitterness came upon his countenance, and, folding it carefully up, he walked out of his tent, and, ascending the highest part of the hill, gazed over the scene below. The stars were growing somewhat faint in the heaven, but the diminution of their lustre was the only sign yet visible of approaching day. All below was still. The wearied troops were sleeping by the nearly extinguished watch-fires; and the tread of a distant sentry, as he paced up and down, could just be heard, marking, rather than breaking, the silence. The murmur of the river, too, reached the ear, but with a stilly sound, full of repose and quiet. Folding his arms upon his breast, Algernon Grey continued to gaze, across the shadowy lines of tents and waggons, down into the valley below, where lay a light morning mist, giving a white gleam, soft and pleasant to the eye, and then he turned his look towards the heavens, and his lips murmured with prayer. A minute or two after, a faint grey streak was seen in the east: it then acquired an orange hue; and one or two light-grey clouds overhead began to glow with spots of a lurid red. Soon after, the orange turned to a fiery-crimson, and floods of rose-coloured rays came pouring over the sky; while the grey air between the tents was mingled with a dim mysterious purple. A solitary figure passing here and there was seen. The neighing of a horse broke the silence. A dull hum gradually succeeded; then brisk and lively sounds. A drum beat in a distant part of the camp; and, just when the broad sun showed half his disc above the horizon, red and fiery, as if ominous of the bloody strife about to take place, the boom of a single cannon shook the air, and all became life and activity.

With a quick step, the young Englishman descended from the spot where he had been standing, paused for a moment or two, some twenty paces down the hill, and gazing out towards a distant point, shading his eyes with his hand; then resumed his course, and bent his steps direct towards the tent of William Lovet. He found one of his cousin's servants at the entrance; and, asking the man whether his master were up, was informed that he had just gone forth.

"There he goes, my lord, along that path," said the man, pointing still farther down the hill; and, instantly advancing with a quick step, Algernon Grey cut him off just as he reached a little open space, which divided the tents of the English and Scotch volunteers from the ground occupied by a small party of Palatinate troops.

"Ah, Algernon!" exclaimed Lovet, turning round at the sound of a quick step; "is that you? I was going to seek you; for there is a rumour that Bavarian foragers are in sight."

"I have seen them," answered Algernon Grey, in a tone peculiarly calm and gentle; "at least I have seen what I consider to be reconnoitring parties of the enemy. A battle is, therefore, certain, ere the day be over; and as no one knows who may come out of this field alive, it is as well we should have a private word or two before we enter it."

"Ah, my grave cousin," cried Lovet, with a laugh, "are you preparing against the worst? Good faith! I never think it worth while to fancy that the ball has yet been cast which is destined to take my life."

"Nor do I dwell upon such thoughts," answered Algernon Grey; "but still there are particular events, my good cousin, which form epochs in the life of man, as others form epochs in the histories of states, and it is as well to take those moments to wind up old accounts, and leave the coming time clear and free for a different course of action."

There was something peculiar, firm, almost stern, in Algernon Grey's tone, which struck William Lovet a good deal, for he had rarely heard that tone employed towards himself, and he knew well that it was an indication of his cousin's mind being strongly moved. Nevertheless he could not restrain his ordinary jesting spirit, or else he judged that light merriment was the best means of covering deeper thoughts. "On my life, Algernon," he said, "if you wish to wind up our accounts, I cannot agree, for I have not the ledger here. It is a large book and the roll of long standing--I do not carry it about me."

"I do," answered Algernon Grey; "there is the last item," and he put into his cousin's hand the letter which I have already laid before the reader.

William Lovet took it and opened it. The moment his eye fell upon the writing, in spite of

habitual self-command, the colour slightly mounted into his cheek, and his lip turned somewhat white. The next instant, however he looked up with a clear eye and a curling lip, saying, "You have read it?"

"Every word," answered Algernon Grey, calmly. "It was given to me as a paper belonging to myself, and I read it throughout: not finding a name which could lead me to the right owner, till the last few lines met my eye."

"It is a precious epistle," said Lovet, holding it with the coolest air imaginable, and then placing it in his pocket; "not quite so eloquent as one of St. Paul's--nor so edifying, cousin mine. But yet, she is a glorious creature, and, as you must have long perceived, I am over head and ears in love with her."

"I have not long perceived it," answered Algernon Grey, bitterly; "had I long perceived, William, my conduct might have been different.--You have mistaken me, sir. It would seem that you cannot comprehend straightforward conduct and direct dealing; for, had you done so, you would have told me all this when first we met after so long a parting. Instead of that, by crooked means and sidelong instigations, you have been urging me to steps tending to the gratification of your own wishes. I will not pause to recapitulate all those acts and words, the true meaning of which is now as clear to me as day. Suffice it, that you love this woman, or her great wealth, and that you have used every sort of artifice to induce me to take these steps, which must necessarily tend to the annulling of my incomplete marriage with herself--Is it not so?"

"Perfectly," answered William Lovet, with the coolest possible assurance; "I have done so most deliberately and considerately; and I trust that you are duly grateful for it.--My dear Algernon, do not look so fierce. Recollect that I am not one on whom frowning brows have any effect; but listen to a little quiet reason; though, I must say, you are the most unreasonable man I ever met with. Now, if a poor man has an oyster in his hand and wants to eat the delicate fish, he must open it with whatever instrument happens to be nearest to him. Would you have him wait till he can go to a cutler's, or an ironmonger's, to buy himself an oyster-knife? If he has a dagger, he uses the dagger; if not, he takes a stone and hammers it open; if no stone is at hand, he dashes it on the ground and breaks it so. Then must he wait for vinegar and pepper, a soft manchet-roll and a glass of sack? Oh, no, he scoops it out and swallows it whole, licks his lips, and thanks the gods for the good gift of oysters. Such is my case: I took the means nearest at hand to obtain my object, and, thinking it much better for your honour and credit, that you should be the person to decline the fulfilment of a contract passed upon you by a couple of grey-headed grandsires, than that the lady should curtsy low and say, I wont, I prompted you to all things that I thought conducive to your happiness, and, at the same time, to my little schemes.--But see what an ungrateful thing is man! Here you set yourself upon the pedestal of injured innocence, and look stout and stalwart, as if you would cut the throat of the man who has done you the greatest possible service."

"Service!" exclaimed Algernon Grey. "Do you call this service?"

"To be sure," answered Lovet, laughing. "A pretty life you would have led with this fair lady. There, read her epistle over again;" and he took it from his pocket. "You cannot have perused it carefully. Not only would you have had a sweet and comfortable companion, full of matrimonial tenderness and domestic duty, but, possibly, a tranquil passage to another state, somewhat more speedy than the ordinary course of nature, unless you had a special taster of your food, and kept all sharp instruments under lock and key."

"And can you really dream of wedding such a thing as you describe?" asked his cousin.

"Oh, yes, as soon as she is wed-able," answered William Lovet. "I am a very fearless animal, fond of riding wild horses, and know, moreover, how to manage them; but in this matter do as you like, kind cousin Algernon. Go back, if it so please you, and ratify your boy's marriage. The lady will soon be a widow, I will warrant; or, if you are wise, do as I have always urged you, take some step to break this boyish union--any step you please; you will find her right ready to second your wishes; and a little interest at court, a good word to the bishops, and humble petition to the King will settle the matter in six weeks. However you may look upon it now, I shall expect your deep gratitude for all that I have done; and when you are wedded to the lady that you love, and I to her I seek, we will each rule our household in different ways; and we will meet at Christmastide and Easter, and, like a couple of pair of cooing doves, congratulate ourselves in soft murmurs on our separate happiness."

"My gratitude will be limited to the occasion, William," cried his cousin; "for my part I never seek to see you more. I find that from the time I left my native land, you have been seeking to withhold, if not withdraw from me, the affections of one bound to me by ties she should have thought indissoluble."

"Affection that you never sought to cultivate yourself," said Lovet, tartly.

"I was bound, as you well know, by a solemn pledge not to return for five years," said Algernon Grey; "but, at all events, it was not a cousin's part nor a friend's to strive to poison my domestic peace--nay, nor even to put it in peril, for who can say whether this marriage can be dissolved?--let me speak out, for time wears,--if we both survive this battle, I beseech you return to England

with all possible speed, tell your fair paramour, that I am aware of all, and that I will take instant means to do my best towards her kind wishes being gratified, that the contract between her and me shall come to an end; and, at the same time, entreat her to use all those keen measures which her shrewd wit can suggest, and her bold courage execute, to second my endeavours. Between you both, doubtless, you will find the matter easy. So farewell!"

He turned upon his heel, and walked a few steps away, but ere he had gone far, he heard Lovet's voice exclaiming, "Algernon, Algernon!"

"Were you ever at a wedding," asked his cousin coming up, as he paused, "where a harsh old father, taken in by a coaxing girl, gave his daughter away to the very man she loved?--have you not seen how she came back to kiss the dear old man's hand, and seemed reluctant to go, and talked of the sweet delights of her domestic home, and a world of canting tenderness taught men and women from their childhood, about infant joys and early pleasures; while, in her heart, she felt like a freed bird with the door of its cage just open?--Get you gone, my noble cousin! You are like this same bride; and, say what you will, this letter has taken a load of care from your shoulders; and, on my life! so much do I love you, that, had I known how balmy and peaceful would be its effects, I would have shown it to you long ago. There, take it and keep it as a tender memorial of your dear and devoted Catherine; and, whenever you think of her large, flashing black eyes, her Juno brow, and curling lip, read some passages from that tender epistle, and, falling down upon your knees, thank Heaven for having given you such a cousin as myself."

"I will keep it," said Algernon Grey, taking the letter from his hand; "but there is one thing, my good cousin, which, for your own sake, you should know. This is not the first intimation that I have had of my so-called wife's infidelity to her engagements with me, though it is the first, that you, my kinsman and companion, had a share in her breach of faith. Perhaps you do not understand my meaning; but you must be of a different wit from that I think, if you so softly believe the woman who would thus act towards me will treat you better."

"Oh, you speak of sundry small amours with which the sweet lady has consoled the weary hours of my long absence," answered Lovet, with his cheek a little heated; "that will be easily pardoned, and my presence will set all right again.--I am no jealous fool, Algernon, and can pardon a reasonable amount of coquetry in a lovely woman, left with no one to keep her thoughts from stagnating." And Lovet turning away with a laugh, took his way back to his own tent.

There are some minds unto which the discovery of baseness and treachery in those who have been trusted, is so painful as to counterbalance, and even more than counterbalance, any portion of relief and happiness that is sometimes obtained under the over-ruling hand of fate, from the very means employed to thwart, to grieve, and to disappoint us. Such was the case with Algernon Grey in the present instance. It must not be denied that it was a relief to him to feel he had a reason, a motive, a just cause for striving, by every means, to annul a contract which had been entered into rather by his parents than himself, long ere he had the power of judging, or acting, on his own behalf; but yet the character of his cousin now stood before him in all its naked deformity; and it offered a painful subject of contemplation, which no prospect of happiness could banish.

He would fain have had a few moments for thought; and was turning his steps towards his own tent, when a large party of young men advancing towards him impeded his way, and the next moment the voice of the younger Prince of Anhalt calling him by name, made him turn towards the slope above. When he perceived that the Englishman heard him, he waved him up; and as soon as Algernon was by his side, he exclaimed, "Come hither, come hither, I have something to show you."

"I think I know what you would say, my Prince; I have already seen some parties in that wood towards Pilsen," answered Algernon. "They are Bavarians, I should think."

"Then the battle is certain," said Christian of Anhalt. "You will charge with me, will you not?"

"Assuredly," replied Algernon Grey; "but I think we had better communicate the news to your father, as there may be yet time, if we can get the men to work, to strengthen our position here a little."

"Come then, come," said the young Prince; "he will be glad to see you. I told him half an hour ago of the news you brought last night from Prague; and he said, 'God send the Queen have power enough to make her husband come; but I doubt it.'--I doubt too, to tell you the truth, my friend; and his presence at this moment were worth ten thousand men.--Will your cousin be of our band? I saw you speaking with him just now."

"We spoke together for the last time, perhaps, in life," answered Algernon Grey; "he has done me wrong--has been doing so for years----"

"And you have found him out at length," said Christian of Anhalt, interrupting him with a smile. "We have understood him better. There is not a man in the camp who would trust him."

"And yet," answered Algernon Grey, "he is a good soldier, and a brave man. You had better have him and his people with you."

"Not I," answered Christian of Anhalt. "True it is, my friend, we cannot unveil the bosoms of those who surround us, and see the thoughts and purposes within; but, on my life! were it possible, I would not take one man along with me, when I go to fall upon the enemy's ranks, whose heart is not pure and high, whose thoughts and purposes as they lie open to the eye of God, might not lie open to the eye of man. And shall I have the company of one I know to be a villain? I always fancy that it is such men as this who bring the bullets most thick amongst us."

Algernon Grey shook his head with a sigh, for he was well aware that in the wise but mysterious ways of Heaven, the lead and the steel as often seek out the noble and the good as the mean and the wicked.

While they had been thus conversing, they had walked on towards the tent of the general, whom they found seated with several other officers taking a hasty meal. The intelligence they gave soon brought that meal to a conclusion; and for several hours every effort was made to induce the men to strengthen the position of the Bohemian army on the hill. The spirit of insubordination, however, was too strong for authority. Some would not work at all, saying that they were soldiers and not grave-diggers. Some slunk away after having begun; and none but a few English and Germans exerted themselves with anything like energy and perseverance.

Little, very little was effected; and, in the mean while, news came from the various reconnoitring parties which had been thrown out, of the rapid approach of the Austrian and Bavarian army. Some had caught sight of one body, some of another; but still the day wore on ere they appeared in sight; and the Prince of Hohenloe, and several others of the commanders, began to doubt that a battle would take place that day.

Old Christian of Anhalt shook his head; "Maximilian of Bavaria," he said, "will fight as soon as he comes up, depend upon it; he must either fight or starve; and one night to him is of more consequence than even to us."

All that the individual exertions of a man could effect, was done by the old Prince himself. He strove to the best of his power to array and encourage the forces. He told them that the King would be with them in an hour. He pointed to the walls and guns of Prague, and said, that with such support as that, with strong hands and brave hearts, they had no need to fear any army were it of ten times their own numbers. His countenance was gay and cheerful, as he rode from rank to rank, whatever doubts might be in his heart; but he failed in raising the spirits of the greater part of the troops; and by all, with the exception of the cavalry under the command of his son, he was listened to with dull and heavy brows, and an aspect of doubt and uncertainty.

When he and his little train had reached the middle of the line, a horseman rode up to him from Prague, and spoke a few words in a low tone. The old man's cheek grew red; and he muttered between his teeth; "In the church! Sin and death! What does he in the church? Why does he not pray here in the eye of the God of battles, and in the presence of his soldiers?"

"I shall have to go and cut Scultetus's throat, to stop his long-winded preaching," said the Prince's son, who was close by.

"Hush," cried the old general; and, raising his voice, he added in loud tone, "the King will be here immediately, my friends; and under his eye you will fight for his crown and your own rights."

"The heads of the columns are appearing on the right, your Highness," said Algernon Grey, in a whisper.

"I am glad of it," answered Christian of Anhalt. "The sooner this is over, the better.--Some one ride down to those Hungarians; tell them to bend back upon the hill; so far advanced, they show our flank to the enemy. Let their right rest upon yon little summer-house; it is quite far enough advanced. You go, Lenepp;" and, riding on, he continued his exhortations to the men, every now and then sending off an officer with orders to one part or another of the line; after having reached the end, he turned his horse, and, accompanied by the Prince of Hohenloe and the rest, rode up at a quick pace to the highest part on the hill, beckoning to the man who had brought him news from Prague to follow. His first attention was directed to the movements of the enemy, whose regiments were now gathering thick in the plain below.

A cloud of light troops, man[oe]uvring hither and thither, almost as if in sport, concealed, in some degree, what was taking place in the main body of the army; but the experienced eye of the old commander was not to be deceived; and once or twice he murmured to himself, "If he does that, and we are wise, he is ruined--We shall soon see--now, sir, what is going on in Prague?" and he turned to the officer who had just arrived from the city: "Praying you say, and preaching too, I suppose. What more?"

"Why, feasting, your Highness," answered the young man, drily; "there is a great banquet prepared for the court after the morning service."

"A banquet!" exclaimed the old Prince furiously; "God's life! who will there be to eat it?--Yes, he will try to cross--No, he is coming farther on.--Praying, and preaching, and feasting, with fifty thousand men at the gates!--Has any one got a bible here?"

"I have," answered a young pale man, standing by on foot; and he handed a small volume to the old commander.

"Let me see," continued Christian of Anhalt, "this is the twenty-third Sunday after Trinity, is it not? and the gospel is the twenty-second of St. Matthew; let me see;" and he sought out the chapter he spoke of, and ran his eye over it in silence for a minute or two: "Ah!" he said, at length, reading from the book; "'Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's'--but, by my grey hair! here comes Cæsar to take them; ay, and to take more than his own too; so we must try and prevent him.--Now, my good cousin of Hohenloe, see if you can make out what Maximilian of Bavaria and that damned Walloon, Bucquoy, are doing."

"Methinks they are going to attack the city on the other side," answered the Prince of Hohenloe, who was in command of the troops which had been gathered on the Weissenberg during old Anhalt's retreat.

"No," answered the other, "no; they are looking for a bridge. They will not show us their flank, depend upon it. That would be a greater fault than that which they are going to commit. Ride down to your men, Christian, my boy; wheel them a little upon their right, about the eighth of a circle; and be ready at a moment's notice. I will send down the Englishmen to you, when I see more."

About a quarter of an hour passed, during which the movements of the enemy seemed wavering and uncertain; at the end of that time, however, clouds of skirmishers, Croats and Albanians, as they were called, began to appear on the nearer side of the river. "It may yet be a feint," said Christian of Anhalt; "it may yet be a feint.--They are getting upon that swampy ground. Five minutes more and they cannot help themselves. By heavens! their columns are broken. What is Maximilian of Bavaria about?--he is trying to turn the march--The Austrians still come on--look, look, they are separating; they will never get their artillery over that little bridge!--Now, cousin of Hohenloe, now noble lords and gentlemen, the moment of victory is before us, if we choose to take it. In a quarter of an hour, the marsh, the stream, and a bridge of a span wide will be between Bucquoy and the Duke. Let us sweep down upon the Bavarian, who is already in confusion. We are more than double his numbers; he can receive no support from the Austrians; and if there be a thousand gallant men in our army, he is irretrievably ruined. The same movement brings us on the flank of Bucquoy; and he is between us and the guns of Prague.--I say, let us charge at once as one man, and the day is ours."

"But you do not consider, Anhalt," said the Prince of Hohenloe, "that we should so lose the advantage of our position; here, upon a high hill, they must climb to attack us, and undergo our whole fire as they advance."

"God of Heaven!" cried Christian of Anhalt.

"I think," said another general officer, close by, "that it would be a pity to give up the great advantage of this ground, which we have taken such pains to obtain."

"Besides," said another, "if we should be repulsed there, we lose the support of Prague, and are totally cut off from the city; we should fight to a disadvantage, and have no place of retreat."

"If we could count upon the zeal and steadiness of our men," cried another, "I should join my voice to the Prince of Anhalt's; but I very much doubt them. I believe that one-half would disperse ere we met the enemy."

The old commander sat upon his horse in silence, with his teeth set, and his bare hands clasped so tight together, that a part of the brown fingers became quite white. "You are losing the only opportunity of victory," he said, at length. "Nay, it is already lost. The Bavarians have turned the marsh; the Austrians are passing the bridge. Ere we could reach them, they will be once more united. Now, nought is to be thought of, but to make as good a fight here as we can. You, Hohenloe, take the left; I command upon the right. Let our artillery open their fire upon the enemy now. We may do something to break them as they advance. Let us each to our post; and, in God's name, do our best!"

Thus saying, he turned his horse to ride away; but, after having gone some twenty or thirty yards, he called up one of his train, and said in a low voice, "Ride to the commanders of regiments, and tell them in private, that in case of a disaster, which God forefend, they are to rally their men upon Brandeis. The campaign is not at an end, though a battle may be lost; and, if Prague does its duty, with the help of Mansfeld, we may still defeat the enemy, and save the crown--Here, my young friend," he continued, beckoning to Algernon Grey, "go to, my son and tell him to ply back to his former ground with the cavalry. Let him know that I have been overruled; and, therefore, that movement was vain. He will now, as far as I see, have the Bavarian cavalry in front. We must try early what a charge upon them will do; but bid him, if successful, not to pursue too far, but turn upon the flank of the infantry and charge again. I will send him an order when it is time."

Thus saying, he proceeded on his way; and Algernon Grey, galloping down to the cavalry under the younger Prince Christian, delivered his father's message.

"See what it is to join fools with wise men," said young Christian of Anhalt, in a low bitter tone.

"They have ruined us."

"Indubitably," answered Algernon Grey; "and the same timid spirit, if it acts here, will render the battle but a short one. I will just give some orders to my people, in case of the worst, and then take my place; for they are coming on fast."

Thus saying, he turned his horse and cantered quickly round to a spot just over the brow of the hill, where the baggage had been collected and left under the charge of the ordinary servants of the officers, with a small guard. "Here, Frill," he cried, as soon as he could find his own people, "tell the men to keep the horses saddled, and the lighter baggage charged; let them lead the grey and the roan down towards the gate of the town, with one of the sumpter-horses, and have the barb brought up behind that tree, in case this should be killed. Keep yourself just over the edge of the hill, to be out of the fire. There is no use of risking your life, my poor boy."

"I should like to see the battle, my lord," said the lad; "no harm happened to me at Rakonitz, though I had my beaver shot through."

"Nonsense," answered his master; "do as I have ordered, and let me not see you above the hill. You have money with you, I think, in case of need?"

The boy answered in the affirmative, and Algernon Grey, turning his horse, rode back to the cavalry under Prince Christian of Anhalt, and took his place at the head of his own men. The Austrians were by this time within three hundred yards of the foot of the hill, upon the troops, ranged along the edge of which their artillery was playing with very little effect. The guns of the Bohemian army, however, though only ten in number, were better placed and better served; and at the moment when Algernon Grey returned to the scene of the commencing strife, the balls from a battery of four large pieces were ploughing through the ranks of a strong body of the enemy's cavalry just in front, creating tremendous confusion and disarray. He had not been three minutes with his troop, when, looking to the right, he saw a German officer galloping furiously along towards the young Prince of Anhalt, and seeming to call aloud to him as he advanced, though the roar of the artillery prevented his words from being heard. The next moment, however, the young Prince waved his sword high in the air, and shouted "Charge!" The word passed along from mouth to mouth; and at once the spurs were driven into the horses' sides; the animals sprang forward; and down the slope of the hill, the whole of the cavalry of the left was hurled like a thunderbolt upon the right wing of the enemy. Everything gave way before them. Men and horses rolled over in the shock; the standard of the Walloons fell; the cavalry was driven back upon the infantry; the infantry was thrown into confusion. A force of Austrian horse, brought up to the support of the Walloons, was broken in a moment; and in that part of the field, for some ten or fifteen minutes, the victory was decided in favour of the Bohemians; but, when all seemed favourable, a thin hard-featured man, riding upon a black horse, wheeled a large body of Bavarian pike-men, supported by a regiment of arquebusiers, upon the young Prince's triumphant cavalry. A fierce volley of small arms instantly followed, as Christian of Anhalt was plunging his horse among the pikes; and the young leader fell at once almost at the feet of Tilly. Algernon Grey's horse went down at the same instant, but, starting up, he endeavoured to drag his friend from amongst the pikes, receiving a slight wound in the shoulder while so doing; and, as the blow forced him to let go his hold for a moment, two strong Bavarians grasped the Prince by the bucklings of the cuirass and dragged him within the line. Another strove to seize the young Englishman; but striking him fiercely over the head with his sword, Algernon freed himself from his grasp, and springing back, caught a masterless horse that was running near, and vaulted into the saddle.

The trumpets of the Bohemian cavalry were sounding a retreat; and spurring after them with two of his own men, who had hastened to his aid, Algernon Grey reascended the hill, and rallied his troop into something like order. All the rest of the field, however, was one wild scene of confusion. Clouds of smoke and dust rolled between the various masses of the army, hardly permitting the eye to distinguish which bodies were keeping their ground, which were flying; but one thing was clear; the enemy were advancing steadily up the hill; and the Bavarian cavalry rallied, and in good order, outflanking the Bohemian line, were preparing to charge their lately victorious foes. The German infantry, towards the centre of the Bohemian line, seemed firm enough; but the Transylvanians, who had been seen upon the right at the commencement of the fight, were no longer to be perceived; and regiment after regiment of the Austrian troops pouring on in that direction, showed that the ground there was clear of opposition.

"My lord, my lord," said a youthful voice, as Algernon Grey was gazing around him, "the day is lost. All the savages have fled; and the whole right is in confusion and disarray; the men scampering hither and thither, and drowning themselves in the Moldau."

"Go back, go back to the place I told you," replied Algernon; "wait there for me; but tell the men to get all the baggage as near the gate as they can.--My lord, the count," he continued, riding up to an old officer, who was advancing, "one more charge for the honour of our arms."

"With all my heart," said old Count Schlick; "where's the boy, Christian? He did that charge right gallantly."

"He is wounded and taken, my lord," answered Algernon Grey.

"Then I will head the men," said the Count; "they will follow grey hair as well as brown, I will warrant--Let us away."

Riding on to the body of cavalry which had rallied, the old Bohemian nobleman put himself at their head; the word was given to charge; and once more, though with less spirit and in diminished numbers, they swept down to meet the advancing enemy. The right of their horse encountering a body of Walloon cavalry, forced them to recoil; and there the Bohemian horsemen were soon mingled with the foe hand to hand. But on the left they found their advance opposed by a steady regiment of Bavarian pikemen, flanked as before by arquebusiers. The first line hesitated, and drew in the rein at the sight of the forest of pikes before them. A discharge of musketry took them in the flank, and in an instant all was confusion, disarray, and flight. About four hundred horse, with the old Count and Algernon Grey, were left in the midst of the imperial army, no longer united as a single mass, but broken into small parties of combatants; and it soon became evident that the strife could not be maintained any longer.

"Away, away!" cried the Count, riding past the young Englishman; "I have ordered the trumpets to sound a retreat,--but, in Heaven's name, let us save our standard."

As he spoke, he pointed to a spot where a banner was floating still, in the midst of a large party of the enemy; and gathering together as many of his own men as he could, Algernon Grey made a charge with the old Bohemian at his side, in order, if possible, to recover it. But the effort was in vain; as they poured down upon the enemy, a pistol shot struck the standard-bearer from his horse, and closing round the little troop of English and Bohemians, the Walloons soon brought many a brave heart to the ground. Algernon Grey thought of Agnes Herbert: there was nothing but death or captivity if he staid to strike another stroke; all was evidently lost; no object was to be obtained, and, turning his horse, he cleared the way with his sword, and galloped up the hill, passing under a furious fire from the musketeers, who were already in his rear.

When he reached the summit, he perceived how vain had been even the last effort. Cavalry and infantry of the Bohemian army were all flying together. The field presented a complete rout, except where, at various points, appeared an Austrian or Bavarian regiment, already in possession of the hill. The artillery, the greater part of the baggage, and all the tents, were in the hands of the enemy; and, spurring on like lightning through the perils that surrounded him, the young Englishman at length reached the tree where the page was waiting, with his own horse and a fresh one for his master. Springing to the ground, Algernon snatched his pistols from the saddle-bow, and leaped upon the back of the other charger.

"Mount and follow, mount and follow," he cried to the page, and then dashed on towards the gates of Prague.

As he approached, he looked eagerly round for his servants and baggage, at the spot where he had appointed them to be; but they were not to be seen; though, as compared with the rest of the field, the ground and the road in front of the gates were nearly solitary; for the stream of fugitives had taken another direction. As he gazed forward, however, he saw some of the soldiers of the tower in the very act of unlocking the chain of the portcullis; and judging rightly what was about to take place, he struck his spurs into his horse's sides and dashed over the drawbridge. A guard presented a partisan to his breast, calling, "Stand back! We have orders--"

But Algernon Grey turned the weapon aside with his sword; the horse in its furious career dashed the man to the ground; and ere any one else could oppose, the young cavalier and the page were both within the walls of Prague.

CHAPTER III.

In the fine old Dom church of Prague, sat Frederic, king of Bohemia, and many of the principal personages of his court. The faint sunshine of a cold November day shone through the tall windows, and one of the pale chilly beams lighted on the bald head and white hair of an old man raised above the rest in a high pulpit, who, with outstretched arm and vehement gesticulation, was declaiming violently against "the woman of the seven hills, and all who bore about with them the mark of the Beast." His piety, indeed, was somewhat blasphemous, and his illustrations exaggerated in character and homely in language, till they became almost ludicrous; but still there was a fierce, rude eloquence about him, which captivated his hearers and enchained their attention. Every eye was turned towards him, every ear was bent to hear, when suddenly a dull heavy sound shook the building, and made the casements rattle in their frames.

The preacher paused; the congregation turned round and gazed in each other's faces; and

then, roar after roar, came the peal of the artillery from the field where all Frederic's hopes were to find their final overthrow.

The young monarch started up with a look of consternation; the congregation followed; and all seemed taken by surprise, and thunderstruck at an event which might have been foreseen by themselves, and had been foreseen by others for weeks before. But there are states of moral apathy--lethargies as it were of the mind, which seem sent by fate to prevent the near impending destruction from giving to the doomed a warning to fly from its approach. Remonstrances had often reached Frederic's ear; urgent appeals had been made to his judgment; every intelligence of the enemy's movements had been communicated to him--but, sunk in listless idleness, or carried away by the pursuit of pleasure, or wrapt in the visions of a fanatical religion, he would not listen, or he would not believe, till the cannon of the field of Prague roused him thus at once in horror and wonder from the long torpor in which he had lain.

The battle had begun, and he was absent; his subjects and his friends were shedding their blood in his defence, and he was not there to share their peril and direct their efforts. But it was still not too late, he thought. He would fly to the field; he would encourage his soldiers by his presence; he would put himself in the front of his host; he would perish or preserve the crown he had gained. He hearkened not to the preacher, though Scultetus in a loud voice called on all to wait and listen to a concluding prayer. He heard not the eager but reasonless questions of his surrounding courtiers; he did not even mark the pale face of Camerarius; but, waving his right hand, and grasping his sword scabbard with the left, he exclaimed aloud, "To the field! To the field! Our friends and brethren are dying in arms in our cause! To the field! To the field; and God defend the right!"

Thus saying, he strode at once out of the church, and hurried back towards the palace, calling loudly for his horse. A page ran on to bring out a charger: and many others followed, in search of arms, they said; but few were ever seen again by the young monarch's side.

"Where is my horse?" cried Frederic vehemently, as he reached the gates of his residence; "quick, quick! Lose not an instant. Tell the Queen I have gone to lead the troops; tell her--"

"Which horse will your Majesty ride?" demanded an officer of the stables, running forth.

"Any one, fool!" exclaimed the King--"hear you not the cannon?--Aught which will carry me to my friends without.--Away! Stay not to talk!--Have it here in a moment!"

"Will you not arm, sire?" said an old officer, in a persuasive tone.

"No!" cried Frederic, sternly; "as I am, with my bare breast, will I face them. Speed is the only armour I would use.--But these men will drive me mad.--Where is my charger?--In the name of pity--in the name of Heaven, see some one what they are doing! Men will call me coward--my name will be a by-word. They will say, for centuries to come, that, while his brave soldiers were bleeding before Prague, Frederic of Bohemia shunned the field where his crown was to be lost or won."

"Here comes your royal charger," cried a voice; and, springing forward, the monarch put his foot in the stirrup and vaulted on the horse's back.

"Follow, follow! All that love me follow!" he cried, and without waiting for any one, dashed down at headlong speed towards the gates. The way was long, the streets narrow and steep; but on, on went the unhappy prince till the small triangular space of open ground before the inner ward lay within sight. Then ran up a half-armed guard; and, approaching close to his horse's side, said in a low voice, "They fly, they fly, your Majesty!"

His look, his tone, were ominous; for he spoke as if he were afraid that his words might be heard by any one near; but still Frederic asked with a sinking heart, "Who fly?"

"Our men, sire," answered the soldier.

"Then I go to rally them," cried the King, "or to die with those who stand."

"That might have done an hour ago," said the soldier, bluntly; "but it is now too late."

It is the fate of misfortune to hear hard truths; and this was the first bitter sting of many that Frederic was yet to feel. He stopped not to answer, however, but pushed on past the man, catching a sight at the same time of several of his attendants spurring down after him. The soldiers of the guard-house scarcely saw his approach; for they were all gazing eagerly forth from the outer gate; but, just beyond the drawbridge, he perceived a rude Bohemian bleeding from several wounds, and leaning for support against the masonry.

"Ah, sir, the day is lost," cried the man, as the monarch rode past; "the troops are all flying towards Brandeis; half the Hungarians drowned in the river; the infantry all in route; the cannon taken----." Frederic listened to no more, but still spurred on, dashing his horse through the guards at the outer gate, and gazing eagerly towards the hill.

Who was it coming so rapidly towards him, followed by half a dozen troopers and a single

banner? Old Christian of Anhalt, bloody and dusty from the fight, where he had fought hand to hand; no hat upon his head, his grey hair streaming in the wind, his head bent sadly down almost to his horse's neck, and his hands grasping tightly the reins with a bitter and convulsive clasp.

"Anhalt!" cried the King.

"It is all lost, my lord, as I knew it would be," said the old soldier, in a low deep voice. "Back with us into Prague as fast as may be. The Bavarian is at our heels.--Let the walls be well manned, and the cannon pour forth their shot upon the enemy, if they come too near. Let the gates be closed, too; the fugitives are taking another way.--Your safety and the defence of Prague are now all we have to think of. We must have counsel with all speed.--You, gentlemen," he continued, turning to those who followed, "away to the Rath-house in the old town, as fast as you can ride; take measures with the magistrates for the sure guarding of the walls; and, hark you, Dillingen, gather every information you can of the temper of the people, and let the King hear at the Hradschin. You will find me there, in case of need.--Come, my lord, come; it is vain thinking of what cannot be remedied. The future, the future! still the future! We may make a good fight yet, if Mansfeld will but help--Not serve under me! Why, I will be his horseboy, if he will fight like a man.--Come, my lord.--Nay, nay, be not so cast down! 'Tis but a battle lost after all. I trust we shall see many such before we die, and win many a one to boot;" and grasping Frederic's hand kindly, he led, rather than followed, the Monarch back into the city, giving orders, as they passed the gates, that they should be closed and defended. The news had already spread through Prague that the royal army had been defeated. There were men who had seen the rout from a church steeple; the tale had been carried from mouth to mouth, and from house to house; there was scarce a babbling child who did not know it, and repeat it; and, as Frederic and his train passed by, almost every door had its group of men and women, who eyed him, some sadly, some sullenly--but few, if any, showed a mark of reverence. Some, especially where there was a cross over the door, suffered a half-suppressed grin to appear, as the unfortunate Prince rode by; and then went and talked in low tones to their neighbours, pointing significantly over the shoulder to the royal group. All that he saw made the young Monarch's heart more sad; and, when he reached the palace, he led the way straight to the ante-room of his wife's apartments.

The first person whom he met there was Agnes Herbert; but she saw that disaster and ruin were in his eyes, and she dared not ask any questions. Not a servant had been found in the court, or on the staircase, or in the hall below; and Frederic, turning to her, said in a sad but gentle tone, "I beseech you, lady, seek some of the people, and tell them to send us what counsellors they can find; above all, Dohna and Camerarius."

"Camerarius!" cried Christian of Anhalt, warmly; "we want counsel with men, not with weak and doubting subtle-wits like that.--Give us the Princess and Dohna.--Old Slick, I fancy, is dead; for I saw him charge desperately to rescue my poor boy, who is wounded and taken, I hear."

"Well, well," said Frederick; "send some one for Dohna, dear lady; and I will call the Queen.--Is your gallant son a prisoner, then, indeed?" he continued, grasping old Anhalt's hand.

"Never mind him," replied the soldier. "God will take care of him.--Let us have the Queen, my lord. Her courage and her wisdom now are worth a dozen other counsellors."

In the mean while, Agnes left the ante-room with her cheek deadly pale, and her heart feeling as cold as ice. There was a question she would fain have asked, but she dared not breathe it--a question which made her bosom feel heavy and her limbs shake, even when she put it to herself, "Where was Algernon Grey?" Oh, when she thought of him in that hour, how deep, how strong, how overpowering did she feel the love which she had so long concealed from her own eyes. She grasped the balustrade of the staircase for support; and, though she knew that each moment was precious, she paused at every step.--Had she gone forward, she would have fallen.

Suddenly, as she descended, she heard a clang as of an armed man springing to the ground at the door of the second court, which opened below. Then came a step in the stone hall at the foot of the stairs. Oh, how her heart beat; for the quick sure ear of love recognised the tread at once. She darted down the remaining steps. The next instant he was before her. She sprang forward, and, ere they knew what they did, she was clasped to his armed bosom.

"I have come to keep my promise, dearest," said Algernon Grey; "to aid, to protect, to defend you with my life, if need should be.--Where is the Queen? where is the King? I must speak with them both, if possible."

"The King is above," answered Agnes, withdrawing herself from his embrace. "He is with the Prince of Anhalt in the Queen's ante-room, just above the court of St. George. He sent me for one of the attendants to call the Viscount of Dohna; but I can find no one.--Good Heaven! they surely cannot all have abandoned their King and their master already!"

"No, no," answered Algernon Grey; "they have gone up to the roofs to see what they can see, or out to gather news. Speed back again, dear Agnes, and tell him I am here. I will seek Dohna, if he lodges where he used. At all events, I will find some one who can call him. Away, dear girl, for I would fain see the King speedily."

Agnes hurried away, with her heart all joyful; for the relief of his coming had swept away the

bitterness of all other disasters with that which he had anticipated. What was to her a battle lost, if Algernon Grey was safe! When she entered the ante-chamber she found the Queen seated between her husband and Christian of Anhalt; her face raised and turned alternately from one to the other; her look eager and grave, but not at all depressed.

"'Tis the best way," she said, as Agnes entered; "so shall we, at least, gain time for intelligence, for preparation, and for action.--Doubtless he will grant it. He is our cousin."

"And his troops have had enough to do," answered Christian of Anhalt; "that is the best security. He has as much need of repose as we have. Prague is a hard bone to pick."

"But whom shall we send?" said Frederic. "It must be some man of rank; and there is an old grudge between him and Dohna. Is the Viscount coming, fair lady?"

"I can find none of the attendants, your Majesty," answered Agnes; "but I met Master Algernon Grey in the hall, just alighted, and he undertook to find the Viscount, begging me to tell your Majesties that he wished to speak with you immediately."

"Then he is safe," cried the Queen; "thank God for that!"

"If he is safe, it is not his own fault," exclaimed Christian of Anhalt, "for he fought like a madman when all hope was over. I never saw so cool a head in counsel, and so hot a one in battle. Let us have him here by all means."

"Can we not send the Earl, Frederic?" asked the Queen, laying her hand gently on her husband's arm, and calling him, in the hour of his distress, by the dear familiar name which she never used but in private. "He must throw off this foolish incognito now, and will go, I am sure, in his own name and character, as our envoy to this proud victor. See for him, my sweet cousin, see for him, and bring him hither with all speed."

Agnes hastened away without reply, and found Algernon Grey already mounting the stairs. He followed her quickly, without even pausing for the words of tenderness which were in his heart; and in a moment after he stood before the King and Queen, who were still nearly in the same position in which Agnes had left them, only that Elizabeth was writing with a rapid hand from her husband's dictation.

"Say four and twenty hours, my lord the King," exclaimed Christian of Anhalt, interrupting him; "he won't grant more, if so much."

"Well, four and twenty hours be it," answered Frederic. "We can gather force enough in that time to make head."

Elizabeth finished writing quickly, and then pushed the paper over to her husband, who took the pen and signed his name.

"This fair lady tells me you wish to speak with me, my lord," said Frederic, as soon as he had done.

"I wish to represent to your Majesty," replied Algernon Grey, "that the gates of the city being closed so soon, before any parties of the enemy are near, may prevent many gallant men, who have already fought well and will do so again, from finding refuge within these walls, where they might do good service. I myself was nearly excluded; and much of the baggage will, doubtless, be lost which might be saved."

"It was an order given by me in haste, my young friend," replied Christian of Anhalt, "not rightly understood by the frightened people there, and to be amended immediately. I meant them to shut out our enemies, not our friends. But now listen to what his Majesty has to say to you."

"It is simply this, my Lord of Hillingdon," said Frederic; "Will you, in a moment of our need like this, take a flag of truce, from the gates to our cousin, Maximilian of Bavaria, and deliver to him this letter, demanding a suspension of arms for four and twenty hours?--You must go in your own character, however; for we cannot send any inferior man to such a Prince in the hour of victory."

"I will be your Majesty's envoy with pleasure," answered Algernon Grey, "and for this night will resume my name and title; but I will beg all here to forget it afterwards, as, for reasons of my own, now more strong than ever, I wish not to have my coming and going bruited about in every part of Europe."

"Be it as you will," answered Frederic; "and many thanks, my lord, for this and all other services. Write on the superscription, dearest lady, 'By the hands of our cousin, the Earl of Hillingdon?'"

Elizabeth wrote, gave Algernon Grey the letter, and raised her eyes to his face, saying, "On your return, whatever be the answer you bring, I must see you for a few moments, my lord. You made me a promise, which I am sure you will fulfil with chivalry and devotion."

"I did not forget it, your Majesty," answered Algernon Grey, looking round with a faint smile towards Agnes; "and I will return to accomplish it as soon as this task is ended. I shall, doubtless,

find a flag at the gates; and so I take my leave."

"Stay, I go with you to give better orders," said Christian of Anhalt, "and to furnish a new password to the guards, for I have some fears of these good citizens. Ha! here comes Dohna--I will return immediately;" and thus saying he withdrew with Algernon Grey.

CHAPTER IV.

All was confusion and disorder in the streets of Kleinseite (or smaller side) of the city of Prague, as old Christian of Anhalt returned from the gates. The lower classes of citizens were hurrying hither and thither, or--collected into crowds wherever a more open space was to be found--were eagerly and vociferously discussing past events and future contingencies. Lowering brows, angry looks, and vehement gestures were seen everywhere; but no one ventured in any way to insult the old commander as he rode along; for not alone did his frank and straightforward bearing and gallant conduct in the field, command respect, but at the gates of the town he had found some thirty or forty cavaliers who, amongst the last to quit the field, had sought shelter under the guns of the fortress, and now accompanied him on his way to the palace. There, all the servants and domestic officers of the King were found once more reassembled, and affecting to perform their several duties, but the scared look, the eager haste, the abstracted manner, all showed consternation; and on mounting to the apartments of the Queen, the Prince found that terror was not confined to the inferior inhabitants of the residence.

A number of Frederic's counsellors had by this time assembled, and, with the exception of Dohna, each seemed more terrified than his neighbour. Neither the presence of their sovereign, the importance of calm discussion, nor even the heroic courage displayed by the Queen herself, could restrain them from talking all at once. Some urged instant flight, some unconditional surrender; and the boldest of them only ventured to suggest an attempt to gain time by cunning negotiations with the enemy. Frederic himself was tranquil and resolute in his air and tone; but in opinion he seemed wavering and uncertain.

The authority of the old soldier, his plain rough speech, sound sense, and stern firmness in the hour of danger, made some impression; but Christian of Anhalt soon saw that, as usual with the weak and crafty, where stratagem is out of time and presence of mind does not exist, the greater part of those present were still confusing counsel with vain speculations, with idle repetitions, and suggestions utterly inapplicable to the circumstances of the moment.

"We must get rid of these men, your Majesty," he said, drawing Frederic aside; "half of them are cowards, and almost all the rest are fools, only fit for the monkey tricks of diplomacy. We want men of energy and action. Let us keep Dohna, as a skilful and firm counsellor, and send for young Thurm. Where his father is, I know not. I saw him very late in the field."

"He is at his own house," said Frederic; "he sent word he would dine, and then come hither."

"'Tis so like him!" cried Anhalt; "he has fought himself into an appetite. But have I your permission to send these men away?"

"Yes, but courteously, my friend, courteously," replied Frederic.

"Oh, courteously, of course," answered the old man, with a grim smile. "Gentlemen," he continued, "an envoy has been sent to the enemy's head quarters. In less than an hour we shall hear more, and till then can decide upon nothing. It may be that we shall have to quit Prague tomorrow; so I would advise all--as every man has some private papers, and most men some little property--to employ the next few minutes in preparing for whatever may be the result. His Majesty will excuse your attendance for an hour--Stay, Dohna, stay!" he added in a low voice, "we shall want you. We are going to send for the two Thurms, and have calm counsel, instead of frightened babble."

The other counsellors hastened away, eager to save their papers and effects; and the moment they were gone a messenger was despatched to old Count Thurm and his son Count Bernhard; but ere he had quitted the room two minutes, there was heard a knock at the door, and the younger count entered in haste with the Baron of Dillinghen, who had been sent to the town hall.

"What is it, gentlemen?" exclaimed the Queen, as soon as she saw them; "there is alarm in both your faces. Has any new disaster happened?"

"No, madam," replied the young count; "but Dillinghen has some news of importance, which I fear I must confirm."

"Speak! speak!" cried Frederic, turning to the baron. "What tidings bring you, sir?--Is the enemy advancing?"

"No, sire," answered the Baron of Dillinghen; "but my lord of Anhalt here bade me collect what tidings I could of the temper of the people and the magistrates. I grieve to say it is not good. They show no willingness to defend the lower town,--declare it is untenable, and there is much murmuring amongst them at the very thought."

"What is to be done?" cried Frederic, turning to the Prince of Anhalt with a look of consternation.

"Go up to the Wyschehrad," answered Anhalt; "we can make it good for a long while, till we are able to draw men enough together to overawe these burghers and take the defence out of their hands."

"My lord, I fear they are not to be overawed," rejoined Dillinghen; "in a word, there is treason amongst them."

"Ay, and even in your Majesty's very court and palace," added Bernhard of Thurm.

"That I know," answered Frederic, in a sad and bitter tone; "do you recollect, Elizabeth, my letter from Rakonitz?--But still I thought the citizens were true."

"So far from it, sire," said Bernhard of Thurm, "and so pressing is the danger, that I was bold enough, ere I came up, to order the Queen's carriage to be made ready with all speed. When you are both safe on the other side of the water, where I can rely upon my garrison, these turbulent burghers may be brought to reason. Now I would lose no time, but depart instantly.--Your attendants can follow, with everything that it may be necessary to bring from the palace.--I would not lose a moment, for to know that you are in their power gives the traitors a bold front."

"I must take some of my poor girls with me," cried Elizabeth,--"poor Ann Dudley, and Amelia of Solms, and my sweet Agnes; but I will be back directly."

As the Queen opened the door to retire into her bed-chamber, a voice of bitter lamentation was heard from within; and Christian of Anhalt exclaimed, "Would to God that these women would learn a lesson of fortitude from their high-souled mistress. What will howling do, to avert peril?"

"Be not harsh, my friend," said Frederic; "that is poor Ann Dudley's voice. Her husband's body lies on that bloody field without. The tidings came just ere you returned. But here is the Queen again. Now let us go. I will send orders afterwards for all that may be needed. Come, sweet friend--methinks, with you beside me, I can never know despair;" and taking Elizabeth's hand, he drew it through his arm and led her down slowly: for she was great with child.

The splendid carriage of blue velvet embroidered with silver stood ready in the court; and, as Elizabeth's eyes fell upon its gorgeous decorations, a faint sad smile came upon her lip, and she shook her head mournfully. Oh, how the emptiness of pomp and pageantry, and lordly state, is felt by the heart in the bitter hour of sorrow and adversity; and while the riches of the soul, the love, the friendship, the trust, the tenderness, rise high in value, sink low the more sordid objects of earthly ambition and pride.

A weeping train followed the Queen to the carriage; some entered with her; some followed in other vehicles, or on foot; and but two, of all the fair and sparkling bevy which had shared Elizabeth's days of joy and splendour, seemed now in a condition to give her comfort and support. Amelia of Solms was sad, but she wept not; Agnes Herbert grave, but firm, though gentle, in her whole demeanour. With kindly care, she whispered from time to time some word of consolation in the ear of poor Ann Dudley, and, though her beautiful eyes were full of melancholy when she gazed at the Queen, yet there was a hopefulness in her words which added to the strength of mind with which Elizabeth bore up under the griefs and perils of the hour.

It seemed a long and weary way to the old citadel of Prague, as with slow steps the horses dragged the carriages up the ascent; but the gates at length were reached, and Frederic took his fair wife in his arms and carried her into the wide hall. He could not forbear saying with a sigh, "I now know where I am. Princes seldom learn the truth till they are taught it by adversity."

An hour went by; and many a messenger came up from the lower town, each burdened with gloomy tidings. The horses and carriages were all brought up from the stables of the Hradschin, and some small sums of money, together with clothes, and papers; but it was soon found that the council of citizens had taken possession of the building; and though they did not exactly prevent the King's servants from removing his own property, yet there were questions asked and objections made, which rendered the task slow and difficult. Night fell, and the confusion in the town increased. The light of numerous torches created a glare which was seen red and portentous from the Wyschehrad; and a loud murmur like the roar of a distant sea rose up and filled the watching hearts above with vague and gloomy apprehensions.

Old Count Thurm had speedily joined the royal party, and a number of devoted friends surrounded Frederic and his Queen; but those who knew the Bohemian capital best did not

contribute, by their warnings, to raise hopes or to still anxieties.

They represented the probability of tumult and violence as great; and all seemed convinced that treason had long been preparing the way for the state of mind the people now displayed.

At length loud but distant shouts, and then the sounds of horses' feet clattering quickly over the paved road, were heard; and in a few minutes Algernon Grey was introduced into the chamber where the King and Queen were seated, surrounded by most of those who had accompanied them to the citadel.

"What are those shouts, my lord?" was Frederic's first question.

"I trust good auguries, your Majesty," replied the young Englishman; "the crowds surrounded me and my people as I returned, calling out loudly for the tidings I bore. I answered briefly, that a truce was concluded to negotiate a peace. Those who understood German translated it to the rest; and then they tossed up their hats and shouted joyfully. So I trust that they will now return to their own homes; for they seemed in a sadly disturbed state.--There, my lord the King, is the convention signed by the Elector and Bucquoy. It was all that by any arguments I could obtain, though I disputed with them for an hour."

"But eight hours suspension of arms!" exclaimed Frederic, looking at the paper, and then gazing at Christian of Anhalt, and at Thurm. "Our decision must be made speedily."

"If we were but sure of Mansfeld," said Anhalt, thoughtfully, "and had but two thousand men more within the walls."

"It is vain, old friend," cried Count Thurm. "I know these people better than any one; and I take upon myself to say to the King--Fly at once. Lose not the precious moments. There are traitors in town, and court, and army. The people are not with us; we have no force to hold out; no hope of succour. You have eight hours, my lord, to save yourself from worse than perhaps you dream of; and, what is far more, to save this dear lady, our Queen. Lose not an instant; but go!"

"It were well, my royal friend," said Christian of Anhalt. "Had we the people with us; had we troops to secure the place without their aid; could we even rally the remains of the army within Prague, I would say, 'Stay; fight it out here to the last; and play the game to an end, however desperate.' But all things at this moment are against us. The only thing in our power is eight hours of time. I see nought to which they can be applied, but to your speedy escape. If you stay, with an army of fifty thousand men at your gates, with a turbulent and discontented population within, with a force not sufficient to man the whole walls, with provisions that will not last ten days, and not ammunition enough to resist a regular siege, a thousand to one the population throw open the gates tomorrow, and deliver you as a prisoner into the hands of the enemy."

"That, too, with the ban of the empire hanging over your head," cried Count Thurm; "and two inveterate enemies ready to execute it."

"Let us go," cried Elizabeth, rising from the table. "It can never be said that I have been the advocate of weak counsels; but now, like the willow, our strength may lie in yielding. Let us not hesitate any longer. In half an hour, I shall be ready. We shall gain seven hours, at least, upon the enemy; and, surely, that will place us in security."

"Madam," said young Bernhard of Thurm, "by your good leave, you shall have some longer space. My lord the King has made me governor of this citadel. I have five hundred men in whom I can trust. With them I will undertake to hold it out for three full days against false Maximilian of Bavaria and his fifty thousand. This Jesuit-soldier shall find work enough beneath these walls to keep him for that time, at least, from pursuing the kinsman he has betrayed, and to make him recollect, perhaps, the promises he has violated."

"Never!" cried Elizabeth, warmly, taking the young man's hand in hers; "I will have no such sacrifice. Never shall the son of our best friend hazard his life to cover my flight. Nor even would I expose this city, fickle as it has proved itself, to the outrages of a furious enemy for such a consideration as my poor safety. Rather let me perish at once, than be remembered as a curse."

Thus saying, she quitted the room, calling to her ladies to follow; and a scene of indescribable confusion succeeded, whilst hasty preparations were made for instant departure. Servants hurried hither and thither; carriages and horses were prepared in haste. What small supplies of money could be obtained, a few of the most necessary articles of apparel, some papers of great importance, some treasured memorials of days of happiness, and a small supply of ammunition for the men of the troop, were packed up with all speed; and a rapid consultation took place between Frederic and his principal advisers, as to the roads he should follow, and the course in which he should direct his flight. All agreed that Breslau was the place best fitted for his first pause, as it brought him near the dominions of friends and relations; and some one was eagerly sought amongst the attendants who could act as a guide to the fugitives through the desolate and inhospitable regions which they had to traverse on the way. Algernon Grey, unable from his ignorance of the country to advise, and uncertain what part he might be called upon to play himself in this sad scene of flight and disaster, remained waiting the decision of others, till at length, a page entering called him to the presence of the Queen.

He found Elizabeth standing in a small room within, holding Agnes Herbert's hand in her's. There was no one else in the chamber; and a single candle afforded the only light, which showed him the pale countenances of his sovereign's daughter and her young companion.

"My lord," said Elizabeth quickly, as soon as he entered, "you promised to save and protect this dear girl. You will remember your promise, I am sure; and I must remember one I made to her uncle twelve long months ago. It was to the effect that, if by the chances of war I was obliged to quit Prague, I would send her back to him under safe escort. She would fain go with me now; but I must deny her wishes. You will doubtless be able to reach the Upper Palatinate in safety; there will be no object in stopping you. The fierce pursuers will most likely be upon my path like hounds before to-morrow morning. In your charge, therefore, I will place her; to your honour as a gentleman, and your conscience as a Christian, I entrust her. She is pure and good, noble and true, worthy of the love of the highest in this or any other land, and as worthy of reverence, as spotless innocence can render woman. Stay not for ceremonious leave-takings; but farewell! You will find a horse prepared for her below; and God bless and protect you, as you protect her!"

"One moment, your Majesty," said Algernon Grey. "Some ten of my sturdy Englishmen have got into the town in safety. Each, I will answer for him, is ready to shed the last drop of his blood in your behalf. Each is well armed and mounted, and provided with gold to defray all his own expenses. You yourself give me another destination, and I will obey your commands; but let these men remain with you as a sort of body-guard. I will leave them under the command of young Hopeton, a gentleman of honourable family, and a friend's son. My page and one servant will be quite enough with us--indeed, we shall pass more easily few than many. The rest of the men, when you are safe, can join me at Heidelberg, where, please God, I will yet serve your Majesty to the best of my power."

"Be it so," answered the Queen. "Now, farewell! And Heaven reward you, my lord, for all you have done for me and mine. Adieu, dearest Agnes, adieu!"

The Queen opened her arms as she spoke; and Agnes Herbert cast herself upon her bosom, and, for an instant, gave way to tears; but, at length, Elizabeth gently removed her, saying, "We have no time for long adieus, sweet cousin; we shall meet again, if it be God's will.--There, my lord," and she placed Agnes' hand in his, looking at him steadfastly for a moment as she did so, and then raising her eyes to heaven.

Algernon Grey understood the appeal, and saying in a low tone, "On my life! on my honour!" he led Agnes from the room; and, without passing through the chamber where he had left Frederic, advanced to the top of the great staircase. There he paused for a moment, and, drawing Agnes' arm through his, looked down on her face tenderly, asking in a low voice, "Are you afraid, Agnes?"

She raised her eyes, beaming through her tears: "Not in the least," she answered--"sorrowful, but not afraid."

When they reached the court-yard, it presented a strange wild scene; carriages, horses, men mounted and dismounted, were all gathered together by the light of a few torches; and some minutes elapsed before Algernon Grey could discover which was the horse that had been prepared for his fair companion. At length, however, a strong but light jennet was found, with a lady's saddle and a small leathern bag, or portmanteau, strapped upon the croup. A page held it, saying, that it had been got ready by the Queen's order; and, lifting the sweet girl lightly into the saddle, Algernon Grey mounted his own horse, bade the boy Frill, who was waiting, to follow, and rode out, turning towards the great gates of the citadel. There he found assembled the men of his own band, who had escaped into Prague, after the slaughter on the Weissenberg. He spoke for some minutes to a fine-looking young man at their head, and then bade his old servant Tony, who was with them, mount and come after him. Then, riding quickly through the streets, he reached the gates of the old town, and began to descend into the lower part of Prague.

The city was now comparatively quiet. The news of an armistice, which he himself had given, had spread amongst the people, calming their fears and cooling their heated passions. Multitudes had retired to their own houses; others had gone to consult at the town-house as to their future conduct; and none but a few stragglers were seen here and there, as the young Englishman and his fair companion rode through the dark unlighted streets. A cold November wind was whistling amongst the tall houses; the sky was varying every moment, now showing a star or two, now loaded with heavy clouds; and every thing seemed to bear the same sad and cheerless aspect that was presented by the fate of the royal persons he had just left. Summer had passed away, and the long, cold, desolate winter was close at hand.

A flaming sort of beacon, raised in an iron frame upon a pole, shed a broad glare over the open space before the guard-house of the inner gate, to which he directed his course; but no one was seen there but a sentry walking up and down; and Algernon Grey directed his servant to give the rein of the baggage-horse, which was led with them, to the page, and desire some one to open the gates. The warder, who came forth with one or two soldiers, seemed disposed to make difficulties; but the young Englishman produced the pass which he had received some hours before when going to the Bavarian camp; and, with a surly and discontented air, the man unlocked the heavy gates and let him pass. The drawbridge was slowly lowered; and, after a careful examination from the wicket-tower, to see that no enemy was near, the warder of the

night opened the outer gates and let the whole party go forth, murmuring something about--"The fewer mouths in Prague the better!"

All was darkness, except where upon the summit of the Weissenberg the light of a fire here and there marked the bivouac of an Imperial regiment, occupying the position where the Bohemian army had been encamped the night before. Taking a narrow road to the right, though he knew not well whither it led, Algernon Grey rode on for some way through a sandy part of the ground, and then passed a small stream by a narrow bridge hardly wide enough for two horses to advance abreast. The moment after a broader glare of light was seen upon the left, and innumerable flames, flickering and flashing on the clouds of smoke which rose from the wood fires, showed where the whole host of the enemy lay.

Algernon Grey laid his hand gently upon that of Agnes Herbert, saying in a low tone, "We are safe for the present, dear Agnes. On our journey we will be brother and sister. God send the time may come when we may call each other by dearer names!"

These were the first words that had been spoken, but they made Agnes's whole frame thrill; and the next moment, putting his horse into a quicker pace, Algernon Grey led the way onward to the dark woods that stretched out before them.

CHAPTER V.

"I fear there are storms in the sky, dear Agnes," said Algernon Grey, as the stars disappeared, and the heavy clouds rolled broad over the heavens. "How cold the night wind blows!--does it not chill you, dear sister?"

"No," she answered; "I am warmly clad; but the poor Queen!--I dread to think of such a journey for her. Happy it is, indeed, that all the royal children were sent away before!"

"Happy indeed!" repeated her companion; "for their presence would have added terribly to the sufferings and fears of such a time as this. The darkness of the night, however, like many another gloomy thing, may not be so evil as it seems. It will conceal their flight; for I much fear that Maximilian of Bavaria would hold himself justified in seizing and keeping as prisoners both King and Queen, notwithstanding the armistice, if he discovered they had left Prague."

"He, surely, never would be so base!" cried Agnes, warmly.

"I know not," replied her lover; "policy is a base thing; and there never was an act so foul that some smooth excuse could not be found for its commission. He has been brought up, too, in a school where plausible pretexts for evil deeds is one part of the training; and to hold Frederic in captivity, would be too great a temptation for a Jesuitical spirit to resist, I fear."

"Then I will thank the darkness," answered his fair companion, "if it be as black as that of Egypt."

"It may sorely impede us ourselves," replied Algernon Grey. "Do you remember, Agnes, the last time that we wandered together through the greater part of the night? I never thought it would be our fate to do so again. But what a different evening was that!--preceded, it is true, by dangers and sorrows, but followed by many brighter days. Oh, may this be so too!"

"God grant it!" cried Agnes. "I recollect it well--can I ever forget it? Oh, no; it is one of those things which, painted on memory--like the frescoes of the Italian artists, in colours that mingle with the very structure of that which bears them,--can never perish but with memory itself! To me that day seems like the beginning of life--of a new life, it certainly was; for what varied scenes--what spirit-changing events, have I not gone through since then! How different has been every aspect of my fate! how altered all my thoughts and feelings, my hopes, and even my fears!"

"I, too, shall remember it for ever," answered Algernon Grey; "though my fate has not undergone such changes. On has it gone in the same course, tending, I trust, to happiness, but by a thorny path. Men have fewer epochs in their lives than women, Agnes--at least, in ordinary circumstances. They pass gradually from state to state; but still, for those who feel--though the current of external things may not be subject to such changes--yet, in the world of the heart, they find moments, too, marked out indelibly in the history of life. That night was one of them for me. Let us ride on somewhat faster, and I will tell you, Agnes, as much as will interest you of my past existence. You must know it some time. Who can tell when opportunity may serve again?"

"Oh! not to-night, not to-night," answered Agnes, shrinking from new emotions on a day which

had been so full of agitation. "I may be very weak, my friend; but I have already undergone so much within twelve hours that, if you would have me keep my courage up for other dangers which may be still before us, you will not tell me aught that can move me more just now. And how can I," she added, feeling that she was showing the feelings of her heart more clearly than woman ever likes to display them; "how can I hear anything, affecting sadly one who has saved, befriended, comforted, supported me, without being deeply moved? Another day, Algernon, when we have calmer thoughts."

"Well, be it so," replied her lover; "I only sought to speak of matters not very bright, lest Agnes Herbert should think, hereafter, I had willingly concealed aught from her that she had a right to know."

"I shall never think evil of you, Algernon," she said, in a firm, quiet tone; "I could sooner doubt myself than you. Hark! do you not hear voices speaking--there, to the right?"

Algernon Grey listened, but all was still; and, somewhat quickening their pace, they rode on through the deep wood which then stretched along the bank of the Moldau. A few minutes after, the sky became lighter as the shadowy masses of vapour were borne away by the wind, and Algernon Grey said, in a low voice, "The moon is rising, I think. Darkness were our best friend, dear Agnes; but yet I trust we are now beyond all danger from the enemy. The wood seems coming to an end."

It was as he supposed; for, ere they had gone a quarter of a mile farther, the trees suddenly ceased, and they found themselves on a broad road close by the side of the river. The moon was shining on the wide waters, rendering them one sheet of liquid silver; but a minute or two after they had emerged from the screen of branches, the horse of Algernon Grey swerved violently away from some object on the bank. He reined him round, and gazed towards the stream. There was a corpse lying on the bank, stripped already of arms and clothing; and a large dark body--what, it was not possible to discover--was seen floating rapidly down the stream. All was still and silent around, without a sound but the murmuring Moldau rushing between its banks, which there were low and flat; and it had a strange and horrible effect, as Algernon Grey gazed over the scene, to behold that naked corpse lying there in the bright moonlight, with the glistening river flowing by, and the dark towers of Prague, far up the stream, rising in its splendid basin of hills, vast and irregular, so that rock and town, could hardly be distinguished from each other; while, on the other side of the river, was still to be distinguished, though faint and indefinite, the glare of the Bavarian watchfires.

"There have been plunderers at work here already," said Algernon Grey, riding on; but Agnes had seen the same object which had caught his sight, and she kept silence, covering her eyes with her hand.

The road then rose again a little, then fell into a sort of wooded glen; and, as they were descending, a voice suddenly cried out, "Stand! who goes there?" and at the same moment an armed man, pike in hand, presented himself, while two or three others drew out from the bushes.

Agnes' heart sunk; but Algernon Grey answered, in a calm tone, "We are peaceable travellers, if we are not molested. But we will not be stopped."

He looked over his shoulder as he spoke, for he heard the galloping of a horse, and to his surprise he saw that, while the lad Frill remained firm, and had already drawn his sword, his old and tried servant Tony was riding quickly away.

"Peaceable travellers!" said the man. "You ride late, and with casque and cuirass. Come up, my men; come up! We must make these peaceable travellers account for their doings to General Tilly."

Algernon Grey's eye ran over the ground around. There were but four men visible, and all seemed armed alike as pikemen. "Drop behind, Agnes," he said in a low tone; "they have no fire-arms. I and the boy have."

As he spoke, the nearest man advanced to lay his hand upon the horse's bridle. "Stand back!" cried the young Englishman in a stern tone, drawing a pistol from his saddle-bow, and levelling it. "Make way there!--You are mere marauders, that is clear, stripping the dead. I will stop for the bidding of none such."

The man recoiled a step or two; but then, after an instant's hesitation, he sprang forward, pushing his pike at the horse's poitral. The young Englishman's finger was pressed firmly and steadily upon the trigger, the hammer fell, a ringing report followed, and his assailant reeled and fell back upon the turf at once. "Now for another," cried Algernon Grey, in German; "which of you will be the next?" and at the same moment he drew a second pistol from the holster. "Have the other weapons at hand, Frill," he continued, speaking to the page, but never withdrawing his eyes from the group before him. "Who is the next, I say?"

No one moved; but they still stood across the path, apparently speaking together in a low voice. It was evident to Algernon Grey that the enemy had no force to fall back upon, and that the party consisted merely either of men sent across the river to cut off any stragglers from the Bohemian army, or of the plunderers who always follow great hosts, and live too frequently by

assassinating the wounded and stripping the dead. As they were still three to two, however, and the presence of Agnes Herbert filled him with apprehensions on her account which he had never known on his own, he was unwilling to hurry into any further strife, while there was a chance of the men retiring and leaving the way open. He therefore paused, ere he took upon himself the part of assailant, holding the pistol ready cocked in his hand, and prepared at once to repel any sudden attack. After a brief consultation amongst themselves, however, the men separated; one remained close to the road, merely drawing behind a tree to the side; the other two ran to the right and left amongst the bushes, evidently with the intention of springing out upon him and his party as he passed. The young Englishman's position was dangerous; but there seemed no choice. To retreat might throw him in the way of other and stronger parties of the same marauders. To parley with the adversary could produce no good result; and, choosing his course speedily, Algernon Grey turned his head to Agnes, saying, "Close up close to me, dear lady; you, boy, take your place on the left, put up your sword, and advance slowly, pistol in hand; aim steadily and near, if any one attacks you, and still keep on."

Then, drawing his sword, he placed it between his teeth, and, holding the pistol in his right, advanced at a foot-pace as soon as Agnes had ridden up to his side.

It would seem that the adversaries were somewhat intimidated by his proceedings, for they did not make their attack at once, as he had expected: and the delay brought unexpected help; for, as the young Englishman, keeping a tight rein upon his charger, was proceeding slowly along the road, he suddenly heard the galloping of horse behind him, and, for an instant, feared that all was lost. He did not venture to turn his head, indeed, keeping a watchful eye in front, and on either side; but the boy Frill, less cautious, looked round by the light of the moon, and then exclaimed aloud,--

"Hurrah! Here comes friend Tony with help."

Either the sort of cheer he gave, or their own observation, showed the marauders that they were likely to be overmatched. The man behind the tree started away and ran down the road, receiving the ball of Algernon Grey's pistol as he went, falling, rising again, and staggering in amongst the bushes. The other two were heard pushing their way through the dry branches; but, ere they could have gone far, the old servant was by his master's side.

"I beg your pardon, my lord, for running away. I'm not accustomed to that trick; but I had heard English tongues, and caught a little glimpse of a fire, as we passed through the wood; and I thought I could serve you better in the rear than in the front."

"Who have you got with you?" asked Algernon Grey, looking round to the other men who had come up, one of whom, with his sword's point dropped, was gazing down upon the body of the man who had been shot, while two others had followed Tony close to the young gentleman's side, and a fourth seemed to be searching the brushwood on the right for any concealed enemy.

"They are four men from Master Digby's troop," answered Tony. "I could have sworn that the voices I heard were English, so I had no fear in going back; and they may prove desperate good help to us as we proceed."

Algernon Grey paused to consider for a moment; and then, turning to the men, he asked them some questions, the answers to which showed that, after the last charge on the part of the Bohemian force, they had contrived to cross the Moldau, and conceal themselves in the wood. They had seen several bands of plunderers come over the river during the evening, and had lain quite still till it was dark, when they had lighted a fire, and sent one of their number to a neighbouring village for provisions. The store they had obtained had been scanty; but they were solacing themselves with this supply when Tony's apparition called them to the saddle; and, without hesitation or fear, they came down to aid a countryman in distress. They asked no better than to accompany the young Englishman and his party; but Algernon Grey, recollecting that Digby's troop had suffered but little, and that Brandeis had been appointed as a rallying place, would only suffer them to accompany him three or four miles farther down the river and then, paying them liberally for their escort, directed them, to the best of his knowledge, on their road to the point of rendezvous.

A little village lay immediately before him, when he parted with his new companions; but it was all dark and solitary; and, though the clouds had gathered thickly over the sky, and the north-east wind was blowing keen, he asked Agnes if she could still proceed; and, on her answering in the affirmative, rode on along the broad and even road, catching, from time to time, a glimpse of the glistening Moldau on the left, though at a much greater distance than before.

"If I recollect right, dear Agnes," he said, "some six or seven miles ahead is the small town of Weltrus, where there is a passage-boat across the river. We can discover there whether there is any danger to be expected on the other side; and, if not, can get across, placing ourselves in the enemy's rear; after which we shall have no difficulty in reaching Waldsachsen, where we shall be in a friendly country, and able, I trust, to make our way through the Upper Palatinate to Heilbronn and Heidelberg."

Agnes agreed to all that he proposed; but the distance was somewhat greater than he had imagined. His own horse showed great symptoms of fatigue. It became necessary to proceed

more slowly as they advanced; and the church clock struck three as they entered the narrow street. All was dark and silent as they advanced, till, when they were about midway through the little town, they heard the watchman of the night, as was then common in almost every village in Germany, and is still practised in remote places, knocking at the doors of the principal houses, and waking the drowsy inhabitants, to assure them that "all is right."

With the aid of this functionary, the landlord of the little Guest-house was brought to the door, and rooms speedily prepared for the travellers to repose. He would fain, to say the truth, have put them all into one chamber; for the manners of that part of the country were somewhat rude in their simplicity; and the good man could not understand the delicacy of a more refined state. All, however, was arranged at length; and Agnes lay down to repose. Her lover occupied a chamber near; and his two attendants were placed on a pallet across the lady's door.

It was evident, from the quiet manner of the host, that no tidings had yet reached him of the rout of Prague; but Algernon Grey was anxious to depart before the rumour spread through the country, and, with the first ray of morning light, he was on foot. From the boatmen at the ferry he found that the only intelligence they had yet received from the scene of war was nearly four days old. Men spoke of the combat of Rakonitz as the last great event, and satisfied that, on the way before him, there would be found none but the ordinary dangers which awaited all travellers in those days, he returned and roused Agnes from the deep slumber into which she had fallen.

In a few minutes she was by his side, saying, "How strange a thing is sleep, Algernon! I had forgot all, and, in the only dream I had, I was a child again, in the happy valley by the banks of the Meuse."

Algernon Grey smiled sadly. "Sometimes I hardly know," he said, "which is the dream, which the reality: the vivid images of sleep or those that pass before our waking eyes. Perhaps a time may come when we shall wake to truer things, and find that this life and all that it presents was but a vision."

"No," said his fair companion, after a moment's thought; "there are some things that must be real. The strong affections that go down with us to death; good actions, and, alas! evil ones, likewise.--But I am ready; let us set out again."

Algernon Grey would not suffer her to encounter renewed fatigue without some refreshment; and, after a light meal already ordered, they passed across the river in the ferry-boat.

"Great news! great news!" cried a stranger, riding up to cross over from the other side, just as they were remounting their horses after landing, "The good Duke of Bavaria and General Bucquoy have defeated the heretic Elector Palatine under the walls of Prague, and taken him and his English wife prisoners!"

"Are you sure of the intelligence?" asked Algernon Grey, gravely.

"Quite," said the horseman, sharply; "do you doubt it, young gentleman?"

"Nay, wait till you get to the other side of the water, and then inquire farther," answered Algernon; "there is many a battle reported won, that is really lost--Good-day" and he rode on with Agnes, leaving the traveller in some doubt and consternation.

"We must lose no time, dear Agnes," he said; "but hasten on into the rear of the enemy's army ere this news spreads far. If we can reach Laun, I think we may escape suspicion as fugitives from Prague, and there are still some garrisons in that quarter which have not yet submitted to the Austrians."

But, as usual in all calculations of distances, the state of the roads was not reckoned. The day proved lowering and gloomy, the wind blew in sharp fierce gusts over the bare hilly ground between the Moldau and the Eger, and though the distance from the one point to the other is not thirty miles in a direct line, the sinuosities of an ill-made country road rendered it nearly double. At length as night was falling, Algernon Grey lifted his fair weary companion from her horse at the door of a small village inn, somewhat to the west of Teinitz, and gladly sat down with her by the fireside of the good widow hostess, who with her daughter were the only occupants of the house. The fare was scanty and simple, but there was a cheerful good humour in the manner with which it was served which rendered it palatable; and the inhabitants of a remote place, with neither fortress nor castle in the neighbourhood, seemed to know and care little about the war which had passed with its rude current at a distance from them. The woman, too, could speak German, and after having provided the weary travellers with all that her house could afford in the way of food, she threw her gray hood over her head, saying, with a cheerful laugh, to Agnes, "I am going out to search the village for eggs, and fowls, and meat; for it will snow before morning; and then we may not be able to get them."

Agnes gazed in Algernon's face with a look of apprehension; but he smiled gaily, replying to her look; "Let it snow if it will, dear Agnes. We shall then have an icy fortress for our defence, which no enemy will be in haste to pass. It will give us time for rest, and thought, and preparation."

The woman's prophecy proved true, for the next morning at daybreak the ground was covered

with several feet of snow; and for three days the roads in the neighbourhood were impassable. They seemed to fly very quickly, however, to Agnes Herbert and Algernon Grey, though she felt her situation arrange. But her companion's gentle kindness deprived it of any painful feeling. The rich stores of his mind were all poured forth to cheer and to amuse her; and if they loved before the hour of their arrival there, oh how they loved when, on the fourth morning, they again set forth from the poor but comfortable shelter they had found!

The day was bright, and almost as warm as summer, they and their horses, too, were refreshed and cheered, and a long day's journey brought them close to the frontiers of the Upper Palatinate. Avoiding all large cities, they again rested for the night in a small town; and on the following day gladly passed the limits of Bohemia, never to return. The rest of their journey, as far as the banks of the Rhine, was performed without difficulty, though not without fatigue, remembered dangers made present security seem more sweet, the weather continued clear and fine, and they wandered for six days through mountains, and valleys and woods, almost as cheerfully as if in the first spring of young love they had gone forth together to view all that is fair and bright in the beautiful book of nature.

CHAPTER VI.

"Evil news, Oberntraut, evil news!" cried Colonel Herbert, as he sat in his tower at Heidelberg, with an open letter in his hand. "Anhalt has been defeated under the walls of Prague--totally defeated! How could it be otherwise? Fifty thousand trained Austrians and Bavarians against thirty-five thousand raw recruits--a mere mob of herds and citizens, and wild Transylvanian horse!"

"What more?" asked Oberntraut, who stood before him with a stern but calm brow. "There must be other news at the back of that; and if you have not yet got it, few days will pass ere it comes."

"There is plenty more," said Herbert, sadly; "Frederic, the Queen, and all the court fled, no one knows whither, and Prague surrendered on the following day."

"I thought so," answered Oberntraut, without any change of tone, "one could see it coming as plain as the Neckar from the bridge. But who is the letter from, your niece? Where is she?--How fares she?"

"I know not," answered the old officer, laying the paper down upon the table and clasping his hands together.

"The letter is from Lodun--but he says no word of Agnes--God help us! But I will not be apprehensive; where her royal mistress could pass, she could pass too. Besides, even if she remained in Prague, these men would never hurt a woman."

"I do not know," replied Oberntraut, with a very gloomy brow. "Tilly is not tender, and such as he have done strange things in the Palatinate lately, as witness Bensheim, Heppenheim, and Otterberg. Herbert, I love your niece too well to rest satisfied so. I must have further news, and I go to seek it."

Herbert rose and grasped his hand, gazing sadly in his face, "Alas! Oberntraut," he said, after a moment's silence, "I fear you are preparing disappointment for yourself.--Woman's heart is a wayward thing, and--"

Oberntraut waved his hand, "You mistake me, my friend," he said; "any disappointment that could be felt has been drunk to the dregs already. Agnes loves me not, as I should require to be loved; and I seek no heart that cannot be entirely mine. I have had my lesson, and have learned it well. I love her still, but with a different love to that of former times; cold, but not less strong; and in return she shall give me esteem and regard. This she cannot refuse; for it depends upon myself, not her--but let us talk of other things. I will have news of her, ere many days be over. I cannot leave my post, 'tis true; nor can you quit yours; but still, neither of us can rest satisfied without some tidings of her fate--you have no indication of which way her steps are turned?--none of where the Queen has gone to?"

"None," answered Herbert. "Lodun says nought that can give the slightest clue. He feared, it would seem, that his letter might fall into the enemy's hands, and wrote most guardedly in consequence.--Yet stay, I recollect that when she left me, the Queen made a solemn promise to send her back hither, if by the chances of war Frederic's court should be driven out of Prague--nor is she one to forget such a promise."

"Hither!" said Oberntraut; "it is an unsafe place of refuge. Here, with war at our very gates; Heidelberg itself menaced daily; weak, vacillating princes, ruining the noblest cause and the finest army ever men had, the Spanish force, daily gaining ground against us; and the whole valley of the Rhine a prey to a foreign enemy.--But it cannot be helped. Even now, most likely, she is on the road; and we must try to shield her from peril, when she comes into the midst of this scene of carnage."

As he spoke a heavy step was heard upon the stairs; and an armed man thrust his head into the room, saying, "The town is in a strange state, Colonel; for the news has driven the people out of their wits with fear."

"What do the fools expect?" exclaimed Oberntraut; "that Maximilian will march hither direct?"

The man shook his head, as if he did not understand him; and Herbert interposed, inquiring, "What news, Ancient?"

"Why, that Spinola has taken Weinheim, and is marching hither," replied the soldier. "Professors and half the students are flying to Neckargemund; and all the rich citizens are frightening each other with long faces in the market-place; while the women are in the churches, praying as hard as they can pray."

"This must be seen to," said the Baron of Oberntraut. "You go and quiet the people, and prepare for defence. I will ride out with my troop, and discover what truth there is in these tidings."

"I love not to meddle," said Herbert, "for I vowed I would have no command, when Merven was put over my head here. But still, I suppose, I must do my best; and, when the hour for fighting comes, they will find that I am young and active enough to defend the place, if not to command the garrison."

"Nay, nay, cast away jealousies," said Oberntraut; "do I not serve under mere boys when the time requires it?"

"Ay, you are mightily changed, my friend," said Herbert.

"I thank God for it," answered Oberntraut, "I have lost nought that was good to keep, and much that was better cast away. But minutes are precious: let us forth. I think the folks will fight when the time of need comes; for these citizens are often more frightened at a distant rumour than a present peril."

"Let those that will, fly," answered Herbert, casting his sword-belt over his shoulder, and putting on his hat. "If we are to have a siege, the fewer mouths and the fewer cowards the better."

The town of Heidelberg presented a strange scene, as the two officers passed through the streets, after descending, by the shortest path, from the castle. Consternation was at its height; and the only preparations to be seen were for flight, not for defence. Men on horseback and on foot--women in carts, many with children in their arms--waggons loaded with goods--every sort of conveyance, in short, that could be found in haste--well nigh blocked up the way leading to the eastern gate of the town, now called the Karl-thor; and in all the marketplaces and open spaces of the city, crowds of burghers were to be seen; some of them bold, indeed, in words, but almost all of them filled with terror, and meditating future flight.

Herbert mingled with the different groups, amidst a population where he was well known, asking, in a calm and somewhat scornful tone,--"Why, what are you afraid of, good people?" and generally adding,--"There is no danger, I tell you, if you have but a little spirit. First, the news is not true, I believe; and, secondly, Spinola has not half men enough to take Heidelberg, if but the schoolboys and parish-beadles will please to hold the gates against him. Come, come; go home and rest quiet. Six months hence it may be a different matter; but now you have no cause for fear."

In many instances, his words, but, more still, his calm tone and easy bearing, had their effect in re-assuring the people. They began to be ashamed of their fears; and a number of the principal townsmen returned to their homes to tell their wives and families that the danger had been magnified. As no farther report of Spinola's approach reached the town during the day, towards evening Heidelberg became far more tranquil, though it must be admitted that the population was considerably thinned between morning and night.

In the mean while, Oberntraut issued forth by the Mannheim-gate at the head of a party of about two hundred horse, and advanced rapidly into the plain. No enemy could be discovered for some time; but at length the young commander saw the smoke of a burning mill at some distance, and concluded thence that Spinola, after sacking Weinheim, had retired, making a mere demonstration on the city of Heidelberg, more for the purpose of striking the inhabitants with terror than with any intention of attacking a place too strong for his small force. Shortly after, from a little rise, the rear-guard of his army could be discovered marching towards Ladenburg; but, at the same time, several large parties of Spanish horse were to be seen on the south side of the Neckar, and two or three cornets could be perceived going at a quick pace along the

mountain-road towards Wiesloch.

"On my life! they are somewhat bold," said Oberntraut to himself. "Whither are they going now, I wonder? We must see."

He paused for several minutes, watching; then called up to his side one of the young officers of his troop, and gave him orders to proceed with fifty men on the road towards Mosbach, to inquire eagerly for all news from Prague, and if he met with any of the ladies of Elizabeth's court returning towards Heidelberg, to give them safe escort back. Three single horsemen he despatched on separate roads--the reader who knows the Palatinate will remember that, passing through the woods and orchards, there are innumerable small bridle-paths and cart-tracks--to watch the movements of the party which had been seen approaching Wiesloch; and then, advancing slowly amongst the trees, so as to conceal his force as far as possible, the German officer did not halt till he reached the village of Hockenheim, whence he threw a small party into Waldorf. Night fell shortly afterwards; and Oberntraut was seated at his frugal supper, when one of the men returned in haste to tell him that the Spanish horse had passed by Wiesloch, and just at nightfall attacked Langenbrücken, adding,--

"They had got possession of one part of the town, I think, ere I came away; but the people had barricaded the bridge, and seemed resolved to hold out in the other part."

"We must give them help," said Oberntraut. "How many of the Spaniards were there?"

"One of the men whom I found half drunk upon the road," said the soldier, "told me that there were Jeronimo Valetto's troop and another; in all near three hundred men."

"Well, we are a hundred and fifty," answered Oberntraut. "Go down, call the men to the saddle--but no trumpets, remember; we will do all quietly;" and, as soon as the soldier was gone, he filled himself a large horn-cup full of wine and drank it off; then placing his helmet on his head again, and tightening the buckle of his cuirass, he issued forth, and in five minutes more was in the saddle.

Advancing quietly and silently by the paths through the plain, which he well knew, he approached Langenbrücken, fancying at one time he heard a firing in that direction. As he came nearer, however, all was still; and neither sight nor sound gave any indication of strife in the long straggling village. At the distance of a quarter of a mile the young baron rode on with four or five men in advance of his troop; and, shortly after, heard several voices laughing, talking, and singing. They were not German tongues; and though the language that they spoke was more harmonious than his own, it did not sound sweet to Oberntraut's ear. Dismounting in profound silence, he advanced with four of his men on foot, till he came in sight of a fire at the end of the narrow street, where three Italian soldiers were sitting, whiling away the time of their watch with drink and song; and, approaching as near as he could without being seen, Oberntraut whispered a word to his followers, and then darted forward upon the little party of the enemy. He had one down and under his feet in a moment; the others started up, but were instantly grappled with by the German reiters, and mastered at once. One of them, indeed, levelled a carbine at Oberntraut and was about to fire; but a stout, tall German thrust his hand over the pan just in time to stop a report which would have alarmed the town.

"The least noise and you are dead men," said Oberntraut, in as good Spanish as he could command. "Where is Valetto?"

"Who are you?" demanded the man to whom he spoke.

"I am he whom you call 'that devil Oberntraut,'" answered the young baron; "so give me an answer quickly, or I'll drive my dagger down your throat."

"He is in that house there, where the sign swings," answered the man sullenly, pointing up the street.

"And the rest of the men?" asked the Colonel.

"Oh, in the different houses, where you will see lights and hear tongues," answered the Italian soldier in bad Spanish; and looking over his shoulder at the same time, he saw the young baron's troop advancing quietly over the dusty road into the town.

"Let fifteen dismount and come with me," said Oberntraut in a low voice, as soon as the head of the troop was near; "the rest search all the houses where there are lights; but let a party be at each door before the least noise is made; then cut down the enemy wherever you find them. Give these men their lives; but guard them well."

Thus saying, he advanced, with the number he had commanded to follow him, towards the house which the Italian had pointed out as his officer's quarters. There was a little step before the door; and, as Oberntraut put his foot upon it, he heard voices speaking in the room to the left. One was that of a man, loud, boisterous, and jovial. The other a woman's tongue, soft and sweet, but speaking in the tone of lamentation and entreaty. Something in that voice made the young baron's heart thrill; and, cocking the pistol in his hand, he pushed open the outer door, turned suddenly to the left, and entered the room whence the sounds proceeded.

Before him, seated at a table loaded with viands and wine, was a stout, tall man with a face inflamed with drink; while, a little in advance, held by the arm by a rough soldier, was the never-to-be-forgotten form of Agnes Herbert. Her face was drowned in tears; her limbs seemed scarcely to have strength to hold her up; and yet her eye flashed as she said, "You are cruel--ungenerous--discourteous!"

Valetto started suddenly up from his seat as he beheld Oberntraut's face; and the soldier, who held Agnes, turned fiercely round and was drawing his sword. But the young baron's pistol was at his head in a moment; the hammer fell, and he rolled dead upon the floor.

Agnes sprang forward to Oberntraut's side; and Valetto sank down into his seat again as pale as death, for the heads of five or six German troopers were seen behind their leader, and the sounds of contention, fierce but short--pistols fired, clashing swords, groans and oaths in Spanish, Italian, and German--were heard from other parts of the house.

"Take that man, and tie him!" said the young baron, speaking to his soldiers. "Two will be enough. The rest go and still that noise! I will come after.--Fear not, fear not, lady! The town is in my hands--you are now quite safe.--Here, sit you down for an instant, and I will rejoin you speedily." As he spoke, he led Agnes gently to a seat, and was then turning away to leave her, when she exclaimed, "Oh! my kind friend--there is--there is--one who needs aid in that room behind, if they have not murdered him.--We were on our way to Heidelberg, when--"

"I will return directly," said Oberntraut, as the sound of another pistol was heard, "fear not--all shall be done that you can desire."

Thus saying, he left her; and Agnes, sitting down, covered her eyes with her hands and wept.

In the mean time the two German soldiers had tied Valetto's arms, and he sat gazing upon the fair girl he had been grossly insulting the moment before, with a look of anxious hesitation.

"Speak to him for me, lady," he said, at length, in Italian, "that incarnate devil will put me to death, if you do not. I know his face too well."

"What do you deserve?" asked Agnes Herbert, raising her eyes for a moment, with a look of reproach; "not for what you have said to me, for that I can forgive, though it was base and cowardly, but for what you have done to those who defended me, and only did their duty to the Prince they serve."

"What is it he has done?" cried Oberntraut, who had overheard the last words as he returned to the room.

"Master Algernon Grey," answered Agnes, with the colour mounting in her pale cheek again, "escorted me hither from Prague, by the Queen's commands. He aided the people to defend the town, and was brought in badly wounded. They tore me away from him when I would have staunched the blood; and I heard that man order him to be put to death."

"Take him out to the door," said Oberntraut, "and hang him to the sign-pole."

"I did but jest! I did but jest!" cried Valetto, who had learned some German, "the cavalier is safe--you will find him living. I know--I believe he is living--if he died not of his wounds--I did but jest--the soldiers know it."

"Nay, nay,--I beseech you," said Agnes, in a tremulous voice, laying her hand upon Oberntraut's arm, "I do not seek revenge--I ought not--must not feel it--Oh, spare him!"

"If our noble friend is alive, well," answered Oberntraut, sternly; "but if he be dead, I will avenge him, whatever you may say, lady. The act shall be mine: come, show me where he was?--and you, my friend, make your peace with Heaven, as far as may be, and as soon; for, if I find him not in life, your time on earth will not be more than five minutes. Come, dear lady, where was our friend when last you saw him? I trust this man's words are true; for no soldier would venture to put a prisoner to death, unless by his commander's orders."

"Come," said Agnes, "this way;" and she led him through the door.

There was a man lying across the passage, with a ghastly wound on his left temple, and the blood weltering forth over the scorched and smoke-blackened skin, forming a small pool in the inequalities of the earthen floor. The lady recoiled for an instant from that fearful object; but the life of Algernon Grey was at stake; and, summoning all her resolution, she stepped over the corpse, and pursued her path towards the back part of the house.

It seemed that the German soldiers had not penetrated there; and it is probable that many of Valetto's men had made their escape already by the little garden at the back, the door of which stood open. Some few steps ere she reached it, the fair girl paused and laid her hand upon a lock on the right, hesitating with that terrible contention of hope and fear, from which the human bosom is seldom free, either in one shape or another. She might, the next moment, see him she loved lying a corpse before her eyes: she might find the greater part of her apprehensions vain; but yet fear had the predominance, and it required a great effort of resolution to make her open

the door and look in. There was a light in the room; and the moment a step was heard, Algernon Grey turned quickly on the bed where he was laid in the clothes which he had worn on his journey; and, looking round with a faint smile, he said, in a low and feeble voice, "I am better, dear Agnes--the bleeding has stopped. What has that man done?--what was all that noise?"

Had the whole world been present, Agnes Herbert could not have resisted the feelings of her heart; and, advancing to the bed-side, she dropped upon her knees, resting her hands on his, and exclaimed, "Thank God!--oh, thank God!"

"Ah, Oberntraut, too," said Algernon Grey, "then I need not ask what those pistol-shots implied. Welcome, my good friend, welcome."

"Hush!" said Oberntraut, gravely, holding up his hand. "The doctors made me keep silence when I was wounded, and so will I do with you.--Are you sure that the wounds have stopped bleeding?--Come, let me see;" and advancing close to the young Englishman's side, he drew back his vest and the neck of his shirt, which were already stiff with blood, and saw a large wound on the right breast, and another, apparently from a pistol-shot, just below the bend of the shoulder.

"Is this all?" he asked, in a cheerful tone. "Methinks these won't kill you, my good friend."

"There is another just below the knee," replied Algernon Grey; "but that is nothing."

"Let me see," said Oberntraut; "let me see;" and he proceeded to examine.

"It is not much," he said carelessly; "but still, this is bleeding and must be stopped; and we must take care that the others do not break out again. I wonder if there be such a thing as a leech in the place--there must be a barber, and we will send for him. Barbers never fly, for enemies must have their beards dressed as well as friends. Stay with him, dear lady, stay with him, and do something, if you can, to stop this blood. I will send some one who knows more of such matters than I do; my trade is more to shed blood than to stanch it."

He staid to say no more, but hurried out; gave some hasty orders to the soldiers in the house, went farther down the street, looked into several houses where there were lights within and horses at the door, and, having satisfied himself that all resistance was over in the place, he inquired of a countryman, whom he found in one of the rooms, where the barber of the village was to be found.

"Oh, a long way farther up," said the man; "you will see the pole and basin out," and, calling two or three of his troopers to follow him, Oberntraut strode away, giving various orders for the security of his men as he went.

The trade of the barber and the profession of the surgeon were then, very strangely, combined together throughout the world, with the exception of one or two cities in one or two kingdoms, in which the chirurgion was acknowledged as belonging to a higher and more honourable class than the mere trimmer of men's beards and the shaver of their cheeks. In every country town, however, the latter exercised the craft of bone-setting and wound-dressing, and the learned functionary of Langenbrücken was not at all surprised at being called upon by the Baron of Oberntraut to tend a wounded man.

"You have nothing to do," said the Baron in a commanding tone, "but to stop the bleeding, and to make sure that it does not break out again as we go to Heidelberg. This case is above your skill, my friend, so that I want you to do nought more than I have said: no vulnerary salves and sympathetic ointments, if you please; and, if I find you meddling beyond your craft, I will slit your ears."

"But how is the gentleman hurt?" asked the barber; "let me know that, at least, that I may bring what is needful."

"How is he hurt?" exclaimed Oberntraut, "what a question is that! First, he is very badly hurt, and I doubt he will not recover, so I don't want you to make it sure. Then he is hurt with sword-thrusts and pistol-balls. All you have to do is to bind up his wounds." Therefore come along at once; and, leading him down to the door of the house where Algernon Grey lay, he then went on to ascertain the number of the prisoners, and of the dead and wounded on both parts.

When the barber entered the room to which Agnes had conducted Oberntraut, he found her still kneeling by her lover's bed-side, and with her hand clasped in his; but the wound, from which the blood had been flowing when the young Baron left them, was now tightly bound up with a scarf, so that but a few drops trickled through, staining the bandage slightly. The lady withdrew her hand as soon as the door opened, and the barber proceeded to his examination, and, being not without skill, from long experience, to which science is but a handmaid, he did what was really best at the moment, in all respects but one. His look and his words certainly did not tend to reassure the wounded man, for, with a fault very ordinary in his calling, he was inclined to make the worst of any case presented to him, for the sake of some little additional reputation if recovery took place, and of security if a fatal result occurred.

Poor Agnes's heart sank at the doubtful shake of the head, and the still more alarming words, "A very bad wound indeed--I wonder where the point of the weapon went;" and not even the

cheerful tone of Oberntraut, when he returned, could dispel her apprehensions.

"There, get you gone, sallow-face," said the Baron, addressing the barber. "There's a crown for you. Your dismal looks are enough to push a sick man into the grave, were he a mile off it. Well, my good friend," he continued, speaking to Algernon Grey, "you will be upon your feet as soon as I was, I dare say. We must get you to Heidelberg to-night, however, for this is an open place and without defence. You shall have a little wine before you go to keep you up, and I have told the men to make some sort of litter to carry you.--There, do not speak; they told me that speaking was the worst of all things. I will answer all your questions, without your asking. I found a man and a boy in one of the houses hard by; the man shot through the leg, just like yourself, and the boy with a wound through his cheek and two or three grindlers lost; but they'll do very well, and can ride as far as need be. Did you come in a carriage, or on horseback, dear lady? I can find no carriage in the place, but horses enough to mount a regiment."

"On horseback," answered Agnes. "We had no time for carriages in quitting Prague."

"Ay, ay! a sad affair, that!" said the young Baron. "But tell me, what has become of the King and Queen, for here we are all in darkness."

Agnes gave him a short account of all that had taken place up to the time of her quitting Prague--under some embarrassment, indeed, for the keen eye of the young Baron of Oberntraut was fixed upon her countenance during the whole time, not rudely, but firmly. Shortly after her account was concluded, and before he could ask any more questions, one of the men came in to say that all was ready, and that the boy had pointed out the lady's horse.

Some wine was then procured, and Oberntraut insisted not only that Algernon Grey should take some, but that Agnes should partake, passing the cup from the one to the other with a meaning smile, not without some share of sadness in it. The hastily-constructed litter was then brought in, and the wounded man placed upon it and carried out. At the door of the little hostelry a number of the villagers had gathered together on the report of the enemy's discomfiture, and Oberntraut addressed them in one of his blunt short speeches, saying, "I have a great mind to burn your town, you knaves, to punish you for not defending it better; but look well to the wounded and I will forgive you. Keep a shrewd watch over the foreigners, and send them in to Heidelberg as they get better. I have left only one of my men with you, and if you do not treat him well I will skin you alive. There, bring the prisoners along;" and, placing Agnes on her horse, he mounted and rode away.

CHAPTER VII.

The long and weary hours of sickness fell heavy upon Algernon Grey. Never for a day during the course of life had he known the weight of illness before, at least within his own remembrance. Powerful in frame, and vigorous in constitution, moderate in habits, and inured to robust exercises from early youth, life had been hitherto all light activity; and if some sorrows and cares had touched him, they had not had power in any way to affect his corporeal frame. The aching head, the dim and dazzled eye, the fainting heart, the weary and powerless limbs of the sickly or the overstudious, he had never known. It had only been with him hitherto to will and to do; the body had been no clog upon the mind; and the active energies of both had seemed to give fresh strength and vigour to each other.

Now, day after day, and week after week he lay upon a sick couch in the castle of Heidelberg. Feeble, languid, full of pain, with every movement uneasy, with broken sleep at night, and drowsy heaviness by day, his cheek and his eyes dull, he lingered on under the unskilful hands of ignorant surgeons, who, with the wild phantasies of the time, only prolonged the period of sickness by the means which they employed to cure the wounds he had received.

All that could comfort or could soothe was done indeed by those around him, to alleviate his sufferings, and to make the heavy time pass lightly. Herbert was with him long every day; and Agnes, too, with a maid to bear her company, sat many an hour beside him. She read to him the books he loved, she sang to him the songs which she thought might waken hope and banish despondency: she conversed in gentle yet cheerful tones, and the sweet sound of her musical voice was the only medicine he received which seemed at all to advance his cure.

There was no opposition to her wishes. She came, she went, when she would; and yet not one word had passed between her and Colonel Herbert on her position with regard to Algernon Grey. He seemed to comprehend it all; to see that they loved mutually and truly; to know that to withhold her presence from him would be to destroy him; that to refuse her the solace of tending

him would wring the gentle heart which it was the thought and business of his life to render happy. He was a man of a peculiar character too, not singular--though I had nearly used that word--for there are many such in the world: he was doubtful and careful at first, perhaps somewhat suspicious; but his confidence once gained, it was unbounded; and no thought of cold proprieties, no question of what the world would say, ever shackled the energies of any generous impulse. He had set himself free years before from all the trammels of convention: he had seen another do so from love for him. It had produced, though it so seldom does so, perfect happiness to both; and he perceived no reason why, between two beings pure and high, and honest in mind, the same conduct should not effect the same result. It might have been a fatal error had he mistaken the character of either, even in the slightest point. But there were other causes for his calm acquiescence in all that Agnes wished. Up to the hour at which she left him for Prague, he had watched her from infancy with fond care and anxiety; all her actions had been under his own eye; her very heart and soul had seemed open to his view; and he had given to her mind in many things the bent of his own. Though he loved the free, wild spirit that animated her at times, he had directed, he had counselled her; but now, for more than a year, she had acted entirely for herself. He had accustomed himself completely in thought, to look upon her as independent of his advice and control; and in none of her letters had he found one word to make him wish that his guidance was still extended over her. She had been alone too, with Algernon Grey in troublous times, and difficult circumstances, for many a long day: she had assured him, that, during that time, no brother could have treated her with more kindness and consideration; and he knew that Agnes would not say that, if there was one dark spot in all the memory of their intercourse. Love, he saw, it was too late to guard against; and for all the rest, he had the fullest confidence.

But there was another who also, from time to time, visited with kindly feeling the chamber of the sick man. The young Baron of Oberntraut came, whenever he set foot in Heidelberg, to see his former adversary. He conversed cheerfully, and yet considerately with him; he told him tales of all those wild and daring exploits which he himself and his gallant band performed by day and night against the enemy, who were now overrunning the Palatinate in every direction--exploits with which the pages of the old chroniclers glow; for, if ever there was a name which, for devotion, gallantry, unceasing activity, and brilliant success with small means, deserves to be placed upon the roll of heroes, it is that of John of Oberntraut. But, of the sad reverses which the forces of the protestant princes met with, in consequence of the weakness, indecision, and discord of their leaders, Oberntraut spoke not; for he well knew, that to depress the spirits of his hearer, would be to frustrate every means employed for his cure.

Yet at times he would gaze at him, as he lay with pale cheek, dim eye, and bloodless lip; and a look of thoughtful, sad, and intense speculation would come into the gallant soldier's face. What was it that he pondered? What was it that he calculated? Heaven knows! I cannot tell. Then, generally, he would turn away hastily, and bidding his companion adieu, leave the room.

It was one day, after a fit of this sort of dreamy meditation, that going down to the Altan to gaze into the plain of the Rhine, he found Agnes breathing the free air, for a short space, before she resumed her post in her lover's sick chamber. She spoke with him kindly and frankly for a moment; and he talked to her with a thoughtful and abstracted air; but very few words had passed, ere she bade him adieu, and turned to go.

"Stay, Agnes, stay," he cried; "I want to speak with you."

She turned, with her cheek somewhat paler, and a degree of alarm in her look, which she could not hide; for now that she knew more of love, she was well aware that Oberntraut had loved her; and she feared that he might love her still.

"You avoid me, Agnes," he said; "nay, hear me--I see it well--or, if you do not avoid me, you feel a restraint, an apprehension, when I am near you. There is but one means of banishing this; and, for both our sakes it must be banished: that must be by a frank explanation on my part. There was a time when I loved you more than life--when I hoped I might be loved in return; and then, with rash vanity and eager passion, I would have taken the life of any man who attempted to cross my course.--Come, sit you down here, dear Agnes; for you tremble needlessly; and, when you have heard me to the end, you will never fear me, or shun me again. I tell you what has been, not what is. I saw you meet another; I saw your hearts and spirits instantly spring towards each other; I saw your eyes mutually light up with the same flame;--Why colour so, sweet lady? It is true, and natural, and just. I was half mad; I did him wrong; I sought his life; I placed him in a situation of danger, difficulty, and it might have been, dishonour. I was vanquished, surpassed, and frustrated. From that hour I knew you never could be mine; I felt I must have lost much of your esteem; and that I had never possessed your love. I resolved that I would regain your respect, at least;--ay, and your friendship. Weakened, tamed down, and softened, I spent the hours of sickness in arguing with my own heart, and conquering my own spirit; and in this combat, at least, I was successful. I cast the thought of love away from me; I made up my mind to the fact, that you were to be his. I could not deny to myself that he had acted generously by me; and I resolved that I would return it by my very best endeavours. I knew, at length, that he who lies ill up there had rendered me the best service; and, with a terrible struggle, but still a successful one, I cast jealousy, and anger, and mortified vanity, and irritated pride away, resolving that he should be my friend, and I would be his. So much for what is between him and me, Agnes; now for our part of it. I loved you passionately then. I love you calmly, coolly now, as a brother, Agnes,--as a friend; not only, no longer with hope, but no longer with passion. There is yet a remnant of pride in my nature; but this pride has turned to good and not to evil; for it has

taught me to read myself, and study myself. I know that I could never be satisfied with aught but the first, fresh affection of a free and untouched heart; that I should be jealous of every thought--ay, even of every remembrance--of the dead, even as well as of the living; that from the woman who consented to be mine, I should require the whole affections of her nature, from the first to the last. I would not have in the whole past, one spot upon which her memory could rest with regret. I would be her happiness; and she should not have ever dreamed of other love but mine. In one word then, Agnes, if he who possesses your love, and I do believe deserves it, were to sink under the wounds he has received--which God forefend!--this hand, once so coveted, should never be sought by me. I tell you so to set your mind at rest, that we may be all that we ever can be to each other--true friends. Shrink not from me henceforth--dread not my presence or words. Look upon John of Oberntraut as your brother, if you will; and at all events believe that nought which a brother's love could do for a sister will not be done at any time by me for you; nought that the warmest friendship can prompt shall be wanting on my part towards him you love."

"Oh, thank you! thank you!" answered Agnes, giving him her hand. "This is kind, indeed. But, tell me, were those words you spoke just now about his state, but hazarded to show your meaning, or uttered as warning to me to prepare?"

She covered her eyes for a moment, and then added, in as firm a tone as she could command,--

"You said, if he should sink under his wounds. Oh, tell me! tell me! is this likely? He does not seem to amend, or so slowly that one day shows no gain upon the other; and these men who come to attend him, with their grave faces and scanty words, alarm rather than re-assure me. My heart sinks when I see them."

"Nay; he will do well," said Oberntraut, in a kindly tone. "No thanks to them, I do believe. 'Tis despite of their art, rather than by it, that he will be cured: by a strong frame, and not by drugs and salves. He will do well. Even to-day he is better. There is more light in his eyes; his lips are not so pale; his voice was somewhat stronger.--But there is one question I would ask you, Agnes. Do you yet know who he is?--Are you aware that this name of Algernon Grey----?"

"Oh, yes!" she answered, with a smile, cheered by the hopes he had given. "I have long known all; but you should not doubt his honour in aught. He has not a thought that is not high and true."

"I do not doubt," he answered. "I am sure he is honest and noble; but many a tale hangs long upon the lips, in times of trouble and of sickness. I heard this, of which I have spoken, from some of his men, who have come in from Breslau, and who seem to love him much. They came asking for 'the earl,' and no one knew whom they meant till I questioned them.--But a word or two more must be said, dear lady, before we part. I would fain that he cast away these men's medicaments. I firmly believe they keep him ill, and that, if left to nature, he would have been well ere now. It is very needful that he should recover speedily. The sky is growing very dark, lady: Tilly, that fierce butcher, is already on the Rhine; post after post has been lost by our weak generals. Though Franckenthal holds out, yet it, and Heidelberg, and Mannheim, are all the places of good strength that we possess; and what can I do with a few hundred men? or Horatio Vere, in Mannheim, with his handful of English? Heidelberg will not be long ere she sees the Bavarian under her walls. Herbert will not leave this castle so long as there is breath within him. I may be away, or dead--who can tell?--and there must be some one to protect and guide you. We must have him well with all speed. Would he would cast away these drugs. The physicians keep his chamber far too hot. Plain cold water and free air would do more than all these potions."

"Is there not a famous man at Heilbronn," asked Agnes, "whom we could send for?"

"That is well bethought," answered Oberntraut. "But there is one man here who, though no physician, has studied nature and her secrets more than any of them--old Dr. Alting. I will go down and bring him up; and, if he sanctions my plan, we will pursue it, without asking further help. Farewell, for the present. Cheer him, cheer him, dear lady;" and, thus saying, he hurried away.

Taking the path under the old arsenal, which stood in front of the large octagon tower, Oberntraut hastened down into the town, and soon reached the house of Dr. Alting. He asked no one for admission; but, with his usual impetuous spirit, opened the door of the outer chamber, and was walking straight towards the old professor's library, when his servant-maid suddenly appeared, and placed herself in the way, saying, "The doctor is busy, noble sir, and said I was not to let any one disturb him."

"I must disturb him," answered Oberntraut, putting her unceremoniously aside, and walking on towards a door, through which he heard voices speaking. The moment after, he laid his hand upon the lock and pushed with his strong arm. Something resisted slightly; but the small bolt gave way, ere he had time to think and withdraw his hand, and the door flew back.

Old Alting, with his black cap off and gray hair streaming, ran instantly towards him, as if to stop his entrance; but, at the same time, Oberntraut saw clearly a man's figure, wrapped in a large falling cloak, pass through the opposite door.

"Why, how now, doctor," he exclaimed; "are you busy with your familiar? I beg his highness's pardon, for intruding upon his conference with his master, and yours, too; but you must excuse

me, for I have a friend sorely ill, up at the castle, of three bad wounds and two worse leeches; and I would fain have you tell me what you think of his case."

The old man seemed sadly discomposed, and ruffled in temper. "Am I a physician or a surgeon either?" he cried. "In truth, Baron of Oberntraut, I will not be thus disturbed, when I have a pupil with me. I will not have aught to do with your friend. Let him get well as he can. It is not my trade to cure wounded men who get themselves hurt, brawling with their neighbours and breaking God's law."

"Nay, nay, my good doctor," exclaimed Oberntraut. "Poor Algernon Grey has been doing nought of the kind. He was defending your friend Herbert's fair niece, that was all."

"Algernon Grey!" cried Doctor Alting. "Is it Algernon Grey? Why, I knew not he had returned. He has never been to see me. That was not right; but I will come--I will come."

"He could not visit you, my good friend," replied Oberntraut, "unless he was brought on men's shoulders; for he was well nigh knocked to pieces at Langenbrücken now more than two months ago, and has ever since been lying in the castle, with two men trying to promote his getting worse."

"I will come to him," said Alting, more calmly; "though you are a rude visitor, my good young lord. Wait for me a moment, and I will go with you--if I can."

Thus saying, he left Oberntraut, who muttered to himself, "If he can! What should stop him if he will?"

The next moment he heard voices speaking again in the room beyond, and he walked to the window that he might not catch the words.

At the end of about ten minutes, the old man returned, with a broad hat upon his head, and a mantle over his shoulders. He was followed by another personage dressed in black, with his neck and chin buried in a deep ruff, forced up by the collar of a large wrapping cloak. On his head, too, was an enormous black beaver, pressed far down over his brow, and his face was farther hidden--not by the ordinary moustache and small pointed tuft of the time, but by a wide-spreading beard, which covered his whole chin and cheeks.

Oberntraut gazed at him firmly for a moment; and Dr. Alting, as if imagining that the young Baron's inquiring look might embarrass his companion, said, in a quick and hurried tone, "This is a learned pupil of mine, who, since I saw him, has travelled in many lands, and has learned a great many curious and valuable secrets. He will go with us, and give us his advice."

"I thank him heartily," said Oberntraut, gravely. "We had better set forth, my good friend; and, as the shortest way, we will go through the garden-gate, under the mills, and then up through the subterraneans;--I have the keys."

Thus saying, he moved towards the door, but stopped for a moment, courteously, to let the stranger go first. As soon as they were in the street, he led the way to a narrow lane which conducted to the old wall, below that part of the gardens where the valley had been filled up with rocks and earth to form terraces. A few hundred yards from the entrance of the lane, a small arch was seen in the wall; and Oberntraut, producing a key, gave admission to his two companions. Locking the heavy, iron-plated door as soon as they were within, he looked around, and seeing some labourers working on a path to the right, he took the zig-zag road to the left. It was a good deal longer, as both Dr. Alting and himself well knew; but the worthy professor made no observation, and followed in silence. Some way up the slope, a small open arch with an iron grate was seen; but it also was opened by the young Baron's keys, and he led the party, by various stairs and passages, till they came out beneath the steps leading from the Altan to one of the smaller entrances of the castle. Then, hurrying his steps, Oberntraut, as if some sudden fit of impetuosity had come over him, mounted towards the higher parts of the building so rapidly, that the poor old professor was obliged to call for mercy.

"Well!" muttered Oberntraut to himself, "the castle is nearly deserted now; and there is no great chance of meeting any one. This way, my reverend friend--in the chamber above lies my young companion;" and, going on more slowly, he opened the door of the room where Algernon Grey had remained ever since his arrival.

Agnes Herbert was sitting by the bedside, with a book in her hand; and her maid was seated in the window, busy with some embroidery. But the young lady instantly closed the book when Oberntraut and his companions appeared; and, beckoning her aside, the young Baron said, in a voice loud enough to be heard by all, "I have brought Dr. Alting to see our friend Algernon; but I wish, dear lady, you would send for your uncle, to his lodging in the tower. He is down at the Trutzkaiser. Tell him I have something important to say to him, and will join him in a few minutes."

Agnes looked somewhat surprised at the request; for the message might as well have been conveyed by an ordinary servant; but Oberntraut's face wore a peculiar expression; and, merely bowing her head, she left the room with her maid.

In the meanwhile, Algernon Grey had turned round uneasily on his bed, and welcomed Dr. Alting with a faint smile.

"Lie still, lie still," said the old man, advancing, and taking his hand: "I have come to see what can be done for you. So, you have been wounded, it seems--and two months ill. They must be strange physicians, not to have killed you or cured you in that time!" and he pressed his fingers on the young man's pulse.

"I say that all he requires is fresh air and cold water," said Oberntraut: "if he has those, he will be well in a week."

"As to fresh air, you are right," answered Dr. Alting. "The frost is gone, the wind is mild;--open that window at once. As to the cold water, we must inquire farther;" and he proceeded to examine the wounds in the young gentleman's breast and shoulder. "Two months?" he said at length.

"Nay, well nigh ten weeks," answered Algernon Grey, faintly.

"Then, cold water is not the remedy," said Dr. Alting; "good sound wine of the Rheingau--a moderate quantity at a time, but frequently repeated--and wholesome and nourishing food, is all that is required. Take no more of these medicines, my young friend;" and he pointed to some potions on the table; "they might be good enough at one time; but the disease has spent itself, and all you want is strength to heal your wounds. Is not that your opinion, my learned friend?" he continued, turning to the gentleman who had accompanied him.

"Assuredly!" said the other; "but I will add a remedy, which will greatly aid his cure. It is a secret however, which no one must hear. If you two gentlemen will retire for a moment, I will join you at the door immediately."

Oberntraut instantly withdrew, without reply; and Dr. Alting followed more slowly. But as soon as they were in the corridor, and the door closed, Oberntraut grasped the old man's arm, saying, in a low tone, and with an agitated look, "This is a terrible risk!--we have no force to defend the town, in case of sudden attack. 'Twere better to send off for Vere and his men directly, and leave Mannheim to its fate, rather than suffer the King's person to be so risked;" and he took a step towards the head of the stairs.

"Stay, stay!" cried Dr. Alting, catching him by the sleeve; "let us hear farther, ere you act."

CHAPTER VIII.

The sun had set; the young moon had risen; and the sky of the early spring-time was full of stars. A great deal of bustle had been observed in the castle, though it was now no longer tenanted by a host of servants, and the gay scene of courtly splendour which it had formerly displayed--the hurrying multitudes, the splendid dresses, the clanging trumpets, and the beating drums, had subsided into dulness, silence, and almost solitude. The ruined fortunes of the Palatinate house were shadowed forth in the desolate change which had come over their dwelling-place.

Yet, as I have said, an unusual degree of activity had appeared in the castle during the last two hours before sunset. Some seven or eight mounted men had gone forth in different directions, none of the ordinary inhabitants of the place knowing what was their errand. The young Baron of Oberntraut himself rode out, followed by a single trooper; but, instead of going down into the plain, which was the direction he usually took, and where his men were quartered, he rode up by steep and precipitous paths--where, perhaps, a horse's hoof had never trod the ground before--round the hills looking upon the Rhine, and going from height to height, often paused to gaze, shading his eyes with his hand, and seeming to scrutinize every path and road in the wide extent of country below him.

At length, just at sunset, he had returned to the castle, and inquired if any of the messengers had come back. Three had already arrived; and he examined them strictly as to what discoveries they had made in regard to the movements of the enemy's troops. They all agreed that Tilly and his forces had passed over the bridge which he had thrown across the Neckar, had then directed his course towards the Rhine, and had crossed that river near Oppenheim.

This news seemed to give the young officer great satisfaction; and he proceeded from the court to the lodging of Colonel Herbert, where the door was carefully closed after his entrance. About an hour subsequently, as good a meal as could be prepared in the castle was carried up to

the rooms of the English officer; but his own servant and Agnes Herbert received the dishes at the door, and the ordinary attendants were not suffered to enter. Another hour elapsed, and then Herbert and Dr. Alting came down the stairs together, looked everywhere round when they reached the door of the tower, and then walked slowly on, taking their way along the inner rampart towards the library-tower, and thence, by the small doors and steps, into the garden. There they turned towards the grating of the arch by which Dr. Alting had been brought that morning to the castle; and Herbert, opening the gate, paused beside it conversing with his old friend.

They had been followed, however, for some way by another party; for, while they were walking along the rampart, Agnes had descended the stairs with the gentleman who had accompanied the old professor in the morning; and they, too, took their way to the gardens. The young Baron of Oberntraut, and Colonel Herbert's servant armed with a stout tuck, followed at a distance of about fifty yards, and, in whichever way Agnes and her companion turned their steps, kept them still in sight.

The fair lady's path seemed somewhat devious: now it was directed towards the lower garden; then, at a word from the gentleman by her side, she mounted the steps, and wound round amongst the trees above, towards the great terrace; then down to the parterres with their curious arabesques; then up again by another flight of steps to the terrace once more; the moon shining bright upon their path the whole way.

"It is a weakness, I know," said her companion, "to cling thus to particular scenes, which only fill one with melancholy regret; but here, fair lady, have passed so many happy hours, that I feel it difficult to tear myself away, although these inanimate objects present nothing to my mind but the memories of pleasures gone--for ever, perhaps."

"The past has a spirit, your Majesty," answered Agnes, "which animates the dull form of the present. The soul of happiness departed, I can well understand, gives life to this changed scene; and to your royal eyes rise up, with every object that we pass, some peculiar hours or days which can never die to the affectionate remembrance of the heart. But let me hope, too, that there lives a future, when once more, amidst these scenes, with all you love best on earth, the days of old shall be renewed, and these dark moments be recalled but as a tempest-cloud which the wind has long swept away."

Frederic shook his head sadly. "I know not," he said; "God grant it! but there is a dark foreboding at my heart that the curse of ambition is upon me, and that the joys which I did not estimate sufficiently when they were mine, are snatched away for ever."

"Ah, no!" said Agnes, sadly: "I would fain think that honour, and virtue, and high purposes can never sink, overwhelmed, before fraud, and violence, and wrong."

"Yet such is too often the course of things here below," replied Frederic. "It will not be for ever. But the world has a life as well as we, dear lady; and our lives are but parts of the world's life. The time will be, when, in the long existence of the universe, all things shall be set right and honesty triumph; but, alas! I fear no man's time is wide enough to give room for hope that evil suffered will have compensation here. I might add, no man is good enough to complain, even when his best purposes are the steps that lead to the punishment which his faults deserve. Alas! fair Heidelberg, thou place of so many memories and so many dreams, I must quit thee once more--for ever--yes, I feel it is for ever!" And, with his head bent and his eyes full of tears, he descended the steps and hurried on to the spot where Herbert and Dr. Alting waited for him.

"Herbert," said the unfortunate Prince, "I go; but you must stay, and, if it be possible, defend this place we both so fondly love from the rude spoiling hands of the enemy. It would be bitter indeed to know that the Bavarian was in these halls; that his brutal soldiery were wasting and devastating all that a long line of princes have with care and skill been bringing to perfection; that the scenes of love and peace--the dwellings of art, and poetry, and science, were polluted by men who have neither feeling nor reverence for such high things. I do beseech you, my noble friend, aid to defend this place to the best of your power, though some wrong has been done you by others, but not by me."

"With the last drop of my blood, Sire," answered Herbert; "but in truth it is time your Majesty should go. You have a long and dangerous journey before you ere you can rejoin Mansfeld; but I trust that it will pass safely, and that together you will strike such a stroke at the enemy, as will keep him far from these walls. Have you all the papers you sought?"

"All, all," answered the King; "but some one must go with me to lock the gate after I and the good Doctor here have passed."

"That will I, your Majesty," said Oberntraut, who had now joined the rest; but Frederic replied, "No, no, you had better mount at once and ride down to your men as we agreed. Herbert, you have to see that no one else quits the castle for two hours. Does this dear lady know the way?"

"Right well," replied Herbert: "I took care of that long ago."

"And will she have no fears in returning through those passages alone?" inquired the King.

"None, Sire," answered Agnes, with a smile; "I have become inured to real dangers, and fear no imaginary ones."

"Well, then--farewell, my friends," said Frederic, shaking hands with Herbert and Oberntraut; "if we never meet again here below, God bless you! and we shall meet hereafter, I do trust."

Thus saying, he passed through the open gate with Dr. Alting. Agnes received a large key from her uncle, while Oberntraut took a dark lantern from the servant, unshaded it, and placed it in her hands. Thus provided, she followed quickly upon the steps of the King, and lighted him through the long and winding passage which at that time led down from the castle to the town. Not a word was spoken as they passed between the heavy walls of rude masonry, on which the green damp stood thick, and through which the water from the earth around oozed in many places; but at the door leading into the city Frederic paused and pressed Agnes's hand, saying, "Farewell, my sweet cousin! Wear this ring for my sake and for the Queen's. See our young friend Algernon to-night, and I think you will find that the intelligence I gave has proved a better medicine for his wounds than any the doctors have prescribed. It was the cup of hope, fair Agnes; but it were well that as soon as he can bear a horse's pace he should set out for England without delay of any kind. Once more, farewell!"

Agnes put the key in the lock and threw the door open for the prince and his old companion to pass; and then saying, "God speed your Majesty!" saw the King depart from the dwelling of his ancestors for the last time.^[4]

With slow and thoughtful steps, and eyes that more than once filled with tears, the fair girl trod her way back towards the castle. She took not, however, the same course which Oberntraut had followed when he led Frederick up some hours before; but, turning to the right at the top of the ascent, where a long gallery ran for some way round the side of the hill, she came to a door which led forth into the open air within the gate, near the great battery which connected the defences of the castle with the old town-wall, long since destroyed. The exit was into a narrow passage between the armoury and the tennis-court; and there she found Colonel Herbert pacing slowly up and down awaiting her coming.

"I have been up to see Algernon, my love," he said, "and the poor youth seems much better this evening. He asked if you would not come again to-night, Agnes; so I promised for you, and left your girl to wait at the foot of the stairs. Would to Heaven that he would get well quickly! for every report of the enemy's movements makes me tremble till there is some one to protect you in case I should be taken away."

The colour mounted into Agnes's cheek; for these were the first words that Herbert had ever uttered having a reference to the probability of a union between Algernon Grey and herself.

"I am sure he would protect me," she said, with a little of that timid hypocrisy which women ever practise even to their own hearts; but the next moment she added more frankly, "The King has just told me that it will be absolutely necessary for Algernon, as soon as he can travel, to go to England for a time."

"That is unfortunate indeed," said Herbert, thoughtfully; "but what does the King know of his affairs?"

"Nay, I cannot tell," replied Agnes timidly. "His Majesty gave him happy news this evening, it would seem, and that has doubtless done him good. It is also very likely that he should have heard from his ambassadors in England much that has not reached us here."

"True," replied Herbert, "a man of his rank is ever food for busy tongues.--But there is one thing, my child, which must not be long delayed. He must know all respecting her whom he has chosen."

"Oh, hush!" cried Agnes, in much agitation. "I know not that he has chosen me--I cannot tell that--"

"Then he has not yet asked your hand?" said Herbert quickly.

"No," replied Agnes, and was pausing there with some anxiety respecting the effect of this information upon Herbert, when she suddenly remembered a chance expression of Algernon Grey's the very day before he had been so sadly wounded; and she added, "I know that he loves me--that he did not conceal; but he said that he would speak with you as soon as we arrived--tell all--explain all."

Herbert mused for a moment: "That was right," he said at length, "that was quite right; and I can easily conceive, Agnes, that the hours of sickness and despondency have not been those he would choose to execute his purpose. Still, let the explanations first come from you, my love. It were quite as well that, ere he says one word more, he should know fully what he is doing. I do not doubt him, Agnes--do you?"

"Less than I should doubt myself," answered Agnes, warmly. "I will do as you tell me; I would have done so before, but I had not your permission. Yet, surely, it cannot be done, while he is still so ill."

"Oh, no," answered Herbert; "there is time enough. Let health come back, at least in some degree; and then, the first time that he goes forth to walk in the gardens here, let him hear the tale. It is pleasant in the sunshine and the free air, beneath green trees and amidst sweet flowers, to tell such a story of times gone. The mind pauses on it untrammelled with the worldly thoughts of crowded cities; the heart opens to it unoppressed by the heavy air of the close room. In the presence of heaven and of God's works the pure, high feelings which nature gave at first, but which hang their heads like sickly city-flowers amongst the multitude, raise themselves up refreshed; and we understand and sympathize with the sorrows and the hopes of others, and feel the link of kindred between ourselves and all mankind. Take some such moment, my sweet child; it is but fair to him and yourself."

Thus saying, he led her on to the castle, and to the foot of the stairs which ascended to Algernon Grey's room. Her maid was waiting for her; and, thus accompanied, she went up and was well repaid by seeing the brighter and more cheerful look, which, to her eyes, was full of the auguries of returning health. Nor was she mistaken; for, everyday from that hour forward, Algernon Grey gained ground against disease. His wounds healed rapidly. The languor and the feebleness they had left behind passed away, and at the end of little more than a week he was able to rise and sit by the open window, and listen to Agnes as she sung. Spring advanced, too, early and radiant; and several causes of disquietude were removed from the inhabitants of the castle. News came, not only that Frederic had recrossed the Rhine in safety and joined his army on the other side, but that, aided by his bold friend, Count Mansfeld, he had defeated the Imperial army, and forced Tilly himself to retreat. No speedy attack of Heidelberg was, consequently, to be expected; and Herbert employed the time of respite thus afforded in strengthening still further the defences of the place.

It need not be said that the heart of Agnes Herbert grew lighter and more cheerful hour by hour. How soon it is in youth, that we forget the storms and tempests that pass over us! The drops are scarcely dry upon the grass ere the sunshine seems to us more bright; the distant sky more clear than ever; and thus it was with Agnes Herbert--ay, and with her lover also, though he had a wider knowledge of the world. The dark events which had taken place in Bohemia, if not forgotten, were remembered as rendering present joy, only more sparkling; and, when Agnes walked forth one day through the gardens above the shining Neckar, with Algernon once more by her side, it seemed to her the brightest hour of existence; and she could scarcely bring her heart to fear that the coming time might present days as dark as those that had been passed. On they went for more than an hour, walking slowly, for his strength had not fully returned; but their conversation was like a gay mountain stream, bounding with brilliant leaps from one point to another. They sat down to rest; they rose up and walked on again; and they might have rambled far and long, had not a quick step behind them caused Agnes suddenly to turn round.

The person who followed was her lover's page, with eager haste in his look; and, the moment he came up, he held out a letter to his master, exclaiming, "A messenger from your uncle, my lord, has brought this posthaste from England."

Algernon Grey took it calmly, opened the packet and read. But Agnes could see his countenance change; his brow contracted--his lip quivered--his cheek grew red.

"This is bad news, yet good, my Agnes," he said. "To tell the bad first, I must away to England without an hour's delay; but, as some consolation, I learn that all those difficulties and impediments which seemed raised up like a barrier between me and happiness are now giving way, and, ere a month be over, must certainly fall to the ground."

"To England, without an hour's delay?" cried Agnes. "Oh, you cannot go! You are unfit for such a journey."

"Nay, not so," replied her lover. "To Mannheim will be the worst part of the affair. Then dropping down the Rhine in a light boat would but refresh me, were it not that I part from you, my Agnes; but the joyful thought of my return must cheer me; and, though the hours will be long, they will not be many, ere I return to claim this hand, not promised, yet mine, I know."

"Oh, the dread uncertainty of the future!" said Agnes, with a deep sigh and eyes full of tears. "Had any one told me, Algernon, but a few brief months ago, when I first met you here, and wandered through these gardens with you, that I should have seen such sights, and witnessed such disasters, should I have believed it?--should I have believed even that I myself should be so changed in thoughts, in feelings, almost in spirit, I may say? And what may not the coming months, too, bring? I thought it was bitter enough, when I parted at Prague from those I loved dearly, from those connected with me by the ties of kindred, with a strange uncertain fate before both them and me; but what will it be now, to part with you!"

"Let us not cloud the moment, dearest Agnes," said Algernon Grey, "which in itself is a sad one, with gloomy anticipations. I go, I acknowledge, full of hope; for the thought of being freed from a detested bond, which bars my union with her I love, is too joyful not to lighten even the pangs of parting. But you say, my Agnes, that at Prague you left those connected with you by the ties of kindred; I knew not that you had kindred there."

Agnes shook her head sadly and thoughtfully; for the tone of the mind contrives to extract from every event reflections of the same hue with itself. "It shows how little we can count even on

an hour," she said. "I had thought to-day to tell you, amidst these fair scenes, a melancholy tale of days long gone--to dwell upon it, and to let you hear each incident, without which, a story such as this is but a lifeless sort of stick, like a vine stripped of its leaves in the winter season. But now, as we go back, I must do it drily and briefly.--My mother was the Abbess of a noble convent in France, of the high family of Latour d'Auverne, and, consequently, by the father's side third cousin, and by the mother's second cousin to the Electress Dowager, Louisa Juliana. In the course of the war, an English gentleman, of high family but small fortune, was wounded severely whilst serving under Henry the Fourth of France, was brought to the small town of Mousson, where the Abbey stood, and was tended kindly by the good sisters. The greater part of the family of Latour are zealous Protestants, as you know; but this branch has always been vehemently Catholic; and the young Abbess had been brought up in that faith. You know the degree of liberty which nuns of high rank have in France; so that the vows they take place very little restraint upon their intercourse with the world. The Abbess saw my father often; acquaintance, with kind care on the one side and gratitude on the other, soon changed into friendship and to love. My mother was frightened at her feelings; and when my father first ventured to speak his affection, fled from him in terror and in anger. But they met again, and then he found means to shake her trust in the dogmas of the Church to which she had hitherto belonged. He brought her into communication with a Protestant minister. The Bible in its simple purity was laid before her. Her eyes were opened, and she renounced the superstitious faith! She dared not do so openly, however; for she was surrounded by powerful and unscrupulous relations, who would have hesitated at no means to punish, where they could not restrain; and she was wedded in secret to my father, till the opportunity served for removing her to a Protestant land. It became necessary that she should quit the convent; and they removed to a small solitary place in the Vosges, where I was born. Various events detained them between four and five years, living concealed in profound retirement; but they were sought for everywhere; and my father found, at length, that it would be necessary to fly, for that a clue had been obtained to their retreat, and pursuit was coming near. They, consequently, set off for the Rhine on an autumn evening, my father and mother in a carriage, with a few servants on horseback, and my father's horse led behind. Their movements, however, had been watched. In passing through a wood the carriage was fired upon, and my mother and one of the men wounded.^[5] She said, at first, that the injury was but slight; and my father, springing out, mounted his horse, and attacked the assassins. They were speedily put to flight; and one of them was killed by my father's own hand. When they came to examine, they found that it was my mother's own nephew who had fallen--but that she never knew; and, pursuing their journey rapidly, they reached the Palatinate, where, at the town of Franckenthal, the wound my mother had received was first dressed. It was then discovered to be much more serious than had been supposed. She lingered a week, and expired in my father's arms!"

Agnes paused; and Algernon Grey demanded eagerly, "But what became of your father?"

"He hastened hither," continued Agnes, "told his tale to the Electress, who had already been made aware of part, and eagerly besought her countenance and protection for myself. She promised she would be to me as a mother; and she has been so, as you know, Algernon. But my mother's brother, a stern and cruel man, was in high favour with the Queen of France; and, as soon as it was known my father had found refuge here, the Elector was required to give him up to answer for my cousin's death. Could a fair trial have been expected, he would have surrendered; but it was known that such was not to be obtained, and he was obliged to fly. He served for several years in distant lands; and when it was supposed that men's passions had become more calm, he returned to be near his child. You have often seen him--know him well, Algernon. But Duke John of Zweibrücken, who was guardian to the Elector Frederic at the time of his return, insisted that some concealment was still necessary; and my father, assuming the character of his brother, who had died the year before, has passed ever since for my uncle, in order not to give offence to the court of France."

"I had some suspicion," said Algernon Grey; "for there has been a tenderness, dear Agnes, in his manner towards you, that nought but the yearnings of paternal love could give.--And now, dearest, we are coming near the castle. I, too, ought to open my whole heart to your father. I fear, however, there is not time; for, when we came away, he said he was going down to strengthen the defences by the bridge. Send down to him, however, dear girl, and ask him to return. I will wait till the last moment, in order to see him; but I ought to reach Mannheim before it is dark."

The messenger, however, could not find Colonel Herbert. Two hours passed by without his coming; and, having waited with his men mounted in the court till not more than half an hour of daylight remained, Algernon Grey tore himself away and rode on towards Mannheim.

In all ages of which we have record, England has been unlike any other country in the world; nor has it been alone in the character of the people, their political institutions, and their religious feelings, that it has differed from all others; but the very aspect of the land has been totally apart, shadowing forth in its very look the mind of the people. We see forests and mountains, rocks, rivers, and cataracts, wide fields and waving corn in other countries; but where else would you see a green bowery lane like that, canopied with boughs and tapestried with flowers, down which those two figures are now walking slowly on? It is England all over--sweet, peaceful, pleasant-looking England. Though the age is remote from that in which we live; though the costume both of the man and woman is very different from our own; though the plumed hat, and the hanging cloak, and the slashed sleeve, might lead one to suppose one's self amongst Spaniards; yet look at the trees with the ivy creeping up them, the yellow banks, the small fields, the trim hedgerows, and not a doubt remains that the scene is English.

But we must just listen to their conversation, too; and that, alas! is very un-English. We must remember, however, that the age was one when a number of events had tended to corrupt society generally, and the court in particular; when the tone of the human mind, both in Britain and in France, had become debased by the conduct and example of the highest personages in the realm; when the monarch on the throne of England, at least, though learned and witty, presented to his people the pattern of all that is despicable, low, and vicious in a man, all that is hateful and contemptible in a monarch; a tyrant without energy or courage; a debauchee without fire or passion; a tricky politician, without perspicuity or judgment; vain of his religion, yet wavering in his doctrines, irreligious in his conduct, and blasphemous in his discourse; proud of his cunning, yet always deceived and frustrated; assuming the tone of command, yet led like an infant or a fool; governed by others, though a despot himself; and only perfect in grossness, selfishness, and treachery. With such a sovereign; with minions imitating and despising him; with a court hungry of gold and avaricious of vice; with the scaffold and the prison offered as rewards for virtue, energy, and genius; can we be surprised that the poison spread, more or less, through all classes; and that the nobles, brought more immediately within the pestilential atmosphere of the court, were peculiarly affected by the moral malady of the time? Can we wonder that every kind of wickedness which the perverse heart of man can conceive or generate was rife; that corruption of all kinds was too common to excite attention; that brawls and murders were heard of every day; and that the enemy or the rival, whom the knife could not reach, found death in the platter or cup? Can we wonder that such conversations as the following were heard by the ears of the air?

"He must be disposed of," said the gentleman, speaking to a lady of extraordinary beauty who walked by his side; "he must be disposed of, that is very clear."

"Ay, but how is it to be done?" asked the lady. "It is very well for you to counsel me, but give me no help."

"Nay, sweetest Kate," replied her companion, "I am willing to give you every help in the world; but I have heard that, during my long and tedious absence from your fair side, you did not fail to console yourself by reasonable tenderness for this same object of your present hate."

"And do you believe such tales?" she exclaimed, turning her flashing eyes upon him. "You do not, William, you do not! I am the creature of your hands; you have made me what I am. From infancy till now you have tutored and led, guided, commanded me--no, not commanded, but at least directed; and you should know--"

"For that very reason I do know," he replied, "that it is the most natural and likely thing in the world, dear Kate, that you should seek a little consolation for a lover's absence. I say no more, I imply no more; for I know that, if real love were in the case, the bold, brave spirit in your heart, guided and directed as you say it has been by me, would even to myself avow the fact, and daringly set all my rage and jealousy at nought. Is it not so, sweet Kate?"

"Ay," she answered with a smile, "even so."

"Well then," he continued, "as you see I understand you fully, and neither suspect nor doubt, but only think that in a vacant hour, dull, and for mere idleness, you have trifled with a growing passion in this great lord, till it has risen into a flame which has somewhat scorched the fingers of the kindler--I say it must be by some means drowned out. The only question is how, and that we must consider. But in order to judge of the best means, I must know fully the provocation he has given my fair love.--Nay, knit not your white brows, dear Kate, with such a puzzled look: I will help you to explanations."

"You cannot," she said; "there can be no explanations, William Ifford. It suffices to me, and should suffice to you, that he has offended and insulted me--her whom you say you love."

"And do love," answered he whom we have hitherto seen under the name of Lovet, "ay, better far than all the thousand I have loved and been loved by before. But yet it matters much, my Kate; for, if the injury and the insult,--as from something you let drop a day or two ago I do suspect,--touches me in the slightest possible degree, my course is very plain, and I will cut his throat ere the moon be an inch broader. But if it refer to you alone, it might be dangerous to take the step of the duello on such a topic, as giving point to certain rumours of our close friendship

which would mar all our plans."

The lady looked down, bending her large, dark, haughty eyes sternly upon the ground; but she murmured in a low tone, "He treated me as he might treat a common harlot; and when I mortified his vanity by cold repulse, he spoke of you, called you my paramour, vowed he could prove the facts and make my shame public to all the world. Now, though I would break, by any means--at any risk, that idle tie to your cold hypocritical cousin Hillingdon, yet I would fain do so without having the finger of every smooth, well-concealed, mock-virtuous woman of the court pointed at me in scorn. He said he could prove it, I tell you.--You start, William, and turn pale: that is not as if your blood fired up like mine."

"My blood has something else to do, bright Kate," answered her cousin. "Why I started was, because your tale awakens a strange doubt in my mind. There was safe in my house, when I left England, a little agate casket with a secret lock, which kept good guard over your dear, long-preserved letters.--Here is the key hanging ever round my neck; but yesterday, when I sought for that casket, I could not find it; and, thinking that it had been mislaid, I left the search, trusting to meet with it another day. Can any one have stolen those letters?--At all events that man must not live much longer; but, my dear Kate, it will not do to fight on such a cause of quarrel. Nay, moreover, if I seek occasion against him, he will judge rightly of the cause, and spread his tale of scandal to the world,--perhaps produce his proofs, if he really have any. We must employ quieter means, wear a smooth face towards him, and, as we do with a wild beast that we fear, lure him into a trap well prepared beforehand. How did you part, in enmity or calmly?"

The lady had turned very pale as he spoke of the loss of the casket; and some time passed ere she answered his question. He repeated it, however, in a quiet, tender tone; and, looking up she said, "He cowed me--rage sank beneath fear, and I smoothed my brow--nay, even smiled and laughed, in order to gain time, till I could speak with you. But you were long ere you arrived, and now it is too late to perfect any plans. He comes to-morrow evening, and has promised to bring the proofs he spoke of with him."

"Not too late, not too late," answered her companion. "I will speed home like lightning, search for these letters, be with you again to-morrow early; and then, if you have courage and resolution, we will find means to rid us of one whom we cannot deal with openly. I will have all prepared if you will but second me. Where will my lord your uncle be tomorrow?"

"A hundred miles hence and more," replied the lady. "He and my good aunt, do not return for two days to come."

"Then all will go easily," rejoined the other. "The man must die--he must not reach Royton alive."

"But blood is soon traced," she said, in a tone of hesitation.

"We will have no blood," replied her lover, with a smile: "men die occasionally of very rapid diseases. I will plan it all--you must execute."

"But how shall we get the papers from him," asked the lady, "without--"

"That must be cared for," answered Lovet. "You must be tender, my fair Kate, till you have got him to produce his proofs; give him fair hopes, and lead him on. He will sup here, of course; and after supper, when he has trifled with somewhat dangerous viands, bid him show the weighty evidence he spoke of. When they are all spread forth, I will come in, to your surprise and his, and take my own again. Then, if he be inclined to quarrel, one hasty thrust, given ere any one has time to hear his tale, will settle all, and I shall pass blameless, for despatching one whom I found insulting my sweet cousin. It will be a claim, too, on her love--a fair motive in the world's eyes for her (in gratitude) to give me her soft hand."

The lady smiled with a meaning look. There was no surprise; there was no horror; there seemed hardly to be any fear. Had her mind been conversant with those ideas before? Who can tell? Such deeds were assuredly common in that day, and, at all events, they were commonly reported. The rumour of crimes always generates fresh ones of the same character. There is an infection in the very sound of such deeds, and the mind that hears it often catches the moral pestilence and dies. As she thought--and for some moments she did not reply--a look of triumph rose in her glittering eyes. "Ay!" she repeated, "ay! he shall rue it! Yes, he shall rue it!--William, you are right. It would not do to raise a clamour about this man's death, by taking your usual mode of settling such affairs; but against one thing you must guard right carefully, that his death be not traceable to us--unless, indeed, it be in hasty brawl, where weapons are soon out, and execution done ere men have time to think. I mean, if he quits my house alive, they must not be able to show that it was in the cup, or in the food which he there partook, that he found his fate."

"I will take care," said her cousin, significantly; "but you must be both ready and resolute, my sweet Kate,--no doubt--no hesitation--no weak remorse."

"I have none!" replied the lady, lifting her hand boldly; "we kill a wolf or a tiger, a snake or a shark. It is the first principle of nature and of right to destroy that which would destroy us. His death is needful to my life. He dies, or I die.--Nay, more; I feel the hunter's spirit within me, and life, for life, I would rather die myself with him, than not see him die."

"His offence must have been bitter," answered her cousin; "though it was very needful to our happiness that Hillingdon should be out of our way, you never thought of using such means with him."

"I may have thought of it," answered the lady, musing; "but I would not have done it, William. In moments of eager impatience, I may have wished him dead--nay, have said so, I think, to you; but yet I would have practised nought against his life. Hillingdon never offended me. He loved me not; but, as I loved him not, that was no offence. His tone was courteous, too, when he did write to me or to my uncle. Plainly and boldly he said he wished the contract dissolved; but I wished it too, and therefore it was a kindness, not an injury. His very absence, that he might never see me, had--as he turned it, and I believe as he felt it--a certain courtesy. Nay: Hillingdon, though cold and stiff, and opposite in almost everything to my nature and my wishes, is still a high and noble-minded man, a gentleman in heart and spirit."

Her companion bit his lip, for he loved not to hear his cousin's praises from that lady's tongue. He was silent, however, and she proceeded: "But this man has, indeed, offended me bitterly, as you say. Encouraged by a light smile, and perhaps some idle freedom--I will not deny it--he thought I had become his slave, assumed the air of triumph, boasted, I doubt not, of his conquest amongst drunken comrades, and thought mine was a heart that would bear the insolent tone, the rude assumption of success, the air and words of conquest. Fool! I taught him better; and then he threatened to turn my bold contempt to burning shame--he did more than threaten, William. He it is, and he alone, who has staid the dissolution of my infant marriage with Hillingdon.--The judges were all agreed--the king himself was won, when this man stepped in. The minion persuaded the king, by his cringing arts, to pause.--Nay, look not doubtful! He told me so himself; with scornful triumph vowed my fate was in his hands; and said, if I had not treated him so disdainfully I should have been now as free as air. Do not the facts bear out the assertion? All that was required by any one was Hillingdon's oath in open court that he had never seen me since I was ten years old. He came and gave it. Then suddenly the king paused and prevaricated, and Algernon returned disgusted and despairing. Have I not cause to say this man is a viper in my way? Have I not a right to set my heel upon his head?"

"Assuredly!" replied William Ifford; "and the sooner the better, my sweet Kate. I see that your mind is made up and your courage equal to the task. He sups here; he will dine at Hertford, at the inn there. I will take care--though the deed cannot be done there on account of the many eyes upon us--that some circumstance of suspicion shall occur at Hertford to direct the doubts of men afterwards away from your house. I have a powder brought from Italy, which I have heard has been most serviceable in the great house of Medici. May it prove as useful to us! And now farewell, my Kate. I will not go up to the mansion with you, as I must return to-morrow morning. Do not pause and ponder on our plans, lest your resolution fail."

"No fear!" she answered, with a calm look; "my courage is firmer than you think, William. Adieu!"

Sir William Ifford left her, and walked back to a village about half a mile distant, where he had left his horse. At first he went quick, as if in haste; but after he had turned out of the lane his pace became slower, and he meditated, murmuring a part of his thoughts as he proceeded. "A dangerous housekeeper!" he said; "and yet a glorious creature--not the most faithful in her loves, I fear--yet how can I blame her? I have not been right faithful myself--and she was alone. We will both do better when we are wedded.--There must be more in this affair than she thinks fit to own--she could not hate so strongly had she not somewhat loved. Well, when he is dead that will be wiped out; her own hand will avenge both herself and me. Yet it is hardly politic to teach her tricks which she may practise hereafter on myself.--I am a bold man to link myself to one so well tutored; but for such a woman, and for such a fortune, who would not be bold? All that will be needed is care for the future,--and a sure antidote in my doublet pocket."

Full of such reflections, he reached the village, and, mounting his horse, rode on to a house which, with the small estate around it, had descended to him from his mother. His patrimonial property had been long spent, and even this was not unencumbered. Springing to the ground, he mounted the six steps which led up into an arched porch covered with ivy, opened the door, and went in. A servant was called and ordered to bring a fresh horse, and then William Ifford paused a moment in the hall, bending his eyes upon the marble pavement in deep meditation. It seemed of a very gloomy character too. Perhaps it was remorse that moved him; for the heart, however sunk in vice and folly, shrinks from the touch of a new crime. Rarely does it happen that it is so corrupted that there is not some sound spot left somewhere; and so long as there is, that part will tremble at the first touch of the corroding poison which has destroyed all the rest. His brow became very cloudy, and gathered thick over his deep, keen eye; his lip quivered; and the fingers of the hand which had fallen by his side were seen to move slowly together, till they were clenched firmly in the palm. The light, the scoffing, and the scornful will have their moments of thought, of doubt, and of depression, as the vicious of regret. There comes upon us all, against our will, we know not how, we know not whence, a shadow as from the gloomy, inevitable rock before us, clouding the sparkling sunny path in which we sported, rendering the gay dreams gloomy, and the clear future obscure. It is the time to ask ourselves, whither that path tends, where those sports may end. But still the counteracting power of evil, waging his eternal war against all good, suggests some reason, presents some excuse for following the impulse of the wilful heart along the course of error; till at length, when all warnings have been given, and every opportunity neglected, the toils of our own acts close round us; and, in the inextricable net

which we ourselves have aided to weave, we struggle in vain; till death takes us forth, and an unknown state begins.

Slowly and even sadly Sir William Ifford raised his eyes and cast a melancholy glance around the dim old hall. There was an air of desolation and neglect about it, very different from the gay and splendid scenes in which he was accustomed and loved to move. The look of poverty was stamped upon it; and in an instant flashed before his eyes the image of a long future of care and penury, and forced self-denial and niggardly restraint. "It must be," he cried, "it must be done;" and, hurrying to an old oaken cabinet, which he opened with one of the keys he wore about him, took out an extremely minute vial filled with some white substance, and gazed at it attentively for an instant; then, placing it in his pocket, he entered his bed-chamber, and drew forth from a large chest a masker's beard, nearly white, and several separate locks of silver hair. With these, put safely up, he rode away towards the town of Hertford, which he reached shortly after nightfall; but, before he entered the street, he fastened the false locks to the lining of his hat and brought them over his forehead and his neck. The beard completed a disguise sufficiently close to prevent any eyes, but such as knew him very well, from recognising him; and then, entering the town, he dismounted at a small public house, and walked on foot towards the principal inn in the great street. About half an hour after, he might be seen speaking in the court-yard to a man in a white night-cap and apron. Their conversation seemed merry, too; for few even knew better how to assume familiar courtesies towards the lower classes, when he liked it, than William Ifford.

"You foolish dog," he cried, at length; "will you lose a good gold piece just for your vanity in your art? I tell you it is for a bet with him. I vowed I would make him eat bitter pottage ere a week were over; and I ask you not to do aught that can hurt him. There's many an innocent herb, and salutary too, that tastes like soot in the mouth. Take your choice of them, and stuff his pottage and the first two dishes full of it. Go out into the garden and get some bitter endive, or any other purifier of the blood. So will you be sure that no harm can come of it. I must have it done, however; and here is a gold piece for your pains."

The man seemed still to hesitate; but William Ifford doubled the offered bribe, and the cook's virtue could not resist the temptation.

"Keep your own counsel," said the gentleman, as he left him, "and all is safe. I shall laugh heartily to-morrow night, when I hear him curse the bitter soup he had at Hertford."

Thus saying, he turned away, mounted his horse again and rode back. On the following morning early he was once more by the Lady Catherine's side; and for two long hours they talked eagerly with meaning looks, but in low tones, as if they feared to be overheard, although they well knew that no ear was near to hear them. But there is a consciousness in crime of an ever open eye, an ear that is never closed.

CHAPTER X.

"Yes, sir, yes," said the King of England lolling upon his left leg, and sticking out his right hip, as if he had dislocated the joint, at the same time thrusting one hand into the wide open pocket of his black velvet hose, "yes, sir, ye had better gang your way back. As ye've staid awa sae lang, I think ye may stay awa a while mair. We'll just conseeder o' the matter--haud your tongue, Steenie, nane o' yer clavers; I've said the word!"

The Duke of Buckingham, who had stepped forward, as if to speak, drew back again with a very significant and uncourtier like look of disgust and impatience; but Buckingham by this time rested the ladder of ambition rather upon the favour of the Prince than of the King, and feared not every now and then to express his dissent somewhat boldly from the Monarch's views.

James's words were addressed to Algernon, Earl of Hillingdon, who stood before him in the midst of a circle of courtiers and flatterers somewhat surprised at the cold, careless, determined manner of the young peer.

The Monarch ended his sentence; but then, seeing that the young lord did not withdraw, he added somewhat sharply: "God's life, man! you shall know our pleasure when it is time."

"I hope your Majesty's pleasure may be to do me justice," answered Algernon Grey; "but, by your gracious permission, I must add a few words before I go. Famous lawyers, bearing high offices in your royal court, have pronounced this marriage null by reason of the age of the contracting parties. Ecclesiastical judges, appointed by yourself, have come to the same conclusion. Your Majesty hesitates, from some scruples, to suffer the sentence to be pronounced;

but let me add, that I must by some means soon learn whether this contract, entered into in my infancy, is a marriage or not. If not, I have nought to say; for all parties are free. But if the law pronounces it a marriage, I must, without loss of time, move my peers for a divorce, on account of the lady's adultery with a person high in your royal favour."

"Hout, tout!" cried the King, with his sallow face flushing, and his thick lips quivering, while his large tongue rolled round and round in his mouth, as if he had a plum, or some other extraneous substance therein; "By God! you shall have neither one, nor the other. What! are we not ourselves the supreme head both of the church and the law, God's vicegerent in this our kingdom of England! Awa wi' ye, sir; and let me hear nae mair. Tak the man awa;" and with a blasphemous oath he added: "ye'll drive me daft."

Prince Charles advanced to his father's side and tried to calm him; while the Duke of Buckingham took the Earl's arm and led him gently from the King's presence.

"Go, Hillingdon, go," he said; "and do not enrage him more. We will do the best for you.--You have said too much already, my lord."

"Not more than was needful to say, Duke," replied Algernon Grey, somewhat sharply; but then, feeling that irritation had made him ungracious towards a man who had exerted himself strenuously in his behalf, he took Buckingham's hand, adding, "Pardon me, your Grace, I thank you a thousand times for all that you have done; but it moves me, I do confess, to see a pitiful, unworthy, ungentlemanly upstart, like this Lord Marston, have power to pervert the course of justice and impede the operation of the law. This is a bitter disappointment to me altogether; and your Grace must pardon something in a man so circumstanced."

"I do, I do," answered Buckingham; "and I counsel you but for your own advantage. Leave the kingdom as soon as may be, and trust to me and his Royal Highness." He paused an instant; and then, laying his hand on Algernon's arm, he added, with a proud and significant air, "This man is my enemy, as well as yours! Is not that sufficient?"

"Methinks, it ought to be," said Algernon Grey; "but in this strange world, where merit and unworthiness, wisdom and folly, seem alternately to succeed, as if upon the chances of the dice, one may be permitted always to doubt what will come next. However, I will follow your Grace's advice; and, repeating my thanks, withdraw."

"The sooner the better," replied Buckingham; "for the Tower is near at hand; and your best friends might find it difficult to keep you out, if the King be wilful; or to get you out, if once in."

Thus saying, he turned away; and Algernon Grey retired from the palace, and proceeded to his house on the bank of the river, in what is, and was then called, the Strand.

"Pack up everything for instant departure, Tony," he said, speaking to his old servant, who opened the door of his bed-room for him. "Let the barge be ready in half an hour, and call a wherry up to the stairs at the end of the garden. See that all the men be warned that they will have to embark to-night on board the 'Mary Anne,' for Rotterdam."

The good man looked in his lord's face, and for a moment was inclined to ask,--"Has all been settled to your satisfaction?" but the expression of Algernon's countenance was answer sufficient; and, without a word, he retired to make the arrangements required. It is strange the influence of the character of a master upon servants and dependants. There be some men, who, without any effort to conciliate or win regard, seem to command it; and their joys or sorrows diffuse themselves around, as it were in eddies, to the utmost limit of those who know them. A few words from the old servant, as he communicated his lord's commands to the rest of the household, spread gloom over the whole; and the attendants went about their preparations with a sad and sorrowful air, as if each had received some personal disappointment.

At the end of half an hour, Algernon Grey issued forth from his chamber with several written papers in his hand. They were merely orders, which he was more inclined to write than to speak. The greater part of his attendants were to accompany him to Germany; but were to wait where they were an hour or two for the return of his barge, which was now ready to convey him, with six or seven whom he had selected, to a vessel about to sail for the mouth of the Rhine. The rest were to remain in London till they heard farther. Some stores of arms, not yet ready, were to be sent after him to Germany in another vessel. Especial care was ordered to be taken of his tenantry, and of two or three old pensioners of the family; and, according to a laudable custom of that time, which the law of Elizabeth had not altogether abrogated, a certain sum was to be distributed in weekly alms to any deserving poor.

Several of his principal servants delayed his departure for a short time by asking directions in various matters which he had not remembered; but ere an hour and a half had passed, after he had quitted the palace, he was floating on the broad bosom of the Thames; and, in about half an hour more, had embarked for Rotterdam. His followers showed zealous punctuality in joining him without delay. Baggage and arms were embarked safely; and, with the first tide that night the ship dropped down the river. The passage could hardly be called fair, for it blew a gale from river-mouth to river-mouth; but the wind was favourable, and speed was all he cared for.

Often he asked himself, however, why he should so eagerly press forward; what but pain and

grief lay before him; what he had to communicate to her he best loved, but doubt, uncertainty, and disappointment; and yet the thought of seeing her again, of holding her hand in his--of gazing into those beautiful and speaking eyes--of reading there love, and hope, and confidence--of gaining new trust for the future from her very look, drew him onward, and formed at least one bright spot in the future, which all the cares and sorrows that surrounded him had no power to cloud. Then, again, at times, he would revolve all that had taken place in England since he had again visited his native land; and he would ask himself, with doubt, whether all had been fair in the conduct of those who professed themselves his friends, and pretended to support his cause. Whether Buckingham was sincere,--whether Prince Charles himself had not been deceiving him? and then he would accuse himself of mean suspicions, and try to cast them from his mind. There was one point, indeed, on which the more he thought, the more he doubted. Had the Lady Catherine's family, though affecting to urge the nullification of the marriage, really exerted themselves to the utmost? They were powerful; in high favour at court, and he could not but remember that the contract between the lady and himself, while both were mere children, had been first proposed by the very uncle with whom she now lived,--a man not very pure in morals, and ambitious in character. Ere he reached the shores of Holland, he resolved to take one step more, to write to the Lady Catherine herself, and, telling her he had done all he could to set her free from an engagement she detested, leave her to move her own relations to exert themselves more strenuously than before. He would trust the letter, he thought, to his old servant and the page,--the one having many friends in the household to which he was sent, from whom he was sure to learn much of the past; the other being of a character almost too remarking, who would form a very sure notion of the disposition of all parties at present. He gave them no orders, indeed, to inquire or to observe, but simply sent them back to England with the letter, as soon as his foot touched the shore, desiring them to obtain an answer, and hasten to join him at Heidelberg.

The voyage up the Rhine, in those days, was slow and difficult; but for some way the strife which was then actually going on in the Low Countries, deterred him from landing; and it was only when he reached the first state of the Protestant Union that he disembarked with his followers, and took his way forward on horseback. Many difficulties and impediments delayed him on the road; and rumours continually reached him of the movements of contending armies in the Palatinate, some true, and many false. He gathered, however, from all accounts, that the temporary prosperity which had visited the arms of the King of Bohemia had by this time passed away; that Mansfeld had retreated into Alsace; that the Prince of Orange had been recalled to Holland; that greater discord than ever reigned among the united princes, and that Horace Vere and his troops, nearly confined to the town of Mannheim and its immediate neighbourhood, could effect little or nothing, against a superior force led by one of the first generals of the age. Tilly, with the united Bavarian, Austrian, and Spanish armies, ranged and ravaged the Palatinate without check. Frankenthal, indeed, resisted still; but there was no power in the open field to protect the villages from oppression, or to maintain the smaller towns against the invader. Every report he received was more or less gloomy; and by some it was stated that Heidelberg itself was menaced, while others represented that the city was already invested.

All these accounts but served to make the young Englishman press more eagerly forward. The men, as well as their horses, were wearied with the rapid advance; but they did not complain, for they all comprehended the feelings in their lord's bosom; and there was sufficient of chivalry, even in the lower classes of that day, to make them think it would be hard that he should be kept from the lady whom he loved, simply because they were tired. Thus, on the ninth day after they had reached Rotterdam, they entered the dominions of the Elector Palatine; and, after a weary march through the plains of the Rhine, with no intelligence but vague rumours amongst the peasantry, they reached, towards nightfall, a large village about eight miles from Mannheim, and somewhat more from Heidelberg. During the last day's journey, sad traces of the ravages of war had been apparent at every step. Villages burnt, houses and churches in ruins, and here and there a dead body lying unburied within a few yards of the road, had marked the devastating course; but the village that they now approached seemed to have escaped better than most of those they had met with; and a barricade drawn across the end of the little street showed that it had been prepared for defence by one or other of the contending parties. A number of the peasantry, armed with heavy arquebuses, presented themselves to the eyes of Algernon Grey just within the barricade; and a loud call to halt and keep off was almost instantly followed by two or three unceremonious shots, which, luckily, did not take effect. Bidding his men retire a little, the young Englishman rode on alone, and was suffered to approach the barrier; but, though he spoke to the peasants in German, begging shelter and repose for at least a few hours, his foreign accent created suspicion; and, with a sagacious shake of the head, the leader of the peasantry told him that they knew better.

"Well, my brave man," answered Algernon Grey, "you seem to be frightened by a very small number; I have not thirty men with me in all; and, if I were an enemy, it would be much more dangerous for me to trust myself within your place than for you to let me in; however, if I must ride on to Heidelberg with weary men and horses, it cannot be helped; but you are not serving your Prince, I can tell you; for I am one of the King's officers, and was with him in Prague."

"Heidelberg!" said the peasant; "I doubt that you will get in. Whom do you want in Heidelberg?"

"Either Colonel Herbert or the Baron of Oberntraut," answered the young Englishman.

"The Baron of Oberntraut!" said the good man, eyeing the other from head to foot; "you may find him without going to Heidelberg--perhaps sooner than you like, if you be what I think."

"Whatever you may think," answered Algernon Grey, "I cannot find him sooner than I should like."

"Well, then, I will send for some one to show you where he is," replied the peasant. "It is not far; and he has two hundred good Reiters with him." Thus saying, he turned to the people who surrounded him, and whispered a word or two to a light, active lad. The latter instantly laid down his arquebuse, and ran full speed up the village.

"The Baron is in the place, my good friend," said Algernon Grey at once. "I understand it all; so you can have no objection to open your barrier and let me in alone to speak with him."

But the worthy peasant was a very cautious man; and he would not venture even upon so safe a step till, in about five minutes, Oberntraut himself was seen coming down the street on foot; the next moment Algernon's hand was grasped in his. The men were brought into the village and obtained some scanty refreshment; and in the mean time, while night fell rapidly, the two gentlemen walked up and down before the church in eager conversation. Algernon Grey now learned that Tilly, reinforced by a large detachment from the army of the Archduke, had been for the last three days drawing nearer and nearer to Heidelberg, evidently with the intention of besieging that city.

"He has not men enough to invest it entirely," said Oberntraut; "but, alas! there are too few in the place to defend it long against the force he has."

"Then I will go on to-night," answered Algernon Grey; "under such circumstances every arm is something."

"Your men may indeed give assistance," said the young Baron; "mine are only accustomed to the open field and their horses' backs; therefore they can be of more service without than within. I will give you escort, however, as far as Neunheim; for the way is not without danger."

"Where does Tilly lie?" asked Algernon Grey. "It would take a large force to close all communication with the town."

"The last news showed all his foot at Rohrbach," answered Oberntraut, "and his horse scattered about by Wiesloch, Russloch, and Wieblingen. There are few parties, if any, on this side of the Neckar; but they cross from time to time, especially at night; so that it will be better that I and my people should go with you. We may, perhaps, gain some advantage by the way."

In the latter expectation, however, Oberntraut was disappointed. The whole forces of the Bavarian general remained on the other side of the Neckar; and Algernon and Oberntraut, with their several forces, reached Neunheim without seeing any human beings, except a few of the unfortunate peasantry, who fled across the fields as soon as they heard the sound of horses' feet.

Furnished with the pass-word, Algernon Grey presented himself at the gates of the bridge, and was immediately recognised by the officer on guard, who had seen him before at Prague. The news spread amongst the soldiery of a reinforcement having come to the aid of the garrison; the word passed from mouth to mouth over the bridge and into the city. Some of the boys and the students, who were loitering about, took it up; a little crowd collected, gathering as it went, and accompanied the English party with loud cheers to the gates of the castle.

The sounds reached Agnes Herbert, as she sat sad and lonely in her own chamber; and, with the presentiment of love, a glow spread over her cheek; a thrill passed through her whole frame; and, leaning her head upon her hand, she wept under the struggle of hope and fear. Some time passed by, however; and every thing remained quiet and sad; for Algernon Grey had been, in the first instance, led to the apartments of the governor Merven, which lay in a distant part of the castle. Hope gave way to apprehension: "I have deceived myself," she thought; "it is not he! The place will be invested; and he will not be able to force his way in;" but at the end of half an hour, there were rapid steps heard coming along the corridor. She knew her father's foot; but there was another, too, the tread of which was hardly less familiar to her ear. Joy overpowered her more than sorrow had ever done. She could not rise--she could not move from her chair; but, with her eyes raised, her hands clasped, her bosom heaving with the quick, short breath of expectation, she gazed towards the door. The next moment there was a light knock; she had hardly strength to say, "Come in;" but, whether he heard the words or not, Herbert threw it open and drew back to let her lover pass in first.

What a painful thing is the struggle between the natural feelings of the heart and the conventional modes of life! Had Agnes given way to what she felt, she would have sprung to Algernon's arms and poured forth her love upon his bosom; but she dared not; and, rising with timid grace, her cheek flushed with emotion, and eyes in which the tears would scarcely be restrained, she glided forward, with her fair hand extended.

He took it and pressed his hands upon it warmly, tenderly, eagerly; but she remarked at once that there was a melancholy shade upon his brow, a look of sadness in his eyes. What could it mean? she asked herself. A letter, received ten days before, breathed nothing but hope and joyful

expectation; it had told of difficulties overcome, of all obstacles removed, of a clear course towards love, and union, and happiness. Whence could that sadness proceed, then? It must arise from the dangerous position of the town; from the thoughts of the approaching siege; from a knowledge of the weakness of the garrison; from the apprehension of danger to those he loved; from any thing--any thing, Agnes was willing to believe, but new obstacles, fresh barriers having risen up between him and her. Every thing but that was light to her. Perils she feared not; privations she was ready to endure; but upon the thought of disappointed love she dared not suffer her mind to rest even for a moment.

No time, however, was given for explanation; for, after a very few words had been spoken, Herbert took her lover's arm, saying, "There, my dear child, I was resolved that you should see our friend safe and well; but now I must go to visit the new redoubt I am throwing up behind the Alte Schloss; for it must be carried on night and day; and he has promised to go with me."

Thus saying, he turned to the door; but Algernon Grey lingered yet for a moment, saying, in a low voice, "I must find a moment to speak with you alone to-morrow, dearest Agnes. Matters do not proceed so quickly as I could wish, but all will go well, I trust."

The door closed upon them, and Agnes Herbert sank into her seat again, and sadly covered her eyes with her hand. Oh, how often in life is the long looked-for moment of joy alloyed by bitter disappointment!

CHAPTER XI.

The wind was from the west, the grey morning dawning calm, and somewhat hazy. Few eyes were open in the castle of Heidelberg, except those of the sentinels on the walls; and amongst those who slept soundest, strange to say, was Algernon Grey. He was wearied with long exertion and fatigue; he was wearied with anxiety and thought; he was wearied with several months' strife between hope and fear; and now, when a brief period of repose had come, when there seemed a pause in his fate, when no exertion on his part could advance or retard whatever events Fate had in store for the future, he slept profoundly--for many hours dreamlessly--till, towards the morning, faint and fleeting visions of Agnes Herbert in danger and distress crossed his mind, changing like the forms of clouds borne over the summer sky. Suddenly, something, he knew not what, awoke him from his sleep, and he gazed round bewildered. For an instant he knew not where he was; but then he heard a faint and distant sound like that of a slowly beaten drum, and he murmured, "Surely that is the noise of firearms." Starting out of bed, he flung on a loose furred dressing-gown, and threw open the door of the ante-room. His servants were already up; the outer door was open, and a man was looking out.

"What is that noise, Stephen Graves?" exclaimed the young Earl, anxiously. "Run and gain intelligence."

"They say it is the enemy," my lord, replied the man, "who have attacked the redoubt called the Ape's Nest, and the new trench you went to see last night. Colonel Herbert has hurried up already;--but I will soon get farther news;" and away he ran.

It was the first act of the siege; and Algernon Grey, while he armed himself in haste, felt that strange sort of impression which is ever produced by the commencement of any great and decisive transaction, long delayed and expected, in which we are destined to bear a part. The siege of Heidelberg had begun. How was it to end? he asked himself. What might be the fate of himself and of those he held most dear, before the final scene of the tragedy then commencing? But although deep reflection and strong feeling were inherent in his character, yet energetic activity was the predominant quality of his nature. Thought never made him pause or hesitate; and, as no particular post had as yet been assigned to him, he resolved at once to hasten as a volunteer to the point assailed, and render the best service in his power.

His men were speedily gathered together, and the arms of the soldiers of that period were caught up and donned; when, just as they were descending to the court, the loud, dull boom of a piece of ordnance was heard, and a cannon-ball striking the wall above, some heavy pieces of stone fell down across the windows.

"They have won the redoubt, my lord," said one of the men, pausing, and turning round to speak to Algernon Grey.

"Never mind," answered the young nobleman; "it can be won back again. Come on!" and, passing to the head of the troop, he led them down into the court, and through what was called

the fore-yard of Louis the Fifth's palace, by a passage which led by the side of the library-tower to the upper casemate, and to the conduit-casemate; thence through the kitchen gardens and the pheasant garden, out to the mount-fort, where the new trench commenced. As they went, another and another cannon-shot was heard; but the balls whistled high over their heads towards the castle and the town. Several soldiers were met hurrying back towards the fortress; and two of them, carrying in their arms a wounded man, paused, both to rest themselves for an instant, and to tell their advancing comrades that the Ape's Nest and the new trench had just been carried by the enemy.

Algernon Grey made no long halt, however, but hurried on to the southern gorge, or entrance of the small octagonal fort, where he found Colonel Herbert directing a furious fire from two small pieces of cannon and about fifty arquebuses, upon the trench which ran towards the half-finished redoubt.

"Ah! my noble friend!" he cried, as soon as he saw the Earl; "this is kind help, and much needed. They have attacked us sooner than we thought, driven out the masons and the few soldiers who were working there; and, worse than all, captured all the beeves which the peasants had gathered up here for the supply of the castle."

"Methinks we can retake the trench and the redoubt," said Algernon Grey, gazing forth, and shading his eyes with his hand from the light of the eastern sun, "perhaps even recapture the cattle; for that is a serious loss. Cover us with a sharp fire; and I will undertake to regain the works with my own men, provided there be not strong reinforcements beyond that wood."

"None, none," replied Herbert; "they have not three companies on the ground."

"Upon them, then!" cried Algernon Grey. "Stephen Graves, array the men at the little stockade below--quick! for they are coming along the trench. Now, my gallant friend, let your fire be directed beyond that little mound of earth in the trench till we reach it, and then cease. You can send out a party to support us, if you see need and have men enough. If you were to put some small balls into that falconet, and brought it to sweep the trench, it would cover us well. Jam them down close, or you will burst the gun."

Thus saying, the young nobleman ran down to his men below, and, ere the cannon he had pointed to could be charged, was seen issuing forth with his men into the trench. The Spaniards and Bavarians were now gathering fast beyond musket-shot in the other end, prepared to rush forward to the attack of the octagon fort, and presented a firm front across the trench, jostling man against man, with their arms and steel caps glittering in the sun. Two guns, however, besides the falconet, had been brought to bear upon the trench from above, and Herbert himself, ordering the cannoneers to pause, aimed the latter with a keen and experienced eye, and then adjusted one of the other pieces of ordnance. He had not time to give his own attention to the third; for Algernon Grey put his men into the charge; and, with sharp pikes lowered, the sturdy Englishmen rushed on. They were now not two hundred yards from their opponents; and the word to meet them at the same place had been given to the Bavarian infantry, when the report of three guns from the fort, discharged rapidly one after the other, was heard. One ball tore through the close ranks of Tilly's soldiers like a hurricane through a forest, laying a number of strong men low in a moment; another struck the edge of the trench beside them, and covered the Bavarians with earth and rubbish; and in the midst of the confusion that followed, a shower of half-pound shot, fitted for what was then called the wall-petronel, completed the disarray. Then came the firm charge of the English, and in a minute or two the trench was swept from end to end, and Algernon Grey and his men rushed with the scattered enemy into the redoubt of the Ape's Nest which had been taken an hour before. Here, however, the struggle became more fierce; for a company of Spanish foot, fresh and in good order, advanced to cover the flight of their allies; the Bavarians rallied behind them, and for a few minutes Algernon with thirty men had to contend with a force of five times that number. The English, however, had the impulse of attack and success with them; the half-completed mounds of the redoubt afforded the enemy no shelter; the first shock drove the Spaniards back, though still in fair array; and ere they could recover their ground Herbert himself and a party of Palatinate troops poured in and completed the victory.

In rout and confusion the adversaries' forces were driven down the slopes of earth which had been thrown up, and fresh troops arriving from the castle and the fort, the pursuit was continued so sharply that neither Spaniards nor Bavarians had time to rally. Flying in confusion, some towards the Wolfswell, some towards the Königstuhl, a number were slain by those who followed them, and at a little distance, beyond a small wood which was then called the Cammerwald, the whole drove of oxen, which had been carried off in the morning, was recaptured, and the poor herds who had been made prisoners liberated.

A halt of the Palatinate troops was then ordered, for no one knew where the chief force of Tilly was posted, and to both Herbert and Algernon Grey it seemed impossible to conceive that so experienced a commander would suffer so small a force as that which had attacked the redoubt, to advance far without support.

"You go back with the men to the fort," said the young nobleman after some consultation, "I will proceed with a small party to reconnoitre, and bring you intelligence soon."

Algernon Grey sent but did not bring intelligence; for with efforts of the mind, as with those of

the body, it is not always possible to check a strong impulse at once. A man runs towards a particular object; but unless something arrests his progress, he is sure to run beyond it. Finding no large body of the enemy within sight, after having gone more than a mile in the direction of the position Tilly was reported to occupy the night before, the young Englishman was led on to reconnoitre further. Guided by one of the soldiers of the castle, whom Herbert had given him as a companion, and followed by eight or ten men, he glided through the woods upon the Königstuhl, taking advantage of every rocky point to examine accurately the ground below; and not even satisfied with the knowledge thus obtained, he determined to descend and approach as close as possible to Rohrbach and Wiesloch, where the enemy's principal force of infantry was supposed to be quartered.

The ground, which is at present covered with vineyards climbing halfway up the hill, was then shaded with thick woods; and under shelter of their branches, at that season in full leaf, the young Englishman approached to within about a quarter of a mile of Rohrbach, where the orchards and plum gardens rested upon the verge of the forest. Pausing on a small spur of the hill, which the guide called the Badger's-haunt--I know not by what name it goes now--Algeron Grey leaned against one of the large oaks, and gazed down below, hearing some voices speaking, evidently not far off. Clouds had come over the sun; and for a moment he could not discover the persons who were speaking; but moving a little to one side, the glittering of a steel cap caught his eyes, and the white head-gear of a country girl. Another slight change of position showed him a Bavarian sentinel, talking with a young woman of the Palatinate; and, to say truth, making somewhat warmer love than is common with his countrymen of the present day. Turning round to his companions with a smile, he very hardheartedly proposed to carry off the poor sentinel from his pleasant relaxation, in order to obtain, at leisure, whatever information he could afford. No great difficulties presented themselves to the undertaking; for the man had been placed to guard a little hollow way leading up into the wood, and had wandered a few steps from his post in order to enjoy the conversation of his fair friend unobserved. On the other side was a plum-garden, fenced by a stone wall, with a break in it; and, dividing his men into two parties, Algeron Grey, with four companions, glided quietly down the hollow way under cover of the bank; while the other party crept on amidst the plum-trees, till they reached the break. The soldier had laid down his arquebuse for a moment or two; and, ere he could recover it, which he attempted to do, at the first sound of a footfall, he was seized; and, with a pistol at his head and an injunction to keep silence, was dragged up into the woods.

Without pausing to question him at the time, lest the woman, who had been left behind, should give the alarm, the young Englishman took his way back to the castle, through different paths from those by which he had gone forth; but the whole day had been consumed in these proceedings, and the sun was setting when he reached the small fort of the Ape's Nest. Herbert was no longer there. The soldiers in the redoubt declared that all had passed quietly; and the reconnoitring party proceeded in the twilight to the castle, where their long absence had caused some uneasiness, although a messenger had been sent about mid-day to say that no great movement could be observed in the enemy's forces.

The examination of the prisoner took place immediately; and from his answers it was found that, according to a general report in Tilly's camp, the siege would be regularly commenced on the following day, and the principal point of attack would be the Ape's Nest, and the high ground around it. A road had been prepared, the man said, for transporting the artillery; and several large pieces of ordnance had that very day been carried a considerable way up the mountain, with less difficulty than had been anticipated.

Thus went by the first day after Algeron Grey's return to Heidelberg; and in the whole course thereof not more than an hour was passed in the society of her he loved: nor was that without drawback, from the presence of many others, as they sat at supper in Colonel Herbert's tower.

Ten persons were assembled round the table at a late hour, comprising Merven, the general governor of the place, and the principal officers of the German, English, and Dutch troops. Though Algeron was placed next to Agnes, with Merven on the other side, but a few words could pass between them unheard by all. Algeron Grey, however, did not lose the opportunity, but whispered in a low tone, while the conversation was going on loud around, "Come down hither, dear girl, early to-morrow, ere your father goes forth; I wish to speak with you both; for, in the dangers which are approaching, there should be no doubt on any part--nothing unexplained--no hesitation, no fear."

Agnes merely bowed her head; for, the moment Algeron concluded, the governor addressed her on some ordinary subject, and all private communication between her and her lover was over for the night.

At eleven o'clock the party rose, and most of the guests retired; but Merven, ere he went, took both Herbert's hands frankly in his, saying, "There is something on my mind, my noble friend; and as we shall all soon be at hard blows with the enemy, I cannot go into the strife without saying it. By every right you should have the command here; and I am sure Horace Vere was not aware that you had made up your mind to stand the brunt of this siege, after having fought so well in other places, or he would have offered it to you; but let us divide our labours and our authority. Take which you will for your own particular post, the castle or the town. I will take the other, and we can hold council together upon all great affairs."

Herbert turned away his head for a moment, but left his hand in Merven's; and then, returning the friendly pressure, he said, "The castle for me. It has been my dwelling for many a year. I have bestowed much pains in strengthening it. It has become a sort of plaything to me--a pet, a favourite, and I would fain stand by it while it stands, or perish with it."

"So be it, then," answered the other. "I will defend the town, and have no thought of letting it fall. No gloomy anticipations, Herbert. We will try, at least, to repel the enemy, and doubt not we shall succeed, and all live to remember our united efforts with pride and satisfaction."

Herbert shook his head gravely, though it could not be called sadly. "It is all in God's hand, good friend," he said. "Death never strikes without authority."

"And God protects the right," answered Merven; "so we will not doubt. I suppose, my lord, you will remain in the castle with your men: but come with me for a moment to my lodging ere you go to bed.--I have some news for you from England, brought by a special messenger, in a letter to Mannheim, since you left our native land."

Algernon Grey's eye lightened with fresh hopes; for love had wrought a change in him; and, whereas he had long given way to despondency, the tendency of his mind had now again become hopeful. As soon as they reached the governor's lodging, Merven put a letter in his hand, signed Horace Vere, and pointed to a particular passage, "Tell the Earl of Hillingdon," so the paragraph ran, "that I have news from the Duke of Buckingham, of the third of this month: he states that there is good hope for the Earl in his cause. The new favourite is getting out of favour, has absented himself from the Royston party without the King's leave, and has been roughly handled in discourse. These advantages improved may remedy all that has gone amiss in the Earl's case; and Buckingham declares that he may trust to him and the Prince for the result."

Such were the tidings which sent Algernon Grey to rest with a heart somewhat relieved; but still many an anxious apprehension crossed his mind, and kept him waking for more than an hour.

He resolved, however, to lose no time in communicating to Colonel Herbert the exact position in which he stood. To Agnes's uncle he might not have felt himself bound by the same rules which affected him towards her father; but he determined, whatever might be the result, he would not keep the parent of her he loved in ignorance of his painful situation.

All such resolutions--indeed, all human resolutions--are the sport of circumstances; and, in the present case, he could not perform that which he had determined to do. Early on the following morning, he knocked at the door of the English officer's saloon. It was the sweet voice of Agnes that bade him enter; and her first intelligence was that her father had already gone forth to the outworks.

"I told him," she said, "that you wished to see him, that you had something to communicate to him of importance: nay, that it referred to me and my happiness; but he would not stay. He replied, that the defence of the place was the first thing to be thought of; that he did not wish his mind to be distracted from his task by any other considerations; that he trusted entirely to my own judgment and feelings; and that, whatever I promised he would confirm. I think he mistook the nature of the communication you had to make, Algernon; that he thought it simply a matter of form; but yet I could not make up my mind to press it upon him; for when excited by such events as are now taking place, he is impatient of any opposition, and gives his whole heart and soul entirely up to what he considers to be his duty as a soldier. Whatever you have to tell, I do think it will be better to reserve it till this siege is over, or at least till we are compelled by other circumstances."

"First hear what it is," replied Algernon Grey, "and then judge; for I must not have him say at a future period, that I acted dishonourably by him;" and he proceeded to relate all the events that had occurred to him while absent in England. He showed her that he had formally applied for the nullification of the marriage, to which he had been a hardly conscious party in his boyhood; that no opposition had been made, but that a similar petition had been addressed to the courts by the Lady Catherine herself; that, after some difficulties, all obstacles had been swept away; and that nothing had been required but his oath, corroborated by other testimony, that he had not seen the lady since she was nine years old; that having gone to England to prove the fact, the judges appointed had come to a unanimous decision; and that his expectations and hopes were raised to the highest pitch, when suddenly the King had interfered, and forbidden the sentence from being promulgated.. The causes which were supposed to have led to this tyrannical conduct on the part of James, he could not fully detail to ears so pure as those which heard him; but he hinted that a new favourite of the monarch's had been the moving cause, from some base motives of his own; and that he had good hope of this new and painful obstacle being speedily removed.

Agnes listened attentively, in deep, sad thought. She asked no questions, for she feared that if she did, the bitter disappointment which she felt would show itself too plainly. When he had done, however, after a short pause, to assure herself of her self-command, she replied,--"I think still, Algernon, it will be better not to press the subject upon him. He cannot say that you have deceived him, when you have sought to tell him all, and he himself has declined to hear; and I know that such tidings, and the doubts they would inspire of my fate and happiness, would agitate and disturb him terribly."

"There is another course, dear Agnes," answered her lover, "and that I will take. I will write the whole facts down, and give the paper to him. He can read it or not, if he likes; but I must not fail on any point where you, dear girl, are concerned. I will go and do it directly, and take the very first moment of putting the statement in his hands."

As soon as he was gone, Agnes gave way to tears; but they lasted not long, and her mind became more calm afterwards. On his part Algernon Grey hastened back to his own chamber and wrote, as he had proposed, stating the facts simply and straightforwardly, and pointing out that the decision of the judges being unanimous and upon record, though not published, the marriage must, sooner or later, be declared null. He then folded up the paper, sealed it, and hurried forth towards the outworks in search of Herbert. He met him ere he had gone a hundred yards, and the good old soldier grasped him frankly by the hand, saying, with a gay air, "I ran away from you this morning, my good friend. Agnes told me you wished to talk with me; but I knew the subject was love; and I will have nought upon my mind, during this siege, but fighting. I trust fully to her and to you, my noble friend; and, as you cannot be married till all this business is over, we can talk of it hereafter, if we both survive. If I die, you must supply my place to her under another name--is it not so?"

"I will," answered Algernon, pressing his hand in his; and Herbert continued with a graver air, "If you fall, Agnes's heart--and I know it well--will be a widowed one, and remain so to her grave. This is all that is needful to say for the present."

"Nay," answered Algernon Grey, "though I would not press the subject upon you, as you dislike it, yet I must not leave you without information on any point when you choose to seek it. I have written down some facts which, I believe, you ought to know, in this packet. Take it and read it when you are disposed and have leisure. I would never have you suppose, my gallant friend, that I do not deal frankly with you in all things."

"I never will," answered Herbert, taking the letter and gazing at it with a smile,--"I will put this safely by, where it will rest undisturbed for a month to come, if this Bavarian do not press his operations more speedily than he is doing at present. No fresh attack has been made; we have finished the redoubt and planted some guns there; but there are defects in the whole position both of castle and town, which I only hope he is not wise enough to understand. Hark! there is a trumpet blowing at the gate--a summons, I suppose; let us go and see."

It was not exactly as he supposed; for Tilly's envoy, on being admitted to the presence of Merven and Herbert, did not formally demand the surrender of the place. The import of the message was, that the Bavarian general desired to confer with the governor of Heidelberg at any place which he would appoint; a truce being agreed upon for the time. A resolute answer was returned, to the effect that such a proposal was inadmissible, and that any farther communication that might be required, must take place with Sir Horace Vere, general-in-chief of the Palatine forces.

Scarcely had the trumpeter and the two commissioners, by whom he was accompanied, retired, when a sharp cannonade was heard from the north-east; and when Herbert and his companion hastened to the pheasant garden, they found that the newly constructed redoubt was in possession of the enemy, and that the force by which the attacking party was supported left not the most remote chance of recovering the position lost. Such was the first event of importance in the siege of Heidelberg.

CHAPTER XII.

The cannon thundered from the Geisberg; and thick and fast the cannon-balls fell into the town and castle; but the distance was great, the science of projectiles little known; and for several days the damage done was of no great importance. Nearer and nearer, however, the Bavarian general pushed his approaches; and almost hourly news reached the city of fresh reinforcements having arrived in the enemy's camp, of some other point being assailed, or some other gate blockaded. No advantage, however, was gained against the place without a fierce and resolute contest. No sooner was a trench dug, than the foe were driven from it; no sooner was a fresh battery constructed, than a fierce and vigorous assault was made to wrest it from the hands of the enemies. Still, however, they advanced slowly but steadfastly. If they were driven back defeated one day, they gained somewhat more than they had lost the next; and with fresh troops continually pouring upon the spot assailed, they carried on the strife unceasingly; while the garrison of Heidelberg were too few in number to oppose anything like an effectual resistance; and retired every night utterly exhausted by the labours of the day.

Wherever the struggle was the most severe, there were Colonel Herbert and Algernon Grey; wherever the fire was the hottest, and the danger most imminent, there they were found in the midst. The confidence of the soldiery was unbounded in those two commanders, especially in the former, who, leading, encouraging, directing, inspired them by his example, and guided them by his experience; and although they saw that the Bavarian army daily made some progress, yet they easily perceived that, if the resistance was carried on with such vigour, months must pass before the town could be reduced; and the never silent voice of hope assured them, that ere then succour would arrive.

On the nineteenth of August, under a tremendous fire of all kinds of missiles, an assault was made on the Trutzkaiser, one of the principal defences of the town; and for nearly an hour and a half one storming party after another poured on relieving each other; but each was met and driven back with a degree of vigour and determination which the Bavarian general had not been led to expect from the terror and consternation which he knew his first approach had spread through the town. The citizens aided the soldiers; the soldiers encouraged the citizens; and not only were the assailants repulsed, but followed far beyond the defences, and many of them slaughtered between the walls and the main body of the Bavarian army.

Habit is a marvellous thing, familiarizing us with all that is most dreadful and abhorrent to our nature. At first the fall of each cannonball in the streets of the town, the destruction of a chimney, the carrying away of a buttress, spread a thrill of terror through the whole place. The inhabitants covered over the narrow streets with large sheets of linen to hide themselves from the eyes which they imagined were directing the messengers of death towards every one who was seen walking in the town. The fall of the place was looked upon as inevitable; and many of the burghers cursed in their hearts the garrison, whose resistance exposed them to a siege. There were others, however, and indeed the major part of those who had remained in the town, whose loyalty and devotion were of a firmer quality; and the spirit which animated them, spread to almost all the rest, as soon as habit had rendered the ears of the townspeople familiar with the roar of the artillery. The death of a citizen by a shot from above, then began to be spoken of as an unfortunate accident; and the man, who some days before would have ran half a mile at the report of a cannon, only jumped a little on one side to avoid the falling stone-work, when a ball struck one of the buildings of the city close to him.

One person in the beleaguered place, however, could not be reconciled to the dangers of that siege. Personal fears she had none; she went out into the town; she visited the wounded and the sick in the hospitals; she passed along the most exposed streets and the paths under the immediate fire of the enemy; she comforted and supported the timid; she encouraged the resolute and strong-hearted; she spoke of resistance unto death, and loyalty that knew no termination but the grave. Wherever she came, her presence, to the hardy man or the frightened woman, was as that of a strengthening angel; and men turned to ask, "Who would have thought that fair Mistress Agnes Herbert, so gay, so gentle, and so tender, would ever have shown such courage and resolution?"

But in the solitude of her own chamber the heart of Agnes sank at the thunder of the cannonade, when she thought of those so dear to her exposed to hourly peril; and when a group of men were seen bearing a wounded or dying comrade from the quarter where her father or her lover were engaged, a feeling of sickening apprehension would come over her; and often with faint steps she would hurry forth to see the face of the dying man. Then she would reproach herself for weakness, resolving, for the future, not to anticipate the evil day; and would prepare to cheer with bright smiles the return of weary friends, when the combat and the watch were over.

They needed all that could be done, indeed, to keep up their spirits in the contest that was going on; for day by day, and hour by hour, notwithstanding every effort of the garrison, notwithstanding an amount of courage on the part of the citizens which no one had anticipated, the enemy gained ground. To Herbert it was a bitter disappointment as well as grief; for, calculating with the experience of long years of war, he felt sure, that when Tilly commenced the siege, the forces of the Bavarian general were inadequate to the task he had undertaken, and that Heidelberg could hold out for months, if it were defended as he was resolved it should be. But two or three days after the siege commenced, fresh bodies of troops appeared in quarters where they had not been expected; a greater number of pieces of heavy ordnance than had been in the imperial camp on the fourteenth of August, opened their fire on the town and castle on the nineteenth; and the report became rife, that the general of the besieging army had been reinforced by ten thousand men from the forces of the Archduke. The English officer became moody and desponding; and, though in the hour of danger and of combat he was full of fire and energy, filling the soldiers by his very look with courage and determination like his own, yet, when he returned to his lodging in the castle, he would fall into long fits of silence, gaze upon the ground with a gloomy eye, or pore over a plan of the defences, and sadly shake his head.

The operations of the siege were at first confined to the left bank of the Neckar; and the communication between the town and country on the right bank by the road over the covered bridge, was unimpeded, except by occasional parties of cavalry, who would pillage the peasantry, bringing in provisions, unless protected by a strong guard. The supply of the city, however, was facilitated by the exertions of the Baron of Obertraut and his small force; and his very name had become so terrible to the imperial troops, that the enemy's cavalry would withdraw in haste at the very first news of his approach. Often, indeed, he came upon them unaware like a quick

thunderstorm; and almost daily news arrived in the place of this regiment of Croats, or that body of Cossacks, having been defeated by Oberntraut, and driven over the river in terror and confusion. He himself, however, never appeared within the walls till one evening in the month of September. From the batteries above the Pheasant-garden a tremendous fire was kept up during the greater part of that whole day upon the defences of the castle and the town. The elements, too, seemed to fight on behalf of the enemy. One of the most awful tempests that a land, prolific in storms, had ever witnessed, swept the valley of the Neckar. Lightning and hail filled the air. The thunder almost drowned the cannonade; and about four o'clock, the wind, which had been rising for some time, increased to a hurricane. Chimneys were blown down; houses were unroofed; men and women were killed in the streets by the falling masonry; and in the midst of the terror and confusion which this awful phenomenon created, the Bavarian commander ordered a general assault to be made on the defences of the town and the castle. Merven, about two-thirds of the garrison, and a large body of the armed citizens presented themselves to defend the place, from what was then called the Spire's gate, to a spot where the walls of the town joined those of the castle. Herbert, with Algernon Grey, the Dutch troops, and the English volunteers, together with two hundred Palatinate infantry, undertook to repel the enemy in their attempt to storm the castle.

The cannonade on both sides was tremendous, as the imperial troops marched steadily to the assault; and from the top of the round tower at the angle of the great casemate, Colonel Herbert watched their approach, anxiously calculating to what point their efforts would be directed; while several inferior officers stood beside him, to carry his orders to Algernon Grey and others who were in command of the troops in the outworks. Suddenly, as he stood and watched, he perceived the fire of several of the largest of the enemy's guns turned in the direction of the lower part of the town, and, as it seemed to him, upon the bridge; but from the spot where he stood, he could not discover what was taking place in that part of the city. After a moment's consideration, he pointed with his hand towards the outworks which crossed the Pheasant-garden, and to the small battery on the mount at the angle, which commanded the trench towards the Ape's Nest fort, lost in the early part of the siege.

"There will be the principal attack," he said, speaking to the officers near him. "Speed away, Wormser, to the troops near the bathhouse, and order them to detach fifty men to reinforce the battery. I must away to see what is going on down there; but I will join them in the Pheasant-garden in a few minutes."

"You will see best from the block-house, sir, by the Carmelite-wood, where the English volunteers are posted," said one of the officers who had marked the fire directed upon the lower part of the town; "I dare say the Earl can tell you what is going on."

Herbert made no reply, but hurried away as fast as he could go, seeing two more guns brought to bear upon the town, towards the river. Hurrying through the great casemate, and thence across the gardens, the balls fell thick about him from the lesser guns of the Bavarian batteries. Every moment some of the fine rare trees, collected from all parts of the world, at an enormous expense, crashed under the shot, or fell, torn asunder, strewing the ground with fruits and flowers, such as Europe seldom saw. The vice and the folly of unnecessary war is never, perhaps, more strongly felt than when its destructive effects are seen amongst all the fair and beautiful objects which the peaceful arts have gathered or produced. But the thoughts and feelings of Herbert at that moment were those of the warrior alone: the thoughtful and contemplative man, which he had appeared in calmer days, was cast away, and the lion was roused within him. The trees, in whose shade and in whose appearance he had delighted, he now cursed, for covering in some degree the approach of the enemy, and he would willingly have ordered them all to be swept away.

Turning the angle of the Pheasant-garden, he soon reached the block-house, where Algernon Grey, with his band of Englishmen, supported by a company of Dutch infantry, had been stationed, as soon as the preparations for an assault had been perceived; and as he reached the foot of the mound, the young Earl came down to meet him, asking, "Have you seen my messenger?"

"No," answered Herbert, quickly. "What news from below there?--they seem firing upon the bridge."

"The wind has carried off the roof," said Algernon Grey, "and there is a great firing near the gate tower on the other side. One cannot well see what is taking place for the smoke and the tower; but fresh troops seem coming up from Neunheim and the plains."

Herbert set his teeth hard, but made no reply; and, mounting to the block-house, he gazed out, holding fast by an iron stanchion; for, on that high ground, it was scarcely possible to stand against the force of the hurricane. After a moment's consideration, he turned to his young countryman, saying in a low voice, "There is no one there we can trust. The fellow there is a coward, given that post because we thought it quite secure from attack. You will not be wanted here, Algernon. Take twenty men with you, and run down with all speed. Assume the command at once; if he resists, blow his brains out; and at all events maintain the gate. If we lose the bridge, they will not be long out of the town."

Without a word the young nobleman obeyed, hurried down by the shortest paths and passed

through the deserted streets of the town, where no human being was to be seen but a wounded soldier crawling slowly back from the walls, and an officer, still more badly hurt, carried in the arms of three or four hospital men. He soon reached the Heidelberg side of the bridge, where he found the gates open, and the archway under the hither tower crowded with soldiery. From the other side of the Neckar, upon the bridge and the farther tower, was directed a terrible fire from a considerable body of Bavarian infantry with two small pieces of cannon and from time to time the balls from the battery on the Geisberg passed over the bridge and dropped into the stream, without doing much damage, except to one of the nearer piers and the houses in the lower town; for it would seem that the Bavarian officers above were somewhat embarrassed by the position of their own men on the right bank of the river.

"Clear the way," cried Algernon Grey, "and, in Heaven's name, establish some order! There, Lanzprisade, array your men behind the gates, and keep ready to close and defend them, in case of need. Where is your commander?"

"God knows," answered the man, with a laugh; "we have not seen him for this hour. And Wasserstein and the rest over there are fighting as well as they can without orders."

"Well, I will command them," answered Algernon Grey; and, advancing at the head of his men, he crossed the bridge towards the opposite gate. Just in the middle of the passage, a bullet through one of the windows of the bridge struck his corslet and glanced off, wounding a man behind; but the young earl hurried on; and, forcing his way through the men crowded round the gate, mounted by the stone stairs to the top of the tower, which was crowded by gallant fellows returning the fire of the enemy from every window and loop-hole. One man in particular, a burly-looking German, holding the rank, which we should now term sergeant, stood with his whole person exposed at the largest aperture, whilst two young lads behind him loaded and re-loaded a store of arquebuses, with which he busied himself in picking off the principal assailants, perfectly heedless of the shot, which sometimes passed through the window close to him, sometimes struck upon the stone-work, or lodged in the wood and tiles of the conical roof just above.

"You are Wasserstein," said Algernon Grey, laying his hand upon his shoulder. "I know you by your gallantry--let me look out, for a moment, I want to see what is going on."

"One shot more, sir, at that man with the green plume," replied the man, who instantly recognised him. "We must make the best fight we can; but I think they are bringing up fresh guns; at least, I see horses there coming at a great pace."

Even while he was speaking he had been taking a quiet and deliberate aim; and the next instant the gun went off, and a Bavarian officer fell.

"There, that will do," said Wasserstein. "Now, sir,--but don't be long."

Algernon Grey advanced to the window and gazed out. The next instant a shot grazed his face, shattered a part of his steel cap, and passed off; but he did not move an inch, and he could hear the man behind him murmur, "Ah! that's something like."

"Good news, my friend," said Algernon Grey: "that is Oberntraut coming up in their rear. I know his cornet. I must go out to meet him. You had better come down and command at the drawbridge when it is let down for me to pass."

"I would rather go with you," said the man.

"There is none here whom I can trust but you," said Algernon Grey, laying his hand upon his arm. "You must stay to support me, in case of need."

"Well, I will, then," answered Wasserstein. "Fire away, my men, fire away! Don't give them a moment's rest: the young Englishman is going out to cut their throats."

Descending to the gates, Algernon Grey addressed a few words to his men, arrayed them with as broad a front as the space would permit, and, after a moment or two spent in preparation, that the enemy might be taken by surprise, the gates were thrown open, and the drawbridge lowered, in an instant. With shortened pikes, and shoulder touching shoulder, the English band rushed across, with their young leader at their head, while every loop-hole of the tower poured forth shot upon the enemy. A number of Bavarian soldiers, with long planks to form a sort of temporary bridge, were right in the way; but seeing what seemed to be a considerable body of the garrison rush forth to the charge, they dropped the timber and ran back upon the ranks, which were covering their approach, and threw the first line into confusion. The narrow road did not admit of a wide front to either party; and, assailed impetuously by the English pikemen, the front line of the Bavarians gave way, driving the second back upon those behind. A number fell; one or two on the left jumped down the bank into the Neckar; and confusion and disarray had spread panic amongst a body of several hundred men, before a mere handful of assailants, when the sharp galloping of horse was heard from beyond the turn of the road; and shots, and cries, and words of command sounded from the rear. A young officer of the Bavarian infantry made a gallant effort to rally his flying soldiers, but it was in vain; and, waving his sword in the air, Algernon Grey exclaimed, "On! on! gallant hearts. Oberntraut is upon their rear. Push on for that gun. We must have one trophy at least."

The men answered with a cheer, and the next moment the cannon was in their hands. Up the slopes, amongst the rocks and orchards, down by the stream, up to their middles in water, the Bavarian troops fled without order; and the moment after, the young Earl could see the Palatinate horsemen dashing in amongst them, pursuing wherever the ground permitted it, and cutting them down without mercy. It was a wild, strange, horrible scene; and in the midst of it was seen Oberntraut himself, without any of the defensive armour of the period, but habited merely with hat and plume, buff coat of untanned leather, and thick gloves and riding-boots.

"Oberntraut! Oberntraut!" cried Algernon Grey, as he came near; but Oberntraut took no notice, dealing a blow here and there with his sword at the heads of the routed Bavarians, and riding on towards the bridge. Yet it was clear that he must have recognised the English party; for they had a Bohemian flag with them, they wore the Palatinate scarfs, and no blow was struck at any of them, although the road was so narrow that the young Earl was obliged to halt his men, and give them a different formation round the captured gun, in order to let the cavalry pass.

"He is heated, and impatient with the fight," thought Algernon Grey; and, without farther comment, he commanded his men to bring the gun, and the stores of ammunition which were with it, into the town, and returned towards the bridge, knowing that there was scarcely a part of the defences where the presence of every man, who could be spared from other points, was not necessary. The drawbridge was by this time down again, and the gates open; and, leaving the cannon in the hands of Wasserstein, the young Englishman hurried up with his men towards the blockhouse, where he had been first posted, remarking a tremendous fire from the right of the pheasant-garden, and a dense smoke rising up from under a cavalier of late construction, still farther to the right. As he approached, the comparative quietness of everything towards the blockhouse, and in the park of the Friesenberg, showed him that the attack had been made in the quarter of the cavalier; and, turning to the right, through the narrow winding paths and half-completed terraces of Solomon de Caus, he soon found himself at the entrance of the pheasant-garden, and had a view of the outwork which had been one of the principal points assailed. The fire seemed somewhat to have slackened; but the Palatinate troops were still ranged within the parapet, and a group of officers were seen standing near the centre of the platform, amongst whom Algernon Grey could remark the figure of Herbert, and, somewhat to his surprise, that of Oberntraut also. Herbert's face was turned away from the Bavarian batteries, and his attitude at once made the young Englishman say to himself, "The enemy have been repulsed." The next moment, he saw Oberntraut shake Colonel Herbert warmly by the hand, and descend the steps leading to the path immediately in front. The young Baron came on with a heavy brow, and eyes bent down, as if in deep thought, scarcely seeming to perceive the approaching party with the Earl at its head. Algernon stopped him, however, and took his hand, saying, "What is the matter, my friend?"

Oberntraut gazed in his face gravely, then suddenly returned his grasp, replying, "There is a great deal I do not understand; but I am sure you're honest--I am sure you are; and I have said so."

Without waiting for any answer, Oberntraut turned away and walked down the hill; and, murmuring to himself, "This is very strange," the young earl advanced and mounted the steps to the top of the cavalier. There he saw the enemy in full retreat, carrying with them, apparently, a number of killed and wounded. Herbert was now at the farther side of the work; but, though he must have seen the young Englishman approach, he did not turn towards him; and, when Algernon spoke, his reply, though not discourteous, was distant and cold.

"The assault has been repelled, my lord," he said; "and will not be renewed to-night. Nevertheless, it may be as well to be prepared; and, therefore, I will beg you to command here in my absence, while I return for awhile to the castle, whither I am called by business."

Algernon Grey was pained and surprised; but it was not a moment or a scene in which any explanation could be asked; and, saying merely, "Very well, I will do so," he turned to examine once more the retreating force of the enemy.

Herbert, in the meantime, descended into the pheasant-garden; and quickening his pace, as soon as he was under cover of the trees, he walked in the most direct line to his own lodging in the tower.

On opening the door he found Agnes watching for his return; and her face lighted up with joy, as soon as she beheld him; but a cloud came over it the next instant to see him return alone, which had seldom happened of late.

"Oh, my dear father," she cried; "I am glad to see you back uninjured. This has been a terrible day,--but where is Algernon? Is he hurt?" and here her voice sunk almost to a whisper.

"No, my child," answered Herbert, gravely; "he is safe and well, and has done his devoir gallantly;" and, putting her gently aside, he advanced to a small cabinet on the other side of the circular room, unlocked a drawer, and took out a sealed letter, which he instantly broke open and commenced reading. Agnes remarked that his hand trembled, which she had never seen in her life before. When he had done, he seated himself and leaned his head upon his hand in thought.

"Agnes, my love," he said at length; "this place is no place for you. The dangers are too great,

the scenes are too terrible. I must send you to Louisa Juliana till the siege is over."

"Oh, no, no," cried Agnes; "I cannot, I will not leave you."

"Hush!" said Herbert; "you must go; your presence here unnerves me. I will send off a messenger early to-morrow morning to the Electress to know if you can be safe with her. He can be back in two days; and then you must go. Your stay here and all the risks, would drive me mad."

Agnes bent down her head and wept; but Herbert's determination came too late. Before the following evening a large force of Imperial infantry and several pieces of cannon crossed the Neckar by the bridge at Ladenburg, and were brought round to the opposite side of the bridge. The town was thus completely invested; and, although not cut off from all communication with the country without, the obstacles which presented themselves were such as Herbert would not willingly expose his daughter to encounter.

CHAPTER XIII.

On an evening at the end of summer, while leaves were yet green and skies yet fall of sunshine, though the long daylight of the year's prime had diminished somewhat more than an hour, and darkness and winter were stealing slowly forward in the distance, a small but handsome room, richly furnished with everything that the taste of that day could display, with exquisite carvings of old oak, with fine pictures, with velvet hangings, ay, and with green shrubs and flowers both rare and beautiful, showed preparations for a supper party, at which two persons only were expected. The table was arranged with great taste: rich fruits in a silver vase formed a pyramid in the midst, and two or three dishes of the most beautiful workmanship presented various tempting pieces of confectionery strewed over, in quaint devices and in a regular pattern, with minute flowers. On the right of the principal table, at some little distance, was a carved oak buffet covered with crimson velvet, just seen from beneath the edges of a damask napkin, on which were arranged some large silver tankards of beautiful forms, two golden goblets, and several tall glasses gilded on the stem. The windows of the room were open, but shaded with trees and flowering shrubs, and a green soft light spread through the interior, as the rays of the setting sun poured through the veil of leaves. That light began to assume a purple hue, showing that the orb of day had touched the verge of the horizon, when a lady entered by a door from the gardens, magnificently habited in an evening dress, with somewhat more display of her fair person than the general habits of the English people rendered decorous. We see the same mode of dress in the pictures of Rubens, especially those in which he represents the court of France at that period; but the costume had not yet become general in Great Britain, and, to English minds, the dress might have been higher, the wing-like collar more close.

The lady closed the door and locked it; looked eagerly round, advanced to the other door, and did the same. Then, taking a small vial from that fair bosom, and a plate from the table, she poured out of the little bottle a white powder into the centre of the plate. There was a little vase of silver standing near, filled with powdered sugar, and from it she took a portion with a small silver ladle, then mingled the sugar and the white powder in the plate intimately together, and sprinkled the confectionery thickly with the mixture. This done, she again gazed round, looked out through both the windows, replaced the little vial in her bosom, and, unlocking either door, went forth again.

The room remained vacant for half an hour; twilight succeeded to broad day, and night to twilight, but soft and fair; no heavy darkness, but a gentle transparent shade, with the starlight and the coming moon, felt though not seen within the chamber. The windows remained open; the soft air sighed in through the branches, and a solitary note of the long-singing merle was heard every now and then from beneath the leaves.

Suddenly the quick hoofs of a number of horses sounded on the road near, then stopped, and voices talking gaily in the house succeeded. Two servants entered that carefully decked room, and lighted the candles in the lustres. A moment after, a man in a white cap and apron followed, looked over the whole table, and moved some of the flowers upon the dishes; but the cook did not seem to remark that aught had been done to his confectionery.

"Ods life, there are more of them coming," he cried, addressing the other two servants, as the tramp of horses was again heard, "I wish they would keep their hungry throats away. Run out, Lloyd, and see who are these new ones."

The room was left vacant again for a few minutes, and then the door was thrown open by one

of the attendants. The lady entered, leaning somewhat languishingly on the arm of a tall, handsome young man, splendidly dressed, but yet without that air of high birth and courtly habits which were eminently conspicuous in his fair companion.

A slight degree of paleness spread over the lady's face as she passed the threshold, and the deep fringed eyelids dropped over the large black eyes. The gentleman's look was upon her at the moment, and his brow somewhat contracted; his countenance assumed an expression of shrewd and bitter meaning. He said nought, however; and the lady, recovering herself in a moment, turned her head, saying to the servant behind, "Let the men wait--tell the boy I will see him, and receive his lord's letter after supper."

"Who are these men?" asked the gentleman, advancing with her towards the table.

"The page of the Earl of Hillingdon, my good lord," she replied, with a sarcastic smile, seating herself in the nearest chair; "his page and a servant, bearing a letter from that noble gentleman to poor deserted me."

"Nay, not much deserted," cried the other, in a gallant tone, "when my heart and so many others are at your feet."

"Hush!" she said sharply, though in a low voice, "nothing of this before the servants."

As she spoke a dish was brought in, and handed first to her guest; but he would be extremely courteous that night, and ordered it to be carried to her. She took some at once, and ate, without noticing his attention, but saying aloud as he helped himself, "I am but a poor housekeeper, my good lord, and am sorry my noble uncle is not here to treat you better; but I told the cook to do his best, and show his skill."

"Oh, this is excellent!" replied the gentleman, "and will make up for my bad fare yesterday at Hertford, where everything was so bitter methought I was poisoned. The taste is in my mouth still."

"Nay, we must drive it thence with better things," said the lady. "I would not deny myself the pleasure of receiving you, when you wrote to say you would come, though my uncle was absent; and I must try to make up for your disappointment in not finding him, by giving you good cheer--will you not take wine?"

"Let us drink from the same cup," said the gentleman, with a soft and passionate look, notwithstanding her warning, "the wine will only taste sweet to me, if your lips sip it too."

The lady's eye flashed suddenly, and her brow grew dark; but she answered, tossing her proud head, "I drink after no one, my lord. As to drinking after me, you may do as you please.--Give me some wine."

"Oh, your cup will render the wine nectar to me," said the guest, while the attendant to whom she had spoken poured out some wine for her into one of the golden goblets. She took a small portion, and then told the man to give it to her visitor, saying, with a laugh not quite natural, "What foolish things men are!"

The supper proceeded; dish after dish was brought in, but the gentleman would taste nothing of which the lady had not partaken before, till his conduct became somewhat remarkable. Her brow grew dark as night for an instant, but cleared again; and all that remained was a bright red spot upon her cheek.

There was a slight rustling sound near the open window, as the supper drew towards its conclusion, and the lady remarked, "The wind methinks is rising." Twice or thrice she looked in the direction of the window, and a sort of anxious uncertain expression came into her face. She pressed her guest to drink more wine, and he did so, always using the same cup and keeping it by him; but the wine at length seemed to have its effect. His face flushed, his eyes sparkled, his language became warm and passionate, somewhat coarse withal, and mingled with a bitterness, especially on the subject of woman's heart and mind, which was little less than insulting in a lady's presence.

Her eye fixed upon him firmly, shining clear and bright like a diamond, from under the slightly contracted brow. The red spot vanished from her cheek, and she remained deadly pale. "Why gaze you at me so sternly, lovely Kate?" asked her guest.

"Because I think you do not yet know women rightly," answered the lady at once: "you will learn better one day.--You need wait no longer," she continued, turning to the attendants; "we will be our own servants.--Now, my good lord, to end your supper, taste one of these tarts of Flemish cream. I marked well, when last you were here, that you loved them, and I had them prepared expressly for you."

One of the servants, ere he went, carried the silver dish to his lady's guest; but the gentleman kept to his rule. "Will you divide one with me, bright Kate?" he asked.

"Nay," she answered, glancing her eyes for an instant to the window, "I am not fond of them."

"Then I will not take them either," said her visitor. "What you love I will love--what you take I will take."

The lady set her teeth hard; then, as the servant set down the dish and withdrew, she suddenly stretched out her hand to another plate. saying in a low but firm voice, and with a bland smile, "Well I will divide one of these lady-grace's, as they call them, with you."

"That is kind, lovely Kate," cried the visitor, drawing his chair nearer to her; "and of all lady's grace on earth, let me have yours."

The lady smiled again quite sweetly, parted the sort of cheese-cake equally, and gave him half. He paused an instant, and she began. Then he ate, saying, "This is excellent."

"It is not bad," she answered, continuing to eat the cake, and keeping her eyes fixed upon him.

"Now that I have my lady's grace,"--he continued, drawing nearer still, and endeavouring to put his arm round her. But, instantly, she started up with a look of scorn; and, at the same moment, William Ifford sprang in at the open window.

"What is this, my lord!" he cried, "insulting my sweet cousin? Upstart and villain as you are, were there a drop of really noble blood in your veins--"

"It is vain, William! it is vain!" said the lady, in a low tone. "You have come too late. I have eaten too.--My right noble lord, you look very pale. I told you that you knew not women rightly. You know them now--as much as e'er you will know.--Heaven! how faint I feel!--But his eyes roll in his head.--Stop him from the door, William.--You are sick, my lord!--Will you try some Flemish cream, or taste more of your lady's grace?--Methinks you have had enough for once."

"I was warned! I was warned!" murmured the unhappy man, holding by the table for support.

"Ay; but not warned that the hate of a heart like mine will sacrifice life itself for vengeance," answered the lady, sinking down into a seat.

"I will have vengeance, too," said the guest, starting up, and staggering with a furious effort towards the door. But William Ifford caught him by the breast, and threw him back. He staggered--fell--rolled for a moment or two in frightful convulsions, and then, with a scream like that of a sea-bird in a storm, gave up the ghost.

William Ifford was at that moment by the lady's side. "Catherine! Catherine!" he cried, "have you taken much?"

She made no answer; some quick sharp shudders passed over her frame, and a sort of choking sobbing convulsed her throat. A minute after, her head fell back upon the chair, and then, with a low but sharp sound, sunk down to the ground.

Her guilty kinsman gazed from the one corpse to the other with a wild and hesitating look. But then he thought he heard a noise. It was the sound of steps and voices coming near; and, leaping through the window, he disappeared. He could not have been gone fifty yards when the door of the room was burst open in haste, and the attendants of the house flocked in, with the page Frill and the old servant Tony in the midst.

"Poisoned, boy!--poisoned!" cried the man named Lloyd. "Heaven and earth! it is too true!"

All paused in an instant, as the sight which that terrible chamber presented lay before their eyes; and, for some moments, not a word was said, while one gazed over the shoulders of another at the two corpses. Then all burst forth at once, surrounding the Earl of Hillingdon's page, and questioning him closely with eager and vociferous tongues. But Frill was more guarded in his answers than might have been expected. He told them that, liking all fine sights, he had amused himself by watching the Lady Catherine and her guest at supper, through the window on the right, between which and the other window stood a thick tree. He then detailed minutely all that had occurred till the entrance of Sir William Ifford; declared that he had heard steps approaching over the grassy lawn, and then had seen some one suddenly appear in the room, who, he supposed, had entered by the other window. He stoutly denied having seen the intruder's face; but at the same time remarked that the poisoning could not be his doing, for that nothing more was eaten till, in the midst of high words, which first gave him a clue to the terrible truth, the one victim had fallen and then the other, and he had run away to bring assistance.

Had the poison been of such a quality that any antidote would have proved effectual, so much time was lost that none could be administered. Not a spark of vitality remained when the bodies were at length examined; and the only indication of how the fatal event had occurred which could be discovered, was a small vial in the lady's bosom, containing a very minute portion of a white powder, which, being tried upon a dog, produced almost instant death.

The wonder lasted its nine days and was then forgotten by the world at large; but the sudden disappearance of Sir William Ifford, the gay, the witty, the dissolute, continued for a few weeks longer to excite inquiry and remark. No one ever learned the conclusion of his history: some said he had entered a monastery of Barefooted Friars, and died there in the odour of sanctity; others,

with greater probability on their side, declared that he had turned Turk, and was to the day of his death one of the most relentless persecutors of the Christians. We only know that, on the night when this double death took place, a horseman rode away at a terrible pace from the small village in the neighbourhood, took his way as fast as possible towards the sea-side, and thence left no traces of his course behind.

For three days the page and the old servant of the Earl of Huntingdon were detained in Huntingdonshire, to give evidence regarding the sudden death of two persons of such high rank; but coroners were as wise, and coroners' juries as enlightened, in those days as in our own, and a burlesque verdict was returned in a very tragic case. The stout old servant and his youthful companion then set out to join their lord, arrived in Germany in safety, and, thanks to many of those circumstances which might have seemed best calculated to impede them, such as their ignorance--or rather small knowledge--of the language, and their very narrow information upon geographical subjects, arrived within a few miles' distance of Heidelberg with fewer difficulties than better instructed persons would probably have encountered. The answers which they gave, in what they called German, to the questions of those who interrogated them, completely puzzled their examiners; and the round they took to arrive at the city, brought them to a point the most opposite from that at which a messenger from England might have been expected to appear. It was late at night when they reached the small village of Siegelhausen; but there they heard from the peasants a confirmation of the rumours which had previously reached them, that Heidelberg was completely invested, and, to use the expression of the boors, "that a field mouse could not creep in."

"I will try, at all events;" said Frill, "for I know my lord would give his right hand for the news we bring. If it cost me my ears, I will try;" and with this magnanimous resolution he lay down to sleep.

CHAPTER XIV.

It was in the early grey of the morning: all was silent and solemn; the beleaguered city lay in its brief repose; the cannon on the hills and at the gates were still: the camp of the assailants slumbered, except where the tired sentinel paced up and down, longing for relief, or where the wounded lay on the feverish beds of the crowded hospitals. Quietly and silently on foot, with their horses left behind at the village, and in the dress of the Palatinate peasantry, the servant and the page plodded on as if going from Siegelhausen to Neunheim. Ere they had gone far, they saw the tents which now thickly covered the slopes towards the Heiligberg, the huts of the Croats, and the breastworks which had been thrown up; while six pieces of artillery appeared stretched out upon a battery some three hundred yards up the hill. Still they walked on, however, plodding along, and affecting the heavy step and swinging air of the boor.

They were within a hundred paces of the bridge, when suddenly, from the neighbouring field, they heard the call to stand; and the next instant several Austrian soldiers, in their white uniforms, sprang down into the road. One seized Tony by the arm, and the others were running up, when the page gave a look to the Neckar, and jumped down the bank. The water, fortunately, was low, and the boy's heart stout.

"In, Frill! in!" cried Tony; and, without more ado, the youth dashed into the stream.

Two shots were instantly fired at him, but in haste and ill aimed. He was seen, too, from the bridge; and several arquebuses were discharged amongst the Austrians with very little reverence for poor Tony, who had nearly suffered severely, held as he was in the midst of the enemy.

Protected by the fire from the bridge, the boy hurried on for some way, up to his middle in water. Then climbing on some rocks, he at length plunged boldly in where the tide was deep and strong. He was a good swimmer; but the force of the stream was great, and the water deadly cold. He was borne down, notwithstanding every effort, carried through one of the arches of the bridge, and though he struck for the shore as long as he could, yet nothing but the town wall presented itself dipping in the river. His strength began to fail, when a little sally-port and landing-place at length came in sight; but the poor lad's heart sunk, for it was distant, and he felt no power within him to reach it. The last thing he saw was a man running quickly along on the top of the wall; then all became dim and green, with a rushing sound in the ears, bewildered thoughts, and, at length, dull forgetfulness.

When the page opened his eyes again, he was in a small room and laid undressed upon a bed, with an old man of a mild and venerable aspect gazing at him. His whole frame tingled; his breathing was heavy and difficult: it seemed as if there was a world upon his chest; and, for

several minutes, he recollected nought of what had happened. There were sounds in the air, however, which soon recalled him to a sense of where he was. Every minute or two a loud explosion shook the house and made the casements clatter as if the whole building were coming down; and, raising himself upon his arm, he tried to speak; but the old man gave him a sign to be silent, and, going to a table near, brought him a small quantity of wine.

It was long ere the stranger would permit him to converse, and longer ere he would allow him to rise, although the page explained that he had come to bring some intelligence of importance to his lord the Earl of Hillingdon.

"Your lord is quite safe and well," replied old Dr. Alting, (to whose house the youth had been taken,) in answer to his anxious inquiries, "and you can go to him by-and-by. At present you are not fit. There will be no assault to-day, for there was one yesterday; so you will have time enough."

But Frill was impatient, and about three o'clock he was permitted to go forth, with directions as to where he was likely to find his master. The poor boy, however, had somewhat miscalculated his strength; for he found to climb the hill a weary task; and when he had obtained admission into the castle, he was sent from place to place in search of Algernon, till at length he sat down at the foot of the second casemate, and wept from very weariness.

While there, a young officer passed with his hand bound up, and paused to enquire what ailed him. The matter was soon explained, and the lad was once more directed onward, but with better assurance.

"The Earl is at the blockhouse which you see just peeping up yonder," said the officer; "I left him there five minutes ago; but go by those lower paths, for the fire is somewhat hot, and you may chance to get hurt as I have done, or worse."

The page rose again and walked on, passed through the park of the Friesenberg, and approached the edge of the Carmelite wood. The cannonade as he went became every moment fiercer, and the balls whistled more than once over his head, while the roar of the artillery was mingled at intervals with the rattling fire of small arms. Not only in front and to the right was heard the sullen sound of the heavy ordnance; but, rolling round and round, the deep voice of the cannon from the walls, and then, farther off again, from the Imperial batteries, was heard like thunder in a forest; and still the mountains and rocks surrounding the narrow valley of the Neckar echoed and re-echoed the terrific noise. He was a brave lad, but his nerves were shaken, and he looked round from time to time to right and to left expecting to see the enemy forcing their way in.

At length, however, he reached the foot of the little hill on which the blockhouse stood, and, gazing up, saw two or three men whose faces he knew well, standing above, before a small palisade. "Is my lord here, Halford?" he cried. "Is my lord here?"

"Yes, yes!" cried the man. "Come up, Frill;" and the page with a lightened heart ran up the steps of the mount. Before he reached the top Algernon Grey came forth himself, saying to the man to whom Frill had spoken, "Go round to Colonel Herbert, Halford, as fast as possible. Say there is not even demonstration here--that I have too many men, and we are doing nothing.--Ah Frill! is that you? Welcome back, my good boy. How in Heaven's name got you in? Where is Tony?" "In the hands of the enemy," replied the boy. "I swam the Neckar, and was nearly drowned, but he was caught."

"What news from England?" asked Algernon Grey eagerly. "Did the Lady Catherine give you or Tony a letter for me?"

"None, my noble lord," answered the page. "She intended, I believe, but was prevented."

"That is most unfortunate!" cried his lord bitterly. "All is going wrong here, and one word might have been of vast importance--"

"I have something to tell, sir," said Frill, in a low tone, "if you would move down a little, for it is not fitted for all ears."

Algernon took a few steps down the hill, saying, "Speak, speak!" and the boy went on, in a voice raised little above a whisper, to detail all that had occurred since he had left his lord. When he came to the catastrophe, Algernon Grey turned deadly pale, shocked and horrified beyond expression. For several minutes he did not utter a word, but gazed upon the ground in sad and bitter silence. He was free--the heavy bond which had weighed upon him for so many years was broken--his liberty was restored; but how dark and terrible were the means! and with these his mind busied itself in gloomy thoughts ere it could rest on aught else.

"Who was the man?" he asked at length,--"the person you say came in by the window?"

"I did not see his face, my lord," replied the boy; "but I heard the voice of Sir William Ifford!"

"My lord, my lord!" cried the soldier Halford, coming back as fast as he could run. "Colonel Herbert desires you to advance to the pheasant-garden without a moment's delay, leaving

nothing but a guard here."

Algernon Grey hurried up, called out the English and Dutch troops from the blockhouse and a small detached trench in front, arrayed them on the slope, and, telling the page to remain with the guard he left behind, ordered the men to advance at the charge by the winding path through the wood. The roll of musketry was now heard sharp and near, mingled with drums beating; and, falling back to the side of the man Halford, the young Earl demanded what he had seen and heard.

"There were full two thousand men, sir, advancing to storm the works in the pheasant-garden," he replied. "I counted ten Austrian ensigns myself; and there were a number of Bavarian troops behind."

"Were they near?" asked Algernon Grey.

"Half-way between the Crane's Nest and the Cavalier," replied the soldier.

The young Earl ran on again to place himself at the head, murmuring, "No time is to be lost, indeed."

The way was heavy and circuitous, interrupted by frequent flights of steps, which greatly delayed the men; but there was no cutting across; for the trees and the rocks of the Friesenberg in that part which had not yet been levelled, interrupted the straight course which might otherwise have been taken; and the firing was heard nearer and nearer, till even the sound of the guns did not drown the cries and shouts with which it was mingled; whilst still the beating drum and the blast of the trumpet was heard urging the men on either side to deadly strife. The young Earl's heart beat vehemently to get forward, but a full quarter of an hour elapsed ere he came in sight of the point of attack, approaching the works assailed by the rear of a fortified terrace which led to the Cavalier. This terrace, originally designed for ornament, was, perhaps, the weakest point in the whole defences of the castle; and, though commanded by the guns of the Cavalier above, it formed a sort of step, as it were, to the attack of the stronger work. The parapets, too, had been terribly shattered by the enemy's fire; and, when the young Englishman first caught sight of it, a terrible and an alarming scene presented itself to his eyes. An Austrian flag was already upon the terrace; the fight was going on hand to hand in several places; and, at the farther angle, driven almost under the guns of the Cavalier, he caught sight of Colonel Herbert, with a Bohemian flag in his hand, rallying his men to charge the enemy in the hope of clearing the platform.

No consideration was necessary; the only course to be pursued was plain and straightforward; and though at the risk of encountering the fire of friends as well as of enemies, Algernon Grey sprang up the steps to the top of the terrace, arrayed his men with a wide front, and gave the order to charge. There was no hesitation either on the part of the English or the Dutch. All saw that, without a great effort, the fort was lost; and, rushing on in a compact body, they swept the whole length of the terrace, driving the assailants before them at the point of the pike. Attacked in front and rear at the same time, the Imperial troops, who were establishing themselves on the platform, gave way; many threw down their arms; and many either leaped over the parapet into the midst of their comrades below, or rushed to the tops of the ladders, and cast themselves upon those who were climbing up to support them.

The outwork was regained; and, waving his hand to Herbert, whom he saw a little in advance, the young Earl was turning his head to give orders for a part of his men to fall back and line the parapet again, when suddenly he beheld Agnes' father stagger, drop the flag, and fall forward on the platform.

With a few brief words as to the defence of the work, Algernon Grey sprang forward to Herbert's side. Two of his men had already raised him in their arms; but his head hung heavily on his shoulder; and a ghastly wound on the right temple, passing along the whole side of the head and evidently injuring the skull, "bade hope itself despair."

"He is dead, sir, he is dead!" said one of the men who held him in his arms.

"I think not," replied Algernon, watching his countenance sadly; "the brain may not be injured. Throw a cloak over him and carry him down into the garden; I will come in a minute, when I have spoken with the captain of the Cavalier--Get him some water."

The men took him up and bore him down the steps; but the news had spread already amongst the men, and it was evident that they were greatly discouraged. Although rapid means were taken by Algernon Grey and the officer now in command of the outwork for its defence, it is probable that it would have been taken that night, as it was on the following morning, had not the Imperial officers, smarting from severe loss and discouraged by an unexpected repulse at the very moment when they thought themselves victorious, ordered the drums to beat a retreat.

A furious cannonade followed the enemy as they retired; and, seeing that all was safe for the time in that quarter, Algernon Grey left his men under the command of the Dutch officer associated with him, and turned to ascertain the fate of his friend. At the top of the steps, however, his eye ran over the town of Heidelberg; and he beheld with consternation fire and smoke arising in large volumes from three different parts of the town. Springing down, he

hurried to a spot where, under some trees, he saw several men grouped together around another lying on the ground; and, as he advanced, one of them, a young German officer, came forward to meet him, saying, "He is living, my lord. He has spoken--he has mentioned your name."

In another instant Algernon was by Herbert's side, and saw, with a gleam of hope, that his eyes were open, and the light of life and intellect still therein. They turned upon him, indeed, with a faint sad look, and the lips moved for a moment ere a sound issued forth. "My child!" he said, at length, "my child?"

"Shall I send for her?" asked Algernon Grey, kneeling by his side, and bending down his ear.

"No, no!" answered the wounded man, quickly; "but her fate, young man--her fate?"

"Fear not, fear not," answered the Earl; "I will defend, protect her with my life--die for her should need be."

"I believe you," said Herbert; "I will trust you!--Oh God! Yet swear to me that you will deal with her honestly; swear by all that you hold most sacred--by your faith in Christ--by your honour as an English gentleman, that you will be to her as a brother."

"I will be more," answered Algernon, in a low, but firm voice, "I will be her husband. I swear to you, by all I hold most sacred, that, as soon as she herself will consent, she shall be my wife; till then, my sister."

"Your wife!" said Herbert, sternly; "have you not another wife, young lord?"

"No," answered Algernon Grey, pressing his hand; "that impediment is removed--that bond broken. If you had read the letter which I wrote you, you would have seen that the marriage was but in name. It is now, however, altogether at an end. I have received the tidings this day--within this hour. She whom men called my wife is dead."

"Dead!" cried Herbert, in a stronger voice; "death is busy just now;" and then he paused, and raised his hand feebly to his head. But the fingers rested upon the bloody hair, and he drew them back, and pressed Algernon's hand in his. "I trust you," he said at length, "I trust you, Algernon. Obertraut's news, that you were already married, frightened--shocked me. I found confirmation in your letter, and I have been very sad ever since--but I trust you. Love her--oh, love her, and make her happy, for she deserves it well. An hour more, and the father's arm will be cold and powerless. Be you all to her.--What wants that man? Ask him whence he comes?--I would fain die in quiet."

"The town has fallen, sir," said an officer who had come up in haste. "In two places they have forced a way; and Governor Merven has retreated to the castle with the garrison. He sent me up to call Colonel Herbert to instant council."

"Tell him," said Herbert, raising his head, "that Colonel Herbert is removed from his command by a higher power than any of the earth. Tell him what you have seen, and that I say, God protect him, and bless his arms in a just cause! Now, Algernon, one word more--there are not many left for me to speak: the town is taken--the castle must fall. We have no stores, no means. Good God! let not my child be in this place, if it must fall by storm! Heaven and earth!--it makes this poor shattered brain reel. Swear,--swear you will take her hence. There are the passages below;--she knows them all. There is the way out--there;"--and he pointed with his hand.

"I will, if it be possible," answered Algernon Grey.

"Possible, possible!" said Herbert, his mind evidently wandering; "oh, yes, it is quite possible. You hear, he swears that he will take her hence," continued the dying man, with his faint eyes rolling over the bystanders; "he swears--remember--keep him to his oath."

"What, my gallant friend!" said an English voice behind Algernon Grey, "brought to this at last?"

"Ay, Merven, ay, even so," answered Herbert; "we must all come to this.--Bring me some water. I will speak with you, Merven. He swears he will take her hence before they storm the place. Send him forth, for I know him--know him well. He will remain to fight; and then she is without father, husband, friend--Oh, God! have mercy on me! how my brain reels!"

"Let some one fetch a litter," said Merven, kneeling down by his side; "we must bear him home."

"I have sent for one already," said Algernon Grey; "yonder it comes, I think."

"My child; my sweet child!" said Herbert, gazing still in Merven's face; "she can close my eyes, and then away--you will not let him linger?"

"No," answered the Governor, "I will send him forth, upon my word. If my command is of any power, he shall go. He can be of little service here, I fear."

"Thanks, thanks!" said Herbert, and fell into silence, closing his eyes.

A few minutes after, a litter was brought up from the castle; it was one which the Princess Elizabeth had often used,--and Herbert was placed upon it, and the curtains drawn. Four stout soldiers, taking it upon their shoulders, carried it down, and Algernon Grey followed, conversing sadly with Merven, and informing him of all that had taken place of the assault on their side.

"You have been more fortunate than we have," answered the Governor. "Trutzkaiser was taken early in the day; and the fools, forgetting to shut the gates as our soldiers rushed in, the enemy came pell mell amongst them. I rallied them, barricaded the street by the Spire's door, and kept them at bay till four, when came the news that the bridge was likewise forced; and it became needful at once to retire into the castle, lest I should be taken in front and rear at once. But even here I find," he added in a low voice, "there is but provision and ammunition for four days. Tilly has already sent to offer terms; but I have referred him to Vere, in Mannheim; and most likely we shall have another assault to-morrow.--Hark! Do you hear those shrieks? 'Tis from the town. The bloody villains are at their work!" and he looked sternly down upon the ground, setting his teeth hard. Algernon Grey made no reply; and Merven continued, "You have promised to go, my friend, and take the sweet girl with you; but how is it to be done?"

"I know not," answered the young Earl; "but my promise was only conditional. If we could send her forth in safety all would be well: I cannot--ought not to quit the place while you remain to defend it."

"He knew you, you see," said Merven; "but if there be a means I must send you; for I have promised unconditionally; and you must obey me, my young lord--how, is the only question."

"Herbert seemed to think Agnes knew of some means," said Algernon Grey; "but yet--"

"No buts, my lord," replied Merven. "If there be a means you must take it, when and how you can. I desire, I command you to do so; it will be two mouths less in the castle, and that is always something.--Stay, I will ask him what he meant. Perhaps we could dress her as a page, and send you under a flag of truce to confer with Vere on the terms of capitulation--but no, it would not do. Tilly is such a brute--you would almost be as safe within the walls; and his men are not the most famous for keeping terms, even when solemnly sworn to. I should not wonder if we were all massacred marching out. But I will ask Herbert if he knows any other means;" and, taking a step or two forward to the side of the litter, he drew back the curtain. The moment after, he turned his face sadly towards Algernon Grey, shaking his head, and saying, "He can give no answer now."

Herbert's eyes were open, but they were fixed and meaningless. The jaw had dropped; the hand grasped tight the side of the litter, but it was already cold as ice.

"Halt, my men," said Merven; "'tis useless bearing him any farther. Carry him to the gardener's house there;" and he pointed up to a small stone building lying between the outer and the inner works, some fifty paces on the left. Then grasping the Earl's hand, he added, "Hasten down to her and break the tidings; then ask her if she knows any means of flying from this place; and, if she does, remember it is my most express command that you guard her safely on the way. They tell me some one got into the town to-day from without; and if so, there must be a way hence also."

"It was my poor page, who swam the Neckar," answered Algernon, with a sad smile; "but I will go and bear my heavy story to poor Agnes."

"Do, do," said Merven; "and I will hasten back into the castle and send a messenger to Tilly, calling on him as a man and a Christian to stop the atrocities going on there below. Those shrieks wring my very heart."

The unfeeling reply to Merven's message is well known; and every reader of history is aware that for three whole days the town of Heidelberg was given up to a brutal soldiery.

Algernon Grey walked sadly on, and slowly too; for he shrunk from the terrible task before him. He did wrong, though unintentionally; for he calculated not how fast rumour travels, knew not that the utmost speed was needful to outstrip the winged messengers of evil tidings. He paused for a moment at the foot of the stairs leading to Agnes's apartments, which were still in what is called the Electress's lodging. Then, having made up his mind how to act, and laid vain plans for breaking the tidings gently, he ascended with a quick step and opened the door.

Agnes was seated at a table, with her hands pressed over her eyes and her bosom heaving with heavy sobs; but the moment he entered she raised her head, started up and cast herself upon his bosom, murmuring, "Oh, Algernon, Algernon!"

He saw that all had been told; and for his sole reply he pressed her to his heart in silence.

"Where have they taken him?" she asked at length, wiping away the tears, which flowed fast again as soon as dried.

"To the gardener's house," he answered, "to the right of the great casemate."

"I must go thither," she said, "I must go thither. Come with me, dear Algernon; I have none but you to support me now." And she moved towards the door, dressed as she was at the moment.

"Nay, throw this veil over you, my love," he said, taking up one that lay near and putting it over her head. Then, drawing her arm through his own, he led her down, and, choosing the least frequented paths, proceeded towards the gardener's house.

The sun was setting: in the mellow evening of an early autumn day; the sky was clear and bright; the aspect of all nature sparkling and beautiful; peace and tranquillity breathed forth from the fair face of all inanimate things; while the tiger in man's heart was defiling with blood the noblest work of the Creator. The contrast rendered that whole day more dark, more sad, more terrible, than if heavy thunderclouds had brooded over the devoted city, or storm and tempest had swept the valley, overrunning with massacre and crime.

They met several of the soldiery, as they walked on; but, with an instinctive reverence for sorrow, the men made large way for them to pass; and Agnes, with trembling steps and weeping eyes, approached the house where her father's body lay, and entered the room of death. For an instant she clung almost convulsively to her lover's bosom, when the fearful sight of the inanimate clay, streaked with the dark blood of the death-wound, appeared before her; but then, loosening her hold, with a wild gasp she crept towards the bed, as if afraid to wake him; and, kneeling down, kissed the cold hand and cheek. She knelt there long, till the daylight faded, and Algernon gently laid his hand upon her arm, saying, "Rouse yourself, dearest Agnes! We have his last commands to obey.--He has given you to me for ever; but has charged me to convey you hence, if it be possible, before a new assault is made upon the place, hinting that you could point out the means of flight. Come, then, into another room, and let us speak of these things."

Agnes rose more calm than he had expected, and, laying her hand on his, she answered, "Whatever you ask me, I will do, Algernon; but you must let me watch here this night; I will come now, but it will be to return again soon; and I will try to clear my thoughts, and tell you what were the wishes and intentions of him who lies there so sadly still."

She turned her head from the bed, and, with her eyes cast down, withdrew into the outer room of the gardener's dwelling, where there was no one but an old servant; for the chief gardener himself had removed some weeks before to a more secure abode; and there, seating herself near the window, she seemed to watch with eyes half overflowing the last faint streaks of light which hung upon the western sky.

"He felt that it would end thus, Algernon," she said at length, "and often talked to me of such evil chances, as if he would prepare my mind for the event. But it went worse with him lately; for something--I know not what--had disturbed and grieved him. He spoke then of sending me to the Electress mother, and seemed doubtful and anxious; whereas before he had always seemed to feel that, if it were God's will he should fall, you would protect and defend me."

"It was, my love, that he heard suddenly, and from one who knew not all the facts," Algernon replied, "that, which he would not listen to from me."

"I fear it embittered his last hour," said Agnes, gloomily; "for he left me this morning more sad and careworn than ever. I fear that doubts and apprehensions for his child, troubled him in the hour of death."

"Not so, dear one," replied her lover;--"by a happy chance, my page found means this morning to force his way into the town, having been sent by me to England; and thus I was enabled to assure him that every obstacle between me and you was removed for ever. It is a sad and horrible tale, Agnes, not fitted for ears so pure as yours to hear; but of this, at all events, be assured, that on that score, at least, your father's heart was at rest, and that our union has his blessing."

"Oh, thank God!" said Agnes, with a deep-drawn breath, as if the bitterest part of her sorrow was withdrawn. "These are balmy tidings, indeed, Algernon. But I recollect not what I was saying.--Yes; it was that he wished me to go to the Electress Louisa; but, ere his messenger could return, the passage from the other side was cut off; and then he would have sent me forth by the passages which lead out through the rock towards the Wolf's Well, beyond the enemy's posts. But I could not go alone, and there was no single person with whom he would trust my safety. If many went, we were sure to be discovered and stopped, and the peril seemed too great for the occasion."

"Such is not the case, now," answered Algernon, the meaning of Herbert's words breaking upon him. "You are in far more peril here than anywhere in the open country. There we should only be made prisoners. But the storming of a fortress is an awful thing, Agnes, and there are fates worse than death. However," he continued, as she bent down her head with a pale cheek, "it is well to be prepared for any event. Know you the way, dear one? Have you the keys?"

"This is all that is needful," answered Agnes, drawing a key from her bosom. "He has made me wear this ever since the siege began; and long ago he taught me all the ways, with a prophetic warning that I might one day need them."

"I remember your telling me so when first we met," answered her lover; and they went on to speak of many things connected with their past, their present, and their future fate, with that desultory discursiveness in which the mind is fond to indulge in moments of deep grief. The old servant of the gardener came in upon them to light a lamp, and recalled them to the present; and

the night-drum beating reminded Algernon Grey that his men were probably still in the outworks. He loved not to leave Agnes there alone; but she herself was the first to propose it. "I must go and take my place in that room," she said; "and there I will spend the night in prayer. You will leave me, dear Algernon, for you must be sadly weary. You were in arms all last night, I know."

"I will leave you for an hour, Agnes, for I must visit the posts," he answered; "but then I will return and keep watch beside you:--or in this room, if you would be alone, though there are no feelings between you and me that the living eyes of him whom we shall watch in death, might not have seen and sanctioned."

"No," she said; "no; you shall stay here, if you will, when you return. I own that to have you near me will be a comfort and a support; but for the time I am there, I would fain be alone. Yet come with me to the door. I am very weak and foolish; but it is the first sight of the cold and motionless clay of those we once loved so dearly, that unnerves the heart."

Algernon Grey took the lamp and guided her to the door, paused when she hesitated for an instant, gazing forward, and then, when she advanced steadily carrying the lamp which he had given her, he closed the door and left her, telling the old man to remain in the outer room till he returned.

With a quick step the young Englishman hurried up first to the blockhouse, and thence, by the same paths he had pursued in the morning, to the terrace and the Cavalier. Everywhere he found the soldiers dull, heavy, and dispirited. They seemed to mourn for Herbert as if he had been a father, and to look upon the defence of the castle as hopeless without him to lead and guide them. In a brief conversation, the officer commanding in the Cavalier mentioned the facts which he had himself observed, and besought Algernon to return to the castle and tell the Governor the state of things at the outworks.

"It would be better," he said, "to relieve the men at once, and send troops that have not been accustomed to fight under the poor Colonel's command. If need be, we can serve elsewhere, but the men are much fatigued."

There was much reason in what he said; and Algernon, speeding back to the castle, made his report to the Governor in person. Mervyn saw at once the expediency of the arrangements proposed, and promised they should be made, adding, "Tilly has allowed me to send an officer to Horace Vere to state exactly our situation, and to ask his commands; but this fierce Bavarian would not grant a suspension of arms even till our messenger's return, thinking, I believe, to wear us out with watching and anxiety, without any intention of renewing the assault at present. Nevertheless I beg that you would escort the lady hence at once if you can find means."

Some officers came in at this moment with reports; and Algernon Grey withdrew to return to the gardener's house. All was quiet and still within; and, advancing to the door of the room, where he had left Agnes, he opened it partially, saying, "I have returned, dear girl." He saw that she was kneeling and in prayer: and, closing the door again, he dismissed the old man to bed, wrapped his cloak round him, and seated himself to think.

For more than an hour he remained in meditation; but he was wearied with long watching and great exertion for the last few days. His eyes felt heavy; and, ere he had power to resist the influence, he slept. He was awoke by a quick, sharp, measured tramp; and, turning his ear he listened. "Fresh men going down to relieve the people at the outworks," he said--"I cannot have slept long;" and, seating himself again in the chair from which he had risen, he began to meditate once more upon his situation. Three minutes had scarcely elapsed when the report of a cannon made him start up again. Then came a rattling fire of small-arms, and then a peal of ordnance from the inner works of the castle. Springing to the door, he ran out, and ascended an outer staircase which led to a high balcony above. There the view was clear over the young, lately planted trees of the garden towards the castle; and, though the night was somewhat dark, it was soon brightened by a long line of fire that ran along between him and the great casemate. At the same instant he heard shots and shouts from the side of the cavalier; and the terrible truth burst upon his mind, that he was there alone with her he loved best on earth, between two large parties of the enemy's troops. By some means the imperialists had passed the outworks, and gained the very foot of the inner defences. All return to the castle was cut off; and it was vain to hope, that, though they might be repulsed from the walls of the castle itself, the enemy could ever be dislodged from the advantageous position they had gained. Thought was vain. There was no room for exertion. Courage and daring could do nothing; and all that remained was to save Agnes by flight, if flight were yet possible.

Hurrying down as speedily as possible, he re-entered the house and found her he loved in the outer room. "What is it?" she cried, with eyes full of terror.

"The enemy have gained the home gardens," answered Algernon Grey; "they are between us and the castle on the one side, and in the Pheasant-garden on the other. Instant flight, dear Agnes, is our only chance. You must not hesitate, dear girl--life is but a small consideration in comparison with what may happen, if we stay--you must not hesitate."

"Not for an instant," she answered; "it was his command, it is your wish, and I am ready;--one last look, and I go."

She returned to the room where her father's body lay; and then, after pressing her lips upon his, came forth, and joined her lover. She wept not, she trembled not--she was calm and firm; and they issued forth together, gazing on into the darkness. "This way," said Agnes, in a low tone; "it is not far.--Hark! how fiercely they are firing; they will not mind us. Let us pass through the labyrinth of clipped hornbeam. Under the arches we shall escape all eyes."

Hurrying on through narrow rows of shrubs cut into the form of arcades, without missing one path or turning, they came to the top of a large flight of steps, where the whole magnificent scene of a night attack upon a fortress was displayed to their eyes, by the continual flashing of the cannon from the bastions, and the long, sudden blaze of the small-arms discharged by the regiments of arquebusiers below. Ever and anon the vast masses of the castle started out from the darkness, illuminated by the broad glare, and then were covered with a black veil again; while the thunder of the artillery broke, with awful grandeur, the stillness of the night. The fugitives paused only for a moment, however; but Agnes whispered, "Let us make haste--day will soon break;" and the castle clock, almost at the same moment, struck the hour of four. Algernon Grey counted but three, for the cannon interrupted the sound; but, hurrying down the steps, they walked along in the direction of the great terrace till, in the front of the rock which had been hewn away nearly into a wall, they came to a niche, before which was placed the statue of a water-god in the midst of a marble basin.

"Here," said Agnes, "here is the place. Let me feel, where is the lock?" and she ran her hand over the face of the niche. For nearly a minute she could not find the key-hole, but at length succeeded; and the stone door at once gave way, opening the mouth of a narrow passage.

"Take the key, and lock it," she said, passing in first. Algernon Grey followed, and closed the door.

"You are safe; I trust you are safe, my beloved!" he cried, throwing his arms round her.

Agnes made no answer; but he could feel her sob violently upon his bosom, now that the extreme peril which had roused all her energies had ceased. He soothed and consoled her to the best of his power; and then, to engage her mind with other things, inquired, "Whither does this lead, dear girl?"

"Up into the hills," she answered, "above the Wolfs-well. It was intended for an aqueduct, I believe, to bring the waters of the stream down to the castle; but it has never been so used.--Let us on, Algernon, the bitter parting is over."

Gently and kindly he led her on, feeling the way before him with his sheathed sword, and supporting the gentle being by his side with his left arm passed round her. The way was steep, and in some places rugged; and for full half an hour they went slowly on, hearing from time to time the tramp of men above them, and the constant roar of the artillery, showing the castle had not yet fallen. Sometimes the air was close; but very frequently a spot of dim light was seen on the left just above the level of their heads; and the cool air blew in from without. At length the grey dawn could be distinguished streaming in through the apertures made to ventilate the conduit; and in a quarter of an hour after, a door presented itself before them--was easily unlocked--and Agnes and her lover stood upon the side of the mountain out of sight of Heidelberg.

The fresh grey morning rested soberly upon the hills. The cannonade had ceased. No sounds broke the stillness of the scene around. The green Neckar flowed glistening on below. All bore the aspect of peace and tranquillity; and, pressed in each other's arms, they thanked God for deliverance, allayed by some sorrow, but still merciful and sweet.

**LETTER FROM AGNES, COUNTESS OF HILLINGDON,
TO AMELIA, PRINCESS OF SOLMS.**

MADAM,

Not knowing where to address her Majesty, I enclose to you the account which she required of the events which have befallen me since the 23d of August last; and I beg that your Highness will present it to her Majesty, with my humble duty, as soon as an opportunity shall offer.

The signature of this letter will show you that I have not failed to obey her Majesty's command, conveyed to me by Mr. Carleton, to give my hand to my Lord the Earl of Hillingdon, sooner than I had myself proposed.

I trust that your Highness will receive the assurances of unalterable attachment with which I

am

Your Highness's most faithful servant,

AGNES HILLINGDON.

THE HAGUE,
This 29th October, 1622.

Post Scriptum.--I forgot to mention in the enclosed that the page joined us three days since, by the boat from Rotterdam, and the ransom of the old servant who was taken, has been agreed upon for two hundred French crowns.

FOOTNOTES

[Footnote 1](#): By some authors it is stated that Craven was not at this time at the electoral court; but of course the chronicle which we copy is the better authority.

[Footnote 2](#): By some historians he is called Baron de Dohna.

[Footnote 3](#): Some letters, from a person who pretended to be an eyewitness, state that Frederic accompanied the Queen and the rest of the court from Heidelberg to Amberg, in a train of eighteen carriages; but it is beyond all doubt that he, and the gentlemen who accompanied him, rode the whole way. The King himself performed the journey to Altdorf, near two hundred miles, on one horse; there the poor beast fell dead, and the stuffed skin was to be seen for many years in the library of that place.

[Footnote 4](#): This last secret visit of Frederic to Heidelberg is now I fancy placed beyond doubt.

[Footnote 5](#): This is fact, not romance.

THE END.

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