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BARBARA BLOMBERG

By Georg Ebers

Volume 4.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Poor Wolf!" old Ursel had exclaimed. But whoever had met the young knight the following morning, as he went up the stairs to the Blombergs' rooms, would have deemed him, like Baron Malfalconnet, the happiest of mortals.

He had obeyed Dr. Hiltner's summons, and remained a long time with him. Then he went home at a rapid pace, for he longed to tell Barbara how fair a prospect for their future was opening before him.

She had showed her liking for him plainly enough yesterday when they parted. What should prevent her from becoming his now that he could promise an ample income?

There was some one stirring in the private chapel as he passed, but he paid no heed; in former days many people from the neighbourhood prayed here frequently.

He found no one in the Blombergs' home except the father.

Barbara would certainly return immediately, the old man said. She had gone down to the chapel a short time before. She was not in the habit of doing so at this hour, but the great favour shown her by the Emperor had probably gone to her head, and who could wonder?

Wolf also thought it natural that so great a success should excite her powerfully: but he, too, had a similar one to relate, and, with joyful emotion, he now told the old gentleman what the syndic had offered.

The Council, which, by the establishment of the "Convivium," had already provided for the fostering of the noble art of music, wished to do still more. The project had been dear to the recently deceased Martin Luther, and the Ratisbon syndic, who had enjoyed his friendship, thought he was carrying out his wishes——

Here Wolf was interrupted, for the table groaned under the blow of the old warrior's still powerful fist, coupled with the exclamation: "So there is still to be no rest from the accursed disturber of the peace, although he is dead! No offence, my lad; but there can be nothing edifying to a good Christian where that Wittenberg fellow is concerned."

"Only have patience," Wolf interposed here, secure of victory, and now, slightly vexed with himself for his imprudence in mentioning Martin Luther's name to the old hater of Turks and heretics, he explained that Dr. Hiltner, in the name of the Council, had offered him the position of Damian Feys, Barbara's teacher. The Netherlander was going home, and the magistrate was glad to have found in him, Wolf, a native of Ratisbon who would be no less skilled in fostering music in this good city. To bind him securely, and avoid the danger of a speedy invitation elsewhere, the position offered was provided with an annual salary hitherto unprecedented in this country, and which far exceeded that of many an imperial councillor. This had been rendered possible through a bequest, whose interest was to be devoted to the development of music, and—if he should accept the place—to him and his future wife.

When he heard this, he would fain have instantly bestowed the most beautiful candles upon the Holy Virgin, but the scruple concerning religion had prevented his rejoicing fully; and when he told the syndic that under no circumstances could he abandon the old faith, it was done with the fear that the glittering bird would fly away from him. But the result had been different, for Dr. Hiltner replied that religion did not enter into the matter. He knew Wolf and his peaceful nature, and therefore hoped that he would be advised that music was a language equally intelligible to all persons of feeling, whatever tongue they spoke and whatever creed they preferred. This opinion was also that of the Catholic maestro Feys, and he had therefore escaped all difficulty. Wolf must, of course, consider the circumstances which he would find here. If he would accommodate himself to them, the Council would be willing to overlook his faith; besides, Hiltner, on his own authority, had given him the three days' time to reflect, for which he had asked on Barbara's account.

A long-drawn "H'm" from Blomberg followed this disclosure. Then he shook his clumsy head, and, grasping his mustache with his hand, as if he wanted in that way to stop the motion of his head, he said thoughtfully: "Not a whole thing, Wolf, rather a double one, or—if we look at it differently—it is only a half, for an honest friend of our Holy Church. The way into which they tempt you is paved with gold, but—but—I see the snares and pitfalls——"

He rose as he spoke, muttering all sorts of unintelligible things, until he finally exclaimed, "Yet perhaps one might——"

Then he looked impatiently toward the door, and asked: "Where is the girl loitering? Would Eve probably bite the apple of temptation also?"

"Shall I call her?" cried Wolf eagerly.

"No, no," said the captain. "It is sinful to disturb even our nearest relatives at prayer. Besides, you would not believe how the maestro's praises and the imperial gift have excited the vanity in her woman's nature. For the first time in I know not how many years, she overslept the hour of mass. It was probably ten o'clock when I knocked at her chamber door. Toward eleven there was a movement in her room. Then I opened the door to bid her good-morning, but she neither heard nor saw anything, and knelt at the priedieu as if turned to stone. Before going to sleep and early in the morning I expect such things, but when it is almost noon! Her porridge still stood untouched on the table here, and to-day there is no occasion for fasting. But I did not like to disturb her, and perhaps she would still be kneeling before the Virgin's image if the maid-servant hadn't blundered in to carry a bouquet which Herr Peter Schlumperger's servant had brought. Then Barbara started up as if a hornet had stung her. And how she looked at me! Once—I knew it instantly—I had gazed into such a matvellously beautiful face, such helpless blue eyes. Afterward I remembered who and where it had been. God guard me from sinning against my own child, but that was exactly the way the young girl looked who they—it was farther back

in the past than you can remember—burned here for a witch, as the halberdiers and monks led her to the place of execution. Susanne Schindler—that was her name—was the daughter of a respectable notary's clerk, who was obliged to wander about the world a great deal, and perished in Hungary just as she reached womanhood. Her mother had died when she was born, and an old woman had taken care of her out of friendship. People called the lass 'beautiful Susel,' and she was wonderfully charming. Pink and white, like the maiden in the fairy tale, and with glittering golden hair just like my Wawerl's. The old woman with whom she lived—her aunt or some other relative—had long practised the healing of all sorts of infirmities, and when a young Spanish count, who had come here with the Emperor Charles to the Reichstag in the year '31, fell under his horse in leaping a ditch, his limbs were injured so that he could not use them. As he did not recover under the care of the Knights of St. John, who first nursed him, he went to the herb doctress, and she took charge of him, and cured him, too, although the skill of the most famous doctors and surgeons had failed to help him.

"But, to make amends, Satan, who probably had the largest share in the miracle, visited him with the sorest evil, for 'beautiful Susel,' who was the old woman's assistant, had so bewitched the young count that he not only fell in love with her, but actually desired to make her his wife.

"Then all the noble relatives at home interfered. The Holy Inquisition commanded the investigation of the case, and sent a stern vicar general to direct the proceedings of the Dominicans, who had seized the temptress. Then it came to light that 'beautiful Susel' had bewitched the luckless young count and robbed him of reason by her wicked arts.

"The old woman, whom they had also examined, escaped her just punishment because she died of the plague, which was raging here at that time, but 'beautiful Susel' was burned, and I looked on while it was done.

"When the Dominicans had led her to the stake, she turned toward the people who had flocked here from all quarters. Many doubtless pitied her on account of her marvellous beauty, and because the devil had given her the mask of the most touching kindness of heart; but she gazed directly into my face with her large, blue eyes as I stood close by, and for years I saw the witch's look distinctly before me. Yet what do we not at last forget? And now it must happen that what reminded me of her again is my own innocent child! Wawerl just looked into my eyes as if 'beautiful Susel' had risen from her grave. It was not long, yet it seemed as if she shrank in terror from me, her own clear father. She gazed up at me in helpless despair, as if she feared God and the world.

"I have learned little about shivering, but a chill ran down my spine. Of course, I did not let her notice anything. Poor child! after the honour bestowed yesterday, I thought there would be nothing to-day except laughter and loud singing. But my grandmother used to say that the grief which tortures a young girl—she herself knows not why—is the hardest to bear, and then Barbara must now make up her mind about marriage, for, besides you, there are Peter Schlumperger and young Crafft to be considered.

"I remembered all this, and so, as usual, I took her face between my hands to give her her morning kiss. She always offers me her lips, but to-day she turned away so that my mouth barely brushed her cheeks. 'Women's whims!' I thought, and therefore let it pass. You can imagine how glad I should have been to hear something more about yesterday evening, but I made no objection when she wished to go to the chapel at once, because she had overslept the hour of mass. She would be back again before the porridge was heated. But the little bowl has stood there probably three quarters of an hour, and we are still waiting in vain."

Here he paused in his voluble flow of speech, and then burst forth angrily: "The devil may understand such a girl's soul! Usually Wawerl does just the opposite of what one expects; but if she does accept you, she will—as an honest man I ought not to conceal it from you—she will give you many a riddle to guess. Whims and freaks are as plenty with her as buttercups in spring turf; but you can't find a more pious girl in all Ratisbon. From ancient times the motto of the Blombergs has been 'Faith, Courage, and Honour,' and for that very reason it seems to me highly improbable that Wawerl would advise you to accept an office which, after all, will force you to yield to the will of heretical superiors. The high pay alone will hardly win her."

"It will not?" asked Wolf in astonishment. "It is for her alone, not for myself, that I value the increased income."

"For her?" repeated the old man, shrugging his shoulders incredulously. "Open your eyes, and you will see what she cares for gold and jewels."

"The splendid bouquet there—do you suppose that she even looked at it? Bright pinks, red roses, and stately lilies in the centre. Where were they obtained, since April is scarcely past? And yet she threw

the costly birthday gift aside as if the flowers were apple parings. It was not she, but I, who afterward put them in the pitcher, for I can't bear to see any of God's creatures thirst, even though it is only a flower. Besides, we both know that the fullest purse in the city, and a man worthy of all respect to boot, are attached to the bouquet. Yes, indeed! For a long time she has been unwilling to share my poverty, and if Herr Peter had remained loyal to our holy religion, I would persuade her myself."

Here, exhausted by his eager speech, he paused with flushed cheeks—for it was a hot day—and raised his long arm to take his hat from the hook, to refresh his dry palate at the tavern.

But, after a brief pause for reflection, he restored it to its place.

He had remembered that he had not stirred a finger that morning, and had promised to have an inscription on a jug completed early the next day. Besides, the baker had not been paid for four weeks, so, sighing heavily, he dragged himself to the workbench to move the burin with a weary hand.

Wolf had followed him with his eyes, and the sight of the chivalrous hero, the father of the girl whom he loved, undertaking such a wretched occupation, in such a mood, pierced him to the heart.

"Father Blomberg," he said warmly, putting his hand on his shoulder, "let your graver rest. I am a suitor for your child's hand. We are old friends, and if from my abundance I offer you——"

Here the hot-blooded old man furiously exclaimed: "Don't forget to whom you are speaking, young fellow! How important he feels because he gets his living at court! True, there is no abundance here; but I practise this art merely because I choose, and because it cools my hot blood in this lukewarm time of peace. But if on that account," he added threateningly, while his prominent eyes protruded even farther than usual, "you ever again venture to talk to me as though I were a day labourer or a receiver of alms——"

Here he hesitated, for in the midst of his outbreak Barbara had noiselessly entered the room. Now she approached him, and, in a more gentle and affectionate tone than she had ever used before, entreated him to rest.

The captain, groaning, shook his head, but Barbara stepped lightly upon the low wooden bench on which he sat, drew his gray head toward her, and tenderly stroked his hair and beard, whispering: "Rise, father, and let somebody else finish the engraving, it is so cool and shady in the green woods where the birds are singing, and only yesterday you praised the refreshing drink at the Red Cock."

Here he impatiently, yet with a pleased senile, endeavoured to release himself from her arms, but she interrupted his exclamation, "Don't you know, Miss Thoughtless," with the whispered entreaty: "Here me out first, father! Maestro Appenzelder asked me to add my voice to the boy choir a few times more, and yesterday evening the treasurer told me that the Queen of Hungary had commissioned him to give me as many ducats as the boys received pennies."

She spoke the truth; but the old man laughed heartily in his deep tones, cast a quick glance at Wolf, who was looking up at his weapons, and, lowering his voice, cried gaily, "That's what I call a feminine Chrysostomus or golden mouth, and I should think——"

Here he hesitated, for a doubt arose in his chivalrous mind whether it was seemly for a young girl who belonged to a knightly race to accept payment for her singing. But the thought that it came from the hand of royalty, and that even the great Duke of Alba, the renowned Granvelles, and so many princes, counts, and barons received golden wages for their services from the Emperor's hand, put an end to these scruples.

So, in a happier frame of mind than he had experienced for a long time, he said in a low tone, that he might not be understood by their guest: "Greater people than we rejoice in the gifts which emperors and kings bestow, and—we can use them, can't we?"

Then he rubbed his hands, laughed as if he had outwitted the people of whom he was thinking, and whispered to his daughter: "The baker will wonder when he gets paid this time in glittering gold, and the butcher and Master Reinhard! My boots still creak softly when I step, and you know what that means. The soles of your little shoes probably only sing, but they, too, are not silent."

The old man, released from a heavy burden of care, laughed merrily again at this jest, and then, raising his voice, told his daughter and Wolf that he would first get a cool drink and then go outside the gate wherever his lame foot might carry him. Would not the young nobleman accompany him?

But Wolf preferred to stay with Barbara, that he might plead his cause in person. There was something so quiet and diffident in her manner. If she would not listen to him to-day, she never would.

In saying farewell, the captain remarked that he would not meddle in the affair of the Council. Wawerl alone must decide that.

"When I return home," he concluded, "you will have come to an agreement, and, whatever the determination may be, I shall be satisfied. Perhaps some bright idea may come to me, too, over the wine. I'll go to the Black Bear, where I always meet fellow-soldiers."

Then he raised his hand with a gay farewell salute, and left the room.

CHAPTER XVII.

As soon as the captain's limping steps died away on the stairs, Wolf summoned all his courage and moved nearer to Barbara.

His heart throbbed anxiously as he told himself that the next few minutes would decide his future destiny.

As he saw her before him, fairer than ever, with downcast eyes, silent and timid, without a trace of the triumphant self-assurance which she had gained during his absence, he firmly believed that he had made the right choice, and that her consent would render him the most enviable of happy mortals. If she refused him her hand—he felt this no less plainly—his life would be forever robbed of light and joy.

True, he was no longer as blithe and full of hope as when he entered her plain lodgings a short time before.

The doubt of the worthy man, behind whom the house door had just closed, had awakened his doubts also. Yet what he now had it in his power to offer, since his conversation with the syndic, was by no means trivial. He must hold fast to it, and as he raised his eyes more freely to her his courage increased, for she was still gazing at the floor in silent submission, as if ready to commit her fate into his hands; nay, in the brief seconds during which his eyes rested upon her, he perceived an expression which seemed wholly alien to her features, and bestowed upon this usually alert, self-assured, vivacious creature an air of weary helplessness.

While he was generally obliged to maintain an attitude of defence toward her, she now seemed to need friendly consolation. So, obeying a hasty impulse, he warmly extended both hands, and in a gentle, sympathizing tone exclaimed, "Wawerl, my dear girl, what troubles you?"

Then her glance met his, and her blue eyes flashed upon him with an expression of defiant resistance; but he could not help thinking of the young witch who was said to have resembled her, and a presentiment told him that she was lost to him.

The confirmation of this foreboding was not delayed, for in a tone whose repellent sternness startled him, she angrily burst forth: "What should trouble me? It is ill becomes you to question me with such looks and queries as it pleases me." Wolf, in bewilderment, assured her that she had seemed to him especially charming in her gracious gentleness. If anything had happened to cloud her fearless joyousness, let her forget it, for the matter now to be considered concerned the happiness of two human lives.

That was what she was saying to herself, Barbara replied in a more friendly tone, and, with newly awakened hope, the young knight informed her that the time had now come when, without offending against modesty, he might call himself a "made man."

With increasing eagerness and confidence he then told her what the councillor had offered. Without concealing her father's scruples, he added the assurance that he felt perfectly secure against the temptations of which there would certainly be no lack while he was in the service of a Protestant magistracy.

"And when you, devout, pure, true girl, stand by my side," he concluded with an ardour which surprised Barbara in this quiet, reserved man, "when you are once mine, my one love, then I shall conquer the hardest obstacle as if it were mere pastime, then I would not change places with the Emperor, for then my happiness would be——"

Hitherto she had silently permitted him to speak, but now her cheeks suddenly flamed with a deep

flush, and she warmly interrupted: "You deserve to be happy, Wolf, and I could desire nothing more ardently than to see you glad and content; but you would never become so through me. How pale you grow! For my sake, do not take it so much to heart; it grieves me to see you suffer. Only believe that. It cuts me to the heart to inflict such great sorrow upon one so loyal, good, and dear, who values me so much more than I deserve."

Here Wolf, deeply agitated, wildly called her name, and besought her not to cast aside so harshly the wealth of love and fidelity which he offered.

His own anguish of soul, and the pain inflicted by the cruel blow which crushed his dearest hopes, robbed him of fortitude and calmness. With tears in his eyes, he threw himself on his knees before her and gazed into her face with anxious entreaty, exclaiming brokenly: "Do not—do not inflict this suffering upon me, Wawerl! Rob me of everything except hope. Defer your acceptance until I can offer you a still fairer future, only be merciful and leave me hope!"

Tears now began to glitter in Barbara's eyes also, and Wolf, noticing it, hastened with reviving courage to assure her how little it would cost him to reject, once for all, to please her, the tempting position offered to him here. He could soon obtain a good office elsewhere, since their Majesties were not only favourably disposed toward him, but now toward her also. True, to him even the most brilliant external gifts of life would be valueless and charmless without her love.

But here Barbara imperatively commanded him to rise, and not make his own heart and hers still heavier without avail.

Wolf pressed his hands upon his temples as violently as if he feared losing his senses; but the young girl voluntarily put her arm around his shoulders, and said with sincere emotion: "Poor Wolf! I know how thoroughly in earnest you are, but I dare not even leave you hope—I neither can nor ought. Yet you may hear this: From my childhood you have been dearer to me than any one else, and never shall I forget how firmly you cling to me, how hard it is for you to give me up."

Then Sir Wolf vehemently asked to know what stood between them; and Barbara, after a brief pause for reflection, answered, "Love for another."

The confession pierced him like a dagger thrust, and he passionately entreated her to tell him the name of the man who had defrauded him of the happiness to which he possessed an older and better right than any one else.

He paced the room with long strides as he spoke, gazing around him as if he imagined that she had his rival concealed somewhere.

In doing so his glance fell upon Herr Schlumperger's bouquet, and he wildly cried: "He? So, after all, wealth——"

But this was too much for Barbara, and she stopped him with the exclamation: "Fool that you are! As if You did not know that I am not to be bought for the paltry florins of a Ratisbon moneybag!"

But the next instant she had repented her outbreak, and in words so loving and gentle, so tender and considerate that his heart melted and he would fain have flung himself again at her feet, she explained to him more particularly why she was obliged to inflict this suffering upon him.

Her heart was no longer free, and precisely because he was worthy of the whole affection of a loyal heart she would not repay him in worthless metal for the pure gold of his love. She was no prophetess, yet she knew full well that some day he would bless this hour. What she concealed from every one, even her father, as an inviolable secret, she had confessed to him because he deserved her confidence.

Then she began to speak of Dr. Hiltner's offer, and discussed its pros and cons with interest as warm as if her own fate was to be associated with his.

The result was that she dissuaded him from settling in Ratisbon. She expected higher achievements from him than he could attain here among the Protestants, who, on account of his faith, would place many a stumbling-block in his way.

Then, changing her businesslike tone, she went on with greater warmth to urge him, for her sake, and that he might be the same to her as ever, to remain loyal to the religion they both professed. She could not fulfil his hopes, it is true, but her thoughts would often dwell with him and her wishes would follow him everywhere. His place was at court, where some day he would win a distinguished position, and nothing could render her happier than the news that he had attained the highest honour, esteem, and fame.

How gentle and kind all this sounded! Wolf had not imagined that she could be so thoughtful, so forgetful of self, and so affectionate in her sympathy. He hung upon her lips in silent admiration, yet it was impossible for him to determine whether this sisterly affection from Barbara was pouring balm or acrid lye upon his wounds.

Positively as she had refused to answer his question concerning the happy mortal whom she preferred to him, Wolf could not help secretly searching for him.

Agitated and tortured to the verge of despair, even the friendliness with which she was trying to sweeten his cruel fate became unbearable, and while she was entreating him to continue to care for her and to remain on the same terms of intimacy with her father and herself, he suddenly seized her hand, covered it with ardent kisses, and then, without a farewell word, hastily left the room.

When Barbara was alone she retired into the bow-window and fell into a silent reverie, during which she often shook her head, as if amazed at herself, and often curled her full lips in a haughty smile.

The maid-servant brought in the modest meal.

Her father had forgotten it, but he would undoubtedly find more substantial viands at the Black Bear. Barbara was speedily satisfied. How poorly the food was cooked, how unappetizing was the serving! When the maid had removed the dishes, Barbara continued her reverie, and even her father had never gazed into vacancy with such gloomy earnestness.

What would she now have given for a mother, a reliable, faithful confidante! But she had none; and Wolf, on whose unselfish love she could depend, was the last person whom she could initiate into her secret.

Her father!

If she had confided to him the matter which so deeply troubled her and yet filled her with the greatest pride, the poor old warrior, who valued honour far more than life, would have turned her out of the house.

Early that morning she had averted her lips from his because she felt as if the Emperor's kiss had consecrated them. She was still under the mastery of the feeling that some disagreeable dream had borne her back to these miserable rooms, while her true place was in the magnificent apartments of royalty.

She had slept too late to attend mass, and therefore went to the private chapel, the abode of the only confidante to whom she could open her whole heart without reserve or timidity—the Mother of God.

She had done this with entire devotion, and endeavoured to reflect upon what had happened and what obligations she must meet. But she had had little success, for as soon as she began to think, her august lover rose before her eyes, she imagined that she heard his tender words, and her mind wandered to the future.

Only she had clearly perceived that she had lost something infinitely great, and obtained in its place something that was far more exquisite, that she had been deemed worthy of a loftier honour, a richer happiness than any one else.

Ah, yes, she was happy, more than happy, and yet not entirely so, for happiness must be bright, and a dark, harassing shadow fell again and again over the sunny enthusiasm which irradiated her nature and lent her a haughtier bearing.

She ascribed it to the novelty of her elevation to a height of which she had never dreamed. Eyes accustomed to twilight must also endure pain, she told herself, ere they became used to the brilliance of the sun.

Perhaps Heaven, in return for such superabundant gifts, demanded a sacrifice, and denied complete enjoyment. She would gladly do all in her power to satisfy the claim, and so she formed the resolve—which seemed to her to possess an atoning power—no longer to deceive the worthy man who loved her so loyally, and for whom she felt an affection. At the very next opportunity Wolf should learn that she could never become his, and when she had just confessed it so gently and lovingly, she had only fulfilled the vow made in the chapel before the Virgin's image. There, too, she had determined, if the Emperor ever gave her any power over his decisions, to reward Wolf's loyal love by interceding for him wherever it could be done.

Now he had left her; but she could wait for her father no longer. She must go to Fran Lerch.

The idea of confiding to her the secret which filled her with happy dread was far from her thoughts; but love had both increased her vanity tenfold, and confined it within narrower limits. She could not be beautiful enough for the lover who awaited her, yet she wished to be beautiful for him alone. But her stock of gowns and finery was so very scanty, and no one understood how to set off her charms so well as the obliging, experienced old woman, who had an expedient for every emergency.

Retiring to her little bow-windowed room, she examined her store of clothes.

There, too, lay her royal lover's gift, the glittering star.

She involuntarily seized it to take the jewel to the Grieb and show it to the old woman; but the next instant, with a strange feeling of dissatisfaction, she flung it back again among the other contents of the chest.

Thus, in her impetuous fashion, she thrust it out of her sight. Maestro Gombert had pronounced the star extremely valuable, and she desired nothing from the Emperor Charles, nothing from her beloved lord save his love.

She had already reached the outer door, when her two Woller cousins from the Ark greeted her. They were merry girls, by no means plain, and very fond of her. The younger, Anne Mirl, was even considered pretty, and had many suitors. They had learned from their house steward, who had been told by a fellow-countryman in the royal service, that his Majesty had rewarded Barbara for her exquisite singing with a magnificent ornament, and they wanted to see it.

So Barbara was obliged to open the chest again, and when the star flashed upon them the rich girls clapped their hands in admiration, and Anne Mirl did not understand how any one could toss such an exquisite memento into a chest as if it were a worn-out glove. If the Emperor Charles had honoured her with such a gift, she would never remove it from her neck, but even wear it to bed.

"Everybody to her taste," replied Barbara curtly, shrugging her shoulders.

Never had her cousins seemed to her so insignificant and commonplace; and, besides, their visit was extremely inopportune.

But the Woller sisters were accustomed to see her in all sorts of moods, and Nandl, the elder, a quiet, thoughtful girl, asked her how she felt. To possess such heavenly gifts as her voice and her beauty must be the most glorious of all glorious things.

"And the honour, the honour!" cried Anne Mirl. "Do you know, Wawerl, one might almost want to poison you from sheer envy and jealousy. Holy Virgin! To be in your place when you sing to the Emperor Charles again! And to talk with him as you would to anybody else!"

Barbara assured them that she would tell the whole story at their next meeting, but she had no time to spare now, for she was expected at the rehearsal.

The sisters then bade her good-bye, but asked to see the star again, and Anne Mirl counted the jewels, to be able to describe it to her mother exactly.

At last Barbara was free, but before, still vexed by the detention, she could set out for Fran Lerch's, she heard loud voices upon the stairs. It startled her, for if the Emperor sent Don Luis Quijada, or even Baron Malfalconnet, to her wretched lodgings, it would now be even more unpleasant than before.

Barbara was obliged to wait some time in vain. Her cousins had been stopped below, and were talking there with her father and another man. At last the captain came stumping up the stairs with his limping steps. Barbara noticed that he was hurrying, and he reached the top more quickly than usual and opened the door.

He looked merry, and his massive but well-formed and manly features were flushed. He came from Erbach in the Black Bear, it is true, but in so short a time—his daughter knew that—the spirits of the wine could have done him no harm. Besides, his voice sounded as deep and firm as usual as he called to her from the threshold: "A guest, Wawerl, a distinguished guest! A splendid fellow! You've already spoken of him, and I made his acquaintance in the Bear. I learned many and many a piece of news from him about how things are going in the world-news, I tell you, girl! My heart is fairly dancing in my body. And, besides, a little puss like you is always glad to hear of an admirer, and only a short time ago you praised him loudly enough as a splendid dancer. A downright good fellow, child, just as I was myself at his age. An uncle of his, a captain of arquebusiers, Pyramus Kogel."

Hitherto Barbara, with increasing displeasure, had only suspected whom her father meant; but when

he now mentioned his new friend's name, the indignant blood crimsoned her cheeks.

She had liked the handsome officer, for it was true that few men so well understood the art of guiding a partner through the dance; she, fool that she was, had made eyes at him in order not to let pretty Elspet Zohrer have the precedence. But he had himself confessed how much farther he had entered the snare than she intended when, on her way home from Fran Lerch's after her meeting with Wolf, the young officer had met her outside of the Grieb and sued for her hand.

Now the amorous swain had probably tried his luck with her father, and how the latter, in spite of poor Wolf and Herr Schlumperger, had treated him was evident from the fact that he, who usually closed his home against old friends, opened it wide to this stranger.

This was not only unpleasant to Barbara, but anger crimsoned her cheeks.

How dared the man whom she had so positively and sternly refused venture to continue his suit? Since the Emperor had loved her, she felt raised infinitely above the poor nobleman. Nay, she considered it a reprehensible impropriety that he still sought her. And, besides what consequences the visit of so stately a ladykiller, whose unusual height rendered him easily recognised, might now entail upon her! Suppose that he should meet a messenger from the Emperor on the stairs, or it should be rumoured at court that she received such visitors. How quickly whatever happened in Ratisbon was noised abroad among the people she had just learned through the Woller girls.

The happiness which filled her was so great that everything which threatened to affect it, even remotely, alarmed her, and thus anxiety blended with indignation as, deeply agitated, she interrupted her father, and in the most unfilial manner reproached him for allowing the flattery of a boastful coxcomb to make him forget what he owed to her and her good name.

The brave champion of the faith dejectedly, almost humbly, strove to soothe her, and at least induce her not to offend his guest by unfriendly words; but she ignored his warnings with defiant passion, and when the recruiting officer, who had been detained some time on the staircase by the Wollers, knocked at the door, she shot the bolt noisily, calling to her father in a tone so loud that it could not fail to be heard outside: "I repeat it, I will neither see nor speak to this importunate gentleman. When he attacked me in the street at night, I thought I showed him plainly enough how I felt. If he forces his way into our house now, receive him, for aught I care; you have a right to command here. But if he undertakes to speak to me, he can wait for an answer till the day of judgment!"

Then she hastily slipped the bolt back again, darted past Pyramus Kogel, who did not know what had befallen him, without vouchsafing him a single glance, and then, with haughty composure, descended the stairs.

The officer, incapable of uttering a word, gazed after her.

The feeling that attracted him to Barbara was something entirely new, which since the last dance at the New Scales had robbed him of sleep by night and rest by day. He had fallen under her spell, body and soul, and he, whose business took him from city to city, from country to country, had resolved, ere he accosted Barbara in the street, to give up the free, gay life which he enjoyed with the eager zest of youth, and seek her hand in marriage.

Her first rebuff had by no means discouraged him; nay, the handsome, spoiled soldier was firmly convinced that her ungracious treatment was not due to his proposal, but to its certainly ill-chosen place. A wife of such rigid austerity would suit him, for he would often be compelled to leave her a long time alone.

When he heard the day before that he would find her among Peter Schlumperger's guests in Prufening, he had joined them, as if by accident, toward evening, and Barbara had danced with him twice.

In the schwabeln she had trusted herself to his guidance even longer than usual, and with what perfect time, with what passionate enjoyment she had whirled around with him under the sway of the intense excitement which had mastered her! He imagined that he felt her heart throb against his own breast, and had surrendered himself to the hope that it was newly awakened love for him which had deprived her of her calm bearing.

True, she had refused his company on the way home, but this was probably because she was afraid of being gossiped about in connection with him.

Well satisfied with his success, he had gone to Red Cock Street the next morning to renew his suit. On the way he met her father, and in the Black Bear had tried on the old warrior, with excellent

success, the art of winning other men, in which, as a recruiting officer, he had become an adept.

Joyously confident of victory, he had accepted Blomberg's invitation, and now had experienced an unprecedentedly mortifying rebuff.

With a face blanched to the pallor of death, he stood before the old man. The wound which he had received burned so fiercely, and paralyzed his will so completely, that the clumsy graybeard found fitting words sooner than the ready, voluble trapper of men.

"You see," the captain began, "what is to be expected from one's own child in these days of insubordination and rebellion, though my Wawerl is as firm in her faith as the tower at Tunis of which I was telling you. But trust experience, Sir Pyramus! It is easier, far easier for you to exact obedience from a refractory squad of recruits than for a father to guide his little daughter according to his own will. For look! If it gets beyond endurance, you can seize the lash, or, if that won't do, a weapon; but where a fragile girl like that is concerned, we can't give vent to our rage, and, though she spoils the flavour of our food and drink by her pouting and fretting, we must say kind words to her into the bargain. Mine at least spares me the weeping and wailing in which many indulge, but it is easier to break iron than her obstinacy when her will differs from that of the person whom, on account of the fourth commandment, she——"

Pyramus Kogel, with both hands resting on the large basket handle of his long rapier, had listened to him in silence; now he interrupted the captain with the exclamation: "Iron against iron, comrade! Throw it into the fire, and swing the hammer. It will bend then. All that is needed is the right man, and I know him. If I did not feel very sorry for such a charming creature, I would laugh at the insult and go my way. But, as it is, I have a good memory, and it will be a pleasure, methinks, to keep so unruly a beauty and artistic nightingale in mind. It shall be done until my turn comes. In my pursuit I do not always succeed at the first attempt, but whoever I once fix my eyes upon comes on the roll at last, and I will keep the foremost place open for your lovely, refractory daughter. We shall meet again, Captain, and I haven't said my last word to your ungracious daughter either."

He held out his hand to Blomberg as he spoke, and after a brief delay the latter clasped it.

The fearless foe of the Turks was troubled by the recruiting officer's mysterious menaces, but his kind heart forbade him to add a new offence to the bitter mortification inflicted upon this man by his daughter. Besides, he had taken a special fancy to the stately, vigorous soldier, whose height and breadth of shoulder were little inferior to his own, and while descending the stairs he thought, "It would serve Wawerl right if yonder fellow put a stop to her obstinacy, pranks, and caprices."

But he quickly silenced the wish, for Barbara did not often give the rein to her self-will so freely, and her objectionable traits of character had been inherited from her mother. She was a good girl at heart, and how much pleasure and favour her beautiful gift brought, how much honour came to him and his ancient name through this rare child! Yet at that time he was not aware of the new benefit he was to owe to her within the next hour.

Before Barbara had returned home the treasurer of the imperial and royal musicians came to his house and, in the regent's name, handed him the gold of which Barbara had spoken for services rendered in the boy choir of her Majesty Queen Mary. He was obliged to sign the receipt in his daughter's name, and when the portly Netherlander, who could also make himself understood in German, asked where a sup of good wine or beer could be had in Ratisbon, he was ready to act as his guide.

Thanks to his daughter's rich gifts, he need not wield the graver any longer that day, and for the second time could grant himself a special treat.

When he returned home he learned from the one-eyed maid that Barbara had been summoned by the Queen of Hungary to sing for her.

Weary as he was, he went to rest, and soon after the young girl entered his room to bid him "good night."

The Queen had been very gracious, and after the singing was over had inquired about hundreds of things—who had been her singing master, what her religion was, whether her mother was still living, what calling her father followed, whether he, too, had drawn the sword against the Turks, her husband's murderers, whether she was accustomed to riding, and, lastly, whether she was obliged to endure the narrow city streets in the summer.

Barbara had then been able to answer that the Wollers sometimes invited her to their country seat at Abbach, and intentionally added that they were her nearest relatives, and owned the Ark, the large,

handsome family mansion which stood exactly opposite to the Golden Cross and her Majesty's windows. She had also often been the guest of her uncle Wolfgang Lorberer, who stood at the head of the community at Landshut.

It had gratified her to boast of these distinguished blood relations.

She had then been asked whether she could consent to leave her father for a time to go into the country with the old Marquise de Leria, whom she knew, and who was charmed with the beauty of her singing.

The leech desired to remove the invalid lady in waiting from the city air, and she had chosen Barbara for a companion.

Here the young girl hesitated, and then carelessly asked her father what he thought of the plan.

As Blomberg knew the name of Leria to be one of the most aristocratic in the empire, and many things were beckoning to him in the future in which Barbara's presence would only have been a hindrance, he left the decision to her.

He had made the acquaintance at the Black Bear, through Pyramus Kogel, of various soldiers who had fought in the same ranks—good Catholics, eager for a fray, who were waiting here for the outbreak of the war against the Smalkalds. What delightful hours their companionship would bestow if Barbara was provided for at present, now that he himself was no longer obliged to save every shilling so carefully!

But he had also thought of something else which was far more important, for the warlike conversation had affected him as the blast of a trumpet stirs the battle charger drawing a plough.

He had found complete enjoyment of life only in war, in the presence of death, in cutting and slashing, and he felt by no means too old to keep his seat in the saddle and lead his company of horsemen to the assault. He was not mistaken there, and, besides not only the recruiting officer, but also the scarred old captain whom they called little Gorgl, asserted that the Emperor would welcome every brave, tried soldier, even though older than he, as soon as war was declared.

Meanwhile Pyramus Kogel was constantly in his mind, and at last he thought it his duty to speak to Barbara about her unseemly treatment of this estimable man.

He had intended ever since she entered to call her to account for it, but, though he did not admit it even to himself, the old soldier dreaded his daughter's firm power of resistance.

Yet he could not keep silence this time; her behaviour had transgressed the bounds of propriety too far.

So he summoned up his courage, and, with a "What I was going to say," began to speak of the admirable officer whom he had brought into his house.

Then, clearing his throat, he drew himself up, and, raising his voice, asked how she dared to assail this gallant nobleman with such abominable, arrogant, and insulting words.

But he was to wait an answer in vain, for, with the brief declaration that she had not come to be lectured like a schoolgirl, Barbara banged the door behind her. Directly after, however, she opened it again, and with a pleasant, "No offence, father," wished the old gentleman a no less pleasant goodnight.

Then she went to her room, but in old Ursel's chamber, at the same hour as on the preceding night, a similar conversation took place.

The one-eyed maid spoke of the rats which had forced their way into the house, and the sick woman repeated impatiently, "The rats!" and, with prudent reserve, silently kept her thoughts to herself.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Queen of Hungary had returned home the evening before, and on the following morning summoned Barbara to the Golden Cross to sing with the boy choir.

When the major-domo, Quijada, obedient to her command, entered the room at eleven o'clock, she called to him: "Miracles, Luis, mighty miracles in these godless times! I have just come from his Majesty, and in what did I find him occupied? Turning over music with Maestro Gombert—of course, for a female voice. Besides, he looked as if he had just defeated the Turks and Frenchmen at once. As for the gout, he'll be dancing the 'hoppedei' with the peasants presently."

"Day before yesterday he surprised us by wearing satin shoes," remarked Quijada. "May I congratulate you on the really magical effect of your Majesty's prescription?"

"Continue to think so, if it suits you," cried the Queen gaily. "Only a few powerful drops from elsewhere have probably fallen into the potion. But how stupidly artless you can look when you feign ignorance, Luis! In this case, however, you need not let your breathing be oppressed by the mask. I bow to your masculine secrecy—but why did my worldly-wise brother mingle a petticoat in this delicate business if he wishes to keep it hidden?"

"The Marquise Leria!" cried the major-domo, shrugging his shoulders angrily, as if against an inevitable misfortune.

"My, senior lady in waiting," said the regent in assent to this conjecture. "Make haste to bestow a stately candle, because it is she, and no one else. You might spare yourself that smile; I know her better than you do. If she had as many teeth as she possesses vices, she might be happy; yet one admirable quality mingles with the evil traits in her character."

"And that?" asked Quijada, as if he deemed a satisfactory answer impossible.

"Secrecy," replied the Queen firmly. "She keeps what she has overheard to herself as closely as a miser guards his gold."

"In order to turn it to account when the favourable moment comes," remarked the major-domo. "Your Majesty will also permit me to observe that if the marquise has already betrayed what was intended to remain secret——"

"Her boasted reticence can not be very great, you think," interrupted the Queen. "But justice for all, my handsome lord. At present she is in any service, and no other. Whose bread I eat, his song I sing—which in this case means: His secret I keep, and to him I carry whatever I discover. Besides, this time even the person betrayed owes her a debt of gratitude, for you know how difficult it is for him to use his limbs, and she is most obligingly smoothing the path for him. I tell you, Luis, with all due respect for his Majesty as a general and a statesman, in a skirmish of intrigue this woman will outwit you all. The schemes her aged brain invents have neither fault nor flaw. The wheels work upon one another as they do in the Emperor's best Nuremberg clock. I want to watch their turning before I go, for, be it known to you, early tomorrow morning—the saints be praised!—I start for Brussels."

"Oh!" exclaimed Quijada with an expression of sincere regret; but the Queen gravely said: "There can be no further delay, Luis. It may sound improbable that there is something which draws me back to the Netherlands more strongly than the desire for freedom of movement, a pleasant ride through the forest, and the excitement of the chase, which lends spice to the insipidity of my life, yet you may believe it."

"Business matters?" asked the nobleman anxiously.

The Queen nodded assent, and then eagerly continued: "And important ones which his Majesty himself solemnly enjoined upon me to hasten my departure. His zeal resembled a rude gesture toward the door, as much as one rotten egg looks like another, for, under certain circumstances, the affectionate brother prefers to have his beloved sister as far away as possible. Had I been of a more obstinate nature, I would stay; but there really are matters to be settled in the Netherlands which can not be deferred, and the manner of his farewell showed plainly enough that he no longer needed me. Merciful Heaven! When we parted yesterday, I dreaded his Majesty's anger. I had left him in the lurch to gratify my own love for copse and forest. I had remained beyond the allotted time, and had resolved, bend or break, to return to my post in Brussels. When I rode in here I really felt as though I was entering the lion's den. But then came miracle after miracle. Do you know something, Luis? The best results have often followed my most reckless acts."

"Probably because even your Majesty's least prudent deeds merit a modest reward," replied Quijada, "and because, besides the heavenly powers, there are also less estimable ones that meddle with the affairs of this world."

"Perhaps so!" exclaimed the Queen, astonished at this idea. "Perhaps the Prince of Darkness finds

pleasure in this affair, and, as a fair-minded devil, is grateful to me. One thing is certain: What a woman of my age could not tell her daughter or—if she has none—her young niece, she should not meddle with. All this is by no means pleasing to me, and yet, Luis, yet We ought to rejoice in this love affair, not only for ourselves, but for his Majesty. De Soto, too, I know, is satisfied; nay, it seems as if he saw a special act of divine favour in this late blazing of the flames of love in a heart whose fires had apparently burned out."

"Wherever this passion originates," observed Quijada, "it seems to have had a good influence upon his Majesty's mood. It is said that Satan often designs evil and yet works good, and if this late and very tender emotion is a gift of hell, it nevertheless affords our sovereign lord unexpected and therefore all the more exquisite joys."

"In whose behalf it may also be said that they are numbered among those which can hardly be approved, or even forbidden ones," the regent eagerly interrupted. "But no matter! Happy is he whose pathway at the beginning of life's evening is once more so brilliantly illumined by the sun of love. In my devotion to the duties of government and the chase, I have not yet wholly forgotten enthusiasm. Whoever has once been really young retains this advantage, and I have, Luis. Therefore I could envy my beloved brother to-day no less sincerely than I pitied him yesterday. Joy is the best thing in life, and who bestows it more certainly and lavishly than the little winged god? It is fortunate for my Charles that he is again permitted to quaff the beaker of happiness! Only too soon— I know it—he will again withdraw it from his lips with his own hand, if it were only because the inclination to self-torture which he inherits, the ascetic instinct, that constantly increases in strength, destroys and stamps as sinful forgetfulness of duty every pleasure which he enjoys for any length of time. We will hope that he will not retain this new happiness too briefly. It would be of service to us all. What he might possibly have granted me after long hesitation and consideration, and with many a delay, he yielded after mass this morning with smiling lips. Love expands the heart, and at the same time enlarges the views, especially if it is not an unfortunate one; but this Barbara Blomberg is a genuine daughter of Eve, over whom the mother of nations, if she met her by chance, would rejoice. A German Venus, whom I would gladly send to Titian for a model. And her voice and the unexpected good fortune of finding such a teacher here! Appenzelder and Gombert are full of her praises. Good heavens! How she sang yesterday evening! It was enough to stir the dead. Afterward I drew her aside for a short time."

"And your Majesty did her the honour to feel her teeth?"—[A German phrase meaning to sound a person's intentions.—TR.]—queried Quijada.

"Feel her teeth?" replied the Queen. "It might have been worth while, for those that glitter between her rosy lips are white and beautifully formed. But I did even more—I tested the girl's heart and mind."

"And the result?"

"H'm!" said the Queen. "Very favourable. Yet no. If I must be honest, that is saying too little. She stood it very, surprisingly well. Her intellect is anything but limited; nay, her comprehension is so swift that she can be sure of not trying his Majesty's patience unduly. Her manners, too, are not amiss for a German; but what is the main point—she is pious, firm in the faith, and ardent in her hatred of the foes of the Holy Church. My life upon it! all this is as genuine as the diamond in my ring, and so the white raven is complete. That she has returned the Emperor Charles love for love by no means sullies her plumage. In my eyes, it only shines the more brightly, since one so great as he permits her, though only for a short distance, to share his glorious flight. This Barbara is certainly a rare bird. But in the chase, and as regent of a restless nation, one's sight becomes keen—"

"And now," cried Quijada, "comes the 'but.'"

"It does come," replied the regent firmly, "and I will point it out to you. I only found the trail; but you, Luis, as a good sportsman and a loyal friend of his Majesty, will keep a sharp watch upon it. This girl is obstinate to the verge of defiance, vain, and unusually ambitious."

"She has already shown us the obstinacy," observed the Castilian.

"When she wheeled her horse to escape you?" asked the Queen.

"But there she was perfectly right. What a heedless, inconsiderate masculine idea, to usher a woman directly from a horseback ride into a company of gentlemen to sing before the Emperor! As to the vanity, I do not find much fault with that. It would be far worse if she lacked it. One can not imagine a genuine woman without it. It has been called pride in charms which we do not possess, but it also serves to place actual charms in a brighter light, and that I expect from this fair one. If she knows how to avoid extravagance, it will willingly be indulged. But her ambition, Luis; perils may arise from that. If it begins to stir too covetously, remember your duty as watcher—sound the horn and set the packs

upon her."

"For the sake of our sovereign lord, I will not fail," replied Quijada. "So far as she herself is concerned, she is one of those women whose beauty I acknowledge, but to whom I am indifferent. More modest manners please me better."

"You are thinking of Dona Magdalena de Ulloa," observed the Queen, "you poor loyal widower, while the loveliest of wives still lives. Certainly this German bears so little resemblance to her——"

"That I most humbly entreat your Majesty," interposed Quijada with haughty decision, "not to compare these two women, even by way of contrast."

"B-r-r!" said the regent, extending her hands toward him as if to repel an assault. "Yet I like you in this mood, Luis. You are a true Castilian! So we will leave Dona Magdalena in her Villagarcia, and only permit myself to admire the self-sacrifice of a woman who grants a husband like you so long a leave of absence. As to the Ratisbon maiden——"

"I should be very glad to know," Quijada began, this time in a submissive tone, "by what sign your Majesty's penetration discovered this young creature's ambition."

"That is soon told," replied the regent kindly. "She specially mentioned her distinguished relatives in the city and in Landshut, and when I advised her to show due respect to the marquise, who, in spite of everything, is a woman of high rank and certainly an old lady, before whose gray hairs Scripture commands us to rise, something hovered around her lips—they are ripe for kisses—something which it is not easy to find exactly the right words to describe: a blending of repugnance, self-assertion, and resistance. She suffered it to remain on her beautiful face only a few minutes, but it gave me reason enough to urge you to sound a warning if his Majesty's late love should render him more yielding than is desirable."

"The warned man will heed what prescient wisdom enjoins upon him," the major-domo protested, with his hand upon his heart. "But if I know his Majesty, his strong and well-warranted sense of imperial dignity will render my attentive solicitude needless. The moment that the singer assails it will put a speedy end to my royal master's love."

The Queen shook her head, and answered doubtfully: "If only you do not undervalue the blind boy-god's power! Yet it must be owned that your theory has a certain degree of justification." She went to the window as she spoke, and added: "Karlowitz, the minister of Duke Maurice of Saxony, is leaving the house. He looks pleased, and if he has come to an agreement with the Bishop of Arras, that will also help to put the Emperor in a pleasant mood——"

"And all of us!" exclaimed Quijada, grasping his sword hilt. "If this energetic young prince, with his military ability and his army, joins us, why, then——"

"Then there will be war," interrupted the Queen, completing the sentence; "then there will be great joy among you younger, belligerent Castilians! What do you care for the tears of mothers and the blood of husbands and sons? Both will flow in streams, and, even if we were certain of victory—which we are not—what will the gain be?"

"Triumph, the restored unity of Holy Church!" cried Quijada enthusiastically.

"For which I daily pray," said the regent. "But even if you succeeded in gaining a complete victory, if every church in city and country again belonged to the only faith by which we can obtain salvation, I shall still see them deprived of their holy vocation, for they will stand empty, because then the men who would rather die than abjure their delusion will be lying silent upon battlefields."

"May they rot there!" cried the Spaniard. "But we are not fighting only for to-day and tomorrow. New generations will again fill churches and chapels. We will shed the last drops of our blood to accomplish it, and every true Castilian thinks as I do."

"I know it," sighed the regent, "and it is not my business to preach to deaf ears. But one thing more: Do you know that his Majesty has just accepted the Marquise de Leria's offer?"

"No; but I should be greatly indebted to your royal——"

"Then listen," the Queen hastily interrupted. "In the suburb of Prebrunn, in a large garden, stands the pretty little castle of the Prince Prior of Berchtesgaden—I don't mean the one belonging to the worthy Trainer, on whose preserves we hunted once in April, and which is erroneously called here the 'cassl.' The reverend owner offered it to his Majesty to shelter a guest of high rank. Now the marquise is to occupy it, because country air would benefit her. The singer will establish herself under the

noblewoman's maternal care. You know the Marquise de Leria's huge litter, which was borne here by two strong mules that Ruy Gomez—what will not people do to find out something?—gave her. The black ark, with the coats-of-arms of the De Lerias and the Duke of Rency on the back, the front, and both sides, is probably well known here. At first the boys ran after the monster; now they are used to the thing, and no longer notice it. But it is comfortable, and it can be opened. When the old woman uses the litter the cover will be removed and people will see her; when it is closed, the most sharp-sighted can not discover who is within. If his Majesty desires to go out to Prebrunn and return here, he will take it, and, even if his foot pains him, will reach his fair goal unseen. The young girl consented yesterday to move there with the marquise, and directly after it will be your duty, aided by Master Adrian, to attend to the furnishing of the little castle. I will aid you. You will hear the particulars from his Majesty. The marquise will take Barbara directly to the chapel, where the choir is to sing. People must become accustomed to see and speak of the two together. What would you think of an alliance between Leria and Blomberg? If I see correctly, the old woman will train the girl to be a useful tool."

"And if the tool cuts her fingers in the process," said Quijada, "I shall be glad."

"So shall I!" assented the Queen, laughing. Then she dismissed the major-domo, and a short time later singing was heard in the chapel.

The Emperor, after he had finished his meal, heard it also, and listened to Barbara as if enraptured when, in Hobrecht's motet for five voices, *Salve crux arbor vitae*, in the sublime *O crux lignum triumphale*, she raised her voice with a power, a wealth of pious devotion which he had never before heard in the execution of this forceful composition.

The little Maltese Hannibal again acquitted himself admirably, and in one of the duets in the second part *Johannes of Cologne* could prove that he had recovered.

His young companion in illness had also escaped lasting injury.

Appenzelder, too, showed himself fully satisfied with Barbara's execution. Something new and powerful, rising from the inmost depth of the soul, a passion of devout exaltation, rang in her voice which he had not perceived during the first rehearsals. Her art seemed to him to grow under his eyes like a wonderful plant, and the quiet, reserved man expressed his delight so unequivocally that the Emperor beckoned to him and asked his opinion of the singer's performance.

The musician expressed with unreserved warmth the emotions that filled his honest heart; but the monarch listened approvingly, and drew from his finger a costly ring to bestow it upon the discoverer of this glorious jewel.

The leader of the choir, it is true, declined this title of honour to award it to Sir Wolf Hartschwert; but the Emperor asserted that he was grateful to him also for many a service, and then ordered the gold chain, which had long been intended for him, to be brought for Maestro Gombert.

After these tokens of favour, which awakened the utmost surprise in those who were present, as the Emperor very rarely yielded to such impulses of generosity, the monarch's eyes sought Barbara's, and his glance seemed to say: "For your sake, love. Thus shall those who have deserved it from you be rewarded."

Finally he accosted her, intentionally raising his voice as he did so.

Word for word was intended to be heard by every one, even the remark that he wished to make the acquaintance of her father, whom he remembered as a brave comrade. Barbara would oblige him if she would request him to call upon him that afternoon. It was his duty to thank the man through whose daughter he enjoyed such lofty pleasure.

CHAPTER XIX.

A short time after, the Emperor Charles, accompanied by the Queen of Hungary and several lords and ladies, took a ride in the open air for the first time after long seclusion.

According to his custom, he had spent Passion week in the monastery. Easter had come on the latest day possible—the twenty-fifth of April— and when he bade farewell to the monks the gout had already attacked him again.

Now he rode forth into the open country and the green woods like a rescued man; the younger Granvelle, long as he had been in his service, had never seen him so gay and unconstrained. He could now understand his father's tales of his Majesty's better days, his vigorous manly strength and eager delight in existence.

True, the period of anxiety concerning the tidings of political affairs which had arrived the day before and that morning appeared to be over, for Herr von Parlowitz, the minister of Duke Maurice of Saxony, had expressed his conviction that this active young monarch might be induced to separate from the other Protestant princes and form an alliance with the Emperor, especially as his Majesty had not the most distant intention of mingling; religious matters in the war that was impending.

Despatches had also been sent from Valladolid by Don Philip, the Emperor's oldest son, which afforded the greatest satisfaction to the sovereign. If war was waged against the Smalkalds, the allied Protestants of Germany, Spain, which had been taught to regard the campaign as a religious war, was ready to aid Charles with large subsidies of money and men.

Lastly, it seemed as if two betrothals were to be made which promised to sustain the Emperor's statesmanship. Two of his nieces, the daughters of his brother Ferdinand, expected to marry—one the heir to the Bavarian throne, the other the Duke of Cleves.

Thus many pleasant things came to him simultaneously with his recovery, and his mind, inclined to mysticism, received them as a sign that Heaven was favourable to his late happiness in love.

Granvelle attributed the Emperor's unexpectedly rapid convalescence and the fortunate change which had taken place in his gloomy mood to the favourable political news, and perhaps also to the music which, as a zealous patron of art, he himself loved. He, who usually did not fail to note even the veriest trifle when he desired to trace the motives of events which were difficult to explain, now thought he need seek no further for causes.

During the ride Barbara was not thought of, but in the Golden Cross it was to become evident to the keen intelligence of the young master of statecraft that something extremely important might escape even his penetration.

While waiting with Malfalconnet in the reception room of the monarch, who had gone into his chamber, for Charles's return, and summing up to the baron in a most charming way the causes which had effected the wonderful rejuvenation of his Majesty, the other showed him that he, Granvelle, had been short-sighted enough to overlook the most powerful influence.

This would have been vexatious to the statesman had not his mind been wholly occupied in considering how this unexpected event could be made most profitable to himself, and also to his master, whom he served with loyal devotion.

Malfalconnet had received no confidence either from the Emperor or any male member of the court, yet he knew all, for, though the Marquise de Leria well deserved the reputation of secrecy, she did not keep her tongue sufficiently in check while talking with her gay countryman. What she overheard, he succeeded by his amiable wiles in learning, and this time also he had not failed.

Soon after the Emperor had appeared again audience was given to several ambassadors. Then Chamberlain de Praet announced Captain Blomberg.

The latter, clad in full armour, entered the apartment. Over the shining coat of mail, which he himself had cleaned with the utmost care, he wore a somewhat faded scarf, and his long battle sword hung at his left side.

He looked stately enough, and his grave, old-fashioned, but thoroughly soldierly manners admirably suited the elderly warrior.

The Emperor Charles accosted the father of the woman he loved with the same blunt friendliness that so easily won the hearts of the companions in arms to whom he condescended.

Blomberg must tell him this thing and that, and the old man gazed into his face with honest amazement and sincere delight when the monarch supplied the names of places and persons which had escaped his own feeble memory.

He accepted the praise of his daughter with a smile and the modest remark: "She is certainly a dear, kind-hearted child; and as for her voice, there were probably some to which people found less pleasure in listening. But, your Majesty, that of the nightingale battering down solid walls sounds still more beautiful to me."

The Emperor knew that the German cannoneers gave their guns the name of nightingale, and was pleased with the comparison.

But while he was still talking gaily with the old warrior, who had really displayed truly leonine courage on many an occasion, Count Buren brought in a new despatch, remarking, as he did so, that unfortunately the bearer, a young Spanish noble, had been thrown from his horse just outside the city, and was lying helpless with a broken leg.

Sincere compassion was expressed, in which the Bishop of Arras joined, meanwhile glancing through the somewhat lengthy document.

It came from the heir and regent, Don Philip, in Valladolid. The prince desired to know the state of the negotiations with Rome and with Duke Maurice of Saxony.

After Granvelle had read the despatch he handed it to the monarch, and the latter, in a low tone, charged him not yet to inform his son of the fair prospects for an alliance with Maurice, but to send an answer at once.

While the minister withdrew to the writing table, the Emperor asked whether a trustworthy horseman could be had, since the Spaniard was disabled; and Reitzenstein, Beust, and Van der Kapellen, in whom implicit confidence could be placed, had been sent off that morning.

Then the Bishop of Arras again turned to the monarch, cast a significant glance at Malfalconnet, and, pointing to Blomberg, eagerly exclaimed: "If this valiant and faithful soldier still has a firm seat in the saddle, this highly important message might be intrusted to him."

The proposal affected the adventure-loving old man like music. With youthful fire he protested that he could ride a horse as fast and endure fatigue as long as the youngest man, even though the goal were the end of the world.

Such an exertion, however, was by no means expected of him, for he was to set sail at Flushing and land at Loredo in Spain. There Postmaster-General de Tassis would furnish him with horses.

The Emperor had listened to this proposal from his counsellor with a smile of satisfaction. His purpose was sufficiently obvious.

How thoroughly this young diplomat understood men! With how delicate a scent he had again discovered a secret and removed a stone of offence from his master's path! He was competent to fill his clever father's place in every respect. It was evident that neither promises nor gifts would have induced the old warrior to favour the tender wishes of his imperial master. Now he himself hastened to leave the field clear, and Granvelle had foreseen how he would receive the proposal. Charles intentionally refrained from taking any personal share in the arrangements with the old man which now followed. A communication from Malfalconnet appeared to claim his whole attention, until the Bishop of Arras announced that the captain had received his instructions and was ready to set out for Flushing and Valladolid.

The monarch listened with a slight shake of the head, and expressed his hesitation about intrusting so important a message to a man of such advanced age; but Malfalconnet, in a tone of good-natured anxiety, called to the captain, "One may be the father of a nightingale, my brave hero, and yet miss the way to the south without a guide."

"True, true," the Emperor assented. "So we will give our gallant friend a travelling companion who understands Castilian, and on whom we can also rely. Besides, affairs of so much moment are better cared for by two messengers than by one. What is the name of the cavalier, Malfalconnet, who spoke to you of the friendship which unites him to this brave old champion of the faith?"

"Wolf Hartschwert, your Majesty," was the reply.

"The musician," said the monarch, as if some memory was awakened in his mind. "A modest fellow, whose reliability my sister praised.—And now, my vigorous friend, a prosperous journey! Your daughter, whom the favour of Heaven has so richly endowed with beautiful gifts, has found, I have heard, a maternal guardian in the Marquise de Leria. We, too, will gladly interest ourselves in the charming singer who affords us such rare pleasure."

As he spoke he showed his old companion in arms the unusual honour of extending his hand to him, and when the latter, deeply moved by such graciousness, ardently kissed it, he hurriedly withdrew it, saying, as he kindly patted his arm, "You are doing us a greater service than you imagine, Captain Blomberg."

Then, wishing him a successful journey, he went to the writing table, on which the secretary Gastelu had laid the newly received despatches.

Radiant with joy, the captain, making many profound bows, left the apartment of the gracious monarch, for whom now he would really have ridden to the world's end.

On the stairs he was detained. Malfalconnet handed him two heavy rolls of gold for the expenses of the journey, and enjoined it upon him to be ready to set out early the following morning. He might make his own arrangements with Sir Wolf Hartschwert, and assure him of his Majesty's gratitude in advance.

A short time after, Barbara was packing the gray-haired courier's knapsack.

She had never yet worked for her father with so much filial solicitude. Everything that might be of use to him on the way was carefully considered.

Though she had not been taken into his confidence, she knew the reason that he had been selected to undertake this toilsome journey.

The Emperor Charles was sending the old man far away that the happiness of her love might be undisturbed and unclouded, and the consciousness weighed heavily upon her by no means unduly sensitive conscience.

Wolf, who was already unhappy on her account, had fared the same. When her father told her that the knight was to accompany him, she had felt as if an incident of her childhood, which had often disturbed her dreams, was repeated.

She had been swinging with boyish recklessness in the Woller garden. Suddenly one of the ropes broke, and the board which supported her feet turned over out of her reach. For a time, clinging with her hands to the uninjured rope, she swayed between heaven and earth. No one was near, and, though she soon stood once more on the firm ground unhurt, the moment when her feet, during the ascent, lost their support, was associated with feelings of so much terror that she—who at that time was considered the bravest of her playfellows—had never forgotten it.

Now she felt as though something similar had befallen her.

She had seen the props on which she might depend removed from under her feet. If her father and Wolf left her, she would look in vain for counsel and support.

That her lover was the most powerful sovereign on earth, and she could appeal to him if she needed help, did not enter her mind. Nay, a vague foreboding told her that he and what was associated with him formed the power against which she must struggle.

The sham affection of the aristocratic lady who was to be her chaperon; the Queen, who last evening had catechised her as if she were a child, and whom she distrusted; the servile flatterer, Malfalconnet, in whose mirthful manner that day for the first time she thought she had detected dislike and slight sarcasm; the imperial love messenger, Don Luis Quijada, who with icy, dutiful coldness scarcely vouchsafed a word to her; and, lastly, the confessor Pedro de Soto, who treated her like a person who needed pity, and probably only awaited a fitting time to hurl an anathema into her face—passed before her memory, and in all these persons, so far above her in birth and rank, she believed that she saw foes.

But how was it with the man who could trample them all in the dust like worms—with her imperial lover?

Until now he had been observant of her every sign, but yesterday night the lion had raised his paw against her.

A slight pain had again made itself felt in his foot. She had eagerly lamented it, and in doing so deplored the fact that she would never be permitted to share the pleasure of dancing with the man she loved and who had first taught her how beautiful life was. This perhaps incautious remark had roused the ire of the suffering monarch.

How sensitive was this man's consciousness of sovereignty, how much suspicion and bitterness must have gathered in his heart, if he could see in the girl's innocent compassion an offence to his dignity, a humiliating reproach!

The rebuking sharpness with which he expressed his displeasure had pierced her very soul. She felt as if she were shivering with a sudden chill, and for a long time she could not recover the loving

warmth with which she had previously treated him. True, he had soon done everything in his power to atone for the pain which his irritability had inflicted, but the incident had given her the perception that the poets whose songs she sung were right when they made sorrow go hand in hand with the joys of love.

But as yet these joys of love far, far outweighed the suffering which it caused.

Even while, before the full knapsack which only needed locking, she was trying to discover what fault was to be found with the man whom she loved, while saying to herself that Charles's inconsiderate, selfish treatment of her father was unworthy of a generous man, and while also thinking of the separation from the faithful Wolf, her heart still longed for her lover.

Was she not, after all, under obligation to be grateful to him for everything for which she reproached him?

How dear she must be to this great sovereign, since, in order to possess her freely and completely, he allowed himself to be urged to an act which was unworthy of him!

If he had wounded her deeply, he had a right to expect her to excuse many things in him.

How he loved her, and how delicately he could woo and flatter, and mingle with his tender speeches the costly gifts of his rich and mobile intellect! How beautifully and aptly he could speak of her own art, and induce her to oppose to his clever remarks her own modest opinion! He had cheerfully endured contradiction the night before during the conversation concerning music.

But what had followed her luckless regret about his lame foot?

The words had pierced her heart like knives; even now she did not understand where she obtained the strength to withhold the sharp answer for which her lips had already parted; but she knew her hasty spirit, which only too easily led her to outbreaks of anger. Had the power of love, or the magic spell which emanates from genuine royalty, forced her to silence?

No matter.

A good angel had aided her to control herself, and in a rapid prayer she besought the Holy Virgin to assist her in future if her august lover again roused her to rebellion.

Now that she was losing her most sincere friends, the only ones who might have ventured a kindly warning, she must learn to guard herself.

Perhaps it was fortunate that she had already discovered how necessary it was not only to show the mighty sovereign to whom her heart belonged that he was dear to her, but also to display the timid reverence with which millions bowed before him. But if she imposed this constraint upon herself, would her love still remain the same?

"No, no, and again no!" cried the refractory spirit within.

Was he not a weak, fallible mortal, subject, like every one else, to suffering and disease, overcome by his passion, who had even been guilty of an act which, had it been committed by the son of a Ratisbon family, would have seemed to her reprehensible?

Again and again this question forced itself upon her, and with it another—whether she, the woman who had never tolerated such a thing from any one, ought not to undertake to defend herself against unjust assaults, which humiliated her in her own eyes, no matter whence they might come?

Would she not hold a higher position in his sight if she showed him, whom no one ventured to contradict, that the woman he deemed worthy of his love dared to defend her dignity, although he had deprived her of her natural protectors?

Precisely because she was conscious of loving him with her whole soul, because for his sake she had given the world the right to deny her honour and dignity, she was eager to show him that she prized both, and was not inclined to let them be assailed.

Hitherto she had not regarded it as a disgrace, but as the highest distinction, to be deemed worthy of the love of the greatest monarch on earth, and, with a sense of pride, had sacrificed her most sacred possession to his wishes. But how could she retain this feeling if he no longer showed her that he, too, regarded her worthy of him?

She had defied custom, law, the voice of her own conscience, and she did not regret that she had done so. On no account would she have changed what had occurred if only she succeeded in guarding

herself from being humiliated by her lover. To accomplish this, it was worth while to confront a great danger boldly. It was the greatest of all, the peril of losing him, for what would she be if he deserted her?

At the bare thought a torturing dread overwhelmed her.

Never had she felt so irresolute, so deeply agitated, and she uttered a sigh of relief when her father returned from his visit to old Ursel, and praised the care with which she had selected the articles that filled his knapsack.

The flushed cheeks which he noticed could scarcely be the result of the light labour which she had performed for him. With the instinct of paternal love, he probably perceived that she was agitated, but he had so little idea of the mental conflict which had taken possession of her soul that her anxiety pleased him. The separation must be hard for the poor child, and how could the honour bestowed upon the father fail to affect the daughter's mind also.

He had hoped to find Wolf in Ursel's room, but he had already been away some time, and had told the old woman that he was going to the Hiltners, and should probably remain there a long while, as his schoolmate, Erasmus Eckhart, the nephew and adopted son of the syndic and his wife, had returned home from Wittenberg.

To find Wolf and deliver the important message Blomberg would have been obliged to enter the accursed heretic's house, and, rather than do it, he protested he would inflict this and that upon himself.

But whom should he trust to represent him? The best plan would be for Barbara to write to the young knight, informing him of the honour in store for him.

He himself wielded the sword so much better than the pen.

The obliging daughter put a speedy end to her father's embarrassment by offering to go in search of Wolf in person; she by no means shunned the Hiltners. In fact, the doctor's wife had always been especially kind to her at the Convivium musicum, and her young daughter Martina, during the months in which she, too, was permitted to sing in the chorus, had displayed, whenever opportunity offered, an admiration for Barbara which bordered on enthusiasm. Besides, there was no obligation to keep Barbara from this errand; the removal to Prebrunn to join the marquise was not to take place until noon of the following day.

The pious captain, it is true, was as reluctant to let his daughter go to the heretic's as to a pesthouse, but Wolf's notification permitted no delay, so he consented, and expressed his willingness to accompany her.

CHAPTER XX.

Barbara had scarcely entered the street with her father when they were stopped by Master Adrian, the Emperor's valet. He came from his Majesty to inform Blomberg that the regent could not spare Sir Wolf Hartschwert, and the captain might choose another companion for his ride. The Emperor expected him to select only a loyal, trustworthy, and vigorous nobleman who had taken the oath of fealty to his Majesty. If he should be in the military service, the necessary leave of absence was granted in advance; only he must present himself to the Lord Bishop of Arras that very day. Sir Wolf Hartschwert must depart for Brussels in the regent's train early the next morning.

This news by no means pleased the old soldier, yet, before the valet had finished the message, his features smoothed—he thought he had already found the right man.

After assuring himself that the imperial messenger had fulfilled his commission, he took a hasty leave of him and his daughter.

His kind heart impelled him to show his chosen companion his friendly remembrance of him, and thereby atone for the offence which had been inflicted upon him in his house. To Barbara's inquiry whom he would take with him, he hurriedly replied that he should not decide until he joined his military comrades in the Black Bear. As soon as this important matter was settled he would return home, for it had now become unnecessary to inform Wolf. The maid-servant could be sent to summon him to the

Golden Cross. Barbara might go herself at once to Ursel and soothe her—anxiety about her beloved young knight weighed heavily upon her soul.

During this conversation? Master Adrian had gone to her side; but as soon as Blomberg had retired, he informed Barbara, in his master's name, that he should expect her after vespers in the apartments of the Queen of Hungary. He longed to hear her voice. The regent desired to know whether she had any special wishes concerning the Prebrunn house. She need not restrict herself on the score of expense; the Prebrunn steward would be authorized to pay everything. True, most of the furniture was supplied and the necessary servants had been obtained, but her Majesty the Queen advised her to take with her a maid or companion whom she personally liked.

Barbara's face crimsoned as she listened, and then asked anxiously whether the Emperor Charles knew of these arrangements.

He had no doubt of it, the man replied, for he had heard his Majesty remark that, if the marquise's companion was not to become the toy of her caprices, she must be enabled to obtain what she desired independently of the old lady. He was anxious to make Barbara's life in Prebrunn a pleasant one.

The latter, with downcast eyes, thanked Master Adrian and turned away; but he detained her with the inquiry whether he should probably find Sir Wolf Hartschwert at home, and received the answer that he had gone to Syndic Hiltner's.

The valet then hastily took his leave, because just at that time his royal master needed him. Any one else could summon the knight to the regent in his place.

In the corridor of the Golden Cross he met Brother Cassian, the body servant of the Confessor de Soto, a middle-aged Swabian, who had formerly as a lay brother worked as a bookbinder in the Dominican monastery at Cologne. He was clad in a half-secular, half-priestly garb, and was an humble, extremely devout man, whose yielding nature had rendered him popular among the servants at the court. His bullet-shaped head was unusually large, and his face, with its narrow brow and small, lustreless eyes, showed that he was not prone to thinking. Yet he fulfilled every order precisely according to directions, and possessed his full share of the cunning which is often a characteristic of narrow minds.

He willingly undertook to summon Sir Wolf Hartschwert, whom he knew, to the presence of the Queen of Hungary. No special haste was needful, and, as he loved good wine and did not lack gifts from those who desired an audience with his master, he went first to the English Greeting, where the travelling clergy lodged and often deigned to accost him.

Barbara had returned home with bowed head, and threw herself into her father's arm-chair in his workshop. She gazed into vacancy with a sore and anxious heart, and, as an insane violinist lures the same tone from the instrument again and again, she constantly returned to the same thought, "Lost! lost!—too late! too late!"

Barbara gave herself up to this mood for several minutes, but at last she remembered her lover's summons for that evening.

He longed to hear her voice, Master Adrian had said.

Surely, surely he himself had clothed the expression in a totally different, a hundred times warmer form. How bewitchingly he, the great Emperor, understood how to flatter, and, with the memory of the charm of his manner, the thought of the blissful hours which she had enjoyed through his love returned to her mind. It was in his power to bestow the highest happiness which earth can give; after all, his love outweighed everything that she must sacrifice for it. To enjoy it, though but for a brief season, she ought not to refuse to bear the hardest, most terrible things, and, if what was now her secret became rumoured among the people, to accept humiliation, shame, and scorn. Let the respectable women of Ratisbon, in their pride of virtue, maliciously cast stones at her; they could not look down upon her, for, as the object of the most illustrious sovereign's love, she was raised far above them.

Meanwhile, with a feeling of defiant self-confidence, she was again braiding her hair. But the mental firmness which she had regained did not last; more than once her hand faltered while the comb was dividing the wealth of her golden tresses. How ardently Charles had praised their luxuriant beauty!—and to-day he was to rejoice in it again. But why had not even one poor word from his own hand accompanied the summons?

Why had his messenger been only a valet? Why had he wounded her so deeply the night before?

Why did leaden weights seem to hang upon her soul when she attempted to soar upward?

Oh, what a state of things!

Who had given the regent, to whom nothing attracted her, the right to dispose of her as though she were a chattel or her captive?

Had she, with her heart and her honour, also resigned her freedom to her lover?

If she had only possessed one, one single person to whom she could utter her thoughts!

Then her glance fell upon the knapsack, and she remembered Wolf. He was to set out on his journey early the next morning; her lover expected her after vespers; so perhaps she would not be permitted to see him again, for she scarcely dared to hope that, after the rebuff which he had experienced, he would seek her again. Yet she longed once more to clasp the hand of the man for whom she felt a sister's affection and yet had so deeply wounded.

Without one kind farewell word from him, the bitterest drop of all would fall into the wormwood which already mingled in her happiness. It seemed incomprehensible that he who from childhood had given her his whole heart would henceforth deny her every friendly feeling. For her own sake, and also for his, this should not be.

How many had sought her love! But perhaps the time would soon come when, on account of the one who must supply the place of all others, no one would care for her. Then she wished at least to be sure of the sympathy, the friendship of this good loyal man.

There were still many things for her to do, but to seek Wolf she left them all, even the visit to Frau Lerch, whom she wished to ask to devote herself exclusively to her service in Prebrunn.

Full of anxious cares, lofty anticipations, and the ardent desire to conciliate Wolf, she took the by no means lengthy walk to the Hiltners. Not until she reached the doctor's house did it occur to her that she had forgotten to execute her father's commission and relieve Ursel's anxiety about her darling.

How did it happen that, if any affair of her own interested her, she always forgot what she owed to others?

Barbara was obliged to wait in the broad, lofty hall of the syndic's house for the maid-servant, who announced her; and the stout man with the big head, who had seized the knocker just before she entered, shared her fate.

He was now leaning with bowed head against the wall, both hands clasped under his beardless chin, and might have been taken for a monk repeating his prayers. The long, brown doublet fastened around his hips by a Hemp rope, instead of a girdle, made him resemble a Franciscan. But his thick, flaxen hair lacked the tonsure, the rope the rosary, and he wore coarse leather shoes on his large feet.

Barbara fancied that she had seen this strange figure somewhere, and he, too, must have recognised her, for he bowed when she looked at him. There was not the slightest movement of the body except the small eyes, which wandered restlessly around the spacious room as if they missed something.

The inquiry what he found lacking here was already rising to Barbara's lips when the syndic's wife came toward her, preceded by her daughter Martina, who, radiant with joy at seeing the ardently admired singer in her own house, kissed her with fervent affection.

The mother merely extended her hand to Barbara, yet the whole manner of the gentle, reserved woman showed that she was a welcome guest.

Frau Sabina loved and understood music, still enjoyed singing hymns with the members of her household, and had done everything in her power to aid the establishment of the Convivium musicum and foster its progress.

Interest in music had also united her to Dr. Martin Luther, her husband's friend, and many a composition of the Wittenberg ecclesiastic had first been performed at the Hiltners.

The old faith offered so much more to charm the senses than the new one! Therefore it seemed a special cause for thanksgiving that singing and playing upon the organ occupied a prominent place in the Protestant religious service, and that Luther most warmly commended the fostering of music to those who professed the evangelical belief. Besides, her adopted son Erasmus, the new Wittenberg master of arts, had devoted himself eagerly to music, and composed several hymns which, if Damian Feys permitted it, would be sung in the Convivium musicum.

Frau Sabina Hiltner had often met Barbara there, and had noticed with admiration and pleasure the great progress which this richly gifted young creature had made under the direction of the Netherland master.

Other members of the Convivium, on the contrary, bore Barbara a grudge because she remained a Catholic, and many a mother of a daughter whom Barbara, as a singer, had cast too far into the shade, would gladly have thrust her out of the circle of music-loving citizens.

Frau Sabina and Master Feys, who, like the much-envied girl, was a professor of the old faith, interceded for her all the more warmly.

Besides, it afforded Frau Hiltner scarcely less pleasure to hear Barbara than it did Martina, and she could also fix her eyes with genuine devotion upon the girl's wonderfully beautiful and nobly formed features. The mother and daughter owed to this peerless singer the best enjoyment which the Collegium afforded them, and, when envy and just displeasure approached Frau Sabina to accuse Barbara of insubordination, obstinacy, pride, and forwardness, which were unseemly for one so young, as well as exchanging coquettish glances with the masculine members of the choir, the profoundly respected wife of the syndic and her young daughter warmly defended the persecuted girl.

In this her husband strongly supported her, for, when necessary, he dealt weighty blows and upheld what he deemed just without fear of man and with the powerful aids of his strong intellect and the weight of the esteem he had won by a stainless, industrious life.

Doubtless Frau Sabina also perceived something unusual in Barbara's nature and conduct, traits of defiance, almost rebellion, which would have troubled her in her Martina, who, though no beauty, was a pretty girl, with the most winning, childlike charm; but she secretly asked herself whether she would not accept it gratefully if, in exchange, her girl could possess such a wonderful gift of God; for, sharply as the eye of envy followed Barbara's every act, she had never given cause to doubt her chastity, and this Frau Hiltner considered greatly in her favour; for what tremendous temptations must have assailed this marvellously beautiful creature, this genuine artist, who had grown to womanhood without a mother, and whose only counsellor and protector was a crippled, eccentric old soldier.

As Martina opened the door of the sitting room a loud conversation in men's voices became audible, and with the deep, resonant tones of the syndic Barbara recognised the higher, less powerful ones of the man whom she was seeking.

The kiss of the scarcely unfolded bud of girlhood, the child of a mother whose presence in the Convivium had often helped her to curb an impetuous impulse, pleased Barbara, and yet awakened the painful feeling that in accepting it without resistance she was guilty of a deception. Besides, she had not confessed, and it seemed as if, in feeling the young heretic's kiss an honour, she were adding to the burden which had not yet been removed from her conscience.

Yet she could not overcome an emotion of rare pleasure when Frau Sabina, after beckoning to her husband, took her hand and led her into the reception room. Erasmus Eckhart, the adopted son of the house, hastened toward Barbara to greet her as an acquaintance of his school days, flushing deeply in his surprise at her great beauty as he did so.

But the mistress of the house gave him no time to renew the relations of childhood, and led her away from him to her husband and her mother-in-law, a woman of ninety, to whom she presented her with kind, nay, with extremely flattering, words. Barbara lowered her eyes in confusion, and did not see how, at her entrance, Wolf's face had blanched and old Frau Hiltner had sat up in her cushioned arm-chair at the window to look her sharply and fixedly in the eyes with the freedom of age.

Meanwhile the man from the hall had stationed himself beside the door in the same attitude, with his hands clasped under his chin and his cap between his breast and arm, and stood motionless. He did not appear to be at ease, and gnawed his thick lower lip with a troubled look as he occasionally cast a glance at the strong countenance of Martin Luther, whose portrait, the size of life, gazed at him from its gilt frame on the opposite wall.

Barbara did not regain complete self-control until the syndic asked his errand.

The man in the brown doublet was Brother Cassian, the body servant of the Emperor's confessor. He now unclasped his hands to grasp the cap under his arm, which he twirled awkwardly in his fingers while saying, in a rapid, expressionless tone, as though he were repeating a lesson, that he had come to summon Wolf Hartschwert to the Queen of Hungary, with whom he must set out for Brussels early the next morning.

Barbara then remarked in a subdued tone that she had come here for the same purpose, and also for

another-to shake hands with the playmate of her childhood, because she probably would not see him again before his departure.

Wolf listened to this statement in surprise, and then told the messenger that he would obey her Majesty's command.

"Obey the command," Cassian repeated, according to his servant custom. Then he was about to retire, but Frau Sabina had filled a goblet with wine for him, and Martina, according too an old custom of the family, offered it to the messenger.

But, much as Cassian liked the juice of the grape, he waved back the kindly meant gift of the mistress of the house with a hoarse "No, no!" and shaking his head, turned on his heel, and without a word of thanks or farewell left the room.

"The heretic's wine," observed Dr. Hiltner, shrugging his shoulders regretfully, and then asked Wolf, "Do you know the queer fellow?"

"The body servant of the almoner, Pedro de Soto," was the reply. The bang of the closed outer door was heard at the same moment, for Cassian had rushed into the open air as fast as his feet would carry him. After leaving part of the street behind him, he stopped, and with a loud "B-r-r-r!" shook himself like a poodle that has just come out of the water.

Into what an abominable heretic house Master Adrian had sent him!

To despatch a good Christian to such an unclean hole!

No images of the Virgin and the saints, no crucifix nor anything else that elevates a human soul in the whole dwelling, but the portrait of the anti-Christ, the arch-heretic Luther, in the best place in the room! However lie turned his eyes away, the fat heretic face had forced him to look at it. Meanwhile he had felt as if the devil himself was already stretching out his arm from the ample sleeve to seize him by the collar.

"B-r-r-r!" he repeated, and hurried off to Saint Leonhard's chapel in the Golden Cross, where he sprinkled himself eagerly with holy water, and then sought Master Adrian. But the valet was with the Emperor, and so he went to his master and told him where he had unexpectedly wandered.

The latter lent a willing ear and shook his sagacious head indignantly when he learned that, besides Sir Wolf Hartschwert, Cassian had also met "the singer" at the house of the syndic, the soul of the evangelical movement in Ratisbon.

Meanwhile Barbara was taking leave of the friend of her youth at the Hiltner house.

The others, with the exception of the deaf old dame, had considerately left the room.

Wolf felt it gratefully, for a dark suspicion, which Barbara's information of her father's long ride as a messenger only confirmed, weighed heavily upon his heart.

The man for whose sake the woman he loved had given him up must be Baron Malfalconnet.

It was well known how recklessly this gay, gallant noble trifled with women's hearts, and he had mentioned Barbara in his presence in a way that justified the conjecture.

Therefore, ere Wolf clasped her hand, he told her the suspicions which filled him with anxiety about her.

But he was soon to discover the baselessness of this fear.

Whatever the truthful girl so positively and solemnly denied must be far from her thoughts, and he now clasped her right hand in both his.

The heavy anxiety that his "queen" had fallen into the baron's hands as a toy had been removed. The thought of the Emperor Charles was as far removed from his mind as heaven from earth, though Barbara emphasized the fact that the man whom she loved would be sure of his respect. She also, with deep emotion, assured him that she wished him the best and most beautiful life, and would always retain her friendship for him whatever Fate might have in store for both.

The words sounded so truthful and loyal that Wolf's heart was moved to its inmost depths, and he now, in his turn, assured her that he would never forget her, and would treasure her image in his heart's core to the end. True, he must endure the keenest suffering for her sake, but he also owed her the greatest happiness life had granted him.

The eyes of both were dim, but when he began to talk in the old pathetic way of the magic of love, which would at last bring together those whom Heaven destined for one another, she tore herself away, hastily begged him to say farewell to Fran Hiltner for her, and then went into the hall; but here Martina overtook the departing guest, threw herself impetuously into her arms, and whispered the question whether she would permit her to pay her a visit at Prebrunn when she was with her old marquise, she had so much, so very much, to tell her.

But the wish, of which her mother was ignorant, remained unfulfilled, for Barbara, scarcely able to control her voice in her embarrassment, hurriedly replied that while with the lady in waiting she would no longer be her own mistress, pressed a hasty kiss upon the innocent child's brow, released herself from her embrace, and rushed through the door, which Wolf was holding open for her, into the street.

The former gazed after her with a troubled heart, and, after she was out of sight, returned to the others. He conscientiously delivered Barbara's farewell, and the praise which Frau Sabina lavished upon her pleased him as much as if nothing had come between them. Finally he made an engagement to see Erasmus Eckhart that evening in his lodgings, and then went to the Queen of Hungary.

After he had left the Hiltners Frau Sabina bent down to her mother-in-law's ear—though she had lost her quickness of hearing, she had retained her sight perfectly—and, raising her voice, told her the name of the young lady who had just left them. Then she asked if she, too, did not admire Barbara's beauty, and what she thought of her.

The grandmother nodded, exclaiming in a low tone, "Beautiful, beautiful— a wonderfully beautiful creature!" Then she gazed thoughtfully into vacancy, and at last asked whether she had heard correctly that Jungfrau Blomberg was also a remarkable singer.

Her daughter-in-law eagerly nodded assent to this question.

The aged woman silently bowed her head, but quickly raised it again, and there was a faint tinge of regret in her voice as she began: "Too much, certainly too much. Such marvels are rare. But one thing or the other. For women of her stamp there are only two conditions, and no other— rapturous happiness and utter misery. She will be content with no average. It does not suit such natures."

Here she paused abruptly, for Martina entered the room, and with affectionate solicitude said to her granddaughter: "Young Trainer was here just now. Has anything happened between you? I see by your eyes that you have been weeping."

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Cunning which is often a characteristic of narrow minds
Pride in charms which we do not possess (vanity)

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BARBARA BLOMBERG — VOLUME 04 ***

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