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BARBARA BLOMBERG

By Georg Ebers

Volume 5.

CHAPTER XXI.

The Emperor Charles loved his sister Mary, and he now desired to show her how dear she was to his heart. She had been obliging to him, and he had in mind the execution of a great enterprise which she had hitherto zealously opposed, yet for which he needed her co-operation.

It satisfied him to know that the father of his love would be absent from Ratisbon for the present. He did not care who accompanied him.

When the regent reproached him for having taken Sir Wolf Hartschwert from her without a word of consultation, although she was unwilling to spare him, he had instantly placed Wolf at her disposal again.

The simplest and cheapest plan would have been to let Blomberg pursue his journey alone; but the monarch feared that the despatch might not be quickly delivered if anything happened to the old man on the way, and he had said before witnesses that he would not allow him to go without companionship.

He scarcely thought of Barbara's filial feeling. She loved him, and the place which she gave to any one else in her heart could and must therefore be extremely small.

How powerfully the passionate love for this girl had seized him he dared not confess to himself. But

he rejoiced in the late love which rejuvenated him and filled him with a joy in existence whose fresh blossoming would have seemed impossible a few days before.

How superb a creature he had found in this German city, from which, since its change of religion, he had withdrawn his former favour! In his youth his heart had throbbed ardently for many a fair woman, but she surpassed in beauty, in swift intelligence, in fervour, in artistic ability, and, above all, in sincere, unfeigned devotion every one whom his faithful memory recalled.

He would hold fast to the loved one who bestowed this happiness and fresh vigour of youth. To make warm the nest which was to receive his dear nightingale he had conquered the economy which was beginning to degenerate into avarice, and also intended to accomplish other sacrifices in order to procure her the position which she deserved.

He no longer knew that he had wounded her deeply the night before. He was in the habit of casting aside whatever displeased him unless it appeared advantageous to impose restraint upon himself; and who would ever have dared to resist the expression of his indignation? Had Barbara obeyed her hasty temper and returned him a sharp answer, he certainly would not have forgotten it. The bare thought of her dispelled melancholy thoughts from his mind; the hope of soon seeing and hearing her again rendered him friendly and yielding to those about him. The trivial sin which this sweet love secret contained had been pardoned in the case of the man bound by no older obligation, after a slight penance, and now for the first time he fully enjoyed the wealth of the unexpected new happiness. It must also be acceptable to Heaven, for this was distinctly shown by the more and more favourable turn of politics, and he held the return gift.

That it was the right one was proved by the nature of the gratifying news brought by the very last despatches. They urged him directly toward the war which hitherto, from the most serious motives, he had avoided, and, as his royal sister correctly saw, would destroy a slowly matured, earnest purpose; for it forced him to renounce the hope of effecting at Trent a reformation of the Church according to his own ideas, and a restoration of the unity of religion in a peaceful manner by yielding on one side and reasonable concessions on the other. He had long since perceived that many things in the old form of religion needed reformation. If war was declared, he would be compelled to resign the hope that these would be undertaken by Rome, and the opposition, the defiance, the bold rebellion of the Protestant princes destroyed every hope of propitiation on their part. They were forcing him to draw the sword, and he might venture to do so at this time, for he need now feel no fear of serious opposition from any of the great powers around him. Maurice of Saxony, too, was on the point of withdrawing from the Smalkalds and becoming his ally; so, with the assistance of Heaven, he might hope to win the victory for the cause of the Church, and with it also that of the crown.

With regard to the probability of this war, he had much to expect from the activity of his sister in the Netherlands, and though she now advocated peace, in the twelfth hour, which must soon strike, he could rely upon her. Yet she was a woman, and it was necessary to bind her to him by every tie of the heart and intellect.

He loved Barbara as warmly as he was capable of loving; but had Mary that evening required his separation from the singer as the price of her assistance in promoting his plans, the desire of the heart would perhaps have yielded to the wishes of the statesman.

But the regent did not impose this choice; she did not grudge him his late happiness, and gratefully appreciated the transformation which Barbara's rare gifts had wrought.

The affectionate sister's heart wished that the bond which produced so favourable a result might be of the longest possible duration, and she had therefore personally attended to the furnishing of the Prebrunn house, and made all sorts of arrangements to render Barbara's life with the marquise, not only enduring, but pleasant.

The Emperor had allowed a considerable sum for this purpose, but she did not trouble herself about the amount allotted. If she exceeded it, Charles must undertake the payment, whether he desired it or not.

Her vivid imagination had showed her how she, in the Emperor's place, would treat the object of his love, and she acted accordingly, without questioning him or the girl for whom her arrangements were made.

Nothing was too expensive for the favoured being who dispelled the Emperor's melancholy, and she had proved how much can be accomplished in a brief space where there is good will on all sides.

By her orders entirely separate suites of apartments had been prepared for Barbara and the marquise. Quijada had selected four of her own saddle horses for the stable of the little castle, and

supplied it with the necessary servants. Her steward had been commissioned to provide the servants wanted in the kitchen, and one of her Netherland officials had received orders to manage the household of the marquise and her companion, and in doing so to anticipate Barbara's wishes in the most attentive manner. One of her best maids, the worthy and skilful Frau Lamperi, though she was reluctant to part with her, had been sent to Prebrunn to serve Barbara as garde-robier. The advice that the Emperor's love should take her own waiting maid also came from her. She knew the value, amid new circumstances, of a person long known and trusted. The idea that Barbara would take her own maid with her rested, it is true, on the supposition that so well-dressed a young lady, who belonged to an ancient family, must as surely possess such a person as eyes and hands.

Barbara had just induced Frau Lerch to accompany her to Prebrunn. The old woman's opposition had only been intended to extort more favourable terms. She knew nothing of the regent's arrangements.

Queen Mary was grateful to Charles for so readily restoring the useful Sir Wolf Hartschwert, and when the latter presented himself he was received even more graciously than usual.

She had some work ready for him. A letter in relation to the betrothal of her nieces, the daughters of King Ferdinand, was to be sent to the Imperial Councillor Schonberg at Vienna. It must be written in German, because the receiver understood no other language.

After she had told the knight the purpose of the letter, she left him; the vesper service summoned her, and afterward Barbara detained her as she sang to the Emperor, alone and accompanied by Appenzelder's boy choir, several songs, and in a manner so thoroughly artistic that the Queen lingered not only in obedience to her brother's wish, but from pleasure in the magnificent music, until the end of the concert.

Just as Wolf, seated in the writing room, which was always at his disposal, finished the letter, the major-domo, Don Luis Quijada, sought him.

He had already intimated several times that he had something in view for him which promised to give Wolf's life, in his opinion, a new and favourable turn. Now he made his proposal.

The duties imposed upon him by the service compelled him to live apart from his beloved, young, and beautiful wife, Dona Magdalena de Ulloa, who had remained at his castle Villagarcia in Spain. She possessed but one true comforter in her solitude—music. But the person who had hitherto instructed her—the family chaplain—was dead. So far as his ability and his taste were concerned, it would have been easy to replace him, but Quijada sought in his successor qualities which rarely adorned a single individual, but which he expected to find united in the knight.

In the first place, the person he desired must be, like the chaplain, of noble birth; for to see his wife closely associated with a man of inferior station was objectionable to the Spanish grandee, who was perhaps the most popular of all the officers in the army, not only on account of his valour in the field, but also for the kindly good will and absolute justice which he bestowed upon even the humblest soldier.

That the chaplain's successor must be a good artist, thoroughly familiar with Netherland and Italian music, was a matter of course. But Don Luis also demanded from Dona Magdalena's new teacher and household companion graceful manners, a modest disposition, and, above all things, a character on which he could absolutely rely. Not that he would have cherished any fears of the fidelity of the wife whom he honoured as the purest and noblest of her sex, and of whom he spoke to the knight with reverence and love; he desired only to guard her from any occurrence that might offend her.

Wolf listened in surprise. He had firmly resolved that on no account would he stay in Ratisbon. What could he find save fresh anxiety and never-ending anguish of the heart if he remained near Barbara, who disdained his love?

He possessed little ambition. It was only for the sake of the woman he loved that he had recently made more active exertions, but with his excellent acquirements and the fair prospects which were open to him at the court, it seemed, even to his modest mind, too humble a fate to bury himself in a Spanish castle in order to while away with music the lonely hours of a noblewoman, no matter how high her rank, how beautiful and estimable she might be, or how gladly he would render her admirable husband a favour.

Quijada had said this to himself, and perceived plainly enough what was passing in the young knight's thoughts.

So he frankly confessed that he was well aware how few temptations his invitation offered a man endowed with Wolf's rare advantages, but he came by no means with empty hands—and he now

informed the listening musician what he could offer him.

This certainly gave his proposal a different aspect.

The aristocratic Quijada family—and as its head he himself—had in its gift a rich living, which annually yielded thousands of ducats, in the great capital of Valladolid. Many a son of a distinguished race sought it, but he wished to bestow it upon Wolf. It would insure him more than a comfortable support, permit him to marry the woman of his choice, and, if he remained several years in Villagarcia, afford him the possibility of accumulating a neat little property, as he would live in Quijada's castle as a welcome guest and scarcely ever be obliged to open his purse strings. Besides, music was cultivated in Valladolid, and if Don Luis introduced him to the clergy there, it might easily happen that they would avail themselves of his great knowledge and fine ability and intrust to him the amendment and perhaps, finally, the direction of the church music.

As Dona Magdalena often spent several months with her brother, the Marquis Rodrigo de la Mota, Wolf could from time to time be permitted to visit the Netherlands or Italy to participate in the more active musical life of these countries.

Wolf listened to this explanation with increasing attention.

The narrow path which buried itself in the sand was becoming a thoroughfare leading upward. He was glad that he had withheld his refusal; but this matter was so important that the prudent young man, after warmly thanking Don Luis for his good opinion, requested some time for consideration.

True, Quijada could assure him that, for the sake of his wife, Dona Magdalena de Ulloa, whom from childhood she had honoured with her special favour, the regent would place no obstacle in the way of his retirement from her service. But Wolf begged him to have patience with him. He was not a man to make swift decisions, and nowhere could he reflect better than in the saddle during a long ride. He would inform him of his determination by the first messenger despatched from Brussels to the Emperor. Even now he could assure him that this generous offer seemed very tempting, since solitude always had far more charm for him than the noisy bustle of the court.

Quijada willingly granted the requested delay, and, before bidding him farewell, Wolf availed himself of the opportunity to deliver into his hands the papers collected by his adopted father, which he had on his person. They contained the proof that he was descended from the legal marriage of a knight and a baroness; and Don Luis willingly undertook to have them confirmed by the Emperor, and his patent renewed in a way which, if he accepted his proposal, might also be useful to him in Spain.

So Wolf took leave of the major-domo with the conviction that he possessed a true friend in this distinguished man. If the regent did not arbitrarily detain him, he would show himself in Villagarcia to be worthy of his confidence.

On the stairs he met the Emperor's confessor, Don Pedro de Soto. Wolf bowed reverently before the dignified figure of the distinguished Dominican, and the latter, as he recognised him, paused to request curtly that he would give him a few minutes the following day.

"If I can be of any service to your Reverence," replied Wolf, taking the prelate's delicate hand to kiss it; but the almoner, with visible coldness, withdrew it, repellently interrupting him: "First, Sir Knight, I must ask you for an explanation. Where the plague is raging in every street, we ought to guard our own houses carefully against it."

"Undoubtedly," replied Wolf, unsuspectingly. "But I shall set out early to-morrow morning with her Majesty."

"Then," replied the Dominican after a brief hesitation, "then a word with you now."

He continued his way to the second story, and Wolf, with an anxious mind, followed him into a waiting room, now empty, near the staircase.

The deep seriousness in the keen eyes of the learned confessor, which could look gentle, indulgent, and sometimes even merry, revealed that he desired to discuss some matter of importance; but the very first question which the priest addressed to him restored the young man's composure.

The confessor merely desired to know what took him to the house of the man who must be known to him as the soul of the evangelical innovations in his native city, and the friend of Martin Luther.

Wolf now quietly informed him what offer Dr. Hiltner, as syndic of Ratisbon, had made him in the name of the Council.

"And you?" asked the confessor anxiously.

"I declined it most positively," replied Wolf, "although it would have suited my taste to stand at the head of the musical life in my native city."

"Because you prefer to remain in the service of her Majesty Queen Mary?" asked De Soto.

"No, your Eminence. Probably I shall soon leave the position near her person. I rather feared that, as a good Catholic, I would find it difficult to do my duty in the service of an evangelical employer."

"There is something in that. But what led the singer—you know whom I mean—to the same house?"

Wolf could not restrain a slight smile, and he answered eagerly: "The young lady and I grew up together under the same roof, your Eminence, and she came for no other purpose than to bid me farewell. A lamb that clings more firmly to the shepherd, and more strongly abhors heresy, could scarcely be found in our Redeemer's flock."

"A lamb!" exclaimed the almoner with a slight touch of scorn. "What are we to think of the foe of heresy who exchanges tender kisses with the wife of the most energetic leader of Protestantism?"

"By your permission, your Eminence," Wolf asserted, "only the daughter offered her her lips. She and her mother made the singer's acquaintance at the musical exercises established here by the Council. Music is the only bond between them."—"Yet there is a bond," cried De Soto suspiciously. "If you see her again before your departure, advise her, in my name, to sever it. She found a friendly welcome and much kindness in that house, and here at least—tell her so—only one faith exists. A prosperous journey, Sir Knight."

The delay caused by this conversation induced Wolf to quicken his pace. It had grown late, and Erasmus Eckhart had surely been waiting some time for his school friend in the old precentor's house.

This was really the case, but the Wittenberg theologian, whose course of study had ended only a fortnight before, and who, with his long, brown locks and bright blue eyes, still looked like a gay young student, had had no reason to lament the delay.

He was first received by Ursel, who had left her bed and was moving slowly about the room, and how much the old woman had had to tell her young fellow-believer from Wittenberg about Martin Luther, who was now no longer living, and Professor Melanchthon; but Erasmus Eckhart liked to talk with her, for as a schoolmate and intimate friend of Wolf he had paid innumerable visits to the house, and received in winter an apple, in summer a handful of cherries, from her.

The young man was still less disposed to be vexed with Wolf for his delay when Barbara appeared in Ursel's room. Erasmus had played with her, too, when he was a boy, and they shared a treasure of memories of the fairest portion of life.

When Wolf at last returned and Barbara gave him her hand, Erasmus envied him the affectionate confidence with which it was done. She was charged with the warmest messages from her father to the knight, and conscientiously delivered them. The old gentleman's companion had advised starting that evening, because experience taught that, on a long ride, it was better for man and beast to spend the night outside the city.

They were to put up at the excellent tavern in Winzer, an hour's journey from Ratisbon, and continue the ride from that point.

Wolf knew that many couriers did the same thing, in order to avoid delay at the gate, and only asked whom her father had chosen for a companion.

"A young nobleman who was here as a recruiting officer," replied Barbara curtly.

She had not heard until the last moment whom her father had selected, and had only seen Pyramus Kogel again while the captain's groom was buckling his knapsack upon the saddle. He had ridden to the house, and while she gazed past him, as though an invisible cap concealed him from her eyes, he asked whether she had no wish concerning her father at heart.

"That some one else was to accompany him," came her sharp reply.

Then, before the captain put his foot into the stirrup, she threw her arms around the old man's neck, kissed him tenderly, and uttered loving wishes for him to take with him on his way.

Her father, deeply moved, at last swung himself into the saddle, commending her to the protection of the gracious Virgin. It was not wholly easy for him to part with her, but the prospect of riding out into

the world with a full purse, highly honoured by his imperial master, gratified the old adventure-loving heart so much that he could feel no genuine sympathy. Too honest to feign an emotion which he did not experience, he behaved accordingly; and, besides, he was sure of leaving his child in the best care as in her earlier years, when, glad to leave the dull city, business, and his arrogant, never-satisfied wife behind, he had gone with a light heart to war.

While pressing the horse's flanks between his legs and forcing the spirited animal, which went round and round with him in a circle, to obedience, he waved his new travelling hat; but Barbara, meanwhile, was thinking that he could only leave her with his mind thus free from care because she was deceiving him, and, as her eyes rested on her father's wounded limb projecting stiffly into the air, bitter grief overwhelmed her.

How often the old wounds caused him pain! Other little infirmities, too, tortured him. Who would bind them up on the journey? who would give him the medicine which afforded relief?

Then pity affected her more deeply than ever before, and it was with difficulty that she forced back the rising tears. Her father might perhaps have noticed them, for one groom carried a torch, and the one-eyed maid's lantern was shining directly into her face.

But while she was struggling not to weep aloud, emotion and anxiety for the old man who, through her fault, would be exposed to so much danger, extorted the cry: "Take care of him, Herr Pyramus! I will be grateful to you."

"That shall be a promise, lovely, ungracious maiden," the recruiting officer quickly answered. But the old man was already waving his hat again, his horse dashed upon the Haidplatz at a gallop, and his companion, with gallant bearing, followed.

Barbara had then gone back into the house, and the maid-servant lighted her upstairs.

It had become perfectly dark in her rooms, and the solitude and silence there oppressed her like a hundredweight burden. Besides, terrible thoughts had assailed her, showing her herself in want and shame, despised, disdained, begging for a morsel of bread, and her father under his fallen horse, on his lonely, couch of pain, in his coffin.

Then her stay in her lonely rooms seemed unendurable. She would have lost her reason ere Quijada came at midnight to conduct her for a short time to the Golden Cross. She could not remain long with her lover, because the servants were obliged to be up early in the morning on account of the regent's departure.

With Ursel she would be protected from the terrors of solitude, for, besides the old woman's voice, a man's tones also reached her through the open window. It was probably the companion of her childhood. In his society she would most speedily regain her lost peace of mind.

In his place she had at first found only Erasmus Eckhart.

The strong, bold boy had become a fine-looking man.

A certain gravity of demeanour had early taken possession of him, and while his close-shut lips showed his ability to cling tenaciously to a resolution, his bright eyes sparkled with the glow of enthusiasm.

Barbara could believe in this young man's capacity for earnest, lofty aspiration, and for that very reason it had aroused special displeasure in her mind when he gaily recalled the foolish pranks, far better suited to a boy, into which as a child she had often allowed herself to be hurried.

She felt as if, in doing so, he was showing her a lack of respect which he would scarcely have ventured toward a young lady whom he esteemed, and the petted singer, whom no less a personage than the Emperor Charles deemed worthy of his love, was unwilling to tolerate such levity from so young a man.

She made no claim to reverence, but she expected admiration and the recognition of being an unusual person, who was great in her own way.

For the sake of the monarch who raised her to his side, she owed it to herself to show, even in her outward bearing, that she did not stand too far below him in aristocratic dignity.

She succeeded in this admirably during the conversation on music and singing which she carried on with Erasmus.

When she at last desired to return home, Wolf accompanied her up the stairs, informed her of his conversation with the confessor, and at the same time warned her against incautious visits to the Hiltners so long as the Emperor held his court in Ratisbon.

To have fallen under suspicion of heresy would have been the last thing Barbara expected, and she called it foolish, nay, ridiculous. But, ere she clasped Wolf's hand in farewell, she promised to show the almoner at the first opportunity upon how false a trail he had come.

CHAPTER XXII.

When Wolf went back to Erasmus the latter assured his friend that he had met no maiden in Ratisbon who, to rare gifts, united the dignity which he had hitherto admired only in the ladies whom he had met at the court of the Elector of Saxony. His sparkling eyes flashed more brightly as he spoke, and, like a blushing girl, he confessed to his friend that Jungfrau Blomberg's promise to sing one of his own compositions to him made him a happy man.

Barbara's conduct had made the repressed fire of love blaze up anew in Wolf.

Now, for the first time, the woman he loved fully and entirely fulfilled the ideal which he had formed of the "queen" of his heart.

Was it the sad separation from him, the taking leave of her father, or her new love, which was bestowed on a man whom he also esteemed, that impressed upon her nature the stamp of a nobility which beseemed her as well as it suited her aristocratic beauty?

Never had it appeared to him so utterly impossible that he could yield her to another without resistance. Perhaps the man chosen by such a jewel was more worthy than he, but no one's love could surpass his in strength and fervour. She had tested it, and he need no longer call himself an insignificant suitor; for, if he gained possession of the living which Don Luis had ready for him, if he obtained a high position in Valladolid—But his friend gave him no time to pursue such thoughts further, for, while Barbara shortly after midnight stole down the stairs like a criminal, and Quijada conducted her to her imperial lover, Erasmus began to press him with demands which he was obliged to reject.

The Wittenberg master of arts, ever since his first meeting with his friend, had been on the point of asking the question how he, who had obtained in the school of poets an insight into the pure word of God, could prevail upon himself to continue to wear the chains of Rome and remain a Catholic.

Wolf had expected this query, and, while he filled his companion's goblet with the good Wurzburg wine which Ursula provided, he begged him not to bring religion into their conversation.

The young Wittenberg theologian, however, had come for the express purpose of discussing it with his friend.

Religion, he asserted in the fervid manner characteristic of him, was in these times the axis around which turned the inner life of the world and every individual. He himself had resolved to live for the object for whose sake it was worth while to die. He knew the great perils which would be associated with it for one of his warlike temperament, but he had become, by the divine summons, an evangelical theologian, a combatant for the liberation of the slaves sighing under the tyranny of Rome. A serious conversation with a friend who was a German and resisted yielding to a movement of the spirit which was kindling the inmost depths of the German nature, thoughts, and feelings, and was destined to heal the woes of the German nation and preserve it from the basest abuse, would be to him inconceivable.

Wolf interrupted this avowal with the assurance that he must nevertheless decline a religious discussion with him, for the weapons they would use were too different. Erasmus, as a theologian, was deeply versed in the Protestant faith, while he professed Catholicism merely as a consequence of his birth and with a layman's understanding and knowledge. Yet he would not shun the conflict if his hands were not bound by the most sacred of oaths. Then he turned to the past, and while he himself, as it were, lived through for the second time the most affecting moment in his existence, he transported his friend to his dead mother's sick-bed.

In vivid language he described how the devout widow and nun implored her son to resist like a rock

in the sea the assault of the new heretical ideas, that the thousands of prayers which she had uttered for him, for his soul, and his father's, might not be vain.

Then Wolf confessed that just at that time, as a pupil in the school of poets, he had come under the influence of the scholar Naevius, whose evangelical views Erasmus knew, and related how difficult it had been for him to take the oath which, nevertheless, now that he had once sworn it, he would keep, even though life and his own intelligence would not have taught him to prefer the old faith to every new doctrine, whether it emanated from Luther, from Calvin, or from Zwingli.

For a short time Erasmus found no answer to this statement, and Wolf's old nurse, who herself clung to the Protestants from complete conviction, and had listened attentively to his words, urged her young co-religionist, by all sorts of signs, to respect his friend's decision.

The confession of his schoolmate had not been entirely without effect upon the young theologian. The name of "mother" also filled him with reverence.

True, his birth had cost his own mother her life, but he had long possessed a distinct idea of her nature and being, and had given her precisely the same position which, in the early days of his school life, the Virgin Mary had occupied.

To induce another to break a vow made to his mother would have been sinful. But a brief reflection changed his mind.

Were there not circumstances in which the Bible itself commanded a man to leave father and mother? Had not Jesus Christ made the surrender of every old relation and the following after him the duty of those who were to become his disciples? What was the meaning of the words the Saviour had uttered to his august mother, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" except it was commanded to turn even from the mother when religion was at stake?

Many another passage of Scripture had strengthened the courage of the young Bible student when at last, with a look of intelligence, he pledged Wolf, and remarking, "How could I venture the attempt to lead you to break so sacred an oath?" instantly brought forward every plea that a son who, in religious matters, followed a different path from his mother could allege in his justification.

A short time before, in Brussels, Wolf had seen a superior of the new Society of Jesus, whose members were now appearing everywhere as defenders of the violently assailed papacy, seek to win back to Catholicism the son of evangelical parents with the very same arguments. He told his friend this, and also expressed the belief that the Jesuit, too, had spoken in good faith.

Erasmus shrugged his shoulders, saying "Doubtless there are many mansions in our Father's house, but who will blame us if we left the dilapidated old one, where our liberty was restricted and our consciences were burdened, and preferred the new one, in which man is subject to no other mortal, but only to the plain words of the Bible and to the judge in his own breast? If we prefer this mansion, which stands open to every one whose heart the old one oppresses, to the ruinous one of former days——"

"Yet," interrupted Wolf, "you must say to yourselves that you leave behind in the old one much which the new one lacks, no matter with how many good things you may equip it. The history of our religion and its development does not belong to your new home—only to the old one."

"We stand upon it as every newer thing rests on the older," replied Erasmus eagerly. "What we cast aside and refuse to take into the new home with us is not the holy faith, but merely its deformity, abasement, and falsification."

"Call it so," replied Wolf calmly. "I have heard others name and interpret differently what you probably have in mind while using these harsh epithets. But is it not the old house, and that alone, in which the martyrs shed their blood for Christianity? Where did it fulfil its lofty task of saturating the heart of mankind with love, softening the customs of rude pagans, clearing away forests, transforming barren wastes into cultivated fields, planting the cross on chapels and churches, summoning men with the consecrated voice of the bell to the sermon which proclaims love and peace? Where did it open the doors of the school which prepares the intellect to satisfy its true destiny, and first qualifies man to become the image of God? By the old mansion this country, covered with marshes, moors; and impenetrable forests, was rendered what it now is; from it proceeded that fostering of science and the arts of which as yet I have seen little in your circles."

"Give us time," cried the theologian, "and perhaps in our home their flowering will attain an unsurpassed richness of development. With what loose bonds the humanists are still united to you!"

"And the finest intellect of all, the great scholar whose name you bear, though he deemed many

things in our old home deserving of improvement, remained with us until his death. Jesus Christ is one, and so his Church must also remain. The only question is, What the Saviour still is to you Protestants, what he is to you, my friend?"

"Before how many saints, and many another whom your Church desires to honour, do you bow the knee?" Erasmus fervidly answered; "but we do so only to the august Trinity. And do you wish to know what Jesus Christ, the Son, is to me? All, and more than all, is the answer; I live and breathe in my Saviour Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and throughout eternity."

The young theologian raised his sparkling eyes heavenward as he spoke, and continued: "Our doctrine is founded on him, his word, his love alone; and who among the enthusiastic heralds of Christianity in ancient times grasped faith in him with warmer sincerity than the very Martin Luther whom you would have led to the stake had not the Emperor Charles's plighted word been dearer to him than the approval of Rome? Oh, my friend, our young faith can also show its martyrs. Think of the Bohemian John Huss and the true Christians who, in the Netherlands and Spain, were burned at the stake and bled upon the scaffold because they read the Bible, the Word of God and their Saviour, and would rather die than deny it. If it should come to the worst, thousands here would also be ready to ascend the funeral pyre, and I at their head. If war is declared now, the Emperor Charles will gain the victory; and if he does not wish to withdraw in earnest from Romish influences, who can tell what will then await us Protestants? But I am not anxious about what may come. We German citizens, who are accustomed to guide our own destinies and maintain the system of government we arranged for ourselves, who built by our own strength our solid, comfortable, gable-roofed houses and noble, towering cathedrals, will also independently maintain the life of our minds and our souls. Rome, with her legions of priests, claimed the right not only to interfere in our civil life, but also to intrude into our houses, our married lives, and our nurseries. What could she not decide for the individual by virtue of the power she arrogates to bind and to loose, to forgive sins, and to open or to close the door of heaven for the dying? What she has done with the Church's gifts of grace we know.

"There is a deep, beautiful meaning underlying this idea. But it has degenerated into a base traffic in indulgences. We have sincere natures. For a long time we believed that salvation is gained by works—gifts to the Church, fasts, scourgings, seclusion from the world, self-confinement in a cell—and our wealth went to Rome. Rarely do we look vainly in the most beautiful sites on mountain or by river for a monastery! But at last the sound sense of Germany rebelled, and when Luther saw in Rome poor sufferers from gout and cripples ascending the stairs of the Lateran on their knees, a voice within cried out to him the great 'sola fide' on which our faith is founded. On it alone, on devotion to Jesus Christ, depends our salvation."

"Then," asked Wolf, "you boldly deny any saving power to good works?"

"Yes," was the firm reply, "so far as they do not proceed from faith."

"As if the Church did not impose the same demand!" replied Wolf in a more animated tone. "True, base wrong has been done in regard to the sale of indulgences, but at the Council of Trent opposition will be made to it. No estimable priest holds the belief that money can atone for a sin or win the mercy of Heaven. With us also sincere repentance or devout faith must accompany the gift, the fasting, and whatever else the believer imposes upon himself here below. Man is so constituted that the only things which make a deep impression are those that the body also feels. The teacher's blow has a greater effect than his words, a gift produces more willingness than an entreaty, and the tendency toward asceticism and penance is genuinely Christian, and belongs to many a people of a different faith. Your Erasmus said that his heart was Catholic, but his stomach desired to be Protestant. You have an easier task than we."

"On the contrary," the young theologian burst forth. "It is mere child's play for you to obtain forgiveness by acts which really do not cut deeply into the flesh; but if one of us errs, how hard must be the conflict in his own breast ere he attains the conviction that his guilt is expiated by deep repentance and better deeds!"

"I can answer for that," here interposed old Ursel, who from her arm-chair had listened to the conversation between the two with intense interest.

"Good heavens! One went forth from the confessional as pure as a white dove after absolution had been received and the penance performed; but now that I belong to the Protestants, it is hard to reach a perfect understanding with the dear Saviour and one's self."

"And ought that to redound to the discredit of my faith?" asked Wolf. "So far as I have learned to know men, the majority, at least, will not hasten to attain our Ursel's complete understanding with one's self. I should even fear that there are many among you who no longer feel a desire to heed little

sins and their forgiveness——"

Here Ursel again interrupted him with an exclamation of dissent, accompanied by a gesture of denial from her thin old hand; but Wolf glanced at the clock which the precentor had received as a testimonial of affection from the members of the cathedral choir, which he had led for years.

It was already half past one, and for the sake of Ursel, who was still obliged to take care of herself, he urged departure, adding gaily that he had not the ability to "defend himself against two." Erasmus, too, was surprised to find it so late, and, after shaking hands with the old woman and promising to visit her soon again, seized his cap. Wolf accompanied him.

The May night was sultry, and the air in the low room had been hot and oppressive.

He would gladly have dropped the useless discussion, but Erasmus's heart was set upon winning his schoolmate to the doctrine which he believed with his whole soul. He toiled with the utmost zeal, but during their nocturnal walk also he failed to convince his opponent. Both were true to their religion. Erasmus saw in his faith the return to the pure teachings of Christ and the liberation of the human soul from ancient fetters; Wolf, who had had them pointed out to him at school by a Protestant teacher, by no means denied the abuses that had crept into his, but he clung with warm love to Holy Church, which offered his soul an abundance of what it needed.

His art certainly also owed to her its best development—from the inexhaustible spring of faith which is formed from thousands of rivulets and tributaries in the holy domain of the Catholic Church, and in it alone, the most sublime of all material flowed to the musician, and not to him only, but to the artist, the architect, and the sculptor. The fullest stream—he was well aware of it—came from ancient pagan times, but from whatever sources the spring was fed, the Church had understood how to assimilate, preserve, and sanctify it.

Erasmus listened silently while Wolf eagerly made these statements; but when the latter closed with the declaration that the evangelical faith would never attain the same power of elevating hearts, he interrupted the knight with the exclamation, "We shall have to wait for that!"

Luther, he went on, had given the most powerful encouragement to music, and the German Protestant composers even now were not so very far behind the Netherland ones. The Catholic Church could no longer claim the great Albrecht Durer, and, if art ceased to create images of the saints, with which the childish minds of the common people practised idolatry, so much the better. The Infinite and Eternal was no subject for the artist. The humanization of God only belittled his infinite and illimitable nature. Earthly life offered art material enough. Man himself would be the worthiest model for imitation, and perhaps no earlier epoch had created handsomer likenesses of men and women than would now be produced by evangelical artists.

To their own surprise, during this conversation they had reached the Hiltner house, and Erasmus invited his friend to come to his room and over a glass of wine answer him, as he had had the last word. But Wolf had already drunk at his own home more of the fiery Wurzburg from the precentor's cellar than usual. Besides, much as he still had to say in reply to Erasmus, the sensible young man deemed it advisable to avoid the syndic's house for the present. The confessor's suspicion had been aroused, and De Soto was a Dominican, who certainly did not stand far from the Holy Inquisition.

Therefore while Erasmus, with burning head and great excitement, was still urging his friend to come in, Wolf unexpectedly bade him a hasty and resolute farewell.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Wolf left the Hiltner house behind him with the feeling that he had upheld the cause of his Church against the learned opponent to the best of his ability, and had not been defeated. Yet he was not entirely satisfied. In former years he had read the Hutten dialogues, and, though he disapproved of their assaults upon the Holy Father in Rome, he had warmly sympathized with the fiery knight's love for his native land.

Far as, at the court of Charles, the German ranked below the Netherlander, the Spaniard, and the Italian, Wolf was proud of being a German, and it vexed him that he had not at least made the attempt to

repel the theologian's charge that the Catholic, to whom the authority of Rome was the highest, would be inferior to the Protestant in patriotism.

But he would have succeeded no better in convincing Erasmus than the learned theologians who, at the Emperor's instance, had held an earnest religious discussion in Ratisbon a short time before, had succeeded in arriving at even a remote understanding.

As he reached the Haidplatz new questions of closer interest were casting these of supreme importance into the shade.

He was to enter his home directly, and then the woman whom he loved would rest above him, and alone, unwatched, and unguarded, perhaps dream of another.

Who was the man for whose sake she withdrew from him the heart to whose possession he had the best and at any rate the oldest right?

Certainly not Baron Malfalconnet.

Neither could he believe it to be Peter Schlumperger or young Crafft.

Yet perhaps the fortunate man belonged to the court. If that was the case, how easy would the game now be made for him with the girl, who was guarded by no faithful eye!

His heart throbbed faster as he entered Red Cock Street.

The moon was still in the cloudless, starry sky, shining with her calm, silver radiance upon one side of the street. Barbara's bow-window was touched by it, and—what did it mean?—a small lamp must still be burning in her room, for the window was illuminated, though but dimly. Perhaps she had kept the light because she felt timid in her lonely chamber. Now Wolf crossed obliquely toward his house.

Just at that moment he saw the tall figure of a man.

What was he doing there at this hour? Was it a thief or a burglar? There was no lack of evil-disposed folk in this time of want.

Wolf still wore his court costume, and the short dress sword which belonged to it hung in its sheath.

His heart beat quicker as he loosed the blade and advanced toward the suspicious night-bird.

Just then he saw the other calmly turn the big key and take it out of the door.

That could be no thief! No, certainly not!

It was a gentleman of tall stature, whose aristocratic figure and Spanish court costume were partially covered by a long cloak.

There was no doubt! Wolf could not be mistaken, for, while the former was putting the key in his pocket, the mantle had slipped from one shoulder.

"Malfalconnet," muttered Wolf, grasping the hilt of his short sword more firmly.

But at the same moment the moonlight showed him the Spaniard's face. A chill ran through his frame, followed by a feverish heat, for the nocturnal intruder into his house was not the baron, but Quijada, the noble Don Luis, his patron, who had just been lauding to the skies the virtues, the beauty, the goodness of the peerless Dona Magdalena de Ulloa, his glorious wife. He had intended to send Wolf, the friend and housemate of his victim, to Spain to become the instructor of his deceived wife.

He saw through the game, and it seemed as if he could not help laughing aloud in delight at his own penetration, in rage and despair.

How clearly, and yet how coarsely and brutally, it had all been planned!

The infamous scoundrel, who possessed so much influence over the Emperor, had first sent old Blomberg away; now he, Wolf, was to follow, that no one might stand between the game and the pursuer.

Barbara's lover must be Quijada. For the Spaniard's sake she had given him up, and perhaps even played the part of adviser in this abominable business. It must be so, for who else could know what she was to him?

Yet no! He himself had aided the guilty passion of this couple, for how warmly he had sung Barbara's

praises to Don Luis! And then in how many a conversation with Barbara had Quijada's name been mentioned, and he had always spoken of this man with warm regard. Hence her remark that he himself deemed her lover worthy of esteem.

In a few seconds these thoughts darted through his heated brain with the speed of lightning.

The street began to whirl around him, and a deep loathing of the base traitor, a boundless hatred of the destroyer of his happiness, of the betrayed girl, and the life which led through such abysses overpowered the deluded man.

The infamous girl had just left her lover's arms, her kiss was doubtless still glowing on his faithless lips!

Wolf groaned aloud like a sorely stricken deer, and for a moment it seemed to him that the best course would be to put an end to his own ruined life. But rage and hate urged him upon another victim, and, unable to control himself, he rushed with uplifted blade upon the hypocritical seducer.

This utterly unexpected attack did not give Don Luis time to draw his sword, but, with ready presence of mind, he forced the hand wielding the weapon aside, and, while he felt a sharp pain in his left arm, seized the assassin with his right hand, swung his light figure upward, and with the strength and skill peculiar to him hurled it with all his might upon the stone steps of the dwelling.

Not a single word, only a savage cry of fury, followed by a piteous moan, had escaped Wolf's lips during this swift deed of violence.

The Spaniard scornfully thrust aside with his foot the inert body lying on the ground. His arrogance did not deem it worth while to ascertain what had befallen the murderer who had been punished. He had more important things to do, for his own blood was flowing in a hot, full stream over his hand.

Accustomed in bull fighting and in battle to maintain his calmness and caution even in the most difficult situation, he said to himself that, if his wound should be connected with the murder before this house it would betray his master's secret to the Ratisbon courts of justice, and thereby to the public.

He had heard the skull of the lurking thief strike against the granite steps of the house. So the dark, motionless mass before him was probably a corpse. There was no hurry about that, but his own condition compelled him to take care of himself. Entering the shadow of a tall building opposite the dwelling, he assured himself that the street was entirely empty, and then, drawing the aching arm from the doublet, he examined the wound as well as the dim light would permit. It was deep, it is true, but the robber's weapon appeared merely to have cut the flesh.

A jerk, and Quijada had stripped the ruff from his neck, and, as this did not suffice, he cut with his sword blade and his teeth a piece of fine linen from his shirt.

This would do for the first bandage. The skilful hand which, in battle, had aided many a bleeding comrade soon completed the task.

Then he flung his uninjured cloak around him again, and turned toward the lifeless body at the foot of the steps.

There lay the murderer's weapon—a delicately fashioned short dress sword, with an ivory hilt, not the knife of a common highwayman.

That was the reason the wound was so narrow.

But who had sought his life with this dainty steel blade?

There were few at court who envied him the Emperor's favour—his office often compelled him to deny even persons of higher rank access to his Majesty; but he had never—this he could assure himself—treated even men of humble station harshly or unjustly. If he had offended any one by haughty self-confidence, it had been unintentional. He was not to blame for the manner natural to the Castilian.

Besides, he had little time for reflection; scarcely had he hastily wiped off with the little cloak that lay beside him the blood which covered the face of the prostrate man than he started back in horror, for the person who had sought his life was the very one whom he had honoured with his highest confidence, and had chosen as the teacher and companion of the wife who was dearer than his own existence.

Some cruel misunderstanding, some pitiable mistake must have been at work here, and he came upon the right trail speedily enough.

The hapless knight loved Barbara, and had taken him, Luis, for her betrayer and nocturnal visitor.

Fatal error of the Emperor, whose lamentable consequences were already beginning!

With sincere repentance for his needlessly violent act of defence, he bent over the severely injured man. His heart was still beating, but doubtless on account of the great loss of blood—it throbbed with alarming weakness. Don Luis also soon found a wound in the skull, which appeared to be fractured.

If speedy aid was not rendered, the unfortunate man was lost.

Quijada laid Wolf's head quickly and carefully on his cloak, which he placed in a roll beneath it, and then hurried to the Red Cock, where one servant was just opening the door and another was leading out two horses. The latter was Jan, Wolf's Netherland servant, who wanted to water the animals before starting on the journey.

He instantly recognised the nobleman; but the latter had resolved to keep the poor musician's attack a secret.

As Jan bowed respectfully to him, he ordered him and the servant of the Red Cock to leave everything and follow him. He had found a dead man in the street.

A few minutes after the three were standing at the steps of the house, before the object of their solicitude.

The groom of the Red Cock, who still held a lantern in his hand, though dawn was already beginning to glimmer faintly in the east, threw the light upon the face of the bleeding form, and Jan exclaimed in grief and terror that the injured man was his master.

The Brabant lad wailed, and the German, who had known the "precentor cavalier" all his life, joined in the lamentation; but Quijada induced them both to think only of saving the wounded nobleman.

The old groom, with savage imprecations upon the scoundrels who now infested their quiet streets, raised the wounded man's head and told Jan to lift his feet. Both were familiar with the house, and, while the servants bore Wolf up the narrow stairs, the proud Spanish grandee lighted their way with the lantern, supporting the wounded man's injured head, with his free hand. At the door of the young knight's rooms he told the servants to attend to his needs, and then hurried back to the Golden Cross.

He found a great bustle prevailing there. Tilted wagons were being loaded with the regent's luggage, couriers and servants were rushing to and fro, and in the courtyard men were currying the horses which were to be ridden on the journey.

Don Luis paid no heed to all this, hastening first to the chapel to ask a young German chaplain to administer the sacrament to Sir Wolf Hartschwert, to whose house he hurriedly directed him. Then going swiftly to the third story, he waked Dr. Mathys, the Emperor's leech.

The portly physician rubbed his eyes angrily; but as soon as he learned for whom he was wanted and how serious was the injury, he showed the most praiseworthy haste and, with the attendant who carried his surgical instruments and medicines, was standing beside the sufferer's couch almost as soon as the wounded man.

The result of his examination was anything but gratifying.

He would gladly do all that his skill would permit for the knight, but in so serious a fracture of the skull only the special mercy of Heaven could preserve life.

Dr. Doll, the best physician in Ratisbon, assisted him with the bandaging, and old Ursel had suddenly recovered her lost strength.

When the maid-servant asked timidly if she should not call Wawerl down from upstairs, she shrugged her shoulders with a movement which the one-eyed girl understood, and which signified anything but acceptance of the proposal.

Yet Barbara would perhaps have rendered most efficacious assistance.

True, she was still sleeping the sound slumber of wearied youth. Directly after her return from her imperial lover, she had gone to rest in the little chamber behind the bow-windowed room. It looked out upon the courtyard, and was protected from the noise of the street. When she heard sounds in the house, she thought that old Ursel was ill and they were summoning the doctor. For a moment she felt an impulse to rise and go downstairs, but she did not like to leave her warm bed, and Wolf would manage without her. She had always lacked patience to wait upon the sick, and Ursel had grown so

harsh and disagreeable since she joined the Protestants. Finally, Barbara had brought home exquisite recollections of her illustrious lover, which must not be clouded by the suffering of the old woman, whom, besides, she could rarely please.

She did not learn what had happened until she went to mass, and then it weighed heavily upon her heart that she had not given Wolf her assistance, especially as she suspected, with strange certainty, that she herself was connected with this terrible misfortune.

Now—ah, how gladly!—she would have helped Ursel with the nursing, but she forbade her to enter the sick-room. The most absolute quiet must reign there. No one was permitted to cross the threshold except herself and an elderly nun, whom the Clares had sent for the sake of the wounded man's dead mother. A Dominican also soon came, whom the old woman could not shut out because he was despatched by the Queen of Hungary, and the violinist Massi, whom she gladly welcomed as a good friend of her Wolf. He proved himself loyal, and devoted every leisure hour of the night to the sufferer. Barbara knocked at the door very often, but Ursel persisted in refusing admittance. She knew that the girl had rejected her darling's proposal, and it was a satisfaction to her when, toward noon, the former told her that she was about to leave the house to go to Prebrunn.

A cart would convey her luggage, but it would be only lightly laden. Fran Lerch went with the baggage.

An hour later Barbara herself moved into the little castle, which had been refurnished for her. Mounted upon a spirited bay horse from her Prebrunn stables, she rode beside the Marquise de Leria's huge litter to her new home.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The very harsh execrations which the regent bestowed upon pleasant Ratisbon when she learned what had befallen Sir Wolf Hartschwert were better suited to the huntress than to the queen and sister of a mighty emperor.

Murderous knaves who, in the heart of the city, close to the imperial precincts, endangered the lives of peaceful people at night! It was unprecedented, and yet evidently only a result of the heretical abuses.

She had sprung into the saddle—she always travelled on horseback—in the worst possible mood, but had urged all who were near the Emperor Charles's person, and also the almoner Pedro de Soto, to remember the wounded man and do everything possible to aid his recovery.

She did not mention Barbara, even by a single word, in her farewell to her royal brother.

The latter had intended to accompany her a portion of the way, but a great quantity of work—not least in consequence of the loss of time occasioned by the new love life—had accumulated, and he therefore preferred to take leave of his sister in the courtyard of the Golden Cross.

There, with his assistance, she mounted her horse.

Quijada, who usually rendered her this service, stood aloof, silent and pale. The regent had noticed it, and attributed his appearance to grief for her departure. No one at court held a higher place in her regard, and it pleased her that he, too, found it so hard to do without her.

As her horse started, her last salute was to the monarch and to him.

Malfalconnet, whose eyes were everywhere, noticed it, and whispered to the Marquise de Leria, who was standing beside him: "Either Don Luis would do well to intrust himself to our Mathys's treatment, or this gentleman is an accomplished actor, or our most gracious lady has tampered with the fidelity of this most loyal husband, and the paternosters and pilgrimages of Dona Magdalena de Ulloa have been vain."

A few minutes after, the Emperor Charles was sitting at the writing table examining, with the Bishop of Arras, a mountain of reports and documents. Two or three hours elapsed ere he received ambassadors and gave audiences, and during that time Quijada was not needed by his royal master.

He had previously had leisure only to provide for the wounded man, cleanse himself from blood, change his dress, bid Queen Mary farewell, and bandage the hurt afresh. He had done this with his own hands because he distrusted the reticence of his extremely skilful but heedless French valet.

When he returned to his lodgings, Master Adrian followed him, and modestly, yet with all the warmth of affection which he felt for this true friend of his master, entreated him to permit him to speak freely. He had perceived, not only by the pallor of Don Luis's cheeks, but other signs, that he was suffering, and in the name of his wife, who, when her husband was summoned from her side, had urged him with the earnestness of anxious love to watch over him, begged him not to force himself beyond his strength to perform his service, if his sufferings corresponded with his appearance.

Don Luis looked sharply into the faithful face, and what he found there induced him to admit that he was concealing a wound. Adrian silently beckoned to him, and led the way into his own room, where he entreated Don Luis to show him the injury. When he saw it, his by no means mobile features blanched.

He knew that Quijada had accompanied Barbara home that night. On this errand, he was sure of it, Don Luis must have received this serious wound at the same time as Wolf, or even obtained it from the young knight himself. Besides, he felt certain that the object of the Emperor's love was connected with both disasters. Yet not a word which could have resembled a question escaped his beardless lips while he examined, sewed, and bandaged the deep sword thrust with the skill and care of a surgeon.

When he had finished his task, he thanked Don Luis for the confidence reposed in him.

Quijada pressed his hand gratefully, and begged him to do his best that no one, not even the Emperor, should learn anything about this vexatious mischance. Then, not from curiosity, for grave motives, he desired to know what relations existed between Sir Wolf Hartschwert and Barbara.

The answer was somewhat delayed, for Wolf had won the affection of the influential valet, and what Master Adrian had learned concerning the young knight's personal affairs from himself, his own wife in Brussels, and the violinist Massi, he would have confided to no one on earth except Quijada, and perhaps not even to him had he not accompanied his inquiry with the assurance that what he intrusted to him would remain buried in his soul, and be used only for Wolf's advantage.

This promise loosed the cautious valet's tongue. He knew his man, and, when Don Luis also desired to learn whether the knight had already discovered that Barbara was now the Emperor's love, he thought he could answer in the negative.

What he had heard of Wolf's relation to Barbara was only that the two had spent their early youth in the same house, that the knight loved the singer, but that she had rejected his suit.

This avowal appeared to satisfy Quijada, and it really did calm him. He now believed that Wolf had misjudged him, and, supposing that he was coming from a meeting with the girl he loved, had drawn his sword against him. The manner in which he had attempted to rid himself of the rival seemed criminal enough, yet the nocturnal attack had scarcely concerned him personally, and he would not condemn the man who was usually so calm and sensible without having heard him.

If Wolf lived—and he desired it from his heart—this act, which he appeared to have committed in a fit of blind jealousy, should do him no injury.

With a warm clasp of the hand, which united these two men more firmly than a long period of mutual intercourse, each went his way in quiet content.

In the afternoon Master Adrian was sent out to Prebrunn to announce to Barbara a visit from the Emperor after vespers.

Wolf, it is true, had told her many things about Adrian Dubois, and informed her how much pleasure he had had at Brussels in visiting him and his sensible, cheerful wife, how implicitly the Emperor trusted him, how faithfully he served him, how highly the ambassadors and the most aristocratic gentlemen esteemed him, and how great an advantage it had been to him, Wolf, to possess his friendship; yet she thought proper to treat the valet with the haughty reserve which beseeemed her as the Emperor's favourite, and which yesterday evening had won the approval of the Wittenberg theologian and of Wolf.

But Master Adrian appeared to take no notice of her manner, and performed his errand with businesslike composure.

The Emperor Charles wished to know how she liked her new home.

In reality she had found its beauty and comfort far beyond her expectations, had clapped her hands in

surprise when she was conducted by the marquise through the new abode, and, under the guidance of the house steward Steen, had been shown the kitchen, the stable, the four horses, and the garden. In her reception-room she found a lute and a harp of exquisitely beautiful workmanship, and a small Milan cabinet made of ebony inlaid with ivory, in which was a heavy casket bound with silver. The key had been given to her the evening before by the regent herself, and when Barbara opened it she discovered so many shining zecchins and ducats that a long time was occupied when she obeyed Fran Lerch's request to count them.

The dressmaker from the Grieb was already in her service, and had been a witness of her sincere delight and grateful pleasure. The second hour after their arrival she had helped her to employ Frau Lamperi, the maid whom the steward called the 'garde-robier', and had already been to the city herself to buy, for her fortunate "darling" costly but, on account of the approach of summer, light materials. But she had seen Master Adrian coming, and, while he was passing through the garden, gave her the advice by no means to praise what she found here, but to appear as though she had been accustomed to such surroundings, and found this and that not quite worthy of her, but needing addition and improvement.

At first Barbara had succeeded in assuming the airs of the spoiled lady, but when Adrian, with prosaic definiteness, asked for details, and she saw herself compelled to begin the game of dissimulation anew, it grew repugnant to her.

To her artist nature every restraint soon became irksome, especially so unpleasant a one, which was opposed to her character, and ere she was her self aware of it she was again the vivacious Wawerl, and frankly and freely expressed her pleasure in the beautiful new things she owed to her lover's kindness.

A smile, so faint and brief that Barbara did not perceive it, was hovering meanwhile around the valet's thin lips. The causes of this strange change of opinion and mood would have been sufficiently intelligible to him, even had he not perceived one of the reproving glances which Frau Lerch cast at Barbara.

She, too, had met one; but since she had once obeyed the impulse of her own nature, and felt content in doing so, she troubled herself no further about the monitor, and there was nothing in her new home which was not far more beautiful than what she had had in the precentor's modest house.

The marquise displeased her most deeply, and this also she plainly told Master Adrian, and begged him to inform his Majesty, with her dutiful greeting. His best gift was the precaution which he had taken that she should live apart from the old monkey.

The valet received this commission, like all the former ones, with a slight, grave bow.

On the whole, the experienced man was not ill-pleased with her, only it seemed to him strange that Barbara did not mention the serious misfortune which had befallen Wolf; yet she knew from his own lips that he loved the knight, and had learned that the latter's life was in serious danger.

So he turned the conversation to his young friend, and in an instant a remarkable change took place in Barbara. Wolf's sorrowful fate and severe wound had weighed heavily upon her heart, but what the present brought was so novel and varied that it had crowded the painful event, near as was the past to which it belonged, into the shadow.

She now desired to know who the murderer was who had attacked him, and cursed him with impetuous wrath. She thought it base and shameful that she had been denied access to his couch.

Poor, poor Wolf!

Of all the men on earth, he was the best! Meanwhile tears of genuine compassion flowed from her eyes and, with passionate vehemence, she declared that no power in the world should keep her from him. The mere sound of her voice, she knew, would be a cordial to him.

So Master Adrian had not been mistaken.

It was not only in song that she was capable of deep feeling, and the love which had seized the Emperor Charles so late, and yet so powerfully, had not gone far astray.

He could scarcely have bestowed it upon a more beautiful woman. While pleasure in her new surroundings held sway over her, it was a real pleasure to see her face. But this creature, so richly gifted by the grace of God, was not suited for his modest young friend; this had become especially evident to him when an almost evil expression escaped her lips while she emptied the vial of her wrath upon Wolf's murderer.

If she deemed herself worthy of his master's love, she would not lack Adrian's protection, which was the more effective the more persistently he refrained from asking of the Emperor's favour even the slightest thing for himself, his wife, or others; that the time would come when she would need it, he was certain.

No one knew the Emperor so well as he, and he saw before him the cliffs which threatened to shatter the little ship of this love bond. Already an imprudent violation of his extreme sense of the dignity of majesty, or of the confidence which he bestowed upon her, might become fatal to it.

But, ardently as she might return his love, loyal and discreet as her conduct might be, there were other grave perils menacing the tie which united the Emperor to Barbara.

Charles was a man of action, of work, of fulfilment of duty. The moment that he perceived this love bond would impede his progress toward the lofty goals to which he aspired might easily mark the beginning of its end.

Now, in the midst of peace, such a result was scarcely to be feared; but if it came to fighting—and many a sign showed Adrian that war was not far distant—a great change would take place in his master's character; the general would assert his rights. Every other consideration would then be pitilessly thrust aside and, if Charles still remained loyal to his affection, he would have fallen under the spell of one of those great passions which defy every assault of time and circumstance and find an end only in death. But the sharp-sighted man could not believe in such love on his master's part; in his nature the claims of reason threw those of the heart too far into the shade. If Barbara was wise, her daily prayer should be for the maintenance of peace.

To speak of these fears to the care-free girl would have been cruel, but he could probably give her a useful hint as opportunity offered.

Accustomed to perform his duty silently and, where speech was necessary, to study the utmost brevity, he had not learned the art of clothing his thoughts in pleasing forms. So, without circumlocution, he whispered to Barbara the advice to send away Frau Lerch, who was not fit for her service, and as soon as possible to dismiss her entirely.

The girl flew into a rage, and no whisper or urgency from another, but her own unbridled, independent nature, which during continual struggle had been steeled to assert herself, in spite of her poverty, among the rich companions of her own rank, as well as the newly awakened haughty consciousness that now, as the object of the mightiest monarch's love, she was exalted far above the companions of her own rank—led her to rebuff the warning of the well-meaning man with a sharpness that it ill beseemed one so much younger to use toward the Emperor's gray-haired messenger.

The valet shrugged his shoulders compassionately, and his regular features, whose expression varied only under the influence of strong, deep feelings, distinctly betrayed how sincerely he lamented her conduct.

Barbara noticed it, and instantly remembered what Wolf had told her about him and his wife. She did not think of the influence which he exercised upon the Emperor and the service which he might render her, but all the more vividly of his steadfast, devoted loyalty, and what he was and had accomplished for the man whom she loved, and, seized with sincere repentance, obeying a powerful impulse, she held out her hand with frank cordiality just as he was already bowing in farewell. Adrian hesitated a moment.

What did this mean?

What accident was causing this new change of feeling in this April day of a girl?

But when her sparkling blue eyes gazed at him so brightly and at the same time so plainly showed that she knew she had wronged him, he clasped the hand, and his face again wore a friendly expression.

Then Barbara laughed in her bewitching, bell-like tones and, like a naughty child begging forgiveness for a trivial fault, asked him gaily not to take offence at her foolish arrogance. All the new things here had somewhat turned her silly brain. She knew how faithfully he served her Charles, and for that reason she could not help liking him already.

"If you have any cause to find fault with me," she concluded merrily, "out with it honestly." Then addressing Frau Lerch, not as though she were speaking to a servant, but to an older friend, she asked her to leave her alone with Herr Adrian a short time; but she insisted positively on having her own way when the dressmaker remarked that she did not know why, after the greatest secret of all had been

forced upon her, her discretion should be distrusted.

As soon as she had retired the valet entreated Barbara to beware of the advice of this woman, whose designs he saw perfectly. He, Adrian, would wish her to have a companion of nobler nature and more delicate perceptions.

But this warning seemed scarcely endurable to Barbara. Although she did not fly into a passion again, she asked in an irritated tone whether Adrian had been granted the power of looking into another's soul. What she perceived with absolute certainty in Frau Lerch, who, as her dead mother's maid, had tended her as a child, was great faithfulness and secrecy and the most skilful hands. Still, she promised to remember his well-meant counsel.

Adrian's warning always to consider what a position her lord occupied in the world, and to beware of crossing the border line which separated the monarch from his subjects, and even from those who were of the highest rank and dearest to him, was gratefully received, for she remembered the sharp rebuff which she had already experienced from her lover. It proved this excellent man's good will toward her, and her eyes fairly hung upon his lips as he informed her of some of his master's habits and peculiarities which she must regard. He warned her, with special earnestness, not to allow herself to be used by others to win favour or pardon for themselves or their kindred. She might perhaps find means for it later; now she would at once awaken in the extremely suspicious monarch doubt of her unselfishness.

This was certainly good advice, and Barbara confessed to the valet that the marquise had requested her at dinner that day to intercede for her unfortunate son, who, unluckily, had the misfortune to be misunderstood by the Emperor Charles. Master Adrian had expected something of the kind, for the lady in waiting had more than once urged him also to obtain his Majesty's pardon for this ruined profligate, the shame of his noble race. He had persistently refused this request, and now enjoined it upon Barbara to follow his example. Before leaving her, he undertook to send her tidings of Wolf's health now and then by the violinist Massi, as he had not leisure to do it himself. At the same time he earnestly entreated her to repress her wish to see the sufferer again, and to bear in mind that she could receive no visitor, take no step in this house or in the city, which would not be known in the Golden Cross.

Barbara passionately demanded to know the spy who was watching her, and whether she must beware specially of the marquise, her French maid, the Spanish priest who accompanied the old woman as her confessor, the garde-robier Lamperi, who nevertheless had a good face, or who else among the servants.

On this point, however, the valet would or could give no information. He knew only his master's nature. Just as he was better acquainted with every province than the most experienced governor, with every band of soldiers than the sergeant, so nothing escaped him which concerned the private lives of those whom he valued. It need not grieve her that he watched her so carefully. Her acts and conduct would not become a matter of indifference to him until he withdrew his confidence from her or his love grew cold.

The deep impression which this information made upon the girl surprised Adrian. While he was speaking her large eyes dilated more and more, and with hurried breathing she listened until he had finished. Then pressing both hands upon her temples, she frantically exclaimed: "But that is horrible! it is base and unworthy! I will not be a prisoner—! will not, can not bear it! My whole heart is his, and never belonged to any other; but, rather than be unable to take a step that is not watched, like the Sultan's female slaves, I will return to my father."

Here she hesitated; for the first time since she had entered Prebrunn she remembered the old man who for her sake had been sent out into the world. But she soon went on more calmly: "I even permitted my father to be taken from me and sent away, perhaps to death. I gave everything to my sovereign, and if he wants my life also," she continued with fresh emotion, "he may have it; but the existence of a caged bird!— that will destroy me."

Here the sensible man interrupted her with the assurance that no one, last of all his Majesty, thought of restricting her liberty more than was reasonable. She would be permitted to walk and to use her horses exactly as she pleased, only the object of her walks and rides must be one which she could mention to her royal lover without timidity.

Barbara, still with quickened breathing, then put the question how she could know this; and Adrian, with a significant smile, replied that her heart would tell her, and if it should ever err—of this he was certain—the Emperor Charles.

With these words he took leave of her to go, on behalf of his master, to the marquise, and Barbara

stood motionless for some time, gazing after him.

In the Golden Cross Quijada asked Adrian what he thought of the singer, and it was some time ere he answered deliberately: "If only I knew exactly myself, your lordship—I am only a plain man, who wishes every one the best future. Here I do so out of regard for his Majesty, Sir Wolf Hartschwert, and the inexperienced youth of this marvellously beautiful creature. But if you were to force me by the rack to form a definite opinion of her, I could not do it. The most favourable would not be too good, the reverse scarcely too severe. To reconcile such contrasts is beyond my power. She is certainly something unusual, that will fit no mould with which I am familiar."

"If you had a son," asked Don Luis, "would you receive her gladly as a daughter-in-law?"

A gesture of denial from the valet gave eloquent expression of his opinion; but Quijada went on in a tone of anxious inquiry: "Then what will she whom he loves be to the master whose happiness and peace are as dear to you as to me?"

Adrian started, and answered firmly: "For him, it seems to me, she will perhaps be the right one, for what power could she assert against his? And, besides, there is something in his Majesty, as well as in this girl, which distinguishes them from other mortals. What do I mean by that? I see and hear it, but I can neither exactly understand nor name it."

"That might be difficult even for a more adroit speaker," replied Quijada; "but I think I know to what you allude. You and I, Master Adrian, have hearts in our breasts, like thousands of other people, and in our heads what is termed common sense. In his Majesty something else is added. It seems as though he has at command a messenger from heaven who brings him thought and decisions."

"That's it!" exclaimed Adrian eagerly; "and whenever she raises her voice to sing, a second one stands by the side of this Barbara Blomberg."

"Only we do not yet know," observed Quijada anxiously, "whether this second one with the singer is a messenger from heaven, like his Majesty's, or an emissary of hell."

The valet shrugged his shoulders irresolutely, and said quietly: "How could I venture to express an opinion about so noble an art? But when I was listening to the hymn to the Virgin yesterday, it seemed as if an angel from heaven was singing from her lips."

"Let us hope that you may be right," replied the other. "But no matter! I think I know whence comes the invisible ally his Majesty has at his disposal. It is the Holy Ghost that sends him—there is no doubt of it! His control is visible everywhere. With miraculous power he urges him on in advance of all others, and even of himself. This becomes most distinctly perceptible in war."

"That is true," declared the valet, "and your lordship has surely hit the right clew. For"—he glanced cautiously around him and lowered his voice—"whenever I put on my master's armour I always feel how he is trembling—yes, trembling, your lordship. His face is livid, and the drops of perspiration on his brow are not due solely to the heat."

"And then," cried Quijada, his black eyes sparkling with a fiery light— "then in his agitation he scarcely knows what he is doing as I hold the stirrup for him. But when, once in his saddle, his divine companion descends to him, he dashes upon the foe like a whirlwind and, wherever he strikes, how the chips fly! The strongest succumb to his blows. 'Victory! victory!' men shout exultingly wherever he goes. Even in the last accursed Algerian defeat his helper was at his side; for, Adrian" —here he, too, lowered his voice—"without him and his wonderful power every living soul of us, down to the last boat and camp follower, would have been destroyed."

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Catholic, but his stomach desired to be Protestant (Erasmus)

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BARBARA BLOMBERG — VOLUME 05 ***

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