

The Truce of God eBook

The Truce of God by Mary Roberts Rinehart

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INTRODUCTION

"The Truce of God" by our American novelist and dramatist, George Henry Miles, is not only a romantic and interesting story, it recalls one of the most striking achievements of the Middle Ages.

After the tide of barbarian invasion, Goths and Vandals, Heruli, Burgundians and Franks had swept away the edifice of Roman civilization, had it not been for the regenerating influence of Christianity, another empire as cruel would have risen on the ruins of Rome. No other power would then have ruled but the sword. The sword was king, and received the worship of thousands. Now and then a ruler appeared like Theodoric, Charlemagne, the Lombard Luitprand, who used the sword on the whole for just and beneficent ends. And because these warrior kings, even in the midst of their conquests, brought some of the blessings of peace to their subject peoples, these peoples welcomed their sway. Peace was, then as now, one of the world's needs.

Although the eighth, ninth and succeeding century were not without their brighter sides and were not those totally Dark Ages they have been represented by the enemies of the Church, nevertheless, seeds of evil passions, which in spite of her endeavors the Church had been unable completely to stifle, lingered in the hearts of those strong-limbed, strong-passioned Teutonic races which had succeeded to the tasks and responsibilities of pagan Rome. Those races did not have Rome's organizing power. By force, it is true, in a great measure, but force intelligently applied, but also by patience, by an instinct for justice and for order, Rome had welded her vast empire into a coherent whole. Rome really, and effectively ruled. She had authority, she had prestige, she was respected and feared, until the fatal day when, for her vices and tyranny, she began to be hated. That day her fate was sealed.

The Teutonic races lacked the power of organization. They were strong and comparatively free from the vices of Rome; they had a rude sense of justice. But that very sense and instinct for that one essential of ordered life drove the individual to take the execution of the law and of justice into his own hands and to claim his rights at the point of the sword. The result can be easily imagined. The sword was never for a long time thrust back into the scabbard. Incessant wars, not at the bidding of the ruler, nor sanctioned by the voice of public authority or for the public welfare, but for private ends, for revenge, for greed and booty, were waged throughout the length and breadth of Europe.

The civil government, or the empty simulacrum that went under the name, seemed powerless, for the simple reason that the strong arm of either a Charlemagne or a Charles Martel too seldom appeared to check the culprits, or because the civil government itself only added fuel to the flame, by the encouragement it gave to license and violence by its own evil example.

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But society had to protect itself. Conscious of its danger, and that it was doomed to destruction, if some remedy were not found, it evolved in the tenth and the following century, not an absolutely efficacious remedy, but one which enabled it to pass in comparative safety that dangerous period and carried European civilization to the full glories of the age of Dante, St. Louis and the Angel of the Schools. The remedy was feudalism.

That institution has been misunderstood. It was called forth by special needs, and when the conditions which it met in an almost providential manner changed, it quietly passed away. But it rendered an important and never-to-be forgotten service to war-torn Europe. Feudalism can scarcely be called a complete and rounded system. For it was constantly undergoing modification. It was not the same north as south of the Loire. It was one thing on the west, and quite another on the east of the Rhine. In general it was, as Stubbs described it ("Constitutional History." Vol. 1, pp. 255, 256), "a regulated and fairly well graduated method of jurisdiction, based on land tenure, in which every lord, king, duke, earl or baron protected, judged, ruled, taxed the class next below him; ... in which private war, private coinage and private prisons took the place of the imperial institutions of power." Land, "the sacramental tie" then, "of all relations," and not money, was the chief wealth of those ages. For services rendered, therefore, fiefs or landed estates were the reward. Feudalism thus rested on a contract entered into by the nation represented by the king, which let out its lands to individuals who paid the rent not only by doing military service, but by rendering such services to the king as the king's courts might require. The bond was frequently extremely loose, and it was hard then to say which of the two was in reality the stronger, the feudal lord or the technically lower, but sometimes in reality stronger, vassal.

The feudal lord was bound to support his vassal, and in return, had a right to expect his help in the hour of danger. The feudal lord owed his vassals justice, protection, shelter and refuge. If certain privileges, claimed by the feudal lord, were onerous, the vassal was not without some guarantee that he would be shown fair play; for it was evident that unless in some way rights and obligations were fairly well balanced, and there was a fair return for service rendered, the whole system would soon crumble to pieces.

The "system," if it can be called one, was, as we have said, by no means perfect, but it bridged the historic gap which stretches between the fall of the Carolingian power and the full dawn of the Middle Ages. It saved Europe from anarchy. Its blessings cannot be denied. It helped to foster the love of independence, of self-government, of local institutions, of communal and municipal freedom. The vassal that lived under the shadows of the strong

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towers of a feudal lord did not look much further beyond, to the king in his palace or in his courts of justice, for protection. He found it closer at home. The vassal, moreover, began to think of his own rights and privileges, to value them and to ask that they be enforced. The idea of right and law, one of the most deeply engraved in the Christian conscience in the Middle Ages, grew and developed. The barons were the first to claim these rights; gradually the whole nation imitated them. Even when they claimed them, primarily for themselves, the whole nation participated sooner or later in their blessings. The Barons of Runnymede were fighting the battles of every ploughboy in England when they wrenched *Magna Charta* from King John.

Although many a feudal lord was a proud and hard-driving master, yet the vassal and the serf knew that there were limits which his lord dared not transgress; that the very spirit of his "caste", for such to a certain extent was the social rank to which the feudal lord belonged, would not tolerate any too flagrant a violation of his privileges. A bond of united interests was found between feudal noble and his vassal. They were found side by side in war; their larger interests were the same in peace. Loyalty, honor, fidelity took deep root in the society which they represented.

As the aristocracy of feudalism was founded, not on wealth or money, but on land tenure, one of the most stable titles to prestige and authority found in history, there was in the underlying concept of society in those days a feeling of stability and permanency, which for a time made feudalism, in spite of its flaws, a bulwark of order. It fostered even a strong family spirit. Baron, count or earl, behind the thick ramparts of his castle, lived a patriarchal life. He was, with his retainers and men-at-arms, his chaplains, to watch over his spiritual needs, his wife and children and vassals, dependent upon him for protection and safety, impelled by every sense of honor, duty and chivalry to make them feel that he was their sword and buckler. They were closely knit to him. There was a patriarchal bond between them. Family spirit grew strong and, under the teaching of the Church, it became pure.

Feudalism had its flaws. It was strictly an aristocratic institution. It fostered the spirit of pride and bore harshly at times upon the serf and the man of low degree. But its harsher features were softened by the teachings of the Church. When it was at its height, voices of Popes like Alexander III and of Doctors like St. Thomas Aquinas, were lifted to proclaim the equality of all men in the sight of God. At the altar, serf and master, count or cottier, knelt side by side. In the monasteries and convents, the poor man's son might wear the Abbot's ring and in the assemblies and councils of the realm, the poor clerk of former days, might speak with all the authority of a Bishop to sway the destinies of both Church and State.



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One of the greatest evils of feudalism was that it fostered to excess the warlike spirit. Of its very nature, the system was a complex one. It gave rise to countless misunderstandings between the various grades of its involved hierarchy. The opportunities and plausible pretexts for misunderstandings, quarrels and war were many. A petty quarrel in Burgundy, in Champagne, in the Berry in France, involved not only the duke and count of these territories but almost every vassal or feudal lord in the province. The same might be said of the German nobles in Suabia, Thuringia and Franconia. Private wars were frequent, and though the barbarism of the past ages had almost completely disappeared under the teaching of the Gospel, these contests, as might be expected, were both sanguinary and wasteful.

The Church fought manfully against these private wars. It took every possible means to prevent them entirely. When in the nature of things, it found it impossible to do away with them altogether, it tried to mitigate their horrors, to limit their field of operation, to diminish their savagery. If the kingly authority was flouted, save perhaps when a sturdy ruler like William the Conqueror in England, or Hugh Capet in France, showed that there was a man at the helm, who meant to rule and was not afraid to quell rebellious earls and make them obey, there was one power these mail-clad warriors respected. They respected the Apostles Peter and Paul, they respected My Lord the Pope, and the Bishops of France and Normandy and England who shared in their authority. They flouted a king's edict, but none but hardened criminals among them laughed at an episcopal or a Papal excommunication.

These rude men, and it places their rude age high in the scale of civilization, respected religion. They lowered the sword before the Cross. The Church had for the disobedient and the refractory one terrible weapon, which she was loath to use, but which she occasionally used with swift and tragic effect, the weapon of excommunication. Many a modern historian or philosopher has smiled good-naturedly and in mild contempt at this weapon used by the Church to frighten her children, much as children are frightened by flaunting some horrid tale of ogre or hobgoblin before them. Yet the student of history might profitably study the use which the Church has made of such an instrument, and find in it one of the most effective causes of social regeneration in the Middle Ages.

The Church, in order to fight the military and armed excesses of feudalism, employed many means. It is to her that we owe what is known as the "Truce of God," or the enforced temporary suspension of hostilities usually, from the sunset of each Wednesday to Monday morning. Under pain of excommunication, during that interval, which at several times was further extended so as to comprise the seasons of Advent and Lent, and some of the major feasts, the sword might not be drawn in private quarrel. From a decree



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of the Council of Elne, in the South of France, we find that the "Truce of God," the "*Treuga Dei*" as it was technically called, was in full honor and had reached the height of its beneficent power in 1207. But long before, in the days when Gregory VII was Pope, and William of Normandy had just won his English crown, and Henry III ruled in Germany and Henry I in France, in the days when feudalism was making its first attempts to bring order out of chaos, several councils of the Church in France and in Normandy had traced out the plan and the outlines of the "Truce of God." Earlier even, at the Councils of Charroux (989), Narbonne (990), Le Puy and Anse (990), severe penalties were pronounced against those who wantonly in time of war destroyed the poor man's cattle or harried his fields, or carried off his beasts of burden. "Leagues of Peace" were formed to diminish the horrors of war, to protect the helpless, to enforce order. The Council of Poitiers, where there is one of the earliest mentions of these "Leagues of Peace," was held 1223 years ago. The Council of Bourges in 1031 created a species of national militia to police the rural districts and prevent war. Our ancestors believed in leagues with "teeth in them." From France where the movement had its origin and culminated at Elne (1207) in the full organization of the "Truce of God," it spread eastward into Germany and Thuringia. The German duchies and the Austrian marches submitted soon after to its humanitarian and Christian code. In 1030, the Pope, the French and German princes united their efforts for the development of the forerunners of the "Truce of God," the conventions known as the "Peace of God." The Peace, the earlier institution of the two, exempted from the evils of war, churches, monasteries, clerics, children, pilgrims, husbandmen; the cattle, the fields, the vineyards of the toiler; his instruments of labor, his barns, his bakehouse, his milch cows, his goats and his fowl. The Truce forbade war at certain "closed seasons." It gave angry passions time to subside, and endeavored to discredit war by making peace more desirable and its blessings more prolonged. It is probable that the Council of Charroux already mentioned laid the germs of the Truce. At the Council of Elne we see it fully organized. In 1139 the Tenth General Council, the Second Lateran, gave in its eleventh Canon its official approbation to what must be considered one of the most beautiful institutions of the Middle Ages.

Under the guidance of our American author, George Henry Miles, we are led back to the days of the eleventh century. He is an accurate and picturesque chronicler of that iron, yet chivalrous age. If on the one hand, we see the sinister figure of Henry IV of Germany, on the other we find the austere but noble monk Hildebrand, who became Pope St. Gregory VII. We hear the clash of swords drawn in private brawl and vendetta, but see them put back into the scabbard at the sound

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of the church bells that announce the beginning of the "Truce of God." The tale opens beneath the arches of a Suabian forest, with Gilbert de Hers and Henry de Stramen facing each other's swords as mortal foes; it closes with Gilbert and Henry, now reconciled, kneeling at the tomb of the fair and lovely Lady Margaret, their hates forgotten before the grave of innocence and maidenly devotion, and learning from the hallowed memory of the dead, the lesson of that forgiveness that makes us divine.

The American novelist, like the Italian Manzoni, teaches the lesson inculcated in "The Betrothed" (*"I Promessi Sposi"*). It is a lesson of forgiveness. It is noblest to forgive. Forgiveness is divine. Forgive seventy times seventy times, again and again. In Manzoni's story, the saintly Frederick Borromeo preaches and acts that sublime lesson in his scene with the *Innominato* with compelling eloquence. In "The Truce of God," the Lady Margaret, the monk Omehr, the very woes of the Houses of Hers and Stramen, the tragic madness of the unfortunate Bertha, the blood shed in a senseless and passionate quarrel, the bells of the sanctuary bidding the warring factions sheathe the sword, incessantly proclaim the same duty. In writing his story, George Henry Miles was not only painting for us a picture aglow with the life of olden times, but pointing out in a masterly way, the historic role of the Church in molding the manners of an entire generation.

The reader of "The Truce of God," in spite of the fact that the romance seems to be sketched only in its broadest outlines, gets a distinct knowledge of its chief actors. They live before his eyes. De Hers and Stramen are not mere abstractions. They have the rugged, clear-cut character, the sudden passions, the quick and at times dangerous and savage impulses of the men of the eleventh century. In them the barbarian has not yet been completely tamed. But neither has he been given full rein. Somewhere in these hearts, there lurks a sentiment of honor, of knighthood, which the Church of Christ has ennobled, and to which the helpless and the innocent do not appeal in vain.

The American has caught this sentiment and plays upon it skillfully. His setting is in keeping with his story. The wandering minstrel, the turreted castle, the festive board, the high-vaulted hall with its oaken rafters, the chase, the wide reaches of the forests of Franconia, the beetling ramparts of old feudal castles by the Rhine or the lovely shores of the Lake of Constance, the vineyards on the slopes of sunny hills, the bannered squadrons, the din of battle, the crash of helm and spear, are brought before us with dramatic power. Historic figures appear on the scene. Close to the principal actors in the story, we see the gallant Rodolph of Arles, Godefroi de Bouillon, Berchtold of Carinthia, Hohenstaufen and Welf, acting their life drama at the council board or on the field of battle. We see a woman and



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an old man, Mathilda of Tuscany and Pope St. Gregory VII, slowly but surely building on the foundations of a half-molded civilization the ramparts of the City of God. "The Truce of God" is true to the requirements of the historical romance. It summons before us a forgotten past, and makes it live. We forget in the vitality and artistic grouping of the picture, in the nobility of the author's purpose and the lasting moral effect of the story, the occasional stiffness of the style. It is the style of the refined scholar, perhaps also of the bookman and the too conscious critic. Occasionally it lacks spontaneity, directness and naturalness. It might unbend more and forget ceremony. But it is picturesque, forcible, clear, and bears us along with its swing and dramatic movement.

American Catholics must not forget the excellent work done by George Henry Miles for the cause of Catholic literature, the more so as his name is not infrequently omitted from many popular histories of American literature. Yet the author of "The Truce of God" had mastered the story teller's and the dramatist's art. "If there was ever a born *litterateur*," writes Eugene L. Didier, in *The Catholic World* for May, 1881, "that man was George Henry Miles. His taste was pure, exquisite and refined, his imagination was rich, vivid, and almost oriental in its warmth." Moreover, he consecrated his life and his talents to the cause of Catholic education, identifying himself for many years with Mount St. Mary's College, Emmitsburg, Maryland, with whose annals so much of the early history of the Catholic Church in the United States, is closely linked.

The author of "The Truce of God" was born in Baltimore, July 31, 1824; he died at Emmitsburg, July 23, 1872. In his twelfth year the lad entered Mount St. Mary's College. Here he became a Catholic and had afterwards the happiness of seeing his family follow him into the Church. The studies at the "Mountain" in those days were still under the magic and salutary spell of the venerable founder, Bishop Dubois, and his followers. They were old fashioned, but they were solid, with the classics of Greece and Rome, mathematics, philosophy and religion as their foundation. They were eminently calculated to mold thinkers, scholars and cultured Catholic gentlemen. They left a deep impression on the young Marylander. After his graduation at the end of the scholastic year, 1843, the law for a short while lured him away, to its digests, its quiddits and quilllets, abstracts and briefs. But it was putting Pegasus in pound. Miles at a lawyer's task was as much out of place as Edgar Allan Poe was when mounting guard as a cadet at West Point, or Charles Lamb with a quill behind his ear balancing his ledger in India House. The Mountain and the Muses lured him back to Emmitsburg, where a short distance from the college gate, in the quiet retreat of Thornbrook, he settled to his books and a professor's tasks



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at the Mount. Close by were the lovely haunts of La Salette, Hillside, Loretto, Tanglewood, Andorra, Mt. Carmel, every little cottage and garden, eloquent, it has been said, of the faith and piety of the builders of the Mount, who breathed the spirit that thus baptized them ("The Story of the Mountain. Mount St. Mary's College and Seminary, Emmitsburg, Maryland." By the Rev. E. McSweeney. Vol. II, p. 102). For its historic associations, its panorama of hills, wooded slopes and fields, the spot could scarcely be matched within the wide amphitheater of the hills of Maryland.

To Emmitsburg, to his "boys", the young professor of English literature gave his enthusiasm, his idealism, his love of all that was fair in art and the world of books. His enthusiasm inspired them with a love of artistic excellence, which, neither in his own work, nor in that of his pupils would tolerate anything commonplace. Before coming to Thornbrook, he had written "The Truce of God," first published as a serial in the *United States Catholic Magazine*, established by John Murphy of Baltimore, and which under the editorship of Bishop Martin John Spalding and the Rev. Charles I. White achieved a national reputation. Two other tales, "Loretto," and the "Governess," had also been published and were extremely popular. Like "The Truce of God," they were of the purest moral tone, elegant in diction, the work of a thorough literary craftsman. In 1850, the American actor, Edwin Forrest, offered a prize of \$1,000.00 for the best drama written by an American. Miles easily carried off the reward with his play "Mohammed." Rich with all the colors of the East, glowing with the warmth and poetry of Arabian romance and story, "Mohammed" was rather the work of a thinker and a poet than of a master dramatist. It was never acted, Forrest himself judging that it had not that ebb and flow of passion, nor that strong presentation of character which of all things are so necessary for the stage. Yet in other plays, notably in "*Senor Valiente*" and especially in "*De Soto*," and "Mary's Birthday," Miles showed that in him the dramatic note was not lacking, and in both he scored remarkable successes.

From Baltimore, after he had left the pursuit of the law, and from Thornbrook, close to the academic halls in which from 1859 he passed his entire life, Miles seldom emerged into public notice. Twice he visited Europe, his impressions of the second journey (1864) being recorded in "Glimpses of Tuscany." In 1851 President Fillmore sent him on a confidential mission to Madrid. That same year, John Howard Payne, the loved singer of "Home, Sweet Home," was reinstated in his consulship of Tunis. Like Miles, that wandering bard was a convert to the Catholic Faith. But unlike Miles, he did not enter the Church until the very end of his life, practically on his death bed. Catholics will be glad to know that the song, "Home, Sweet Home," whose underlying melody Payne caught from the lips of an



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Italian peasant girl, was written by one who, after many strange wanderings, found "Home" at last in that Church which is the mistress and inspirer of art. Like Payne, Miles captured the fancy of his countrymen with one song, "Said the Rose," which at one time was the most popular song in the United States. It has not the depth and the melting tenderness of "Home, Sweet Home," but its quaint fancy and melodious verse struck a responsive chord. In his "Inkerman," a stirring ballad, which every American boy of a former age knew by heart, there was an echo of the "Lays of Ancient Rome," of the "Lays" of Scott and Aytoun, while in the more ambitious "Christine" (1866), there was the accent of the genuine poet, something that recalled the "Christabel" of Coleridge. Miles had projected a series of studies on the characters and plays of Shakespeare. Judging from two remaining fragments, "Hamlet" and "Macbeth," the latter a mere outline, we regret that the writer was not able to finish the task. To beauty of language his study of "Hamlet" adds keen analytical powers and original views. ("An American Catholic Poet," *The Catholic World*. Vol. XXXIII, p. 145 ff.)

In the quiet churchyard on the slope of his beloved Mountain, in a simple grave, over which the green hills of Maryland keep guard, not far from the class-rooms and the chapel he loved, rest the mortal remains of the author of "The Truce of God." It is not necessary to describe him. Those who read this simple but romantic and stirring tale of the eleventh century which he wrote three-quarters of a century ago, cannot fail to catch the main features of the man. They will conclude that in George Henry Miles, religion and art, the purest ideals of the Catholic faith and the highest standards of culture and letters, are blended in rare proportion.

*John C. Reville, S.J.,
Editor-in-chief.*

THE TRUCE OF GOD

CHAPTER I

Of ancient deeds so long forgot;
Of feuds whose memory was not;
Of forests now laid waste and bare;
Of towers which harbor now the hare;
Of manners long since changed and gone;
Of chiefs who under their gray stone
So long had slept, that fickle fame
Hath blotted from her rolls their name.

Scott.



Reader! if your mind, harassed with the cares of a utilitarian age, require an hour of recreation; if a legend of a far different and far distant day have aught that can claim your sympathy or awaken your attention; if the "Dark Ages" be to you Ages of Faith, or even lit with the gray morning-light of civilization, come wander back with me beyond the experimental revolution of the sixteenth century, to the time when the Gothic temples of the living God were new.



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It was the eleventh century: the sun shone as brightly then as now; ay, and virtue too, though sympathy for a lustful tyrant has stamped the age with infamy. Through an extensive forest in Suabia, as the old chronicle from which I copy relates, a gallant youth was urging on, with voice and rein, a steed that seemed as bold and fiery as his rider. The youth's flashing eye, and the spear in his hand, told clearly enough that the boar was before him. On he went, as if the forest were his element, now bending low beneath the knotted bough, now swerving aside from the stern old trunk which sturdily opposed his progress, and seemed to mock him as he passed. On he went, as if danger were behind and safety before him; as if he galloped to save his own life, not to risk it in taking a boar's. An angry bark and a fearful howl rang in the distance, and the hunter's bugle sounded a merry blast. On he went, faster than before, and now as if he sought his mortal foe. The boar was at bay; monarch of the wood, he had turned to defend his realm, and his white tusks were soon red with the blood of the noble hounds who fearlessly disputed his right. The youth leaped from his horse with the speed of thought. Bred to the chase, the well-trained animal stood firm while his master cautiously, but with the calmness of the victor of a hundred frays, advanced against the bristling monster. Quitting the dogs for this new assailant, the boar came madly on; the huntsman sank upon one knee, and so true was his eye, and so firm his hand, that the heart of the savage was cloven by the spear. The youth rose to his feet, dizzy from the shock, and, springing nimbly upon the grim body of his prostrate victim, his fine form swelling with the rapture of his recent triumph, brought his horn to his lips, and again its notes went ringing merrily through the woods.

Echoes, like fading memories, growing fainter and fainter as they receded, gave the only response.

"Where can they be?" said the youth, "their steeds were fleet. Out of sight and out of hearing! How completely I have beaten them."

He laughed triumphantly as he said this, and, sitting down upon the long grass, began to caress an enormous hound that panted at his feet, as unconcernedly as though the forest now contained nothing more formidable than doves or lambs. His horse, thoroughly domesticated, strayed a little from the dead boar, feeding as it went.

The youth took off his plumed bonnet, and, flinging back his long black hair, fell into one of those light, smiling day-dreams which belong only to the young and innocent. He built fifteen air-castles in as many minutes. But at last he grew impatient; he sounded blast after blast; still no answer came. The trees kept up their sleepy sigh, and the sapless branches creaked, but no human voice, no human foot save his own, broke the silence.

"Thou hast given me a goodly chase," exclaimed the youth, springing up and addressing the boar, "and I shall wear this in remembrance of thee."

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He drew his hunting-knife, and soon uprooted one of the monster's tusks. Depositing the precious relic in a hunting pouch he wore at his side, he mounted his horse, rather puzzled where to go.

"It is easier to get in this oaken field than to get out of it," said our hunter, "but if the forest have an end, I'll find it. Now, my dear loitering friends, we hunt each other."

Giving his horse the spur, and allowing the creature to choose its course, he called on the lagging hounds, and dashed away as rapidly as he had come. The wood was light as ever, and here and there sunbeam lay, like a golden spear, along the ground yet the rich lustre of the sky, wherever it was visible the hum of numberless insects, the fresh flight of the awakened bird, and the freer and cooler breeze, warned the youth that sunset was near. On went the noble steed, with steady step and trembling nostril while his finely veined ears spoke so rapidly that the rider could scarcely understand their language. They passed through long lines of trees that opened into other lines, from one limited horizon to another, yet all was green before and behind, to the right and to the left, one interminable emerald. The light turned from a rich gold to a golden red, and yet it played only on whispering leaves and on the long grass at their feet. Still the youth felt no fear, but hummed some old ballad, or drew a lively peal from his horn. He dismounted to refresh himself at a spring that had nestled among some rocks, and was murmuring there like a spoiled child. Having cared for the gallant animal which had borne him so well, he stretched himself a moment upon the green bank.

"Ha! what is that!" he exclaimed, bending forward to listen; "a horseman? Let him come; friend or foe, I shall be glad to see him."

He was on his horse in a moment. As he turned to look behind, he saw a gentleman, richly dressed, and admirably mounted, coming at full speed from another quarter of the wood. The stranger was quite young, perhaps a year or two older than our hunter, but certainly not over twenty-three. The youth knit his brows as the horseman approached, and eyed him keenly and sternly. When within a few yards of the spring, the stranger dismounted and drew his sword. The youth did the same. His handsome features were now distorted with anger and disdain, and it was difficult to recognize in the fierce figure, that seemed the guardian dragon of the fountain, the laughing boy who sat there so quietly a moment before. The stranger appeared to return the bitter hatred.

"I have found you, Gilbert de Hers," he muttered; "your bugle has rung your knell."

Gilbert replied but by a laugh of scorn, and the next instant their swords gleamed in the air. But just as the two blades met with a sharp clang, there came stealing through the wood the mellow sound of a distant bell. It was like the voice of an angel forbidding strife. Those soft, lingering notes seemed to have won a sweetness from the skies to pour out upon the world, and, filling the space between field and cloud, connected for a



moment heaven and earth—for they wake in the heart of man the same emotions more perfectly felt in paradise.

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For many centuries after the destruction of the Roman Empire, when all human institutions were swept away by the resistless torrent that poured from the North, and the Church of God alone stood safe and firm, with the rainbow of heaven around her, the stern warriors of Germany asserted their rights, or redressed their wrongs with the sword, and scorned to bow before the impotent decrees of a civil tribunal. A regular system of private warfare gradually sprang up, which falsely led every man of honor to revenge any real or fancied offence offered to any of his kindred. The most deadly enmity frequently existed between neighboring chiefs, and the bitter feeling was transmitted unimpaired from father to son. The most dreadful consequences inevitably resulted from this fatal installation of might in the outraged temple of justice. Until lately a blind prejudice and a perverted history have charged this unfortunate state of things to the pernicious influence of the Church of Rome. But the wiser Protestants of the present day, considering it rather a poor compliment to their faith to assign its birth to the sixteenth century, are beginning to be awake to the powerful instrumentality of the Christian Church in the regeneration of mankind, and the production of modern civilization. Few, indeed, even with the light of history, can form an adequate idea of the immensity of the task assigned to Christianity in shedding light over the chaos that followed the overthrow of Rome, in reducing it to order, and preparing the nicely fitted elements of modern Europe.

The Catholic Church beheld, and bitterly deplored, the evils of private warfare. Council after council fulminated its decrees against the pernicious system; men were exhorted by the sacred relics of the Saints to extinguish their animosities, and abstain from violence. But the custom had taken deep root; for, in the language of a well-known Protestant historian, "it flattered the pride of the nobles, and gratified their favorite passions." But in the eleventh century the Church had gained a partial victory over the dearest appetites of the fiery Frank and the warlike Saxon. It was enacted, under pain of excommunication, that private warfare should cease from the sunset of Wednesday to the morning of Monday, and few were hardy enough to expose themselves to the penalty. The respite from hostilities which followed was called the "Truce of God."

It was not the musical voice of the bell that made Gilbert de Hers pause on the very threshold of the struggle, and bite his lip until it grew white; but the sweet-toned bell announced the sunset of Wednesday. The young men stood gazing at each other, as though some spell had transformed them into stone. But the messenger of peace had stayed the uplifted sword, and, sheathing their unstained weapons, they knelt upon the green carpet beneath them, and put forth the same prayer to the same God.

It is a sight that may well command the eyes of Angels, when, though deaf to earthly laws and considerations, the angry heart, in the first heat of its wild career, still stops obedient to the voice of religion. Amid the dross of human frailty, the pure metal shines with the lustre that surrounds the sinner in the morning of his conversion.



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They rose almost together, and their faces, so lately flushed with anger, were now calm and subdued.

“Farewell! Henry de Stramen,” said Gilbert, as he leaped into the saddle.

“Farewell!” replied his antagonist, and, almost side by side, they proceeded in the direction of the bell.

A deadly feud was raging between the families of Hers and Stramen. It had continued for more than twenty years, and now burned with unabated fury. It originated in some dispute between Gilbert’s father and the Lord Robert de Stramen, Henry’s uncle, which resulted in the death of the latter. The Baron of Hers was charged with the murder, and, though he persisted in declaring his innocence, Henry’s impetuous father, the Lord Sandrit de Stramen, swore over the dead body of his brother to take a bitter revenge on the Baron of Hers and all his line. Henry de Stramen had been nursed in the bitterest hostility to all who bore the name of Hers, and the unrelenting persecution of the Lord Sandrit had made Gilbert detest most cordially the house of Stramen. It was with mutual hatred, then, that the two young men had met at the spring. They knew each other well, for they had often fought hand to hand, with their kinsmen and serfs around them. Now they were alone, and what a triumph would be the victor’s! but the bell, the Tell of peace, the silver-tongued herald of the truce of God, had sheathed their weapons.

It could not have been without a severe struggle that the two mortal foes rode quietly in the same direction, with but a few yards between them. They were not half an hour in the saddle when they discovered the spire of the church they were both in search of, rising gracefully above the trees. As they emerged from the forest, they could see stretching before them a broad expanse of hill and dale, wood and field. Scattered here and there were the humble dwellings of the forester and husbandman, and, from their midst, towering above them, like Jupiter among the demigods, stately and stern rose the old castle of the house of Stramen. The western sky was still bathed in light, and shared its glories with the earth; airy clouds, ever changing their hues, sported, like chameleons, on the horizon; the stream that wound around the castle seemed sheeted with polished silver: the herds and flocks were all still, and the voice of the birds was the only sound; and, amid this beauty and repose, how lovely and majestic was that finely moulded Gothic church!

Henry de Stramen tied his horse to a tree, and was soon lost in the elegantly carved doorway. Gilbert paused a moment, and gazed upon the open country before him with very mingled emotions. He had been there before at the head of his clan to disturb the serenity which, in spite of himself, was now softening his heart. He did not linger long, but led his horse a little within the woods, and entered the church. The gray-headed priest at the altar was solemnly chanting,



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from the beautiful liturgy of the Church, as he knelt down on the hard aisle, and the branching ceiling seemed to catch and repeat the notes. Through the stained window, where was pictured in unfading colors many a scene suggesting the goodness and mercy of God, and the blessed tidings of salvation, came the fading light of day, softened and beautiful. It was not merely the superior genius of the age that made the chapels and cathedrals of the Ages of Faith so immensely superior to the creations of the present day, but its piety too; that generous and pure devotion which induced our ancestors to employ their best faculties and richest treasures in preparing an abode as worthy as earth could make it of the presence of the Son of God. Then the house of the minister was not more splendid than his church, his sideboard not more valuable than the altar.

Gilbert saw around him the hard, sunburnt features, the stalwart forms he had marked in the desperate fray; he could touch the hands, now clasped in prayer, that had been so often raised against him in anger. Beside him knelt the maiden, with her brow all smooth and unfurrowed by care, and the matron who, numbering more than double her years, had felt more than treble her sorrows. The youth was deeply moved, as he gazed, and thought he might have robbed that mother of her son, that wife of her husband, that sister of a brother. Those gentle, melancholy beings had never harmed him, and, perhaps, in a moment of passion, he had deprived their existence of half its sweetness, and turned their smiles to tears. It was with an aching, an humbled heart that he bowed his head until it touched the cold floor, when the Lamb without spot was elevated for the adoration of the faithful.

A hymn, befitting the occasion, had been intoned, and the priest had left the altar, but those fervent men and women did not hurry from the church as if grateful for permission to retire, but lingered to meditate and pray.

Gilbert remained until all had gone save Henry de Stramen and a lady who knelt beside him. They rose at length, and, passing so close to Gilbert that he could distinctly see their faces, left him alone. He was in the act of rising when the priest appeared, and beckoned him into the sacristy.

"Remain here," the old man said, taking the youth by the hand.

"I must hurry home, Father," replied Gilbert; "my father will have no peace, thinking the boar has killed me."

"Let him fret awhile; it is better he should lament you alive, than dead by the serfs of Stramen."



“They dare not attack me!” exclaimed the youth; “they fear the Church and my own arm too much for that!”

“Nay, peace!” rejoined the priest; “it is better not to expose them to the temptation, or you to the danger.”

The practicability of spending the night in security in the very teeth of Stramen Castle had not occurred to Gilbert; he hesitated a second or two, and then, as if all his plans and ideas had undergone a thorough revolution, gracefully promised obedience.

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“You are right, Father,” he said; “and to speak truth, I am weary enough. If you promise me protection to-night, I will gladly rest my head wherever you place the pillow.”

“Those who sleep with me,” whispered his venerable adviser, “must content themselves without a pillow. But I will promise you a safe couch, though it is a hard one; the softest beds are not always the freest from danger. In the mean time, tarry here until I have said some prayers.”

“But my horse,” interposed Gilbert.

His companion rang a small bell. A benevolent-looking man, somewhat past the prime of life, plainly dressed in a black cassock, answered the call. The priest conversed awhile with him, in an undertone, and then, ascertaining from Gilbert where his horse was, dismissed the attendant, remarking that the animal should not suffer.

Motioning Gilbert to a chair, the priest entered the sanctuary. Instead of sitting down, the young noble leaned against a lancet window which commanded a view of the neighboring castle. He stood there looking idly upon the darkening prospect, until the appearance of two persons riding rapidly along the main road to the castle, aroused his attention. He followed them eagerly with his eyes until they were completely lost in the twilight. One of the riders was evidently a woman; but it would be inquiring too minutely into Gilbert’s thoughts to determine whether that circumstance, or the proneness of youth to become interested in trifles, excited his curiosity.

Night was fast approaching, and a light from the altar made itself felt throughout the church. Still the priest knelt before the sacred tabernacle, and Gilbert longed for his appearance. He grew impatient of being alone, when a companion was so near at hand; the place was strange, and there were no well-known objects to stand in the place of friends, supplying by the thousand associations they conjure up, and their mute appeals to memory, the absence of language.

The minutes wore heavily on; but at length the priest entered the sacristy. Gilbert followed him out of the church to a very small house a few paces off, within the shadow of the wood. The house, which was but one story high, was divided into two rooms by a stone partition. In the back room slept the pastor of the church, Father Omehr. The front room contained a table and a bench. Father Omehr, for this was the name of Gilbert’s companion, struck a light and made the young man sit down upon the bench, while he spread out upon the table some fruit and bread and wine.

“Eat, my son,” said the old man; “the wine is good and the bread is quite fresh. These grapes are better than any in Hers.”

Gilbert seemed inclined to dispute the last assertion; but the length and vigor of his repast strongly confirmed the opinion expressed by his host. The latter remained



standing with his arms folded on his breast, and regarded the youth with a smile, as he indulged the keen appetite sharpened by the severe exercise of the day. The meal was eaten in silence, save an occasional entreaty from Gilbert to his entertainer to partake of his own cheer, and the refusal. The little lamp between them shone upon two noble faces: in spite of the great disparity between their ages, they were alike; not so much in feature as in the character of the head.



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The priest must have been near seventy. The top of his head was entirely bald; yet the little hair left him, which grew behind in a semicircle, from ear to ear, was only sprinkled with gray. He was tall and admirably formed for strength and agility; and though his cheek was pale and sunken, and his high broad forehead ploughed by many a heavy line, still in his eye and lips and nose were visible the relics of a splendid creation. There was an expression of great energy about his mouth; his whole face indicated intelligence and benevolence; and it was the actual possession of this energy, intellect, and virtue that made Father Omehr a worthy descendant of the noble emissaries of Adrian, who, ever in the rear of Charlemagne's armies, healed by the Cross the wounds inflicted by the sword, and drove forever from the forests of Germany the gloomy and accursed rites of Hesus and Taranis.

Gilbert de Hers was more than a fearless hunter and skilful soldier. He had been carefully instructed by his confessor in the writings of the Fathers—in logic, philosophy, and the classics; he had read the death of Patroclus, and the episode of Nisus and Euryalus; he knew by heart many of those beautiful hymns whose authors, in the spirit of Catholic humility, had concealed their names. He was much beloved by all who knew him and were permitted to love him. His charities were numerous and unostentatious. Though scarcely twenty-one, his bearing, was bold and manly; there was no disguise about his large black eyes; they spoke out all his thoughts before his tongue could tell them. Apart from the great beauty of his features, high thoughts had printed a language on his face much more fascinating than mere regularity of feature. His very elegant form did not promise extraordinary strength, yet he was as formidable to his foes as welcome to his friends.

Gilbert rose at the conclusion of his rather protracted meal, and declared he would remain seated no longer while his companion stood. The priest carefully removed the remnants, after which he sat down upon the bench, and obliged the youth to sit beside him.

"Now, my son," he said, "tell me what in the world has brought you here alone?"

"No inclination of mine, my dear Father," replied Gilbert.

"Who has sent you then?"

"I am sent by chance," answered Gilbert, laughing. "Early this morning I set out, with some twenty companions, in pursuit of a boar. I was better mounted than they, and so was the boar, for he distanced them. When the chase was at an end I found myself entirely alone, and could hear nothing of my men. I did not know where I was; so I permitted my horse to choose his own course, and by some accident he has brought me here."

Father Omehr listened attentively, and added, after a pause:



“It is well you came not yesterday. Did you meet any one in the wood?”

Gilbert felt the searching eye of his companion upon him, and related with much embarrassment all that had happened at the spring.



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“I knew he was in search of something to prey upon when he left me so suddenly. That Henry de Stramen should thus pursue a boy!—fie! It is a stain upon his manhood!”

Gilbert looked up in the speaker’s face to ascertain if he were in earnest.

“And but for that little bell, where should you be at this moment?”

“Here, Father, most likely!”

This was said so calmly and maliciously, that Father Omehr could not repress a smile. But it quickly vanished, and left behind an expression of deep sorrow.

“And must this fatal feud last forever?” was his passionate exclamation; “are ye ever to revel in carnage, like the lion of the desert—and shall the example of the Son of God inspire nothing but contempt for those who imitate Him?”

The missionary buried his face in his hands, and Gilbert, abashed by the solemn rebuke, kept a respectful silence.

“O Gilbert! Gilbert!” resumed the priest, lifting his tearful eyes from the ground, “if your God submitted to insult and stripes and death to save you, can you not patiently endure for His sake a few slight injuries?”

“Our injuries are not slight,” replied the youth, “nor is the vengeance of the house of Stramen an idle threat. They have burned the houses of our serfs, desolated our fields, butchered our kinsmen and dependants; shall we not protect ourselves, even though our resistance makes their blood run freely? They have accused my father of a crime of which he is innocent, and have sought to visit upon him real chastisement for the imaginary murder. Shall I stand still and tamely see them wreak their most unrighteous wrath upon my guiltless parent’s head?”

“I should be glad, my son, if you confined yourselves to mere resistance; but how often have you inflicted, within sight of this very door, the injuries of which you complain? Could you see what I see—the orphan’s piteous face, the widowed mother’s tear of agony—blighted hopes and unavailing regrets—you might pause in your fearful retaliation!”

“They have brought it on themselves,” said Gilbert, musing, “*they* are the aggressors.”

“Alas! be not the means by which their sins are aggravated.”

“You must address yourself to them!” returned the other.

“And have I not? Day and night I have reasoned, implored, prayed; I have represented the folly, injustice, and impiety of their violence; I have held out to them the anger of



God and the maledictions of man; I have employed art, eloquence, and reproof: but all in vain. Oh, what years of misery has your quarrel cost me! Could I only live to see it healed; to see you once more living like Christian men, employed in atoning for your own sins, not in arrogantly chastising each other's faults; to see the sword of discord broken, and peace and love and safety proclaiming the Divine efficacy of our holy religion! We all have enough to do to vanquish ourselves, and have little time to spare in subduing others, unless we aid them in conquering their passions, and then we promote our salvation: but your conquests only peril your eternal welfare."



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Gilbert understood from this last remark that his companion had read what was passing in his mind, and he contented himself by saying:

“Believe me, Father, I regret their obstinacy.”

“You are young now,” pursued his monitor; “but, trust me, when your old limbs fail you, and your sight waxes dim, your angry deeds will rise like spectres around you and haunt you to the tomb.”

Gilbert attempted no reply, but listened with the air of one who approved the advice, but despaired of ever profiting by it. After an interval of meditation, Father Omehr arose and spread some soft fleeces in the corner of the room.

“May you sleep soundly, my son,” he said, “and beg of God grace to moderate your angry passions. Your bed is not very soft, but it is in your power to sanctify it, and then it will be better than the down which muffles those who disdain or neglect to invoke the Divine protection.”

Gilbert knelt down and received the old man’s blessing, who, wishing him a good night, withdrew into his own apartment and closed the door.

CHAPTER II

The golden sceptre which thou didst reject,
Is now an angry rod to bruise and break
Thy disobedience.

Gilbert de Hers, as the good priest withdrew into his own apartment, resumed his seat upon the bench, and soon became absorbed in meditation. His varying face betrayed the character of each thought as it filed before his mind in rapid review. For more than an hour he remained in that statue-like state, when we, in a measure, assume a triple being, as the past and the present unite to form a future.

But as all reveries, like life itself, must end, Gilbert at length seemed to be aware of the reality of the unpretending bed in the corner. Having repeated the prayers which his piety suggested, he extinguished the almost exhausted taper, and threw himself upon the bed. He could not sleep, however; for, great as the fatigue of the day had been, the excitement was greater. His mind was perpetually recurring to the events at the spring, from which they wandered to his father’s lonely and anxious chamber: now he remembered the earnest appeal of Father Omehr, and now pondered the injuries he had received from the house of Stramen. Through a narrow opening in the wall he could see the noble church sleeping in the moonlight. Its walls of variegated marble had been built principally at the expense of the Barons of Stramen, for in those days it was not unfrequent for private families to erect magnificent churches from their own

resources; and as his eye rested upon the misty window, perhaps he felt that though utterly opposed in all else, there was one thing in common between his own haughty race and the founders of that church—religion.



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The night wore on, and was far advanced; but Gilbert still kept piling thought upon thought, unable and even scarcely desiring to exchange them for the deep repose or more confused images of slumber. It must have been after midnight when, as he lay awake, he could distinctly hear the sound of blows. Gilbert was not a moment in conjecturing the cause; he knew at once that the venerable priest was subjecting himself to corporal chastisement. He did not live in an age when voluntary mortification was ridiculed, when a sacred ambition to imitate a crucified God insured contempt from man. Then, those self-denying religious were not taunted with “the hope of gaining heaven by making earth a hell.” And perhaps Gilbert knew that the spiritual peace and delight derived from such chastisements, were infinitely sweeter, even here below, than the impure pleasures of worldlings. Feeling thus, he could not but contrast the mortified life of that holy man with his own indulged and pampered existence. He had never known the sting of adversity, and rarely been thwarted in a single desire; yet how much greater his sins than those of Father Omehr! Amid such reflections he felt—and it is a salutary feeling—the truth of a hereafter.

But we will no longer pursue the reflections of the youth. Some time after the sounds had ceased he fell asleep, and was only roused by the sun streaming into his apartment, and the solemn tones of the church bell.

The morning was beautiful. The sun was everywhere; kindling the hoary tops of the Suabian Alps, sparkling on the broad Danube as it rolled majestically on from the southwest to the northeast, lighting up hamlet, hill, vale, rivulet, forest, and making the church glitter like a stupendous diamond. But Gilbert was ill-prepared to enjoy this blaze of beauty. In a melancholy mood he leaned against the window, watching the sturdy serf in the centre of his family, as he came to share the blessings of the Mass. He was rather startled when the outer door opened and admitted the lady he had seen in the church the night before with Henry de Stramen. She came unattended, save by an old female servant, who carried with some difficulty a basket filled with fruits, delicacies, and medicines of various kinds, designed for Father Omehr to apply to any purpose his piety might point out.

Though in the year 1076 chivalry was not the regular and well-defined institution it became during and after the Crusades, yet the same amount of valor and devotion to woman was expected from the knight. The spirit of Christianity, operating upon Teutonic virtue, which has raised the woman from the drudge of man to be the ornament of society, created a chivalric courtesy long before the cry of “*Deus vult!*” rang from Italy to England. Gilbert de Hers, born and bred in the courtly circle of Suabia, though his spurs were not yet won, was still familiar with the duties of knighthood. As the lady paused, surprised at his presence, he made a profound and respectful reverence, and he would have done the same had she been less noble, or had he known, as he then surmised, that the fair visitor was the daughter of his father’s deadliest foe.



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Their embarrassment was relieved by the appearance of Father Omehr, who extended to both his blessing, gratefully received the basket from the attendant, and, after Margaret de Stramen had retired, accompanied Gilbert to the church. As they emerged into the morning air, Gilbert caught a glimpse of the graceful figure of the young lady entering the church. But his attention was soon arrested by a strange, wild-looking being upon the church steps. She was apparently not over forty, tall, slightly built, and evidently the victim of insanity. Her long black hair hung in thick masses over her pale face and deathly-white neck; her arms swung to and fro with a restless motion, and she sang at intervals snatches from the ballads for which Suabia is so renowned. As Gilbert passed her, she bent her large wild eyes upon him with an expression of such fearful meaning, that brave as was the youth in battle, he recoiled from their ferocious glare. The next instant she was abstracted as before, and crossed her hands upon her breast in an attitude of devotion. Gilbert looked to his companion with an inquiring eye, but the priest was silent.

The next instant they were treading the marble aisle. Gilbert knelt down upon a tombstone, and endeavored to compose himself for the Mass. He perceived from the glances thrown upon him from time to time by some of the peasantry, that he was recognized as an enemy, yet respected as one under the aegis of religion. These glances became more frequent when Father Omehr, in his brief discourse, eloquently adverted to the example of Jesus in the forgiveness of injuries, and enforced the sacred duty of a Christian to imitate that Divine model. In powerful terms the gray-haired priest portrayed the miseries of discord, and the blessings of mutual forbearance; and Gilbert felt that a change was creeping over him.

He left the church when the Holy Sacrifice had been completed, meditating upon the pastor's powerful exhortation. But the train of his thoughts was broken upon the steps by that wild face almost touching his. As the maniac stared fixedly at him, she muttered in a hoarse whisper:

They laid him 'neath a noisy tree,
And his glossy head was bare;
They piled the cold earth on his breast,
Then left him helpless there.

While the youth listened in amazement, and almost in terror, the frantic woman drew from her bosom a long knife, and inflicted a deep wound upon him before he could wrench it from her determined grasp. The knife had penetrated to the rib, but not farther, having glanced off to the side. As the blood spread rapidly over his hunting-shirt, the maniac gave a wild laugh, and repeated in the same low, dismal tone:

'T is red, 't is red, as red as his;
Man's blood is ever red;



'T was thus his side was crimsoned o'er
When they told me he was dead.

With the last words, she laughed again, more wildly than before, and, darting into the wood, was soon lost among the gigantic trees.



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Some serfs were standing around, but offered no assistance. They seemed rooted to the ground in terror at the rash act, and crossed themselves in mute astonishment. At this juncture, while Gilbert was examining the extent of the wound, and vainly endeavoring to stanch the blood, the Lady Margaret and the priest appeared at the doorway, having been attracted by the loud laugh of Gilbert's assailant.

Comprehending in an instant that Gilbert had been wounded, Father Omehr hastened to support him.

"It is but a trifle, Father," said the youth, anxious to relieve the evident uneasiness of the old man.

"May God will that it be so!" replied the priest, eagerly removing the hunting-shirt, and examining the path of the knife. After which, having carefully replaced the garment, he turned to the serfs who yet lingered there, inquiring, in a voice of deep indignation:

"Who has dared to do this? Who has been impious enough to draw blood during the truce of God, upon the threshold of God's sacred temple?"

One of them hastened to reply:

"It was Alber of the Thorn's widow, crazy Bertha. God preserve us from such a deed, at such a time, and in such a place!"

"But could you not have prevented it?" continued the priest, eyeing the man until he quailed.

Gilbert interposed.

"They are not to blame, Father," he said; "I did not expect the attack myself, and none else could have prevented the blow."

"It bleeds much," pursued the priest, again examining the wound.

Gilbert made a step forward, but Father Omehr detained him, and reluctantly the youth allowed himself to be supported by two of the serfs of Stramen to the bed he had occupied during the night.

Margaret de Stramen, in the spirit of the age, had gone to the cell, after discovering the nature of the young man's injury, and taken from the basket she had brought some salves and stringents with which she stood ready at the door. She washed the wound and dressed it with the tenderness peculiar to woman, and received Gilbert's thanks with a slight inclination of the head. Having completed her task, she drew the priest aside, and, looking up into his face with evident emotion, said:



“Could there have been poison on the knife?”

Though spoken in a whisper, the youth must have heard it, for he smiled at first, and the next moment became pale as death. Father Omehr noticed the change upon his features, and replied loud enough to be overheard:

“No, no! it cannot be. Some momentary paroxysm prompted the deed; there could have been no preparation, no predetermination.”

“It is not for his sake,” continued Margaret, in a still lower tone, and withdrawing farther from the bed; “not for his sake I fear an unfortunate result; but for our own. I know that it is Gilbert de Hers who lies there, and I have drunk too deeply in the prejudices of our family to repine at any calamity that may befall him. But this impious outrage can insure nothing but the Divine vengeance upon our heads. If he were borne down in battle, I perhaps should rejoice at heart at the triumph of my father; but I would rather die than see him perish from a noble confidence in the house of Stramen.”



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“You are not responsible, my child,” rejoined her companion, “for the blind violence of a crazy woman. I am confident that the wound is not dangerous. Perhaps the accident, apparently so untoward, may in the end be productive of good. We are too apt to receive as good what should be avoided as evil, and to deem that a curse which should be considered a blessing.”

The young lady made no reply, but advanced to Gilbert’s bedside.

“Believe me, sir,” she began with dignity but in some confusion, “that I sincerely regret the accident which has confined you here, and that I desire and will pray for your speedy recovery. You cannot suspect the house of Stramen of conniving at such a cowardly assault; they are too powerful in the field to resort to such a pitiful stratagem. Our effort shall now be to secure you from further violence.”

The blood returned to Gilbert’s cheek as she spoke. Feeble with pain and the loss of blood, he with difficulty replied:

“I little expected ever to receive such kindness as you have shown me from the daughter of my father’s foes; but come what may, kind lady, I shall never forget your services. I feel assured that the kinsmen of her whom I address, could never be guilty of so ignoble an action.”

It was not without pleasure that the noble maiden heard an answer so flattering to her pride, and so earnestly pronounced. Her cheek became brighter than Gilbert’s as she bowed and left the apartment, attended by the old woman servant.

We will leave Gilbert, for the present, in the care of Father Omehr, to follow the footsteps of the fair lady of Stramen.

Margaret led the way rapidly to the border of the forest, where she had left a groom with horses. She sprang lightly upon her spirited palfrey, and exchanging a few words with the old woman, dismissed both domestics to the castle, and galloped off alone in an opposite direction. As she rode along, she was greeted with smiles and blessings by all who met her; yet she seemed to heed but little the frequent reverence and heartfelt salutation.

After proceeding about three miles, she struck into a deep, dark ravine, through which there rushed a slender stream, whose waters, seldom gladdened by a sunbeam, seemed to groan and murmur like an angry captive. The way, thickly strewn with moss-bound stones and the mouldering skeletons of trees, required all the maiden’s horsemanship. But she struggled on, until she reached something midway between a grotto and a hut, projecting from the side of the gully, and looking as though by some fantastic freak of nature it had grown there, so admirably was it in keeping with the character of the place.



From the time she had mounted her horse, the maiden's face expressed great anxiety, which increased as she alighted and entered the singular excrescence we have mentioned. A blazing pine-knot driven in the ground, shed a fierce, and flickering light over the interior of this gloomy abode, for it was an abode—and more, a home—the home of Bertha! The maniac was sitting upon a rude bench, close to the firebrand which gave a fearful lustre to her haggard features, while with a species of exultation she gazed upon the knife stained with Gilbert's blood, still clenched in her hand.

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The husband of this unfortunate woman had, about a year before, been mortally wounded in a chance affray between the partisans of the lords of Hers and Stramen. He was brought home only to die in the arms of his wife. The shock had reduced her to this miserable extremity. She could not be prevailed upon to remain in the cottage she had occupied in the hour of her joy; and though repeatedly offered a home by Father Omehr and the Baron of Stramen, she had built for herself this wild nest, and obstinately refused to leave it except to wander to the church or to the grave-yard. She was maintained by the Lady Margaret principally, and by the charities of the peasantry. Up to the present time, she had been perfectly harmless, and was rather loved than feared by the children of the country. She had always manifested an extreme affection for the Lady Margaret, to whom she would sing her sweetest songs, and whose hand she would almost devour with kisses.

Margaret, though somewhat appalled at Bertha's frightful appearance, yet confiding in the power she had over her, advanced and silently sat down upon the bench. For some minutes Bertha seemed unconscious of the presence of her visitor, but suddenly removing her eyes from the knife, she bent them upon Margaret. In an instant a smile of strange sweetness stole over the poor creature's wasted face: every trace of anger disappeared as she fell upon her knees and raised the hem of the maiden's garment to her lips. Without rising she sang one of those simple ballads which even insanity could not make her forget. The lady of Stramen patiently permitted her to proceed without interruption. But the moment her strange companion was silent, she minted to the knife, exclaiming:

"Is this blood, Bertha?"

Still kneeling, the woman began:

The chieftain swore on bended knee,
That blood for blood should flow—
Then leaped upon his coal-black steed,
And spurred against the foe.

"Has anyone hurt you?" continued Margaret.

But Bertha only replied:

Sir Arthur swung his falchion keen—
The serf implored in vain;—
The knight is galloping away—
The serf lies on the plain!

"Bertha! Bertha! this is wrong: I hope you have committed no violence?"



But the answer, as before, was given in rude, indefinite verse.

It may be unnecessary to say that the object of the lady's visit was to discover if the knife had been poisoned. Finding that all question would be useless, she had recourse to an artifice to effect her purpose, suggested by the discovery of a splinter buried in Bertha's thumb.

"Let me remove this—it must give you pain," she said, examining the hand she had taken in hers, and reaching after the knife. Bertha passively resigned the weapon, but rapidly withdrew her hand, just as her mistress feigned to prepare for the incision. Margaret shuddered, for she naturally saw in that quick gesture a confirmation of her worst fears. For some moments they gazed at each other in mute anxiety. Bertha was the first to break the silence, and her words revived a gleam of hope in the bosom of her companion.



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“No! no!” she exclaimed, slowly and sternly, “his blood must not mix with mine!”

“Is there poison here?” pursued the lady, in a low searching tone.

She received in reply:

There was no poison on the steel
That robbed Sir James of breath;
There was no poison on the blade
That well avenged his death.

Greatly relieved, but still unsatisfied, the high-born damsel sprang to her feet.

“It is the blood of Hers!” she cried, exultingly.

The maniac’s face assumed a look of savage triumph.

“Then will I keep this blood-stained instrument as a precious jewel. Farewell, Bertha; you shall hear from me soon.”

She passed rapidly through the narrow aperture by which she had entered, leaving Bertha in blank amazement, utterly unable to comprehend what had passed.

Emerging from the dark ravine, the Lady Margaret rode straight toward the old castle of Stramen, whose gray towers retained their sombre majesty, which the merry sun could not entirely dispel. It was not long before she passed the drawbridge, sped through the massive gate, and reined in her palfrey upon the ample terrace; when, having thrown her bridle to an attendant, she proceeded at once to her chamber, and summoned Linda, the old domestic, to her side.

“You are skilled in such matters, Linda,” she said, producing the knife, before the faithful neif had finished her salutation; “is there poison on this blade?”

Linda took the knife, and having examined it attentively, returned it to her mistress; after which she left the room, making a signal that she would soon return. After the lapse of a few minutes, she reappeared with a vessel of boiling water, which she placed upon a marble slab. Then taking from her pocket a piece of polished silver, and at the same time receiving the knife, she plunged them both into the hissing liquid. As the lady of Stramen, eagerly watching the experiment, stood bending over the water with her back to the door, she was not aware of her father’s presence. He had entered unperceived, and was contemplating in some surprise the mysterious operation going on before him. He could scarce repress a laugh, for there was something ludicrous in Linda’s very wise and consequential manner, as she knelt over the kettle, while his daughter, equally absorbed, her hat yet untied, continued in an attitude of profound attention beside her.



When the water had cooled, the old woman with a trembling hand drew out the silver—it was bright as ever!

“It is venomless as the bill of the turtle-dove,” she exclaimed, with the importance of an oracle, looking up at her mistress.

“May I ask the meaning of all this, without being referred to the prince of magic for an answer?” said the Baron of Stramen, stepping forward; and he added, addressing Linda, who in her surprise had nearly overturned the vessel: “Do you wish to be hung for a witch?”

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The old woman slunk terrified into a corner, but Margaret hastily replied:

“You are already informed, sir, of the violation of the truce of God, which occurred this morning. Our magic consisted only in the discovery that there was no poison upon the knife which inflicted the wound.”

“I cannot but think,” rejoined her father, “that you have displayed an unnecessary interest about the result. That young stripling has cost me more lives than he numbers years; and though I could not connive at Bertha’s attempt to assassinate, I certainly do not see much reason to rejoice at his escape.”

It may have been that Margaret quailed a little beneath her father’s rigid scrutiny, but without embarrassment she returned:

“If I had been born and bred to arms, if my breast were accustomed to the coat of mail, if my hand could wield the battle-axe, I might anxiously crave, or coldly behold the murder of a foe confiding in our generosity and in our plighted faith to the Church; but I have never worn the gauntlet, or drawn the sword; my heart has never exulted at the gladsome sight of an enemy’s blood, and I scorn to ascribe the interest I may have shown, to a wish of having the sweet assurance that a scion of Hers would perish like a dog, when in reality I hoped to find the weapon venomless.”

“Spoken like a woman, as you are,” muttered the knight. “I would have you feel otherwise, but God has given you your sex; I cannot change its nature.”

The Baron of Stramen was a tall, powerful man, whose vigor fifty years had not impaired. His face was stern, though not repulsive, and free from any approach to vulgarity. A man of strong passions, yet the strongest of all was an unvarying love for his daughter, on whom seemed to have centered all the tenderness of which he was capable. On the present occasion, he put an end to further controversy by drawing Margaret to his side, and giving her an exquisitely wrought head of Gregory VII.

“Treasure it, my child,” he said, “it is the faithful likeness of a wonderful man—a man who may one day, with a few stout hearts to second his energy, chastise the impious tyranny of the house of Franconia!” He spoke with deep feeling, and, after pacing the room, with his arms folded upon his broad breast, abruptly stalked through the door, apparently absorbed in some momentous question.

No sooner had he gone, than Margaret turned to Linda, who still occupied the corner, and dismissed her with a message to Father Omehr. When alone, she knelt down before an ivory image of the Blessed Virgin and prayed—not to the polished ivory—but to the Mother of purity whose intercession it suggested, with a fervency and constancy which only they venture to ridicule who cannot record the virtues of Mary without a sneer.

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Though not apprehensive, Father Omehr was pleased to learn from Linda that the knife had not been poisoned. Gilbert's eye brightened at the intelligence, though he had not given utterance to his fears—*fears* they were—for even the young and brave recoil in terror from death, when it assumes a form and hovers near in a detested shape. Having informed the youth that a messenger had been despatched to his father, the priest left Gilbert in charge of the sacristan, and proceeded on his daily errand of mercy through the neighborhood. By men like him, fervent, fearless, faithful, the rude Northern hordes were induced to abandon their idolatry, and embrace the faith of the Church of Rome. These noble missionaries slowly but surely prepared the canvas on which were afterward laid, in colors of enduring brightness, the features of Christian civilization.

When Father Omehr returned, Gilbert was asleep. The sacristan put in his hands a letter from a distinguished prelate, informing him of the nomination of Henry, canon of Verdun, by Henry IV.

“O God, protect Thy holy Church!” exclaimed the missionary, crushing the paper in his excitement. “If the ministers of God become the creatures of the king, despotism and irreligion must inevitably ensue. How long will virtue be accounted a crime? Shall every faithful shepherd be supplanted, to make room for the wolf of lay investiture, the instrument of a lustful tyrant, raised by simony, and upheld by royal favor?”

Gilbert's light slumber had been broken by the voice of his benefactor. As soon as Father Omehr saw the youth awake, he approached him, and inquired, with great kindness of manner, whether he felt better.

The youth replied in the affirmative.

“I have discovered,” continued the other, “that you have richly deserved this wound. You killed with your own hand the husband of the woman who stabbed you, and though the chance thrust of an affray, it was noted, and communicated to Bertha by an eye-witness, one of the combatants. This is her revenge—but how inadequate to her suffering!”

“It is, indeed,” said Gilbert, replying to the last remark, which had been particularly emphasized. His companion could not conceal the satisfaction with which he hailed this reply, as an omen of regret, and of a right apprehension of his former violence. But the youth was drowsy, and prudence forbade a longer conversation. At the close of the evening service, the lady of Stramen was seen to exchange a few words with her venerable pastor, but she did not enter the cell.

The gorgeous sun of ancient Suabia was beneath the horizon—but Gilbert slept upon his couch; the moon had lit her feebler torch, and walked silently beneath the stars—yet not until midnight did Gilbert awake. All was profoundly still. The dim light of the taper at his bedside revealed only the motionless figure of the sacristan, and the outline of a



crucifix hanging against the wall. His eyes involuntarily closed, and in a moment he stood before his father, in the oaken halls of Hers—his retainers were around him—the horses pranced merrily—the bugle sounded—“On to the chase!” was the cry. He opened his eyes—the crucifix became more distinct.



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He knelt before a prince, and arose a knight—a brodered kerchief streamed from his polished casque—the herald, in trumpet tones, proclaimed his prowess—the troubador embalmed his deeds in immortal verse—the smiles of high-born damsels were lavished upon him—the page clasped his sword at the mention of his name. He opened his eyes—the crucifix, and the sacristan!

A form of beauty was before him—at first, haughty and disdainful, but gradually assuming a look of interest and pity—it bent over him, and poured a balm into his wound, with a prayer for its efficacy—but the figure lifted its finger with a menacing air, and pointed to a snake, hissing from its hair—a mist settled around him, and the apparition was gone. He opened his eyes—the taper burned brighter—the crucifix became more distinct.

Gilbert was now fully awake. His wound was more painful than it had yet been, and in vain he endeavored to win back the repose so lately enjoyed. Nor was corporal uneasiness his only annoyance. Father Omehr's revelation of the motives by which Bertha was actuated, had left a more painful impression upon his mind than his monitor perhaps desired. Though the priest had not directly attributed the woman's insanity to her husband's death, Gilbert too clearly understood that such was the fact. His was too generous a heart, not to deplore bitterly so terrible a calamity, of which he was—however unintentionally—the cause. He felt no resentment for his misguided assailant—he would willingly have exposed himself to a second attack, could he have thus restored her reason. The memento of the crucifixion—that Catholic alphabet, the crucifix—held up unto his soul the wondrous truth that God had voluntarily suffered, for the sake of man, all that humanity can endure; and the youth interiorly acknowledged that the errors of his life were but imperfectly balanced by the inconvenience he then experienced.

It is not in the pride of health and youth, surrounded by pleasure, and strangers to care, that a heart, wedded to the world, is apt to prostrate itself in humility before the Author of life; but in danger and affliction, we learn to mistrust our self-sufficiency, and feel our complete dependence upon an invisible and almighty power. We are much more disposed to appeal to heaven for protection, than to return thanks for repeated favors. It is not to be wondered at, then, that Gilbert sought relief in prayer; there is nothing more natural to one who prefers the consolations of religion to the staff of philosophy. He was far indeed from that exalted perfection of loving God for Himself alone; but who can predict what may spring from the mustard-seed?

By the first gray light of the morning Father Omehr was bending over his youthful charge: Gilbert was fast asleep.



CHAPTER III

Fit to govern!
No, not to live. O nation miserable,
With an untitled tyrant, bloody-sceptred,
When shalt thou see thy wholesome days again?



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MACBETH.

The third Friday after Gilbert had been wounded, he mounted his horse, and, accompanied by Father Omehr, set out for the Castle of Hers, which lay some four leagues distant to the south.

“You are sad, Father,” said the youth, who felt all the exhilaration of returning strength, heightened by the freshness of the morning.

“It is true, my son; for though in all the trials of this pilgrimage I endeavor to turn to God the cheerful face He loves to see in affliction, I am sometimes weak enough to tremble at the gloomy period before us. We are upon the eve of a tremendous struggle. You may not be aware of it, for you are unaccustomed to watch events which govern the future for good or evil; but the firmness of our Holy Father, and the increasing recklessness and impiety of the emperor, must create an earthquake sooner or later.”

“My father,” replied Gilbert, “has imputed to His Holiness a want of firmness.”

“Alas, with how little reason! He who, when seized by Cencius and his armed assassins at the altar of St. Mary Major—bruised, and dragged by the hair to the castle of his assailant—yet remained calm and unmoved, with the face of an Angel, neither imploring mercy nor attempting an ineffectual resistance—cannot be accused of a want of firmness. The matchless benevolence—the heart which melts at the first symptom of repentance—the clemency which led him, while his wounds were yet fresh, to pardon Cencius, prostrate at his feet—have also induced him to hearken to the promises of King Henry and accept his contrition.”

“But is it not almost folly to trust the royal hypocrite to whom Suabia pays so heavy a tribute? I wish that when his infant majesty fell in the Rhine, there had been no Count Ecbert nigh to rescue him!”

“Is it not rather an exalted charity, of which you have no conception, and a Christian forgiveness which puts to shame your last ungenerous wish?”

“I can have no sympathy or pity for him who has loaded with insult a princess alike distinguished for beauty and virtue.”

“You mean the queen, his wife. But tell me, when he endeavored to procure a divorce from Bertha, who prevented the criminal separation? Was it the boasted chivalry of Suabia? No! Peter Damian, the Pope’s legate, alone opposed the angry monarch, and told him, in the presence of all his courtiers, that ‘his designs were disgraceful to a king—still more disgraceful to a Christian; that he should blush to commit a crime he would punish in another; and that, unless he renounced his iniquitous project, he would incur the denunciation of the Church and the severity of the holy canons.’ The result was the



reconciliation of Henry with Bertha, in Saxony. And though Alexander was Pope, Peter received his instructions from Hildebrand. But there is a wide difference between your hostility to Henry of Austria and the resistance of Gregory VII to his encroachments: your motives all flow from human considerations, and seek a human revenge; his, on the contrary, proceed from the knowledge of his duty, to God, and breathe forgiveness: you seek the king's destruction and your own aggrandizement—Gregory, the king's welfare, and the independence and prosperity of the Christian Church.”

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We will no longer continue a conversation which, to be intelligible to all, would require a more intimate acquaintance with the history of the times than can be obtained from the books in free circulation among us. Though Gregory VII has been reproached by all Protestants, and by some Catholics, with an undue assumption of temporal power, and an unnecessary severity against Henry IV of Austria, it is certain that, in his own day, he was charged by many of his own friends, particularly, in Saxony and Suabia, with too tender a regard for a monarch who violated his most solemn engagements the moment he fancied he could do so with impunity, and whose court, already openly profligate, threatened to present the appearance of an Eastern seraglio. A hasty glance at the prominent facts of the dispute will leave us in doubt whether to admire most the dignified and Christian forbearance of the Pope while a hope of saving his adversary remained, or the unwavering resolution he displayed, even to death in exile, when convinced that mercy to the king would be injustice to God.

No sooner had Gregory assumed the tiara, than he addressed letters to different persons, in which he assured them of his earnest desire to unite with Henry in upholding the honor of the Church and the imperial dignity; to accomplish which he would embrace the first opportunity of sending legates to Henry, to acquaint the king with his views. But, while proferring his love, he declared that, if Henry should venture to offer God insult instead of honor, he would not fail in his duty to the Divine Head of the Church through fear of offending man. So, in a letter to Rodolph, Duke of Suabia, who at that time was known to be secretly hostile to the king, Gregory declared that he entertained no ill feeling whatever for Henry, but simply desired to do his duty.

There were two evils which Gregory was resolved to extirpate: lay investitures, and the incontinence of the clergy. When the power of appointing to benefices was usurped by the civil power, the emperor was sure to fill the highest places in his gift with creatures of his own. The inevitable result of this was to create two classes of prelates—one of lay, the other of ecclesial investiture. Its ultimate effect was to render the Church completely depend upon the State, and to change and corrupt its very source with the varying vices of libertine despots. It was found (and how could it be otherwise?) that the proteges of the emperor studied only how to please him; and that, in serving the State and the prince, they became indifferent to the Church. Selected to serve a particular purpose, or chosen in consideration of a valuable donation, the lay nominee had been sure to fulfil the object for which he was elevated, or to indulge the avarice or ambition which had craved the appointment. It was in attempting to remedy this fatal innovation that Gregory found himself repeatedly thwarted by Henry; and yet he had been censured by those who lament the worldliness of a portion of the medieval clergy, for striking at the root of the evil.



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After repeated provocation, the arm of the Pope is uplifted to strike; but Henry, awed by his menaces, and by an insurrection in Saxony, hastens to avert the blow by an unreserved submission and the fairest promises. He confesses, not only to have meddled in ecclesiastical matters, but to have unjustly stripped churches of their pastors—to have sold them to unworthy subjects guilty of simony, whose very ordination was questionable—and implores the Pope to begin the reform with the Cathedral of Milan, which is in schism by his fault.

Gregory pardons him; and, in 1074, holds his first council at Rome against simony and the incontinence of the clergy. It was in this year that Henry, already pressed by the Saxons and Thuringians, found himself threatened by Salomon, King of Hungary. In this emergency, he has recourse to Gregory, who, by an eloquent letter, calms the indignant Hungarian.

With the year following, the campaign against Saxony begins. This brave but turbulent people had risen against the towns in possession of Henry, and burned the magnificent Cathedral at Hartzburg. Here again the Pope secured to the king the powerful assistance of Rodolph, Duke of Suabia, in conjunction with whom the royal army obtains a decisive victory at Hohenburg. But once in security and crowned with success, the graceless monarch forgets his submission, and exclaims, "It does not befit a hero, who has vanquished a warlike people, struggling in defence of what they hold most sacred, to bow humbly down before a priest, whose only weapon is his tongue!" Faithless to his recorded vow in the hour of danger, he nominates Henry, canon of Verdun, to fill the see vacated by the Bishop of Liege; and, soon after, calls to the see of Milan, Theobald, his own chaplain, in place of the murdered Herlembaud. Thus repeatedly deceived, Gregory must strike at last, or sacrifice the independence of the Church of God to human weakness.

It was in the pause between these new indignities and the consecration of Hidolphe in the archbishopric of Cologne, that Father Omehr and Gilbert rode slowly on toward the Castle of Hers.

The conversation naturally turned from the consideration of impending evils, to the miserable feud actually existing between the two houses of Hers and Stramen.

"I sincerely wish it were ended," said Gilbert, in reply to a vehement denunciation just pronounced by his companion. "I could willingly forgive all the injuries I have received at their hands, when I remember the kindness of the Lady Margaret."

The priest looked quickly up in the young man's face, but Gilbert was gazing with an abstracted air upon the blue outline of the beautiful Lake of Constance, which just began to appear to the south.



“It were far better,” he said, commanding the youth’s attention by taking his hand—“it were far better to forgive them when you remember the prayer of your dying Jesus for His persecutors, than out of gratitude to the ordinary courtesy of a pitying damsel.”



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Gilbert made no direct reply, nor did he return the glance of his friend, which he well knew was upon him.

"I could wish," he began, after a considerable pause, "before leaving your hospitable roof, to have expressed to the Lady Margaret my deep sense of the interest she deigned to display in my regard, and which I fear has done more to soften my feelings toward her father, than the nobler and holier motive you have mentioned."

There was a humility in this that pleased the good missionary; but he saw with pain and uneasiness the direction which the ardent mind of the youth was evidently taking, and instantly rejoined:

"Did you know the Lady Margaret better, you would spare yourself that regret. In her charitable attention to your wants, she overcame a natural repugnance to yourself. She would rather miss than receive any return you can make, and is always more inclined to set a proper value upon the solid and eternal recompense of God, than attach any importance to the empty and interested gratitude of man."

Gilbert's eyes were bent again upon the Lake of Constance. They were now at the foot of a long, high hill, which they began to ascend in silence. Gilbert pressed his horse rather swiftly up the gradual ascent, and they soon gained the summit.

"What is the Danube to that splendid lake!" cried the mercurial stripling; "and what is there in all the lordship of Stramen to vie with this!"

The view now opened might excuse his excitement, even in a less interested person. The Castle of Hers, though built for strength, presented a very different appearance from that of Stramen: its outline was light and graceful, and it seemed rather to lift up than cumber the tall hill that it so elegantly crowned. It was situated upon the border of the lake, which, by *trouvere* and *troubadour*, in song and in verse, in every age and in every clime, has been so justly celebrated. A few miles to the southwest the mighty Rhine came tumbling in; who, as the German poets say, scorns to mingle his mountain stream with the quiet waters of the lake. We will attempt no further description, for fear of spoiling a finer picture, which must already exist in the eye of the reader, created by more skilful hands.

As the horsemen neared the castle, they saw a knight, followed by a few men, dashing down the hill. Gilbert knew his father, and hastened to meet him. Their meeting was manly and cordial. The baron stopped but to embrace his son, and hastened to welcome Father Omehr. He dismounted, and imprinted a kiss upon the old man's still vigorous hand.

"I should be childless now," he said, "but for your kindness; and you know that words would but mock my feelings."



The tears in the baron's eyes expressed more than a long oration.

Father Omehr only replied, with a laugh, "You must blame your son's indiscretion, and not applaud me!" Thus saved from a formal and unsatisfactory conversation, the knight remounted his horse and led the way to the castle.



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Upon the slope of the hill, half-way between the castle and the lake, was a chapel built of white stone, which had stood there, according to tradition, from the ninth century. It was said to have been erected by Charlemagne, on his second expedition against the Saxons. The Baron of Hers had ornamented and repaired it with much taste and at great expense, until it was celebrated throughout the circle of Suabia for its richness and elegance. It had been dedicated to Mary the Morning Star, as appeared from a statue of the Blessed Virgin surmounted with a star, and was called the Pilgrim's Chapel. It was in charge of Herman, a priest, who had studied at Monte Cassino under the Benedictines, with Father Omehr, whom he loved as a brother. They had spent their period of training and had been ordained together; and, for forty years they had labored in the same vineyard, side by side, yet seldom meeting. When they did meet, however, it was with the joy and chastened affection which only the pure-minded and truly religious can know; and they would recall with tears of happiness the scenes of other days—the splendid convent, whose church shone like a grotto of jewels and precious stones—the learned and devout monk, and the theological difficulties over which they had triumphed hand in hand.

After taking some slight refreshment (for the baron could ill brook a refusal of his cheer), Father Omehr left the father and son to each other, and began to descend the path to the chapel. Herman had gone to administer the last Sacraments to a distant parishioner. Father Omehr knelt down in the chapel and awaited his return. It did not seem long before his brother missionary entered through the sacristy and knelt beside him. The little chapel was very beautiful, with its branching pillars, supporting clusters of Angels carved in stone. The images of the Saints served to awaken many fine emotions—and the principal statue of Our Lady, which the artist had designed to represent the immaculate purity of the Mother of God—gave an indescribable sweetness to that consecrated spot: but more beautiful still, and more acceptable to God, were the two holy men who, bent with age and grown gray in the service of a heavenly Master, bowed down together before the altar of the Most High, and for a time forgot each other in the contemplation of the majesty and infinite goodness of Him they served.

At length they rose; and when in the open air gave way to the impulse of human love, which until then had yielded to a loftier feeling.

There was a room in the Castle of Hers in which Herman spent the hours not required for the active duties of his ministry, and to this the two friends retired. There for more than an hour, they discussed topics of mutual interest—compared the condition of their flocks—and wandered back to Naples and Monte Cassino. The introduction of this last subject seemed to remind Herman of something he had forgotten; for he started up and went to a shelf, which was filled with extracts he had been permitted to make from the celebrated library of the convent, and taking down a small piece of parchment, gave it to his companion. It was an illuminated manuscript of the *Salve Regina*.



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“It was sent me yesterday across the lake by a Benedictine monk,” he said, when Father Omehr had finished reading and raised his eyes in wonder and delight.

“And who has written it?”

“A namesake of mine—a Benedictine. It was not seen until after his death, when the manuscript was discovered in his cell. What is more remarkable is that the monk was distinguished for nothing but his piety, and had never made any pretension to learning or accomplishment.”

Much to the surprise of Herman, his friend, though deeply moved by that beautiful effusion of Catholic piety, seemed not to give the entire attention which it so eminently deserved.

“Listen!” he said, repeating the lines. “What melody! what tenderness! what love! You certainly must feel its exalted piety?” he added, appealing to Father Omehr.

“I do, indeed; but you perceive that I am disturbed. In brief, then—for I could not bring myself to say until now—Anno of Cologne is dead.”

Anno, Archbishop of Cologne, was revered throughout Europe in the eleventh century for his virtue and wisdom. It is said of him that, when others slept, he rose, filled with a holy zeal, and visited many churches, carrying with him his pious offerings. In the halls of kings, says the poet who celebrates his virtues, he sat with the haughtiness of the lion; in the hut of the peasant, he stood with the humility of a lamb. So obnoxious was he to the king, that Henry at one time assaulted him sword in hand; and he was only saved from death by the interposition of a monk. Alone, he founded five monasteries, including that of Siegberg, his favorite residence, where he died, and where his tomb was long pointed out to the traveller. He was said to have emitted a light, the splendor and beauty of which spread around like the lustre of a precious stone in a ring of gold.

“O God, the giver of all!” exclaimed Herman, after a pause, “in taking him to Thyself, do not leave us desolate!”

Father Omehr then described the fearful ulcers which had tormented Anno’s body, and the celestial visions and brilliant apparitions that delighted his soul and foreshadowed the bliss awaiting him in the life to come.

“But let us not weep for him whose epitaph is in the mouths of the widow and the orphan, and whose soul is in the hand of God!” said the pious chaplain of Hers, grasping the hand of his friend.

“Not for him I weep,” was the reply; “nor yet for the bereaved people of Cologne.” The missionary paused, unable to proceed, and then hurriedly exclaimed, “Who is to be his successor? Who is to appoint him?—Gregory VII or Henry of Austria!”



“He will not dare!” ejaculated the other, who not until this moment clearly understood his more keen-sighted friend.

“He who has dared to fill the sees of Liege and Milan may not scruple to dishonor the see of Cologne! But let us pray and hope; for suffer what we may, we cannot be conquered.”



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This long interview was here terminated by the bell of the Benedictine, summoning to dinner. The Baron of Hers was noted for his fine person and his polished address, and saluted them with even more than his usual politeness as they entered the dining-room. He was the only one of the group who seemed at ease; for the two missionaries could not forget the death of Anno—and Gilbert, from some cause or other, had lost his sprightliness.

“I fear,” said the knight to Father Omehr, “that you have half made a traitor of Gilbert, for he will no longer let me abuse my friends at Stramen, but sides with them against me. It is hard to fight our battles all alone, and against our friends, after forty.”

“The Lady Margaret, who dressed his wound, must be blamed—not I,” replied the priest.

The handsome face of the Baron of Hers, in an instant, became black as night, and as quickly recovered its former mildness; but the change, apparently, was not noticed by him who had caused it.

“I have heard,” resumed the knight, in a careless tone, “that the young lady possesses much virtue, intelligence, and beauty, and is wise enough to prefer the cloister to the court.”

“You have not been misinformed; yet her health is so feeble, that the grave will probably anticipate her choice of either.”

It was not until the close of the meal that the Lord of Hers was informed of the death of the Archbishop of Cologne, and from that time until they rose the conversation turned wholly upon the venerated and saintly prelate.

Toward sunset they descended the hill and walked along the picturesque banks of the lake. The noble sheet of water stretched away to the south far as the eye could reach, burnished by the sun, and forming part of the horizon.

“This lake of ours,” said the baron, “has obtained a reputation which the best man cannot expect—and, indeed, would not desire: no one has ever breathed a word against it.”

“There is a boat!” interposed Gilbert, pointing to a speck in the distance, which his father discovered after a long search, and was invisible to their two older companions. They stood in the shadow of some trees, and watched the object as it increased in size and gradually assumed the undeniable outline of a boat. It came from the direction of Zurich, and pointed directly to the castle. As it neared, they could distinguish four stout rowers and a person seated in the stern. With increased speed it seemed—for it was now within hailing distance—the boat darted straight to where they were standing; and, before it was made fast, the gentleman in the stern sprang ashore, and, removing the



cloak in which he had been enveloped, discovered the princely features of Rodolph, Duke of Suabia. Rodolph was descended from the counts of Hapsburg, on the father's side—and, on the mother's, from the illustrious family of Otto the Great. He was styled King of Arles, and resided for the most



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part at Zurich. He was connected with Henry of Austria by a double tie, Matilda, his first wife, having been the sister of the king, and Adelaide, to whom he was then married, being the sister of the queen. But, though thus allied to Henry, he neither loved nor respected him. Once, indeed, the emperor had summoned him to court, on the charge of entertaining projects hostile to the house of Franconia, but Rodolph, well knowing the treacherous character of the monarch, and always a hero, boldly refused, preferring the fortune of arms to the fate of an investigation. Subsequently, filled with horror at the impiety of the Saxons in burning the Cathedral at Hartzburg, hallowed by numerous relics, and filled with the rich offerings of the faithful, he had united with Henry to chastise their sacrilege. At the battle of Hohenburg, in the van—the privilege of Suabia—he distinguished himself above all others by his impetuous valor, and only left the field when covered with wounds. Rodolph was equally remarkable for the size and beauty of his person, and the elevation of his soul. The Teutonic antiquities contain many songs of the Minnesingers, in which he is invested with all the qualities of mind and heart and body that can adorn the knight; but one fault is imputed to him—ambition. His subjects almost worshipped him, and his power is said to have been built upon their hearts. So conspicuous was he among his brother dukes, that, at the Diet of Gerstungen, in 1073, he had been offered the imperial crown, but he declined it unless awarded by the unanimous suffrages of the confederation.

Between him and the Baron of Hers a close friendship of long standing had existed, which had been interrupted by the baron's refusal to accompany him the preceding year in the expedition against Saxony. This refusal had been dictated by the knight's invincible repugnance to Henry, and by the politic move of conciliating all who opposed the emperor. Since the battle of Hohenburg they had not met.

After receiving the formal salutation due to his rank, Rodolph cordially embraced the Lord of Hers, and extended his regards to Gilbert, who could not sufficiently admire the hero of Hohenburg.

“But for your father's obstinacy,” he said to the youth, “you would now be a knight. But I will see you win your spurs yet.”

The greetings over, they all began to ascend the hill. The duke would not pass the chapel without entering. The pavement upon which they knelt had been worked with many a rich and curious device; but time and the knees of the faithful had worn away most of the finest tracery. At the foot of one of the columns still remained this fragment of an inscription:

*Hoc pavementum ... feci
... ductus amore Dei.*



This was the spot upon which the duke loved to kneel. Before rising, he drew from under his robe a golden chalice, and gave it to Herman, who was beside him. The priest took it and carried it to the sanctuary.



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“I would almost give the decade of Jura,” exclaimed Rodolph, as he approached the castle gate, “to know who made that superb pavement.”

“It resembles more the pavement of a cathedral than the simple floor of a chapel,” said Father Omehr. “I wish we had such an one to our little church at Stramen.”

“Trust that to your successor,” replied the duke; “you have given him the walls, the pillars, the windows, and the roof, and are well entitled to a pavement and alabaster altar at his hands.”

They were now at the gate, into which were cut two niches containing statues of SS. Victor and Apollinaris. The bars, which yielded to every stranger and to every peasant, flew open before the high-born group, and the almoner, as he recognized the duke, bent his knee in reverence. They mounted a heavy flight of stairs, and, traversing an arched gallery, were ushered into the principal hall. This large room was hung with solemn tapestry, reaching from the ceiling to the floor. The characteristic piety of these ages displayed itself in the beautiful recesses in the walls, adapted to the reception of holy water, and in the devices upon the floor and ceiling, which always conveyed some pious meaning. The walls were covered with paintings chiefly relating to the exploits of the lords of Hers, or filled up with heraldic blazonry.

In the cathedral or in the castle, in the monastery or in the chapel, durability was the principal object of the architect. It is true that the genius of the age contrived to combine the greatest strength with the greatest elegance; but durability was the great end. The pious men of the Middle Ages did not erect mere shells, which, though sufficient for their own brief lives, would crumble over their posterity; but looked to the wants of future generations. And, then, there was a reliance upon posterity which is neither felt nor warranted now. Thus, in the minor Church of the Nativity in the lordship of Stramen, which had been designed by Father Omehr, and which had exhausted the revenues of the barony, the missionary had conceived it upon a scale to which his present means were insufficient, but to which the charity of another generation would be adequate. This was always the case with the cathedrals. Even the castles themselves had so many rooms set apart for recluses and wanderers, that it was easy to convert them into monasteries; and the Castle of Hers, with very little alteration, would have made an excellent convent.

Rodolph was about to throw himself into one of the large high-back chairs of state; but yielding a graceful respect to the aged priests, he motioned them to be seated, and placed himself between them.

“You are rather pale, my lord duke, from your wounds,” said the baron, as an attendant entered with some wine-cups—“and I beg you to accept from my son a draught of the vintage you used to relish.”

Rodolph received the goblet from the youth, and replied, as he raised it to his lips, "How I missed you at Hohenburg!"



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"I would have given my lordship," returned the baron, "to have seen you outstripping all the chivalry of Austria, and charging where none dared to follow!"

"My fair cousin, the Margrave Udo, would have atoned for the thrust at my face, which made me see more stars than were ever created, had you been at my side."

"But to aid you was to assist Henry; and I was loth to break our league with Saxony."

"That league was merely defensive, and *they* broke it by aggression and sacrilege."

"But we could not punish their crime without strengthening the power of that greater criminal, the emperor."

"You acted uncharitably," said the duke; "but you judged aright, and I have forgiven you."

"For which; my liege," replied the baron, "I cannot be too grateful."

"Listen," continued the King of Arles, "ye true pastors of the Church of God, and you, Albert of Hers, that Henry of Austria has nominated a successor to Anno of Cologne!"

At this announcement Herman and the knight sprang to their feet, while their looks expressed their horror and surprise. But Father Omehr kept his seat, and said calmly:

"Will your highness inform us more fully?"

The duke resumed: "A messenger, post haste from Goslar, brought me the news this morning at Zurich. Henry refused to meet the Pope in council to take measures for the purification of Milan, Firmano, and Spoleto, and has thus replied to the threat of excommunication. The nominee is Hidolph, who is attached to his own chapel, a man of no merit whatever, but devoted to the emperor; and whose principal endeavor it has been to remedy by art the unprepossessing exterior which nature has given him."

"I know him," said Father Omehr. "Is he yet consecrated?"

"No! All Germany is indignant at the choice, and the people of Cologne are imploring the monarch to make another appointment."

"It will serve but to confirm the nomination," said the priest of Stramen.

"What remains to His Holiness?" inquired Rodolph.

Slowly and solemnly the missionary pronounced the single word:

"Excommunication!"



“Henry is preparing for it!” exclaimed the duke, rising and addressing the Lord of Hers; “he convened at Goslar all who respected his summons—among whom was the Duke of Bohemia: and he has liberated Otto of Nordheim, my adversary at Hohenburg, and received him into his most secret councils. It must *come*, my friend,” he added, grasping the baron’s hand; “we shall not be separated here; and, if I mistake not, we have in Gilbert one who is not to be awed by the lion of Franconia!”

Father Omehr beheld with sorrow the meaning glances of the proud nobles, as they eagerly joined hands; and he read in the animated features of the hero of Hohenburg that the impending excommunication would be the signal for a revolt. He rose, and, exchanging a few words in an undertone with Herman, explained the necessity he was under of returning at once to the Castle of Stramen.



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“I will accompany you,” said the duke, “if you will delay your departure a few minutes.”

Father Omehr expressed his assent, and retired to the chapel with Herman, leaving the two knights in close converse. Gilbert ran to order the best horse for the duke, and to see that his venerable benefactor should want nothing to carry him safely over the intervening hills. After exchanging many kind adieus, Rodolph and the missionary, near the close of twilight, started for the Castle of Stramen.

CHAPTER IV

...Simonis leprosam Execrate haeresim, Sacerdotum simul atque Scelus adulterii,
Laicorum dominatus Cedat ab ecclesiis._

ST. PETER DAMIAN.

The King of Arles and the missionary rode along without an escort, and felt none of the fears that the traveller of the times is often made to entertain for his personal safety. They did not apprehend any violence, and their only preparation for the expedition had been a recommendation to God through Our Lady and the Saints. It is as purely imaginative in historians and novelists—and it is difficult indeed to distinguish the one from the other—to surround every castle with a wall of banditti, as to station in Catholic countries of the present day, a robber or an assassin behind every tree. In the Middle Ages, the stranger could wander from castle to castle with as little danger as the nature of the country permitted; even in times of war, the blind, the young, the sick, and the clergy were privileged from outrage, though found on hostile territory. And in war, peace, or truce, the pilgrim's shallop was a passport through Christendom; he was under the special protection of the Pope, and to thwart his pious designs was to incur excommunication. Even amid the terrors of invasion, the laborer was free to pursue his occupation, and his flocks and his herds were secure from molestation; for it was beneath the dignity of the man-at-arms to trample upon the person or property of the poor unarmed peasant. Such were the principles recognized even in the eleventh century; and though we witness frequent departures from these admirable provisions, we must be careful not to mistake the exception for the rule, or to impute to the spirit of the age a violence and contempt of authority common to all times, and found alike in Norman and Frank, American and Mexican. To balance these infringements of regular warfare or “blessed peace,” we often meet with instances as beautiful as the march of Duke Louis, the husband of St. Elizabeth, into Franconia, in 1225, to obtain reparation for injuries inflicted on a *peddler*.

“I hope the Baron of Stramen has lost none of his vigor,” said the duke; “we were together at Hohenburg, and I may need him at my side again. His son Henry, too, whom I knighted before the battle, and who won his spurs so nobly, how is he?”

“They were both well,” replied Father Omehr, “when I saw them last, and were anxiously expecting a visit from their liege.”



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“And the Lady Margaret, from whom not a knight can boast a token, though all are striving to obtain one?”

“She has not altered since you saw her,” answered the priest; “she was always rather frail, but I do not see that she grows weaker.”

“You cannot imagine,” interposed Rodolph, “how much it grieves me to be unable to reconcile these two families whom I so dearly love, and who, in the camp or in the chamber, have proved themselves so devotedly attached to me. I cannot even ask of one in the hearing of the other, without giving offence or receiving a bitter answer. In all things else, they are obedient as this horse to his rein; but the moment I speak of reconciliation, the stubborn neck is arched, and will not relax either for threats or entreaties.”

“Your grief cannot equal mine,” returned the missionary, “and I confess, that without the hope of obtaining assistance from heaven, I should despair of ever softening the determined animosity of the Baron of Stramen. The Lord of Hers, perhaps, might be induced to throw enmity aside, if his adversary relented; but he cannot be persuaded to sue for peace, especially when his supplication might be unavailing.”

“I cannot believe,” continued the duke, “that my friend of Hers could have killed Robert of Stramen, since he most positively denies it. It is true that their relations were anything but amicable, yet Albert of Hers would scorn to take a knight at a disadvantage, and would not attempt to conceal the result of a mortal struggle. If Robert of Stramen fell by his hand, it must have been in fair combat; and if in a fair tilt, there is no motive for concealment.”

“But the circumstances are strong enough to amount to conviction in an angry brother’s eyes. A woman, who has since lost her mind, named Bertha, her father, and her husband, all swore to have seen Sir Albert ride away from the spot a short time before the body was found; and the scarf of the Lord of Hers was clutched convulsively in the dead man’s hand. The wound upon the head resembled that produced by hurling a mace, and was of such a character that the head could not have been protected by any steel piece. I do not consider this conclusive against the Lord of Hers, or even incapable of explanation; but real and unequivocal guilt itself could not justify the untiring malignity of the Baron of Stramen. His brother’s soul would be much better honored by his prayers, than by imprecations and the clash of steel; we cannot avenge the dead, for their bodies are dust, and their souls absorbed in things eternal; and Sandrit de Stramen is but making his brother’s misfortune the occasion of his own temporal, and perhaps eternal injury. I wish, indeed, this criminal work of vengeance could be stopped.”

“Yes,” replied the duke, “they had better husband their energies, for if I read the future aright, Suabia will have need of every nerve.”

Rodolph paused here; and as his companion did not reply, they rode on in silence.



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"I have a plan," exclaimed the duke, with singular vivacity. "But tell me first, has that young Gilbert seen the Lady Margaret?"

In reply the missionary briefly narrated the events of which the reader is already in possession. "Then," pursued the King of Arles, eagerly, "I have strong hopes of success. Listen to me, holy Father: the maiden is beautiful and virtuous, the youth fair and knightly, and I can so represent one to the other, as to create an attachment strong enough to insure to filial love a victory over parental hate. It is fair, I think, to employ the bodily graces of these young persons against the mental deformity of their parents—to array the child against the father, when we seek the triumph of innocence over sin."

"Your highness is inclined to be romantic," rejoined the priest.

"Only the circumstances are romantic, and they seem to have shaped themselves; my plan is practical enough. Tell me—what think you of it?"

"Briefly, then, I think your project impracticable."

"Impracticable! You cannot know, Father, all that love and youth will dare; but I, whose earthly life has given me experience in such matters, have seen the impossibilities of sober minds yield to the irresistible energy of two plighted hearts. Oh, no; it is not impracticable."

"I will grant you," replied the missionary, "that these two young persons might be brought to love each other, that they might marry in spite of family opposition, but the result would make your romance a tragedy."

"How so?" inquired the duke. "May we not deem without impiety that God, in His mercy, has designed them for the extirpation of this miserable feud, and has drawn out of the stern parents themselves the instruments by which their hearts may be softened?"

"It is impossible," said Father Omehr, "for us to discover by any human means what the mercy of God may appoint; all we can do is to ask for light to guide our steps, and to exercise the reason with which He has endowed us. I have good ground to believe that any approach to tenderness, on the part of the children, would widen the breach between the fathers. And were such the case, the consummation of your plan would give only a new and horrible feature to the present discord, by severing the bond between child and parent. For, unless I am much deceived, the lords of Hers and Stramen would turn away in disgust from children whom they would consider, not only to have disobeyed them, but to have proved faithless to their race. In this view, I can not suppose that heaven indicates the path to final reconciliation through fresh dissension. The hearts of the parents can not be softened in the way your highness proposed, and that must be the first step in your plan. Besides, I have little confidence in the agency of a human and selfish love to reach an end that ought to be gained by

purser motives. I have discovered, from observation, what the power you spoke of will dare; I know its greatness and its littleness.”



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"I must tax my ingenuity for a more auspicious scheme," resumed Rodolph of Suabia, "for I begin to be distrustful of my first. I was a little romantic, I confess; but it is thus we give the rein to some solitary impulse of youth, lingering, like a firebrand, among our more matured resolves."

They had ridden slowly, and were now on the brink of the ravine, three miles from the Castle of Stramen. The waning moon and the bright starlight showed them a white figure standing in the road, a few paces from the mouth of the gorge.

"Who is that before us?" asked the noble.

"Bertha, the poor crazy woman, who swore to the presence of the Lord of Hers at the spot where Robert de Stramen was found," whispered the priest, and he advanced to where she stood.

"I heard your horse's hoofs, Father," she said, "and I came to get your blessing."

"And you shall have it, Bertha," he answered, extending his hands over her head. "Good night," he added, seeing that she did not move.

"Who is this you have brought us?" continued the woman, pointing to the duke.

"That," replied Father Omehr, "is Rodolph, Duke of Suabia, and King of Arles."

Bertha approached the duke, knelt down, and kissed his hand. She then walked slowly up the ravine.

"A singular being," exclaimed the duke, as they gave their horses the spur, for it was growing late. "I have not seen any one thus afflicted for many years, and it is always a painful sight."

The two horsemen were now at the church, but they passed it and kept on to the castle; and hearty was the welcome of the noble duke to the halls of Stramen castle. Sir Sandrit's eyes gleamed with delight as he saluted his liege; Henry's cheek flushed with pleasure when Rodolph, the flower of German chivalry, spoke of his youthful prowess at Hohenburg; the Lady Margaret loved the duke for the praises he heaped upon her brother. Nor were the domestics gazing idly on; but kept gliding to and fro, and hurrying here and there until the genial board was spread, and the fish, fresh from the Danube, smoked, and the goblet gleamed.

As it was near midnight when they sat down, Father Omehr felt at liberty to leave the room without ceremony. The Lady Margaret stayed no longer than courtesy demanded, when she rose and retired to her chamber. This young lady had always been noted for her piety and her charities to the poor, whose wants she was sure to discover and supply. Under the skilful and fervent training of Father Omehr, she had learned to



repress a spirit, perhaps naturally quick and imperious, and to practise on every occasion a humility very difficult to haughty natures. There was even some austerity in her devotion; for she would subject herself to rigorous fasts and to weary vigils, and deny herself the luxuries that her father delighted in procuring for her, little dreaming that they were secretly dispensed to the sick of the neighborhood.



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She never failed to hear Mass, unless prevented by sickness or some other controlling cause, but every morning laid a bunch of fresh and fragrant flowers upon the altar of our Blessed Mother. And who shall say that the sweet lilies of the field, the roses and the violets, colored with the hues of the dawn, and freshened in the dew of the twilight, when offered and consecrated by the homage of an innocent heart, are not grateful to her whose purity they typify! Yet there was a lurking family pride in Margaret's heart that she could not entirely eradicate, and a sleeping antipathy to the house of Hers that at times betrayed itself to her watchful self-examination. The reader must not imagine that, when she told the missionary at Gilbert's bedside that had the youth fallen in battle she perhaps would rejoice, she actually desired such an event. She spoke to one who knew her better. She felt this antipathy, but did not know its extent; and, with the humility of virtue, she feared that, although engaged in an act of charity, there might be the fiend of revenge at the bottom of her soul. Margaret de Stramen was not blind to her imperfections, and she did not hesitate to impute to herself an inclination to the un-Christian hate so cherished by her family. But she endeavored to overcome it by prayer, by the Sacraments, by penance, and by pondering the splendid example of Jesus of Nazareth.

The Lady Margaret was not one of those fair and fanciful creations, endowed with such exquisite sensibilities as to perceive and return the admiration of a young knight-errant with whom she had been associated by any romantic circumstance. Nor was her disposition of that impulsive kind which will permit the impression of a moment to overthrow the prejudices of years. But to her joy and surprise, she found that, far from rejoicing at Gilbert's misfortune, she had regretted it; and regretted it, not merely because it might stigmatize the fair name of Stramen, but also in obedience to an elevated generosity that sickened, ungratified, at the sight of obtained revenge. She had been almost constrained to render assistance to the youth; and there are some who think the sting of a favor worse than the fang of an injury, and are more disposed to forgive after having benefited. With the facility peculiar to a gifted woman, she had read in Gilbert's face the ingenuousness and goodness of his heart, and though she did not ascribe to him any exalted qualities, she admitted that it was not easy to believe him guilty of cruelty or meanness. In a word, the sympathies of the woman were now arrayed against family pride and family prejudice, and a trial still more dangerous and severe awaited her piety and resolution.

In the morning, after hearing Mass, she found the duke and her father in close conversation, while her brother was busily preparing for some important event. It was soon evident that Rodolph was about to depart, and that Henry was to accompany him; for the grooms led to the door two handsome and stalwart steeds, richly caparisoned, and four mounted men-at-arms rode up and halted upon the terrace, where they waited motionless as statues of steel.



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When their private conference was over, the duke advanced, and took the Lady Margaret by the hand. "I am selfish enough," he said, "to deprive you of your brother for a few weeks, to assist me by his counsel, and protect me by his arm, should it be necessary, in a little adventure we have resolved to undertake."

"I am too true to you, my lord," replied Margaret, "to desire my brother's society when you request his assistance. Were I a young knight, I should esteem it no light favor to march—no matter where—as an escort to Rodolph, Duke of Suabia."

"And I, fair maiden," returned the duke, "could wander to the end of the world with such a companion."

"I hope you may not find Henry so agreeable as to carry you so far, for I expect to welcome you back in a week."

"If I consulted my pleasure," said Rodolph, "I should not be absent a day, but my duty may detain me a month. I will not offer an apology for so long a stay, because I fear that before sunset you will have ceased to think of me, or remember me only in connection with your brother."

"A noble duke," replied the lady, "whose name is heard wherever the minstrel tunes his harp, whose word was never plighted in vain, whose sword was never stained in an unrighteous cause, whose arm and purse are ever at the command of the poor and persecuted, whose courage and clemency, wisdom and piety, so well entitle him to the love of all his people, is not so easily forgotten."

"I assure you, on my honor," exclaimed Rodolph, "that I value your words more than all the songs of all the minstrels I ever heard. I would I were worthy your praise; but you have inspired me to deserve it. Farewell! I see that Henry is impatient, and we must not lose the early morning."

He bade adieu to the baron and his daughter, and turned to mount his horse, when Bertha touched his arm, and placed in his hand something enveloped in silk. Bertha said not one word, but she looked earnestly up in Rodolph's face, and then walked away as swiftly and silently as she came. The duke could not help remarking the wild beauty of her pale and wasted face, and remained some moments gazing after her with a painful interest. He removed the silk and found that it contained a ring garnished with a stone of rare value. He started as his eye fell upon the trinket, for he remembered that years ago he had given it to the Lord of Hers. How could it have come into Bertha's possession, was the question that naturally occurred to him; but the answer came not so readily as the question. While the duke was thus pondering, Henry had embraced his father and sister, and leaped upon his horse. Rodolph mounted slowly, after examining the girths with his own hand; and the little troop, waving a parting salute, swept over the drawbridge, and were soon lost among the trees.



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About the same hour, or a little earlier, the Lord of Hers, with a small retinue, had set out in an opposite direction, but on the same mission. Rodolph had long seen that King Henry's unprincipled ambition threatened the liberties of religion and of Austria, and he only paused for the Papal excommunication to throw off all allegiance to a monarch who could not be safely trusted. That excommunication was impending, and, as may be easily conjectured, the duke was making a rapid circuit of his dominions, to unite his barons more closely to his interests; to warn them to prepare for the approaching struggle; to confirm the weak and wavering in their fidelity; inspire the resolves of those who were true and firm, and make all the pulses of the circle of Suabia throb in concert to the action of one grand moving power. To gain time, the Lord of Hers had been despatched to the provinces bordering upon the Rhine with letters from Rodolph to the principal barons there, while the duke himself, with Henry of Stramen, followed the Danube.

For many months there had been no active warfare between the hostile houses, though the feud had lost none of its venom. But age was stiffening the impetuosity of the old barons; and their sons, no longer urged on by the battle-cry of their sires, listened with more attention to the advice and representations of their spiritual instructors. Gilbert of Hers was not inclined to take an injury to his breast, and hug it there; but the bold and frequent incursions of Henry of Stramen had induced him to retaliate rather in a spirit of rivalry than of revenge. Henry of Stramen inherited all his father's implacability, but he had often yielded to his sister's solicitation to dedicate to the chase the day he had devoted to a descent upon the lordship of Hers. The troubled condition of Germany had also diverted the chiefs from the disputes of their firesides to the civil wars of the empire; and neither the Lord of Hers nor the Baron of Stramen gave much attention to aught else than the league that Rodolph was forming against Henry IV of the house of Franconia.

Gilbert, left almost without a companion—for the good priest Herman, whose time was divided between his pastoral duties, his prayers, and his studies, saw him but at intervals—found time to hang very heavily upon his hands. He thought the old reaper weary and sluggish, for the scythe flies fast only when we employ or enjoy the moments. The autumn blast was beginning to lend a thousand bright colors to the trees, and the giddy leaves, like giddy mortals, threw off their simple green for the gaudy livery that was but a prelude to their fall—for the beauty that, like the dying note of the swan, was but the beauty of death. It was the season of all others for the chase, that health-giving but dangerous pastime, which our ancestors pursued with almost incredible eagerness, hunting the stag or the boar, over hill and dale, bog and jungle, through every twist and turn, as their Anglo-Saxon descendants now pursue the flying dollar.

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But Gilbert often declined the invitation of the forester to fly the falcon, rarely indulging in his favorite amusement. He preferred to wander along the borders of the magnificent Lake of Constance, or to loiter among the neighboring hills, and watch, from some bare peak, the broad-winged vulture sailing slowly and steadily through the skies. He would watch it until it became a mere speck in the blue distance: we may often catch ourselves gazing after receding objects as though they were bearing away a thought we had fixed upon them. His wound was nearly well, and the freshness of health was again in his cheeks; but his spirit had lost a part of its sprightliness, and he seemed to have grown older. He did not evince his former relish for the manuscripts of Herman, but his visits to the chapel were more frequent and lasted longer. Thus, day after day, he would study the lake, the clouds, and the cliffs, neither fearing an attack from the men of Stramen, nor meditating one against them.

We shall leave him in his inactivity, to trace the progress of events which form one of the most important and exciting periods in history.

Rodolph was not a moment too soon in concentrating his power; for Henry IV, flushed with his recent victory over the Saxons, had called at Goslar a diet of the princes of the empire, under the pretext of deciding, in their presence, the fate of their Saxon prisoners. Only a small minority of the princes obeyed the summons; but the real object of the king became evident when he made them swear to exalt, upon his own death, Conrad his son, a minor, to the throne. In the meantime, the news of the nomination of Hidolph, as successor to the sainted Anno, had spread to Rome. The Pope beheld with profound sorrow the obstinacy and ambition of the king. Henry was not to be driven from his purpose by the universal contempt this nomination excited, and he replied to the repeated remonstrances of the citizens of Cologne, that they must content themselves with Hidolph or with a vacant see. And his firmness triumphed over the popular indignation; for Hidolph was invested by the king with the crozier and the ring, and finally consecrated Archbishop of Cologne.

But his victory was not complete. He had yet to cope with an adversary more formidable than popular opposition; one who would not yield to temporal tyranny the watch-towers and guardian rights of spiritual liberty. That adversary was Gregory VII. Already the tremendous threat had issued: "Appear at Rome on a given day to answer the charges against you, or you shall be excommunicated and cast from the body of the Church." But the infatuated monarch, too proud to recede, hurried on by his impetuous arrogance, and by the unprincipled favorites and corrupt prelates who shared his bounty, loaded the Papal legates with scorn and contumely, and drove them from his presence.



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He did not even wait for the sentence of excommunication to fall, that now hung by a hair above his head, but began the attack, as if resolved to have the advantage of the first blow. Couriers were despatched to every part of the empire, with commands to all the prelates and nobles upon whom he could rely, to assemble at Worms, where he promised to meet them without fail. Twenty-four bishops and a great number of laymen hastened to obey the summons. The conventicle sat three days, and the following charges were formally preferred against the Pope: "That he had by force extracted a solemn oath from the clergy not to adhere to the king, nor to favor or obey any other Pope than himself; that he had falsely interpreted the Scriptures; that he had excommunicated the king without legal or canonical examination, and without the consent of the cardinals; that he had conspired against the life of the king; that, in spite of the remonstrances of his cardinals, he had cast the Body and Blood of our Lord into the flames; that he had arrogated to himself the gift of prophecy; that he had connived at an attempted assassination of the king; that he had condemned and executed three men without a judgment or an admission of their guilt; that he kept constantly about his person a book of magic."

So palpably absurd and false were these charges that three of the assembled prelates refused to sign an instrument for the deposition of a pontiff, so little conforming to the ancient discipline, and unsupported by witnesses worthy of belief. Nor were Henry's machinations confined to Germany, but he ransacked Lombardy and the marches of Ancona for bishops to sign these articles of condemnation, and even aspired to infect Rome itself by presents and specious promises. But the golden ass could not then leap the walls of Christian Rome.

Gregory's principal accuser was the Cardinal Hugues le Blanc, whom he had previously excommunicated. This ambitious man rose in the council and taunted the Pope with his low extraction, at the same time charging him with crimes that were proved to be the offspring of calumny and error. He produced a forged letter, purporting to come in the name of the archbishops, bishops, and cardinals, from the senate and people of Rome, inveighing against the Pope, and clamoring for the election of another head of the Church. Encouraged by imperial patronage, and stimulated by a desire to rid himself of disgrace by sullyng the hands that had branded him, the excommunicated cardinal did not hesitate to call the Pope a heretic, an adulterer, a sanguinary beast of prey. The emperor himself knew Gregory too well to believe such a tissue of absurdity; but he hoped to find others more credulous than himself.



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Upon the accusations already specified, and the invectives of Hugues le Blanc, the assemblage of prelates at Worms resolve upon the deposition of Gregory VII. It is then that Henry steps forth, as the life and soul of the conventicle, armed with its decree, and addresses an insulting letter to the Pope, inscribed "Henry, king by the grace of God, to Hildebrand." In this letter, the decree of the conventicle is lost in the insolence of the king. "I," is the language of the missive, "I have followed their advice, because it seemed to me just. I refuse to acknowledge you Pope, and in the capacity of patron of Rome command you to vacate the Holy See." Can the most jaundiced eye, can the man who learned, even in his boyhood, to loathe the name of Hildebrand, read these expressions without confessing that the king was the aggressor, and that if the Christian Church had a right to expect protection from its appointed head, Gregory VII was called upon to vindicate the majesty and liberty of religion so grossly outraged in his person? Surely it will not be asserted at this day that the head of the State, by virtue of his temporal power, should be the head of the Church; or does that beautiful logic still exist, which denied an absolute spiritual supremacy in the successor of St. Peter, yet admitted it as an incidental prerogative to the crown of England? But we have yet to see the last act of this attempted deposition.

A clerk of Parma, named Roland, was charged with the delivery of this letter, and the decrees of the conventicle of Worms. A synod had been convoked in the Church of Lateran, and the Pope, surrounded by his bishops, occupied a chair elevated above the rest. Roland's mission had been kept a profound secret, and, when he appeared before the conclave, not a prelate there could guess his purpose. They had not heard the voice that had gone forth from Worms. But they did not long remain in suspense. Turning to the Pope, the envoy thus began "The king, my master, and all the ultramontane and Italian bishops, command you to resign, at once, the throne of St. Peter and the government of the Roman Church, which you have usurped; for you cannot justly claim so exalted a dignity without the approbation of the bishops and the confirmation of the emperor!" Then addressing the clergy, he thus continued: "My brothers, it is my duty to inform you, that you must appear before the king at the approaching festival of Pentecost, to receive a Pope from his hand; for the tiara is now worn, not by a Pope, but by a devouring wolf!"

Receive a Pope from the king! receive from Caesar what he must usurp to bestow! Had Gregory flinched, the independence of the Church would have been sacrificed, and her acknowledged inability to cope with royal vices would have permitted every European monarch to change his queen with his courtiers. Henry IV would have had his successor to Bertha; Philip Augustus his Agnes de Meranie; and Henry VIII his Cranmer and his scaffold without one moment's opposition.



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But no sooner had Roland pronounced those last words, than the Bishop of Porto leaped from his chair, and cried out: "Seize him!" The prefect and nobles of Rome and the soldiers drew their swords, and, in their sudden fury, would have killed the audacious envoy, had not Gregory, repeating his magnanimity to Cencius, covered the clerk with his own body, and by his calmness and eloquence controlled the indignation and disgust of his too zealous friends.

"My friends!" he said, with all the dignity of human greatness, elevated and purified by the most exalted piety, "disturb not the peace of the Church. Behold the dangerous times, of which the Scripture speaks, are come, when men shall be lovers of themselves, covetous, haughty, and disobedient to parents. We cannot escape these scandals; and God has said that He has sent us like sheep in the midst of wolves. It is necessary for us then to combine the innocence of the dove with the prudence of the serpent. Now, when the precursor of Antichrist erects himself against the Church, he must find us innocent and prudent; these dispositions constitute wisdom. We must hate no one, but bear with the madmen who would violate the law of God. Remember that God, descending a second time among men, proclaims aloud: 'He who would follow me must forsake himself!' We have lived in peace long enough, and God wishes that the harvest should again be moistened with the blood of His Saints. Let us prepare for martyrdom, if it shall be needed, for the law of God, and resolve that nothing shall sever us from the charity of Jesus Christ."

The synod, in breathless interest, listened to the holy Pontiff, who then proceeded with wonderful composure to read the charges that had been preferred against him. Among Roland's letters was another signed, "Henry, king not by usurpation, but by the grace of God, to Hildebrand, false monk and anti-pope." This was couched, if possible, in language more insulting than the former. One sentence will show the temper of the document, and prove that the king was struggling to build up a monarchy of divine rights and appointment. "A true Pope, Saint Leo, says, *Fear God! honor the king!* But as you do not fear God, neither do you honor me whom He has appointed king." Can any expression more clearly indicate that Henry of Austria had resolved to crush a Pontiff who stood between him and unquestioned despotism, and that he aimed at a heaven-commissioned temporal power, often conceded, it is true, but never by Catholicity. The letter concludes with these words: "I, Henry, king by the grace of God, warn you, with all our bishops: descend! descend!"

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When the Pope had finished reading the invectives of Henry and those who were weak enough to second his ambition, so great was the exasperation of the synod, that he adjourned it to meet the next day. When the morrow came, in the presence of one hundred and ten bishops, he recited his former indulgence to Henry, his paternal remonstrances, and his repeated proofs of love and goodness. The whole assembly rose in a body, and implored him to anathematize a perjured prince, an oppressor, and a tyrant, declaring that they would never abandon the Pope, and that they were ready to die in his defence. It was then that Gregory VII rose and pronounced, amid the unanimous acclamations of the synod, the sentence of excommunication against the emperor.

Thus went forth this awful thunderbolt for the first time against a crowned head. A dissolute and ambitious monarch had called upon the successor of St. Peter to yield up the keys, and lay the tiara at the feet of the lion of Austria, because that successor had declared an invincible determination to preserve the purity of the Church and its liberties, at the sacrifice of life itself. The tyrant struck in anger, and the Pontiff, incapable of yielding, gave the blow at last; for the *temple* of religion was insulted and invaded.

It is easy, when calmly seated at a winter's fireside, to charge Gregory VII with an undue assumption of temporal power. But he who will study the critical position of Europe during the eleventh century, must bow down in reverence before the mighty mind of him who seized the moment to proclaim amid the storm the independence of the Christian Church. Was not this resistance to Henry expedient? Yes! And to one who knows that the Church was the lever by which the world was raised from barbarism to civilization, and will confess, with Guizot, that without a visible head, Christianity would have perished in the shock that convulsed Europe to its centre, the truth is revealed, as it was to the master mind of Gregory, that had he pursued any other course, peace and unity, as far as human eye extends, would have perished with the compromised liberty of the Church of Rome. Let us rejoice, then, that this sainted Pontiff hurled against the Austrian tyrant the anathema on which was written—"The independence of the Church of God shall be sustained, though the thrones of princes crumble around her, or though her ministers are driven to seal their fidelity with death."

CHAPTER V

Fierce he broke forth: "And darest thou then
To beard the lion in his den?
The Douglas in his hall?
And hopest thou hence unscathed to got
No, by Saint Bride of Bothwell, no!
Up drawbridge, grooms!—ho! warder, ho!
Let the portcullis fall!"

MARMION

For three weeks the Lady Margaret had expected the duke and her brother; for three weeks Gilbert had impatiently awaited his father's return.



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Toward the close of September, a group of young children might be seen clustering around an old man, at the edge of the forest, within a stone's throw of the Church of the Nativity. They were listening eagerly and delightedly to the patriarch they had surrounded, in whom we recognize Father Omehr. The faces of the infant band were bright with innocence and that happy alchemy which turns the merest toy to a costly treasure. There was a tender piety on the features of those children that moved the heart. Devotion lies upon the face of youth with a peculiar fitness. As we see it dwelling in that unsullied abode, we remember how the cheek of the Madonna is pressed against the infant in her arms. Their instructor seemed to have caught a portion of their light-heartedness. Sad recollections and gloomy anticipations were forgotten. The throes of the empire and dangers of the Church intruded not; for a moment, the aged missionary felt the elasticity of childhood, and, as his heart was as pure, his face became as bright as theirs.

"Perhaps you have thought, my children," the priest was saying, while his hand rested lightly upon the head of the nearest boy, "perhaps you have thought at times, that had you been little children at Jerusalem when our Saviour entered the city in triumph, and the people went forth to meet Him with palm-branches, you too would have run to welcome Him, and laid fruits and pretty flowers at His feet. Perhaps you have thought that you would have offered Him some refreshing drink as He tottered under His cross up the hill of Calvary; that you would have embraced Him and wept most piteously when He fainted away in agony. How delightful would it have been to receive a smile from your suffering Lord! You have still the very same opportunity, my children, you would have had at Jerusalem. You can still run to meet your Redeemer! He loves the flowers of a pure heart better than those which make the green fields as beautiful as the blue sky with its stars; and He values the tears we shed for our sins more than the pain we should have felt to see Him suffer. Still continue to bring the fruits and flowers of piety and obedience to your parents to Jesus, and you will be permitted to wait upon Him in heaven for all eternity.

"Go, now, and play! And when the bell rings, come quietly to the church."

Not until his little flock had dispersed did Father Omehr perceive that the Lady Margaret was standing almost at his side.

The Lady Margaret has changed since we saw her return the parting salute of Rodolph and Henry. Her cheek has grown brighter, but her brow is smoother and paler. Her face is sweeter than ever, though still more melancholy. It may have been the balminess of the afternoon, solicitude for her brother's return, or a transient feeling, that controlled the expression of the maiden's face, but it seemed to have still less of earth in its exquisite proportions, and her eye was softer and deeper.



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It was Monday afternoon; and on this day every week, the missionary instructed the children of the neighborhood and prepared them for Communion. There still remained an hour before the time for evening service, and Father Omehr proposed to the Lady Margaret a walk along the shady avenue at the border of the forest. Disengaging herself from the children, who loved her and were clustering about her, she readily assented.

“Father,” began the maiden, as they walked together, “when may we expect the duke?”

“Before long, I hope,” replied the missionary; “the conventicle at Worms will decide at once which of his barons are for and which against him. I should not be surprised to see them returning at any moment.”

“Are they in no danger from ill-disposed chieftains?” asked the lady.

“The duke will pass through a friendly country, and is too much loved and feared to be assailed in his own dominions. Your father, I presume, is not anxious about their safety?”

“Oh, no! He talks as if they were invulnerable.”

“At least,” returned the priest, “you should rest content with praying for them, and not distress yourself with idle fears.”

A pause of some minutes ensued here, during which Margaret’s mind seemed actively and painfully employed. She broke the silence by exclaiming, in a low but earnest tone:

“I have always been too much influenced by idle fears—my whole life has been a tissue of timidity.”

“Do not accuse yourself unjustly, my child,” said her companion; “we must beware, even in reproaching ourselves, that we do not despise the favors of God, and lose the grace of perseverance in virtue.”

The fair girl was again silent, but she suddenly exclaimed, with much emotion:

“Year after year I felt a strong impulse to join the convent at Cologne, founded by the sainted Anno, but was withheld by a fear of my own weakness; I resolved to seek the cloister and forget the garb and customs of the world, but I feared that I might thus confirm my father in his indifference to religion and my brother in his antipathy to the house of Hers. The months kept gliding by, and still I was irresolute. I have prayed, with all the ardor I could command, for light to see my vocation; and if God have mercifully granted it, I wilfully remain blind. This self-made uncertainty and irresolution



cost me many a pang; nor have I even the merit of patiently and cheerfully enduring what they inflict.”

Margaret was violently agitated as she spoke, but was not entirely subdued by her excited heart, though more than one big tear went down her cheeks.

“Margaret!” said her venerable companion, stopping short and speaking so impressively that the maiden looked up through her tears.



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“Margaret!” he repeated, as their eyes met, “you have done much to soften your father’s anger and your brother’s impetuosity, and your mediation has perhaps endeared you to heaven—but you can do *more*! Devote your life to the extinction of the feud between the houses of Stramen and Hers—look to the duty that stares you in the face, and fulfil that vocation before you seek another! Make peace between these houses the first object of your prayers, and the aim of all your efforts, and God will soon determine whether the cloister or the castle requires your presence in the accomplishment of your noble end!”

As Father Omehr concluded, the Lady Margaret, yielding to the impulse she had till then controlled, wept like a child. Yet it was not deeper dejection that made her sob as though her heart would break, but rather a sense of relief, and a sweet consolation that banished all spiritual dryness. Her instructor had often before suggested her obligation to consecrate herself to the task of healing the feud; but never had he so solemnly warned her, and never had she seen her duty so clearly.

“Be calm, my child,” continued the missionary; “you can compose yourself in the church, while I prepare for the service. Prostrate yourself before the infinite majesty and goodness of God, and invoke His assistance, with a determination to accept with resignation whatever trial He may send. And forget not to supplicate the intercession of the Blessed Mary. Open your heart to her; beg her to discover and obtain its pious wants. *She* whom Jesus obeyed on earth, will not ask in vain in His eternal kingdom: God, who made her the medium of salvation to man while she remained a poor Jewish virgin, cannot deem her unworthy of being the channel of His choicest graces to us, now that she stands beatified in heaven!”

The Lady Margaret passed into the church and knelt before the altar. There she remained until the psalms were sung and the evening hymn was over. When she rose, her face was calm, and even joyous. There was no exultation in her look, but it was full of meek serenity. As she left the church, she met Father Omehr. She greeted him with a smile that told what a load was taken off her heart. There was gratitude, esteem, and a holy joy in that smile—it was full of tender and indescribable sweetness—it was an expression of the happiness and purity of her soul.

It was not the bright smile of youth, or the warm smile of affection; it had none of the witchery of woman, but much of the devotion of the Saint: beautiful as she was, and still more beautiful as it made her, it suggested the Creator, not the creature.

“We shall expect you to-night, Father,” she said, pausing but a moment.

Father Omehr nodded, and dismissed the children, who had come for a parting blessing, while the maiden turned her palfrey toward the castle. She rode swiftly, for dark clouds were climbing up the knew the extent of his infatuation, he was revolving

the feasibility of revealing his attachment. At last he had determined to embrace the first chance of declaring a love now past concealment.



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At the same time that the Lady Margaret was speeding to Stramen Castle, Gilbert was standing on the top of a steep hill that rose abruptly some distance to the north of that on which the towers of his fathers were built. He found a pleasure in surveying the majestic masses of thick dark clouds, that slowly overspread the West and swallowed up the sun. There seemed to be a mysterious sympathy between him and the angry elements, or perhaps he felt flattered to find the deep thunder and arrowy lightning less potent than the feelings within his bosom. He laughed at the coming storm, while the eagle flew by with a shriek, and the cattle sought any casual shelter. But, as he was not ambitious of becoming thoroughly wet, he sprang down the hill when the big drops began to fall, and entered a neat cottage situated in the opening of a rich valley, that swept from the hills toward the lake.

"What! alone, Humbert?" said the youth. "Your wife and children are not out in this storm, I hope?"

"They are praying in the next room," replied the man, sinking his voice.

Gilbert turned to the window; but the rain was now pouring down in torrents, and he could discern nothing but the lightning. Humbert was a favorite with the Lord of Hers. He played upon the harp with more than common skill, and could personate the regular minnesinger to perfection. His stock of ballads was inexhaustible, and some of his original songs might well compare with his borrowed lore. Besides this, he was a daring huntsman, an expert falconer, and a trusty follower.

"Humbert!" exclaimed the youth, in a searching whisper, "would you like to play the minnesinger in this storm?"

The retainer smiled and replied, "Yes, if I were a bull, and could bellow the lay."

But Gilbert answered, without relaxing a muscle, "You will not be called upon to play until you can be heard."

"Then we might as well wait until to-morrow," said the other, with great *sangfroid*, looking over Gilbert's shoulder at the rain.

"But understand me!" muttered the youth, rather sternly; "I am in earnest! Will your harp weather this storm?"

"Yes," returned Humbert, still playfully, "if we loosen its strings: I have a water-proof case for it. But I have no water-proof case for myself; and being compelled to brace *my* nerves for the encounter, they will be apt to snap."

"You incorrigible trifler, can you disguise yourself as well now, as when you palmed yourself upon us all for the minstrel Guigo?"



“Certainly.”

“And can you array me as your harpbearer, and alter this face and form of mine?”

“With much more ease than I can play the minstrel in this storm.”

“Then do it at once,” said Gilbert.

“My lord!”

“Yes!”

“Where?”

“Here!”

“When?”

“Now!”

Humbert eyed the young noble with a comic surprise.



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“Had we not better wait until the rain abates?”

“It is abating now,” replied Gilbert.

It was true: the first frenzy of the storm was over, and there was coming a pause in its wild career.

“There!” resumed the youth; “you can ride to the castle and bring two good horses before it begins again. Quick! I shall wait here.”

“You had better wait upstairs, out of sight,” suggested Humbert.

“You are right.”

“This way, my lord;” and, followed by his retainer, the young noble ascended to a room that might have been called Humbert’s studio. The latter, descending at once, called his wife, exchanged a few words with her, the import of which was to keep herself invisible, and, accustomed to a ready obedience, he leaped upon his horse and spurred for the castle. The distance was not greater than half a league, yet to Gilbert he was absent an age.

It was quite dark before Humbert had completed the disguises to his satisfaction. His own was a masterpiece in its way. He assumed a grace and a lightness that might well become a minstrel of no ordinary degree. The character of his face was completely changed, and was reduced, by means of long flaxen curls and other artificial additions, from frank manliness to almost feminine delicacy. The Lord of Hers himself could not have recognized his son in the drooping, swarthy, gypsy-looking figure that stood beside Humbert. Gilbert’s head was enveloped in something like a cowl, and his whole figure was muffled up in a coarse brown cloak. Thus attired, he was to play the part of a Bohemian harp-bearer.

The moment the finishing touches were put, the impatient youth hurried the more cautious yeoman to the saddle. The rain had ceased to fall, but the sky was still overcast and threatening. Though the moon was more than half full, they had barely light enough to justify the rapid pace at which the noble led the way. It was a little out of character for the minnesinger to carry his own instrument when a harp-bearer was so near at hand. But Humbert knew how to sling the harp across his back, and Gilbert, a mere novice in the art, would have found the burden excessively embarrassing. Gilbert pressed forward without opening his lips or looking behind, until they had entered the lordship of Stramen. Humbert, respecting the humors of his superior, followed just as silently. But he began to grow anxious as they kept advancing, and he could not repress an exclamation of surprise as Gilbert halted on the brink of the ravine we have described before, within a league of the castle. They led their horses down into the gully and tied them to two stout trees.



“Give me the harp!” exclaimed the youth, commanding rather than entreating. Humbert surrendered the instrument without a word, and they emerged from the ravine. They walked on, side by side, still in silence; for Gilbert’s mind was wrought up to the highest pitch, and held too thrilling communion with itself to notice his companion, except at brief intervals. But when they came within full view of the dim turrets of Stramen Castle, and the youth kept steadily advancing toward them, Humbert stopped short, and perceiving that Gilbert still advanced, he made bold to stay the rash stripling by touching his arm.



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Gilbert started and stood still; then said, with cold contempt: "Do you flinch?"

"From what?" inquired the other, calmly.

"From that mass of stone."

"What have we to do with that?"

"Enter it before an hour."

"And die before an hour," replied Humbert.

"Or live," said Gilbert, rather to himself than to his attendant, and resuming his rapid advance.

Humbert stood awhile, rooted to the ground, in mute amazement at his lord's inexplicable behavior. But every moment was precious. He sprang forward, and again seizing Gilbert's arm, he threw himself on his knees.

"My dear lord!" he exclaimed, "I conjure you in the name of your father to desist from this madness, and to return! You are rushing upon certain destruction! You are flinging away your life! Remember it is Monday! The arm of our blessed mother, the Church, cannot protect you to-day! My wife and my children will be left without a father, and the lordship of Hers without an heir!" Here the honest yeoman burst into tears, but the youth's determination was taken. He disengaged himself from his follower's grasp, and said, resolutely, but kindly:

"Return!"

"And leave you to perish alone?" cried Humbert, springing to his feet. "No, no! I am no craven! And why should I return? To be reproached with having seduced my lord into danger, and then basely deserted him? If you advance, I go with you, though I cannot guess your object, or justify your seeming madness. But I implore you to remember your duty as a son and as a Christian, and not to take a step that will make your enemies exult and your friends tear their hair in sorrow!"

For a moment the noble stood irresolute; but the next instant he seized Humbert's hand with a vice-like grip, and whispered in his ear, "I must see the Lady Margaret!"

Without waiting for a reply, Gilbert strode forward. Before the drawbridge was gained, Humbert had recovered himself, and was prepared to put forth all his daring and skill to extricate themselves from the consequences of this perilous adventure.

"Ho! warder!" he cried, in a confident tone, "a minnesinger—Ailred of Zurich—and his harp-bearer, wet and fasting. Shelter in the name of God!"



Down came the drawbridge, and the portcullis rose and fell, leaving them on the other side of the moat, surrounded by the men of Stramen. They were conducted with much respect to a comfortable room in the castle, and the arrival announced to the Lord Sandrit de Stramen. The baron, who had heard of Ailred's rising fame, was delighted with the intelligence, and invited the minstrel to his principal hall. Humbert encased his harp, and having tuned it, delivered it to Gilbert. Then, with scrupulous care, having re-examined his costume, he ascended a flight of stairs, escorted by a serf, and ordered Gilbert to follow. They were ushered into a spacious room, hung with armor and broidered tapestry.



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By a blazing fire were seated the baron and Father Omehr, and some paces behind them stood several attendants. Sir Sandrit rose and saluted the minstrel with much courtesy, and bade him warm himself at the genial hearth. Humbert received the baron's congratulations without embarrassment, and pledged his health in a brimming bowl. While the minnesinger and the noble were exchanging compliments, Gilbert kept a respectful distance, supporting the harp. He feared to look at the missionary, who sat, evidently little concerned about Ailred of Zurrich, wrapped in meditation. His heart had grown cold when, on entering the room, as he glanced around, he missed the Lady Margaret. Was she sick? Was the prophecy to be so swiftly consummated? He maintained his position unnoticed, save by the domestic who offered him wine, until the diligent seneschal had spread a long table, which soon presented a most tempting appearance. Venison, boar's flesh, fish, fowl, pastries of various kinds, and generous bowls of wine, proclaimed the hospitality of the proud baron. Father Omehr blessed the board, but declined participating in the repast.

Sir Sandrit forced the troubadour to sit at his side, while Gilbert occupied a seat at the lower end of the table, among the dependents of the house; for the arrival of a minstrel was one of those momentous occasions when the lord of the fee welcomed his retainers to his own board, and extended equal favor and protection to the highest and the lowest. Humbert's animation increased as the sumptuous meal progressed, while his naturally brilliant qualities, and a remarkable fund of wit and anecdote, so fascinated the baron that he was wholly absorbed in the charming Ailred. Gilbert sat silent and watchful, eating just enough to avoid observation. When the banquet was drawing to a close, the Lady Margaret entered the room, and glided to a seat beside the priest. The blood rushed to Gilbert's face with such a burning thrill, that he bent his head to hide his confusion. He trembled in the violence of his smothered emotion. It was some minutes before he dared to look up. Her face was exposed to his gaze, and he could see every feature distinctly. She was still the same—ay, more than the same—she was lovelier than ever. Regardless of discovery, he fixed his eyes upon the apparition that had haunted him so long, and was only recalled to a sense of his position by a loud call from the baron for the harp.

As he carried the instrument to the spot indicated by Ailred, the baron presented the minstrel to his daughter. Humbert behaved with becoming reverence. He took his station a few feet from the table, between Sir Sandrit and his daughter, and began to prelude with decision and great sweetness. Gilbert stood behind him, with his back to the baron and his face to the Lady Margaret. Humbert, emboldened by his reception, and perhaps inspirited by the wine, sounded the chords with admirable effect; and when the expectation



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of the audience was at the highest, he introduced a beautiful ballad, and raising his voice, sang the praises of Rodolph of Suabia. The baron and all his followers were listening intently to the minstrel, as, with a heaving breast and flashing eye, he recited the glory of Suabia and of her majestic duke. Even Father Omehr was carried away by the excited Humbert. But Gilbert's eyes and soul were riveted upon the Lady Margaret. What was the strain to him? he heard it not. The violent hopes and fears that had alternately shaken him, had given way to a silent rapture; the unnatural tension of his nerves was relaxed, and in spite of all his efforts, the tears gleamed in his eyes. When the lay was over, the room resounded with loud praises, and the baron threw a chain of gold around the minstrel's neck.

At this moment Margaret encountered Gilbert's eyes; she reddened with anger at first, but almost instantaneously became pale as death. Gilbert saw that he was recognized—he bent his head upon his breast, and prepared for the worst. But so completely had Humbert engrossed all eyes, that the maiden's agitation was not observed. She had penetrated the youth's disguise, and the discovery stunned her. She was bewildered, and could not determine what course to pursue. Humbert sounded his harp again, and began a wild romance. Concealing her agitation, she endeavored during the song to collect her thoughts. What embarrassed her most, was to divine whether Gilbert's purpose in his mad visit were hostile or merely a piece of bravado. But she resolved to take no step without mature reflection. She was deliberating whether she could communicate her secret to Father Omehr, without so surprising him as to excite remark, when he rose and left the room.

The Lady Margaret was detained to hear some verses improvised to herself, which she rewarded with a slight token; she then withdrew, without raising her eyes to Gilbert. After she had disappeared, the baron dismissed the guests and retained the minstrel. Seizing this opportunity, Humbert told Gilbert he might retire until he was called, and the youth passed out, leaving behind only a few favorite retainers with Sir Sandrit and the minnesinger. As the door closed behind him, Gilbert found himself in a long and dimly lighted corridor. He saw a black figure enter at the other end—it was Father Omehr.

"It rains too hard at present to venture out," said the priest, in passing, and he re-entered the hall to wait till the gust had exhausted itself.

Gilbert wandered along the arched gallery without any definite aim, yet expecting to see the Lady Margaret start from some secret niche. Suddenly his cloak was pulled so sharply, that he grasped his sword, which he had been prudent enough to conceal beneath the ample folds of his gown. As he turned, he saw a woman with her finger on her lips, but it was not the Lady Margaret: that shrivelled face and curved back belonged to Linda. The old neif,



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after thus enjoining silence, made a gesture for the youth to follow, and shuffled noiselessly before him. Gilbert's heart was well-nigh bursting with anxiety as they strode along. When they reached the point where the corridor branched off into many smaller passages, Linda entered one that opened through a sharp-arched door upon the top of a battlemented tower. The youth felt relieved by the cold, damp wind that drove through the aperture against his burning cheeks. As they reached a recess near the tower, Linda stopped and leaned against a buttress with her arms crossed on her breast. At this moment, Gilbert became aware of the presence of a third figure, muffled from head to foot in a mantle of fur; he felt that the Lady Margaret stood before him, but all his gallant resolutions melted away, and he remained mute and motionless, powerless to speak or act. Apparently unconscious of Gilbert's presence, the lady stepped within the recess and knelt before a statue of the *Mater Dolorosa*; the youth was awed and abashed: he began to consider his daring adventure an unwarrantable intrusion; he meditating kissing the hem of her garment and retiring with all his love unspoken. In the midst of his suspense Margaret arose and confronted him; her manner was formal and dignified without being cold or stern.

"Are you Gilbert de Hers?" she said, in an undertone, but her voice was firm and clear.

Gilbert bowed, but made no other reply.

"What is your motive in coming here?" pursued the maiden, still calmly.

The youth was silent, his eyes fixed on the pavement.

"Why have you come so mysteriously—in such a strange disguise?"

But still no answer came.

"Are you here," continued his fair questioner, with more emphasis, "on a hostile mission? Are you seeking vengeance on our house by stealth? Are you engaged in the prosecution of some criminal vow to injure us? Speak! Have you come to draw blood?"

"No, no!" muttered Gilbert, finding voice at last; "I bear your house no enmity."

"Beware!" said the lady. "Remember that for years you have been our professed and bitter enemy."

"I was your enemy. I solemnly declare myself one no longer."

"Then what has impelled you to this step? Is it an idle curiosity—a mere piece of bravado?" Gilbert made no reply.



“Is the object of your visit fulfilled? If so, fly at once! Your life is in danger—you cannot long escape detection—it is dangerous to tempt my father. Go! you will find none else here to listen to your denial of an inimical intent in this reckless deception.”

“My object is but half fulfilled!” exclaimed the youth, throwing himself at the Lady Margaret’s feet.



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It would argue a poor knowledge of the quick apprehension of woman, to say that the maiden was entirely unprepared for such a movement; but the suddenness of the demonstration made her start. Gilbert's embarrassment had disappeared in his fervor. He no longer stammered and stuttered, but with unhesitating eloquence went through that ancient but ever fresh story, found in the mouths of all suitors in all ages. Linda stood with her eyes and mouth distended, looking as though she had been petrified just as she was about to scream. It was rather a poor omen for Gilbert that Margaret should have turned to the old servant, who had advanced a pace, and calmly motioned her back to her corner. The daughter of Stramen listened to Gilbert's passionate professions with the air of one who was hearing the same vows, from the same person, under similar circumstances for the second time. She could scarcely have foreseen this, but there is no estimating the power of anticipation it is the mother of much presence of mind and unpremeditated wit.

After reciting the history of his love from its dawn to its zenith, Gilbert began to conjure her not to slight his affection, and not to permit family prejudices to stand in the way of their union.

"It can never be sufficiently lamented," he said, "that the demon of revenge has so long separated our houses, which ought to be united in the closest ties of friendship. It is time for us to learn to forgive. We have been too long aliens from God, and wedded to our evil passions. We must fling aside the scowl of defiance, the angry malediction, the sword and the firebrand, and, like Christians and neighbors, contract an alliance that may edify as much as our discord has scandalized. I conjure you, in the name of the victims already made by our feud—of the numbers who must perish by its continuance—in the name of the holy Church whose precepts we have disregarded, of the God whose Commandments we have violated, not to dismiss me in scorn and anger. I have perilled my life, that I might end our enmity in love."

"I am most happy," interposed the Lady Margaret, availing herself of the first pause in his rapid utterance, "I am most happy," she repeated, in a voice of singular sweetness, "that our enmity may end in love—"

A smile of exultation shot over Gilbert's face, and a sound of joy trembled on his lips. This did not escape the maiden, for she instantly added:

"But not in the love you propose!"

The light was gone from Gilbert's countenance, and he stared wildly into the lovely and mournful face before him.

"Not in the love you propose," she resumed. Hitherto she had spoken seriously and without agitation, but now her whole manner was changed. Her cheek glowed and her eyes gleamed: a sudden animation appeared in every limb. She took a step forward,

and bent over the still kneeling youth, fixing upon his a steady, penetrating gaze, as though she sought to read his inmost soul.



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“Tell me, Gilbert de Hers,” she said, “do you truly desire peace between us?”

“As I live,” replied Gilbert, “yes!”

“Do you desire it for the love of God, and because our enmity displeases Him?”

“Yes.”

“Then consecrate yourself to the attainment of that peace! Let no selfish motive spur you on! Look to heaven for your recompense, not to me I Aspire to eternal favor, not to mortal love! As for me—my days are numbered here!—but what remains of life, I devote to the same holy end. We will labor together, though apart, in a noble cause—our prayers shall be the same—our hopes the same—our actions guided by the same resolves! If I should die before our task is done—if my death fail to soften my father’s heart—falter not in your enterprise! With the grace of God, I shall be with you still! Fix your heart *there!*”

Her trembling finger was raised to heaven as she spoke, and in the splendor of her pious enthusiasm, she seemed rather the guardian Angel of the youth than a daughter of earth.

Gilbert remained as one entranced—he did not even hear the sharp scream that burst from Linda, as Bertha, with her hair streaming wildly over her face and neck, darted toward them through the corridor, followed by a dozen men-at-arms.

“Fly! fly! my lady!” cried the terrified neif, setting the example.

But Margaret remained firm.

“Rise!” she said to Gilbert, who still knelt as if turned to stone. Alive to her voice, he sprang to his feet.

“Back!” cried the Lady Margaret to the leader of the party, who was now within a few feet of her.

“Pardon me, my lady,” said the man, bowing deeply; “your sire has commanded us to arrest the harp-bearer.”

The maiden reflected an instant, and then said: “Offer him no violence—take him before my father—I will accompany you.”

Gilbert had drawn his sword, but at a sign from the Lady Margaret, replaced it in his belt, and suffered himself to be seized by two of the men of Stramen. Margaret led the way along the corridor, followed by Bertha, whose voice could be heard at times mingling with the clang of the heavy feet that waked a hundred echoes along the



vaulted passage. Had Gilbert looked behind him as he left the ravine, he would have seen a female figure there—that figure had dogged him ever since. Bertha was again his evil spirit: with a peculiar cunning, she had followed him unobserved to the interview with the Lady Margaret, and then communicated her suspicions by gestures and broken sentences to the baron. Scarce knowing whether to credit the confused story of the unfortunate woman, Sir Sandrit had ordered Gilbert's arrest, rather to get rid of Bertha's importunity than as a prudent or necessary measure. When the youth entered the room with Margaret, Bertha, and his armed escort, the baron said, without any irritation:

“Is this a Bohemian, my daughter? Has he been telling your fortune?”



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But the Lady Margaret was silent.

“Unmuffle that churl,” pursued the knight, manifesting some impatience; “let us see what lurks beneath that sordid cowl.”

“Hold!” cried the youth, arresting the lifted arm of his guard and uncovering his head with his own hand. “There is no motive for concealment now, sir,” he continued, meeting without flinching the kindling eye of the baron. “I am Gilbert de Hers!”

At this bold declaration, Sir Sandrit started up, almost livid with anger, while the corded veins swelled in his menacing brow; Father Omehr clasped his hands, despondingly at first, and then, raising them as if in prayer, kept his eye fixed on the baron; the Lady Margaret bent her head in deep affliction, and Humbert involuntarily struck his harp. The single note sounded like a knell: a death-like silence ensued. Already four stalwart soldiers had secured Gilbert’s arms, and with determined looks they waited but a signal from their chief: still the infuriated knight scowled at Gilbert, and still the latter firmly bore the storm.

“To prison with him!” at length exclaimed the baron. “Instant death were too good for the designing villain who has stolen like a snake into our midst. Away with the deceiver, who would stoop, to seek by a most unmanly stratagem the revenge he dared not openly attempt.”

“The bravest of your name,” retorted Gilbert, “has not yet dared to set foot within my father’s halls.”

“Because we murder not by stealth!” shouted Sir Sandrit, stung by the sarcasm.

“I meant no murder in coming here!”

“Aha! you find it easy to disguise your designs as well as your person!”

“I came to renounce the foe at your daughter’s feet, and tell her that I loved her. I have done so—do your worst!”

While the youth was speaking, the maddened baron snatched a heavy mace from a man who stood by. Already the ponderous mass quivered in his powerful grasp, when his daughter, with a piercing shriek, threw herself upon his arm. After a vain effort to free himself, the ready knight seized the weapon with his left hand, and with wonderful adroitness and strength prepared for the blow. But the baron’s arm was again arrested. Between the chieftain and the motionless object of his wrath stood Father Omehr. The mace must crush that majestic forehead, that benevolent eye, must steep those venerable hairs in blood, before it can reach the unfortunate Gilbert. Calm, but stern, the missionary, stood, superior to the frenzy of the noble.



“Forbear! In the name of God I command you—forbear!” Such was his exclamation, as, with one arm outstretched, he opposed his hand to the mace.

“Tempt me not!” cried the baron, growing pale, and stamping in his rage.

“Tempt not your God!” returned the fearless priest.

“Stand aside! Beware! You shelter a miscreant!”

“Beware yourself of the fiend at your heart!” replied the old man, maintaining his perilous position.



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“Think not to thwart me always,” resumed Sir Sandrit. “I have too long permitted your interference. Again and again have you thrust yourself between me and the objects of my wrath! You have ever sided with my inferiors—protected my serfs, and insulted their master.”

“I have sided with mercy and with your better nature. You are a demon now—and seek what, if obtained, would make you even loathe yourself, and would, in the pure eye of God—”

A shrill blast of a bugle sounded at the castle gate.

“The duke! the duke!” exclaimed the Lady Margaret, throwing her arms around her father’s neck.

The mace was still uplifted, the priest was still before it, Gilbert was still pinioned by the men of Stramen, and all was silent as the tomb, when Rodolph and Henry entered the room.

“Did you listen to that minion, Margaret?” said the baron to his daughter, without seeming to notice the presence of the duke.

“It is because she gave me no hope,” interposed Gilbert, “that I am indifferent to your anger.”

Rodolph, perceiving the difficulty at a glance, put his arm in his angry baron’s and led him aside, while Henry advanced to his sister. After a long and vehement discussion, the King of Arles left the knight standing with his arms folded on his breast and his back to the group, and released Gilbert from the close grasp of his captors.

“Come with me,” he said, in a whisper.

“Where?” inquired Gilbert.

“To the other side of the drawbridge?”

“But—I cannot leave Humbert,” said the youth, pointing to the frightened minnesinger.

“He shall go with you—they care not for him.”

At a beck from the duke, Humbert was at his side. “Follow me,” said Rodolph.

But Gilbert lingered a moment to press Father Omehr’s hand to his lips, and then the three passed silently, out of the apartment. They soon gained the terrace, where, to his surprise, Gilbert found his own horses that had been tied in the ravine. Bertha had



brought them there. The two adventurers were conducted by the duke beyond the castle bounds. The clouds had passed away, and the moon and stars shone brightly.

“Away now!” cried the hero of Hohenburg.

Bidding the noble duke an affectionate farewell, Gilbert and his follower sprang to the saddle and galloped off. But the adventures of the night were not yet over. Hardly had they passed the ravine, before Humbert’s quick ear detected the tramp of a horse behind them.

“Faster!” said Gilbert, putting spurs to the somewhat jaded animal he rode.

Faster they went, but the sound came nearer and nearer. Again Gilbert urged on his horse, and again the galled creature bounded forward, but the pursuing sound came faster than they. Humbert looked behind, and by the bright moonlight saw a solitary horseman advancing at a furious pace.

“It is but one man,” said he.



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“So much the worse!” replied the youth, without checking his speed.

“He must overtake us!” continued Humbert; “he gains at every leap!”

It was true. The horseman was almost on them.

“Fly not so fast, gentlemen!” he cried as he came up.

“I knew it was he,” muttered Gilbert, halting.

“You have given me some trouble to overtake you!” said Henry of Stramen, with a bitter sneer, as he wheeled his swift horse, which had darted ahead, and confronted them.

“Had I been well mounted,” answered Gilbert, “you should have had your trouble in vain!”

“I conjectured as much, from your determined flight,” returned Henry.

Gilbert was stung to the quick, but he constrained himself to reply:

“With your permission, sir, we will ride on.”

“My permission can only be obtained in one way, and that way should already have been embraced by a Suabian noble.”

Saying this, the young knight leaped to the ground, and drew his sword.

“You will dismount, I trust!” he continued, as Gilbert sat steadily in his saddle.

“No! Let me pass, I entreat you!” said Gilbert, putting his horse in motion. But Henry of Stramen, with a sudden spring, caught the reins, and forced the animal well-nigh upon his haunches.

“I knew it!” cried Henry, with a bitter laugh. “You took advantage of my absence to insult my sister, but I returned too soon for your chivalry. Dismount! The truce of God covers not to-day. Dismount! Add not cowardice to deceit!”

This was more than Gilbert could bear. Quick as lightning he stood beside the challenger. It was but the work of a moment to throw off his coarse cloak and draw his sword. Having chosen his position, he awaited the assault of his adversary. Humbert looked on in breathless interest, while the two young nobles fought in the moonlight. For some minutes Gilbert maintained his ground, despite the furious efforts of his assailant. There was a strong contrast between the desperate energy of Henry and the calm courage of Gilbert. But at length the latter began to recede rapidly down a gentle slope. His antagonist recklessly pursued. The motive of Gilbert’s retreat soon became



evident. Henry's foot slipped on the long grass, slimy from the recent rain, and he fell at full length upon the ground. Before he could rise, Gilbert had mounted the far fleeter steed of his opponent.

"Return, coward! and see if chance will save you again!" shouted Henry, as he gained his feet.

"Your sister has saved you once, and she shall save you again!" answered Gilbert; and, without regarding the denunciations of the knight of Stramen, he called to Humbert, and resuming the road to Hers, was soon out of hearing of Henry's threats.

CHAPTER VI

No ceremony that to great ones 'longs,
Not the king's crown, nor the deputed sword,
The marshal's truncheon, nor the judge's robe,
Become them with one half so good a grace
As mercy does.

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MEASURE FOR MEASURE.

The sentence pronounced at Rome against Henry IV of Austria spread consternation wherever it went; the resolute prepared for instant action, and the timid looked in vain for a peaceful asylum. There could be no neutrality, since not to serve the king was to serve his antagonist. Throughout the empire the stern challenge was ringing: "Are you for the Pope or for the king?" The gay and reckless champions of the court, the knights of the house of Franconia, and many a bold adventurer, crowded around the royal banner. Many a haughty prelate, too, seduced by avarice or ambition, urged on the monarch in his mad career.

But the enterprise of Rodolph and the Lord of Hers had been most happily timed, and the chivalry of Suabia were prepared to follow their martial duke at a moment's warning. That warning followed shortly after the date of the last chapter. Gilbert had gained his chamber as the morn was breaking, and had hardly time to review the exciting events of the night, before an attendant announced his father's arrival. The Lord of Hers had reached Zurich on his return, just as the tidings from Rome had been received; and without pausing an instant, he hurried across the lake to convey the intelligence to the King of Arles. The baron was himself too much excited with the momentous results at last developed, and the still more momentous sequel already shadowed forth in the uncertain future, to remark the nervous and somewhat jaded appearance of his son. His first words, after hastily embracing Gilbert, were:

"Where is the duke?"

"At Stramen Castle," replied the youth.

"When did he arrive?"

"Last night," answered Gilbert, without reflecting that he was, as effectually as possible, giving his father a clue to his hare-brained expedition with Humbert. It was well for him that the baron was too well satisfied with the information to inquire how it had been obtained; for, incapable of deceiving his parent, he would have been compelled, very reluctantly, to submit a brief account of his connection with Ailred of Zurich, the minnesinger. A chilly anticipation of the question struck him, just as the words escaped his lips, and his cheek tingled as the blood came creeping against it. But, to his great relief, his father, without noticing his confusion, turned to a soldier who stood behind him, and thus addressed him:

"Mount your best horse and ride for life and limb to Stramen Castle! Here!" continued the baron, taking a fold of parchment from his breast, as the man, prompt to obey without question or hesitation, bowed and was going; "this for his highness, the King of Arles. Guard it with your life from the enemies of the duke, and if you meet the serfs of

Stramen, proclaim your errand. Away! spare neither spur nor rein!" cried the knight, as the man dashed fearlessly down the hill.



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Rodolph of Suabia was scarcely less anxious to see the Lord of Hers, than the latter had been to acquaint the duke with Gregory's rigorous measures. He felt assured that the infamous conventicle at Worms must have been already met by the Pope, and he thirsted for news from Rome. He knew that the Lord of Hers would be first in possession of the facts, from his position along the Rhine; and anxious not to lose a moment in executing his plans, which were to be regulated by the action of the Holy See, he could scarcely be prevailed upon to defer till daylight his return to Zurich by the Castle of Hers.

The baron's envoy had not accomplished half the distance between the rival castles, before he met the duke, unattended, as was his wont, bearing rapidly down upon him. He was no stranger to the lordly bearing of the duke, for he had watched him in battle, when the strife was warmest and the fight most dubious. The moment he recognized him, he sprang from his horse, and uncovering his head and kneeling down, presented the parchment as Rodolph advanced. Without dismounting, the duke received the missive, and eagerly unrolling it, began to read. The instrument contained a narrative of the proceedings of the council and a transcript of the sentence of excommunication. The noble's eagle eye flashed at it scanned the page, and his broad bosom heaved. He struck his breast in his excitement, and brandishing the parchment in the air, exclaimed aloud, in a deep, tremulous voice: "Well done, thou noble Pontiff! Now, my brother Henry, the time has come, and heaven be the judge between us!"

With these meaning words Rodolph galloped on, unmindful of the soldier behind him. Yet it would seem he had not entirely forgotten the messenger, for when alighting at the Castle of Hers, he threw the man a largess such as had never fallen to his lot before.

The duke could not but smile when he saw Gilbert, and taking him aside, he whispered in his ear: "You will soon have an opportunity to display upon the battle-field the gallantry of the Bohemian harp-bearer, and to couch a lance for Suabia and the Lady Margaret!"

"But how can I thank you for—"

"Thank that generous priest and that noble girl!" said Rodolph, interrupting the youth; "I ran no risk in interposing: the Baron of Stramen was but cancelling an old debt; I intercepted a battle-axe that was descending upon him at Hohenburg, and I asked mercy for you, in requital."

After a long interview, the duke and Albert of Hers resolved to assemble the chiefs of the ducal party at Ulm, and to fix the fifteenth of October for a general meeting, at Tribur, of all who would take up arms against the king.



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While the Lord of Hers was engaged in persuading the Duke of Bohemia and the bishops of Wuertzburg and Worms to repair to Ulm without delay, Gilbert was polishing his armor and exercising his barb. The stirring spirit of the times, the approaching honors of knighthood, with a golden chance of winning his spurs, assisted in diverting his mind from a melancholy contemplation of the hopelessness of his love. But even when brandishing his stout lance, or wheeling his good war-horse, he would hear those withering words: "*The grave will anticipate her choice!*" followed by the fatal echo which came from her own lips, in solemn confirmation of the prophecy: "*My days are numbered here!*" Nor could the dazzling dreams of young ambition shut out the still more delicious sight of the Lady Margaret, now kneeling before the *Mater Dolorosa*, now appealing to him with the pure emotion and wondrous beauty of an Angel, and now clinging to her father between him and the battle-axe.

While the stern Sandrit de Stramen was preparing his vassals for the impending strife, and literally converting the scythe into the sword—while he spared no expense or trouble in supplying his men with arms and horses, all gayly decorated to make a gallant show at Tribur—while the sturdy yeomen were leaving their ploughs in the field to pay their rent by the service of shield and sword—the Lady Margaret, uninfluenced by the war-like bustle, calmly pursued her meditations, her daily visits to the church, and her numberless acts of charity. She had a delicate and difficult duty to perform in soothing the proud mind of her brother, stung to the quick by his unlucky encounter with Gilbert. The young knight of Stramen was panting for an opportunity to retrieve his misfortune and wipe out his fancied disgrace. When in conversation with his sister, to whom he would outpour his passionate impulses, he pledged himself over and over again to bring the daring stripling to his knee, who had dared to insult her in his absence. To his fiery threats, Margaret would offer no direct opposition, for she feared to awaken an easily excited suspicion that she sympathized far too warmly with the culprit. This suspicion would have paralyzed her influence. She contented herself with pointing out the impossibility of settling a domestic quarrel at the present moment, and the imperative duty of considering rather the public weal than the gratification of a private inclination. And at times, when Henry appeared more tractable, and when, moved by her tender affection and earnest discourse, he exhibited a disposition more closely resembling her own, she would suggest what a nobler and better revenge it would be to seek an opportunity of saving Gilbert's life in the coming struggle. Henry's chivalrous nature was easily attracted by this suggestion, and he determined to prove his superiority over his rival, before attempting his ultimate revenge.

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Father Omehr's duties increased as the fifteenth of October approached. The yeomen and vassals of Stramen recked little of their bodies, but they cared not to peril their souls. They feared not to expose their breasts to the arrow and lance, and to meet the powerful war-horse with unflinching spear; but they were solicitous, at the same time, to purify their hearts for the mortal struggle. This wise precaution indicates no craven spirit, for he who fears eternity the most, fears death the least. The good missionary beheld with a mournful eye the preparations everywhere making for a struggle apparently inevitable. He shared not in the ambition of Rodolph or the ardor of his barons; and he bitterly lamented the dire necessity which compelled blessed peace to disappear beneath the withering breath of war. Yet war seemed to be the unavoidable result of the excommunication, and the action of the Pope was necessary to preserve the purity and liberty of the Church. Deeply as he deplored the present crisis, he exclaimed, "Thy will, O God, be done! We have done what seemed to be our duty, be the consequences what they may!"

The empire was thus divided into two great parties. At first the partisans of the king were much more numerous and powerful, but their strength was daily diminishing, as conscience began to operate upon some, and fear upon others. The most marked and appalling chastisement was overtaking the fiercest calumniators of the Pope. It happened that, on a certain festival, the Bishop William, in the presence of the king, interrupted the Mass by a violent denunciation of the Pope, in which he called him an adulterer and false apostle, and assailed him with bitter raillery. Hardly had the ceremonies been concluded before the episcopal slanderer was struck down with a fatal malady. In the midst of the most excruciating torments of mind and body, he turned to the minions of Henry who surrounded him, and cried: "Go, tell the king, that he, and I, and all who have connived at his guilt, are lost for eternity!" The clerks at his bedside conjured him not to rave in that manner; but he replied, "And why shall I not reveal what is clear to my soul? Behold the demons clinging to my couch, to possess themselves of my soul the moment it leaves my body. I entreat you—you, and all the faithful, not to pray for me after my death!" With this he died in despair. The same day, the cathedral of Utrecht, in which he had preached, and the royal pavilion, were suddenly consumed by fire from heaven. Burchard, Bishop of Misne, Eppo of Ceitz, Henry of Spire, and the Duke Gazelon, were successively the victims of sudden and fatal misfortunes. Whatever may be the impression produced at the present day, it is certain that these examples and a great number of others, struck terror into the partisans of the king, and many prelates and priests threw themselves at the feet of the Pope and renounced their errors. Thus, Udo, Archbishop of Treves, repaired all penitent to Rome, and Herman of Metz began to waver in his hitherto steady fidelity to Henry.



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While these causes were sapping the imperial power, Henry was unexpectedly menaced from another quarter. The two sons of Count Geron, William and Thiery, who had for some time secretly cherished the hope of regaining the lost freedom of their country, saw in the present confusion the moment for which they had sighed. They raised the standard of revolt, and were soon at the head of a band of young and noble chieftains, whose intrepid bearing and dauntless confidence inspired the nation with the desire and the hope of liberty. The escape of the two Saxon princes from Henry's hands and their arrival in Saxony gave an irresistible impulse to the movement, and the whole circle, animated by the same spirit, rose haughtily to throw off the heavy yoke, never patiently endured.

Rodolph lost not a moment in concentrating his forces and in profiting by this new defection. He had already secured the powerful assistance of Berthold of Carinthia and Welf of Bavaria, and could now oppose to the emperor the formidable league of Suabia, Carinthia, Bavaria, and a portion of Lombardy. His policy evidently was to conciliate the Saxons, and he deemed their impiety sufficiently chastised at Hohenburg. He took care to assure them that so far from having anything to apprehend from his opposition to their enterprise, they might rely upon his assistance and countenance.

Henry had long affected a contempt for the anathemas of Gregory and an unconcern he was far from feeling; but this formidable coalition burst the shell of his apathy and laid bare his uneasiness. He supplicates his nobles in the disaffected provinces to meet him at Mayence; but his earnest prayers are disregarded. Finding his advances indignantly rejected by the princes of Upper Germany, and seeing that his prelates were rapidly deserting him, he addresses himself to the task of conciliating the Saxons. He employs every artifice to excite Otto of Nordheim against the two sons of Geron—menacing Otto's own sons, whom he held as hostages, in case the father refused. But the noble Saxon replied, that he would stand or fall by his country. Though signally foiled in all his schemes, Henry was still at the head of a numerous and veteran army, and he boldly advanced upon the marches of the Misne, to give battle to the sons of Geron. The Saxons did not wait an attack, but sallied forth to meet the monarch. The Mulda, swollen with the recent rains, alone separated the hostile armies, when the king, seized with a sudden panic, ordered a hasty retreat, and fell back upon Worms, where he gave himself up to a lively regret and the gloomiest forebodings.



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The Saxons exulting in their first success, wished to revive the league with Suabia; but first besought the Holy See to indicate which side they should espouse. Gregory's saintly and heroic reply displays the pure motives by which he was animated in excommunicating the king, and which continued to govern his conduct throughout the contest. He cannot recommend the anathematized monarch to the embraces of the Saxons—nor, on the other hand, does he entirely commend the self-interested zeal of Rodolph. He wishes to humble the king without exalting his adversaries—to reform the empire without a civil war. Had he possessed a particle of the lofty ambition which has sometimes been ascribed to him, this was the moment to attach the Saxons to the Suabian confederacy, and give a death-blow to the Franconian line. But instead of an animated exhortation to arms, in the name of outraged religion, the magnanimous Pontiff writes: "Forget not, I pray you, the frailty of human nature; and remember the piety of his father and his mother, unequalled in our time." Gregory's respect for Henry's parents seems to have inspired him with the charitable hope, which never deserted him, that the king would renounce his vices and return to virtue. It is well to keep this in view, since it is easier, after an inquiry into the struggle between them, to justify the severity than the lenity of the Holy See.

The fifteenth of October had at length arrived, and the eyes of Germany were eagerly directed to Tribur. The left bank of the Rhine was glittering with the chivalry of Upper Germany, and the legions of Suabia were encamped along the bristling river. Here might be seen the swarthy Bohemian, the stern Thuringian rider, the gay Loinhard, and the gigantic Swiss, all mingling together, and apparently indifferent as to where they might be led. Gilbert de Hers felt a new and ardent delight in gazing upon the long and dazzling array of helmets and spears. He longed for the hour when the whole mass would be in motion against a body as beautiful and powerful as itself. With far different feelings did Father Omehr behold the formidable battalia. He knew that the pomp of war, if often sung by poets, is oftener chronicled in hell. In the beautiful language of the age, he had been taught that "Peace is the language of heaven, for Christ, who came from heaven, spoke that language, saying, '*Pax vobis!*' It is the language of Angels, who cried, exulting, '*In terra pax!*' It is the language of the Apostles, who thus greeted every house they entered: '*Pax huic domui!*'" Were the hasty and unscrupulous penmen of our generation to draw their information from the writings of the Saints, instead of from martial legends or miserable perversions even of these, they would find the spirit of the Ages of Faith eminently pacific, and could be induced so to represent it. At least, the Church, the teacher and the regenerator of Europe, breathed nothing but "Peace!" Many holy doctors went so far as to condemn hunting, as being calculated to make men love war. And even the war-cry of the red-crossed knights was: "*Mansuetudinem quaerimus et non bella!*"



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The nobles of the empire, the principal prelates who remained faithful to Rome, and the Papal legates, Siccard, Patriarch of Aquileia, and Altmann, Bishop of Passau, were assembled within the town in solemn council. Scarcely, however, had their deliberations begun, before Otto of Nordheim, at the head of the flower of Saxony, appeared among them and declared himself in their favor. Then former jealousies and wrongs were forgotten, and Otto and Welf and Rodolph, cordially embracing each other, devoted themselves to the execution of whatever enterprise the common cause might require. Seven days were consumed by the council in the discussion of the diseases, the wants, and the dangers of the State. In the meantime, Henry, apprised of the meeting, had hastened with his army to Oppenheim, and occupied the opposite side of the river.

When informed that his cruelty, his blasphemy, his perfidy were strongly exposed and unanimously condemned, and that he was denounced as a violator of law and propriety, false to the dignity of the Church, and faithless to the State, he implored the princes to accept his contrition, and offered to resign all but the insignia of royalty, with which he could not honorably part, and to give hostages for his future good behavior. But the council replied that they knew his sincerity too well to desire another proof of it; and that a perfidy so deeply rooted as his must be incurable. The messages of the monarch served only to inflame his opponents still more violently against him; and the princes, disgusted with his pretended submission, resolved to elect a new king, pass the Rhine, and attack the imperial troops. Henry, driven to despair, concentrated his forces upon a single point, and prepared to give battle, determined to conquer or die.

But here, again, the peaceful spirit of the Church interfered to prevent a scene of carnage, by withholding the Apostolical suffrage from the nominee to the imperial dignity. As in almost every battle chronicled by Froissart, the bishops at first passed from army to army, exhorting to peace, and studying to bring the point in dispute to an amicable adjustment, so at this moment the Papal legates and the bishops compelled the confederates to give the king to the end of the year to repent, if he complied with certain conditions, the observance of which was required for the peace and safety of Germany. The two most important of these conditions were, to retire from public life, and to seek, in person, at Rome, the raising of the interdict. It is impossible not to see in this arrangement the finger of Gregory, solicitous to avert bloodshed, and directed by his magnanimous and charitable repugnance to credit Henry's utter depravity.



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There were some who regretted this peaceful result, among whom the stern Baron of Stramen was conspicuous for his open denunciation of the treaty nor could the polished Lord of Hers conceal his contempt for a compromise, which threw away a present advantage, in consideration of the fear-extorted oath of a perjured debauchee. Rodolph himself deeply regretted that the Pope would not consent to crown him king, a consummation he required before acting against his brother, lest he should be branded as a rebel. Even Gilbert and Henry of Stramen were crestfallen in the blight of all their budding hopes. Of all our Suabian friends, Father Omehr was the only one who rejoiced in this amicable termination of the council, and who devoutly returned thanks to God for averting a direful war, and proclaiming, in the favorite language of heaven, "*Pax fiat!*"

During two months and a half, Henry buried himself in solitude at Spire. Rodolph remained watchful and expectant, now at Zurich, and now in Saxony. All was calm in the lordships of Hers and Stramen. The Lady Margaret was lamenting the absence of Father Omehr, who had been summoned to Rome, and whose missionary duties were performed by the pious Herman.

The year of grace was drawing to a close, and the proud baron began to hope that the emperor would permit it to pass without observing the stipulation in the treaty to repair to Rome and ask pardon of the Pope. The new year had begun, and January was half over when the King of Arles was startled with the intelligence that Henry had purchased from Adelaide, the widow of the Margrave Otho, a free passage into Italy, and, in spite of snow and ice, had crossed the Alps, and was approaching the fortress of Canossa, whither Gregory had retired. At first it was rumored that the monarch had gone to depose the Pope, and the Duke of Suabia secretly exulted in the prospect of instant action. But it was soon ascertained that Henry presented himself in the character of a suppliant, and the result of his application was awaited with breathless interest.

Early in the spring of 1077, toward the close of a cold, bright day, Rodolph was seated in his palace at Zurich, surrounded by Albert of Hers and Gilbert, on one side, and on the other, by Sandrit and Henry of Stramen. This strange meeting, though unexpected and unwelcome to the hostile knights, was designed by Rodolph, who thought that by thus accustoming them to restrain their passions in his presence, and by distinguishing them with equal confidence, and praising both sides in equal measure, he might control, in some degree, the antipathies he could not entirely subdue. But the barons maintained a stern, unyielding reserve, and Gilbert studiously avoided the disdainful gaze of Henry of Stramen. The lamps were scarcely lighted when a messenger from Rome was announced, and the next moment Father Omehr entered the room.

The nobles rose, and, greeting the venerable missionary respectfully and affectionately, conducted him to a seat, and gathered about him. When the attendants had been dismissed, and the duke invited him to proceed, Father Omehr thus began to describe the interview between the Pope and the king, to which he had been an eye-witness:



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"I had the happiness to be with His Holiness when Henry was conducted by the noisy populace to the walls of Canossa; and though we knew not with any certainty whether the king's intentions were inimical or friendly, I could discover in the Pontiff's placid face neither hope nor fear. The first prayer presented by the royal suppliant, ascribed ambition and envy to the leaders of the coalition against him."

"Tyrant!" interposed the Lord of Hers, "he begins his penitence by a calumny."

"Our Holy Father only replied," continued the priest, "that the ecclesiastical law did not permit him to judge the accused in the absence of his accusers; and invited him, since he confided in his innocence, to meet his accusers at Augsburg, and abide by the Papal decision."

"Yes!" exclaimed Rodolph, eagerly. "And what said the king?"

"That the anniversary of his excommunication was approaching, and that unless the interdict were raised, his rights to the crown would be forfeited. Should the Pope receive him to favor at once, he promised to submit to whatever His Holiness might subsequently decree, and answer his accusers at Augsburg."

"Artful villain!" ejaculated Albert of Hers.

"But His Holiness remained inflexible," resumed the missionary. "At last, moved by the prayers and tears of those around him, he permitted Henry to approach him, to prove his penitence and atone for his contempt of the Holy See. The prince delayed not to avail himself of this grace; and the next morning presented himself at the inner gate of the castle, barefoot and in sackcloth, where he remained, fasting, from daybreak to sunset. This he repeated the second and the third day."

"Oh that I had seen him in that saintly guise!" cried the duke, with a short, disdainful laugh, while he rubbed his hands, and pressed the floor with his iron heel.

"Consummate hypocrite!" said the Lord Albert.

"Coward!" muttered the Baron of Stramen.

"I think I can hear his piteous cries now," continued Father Omehr, endeavoring to excite their compassion, "put forth at intervals: '*Parce, beate Pater, pie, parce mihi, peto, plane!*'"

But the nobles only expressed extreme disgust.

"Finally," proceeded the priest, "the supplications of the saintly countess, Matilda, and of many holy men, induced our good Father to raise the anathema on these conditions, proposed to the king, still barefoot and numbed with cold."



A deathlike silence prevailed as the missionary began the enumeration:

“That Henry should appear at Augsburg—that the Pope should be the judge—that he should submit without resistance to the decision—that he should banish the excommunicated bishops and favorites—and if one of these conditions were violated, that his guilt would be deemed established, and the princes of the empire at liberty to elect another king.”

The knights still sat in silence, as if spell-bound, while Father Omehr calmly went on with his narrative:



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“The monarch swore to observe the compact inviolably. But to give additional solemnity to the oath, the Pontiff, while celebrating the Mass that followed the reconciliation, turned from the altar, and thus addressed the king: ‘Do, if it please you, my son, as you have seen me do. The German princes are continually charging you with crimes for which they demand an interdict over you for life, not only from the seals of royalty, but from all communion with the Church or society. They demand your immediate condemnation; but you know the uncertainty of human judgments. Do, then, as I advise you, and if you are conscious of innocence, rid the Church of this scandal and yourself of these imputations! Receive this other half of the Host, that this proof of your innocence may silence your enemies, and I pledge myself to be your best champion in appeasing your barons and in arresting this civil war!’”

“And Henry?—” whispered Rodolph, trembling with excitement.

“Recoiled from a proof so terrible,” answered the missionary.

The duke still occupied his chair, with his forehead knit, and his arms folded on his breast, but the Lord of Hers sprang to his feet and began to pace the room, and the Baron of Stramen brought his battle-axe heavily against the floor.

“Tell me,” said Albert of Hers, addressing Father Omehr, “did not the Pope revoke his pardon at this evident insincerity?”

“No,” was the reply.

“Then, may God forgive me,” returned the excited knight, “but the mercy of His Holiness sounds like human folly!”

“It is weakness—cowardice!” muttered the Baron of Stramen.

The missionary smiled at cowardice in connection with the name of Gregory VII.

A bright smile now began to break over Rodolph’s face, and he said, turning to his friends:

“My gallant knights, this is but an expedient of the king’s to gain time, he will never confront us at Augsburg. We must prepare for a struggle more desperate than ever, and, before another day, I must set out for Saxony.”

The prophecy of the King of Arles was soon verified. For five days after leaving Canossa, Henry kept his oath; on the sixth he broke it, and, with an armed band, prevented the Pope from appearing among the princes at the Diet of Augsburg.

Before another week had passed, the lordships of Hers and Stramen seemed almost deserted. Rodolph had passed into Saxony, to assemble an army there, leaving Welf,



the Duke of Bavaria, and the Lord Albert, to collect the forces of Suabia. Rodolph had taken with him the Baron of Stramen, with his son, and Gilbert de Hers. Father Omehr, who had been secretly charged by the Pope to moderate the zeal of the King of Arles, had also followed the duke, committing his flock and the Lady Margaret to the care of Herman. It was with a heavy heart that Gilbert saw the towers of Stramen fading in the distance, and felt that he was leaving, perhaps forever, a being to whom he was so deeply attached, without a word, a glance, or even a look. He had, however, evinced his solicitude for the Lady Margaret's welfare by solemnly charging Humbert to watch over her in his absence and protect her with his life.



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The knights and burghers of Suabia were now assembling at Ulm. Scarce a man could be seen between the Danube and the Lake of Constance: mothers were working in the fields, with their children about them, and here and there some old or infirm vassal was seated at his cabin door. Little did the Lady Margaret dream, as she gazed from her lattice over the beautiful country, dipping down into the river, dotted all over with thriving cottages, from which the quiet smoke of peace was curling—little did she think, as she watched the green fields struggling through the melting snow, and fixed her eyes upon the Church of the Nativity, how soon those Cottages would flame, those fields be red with human gore, and that church be polluted by a hireling soldiery. Little did she think, when praying for the safety of her father and brother, that her own paternal castle would be the first victim of the war.

CHAPTER VII

The wild dog
Shall flesh his tooth in every innocent.
O my poor kingdom, sick with civil blows!

HENRY IV.

Shut out from Augsburg by the treachery of the emperor, Gregory VII retired to Canossa, where he resolved to let the affairs of Germany shape themselves for a time, while he awaited a more favorable moment for action. Nor was his gigantic mind occupied with Germany alone, and the movements there which menaced his life and the liberty and purity of the Church. Dalmatia, Poland, and England claimed his constant attention. With the most powerful monarch in Europe plotting his downfall, he contrived to win the love and obedience of Zwonimir, to force the rebellious Boleslaus from his throne, and to purify England still more from simony and incontinency.

As Henry's submission to the Pope had disgusted the bold who were ready to assist him, and repelled the timid who waited but a second call, so his shameless perjury and fearless defiance of Gregory at Augsburg reassembled his professional adherents, and inspired with new courage those who secretly clung to his cause. The mitres of Luinar, Benno, Burchardt of Lausanne, and Eppo of Ceitz again sparkled around him, and Eberhard, Berthold, and Ulric of Cosheim displayed their lances to confirm his resolution. In every country and in every age there must exist a large and powerful party prone to pleasure and license, which is easily arrayed against virtue, when the indulgence of their criminal passions is threatened. This party is ever formidable, especially when supported by a powerful king, nobly descended, and legally invested with the crown. A natural sympathy, too, had been awakened for the emperor, as numbed with cold he besought the pity of the Pontiff; and, with proverbial fickleness, men, in ascribing humility to the king, imputed arrogance to the Pope. Owing to these causes, it was not long before Henry found himself stronger than ever. Inflamed with



new ardor, he loudly lamented his submission at Canossa, and cursing the hours of misery passed there, swore speedy vengeance against the presumptuous son of Bonizo the carpenter.



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Rodolph had no sooner reached Forchheim, than it was announced that a general diet would be held there for the discussion of matters of vital importance to the Church and State, with the suggestion that the absence of the king would facilitate their deliberations. The Count Mangold de Veringen was despatched to the Pope, inviting him to sanction the diet by his presence, to aid them by his wisdom and intrepidity, and to take the helm of the tempest-tossed vessel of state. He was also commissioned to inform His Holiness of their determination to elect a new king. The Pope, in reply, conjured them not to be precipitate, and to wait his arrival before they acted.

There was one feature in the proposed diet to which Gregory objected—the attempted exclusion of Henry from any participation in it. This he endeavored to remedy by obtaining a promise from the emperor to attend the meeting in person. It was partly to avoid the appearance of partiality, but principally in the hope of reconciling the angry factions, that the Pope requested the presence of his unscrupulous antagonist. Henry not only recoiled from his engagement, but, by blocking up all the avenues to Forchheim, compelled the Pope to remain at Carpineta, unable either to enter Germany or return to Rome.

Bernard, cardinal deacon, Bernard, Abbe of St. Victor, and the celebrated Guimond, the Papal legates, announced to the confederates the desire of His Holiness that they should wait his arrival. But the assembled nobles dreaded the least delay. Already their cause was weakened by indecision, and a hostile army was in the field, receiving daily accessions. Though May had been fixed for the opening of the diet, so great was the impatience of Rodolph and his barons, that it was concluded in the middle of March. No sooner had the legates delivered their instructions, than deliberations were virtually begun. The chiefs directed all their efforts to induce the legates to sanction the election of a king, and confirm their choice. Guimond and his companions, faithful to their instructions, replied: “It were far better to await the arrival of His Holiness”; but they added, imprudently, “that they did not wish to oppose their advice to the wisdom of the princes, who knew much better than they what was most conducive to the interests of the State.” Assuming an implied permission to act from these words of courtesy, the nobles proceeded at once to cast their votes. A scene of confusion ensued, created by the jarring of private interests. These were finally quelled by the interposition of the Papal legates, and the balloting proceeded without interruption. The vote of the bishops alone remained to be taken. The Archbishop of Mayence rose, and exercising his prescriptive title, gave the first voice for Rodolph of Suabia. Adalbert and the other bishops followed his example. Otto, Welf, Berthold, ranged themselves on the same side, and amid universal acclamations Rodolph was proclaimed king.



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Something still remained—the Papal confirmation. There were some who were sad and mute amid the general rejoicings, and among them was Father Omehr. In vain had he implored Rodolph to postpone the session, at least until the appointed time would arrive: the King of Arles regarded the delay as suicidal. In vain, too, he conjured the legates to refuse their approval, at least until May, and begged them, with tears in his eyes, not to give the signal for civil war. All the princes and a majority of the bishops conceived that the denial of the Apostolic benediction would destroy the hopes of the Church party. They beheld in themselves the champions of the Church, and identified their own welfare with that of the Holy See; they believed that Gregory was only restrained by circumstances from granting the prayers of those who had sworn never to desert him; they maintained that although the Pope might not have permitted the election, he could not refuse to sanction their choice after it had been made. Moved by these passionate representations, and, perhaps, expecting to please the Sovereign Pontiff, the legates yielded, and confirmed the election of Rodolph.

When Rodolph heard that he had been called to the throne he shut himself up in his room and sent for Father Omehr. Scarce a minute elapsed before the missionary stood at his side. They gazed at each other in silence for some moments. The duke's lips were compressed, and his brow gathered into a deep frown. Mingled sorrow and hope were portrayed in the missionary's face, and his breast heaved with excitement.

"I am king!" said Rodolph, in a whisper, still scanning the priest, as though he would read his soul.

"Not yet!" was the reply.

"Who can prevent it?"

"God!"

"Most humbly would I submit to His gracious interposition," said the duke, bending his head devoutly; "but can any human power prevent it?"

"Yourself!"

Rodolph buried his face in his hands and with rapid, nervous gestures paced up and down the small apartment.

"Hear me!" he exclaimed, suddenly leading Father Omehr to a chair, and taking a seat beside him. "Hear me!" he repeated, bending forward until his lips almost touched his companion's ear, and the veins swelled in his throat and temples:

"I have toiled and sighed and prayed for this! Day after day, night after night, for years, this has been the aim of all my actions, ay, even the limit of my aspirations. Once to be king—oh! ever since I first clutched a lance I panted for it! In love, in sickness, in peace,



in war, I never forgot that one surpassing object—the crown! Hear me on! It is now within my reach—I can touch it—and you ask me to resign it?—”

The duke paused a minute, his eagle eye flashing fire; then, with a vehemence almost appalling, he resumed: “You ask me to resign it—and I *would*, without a pang—gladly, cheerfully—this very instant! Yes—I swear to you—here in presence of my Creator, that I no longer covet the crown I have well-nigh worshipped; that, but for Germany and the Church, I would rather place it on Henry’s perjured head than wear it on my own!”



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“Then you will resign it?” said the missionary, eagerly.

Rodolph slowly shook his head and fixed his eyes upon the floor.

“Let no fears for the Church and your country restrain you,” pursued the priest; “they both demand your refusal, not your acceptance.”

Still Rodolph sternly shook his head.

“Then as you value honor, defer your decision until the appointed time—our Holy Father may still be with us—it is treacherous to deprive him of the opportunity of interfering, by thus anticipating by a month the day on which we invited him to meet us.”

“It is too late for interference now,” replied the duke, “and of what avail is it to pause on the brink when all the avenues from Carpineta are closed by Henry’s minions?”

“Have confidence, I conjure you,” exclaimed the other, passionately, “in the virtue and wisdom of His Holiness. Rest assured that he will find some means to avert bloodshed and yet preserve his See and the empire.”

“War is inevitable!”

“Obey the Pope and trust in God. Beware how you take upon yourself to plunge the nation in war—to tear down the sacred barriers of peace—and open the floodgates for a thousand evil passions to deluge Germany with crime and blood! Can you foresee what may occur—what a month may develop—what new political combination the master mind of Gregory may devise for our preservation?”

“I must rather beware,” returned the noble, “how I sacrifice the last hope of my country and the main support of religion by procrastination and criminal hesitation. If I refuse the crown, I disband my party. Men will leave us, and say we tremble, and before long we are at the tender mercies of the tyrant, for my resignation, while striking terror into our ranks, will infuse new courage into his. Then would I see my allies—the friends whom I seduced into rebellion and then abandoned—destroyed in detail—pursued, hunted down, exiled, and martyred before my eyes. No! come what may, I must accept.”

“What is your situation now,” rejoined the missionary, “that you have anything else to expect than defeat and disgrace? You know the emperor—you have seen his dauntless courage, his consummate skill, his desperate resolution. You know that he is at the head of an army more numerous and better disciplined than your own. And you must also clearly foresee that if the Pope—as he certainly will—shall condemn the policy of his legates, your efforts will want the principle of life which alone can bless them with success.”



“If the prospect now is bad,” said Rodolph, solemnly, “delay can only make it worse. And I believe that, could His Holiness see what is evident to us, he would command me to accept the crown, and place it with his own hands upon my head.”

“You are mistaken—woefully mistaken, my lord. While a hope of averting anarchy and civil war remains, Gregory will not adopt the surest means of inflicting both. Trust in God for the future! Do not pursue what to the mole-blind vision of humanity seems expedient, when certain bloodshed is the result! Humble yourself before Him who alone can exalt and lay low! Confide in the efficacy of prayer! Think not that God will desert His Church or her champions!”



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"I do trust in the future," answered the duke, "but not until I have embraced what reason dictates for the present."

"Do you hold your reason more enlightened than that of His Holiness?"

"He cannot see what I see. Urge me no more! It is too late to recede. I know well what dangers I incur by accepting the crown—and what disgrace I should earn in refusing it. Did I consult my inclinations, I should renounce the glittering ornament: but I will not have men to point at me covertly, and say, 'He faltered!' I will not endanger the noble barons who have devoted themselves to my advancement. If I have sinned in alluring them thus far, I will not deepen my guilt by betraying them. Though I knew that the crown which I am about to assume were like the gift of Medea, I would still set it on my temples: better pay the penalty of ambition by advancing than by timidly retreating, when boldness may remedy, and retreat is certain death!"

The tread of armed men was heard along the passage, and immediately afterward the Count Mangold entered the room.

"The diet awaits your highness' answer," he said, bowing deeply to the duke.

"I will follow you," said Rodolph, "and deliver it in person." Saying this, he strode proudly from the room, preceded by the count and his attendants.

As the door closed behind them, Father Omehr fell upon his knees. He knelt there with the tears streaming down his pale cheeks and his hands clasped in prayer, until a long loud shout announced Rodolph's acceptance. Then the trumpets' merry notes, mingled with the joyful clang of arms, went up to heaven together with the missionary's sighs. Father Omehr appeared scarcely to hear the martial revelry, but as the tumult increased, he rose and glided from the room.

Amid the congratulations of the bishops, nobles, and people, Rodolph proceeded in great pomp to Mayence, where he was to be crowned and consecrated the following day. It was after nightfall when Rodolph reached the palace prepared for his reception; and seizing the first moment to escape from the embraces of his friends, he retired early to his chambers, accompanied only by Gilbert de Hers. Rodolph had always evinced a strong partiality for Gilbert, which the youth repaid by the liveliest love and admiration. No sooner were they alone, than the duke threw himself dejectedly into a chair, and was soon plunged into a fit of gloomy abstraction. Gilbert stood motionless beside him, inwardly wondering at the silence and despondency of the man, who, a moment before, had been gayly exchanging felicitations with all who approached him.

"Sit down, my son," said the duke.

Gilbert mechanically obeyed.



“Do I seem happy?” asked Rodolph.

“No, my lord; are you unwell?”

“Do I seem overwhelmed with joy at my good fortune?”

“Has anything befallen you, sire?” inquired the youth.



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“Yes!” cried the monarch-elect, seizing his wrist, “the gratification of my ambition!”

Gilbert started at the trembling tones and excited gesture of his companion.

“Gilbert,” continued the duke, regaining his composure, “you see me in possession of all that I ever craved on earth. I am now legally invested with the imperial crown. It was not the peaceable enjoyment of the throne I asked, but permission to occupy it. I am gratified. With all my hopes realized—I never was more miserable than at this moment. I am not sad because I feel that my career is drawing to a close—that I shall be unsuccessful in the struggle for undisputed power: it is sufficient for me that I die a king. I tremble because I have discovered the impotence of earthly things to gratify the cravings of an immortal soul—because, in finding that I have a capacity of enjoyment not to be appeased by the highest dignities on earth, I begin to comprehend my immortality. I see what a shadow I have pursued—how madly I have neglected eternal happiness for temporal preferment. You, my son, are full of earthly hope, dreaming of the Lady Margaret, of minstrels’ praises, and knightly fame. Do not think me harsh, if I pray God that you may speedily know their emptiness. You can never rise as high in this mundane atmosphere as I am now; but your soul is as immortal as mine, and would sicken over less renown, as I do over this.”

Rodolph paused, and Gilbert, struck dumb with surprise, gazed up into his face.

“It is late, my son,” he resumed, “and we must part. Is there anything you would ask before leaving me?”

“There is to be a tournament to-morrow,” the youth faltered out.

“And you would take part, in spite of my discourse,” said the duke, with a smile.

Gilbert’s reddening cheeks answered for him.

“I must forbid you to couch lance to-morrow,” said Rodolph, tenderly; “you shall receive your spurs at my hands when I am king, but let me be the judge of the time. And remember, my son,” he added, detaining Gilbert as the latter was about to retire, “remember what you have seen this night. When men shall question my motives, and extol or condemn me, you may say that Rodolph of Suabia was inspired by ambition to seek the crown, but that when it was within his grasp, he would have turned from it in disgust, had not conscience and patriotism compelled him to wear it.”

As Gilbert, deeply moved, kissed his hand and withdrew, Rodolph retired to an oratory into which his apartments opened. He had been there engaged in prayer for more than an hour, when the Archbishop of Mayence appeared, and, after a brief adoration, entered the confessional. There, in the silent hour of midnight, the king knelt before the priest, in obedience to the voice of that God who bequeathed us a Church to administer

the Sacraments which He appointed for our salvation, and through which we can only attain it. When Rodolph sat again in his chamber, his brow was calmer and his eye softer and brighter.



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The morning of the twenty-sixth of March dawned calm and bright. A warm sun suddenly interrupted a long-protracted spell of cold weather, the snow rapidly disappeared from the fields and streets, and the credulous saw a happy omen in the genial spring day that broke through the icy fetters of winter to greet the coronation. A splendid procession moved to the cathedral, and during the celebration of Solemn High Mass, Sigefroy, Archbishop of Mayence, crowned and consecrated Rodolph rightful king and defender of the kingdom of the Franks.

After the ceremony, the nobles assembled to witness the tournament, where the newly crowned monarch presided with a crowd of barons at his side. Gilbert stood at some distance from the royal person, and watched the tilting with all-absorbing interest. Henry of Stramen displayed so much address and managed his horse with so much skill that Gilbert could scarce forbear to join in the applause rendered by those around him. So intent was he upon the lists that a citizen by his side had, unobserved by him, severed the links of a massive gold chain which he wore around his neck, and had concealed it in his gown. But a page who had perceived the theft, throttled the culprit and drew the chain from its hiding-place. The man was ordered to prison, and Gilbert had forgotten the occurrence, when the assembly was disturbed by loud cries and imprecations from without. Gilbert quick as thought passed through the doorway and stood in the street. The bourgeois of Mayence were zealous partisans of Henry, and had already scowled upon the honors paid to his rival. The maltreatment of their townsman had kindled the spark of discontent to flame. They had attacked the soldiers of Rodolph, who, as was customary, attended the joust unarmed, and had rescued the thief. As Gilbert stood watching the tumult, he was singled out as the object of attack, probably at the direction of the citizen who had suffered in the attempt to steal his chain. The situation of the young noble, clad only in a velvet doublet and armed only with a light sword, was extremely precarious. Yet he did not dream of flight, but for a time kept his assailants at bay, slowly falling back upon the arena. A number of soldiers issuing from the pavilion gathered around him, but, shorn of their weapons, they could only parry without returning the blows of their adversaries, who were well supplied with stones and clubs.

Gilbert had not left the lists unobserved by Rodolph, who immediately despatched a page to watch his movements. When informed of his young friend's danger, he arose and cried in a loud voice:

"Gentlemen, we would not have you meddle in this affray: a party of my men have gone for their arms, and it will speedily be terminated. But the son of Albert de Hers is now overpowered by these boors. Let some one hasten to his rescue!"

Three young knights at once dismounted and passed out: the foremost bore in his crest a long dark plume.



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The generous soldiers, who had hitherto received upon their defenceless bodies the blows aimed at Gilbert, were almost all beaten down, and in a few minutes more he would have been exposed comparatively unaided to the fury of the populace. His sword was shivered to the hilt, and though he drove back a giant who attempted to close with him, by dashing the guard in his face, he must have fallen beneath a club that swung over his head, had not a tall knight, completely clad in armor, striding before him, intercepted the blow, and dashed the assailant to the earth. A shower of blows saluted the youth's deliverer, but he bore them unflinching, and, vigorously plying his two-handed sword, cleared a space around the exhausted Gilbert. The two other knights arriving at this moment, the contest became more equal. But the mob were now displaying deadlier weapons, and Rodolph reluctantly resolved to command his chivalry to disperse the rabble, when his soldiers arrived with their arms. Inflamed by the loss of their comrades, the now formidable troops threw themselves upon the citizens, and pursued them with great slaughter to their homes. When the knights were left without an enemy, Gilbert advanced to embrace his deliverer. But the knight of the black plume stepped back a pace, and raising his visor, disclosed the features of Henry of Stramen, cold, haughty, and showing just the traces of a smile of disdain.

Gladly at that moment would Gilbert have fallen into his arms and entreated him to forget the past; but there were too many eyes to witness a repulse. He contented himself by saying:

"Sir, you have preserved my life, and with the grace of God you shall not repent it."

Henry made no reply, and they parted.

Gilbert was far too generous to regret an incident which laid him under such deep obligations to Henry of Stramen. He rejoiced that it had occurred, for it might remove the mortification produced by their late encounter, and diminish the mortal hatred with which he was regarded. He was also well disposed to welcome any accident that might give him a pretext for conciliating the house of Stramen. Henry perhaps secretly exulted that he had conferred a favor upon Gilbert that would gall his heart, while it poured a balm upon his own. Still he did not hold the youth in the same utter detestation as before.

On the next day, Rodolph, following an ancient custom, began a tour through his dominions.

Germany now presented the spectacle of a country claimed by two kings. To Gregory the party of the old king was heretical and odious—that of the new king pure and orthodox. Though all his sympathies were with the latter, he still openly blamed and deplored the conduct of his legates, and refused to acknowledge Rodolph as king. The Pope well knew what a delicate undertaking it was to depose a sovereign whom he had consecrated, and how fraught with danger such a precedent must be. His interest



evidently called him to receive Rodolph at once into his arms, and had he done this, the result of the contest would have been very different. In the behavior of Gregory we discover, in addition to an insuperable aversion to countenance civil war, a disposition to endure the last extremity rather than dethrone a legitimate monarch, and perhaps a preference of Henry, for his parents' sake, to his rival.



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Both kings prepared vigorously for the struggle which could not be long postponed. Henry's measures were admirably calculated to increase his power. He scattered rich benefices lavishly among the clergy, lured on the soldiers of fortune with tempting bribes, and granted enviable privileges to the seaboard towns. The citizens of Augsburg, after tasting his bounty, braved the menaces of his antagonist. Hordes of brigands from Bohemia were attracted to his camp by brilliant largesses and the prospect of an easy booty. The German cities, and particularly those along the Rhine, had always, pursuant to the policy of his ancestors, been the object of his peculiar favor, and the merchants of Worms were relieved from all imposts. The population of these cities was soon ranged under the banner of Henry, whose ranks increased so long as gold could buy, and the promise of license and plunder attracted.

Rodolph's policy served to diminish instead of swelling his numbers. He devoted himself, at the sacrifice of everything else, to gain the Pope to acknowledge him as king. He appeared the inflexible chastiser of simony and ecclesiastical corruption. The very day of his coronation he had obtained the dismissal of a simoniacal deacon. Everywhere he compelled the nominees of Henry to fly, and filled their places with zealous champions of the canonical discipline. At Constance and Zurich he drove the irregularly appointed bishops from their sees: he placed Lutold, a zealous champion of the Pope, over the monastery of St. Gall, which had been devoted to his rival. Many, frightened by these severities, deserted his standards, and others recoiled from the presence of so rigorous an enforcer of spiritual purity.

Thus, while the cause of Henry was flourishing under his criminal artifices, Rodolph was weakened by his honest severity. Yet there was this difference between the parties. The minions of Henry were goaded on by individual interests—the partisans of Rodolph by a common resolution to die in defence of a sublime principle; the first were incited by the hope of plunder, the lust of empire, ambition, avarice, or a lawless appetite for war—the last were animated by a love of liberty, and fought for future security from oppression; the one prepared to preserve unrighteous license and ill-gotten gains—the other were inspired by the hope of regaining the freedom of which they had been unjustly deprived, and by the resolve to regain their ancestral rights and to protect the outraged Church of God.

Albert of Hers with all his energy and address had not succeeded in extracting from Suabia more than two thousand men. With this small force he joined Rodolph, who was then encamped at the little village of Sommeringen, with scarce three thousand Suabians. Here they learned that Henry, at the head of twelve thousand effective troops, was advancing upon Suabia through Ratisbon. Rodolph soon heard of the atrocities of his rival, who abandoned the country to fire, sword, and rapine. Old men and women, pale with fear, came crowding into camp with thrilling tales of the brutality of the Bohemians and their associates. The war had begun; and Henry was devastating the region bordering on the Danube and the Rhine, from Esslingen to Ulm.

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Though his force did not amount to half that of his opponent, Rodolph, enraged by the crimes he could not prevent, would have gone to meet his competitor, but for the unanimous opposition of his nobles. While the Suabian party were deliberating upon the best course to pursue, Henry, by a forced march, fell unexpectedly upon their rear. Taken by surprise and overpowered by numbers, they fled in all directions, and Rodolph, accompanied only by a remnant of his army, escaped with difficulty into Saxony. Suabia was now at the mercy of the victor.

Tidings of this disastrous defeat had not yet reached the Lady Margaret. The scanty intelligence she could occasionally glean was not such as to brighten the melancholy caused by the absence of her father and brother. Her fears thickened daily, as rumor, for once unable to exaggerate, divulged the massacres and impieties of the old imperialists. Her only relief was in the Sacraments, administered by the saintly Herman, and in prayer. The wives of the yeomen, not knowing when to expect the enemy, sought shelter in the castle with their parents and children. There were gathered the innocent, the aged, the young, the beautiful, and the Lady Margaret experienced some relief in administering to their wants and calming their anxiety. She did not rely much upon the few faithful soldiers who were left to guard the castle; but though womanly apprehension would often blanch her cheek, and her frame quiver as some recent deed of shame was unfolded, her confidence in God continued unabated.

One afternoon, as the Lady Margaret, surrounded by the inmates of the castle, was seated in the hall, Bertha, clad in a black mantle, stole silently into the room, and glancing wildly around, began to traverse the apartment with rapid strides. Her excited manner attracted much attention, and many anxious conjectures were made as to the cause of her meaning gestures. At length, stopping before the Lady Margaret, who watched her movements with a troubled eye, she sang, almost in a whisper:

The sunbeam was bright on their shields as they came,
But dim on their blood-rusted spears;
They gave up the hamlet to pillage and flame,
And scoffed at the kneeling one's tears!

"Perhaps the enemy are upon us," said a graycoated palmer, who for some days had shared the bounty of the Lady Margaret.

At these words, a general murmur ran round the group, and then all was still as death.

Bertha resumed, in a louder tone:

They come—they come—the groan, the shout
Of death and life ring wildly out!
The sky is clouding at their cry,
As they toss their reeking blades on high;



Arm, gallants all! and watch ye well,
Or to-morrow's chime will be your knell.

As she concluded the rough fragment, she extended her arm to the south, and shaking her finger menacingly, muttered, "They come!"



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This thrilling announcement called forth more than one cry from the lips of the trembling listeners. To increase the panic, a groom burst into the room, and whispered something into the Lady Margaret's ear that made her start and turn pale as marble. Awhile she sat motionless and apparently sinking. But it was not long before her weakness disappeared, and her face assumed a serene, undaunted expression that imparted new hope to those who were sobbing about her. The wailing was hushed as she rose and said, calmly and without faltering:

"We shall probably be attacked in a few hours by an inferior force. Let us pray to God that we may be able to defeat their malice."

In uttering this she had fallen upon her knees, and the rest of the group, imitating her example, knelt beside her. When that solemn and fervent prayer was over, the voice of the gray palmer was again heard, as he cried:

"If any man here can still hurl stone, or thrust spear, let him follow me to the walls!"

About six, in whom age had not quenched the fire or strength of youth, and as many beardless youths, sprang up at the call, and accompanied the speaker out of the room.

Exclusive of this new force, the defenders of the castle were not more than twenty, yet so admirable were its defences that they might hold in check an attacking party of more than a hundred. The warder and his men were grouped together at the main gate, straining their eyes against the horizon, where the smoke of some cottages indicated the presence of the foe, when the palmer advanced and asked permission to assist them. This was readily granted, and the recruits were soon supplied with defensive armor and the usual weapons. The palmer wore his headpiece over his hood, and, with his breast-plate over his gown, which, tucked up with more than John Chandos' prudence, but half revealed the thigh-pieces beneath it, he was equally conspicuous and grotesque.

A body of mounted men could now be plainly seen rapidly advancing. They no longer stayed to desolate the humble dwellings in their path, but swept on against the stately castle which seemed to bid them defiance. The Lady Margaret was now among the soldiers, animating them to resistance. Guided by the palmer, to whom the command had been tacitly yielded, the men were busily engaged in carrying large stones up to the battlements over the archway.

"Who are our assailants?" asked the maiden, as with a firm step she mounted the wall.

The advancing troops rode up to the raised drawbridge, displaying as they came the picturesque costume and swarthy face of the Bohemian marauder. The Lady Margaret's cheek was now deeply flushed, and the haughty spirit of her race flashed within her eyes and curled her lip in scorn.



“They are not a hundred,” she said to the palmer, who stood at her side.

In reply, the palmer pointed to a body of men-at-arms, then emerging from a clump of trees in which they had been hitherto concealed. Her color fell at the sight of this new force—yet only for a moment: the next instant her cheek resumed its glow. This column, about a hundred strong, approached slowly and cautiously, as if expecting a sally, until they too had reached the moat.



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"We call upon you to open your gates!" exclaimed a knight, who rode a little in advance.

"To whom?" replied the Lady Margaret, in a loud voice.

"To your rightful king and master, Henry of Austria!"

"We do not own a monarch," she returned, "who has forfeited the crown, and our gates shall be closed against all who come in his name."

"You refuse to surrender?"

"Yes!"

"Prepare then, for we will force a passage!"

"We are ready, and invite you to begin!"

The animation which had hitherto supported the maiden gave way, and, all trembling, she descended the rough steps and returned to the castle.

The attack was at once begun. The assailants were not supplied with cross-bows or instruments for casting stones, and the palmer with the soldiers, who readily submitted to his command, could safely watch their operations from the battlements. Some with their battle-axes dashed into the moat and swam across to cut the chain which raised the bridge; but hardly had they reached the shore before they were struck down with stones hurled from the walls. The palmer's object was to hold out until nightfall, and create as much delay as was attainable. The sun was already half hidden behind the hills.

But the fall of the bridge now became inevitable. Their ammunition was exhausted, and three of the assailants, armed with axes, occupied the bridge, while others were arriving at intervals.

"Let us at least gain five minutes," exclaimed the palmer. "One sortie for the Pope and Rodolph of Suabia!"

The bars were withdrawn and the gallant band poured out.

"Suabia!" shouted the palmer, as he launched a heavy mace at one who was hewing at the chain, and felled him to the earth. With a well-aimed thrust he laid another at his feet, and so well was he seconded that the bridge was soon cleared. This gallant feat was greeted with cries of rage from their opponents on the other bank, many of whom, forgetting their heavy armor in their indignation, leaped into the water and sank, muttering idle imprecations. For some minutes the defenders held the bridge, but



fearful of being intercepted, they made good their retreat and stood safe within the gate, without the loss of a man.

As further resistance was impossible, the bridge was abandoned to its fate, and was speedily lowered, amid the rejoicings and threats of the besiegers. It was now toward twilight, and the strong gate would baffle their efforts till dark. When that was won, the ballium and the inner wall could still be disputed.

“There is nothing to be done now,” said the palmer to his companions; “and you had better go to the castle and take some refreshment, for we will soon have need of all our strength.”

As they retired at his suggestion, he climbed to the crenelles and looked anxiously out upon the plain until the men returned; when, resigning the barbican to the warder, he went to receive the thanks of the Lady Margaret, who expressed her gratitude for his services by waiting upon him in person.



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The assailants had cut down a tree which they used as a battering-ram against the gate; but the stern bars were yet unbroken. It was now pitch-dark. A thunderstorm had suddenly gathered, and the report of the distant bolt came upon the ear, mingling with the still more appalling clash of the beam against the gate.

Brief indeed was the repose of the palmer before he was again at the embrasures. Bold as he was, he trembled as a blinding flash poured a flood of livid light over the plain and castle. It was not the sudden bolt that awed him; but the lightning streamed upon a host of armed men, stretching away as far as the eye could reach. They were not half a mile off. Another flash leaped out, and revealed a forest of spears. "It is the king himself!" muttered the palmer; "we will be surrounded by a host! God assist us, or we are lost!"

Such were the sounds that trembled on his lips as he abandoned his post. Selecting the groom who had announced the enemy, he whispered to him:

"Do you wish to save your mistress?"

"With my life!" said the man.

"Then lead me to the postern gate."

In their impetuosity, the attacking party had neglected to blockade this avenue, before darkness prevented them from discovering it. The banks of the moat opposite the gate had been made shelving, so as to afford a means of retreat to the besieged, without giving any advantage to the besieger. When they had gained the postern and drawn back the bolts, the palmer said to his companion:

"Now, as you value life and honor, saddle the best three horses—one for yourself, one for your lady, the third for me—swim the moat, and wait till I come."

The groom promised obedience, and they separated—the groom to the stable, and the palmer in quest of the Lady Margaret. He found her in the midst of her dependents, praying in the oratory. It was a sight to make the heart bleed—that defenceless group, with tearful eyes and hands raised trembling to heaven, now starting as the iron gate groaned beneath the heavy blows, now glancing timidly around as the lightning streamed in upon them. The palmer stepped up to the maiden and drew her aside.

"You must fly with me!" he said.

"Why? Are we not safe?"

"Before one may count a hundred, we are surrounded by the whole army of the tyrant!"

This sudden and awful disclosure was too much for the frail maiden, already exhausted by watching and excitement. She grasped his wrist, and shuddering as she fixed her



eyes on him, staggered forward, and would have fallen, had not the palmer caught her now unconscious form, and, raising it in his arms, passed from the room. Through the gallery, down the staircase, along the portico he passed, as swiftly as though he carried but a child. The wind came damp and cold against his cheek, the rain poured pitilessly upon his head, the arrowy lightning seemed to play



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around his feet, but manfully he hurried on with his precious charge. The gate was reached; he paused but an instant to hail the groom and take breath, then slid into the moat, and in a short space stood safe upon the other side. Here he staid but to envelop the maiden in his own heavy cloak, which he had snatched up when the rain began. As her consciousness was but imperfectly restored, the palmer mounted one of the horses and placed her before him. The groom, at his direction, sprang to the saddle and led the third animal.

When they were a little within the wood, the palmer exclaimed

“Can you find the road to Count Montfort’s?”

The groom replied in the affirmative.

“Then take the lead, and strike it at the nearest point.”

After groping for some minutes, they succeeded in hitting it, and, aided by the lightning, pursued their course as swiftly as the stormy night permitted.

The Lady Margaret was awakened to her situation only to pour forth torrents of tears. In vain the palmer tried to moderate her grief—she could scarcely be persuaded from returning.

The rain had now ceased, and as the clouds rolled away, they obtained light enough to continue their flight more rapidly and securely.

“Look!” cried the groom, as they stood on the top of a lofty hill. The palmer could scarcely repress an inclination to throttle his imprudent friend; for as the Lady Margaret turned her head, she saw a column of smoke and flame curling up, as if it warred against the skies.

“It is my father’s castle!” she said. “Oh, what has become of those we left?” she added shuddering. “Let us trust in God!” murmured the palmer. Brighter and brighter grew the flame—higher and higher rose the lurid column. Still the Lady Margaret continued to gaze on the fiery pillar. At last the light suddenly expanded and burned awhile with intense brilliancy. It was but for a moment. Dimmer and dimmer grew the flame, and darkness soon settled over the ashes of Stramen Castle.

The palmer now placed the maiden upon the third horse, and led the way with his hand upon her bridle. Two hours more brought them to the fortress of Tuebingen, where the brave Count Montfort, though refusing to join Rodolph, had designed to hold out to the last against his perjured and sacrilegious rival. The palmer demanded admittance in the name of Albert of Hers, and instantly obtained it.



The generous countess received the daughter of Stramen with open arms, and the count swore first to protect and then to avenge her. Nor was the palmer forgotten. Despite his ridiculous costume, now soiled and torn and stained with blood, he exhibited no embarrassment when ushered into the presence of the noble group.

“The Lady Margaret would know her deliverer,” said the countess.

The palmer removed his head-piece and threw back his hood.

“Do you remember me, my lady?” he asked, with a smile.



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The maiden looked as one striving to recall a dream.

“Do you remember Ailred of Zurich, the minnesinger?”

Her cheek turned scarlet as she exclaimed, “Oh I how much I owe to you!”

“You owe me nothing, lady,” returned Humbert.

“Is my life nothing?”

“If you prize that,” was the reply, “reserve your thanks for him who made your safety my duty.”

CHAPTER VIII

Hark to the trump and the drum,
And the mournful sound of the barbarous horn,
And the flap of the banners that flit as they're borne,
And the neigh of the steeds, and the multitude's hum,
And the clash, and the shout, “They come, they come!”

SIEGE OF CORINTH.

Rodolph was received with open arms by the Saxons. Dukes, counts, barons and gentlemen hastened to Merseburg, where, at a grand festival in his honor, he was solemnly acknowledged king of the Saxons. On every side the Saxons were flying to arms against their old enemy, and the princes unanimously advised the new monarch to march against his competitor, who had been recently again anathematized by the Papal legates. Rodolph, burning to retrieve his defeat and to save Suabia from further desolation, hearkened eagerly to suggestions that chimed so well with his own inclinations. He tarried only to wait the reinforcements of Welf and Berthold, and, hoping to expedite their union with him, marched upon Melrichstadt in Franconia.

Henry was no sooner apprised of this intended junction, than he resolved to defeat it. Instantly evacuating Suabia, he led his powerful army toward Saxony. He had deployed twelve thousand peasants to cut off the two dukes, and advanced with the rest of his force to the banks of the Strewe. Before reaching the river, he ascertained that Rodolph was encamped on the opposite side. It now occurred to his unprincipled mind, that he might deprive his rival even of the warning which his open approach would give, by deputing a flag of truce to solicit a parley. The artifice succeeded. Scarcely had the deputation left the Saxon camp, before Henry began the attack. Unprepared for this treacherous movement, Rodolph had barely time to form his ranks and address a few words of encouragement to his troops. He was answered with a shout that attested the eagerness of his soldiers for the fray. Already the clang of arms, the cries of the living,



and the groans of the dying were heard along the line. The army of Rodolph was drawn up in two divisions—one commanded by the king, the other by the valiant Otto of Nordheim. As the division of Otto was a little in the rear, that of the monarch was for a time exposed alone to the overwhelming numbers of the enemy. But nobly indeed was the brunt of the battle borne. Rodolph waited not the onset, but led on his columns to the charge. Then Suabian and Saxon darted forward shoulder to shoulder, and the lords of Hers and Stramen,



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side by side, shouted their battle-cries and hurled their followers upon the opposing ranks. Such was the ardor inspired by Rodolph that, at the first shock, two of Henry's columns were broken. But this advantage did not long avail against equal courage and superior numbers. Henry was at the head of the finest troops in the empire. But the consciousness of the sacredness of their cause made the soldiers of Rodolph invincible. Already Eberard le Barbu, the faithful counsellor of Henry, the Count of Hennenburg, Thibalt, and Henry of Lechsgemund had fallen around their lord. At this moment some bishops, retiring from the ranks of Rodolph, communicated a panic to those around them. It was in vain that Rodolph displayed the brilliant valor that had won him the name of the first knight of the times—that the Lord of Hers put forth his utmost skill, and the Baron of Stramen displayed his unrivalled strength. Menace and entreaty failed alike, nor could example or reproach recall the fugitives.

“Why does not Otto advance!” exclaimed Rodolph, who, by dint of almost superhuman exertion, had preserved his front still unbroken. “Unless I am supported within a minute, the battle is lost.”

Hardly had the words escaped his lips, before the war-cry of Saxony—“St. Peter! St. Peter!” burst from three thousand throats, and the noble Otto and the Count Palatine Frederick could be seen leading on their troops, all fresh and panting for the fight. Borne down by this vigorous assault, the pursuing column fell back in confusion, and were routed with great slaughter. Rodolph, having rallied his men, rushed on to where the imperial standard was waving, and with his own hand cut down the banner of his rival. A cry now arose: “Henry is dead!” Dispirited and borne down, the troops of Henry turned and fled in confusion. They were pursued up to the gates of Wuertzburg, where the vanquished monarch found an asylum. The Saxons passed the night on the battle-field, amid hymns of praise and cries of joy.

In the morning, Rodolph, from his inferiority being unable to pursue his victory, reentered Merseburg in triumph; and Henry, unwilling to hazard another engagement, fell back upon Ratisbon to levy new troops.

Thus ended the battle of Melrichstadt: all night the waters of the Strewe, as they glided carelessly along, were red with the noblest blood in Germany.

Some hours after nightfall, when all the requisite precautions had been taken, Gilbert de Hers, unharmed, but worn out by the fatigues of the day, retired to his father's tent. He was alone, for the Lord of Hers was in council with the king. It was a sultry night in August, and, stripping off his armor, he threw himself upon a couch, and gazed languidly but steadily at the flickering watch fires. He had been knighted on the field by the king, and had nobly worn his spurs, but his thoughts were evidently not running on his own prowess or the praises of his monarch. A listless calm had succeeded his late



excitement. His meditations were rather rudely interrupted by the entrance of a man who dashed aside the curtains of his tent and pressed the young noble's hand to his lips.



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“Humbert!” exclaimed the astonished youth, springing to his feet; and embracing his trusty follower, he poured forth question upon question with such rapidity that Humbert did not even attempt a reply. When Gilbert had composed himself sufficiently to listen, the gallant retainer began to relate all that had occurred at the lordship of Stramen. Gilbert listened mute and breathless until informed of the Lady Margaret’s safe arrival and princely reception at the fortress of Tuebingen. Then, forgetting his rank in his joy and gratitude, he threw his arms around his companion’s neck, and forced into his hands the chain of gold which had nearly proved fatal to him at the tournament.

“The morning after our arrival at Tuebingen—” resumed Humbert.

“Yes—go on!” said the youth, who not until then had reflected upon the danger of her position, even at Tuebingen, and was eagerly drinking in the words of his companion.

“The morning after our arrival we saw Henry’s whole army drawn out in the plain. We were summoned to surrender. The whole court replied: ‘A Montfort holds no parley with a perjured king and false knight.’ Instantly we were furiously assaulted on all sides. But the defences were complete and completely manned, and they fell back foiled at every point. For three long days we held the barbican against their united efforts. On the morning of the fourth they began to retire, and before sunset we were left without an enemy. When I found that my services were no longer required, I determined to return to Hers, and then seek you here.”

“Had the Lady Margaret recovered from her fright and fatigue?” asked the youth.

“With the exception of a slight cough, brought on, I suppose, by the rain.”

Gilbert’s next question related to his paternal estate.

“The chapel stands uninjured,” said Humbert.

“And the castle?”

“The blackened walls alone remain!”

“We shall be avenged!” cried the young knight, drawing a deep breath. “How was the chapel preserved?”

“Numbers of women and children had fled there for protection, and our good Father Herman, standing in the doorway, told the miscreants they must pass over his body. He would have fallen a victim to his zeal, had not the Duke Godfrey de Bouillon interposed and driven back his soldiers with loud reproaches.”

“Where is Herman now?”



“Among his poor flock, who have lost almost all—endeavoring to procure them food and shelter, and exhorting them to patience and submission to the will of God.”

“How fared Stramen Castle?”

“Even worse than your own.”

“And the church?” continued Gilbert.

“Was despoiled and fired.”

At this instant the curtain of the tent was parted again, and Father Omehr stood before them.

When informed of the fate of his church, the missionary calmly raised his eyes to heaven and repeated, in a clear, steady voice, those sublime words: “The Lord has given and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!”



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But when apprised of the position of his parishioners, who must inevitably have perished from the oldest to the youngest, the old man bent his head upon his breast, and, pressing his hands to his face, wept bitterly. He soon recovered his habitual resignation, and then, turning to Gilbert, said mournfully:

“Do you see, my son, that God is *beginning* to punish our feud?”

Immediately after his victory, Rodolph despatched messengers to the Pope to give him the intelligence, and implore him to recognize the king in the victor.

We always approach with veneration and extreme diffidence the character of this mighty man. It is difficult, indeed, to form an adequate idea of his moral grandeur. The better you study his views, the more you are astonished at his wisdom and fore-sight; the deeper your scrutiny of his motives, the higher your respect for his sanctity. His was an age of transition. The great question was still undecided: Shall liberty or tyranny prevail—barbarism or civilization? This question depended upon the answer to another: Shall the Church of God be free or become the creature of temporal power? Already William the Conqueror and Henry of Austria were trying to fetter the spouse of Christ—already the gulf was opening that threatened spiritual Rome with destruction. Then it was that Gregory VII saved the Church as Curtius saved the city; but while the pagan has been raised to the skies, the Christian has been insulted and belied.

Never can we sufficiently contemplate the spectacle of one man contending against the world! Not a chieftain, at the head of an army, subduing kingdom after kingdom, but a priest, without a carnal weapon, resisting a continent combined at once to crush him, and finally vanquishing by his death. Uninspired by ambition, assailed by every earthly motive, God alone could have directed, and God only could have upheld him. The Emperor of Austria had sworn to depose him, the Italians promised to assist his antagonist. With scarce a footing in Germany or Italy, cooped up on a barren peak, he wrestled with the haughty conqueror of England, humbled the pride of Nicephorus Botoniates who had usurped from Michael Paripinasses the empire of the East, and deposed Guibert the guilty Bishop of Ravenna. Yet amid these cares, such as human shoulders seldom knew before or since, he forgot not the objects to which he had dedicated his life—the punishment of simony and the preservation of ecclesiastical purity. It was in the attainment of these, that he arrayed kingdoms against him and died in exile at Salerno. Harassed and chained down as he was, the councils of Anse, Clermont, Dijon, Autun, Poitiers, and Lyons were thundering against simony and incontinency.

It would be presumptuous to offer a word in defence of the conduct of such a man, had not his actions been so grievously misstated, and his aims so ungenerously misinterpreted. It were as well to point out the sun when the eye is dazzled by its brightness.



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Gregory received Rodolph's envoys with every mark of affection, but dismissed them, saying he could not comply with their request. The Pontiff's object was to keep royalty within its legitimate sphere, not to depose a particular king, and he wished to accomplish this with as little bloodshed as possible. He saw clearly enough that to declare for Rodolph would be to proclaim war to the knife. He also hoped that Henry would have recourse to his mediation after his defeat. He was again disappointed. His very friends now began to desert him, upbraiding him with ingratitude and coldness. The Saxons addressed him several epistles in which they threatened to abandon him. But less moved by their threats than their entreaties, the Pontiff accused them of weakness and insolence. There was another reason sufficient to deter him from confirming the nomination of Rodolph, had none other opposed it. All Italy, with few exceptions, espoused the cause of Henry, and waited only the pontifical coronation of his rival, to rise in open rebellion. When the history of the times is carefully studied, it will be confessed that the Pope's refusal to accede to Rodolph's request was dictated by the greatest wisdom, enlightened and purified by the greatest virtue and forbearance.

Still hoping to arrest the purple tide of civil war, Gregory despatched legate after legate to Henry, charging them to omit no lawful means to incline the monarch to peace, and induce him to abide by the decision of a diet which should be convened to judge between him and his rival. This was the pacific adjustment to which the Pontiff looked. But Henry remained deaf to all these remonstrances, constantly declaring that the sword alone must decide. He was again at the head of a powerful army, and burned to retrieve the lustre of his arms. Rodolph, perceiving that another battle was inevitable, prepared for it without delay. Each king was now in quest of the other.

They met near Fladenheim in Thuringia. As at Melrichstadt, the allied forces of Suabia and Saxony were drawn up in two divisions under Rodolph and Otto. The former occupied a steep hill on the bank of a deep stream, which separated the combatants. Otto with his Saxons was stationed in the van, and was to sustain the attack, while the division of Rodolph was to act as a reserve. It was a bitter cold day in January, and a thick mist had canopied the river. Under cover of this, Henry, by a retrograde movement, gained the rear of his adversary. Rodolph, unconscious of this, was anxiously listening for the din of battle as the fog partially obscured his view. Gilbert had never seen the new king's noble brow so calm and unclouded—he had never seen his eye flash so proudly and joyously, or the same sweet, buoyant smile upon his lips. But as the hostile army filed out into the plain, and Rodolph found that the enemy he had expected in front was in his rear, a deep frown for a moment dispelled his smiles. It was only for a moment. He saw that Henry was now between him and Otto.



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"Ride to my noble Otto," he said to Gilbert, who was at his side, "and bid him charge at once." Before Rodolph had altered his array, Gilbert brought back the Saxon's answer:

"Otto of Nordheim declines to abandon the advantages of his position, and says he will not fail you, should you require his assistance."

"It is well," said the king, frowning slightly; "he will not fail us." Then turning to Albert of Hers, he said, in a whisper: "Otto wishes the glory, of deciding the day, as at Melrichstadt. Let us try that he may obtain the laurel of victory instead of the odium of defeat. Gentlemen!" he said, in a loud voice, exchanging cheerful smiles with the Suabian nobles around him, "you have now an opportunity of meeting face to face the desolators of your country. Soldiers!" he said, mingling among his troops, "there are the Bohemians who butchered your wives and families!" As the whole body clamored for the signal to begin, Rodolph gave the word, and the chivalry and yeomanry of Suabia swept rapidly down the hill. They were met at the base by the whole army of Henry. Still, nothing daunted, Rodolph displayed his impetuous valor, the lords of Hers and Stramen rushed on the destroyers of their castles, and Gilbert and Henry fought side by side, each trying to outstrip the other. At this moment, as Rodolph was tugging at his lance to draw it from a body of a knight he had pierced, it was seized by Vratislaus, Duke of Bohemia. As Vratislaus put forth all his strength to disarm his antagonist, Rodolph suddenly yielded up the weapon, and as the duke staggered back, sprang upon him with his sword. Timely succor alone saved the Bohemian.

"He will be rewarded for capturing my lance," said Rodolph, calmly. "Had not his friends been so fleet, he might have had his recompense in another world."

But the Suabians, opposed to three times their number, were beginning to retreat, when Otto of Nordheim, true to his word, emerged from the mist and fell upon the enemy's flank.

"Well done, thou Saxon eagle!" exclaimed Rodolph, eagerly, seeing the discomfited foe staggering before this unexpected and vigorous attack. "Henry of Stramen, ride to the duke, and tell him he has won the day."

Rodolph, surrounded by some of his barons, among whom were the lords of Hers and Stramen and Gilbert, was posted upon a little knoll, watching the progress of the fight, when Henry returned with Otto's acknowledgments to the king.

"Sire!" said Albert of Hers, riding up to the monarch, "your cunning rival there has profited by this mist, and I think we may now turn it to our account."

"How?" asked the king.



“The enemy has left his camp in our rear—we may cross the river unperceived and surprise it. Give me five hundred men, and I will not leave him as much as would satisfy a peasant.”



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Rodolph instantly acceded to the request, and commanded the Baron of Stramen to assist in the enterprise. Though somewhat loath to unite in any undertaking with his sworn enemy, Sir Sandrit had learned to subdue his personal prejudices for the welfare of Germany. And perhaps his desire to avenge his recent wrongs overpowered his aversion to the author of older injuries. He readily assented, and now, united for once, the rival clans of Hers and Stramen moved rapidly across the ice on their chivalrous mission. By a well-executed movement they came unperceived upon the guard. No quarter was given there; scarce a hostile soldier escaped. Sir Albert bade his men spare not the cowards whose swords were red with the blood of babes and mothers. Sir Sandrit, at the top of his voice, shouted, "Remember the castle!" Henry and Gilbert unrelentingly pursued the terror-stricken fugitives. When they returned to the captured camp, every article of luxury was gone. The vessels of gold and silver, which the Patriarch of Aquileia and many of the other nobles had brought to grace the revels of their king, were now in the hands of their rough victors, who brandished the precious goblets in the air, crying, "Death to the spoilers of Suabia!" The purple curtains, torn into shreds, were trailed in the clotted gore and dust. Before many minutes the pillage was as complete as the surprise. When nothing remained to slay or plunder, the barons gave the signal to retreat, and they recrossed the ice. Had they remained an instant longer, Henry IV would have fallen into their hands; for hardly had they left, before the monarch, flying from the battle-field, conducted by a guide named Louis, entered his ruined camp.

The battle was over when the detachment reached the scene of action. Folkmar, governor of Prague, had fallen, Henry had fled, and the Bohemians were routed with prodigious slaughter. The fugitives rallied under the walls of Wartburg. But they were speedily dispersed and pursued, until nightfall saved them from further molestation.

"The mist of Fladenheim is clearing away," said Rodolph, pointing to the setting sun, which now broke out in unclouded splendor, as the fog vanished before a strong north wind. That day was like his life, most brilliant at its close. Otto now advanced, and the two monarchs embraced with mutual affection and esteem. Whatever rivalry there might be between them was forgotten in success.

Henry retired into Franconia and dismissed his army, and Rodolph again solicited the Pope to confirm his election.

The news of these victories imparted some consolation to the Lady Margaret's breast, now torn with anxiety and solicitude. Her grief was not lightened because her own misfortunes were avenged in Henry's adversity, but because the chances of peace were increased by Rodolph's success. She was now incapable of relishing revenge. The feudal antipathies so long nourished and so early instilled as to be almost a part of her existence, were entirely eradicated. From the evening of her interview with Father Omehr, before the now ruined Church of the Nativity, she had dedicated her life to the extinguishment of the feud between the houses of Hers and Stramen. For this she had

prayed, for this she had toiled. But her labors were interrupted by the harsh music of war, by gong and tymbalon.



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What could she do now? Nothing. Nothing? When she knelt before the altar at Tuebingen before the sun had risen, and the Countess of Montfort felt as if she had given shelter to an Angel, was she doing nothing? When she lingered in the oratory of our Blessed Mother long after the sun had set, and the menials passed by on tiptoe lest they should mar the celestial expression of her face, was she doing nothing? There had come a deeper lustre still into the Lady Margaret's eye, and the blush on her cheek mingled not so freely with the pure white in which it was cradled. Perhaps her head was not so erect—perhaps the line of the back had lost in firmness what it gained in grace. Already the men and women of Montfort had learned to love and bless her, and as she passed among them serenely and silently, like a spirit of light, and as they marked the strange transparency of her features, they would salute her with a feeling in which awe prevailed, and, after thoughtfully gazing at her awhile, transfer their glance to the skies. The Lady of Montfort loved to hear the maiden sweetly singing the *Salve Regina*, for which Humbert had invented or selected a melody of singular beauty, but often, when the hymn was concluded, the countess's cheeks would be bathed in tears, and she would fold the Lady Margaret in her arms, and gaze up earnestly into her face.

Gilbert! Gilbert! come read this face of more than earthly beauty! See if the words that haunt you are chiselled there!

CHAPTER IX

Glory is like a circle in the water,
which never ceaseth to enlarge itself
Till, by wide spreading, it disperse to nought.

SHAKESPEARE.

The battle of Fladenheim was fought just as Gregory VII was opening his seventh synod at Rome. Hardly had the ancient canons been renewed and Guibert of Ravenna excommunicated, before the envoys of Rodolph appeared, and, after reciting Henry's fresh iniquities, supplicated their master's coronation and his rival's deposition.

The Pope had not failed to invite his impious antagonist to abide by his decision, but his recent defeat seemed only to have confirmed his obstinacy. It was evident that Henry would keep the field while a hope of success remained, and that peace could not be recovered but by the complete triumph of one of the hostile parties. The Pontiff no longer hesitated. Since all hope of an amicable adjustment had fled, the interests of the Church and of mankind required the ascendancy of Rodolph; and Gregory saw that to withhold his sanction now, was to peril his cause, or at least to prolong the contest. The victory of Fladenheim had calmed the impetuosity of the Italian nobles who burned to declare for Henry; and they were disposed to preserve a safe neutrality. The cruelties

and vices of the Franconian were past endurance; the moment for which the Suabian so patiently and yet so ardently looked, had at length arrived. Rising



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before the crowded council, the noble Pontiff, giving voice to a holy enthusiasm he could not restrain, invoked the aid of St. Peter, the Prince of Apostles, and of St. Paul, the Teacher of the Nations. He called upon them to witness, that in spite of his grief, his groans, and his tears, he had been chosen their most unworthy successor; and that princes, ecclesiastics, and courtesans were leagued to accomplish his death or exile. "By *your* authority," he exclaims, "relying upon the mercy of God and the pity of His Virgin Mother, I excommunicate Henry and all his partisans, and absolve his subjects from their allegiance. And even as Henry is justly deprived of his royalty by his pride, his disobedience, and perfidy, so are the same power and royal authority granted to Rodolph for his humility, his submission, and his merits."

The envoys of Rodolph hastened back to Saxony, bearing him the Papal confirmation of his election and the benediction so fervently pronounced. The king and his army were inspired with the most lively joy and confidence. Those who before had dreaded the result, no longer doubted, but deemed the agony of the empire already ended. Mass was celebrated amid universal rejoicings, and Saxon and Suabian forgot the desolation of their homes in this presage of victory and peace. The camp of Henry presented another scene. The excommunicated king abandoned himself to the most violent transports of fury. He swore the destruction of the daring Pontiff and the usurper who now went forth as the chosen champion of the Holy See. He assembled at Mayence thirty bishops and a proud array of princes and barons.

Here again was acted the solemn farce of the conventicle of Brixen. A decree was prepared and published, asserting that it was necessary to cut off from the communion of the faithful, a priest who had been rash enough to deprive the august person of majesty of all participation in the government of the Church, and to strike him with anathema. "He is not the elect of God," runs the instrument, "but owes his elevation to his own unblushing fraud and corruption. He has ruined the Church—he has distracted the State; he has embittered the life of a *pious and peaceful* monarch, upheld a perjured rebel, and scattered everywhere discord, jealousy, and adultery. For this, here in final council at Mayence, we have resolved to depose, expel, and, if he disobey our command, to doom to eternal condemnation a monster who preaches the pillaging of churches and assassination, who abets perjury and homicide, who denies the Catholic and Apostolic faith concerning the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ—this accursed Hildebrand, this ancient ally of the heretic Berengarius, this conjurer and magician, this necromancer, this monk possessed by a devil, this vile apostate from the faith of our fathers."

After this violent invective had been launched, Guibert of Ravenna was unanimously elected anti-pope, under the name of Clement III. Henry next addressed himself to win the support of England; but Cardinal Lanfranc condemned his precipitation, and refused to unite in these insults and outrages.

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The brief respite from arms that followed the battle of Fladenheim was over. Hostilities had commenced. Cries of war were heard from every quarter, and while the two kings were mustering their strength for another great struggle, the partisans of Rodolph and Henry were daily mingling in deadly strife. Nor were princes and counts, knights, pages, and vassals alone in the field, but the spear and sword flashed in the hands of bishops, abbots, and monks. Ulrich, Abbot of Saint Gall, was ravaging Linzgau and Thurgovia, demolishing the castles of Otto, of Marchdorf, Marquard of Bregence, and Hartman of Kyburg, and forcing the friends of Rodolph to fly before him.

These trivial advantages were amply compensated by the victory of Welf over Frederick of Hohenstaufen, at Hochstadt, and the occupation of Augsburg.

It was in the month of October, 1080, that Henry, confiding in the superior numbers and discipline of his army, advanced upon Saxony, where Rodolph calmly awaited his approach. Each monarch well knew that the approaching contest would be decisive of his fate, and had omitted nothing to insure the victory. Anxious to shorten an interval of such painful suspense, they longed to meet, Henry stimulated by hatred and the memory of his recent defeats, Rodolph animated by a just indignation and conscious rectitude.

Once upon the soil of Saxony, Henry swept the country with fire and sword to the banks of the Elster. He took a strong position at Mulsen, and awaited reinforcements from Bohemia. When the desired succor had arrived, he put his army in motion, intending to desolate the country and then retire. But he had not advanced far, before he discovered the allied forces of Saxony and Suabia drawn up to oppose him. Daunted for a moment, by this gallant host, he fell back upon the Elster. The deep river prevented a farther retreat. His position was protected by narrow and difficult approaches, and by a deep morass. Here he passed the night.

Early in the morning of the fifteenth of October, the army of Henry was drawn up in battle array along the Elster, while the vanguard of his rival became visible in the distance. The soldiers of the former were unwearied and invigorated by a night of repose; the troops of Rodolph were jaded with forced marches over roads almost impassable. Rodolph, apprehensive lest fatigue should prove fatal, would have declined an immediate action, but he found it impossible to restrain the ardor of his men. The knights leaped from their sinking steeds and formed themselves on foot, and the infantry, forgetting their toil at the sight of the foe, continued to advance. They halted at length on the edge of the deep morass of Grona, in full view of the opposing army on the other side.



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With Henry were the bishops of Basle and Lausanne with their men-at-arms, the Count Palatine Herman with all Franconia, Marquard of Carinthia, and Lutold, his son. Many recreant Bavarians were around him, and even Suabia raised her arm against her noble duke, in the person of Werner, Archbishop of Strasburg. There, too, were found Ulrich of Eppenstein, Arnaud of Lentzburg, Ulrich of Bregenz, Lutold of Dillingen, the counts and prelates of the house of Welschneuenburg, Egina of Achalm, and Werner of Gruningen. But conspicuous, even amid that high-born and martial group, stood the Duke Godfrey of Bouillon and Frederick of Hohenstaufen.

Rodolph was surrounded by Altman of Constance, and the mitres of Coire, Rheinau, Stein, Wuertzburg, and Worms; he could touch the hands of Eckhard of Richenau, of the Abbot of the Convent of All Saints at Schafhouse, and of William de Hirschau, the most exemplary man of his day. Welf, Otto of Nordheim, Berthold of Carinthia, and Hugo, Count Palatine of Tuebingen, were ready to support him with their lives, as they marched on proudly at the head of their vassals and soldiers. Glittering at his side were raised the lances of Marquard of Bregenz, Hartman of Dillingen, Burchard of Nellemburg, Cuno and Lutold of Achalm, Werner of Hapsburg, Adalbert of Calm, Albert of Hers, and Sandrit of Stramen.

At the moment the advancing columns halted, the legates of Gregory appeared in front of the army and imparted the Papal benediction to all who had taken up arms against the enemy of the Church and of the liberties of Germany. As if a thunderbolt had stricken them down, the soldiers sank simultaneously upon their knees, and, with their heads bent upon their hearts, received the boon so dearly prized. While they were yet kneeling, the clerks began to intone the eighty-second Psalm, and the solemn strains could be heard all along the ranks. How sad was the thought, that this calm music was but the prelude to the groans of the dying and the hoarse shouts of blood-stained victory! As the army rose at the last note of the Psalm, the clash of steel, instead of the mournful chant, was heard along the line.

Rodolph, pale and thoughtful, but calm and dignified, rode through his columns, uttering brief expressions of encouragement and confidence, which were answered by cheers that made the welkin ring. When he had gained an eminence which commanded a view of both armies, a messenger, darting from his side, flew like an arrow toward the column of Welf of Bavaria. After the lapse of a few minutes, the Bavarians had turned the morass, and were almost within striking distance of the enemy. Without moving from his position, Frederick of Hohenstaufen waited the assault. The next instant the Bavarians had encountered the Bohemians hand to hand. For a time the combat seemed equal, but at length the division of Welf could be seen slowly falling back. The Suabian nobles, who had hitherto watched the contest in silence and



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the deepest interest, besought the king to permit them to aid the retreating column. But Rodolph firmly refused. He watched the combatants sternly, but without moving a muscle, until the main body of Henry's army was in motion, and then Gilbert could see the smile he had marked at Fladenheim, curling the hero's lip and lighting up his eye. Yet it was not the same smile: there was something sadder, yet fiercer in it. Never had his eye flashed forth such wild lustre, or his bosom heaved with such pent-up emotion.

Then, as the main body of the Saxons pressed rapidly forward under Otto of Nordheim, against the foe disordered by pursuit, and Rodolph saw his plans accomplished, he turned to the Archbishop of Mayence, and exclaimed, in a voice broken by deep feeling:

"The day is ours!"

The prelate uttered a prayer of thanksgiving, and, turning to the king, said:

"I give your highness joy!"

"I may need your prayers rather than your congratulations," replied Rodolph, in a whisper, and he closed his visor.

The king still occupied the height from which he had directed the battle, that had now become general. Around him were the chivalry of Suabia and his former faithful subjects, acting in concert with a large body of Saxons. Henry's army was divided into two bodies, one of which, commanded by the monarch in person, was engaged with Otto, while the other, led by Godfrey de Bouillon and Frederick of Hohenstaufen, assailed the Bavarians. Welf, borne down by numbers, still retreated in obedience to his instructions.

"Our turn has come at last, gentlemen," cried the king. "Forward!"

The barons, who had waited as impatiently as hounds in the leash, required no second bidding, but dashed after their chivalrous monarch, who was in full course with his lance in rest. Already, in Henry's camp, the *Te Deum* was sounding in anticipation of the victory promised by the supposed rout of the Bavarians. But the arrival of Rodolph changed the face of affairs. The strife then began in earnest. The enemy recoiled at first before the king's impetuous charge, but they were commanded by the ablest knights in the empire, and soon recovered from their momentary panic. Foremost of all his gallant chiefs, Rodolph carried death and terror into the Bohemian ranks. He seemed endowed with supernatural strength, and neither lance nor mace could arrest his brilliant career. Wherever the foe was thickest, or the fight most dubious, his white crest gleamed like some fearful meteor. It was difficult for the Suabian nobles to keep



up with their invincible monarch, and only by dint of the most extraordinary efforts about twenty of the best lances of his army could prevent his falling alone upon the hostile masses. Among those who fought at his side were the lords of Stramen and Hers, Gilbert and Henry. At this moment a band of perhaps thirty horsemen, with their spears in rest, headed by a knight of gigantic size and another whose deeds had proclaimed him equally formidable, came like a thunderbolt through the opening files of the Bohemians, and fell upon the Suabian group.



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The shock was fearful. Many of the combatants were hurled to the earth; but the white plume still waved, and Rodolph of Suabia was in mortal combat with Godfrey de Bouillon. The giant had singled out Sandrit of Stramen, who spurred to meet him with equal avidity. In an instant both riders rolled in the dust. The antagonist of Sir Sandrit was the first to rise, and as the knight of Stramen staggered to his feet, the battle-axe of his opponent was poised above his head. A moment more and the Lady Margaret would have been an orphan—for Frederick of Hohenstaufen's strength was not to be babied by steel casque or bars of proof. But the axe was destined to take another direction. A mounted knight, spurring to the rescue of Sir Sandrit, was within a few bounds of the Lord of Hohenstaufen. Sir Frederick saw his danger, and with wonderful quickness changed his aim, and discharged the ponderous weapon against this new assailant. But the Suabian, displaying equal quickness, fell suddenly upon the neck of his steed, and the flying mass passed harmlessly over his head, grazing his crest. But as the rider rose to his seat, a Bohemian knight, darting before Sir Frederick, checked his career. Such was the fury of the onset that both were unhorsed. The saddle-girths of the Suabian had given way, but the Bohemian fell, pierced by the spear of his antagonist. The former sprang uninjured to his feet, and drawing his sword, rushed against the first object of his attack. Sir Sandrit, dizzy from his first shock, was staggering beneath the heavy blows of his powerful opponent, as the knight whose advance we have marked, crying "God and Suabia!" turned aside a stroke aimed at the exhausted baron, and stepped between them.

"Who are you?" said the Lord of Hohenstaufen, parrying a blow and returning it. "Your shield bears no device; beware lest you fall before it obtains one!"

"I shall take a device when I have earned one," was the reply. "My name would convey nothing to your ears."

"Then perish in your insignificance!" exclaimed the giant, bringing down his sword with both hands. But the blow was avoided with admirable agility, and the combat went on in silence. It seemed as if the struggle could not last an instant, for Frederick towered full a foot above his adversary. But the Lord of Hohenstaufen was fatigued by his passage with the Baron of Stramen, and his wonderful strength was partially balanced by the superior activity of the Suabian. In the mean time, numbers of Rodolph's knights had now arrived, and the Duke Godfrey was compelled to retreat. Frederick of Hohenstaufen lingered until almost surrounded, and then retired slowly before his antagonist, hoping to obtain some advantage from the pursuer's impetuosity.

But the Suabian was as cautious and dangerous as ever.

"Hold, Sir Knight!" said Frederick, suddenly sinking his sword and lowering his visor. "I beg your name."

"I am called Gilbert de Hers," replied the youth, imitating his example.



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“There,” cried the Lord of Hohenstaufen, throwing down his glove, “wear that for me, and say for Frederick of Hohenstaufen, that he rarely coped with better knight.”

At these words, the giant mounted a horse which a groom had brought him through the fray, and, waving an adieu, wheeled off to another part of the field. Gilbert raised the gage and fastened it in his casque. There was a strong tumult in the young noble's heart. In spite of his impulsive disposition, he was never so calm as when in danger. Though sharing the intense excitement of the battle-field, he was not carried away by the frenzy of the strife. Though the praises of an illustrious enemy were sounding in his ears, he felt little of the exultation which such a circumstance might naturally impart. He had rescued the Baron of Stramen from imminent peril; but though the Lady Margaret's image had been before him through the horror and glory of the day, it was only for a moment that he thrilled at the prospect of a relenting father. His interview with Rodolph had sunk deep into his soul, and not even the pomp and terror of war could blot from his mind the contemplation of the king and his solemn language. He knew not why, but he could scarce withdraw his eyes from the snow-white crest, which, still unwearied, hung upon the now retiring columns of the foe. The Count Rapatho had already fallen before the fiery Rodolph, and the *Te Deum* was hushed as the mangled corpse was brought into Henry's camp.

Nor was Otto of Nordheim less successful. At the head of the Saxon infantry, he had routed the legions of Franconia, and had driven numbers into the deep and rapid river. Fruitlessly did Henry endeavor to preserve his array and keep his ground: he was routed at every point. The Saxons, now certain of victory, would have fallen upon and pillaged the camp. But Otto was too old a warrior to throw caution aside because of a partial success. “Wait a moment!” was all the veteran said, as he checked their appetite for plunder; and the wisdom of his advice was soon made evident. Henry de Laca, Count Palatine of the Rhine, began to menace his rear. The troops of the count were fresh, and had been proved in former trials. As they advanced with the rapidity and steadiness of veterans, singing the *Kyrie eleison*, they seemed well able to retrieve the fortunes of the day.

“Another triumph awaits us!” cried Otto; “let us trust in God!”

Without hesitating a moment, the gallant Saxon, with his wonted impetuosity, fell upon the advancing lines, and, though stubbornly resisted for a time, gained at last a complete victory. When the forces of the Palatine of the Rhine had been driven across the Elster, Otto turned to his soldiers, exclaiming:

“Now to the camp, and take the reward of your valor!”

In the meanwhile, the retreat of the Bohemians had turned into a confused flight. Rodolph, in the eagerness of pursuit, had rashly penetrated too far into the flying

masses of the foe, who now turned upon the pursuer. Awhile the white crest danced amid hostile helmets and spears—then vanished.



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“He is down!” screamed Gilbert, in agony, hewing his way toward the king. Rodolph was alone against a host, while his horse sank up to his knees in the marshy ground. Before succor could arrive, a sword had cloven through the monarch’s wrist, and his right hand fell to the ground.

“It is the hand that I raised when swearing allegiance to Henry,” muttered Rodolph, bitterly. With tears in his eyes, Gilbert struggled to reach the king, who, unarmed and disabled, drove his steed against the circle that hemmed him in. His crest was gone, and his armor hacked and stained with blood: still fearlessly he bore up against his foes, and seemed to rejoice in the unequal strife. The chivalry of Suabia were spurring fast to the rescue, and Gilbert, now supported by a small band of friends, was almost at his side, when Godfrey de Bouillon charged the king with levelled lance. The steel, impelled by a powerful hand, entered at the groin, and Rodolph, mortally wounded, fell to the ground. The Bohemians uttered a cry of joy at the king’s overthrow, for they knew him well by his armor and actions. Their triumph was short-lived, however, for the Suabians, eager to avenge their leader, gave no quarter, and the victorious Saxons had attacked their rear.

“Stop not now!” said Rodolph to the nobles about him; and the lords of Hapsburg, Tuebingen, Achalm, Hers, and Stramen swept on to avenge him. Gilbert remained rooted to the spot. His lance dropped from his hand as he leaped from his horse and knelt beside his monarch. Already the helmet had been removed by one who supported the dying hero in his arms. From Gregory VII to Pius IX, from the Dominican that accompanied Cortez to the Jesuit who followed a more recent conqueror, the Catholic missionary had been found in the front of battle. It was Father Omehr whose breast now pillowed the monarch’s head. Gilbert’s heart was almost bursting as he pressed the only remaining hand to his lips and saw that he was recognized. Feeling he could not long survive, Rodolph raised his head and asked, in a dying voice, “Whose is the day?” “Yours, my lord, yours!” replied those who were around him; for Gilbert, unable to speak, did not attempt to answer, but continued to gaze on the eagle eye over which the film of death was gathering fast.

“Yours, my lord, yours,” repeated the mourners. At these words, Rodolph fell back in the missionary’s arms, saying, “Then I accept with joy the end to which God has called me. Death no longer disturbs me, since it brings victory with it.” From this moment he was speechless; and with his gaze earnestly bent upon his shield, that had been raised by a page, and on which was blazoned a crowned lion sleeping upon the knees of the Blessed Virgin, Rodolph of Suabia breathed his last. The calm face of the dead was not paler than Gilbert, who, unmoved by the shout of victory, watched the clay that had so lately been—a king.



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While they bore the body to the royal pavilion, the pursuit was continued with terrible effect. The Saxons remembered the losses they had suffered five years before—the Suabians saw their desolated homes and their expiring duke. The small remnant of Henry's army that escaped the relentless sword and the equally fatal depths of the Elster, were only reserved for a fate still more dreadful. After wandering about, a prey to want and misery, they were now butchered by the peasantry of Saxony and Thuringia, who, armed with hatchets and scythes, flew to avenge upon the relic the wrongs they had suffered from the whole army. Many of the fugitives plunged into the forests, preferring the slow tooth of famine to the swifter stroke of steel. Others, concealing themselves until the first gust of passion was over, besought the mercy of the peasantry, who, at last moved with compassion or glutted with slaughter, received them as fellow-beings, healed their wounds, and sent them to their homes. Henry of Austria, with a suite little proportioned to his rank, fled to Bohemia.

There was none of the exultation of victory in the allied camp that night: each soldier seemed to feel that the conquest had been too dearly won. Rodolph was not only beloved by the Suabians, who from their cradles had experienced his bounty, his virtue, and justice, but he had endeared himself to the Saxons by his affability, his wisdom, and his valor. He had healed their private quarrels and humbled their public enemies; he found them divided and feeble, he left them united and vigorous. They regarded him as the savior of Saxony, and affectionately styled him "*Pater patriae*." Nor was the grief of the bishops and priests less ardent and sincere, for they felt that a zealous and dauntless defender of the Church had fallen.

The soldiers, scattered about in groups, slept little, but whispered to each other, and fixed their eyes upon the torches that burned so steadily in the royal pavilion. There was stretched, cold and stiff, the victor of the day, his noble features rigid in death, while his barons knelt weeping around the bier, and the Archbishop of Mayence recited prayers for his soul. The night wore away, and when the morning broke out cheerfully as though no care were in the world, Gilbert de Hers still knelt beside the corpse of the king. No tears were in his eyes then, and the expression of his face varied between deep thought and deep grief. He might have remarked that the scorn had departed from Henry of Stramen's lip; but he did not. His mind was occupied with other things; and silent and sad, he would not leave his vigil beside the dead.

Early in the morning of the sixteenth, the victorious army, sadder than defeat could ever have made it, entered Merseburg. After the obsequies had been performed with equal solemnity and magnificence, the body of the king was deposited in the choir of the cathedral. A statue of gilt bronze for many a year marked the tomb of Rodolph of Suabia.



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On the same evening, when the soldiers were scattered through the town, and the nobles had retired to such quarters as they could procure, Gilbert de Hers sought out Father Omehr, and found him in an apartment which the Archbishop of Mayence had obtained for the missionary.

Up to the day of his interview with Rodolph at Mayence, Gilbert's mind had been wholly engrossed with the bright pictures which a vivid and worldly fancy and a keen ambition to excel can always unfold to the eye of youth. At times he remembered the night passed in the missionary's humble dwelling, when Bertha's knife had confined him there, and he saw again the crucifix and the sacristan. But this was only for a moment. The image of the Lady Margaret was sure to enter and banish every other feeling than that of deep love for her. But from the night of the coronation, a change had fallen upon the youth, which Father Omehr's keen eye had not failed to remark. He displayed no longer the same thoughtless gayety or the same dreamy abstraction. He had reveries, it is true, proceeding from the fear of losing the Lady Margaret, or the hope of gaining her. The missionary had refrained from questioning the young knight, nor did Gilbert reveal any secret to his venerable friend. Whether he might have recovered his former levity can scarcely be answered, but the death of Rodolph seemed to have extinguished it forever. So great a change had this last incident wrought in him, that it was not only evident to Father Omehr and Sir Albert, but all who knew him were struck with his altered manner. They ascribed it to grief alone, for they knew him to have been the monarch's favorite.

When the young noble and the old priest, whose love for each other had steadily increased, had sat awhile in silence, the latter took his companion by the hand, and, as the visit seemed to solicit the question, said, in a tone evincing the interest of a parent: "My son, what ails you?"

Then, for the first time, the violent and various feelings which had been aroused in Gilbert's breast found a vent in tears. An hour almost passed away before he could compose himself, and then he only said: "To witness him struck down by death just as he had gained all for which he lived—to see the fruit of thirty years' labor snatched from his lips before he could taste it! O God, for what trifles are we toiling!"

It was difficult to recognize Gilbert de Hers in the pale, excited face and trembling figure which, with clasped hands and eyes upturned, uttered these meaning words.

Another hour passed, and the youth was kneeling at the missionary's feet.

Midnight was tolled by the great bell of the cathedral, and Gilbert had risen.

"My son," said Father Omehr, as they parted, "you have been taught to despise the world—the next step is to love God!"



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Otto of Nordheim and Welf of Bavaria had determined to keep their forces together until apprised of Henry's further designs, and the allied armies rested upon their arms at Merseburg. In the meantime Henry used every artifice to raise another army; but such a panic had seized his adherents, that they declared they would rather be swallowed up in the earth than again encounter the Saxons. When Otto and Welf were thus assured of Henry's immediate inability to injure them, they disbanded the troops which had served them so gallantly. Much as the soldiers longed to return to their homes, they did not part without some reluctance. They had long toiled side by side in the same glorious cause; they had shared the same dangers and the same pleasures. They had slept and kept watch together. Reminiscences of hair-breadth escapes and of mutual services had created friendships of no ordinary strength. For many days the different troops could be seen evacuating the city under their feudal chiefs, until at last scarce a soldier remained at Merseburg.

It was about the first of November that the barons of Hers and Stramen set out with the relics of their clans for their lordships in Suabia. The face of Sandrit of Stramen was sterner than ever, and his son seemed to have caught a portion of his severity. They rode along swiftly, and whenever they spoke it was about the Lady Margaret. Father Omehr alone preserved his equanimity, and even he was now unusually absent and thoughtful. Nor was the retinue of Albert of Hers more cheerful. Sir Albert's eyes were fixed on the ground in deep dejection; tears were ever and anon springing into Humbert's eyes, and even the vassals behind them were gloomy and dispirited. They were returning to a desolated home, it is true; but, what was worse, they were returning without Gilbert.

The Lady Margaret was still at Tuebingen. With scarce more fervor did Gregory VII uphold against the world the measures he deemed essential to the liberty, unity, and purity of the Church, than did this young girl pursue the object to which she had consecrated herself—the extinction of the feud. Humble as were her aim and efforts, when contrasted with the objects and exertions of the sainted Pontiff, she could still imitate his piety and perseverance. The reader may have remarked the changes in the Lady Margaret's character. She was naturally haughty and impetuous, though generous and sincere. In spite of her piety, that pride, so difficult to curb, would still break out. But these infirmities had been zealously combated, until religion had triumphed over the weakness of humanity. Still, for some time, the Lady Margaret was unhappy, and accused herself of human love in seeking the reconciliation, imputing the revolution in her feelings to a culpable tenderness. But she soon discovered that vanity—that an aspiration after the *consciousness* of perfection rather than true piety—occasioned her uneasiness.



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She no longer tormented herself with dangerous mistrusts, but gave all she had to God, begging Him to purify the gift and supply her mind with the dispositions to render the offering acceptable. She had learned that most difficult lesson even to the holy—to hope rather than despond in the conviction of unworthiness. There was one other victory which the Lady Margaret had gained over herself: she had suppressed an inclination to return the attachment of Gilbert de Hers, which she clearly saw could only lead to unfortunate results. It was the remembrance of this inclination that occasioned the misgivings which she had at last obtained grace to disregard.

Such was the Lady Margaret at the time of the battle of Elster. She frequently reverted to the challenge she had given the assailants of Stramen Castle, and detected in that defiance a relic of her former pride. It was the last spark.

She was now in daily expectation of her father and brother, and of one almost equally dear—Father Omehr. Her walks were confined to a large room adjoining her chamber, and thence along the corridor to the chapel. Her evening exercise was to walk, supported by the Countess of Montfort, to the altar of the Blessed Virgin, and observe the custom of her earliest youth, by leaving there a bunch of flowers. She spent most of the day in a cushioned chair—she was too weak to kneel long. She loved to sit in the sunlight, holding the countess's hand in her own attenuated fingers. Then she would speak of her father and brother, and say that on the morrow they would surely be reunited. She never mentioned sickness or pain; she saw her companion's tears falling fast at times, but she would only wipe them away with a smile and an embrace. As the sunbeams played upon her wasted features, fringing her hair with gold, and encircling her with a brilliant halo, the countess would turn away from the lovely vision to hide her emotion, and whisper to herself: "This is a glimpse of the world beyond the grave!"

CHAPTER X

We need not mourn for thee, here laid to rest;
Earth is thy bed, and not thy grave; the skies
Are for thy soul the cradle and the nest.
There live!

TASSO.

Toward the close of November, on one of those bright warm days, when winter, as if in memory of the departed summer, puts by his blasts and snows, the Countess of Montfort was seated at the bedside of the Lady Margaret. The countess, though in the bloom of health and youth, was sad and tearful. The maiden, though her breath was short and difficult, wore a smile upon her lips. The shadow of death was on her sunken



temples, and had touched her quivering nostril and waxen ear, through which the light came as through porcelain. Yet the eyes were closed, and the pale lips moved, and the wasted hands, embracing a crucifix, were joined in prayer. She could still beg God to heal the feud. How edifying, how beautiful, how sublime the spectacle!—sublimier than the deeds of heroes, the conceptions of poets, the aspirations of genius. What is Archimedes moving the world to the humblest Christian moving heaven by prayer!



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In a corner of the room a small statue of the Immaculate Mother of God stood upon a pedestal. The marble figure breathed all that purity and simplicity so striking in the images which adorned the old Gothic cathedrals. The eyes of the maiden frequently rested upon it, and as often as sunset came, she would bid the countess place a bunch of flowers at its feet. Thus did she continue to the end of her life the pious custom of her infancy.

All was still in the darkened chamber, and the rich tapestry hung mournfully from the walls. The things of earth make the earthly heart ache in the presence of death. But how joyously the eye of faith kindled up, as it rested on the face of the meek sufferer!

The door opened softly, a light step entered, and a female servant whispered something to the countess. She started and looked suddenly at Margaret. The invalid had caught the whisper, low as it was. A slight tinge was visible on her cheek, as she pressed her white fingers to her breast and said, in a low tone:

“God be praised! It is my father! Bring him to me.”

Is this dying girl his daughter! Is this attenuated form all that remains of his noble, his beautiful, his darling Margaret? Like a blasted pine, the stalwart warrior fell upon his knees, with a groan as if his heart had burst, and buried his face in the curtains. Henry, all tears and sobs, caught his sister’s outstretched hand and held it to his heart, gazing in anguish at the ruin of his idol. Behind these knelt Father Omehr. For a moment the man triumphed over the Christian, and he too felt the thorn of grief in his throat. But when Margaret’s calm eye rested on him, and her meek smile beamed out, he felt the rapture which is only known to the holy, when a soul is happily returning to the bosom whence it came.

“Let us thank God for having thus united us!” said the Lady Margaret, and they remained some minutes in silent prayer.

“Father!” whispered the invalid.

The broad chest was convulsed and the moan deepened, but that bent, crushed figure made no reply.

“Father!” she repeated, as her hand fell, in a caress, upon her parent’s head.

Sir Sandrit, starting at her touch, looked up and seized the hand. A minute had changed his face, as if a year had been ravaging there: it was so furrowed, so haggard. He gazed but an instant at his daughter; then hid his face again, muttering but one word: “Margaret!”

“Father,” said the maiden to Father Omehr, who now stood at her at her pillow, “is Albert of Hers at home?”



The missionary nodded.

“Let him know that Margaret of Stramen, on her death-bed, entreated him to fly here without a moment’s delay.”

Even the sound of that hated name produced no perceptible impression upon the heart-broken baron. The Count Montfort, who had just entered the room, suddenly exclaimed:

“I, myself, will deliver your message, my child, as quickly as horse can speed.”



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Margaret endeavored to thank him, but, exhausted by excitement and exertion, she fell back upon her pillow. The countess prudently led the unresisting father from the room, and despatched Henry to administer to his grief.

"I am changed," said Margaret to the missionary, as she recovered.

"God has changed you for Himself, my child," replied the old man, struggling with the weakness of human nature, for he had known and loved her from her infancy.

"I have hoped so, even in the recollection of my many sins, for His mercy is infinite. May He uphold and strengthen my father, and teach him to rejoice in the change he now deploras!"

The countess left the room, and once more the Lady Margaret opened her soul to her first confessor.

The baron knelt all night beside his dying child. He watched her broken slumbers, as if he feared each might be the last. A thousand sighs of anguish and affection were given and returned before another day began to dawn. How precious are the last hours of life! In our inability to lengthen them, we strive to gather into them more feeling and action than we could extract from as many years.

As the sun flashed out the Lady Margaret seemed animated with new strength. Her father trembled at the suggestion—what if she should recover! Thus hope feeds upon the wishes of the heart.

An hour before noon the Count Montfort, accompanied by Albert of Hers, entered the apartment. Sir Albert, obeying a look which the maiden gave him, advanced, and with much emotion pronounced the words, "My lady, I am here!"

Sir Sandrit had anticipated all; nor did his son manifest the least surprise. They both stood sorrowful and mute, nor did anger and disdain appear in the features with which they were so familiar. Albert of Hers saw, at a glance, the position in which he was placed.

"Father!" began the sinking girl—"father! let me die in the assurance of meeting you hereafter. In the name of Him before whom I am soon to appear, forgive this man!"

The struggle had already taken place in the baron's soul. When his heart was trampled in the dust, his pride was broken. The stubborn rock was smitten by the heaven-directed wand, and the waters of contrition gushed forth.

"You have conquered, my child," he murmured, kneeling and kissing her pale forehead.

"Not I, my father. God is the conqueror!"



It seemed as if her upward glance had rested upon something more than mortal, her face assumed an expression of such unearthly meaning. Sir Albert, too, knelt beside his ancient foe: he felt it impious to stand.

The maiden motioned to the countess, who raised and supported her in her arms and drew back the long hair which had partially covered the hollow cheeks. Without a word, but with an eloquence that must have charmed the attendant Angels as much as it entranced the mortals who witnessed it, she placed her father's hand into Sir Albert's right hand, while Henry took the left.



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“Albert de Hers,” said Sir Sandrit, as the tears coursed down his brown cheeks, “I freely forgive you and yours; and nevermore shall my hand be raised against you.”

Henry repeated the words after his father.

“And I,” said the Lord of Hers, “will forget the past: and I declare, here in the presence of dying innocence, that I am guiltless of your brother’s blood!”

The Countess of Montfort sobbed aloud, and her husband made no effort to conceal his tears. Father Omehr, who had raised his hands to heaven in an ecstasy of gratitude, now exclaimed:

“Let me speak for one who is not here: Gilbert de Hers has long since forgiven those who were once his father’s foes.”

The object of her life was attained—the goal was reached—the victory was won. There lay the victor, supported in the arms of her friend. The victory was hers, for though heaven had won it, she had won heaven by prayer. What are earth’s conquests to a victory like this! What the splendid overthrow of nations—what Thermopylae, or Marathon, or Trafalgar to this triumph over long-nourished hatred! When does man appear in so magnificent an attitude as when, by fervent prayer and complete humility, he converts heaven into an agent by which his desires are accomplished!

Yet the dying victor felt no pride. Her heart was dissolved in gratitude: she knew her nothingness, and ascribed all to God. She spoke not, she wept not: even the wonted smile forsook her lips. She only felt the immensity of the goodness of God—she only bowed before this new manifestation of his power. The three knights, who looked up in her face, saw she was invoking a blessing upon them, and reverently bent their heads, as if in the feeling that the blessing was then descending.

Young girls clothed in white were noiselessly strewing with flowers the way by which the adorable Sacrament was to pass from the chapel to the chamber. The blessed candle, the emblem of the light of faith and of the heavenly mansions, was lit, and the maiden, unable to kneel, received the Sacred Body as she lay. Her eyes were closed, and, as if detached from all earthly things, she continued to murmur, almost inaudibly, passages from the Psalms and pious ejaculations. She raised her finger to trace upon her lips the sign of Christ, and then fell into her agony.

Three times the bell had tolled when the last absolution was given, and its solemn voice still sounded at regular intervals, mingling with the sublime words that bade the faint soul go forth from the world in the name of God the Father Almighty, who created it, in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, who suffered for it, in the name of the Holy Spirit, which had been imparted to it: in the name of Angels and Archangels, in the name of Thrones and Dominations, in the name of Principalities and Powers, in the



name of Cherubim and Seraphim, in the name of Patriarchs and Prophets, in the name of holy Apostles and Evangelists, in the name of holy martyrs and confessors, in the name of holy monks and hermits, in the name of holy virgins and all the Saints of God, that its rest that day might be in peace, and its habitation in holy Sion!

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There was no struggle, no contortion, to mark the moment of dissolution. The face only grew more serene and less death-like, as the soul passed from its frail tenement.

The bells no longer swung slowly and solemnly, but poured forth a festive sound. And well might they peal more merrily then, than at birth, or marriage, or earthly conquest. Tears were falling fast around the bed; yet only the body wept—the soul was exulting.

On the morning of the third day after the Lady Margaret's death, a funeral procession could be seen slowly approaching, within sight of the ruins of Stramen Castle and the blackened Church of the Nativity. The peasantry, who were expecting it, had gone forth to meet the remains of their dearly loved lady, and rosy children were scattering flowers before the bier. They could not repress some tears and sighs for their benefactress, yet they knew it was for themselves they grieved, not for her they had lost. How they wondered at first—and how their wonder melted into joyous thanksgivings, to see the Lord of Hers supporting the now humble and contrite Baron of Stramen!

The mourners—if such they may be called—entered the grave-yard, which was near the church, and had not been violated by the sacrilegious marauders, and halted before a new-made grave. In those days, it was the peculiar privilege of bishops, abbots, and holy priests to be buried within the church, or only extended to laics of distinguished sanctity. Yet Father Omehr had assured the maiden that she might be interred in the choir at Tuebingen. Margaret had declined a privilege of which she deemed herself unworthy, saying that she did not wish to be associated in sepulture with those from whom she was far separated in merit, and expressing a wish to be placed beside her mother. And they laid her, with prayers and unbidden tears, in the place she had chosen.

The gorgeous sun of ancient Suabia was beaming out in cloudless splendor, and the mountains and the Danube, the forest and the fields looked lovely in the glittering day; yet not one of those who stood around the grave would have said to the dead, "*Awake!*" if the word could have recalled her to share the beauty of the world before them. When the Count and Countess of Montfort saw that their longer presence would only impose a restraint upon the family group, they bade the missionary a silent adieu, and began to retrace their steps to Tuebingen.

The cottage of the missionary was spared on account of its insignificance; and Father Omehr led the Lord of Hers and the father and son into his humble apartments, which had been zealously tended by his pious penitents. All was arranged just as he had left it, to his own bed and the corner where Gilbert had slept. There was nothing here to mark the scourge which had desolated the smiling country without. The Baron of Stramen sat down upon a bench, covering his face with his hands. Here, in the sight of his ruined castle, and with the



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funeral tears of his only daughter undried upon his cheeks, he was happier than he had been for many a year: happier than when carousing in his father's halls—happier than when proudly embracing his darling child—happier than when engaged in avenging his brother—happier than when exulting in the victories of Rodolph! And Henry, too, shared in this blessed change wrought by his sister's prayers. Each heart was too full for speech; words would have fallen meaningless and cold.

At this eloquent moment, a man, exhausted with running, and greatly agitated, abruptly entered the cottage. He checked himself, however, and stood as if petrified at the sight of the group before him. Father Omehr, who rightly judged that his rude intrusion must have been caused by no ordinary occurrence, rose, and in a whisper commanded him to explain himself.

"Bertha seems adying!" said the man.

"Where is she?" asked the priest.

"About a mile from here—I will take you there." The Baron of Stramen seemed not to listen, for he sat motionless; but his son manifested much interest.

"Shall I go with you?" he said to the missionary.

"No, my child, remain with your father."

Albert de Hers had started up at the peasant's announcement, and followed Father Omehr out of the apartment.

"Permit me," he said, "to accompany you; I feel that the call is intended for me too. This ring," he continued, holding up his finger, "was given me in my youth by Rodolph of Suabia; in a moment of folly and sin, I parted with it. After an interval of more than twenty years, it was restored to Rodolph by this Bertha, without a word of explanation. He gave it to me the night before his death"—here the baron paused an instant—"and informed me how and from whom he had received it. I resolved to seek out the woman on my return; for if she be the Bertha to whom I gave this ring, even in her madness she may throw light upon an event hitherto involved in mystery."

"You mean the death of Sir Sandrit's brother?"

"Yes."

"I see no reason to oppose your wish," said the missionary; "perhaps the mercy of God may choose to reveal what we vainly have endeavored to discover."



It was not known how Bertha had escaped from the castle on the fatal night when it was fired and its inmates put to the sword. Her insanity might have shielded her; or she might have availed herself of the confusion and darkness to elude observation, or extricated herself by some secret passage. A peasant thought he had seen her, by moonlight, walking along the moat of the castle, some days after the hostile army had disappeared; but his account was discredited until she appeared by daylight to the surviving vassals of Stramen, when they emerged from the forest in which they had taken refuge. At the time of the return of the soldiers of Stramen, she was much thinner and walked with difficulty, rarely issuing from her retreat



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in the ravine, to which she had again retired. On the morning of Margaret's funeral she could be seen, pale and haggard, tottering toward the grave-yard. The simple peasants recoiled before the ghastly figure, which, tall and trembling, with a black gown and death-white face, passed among them like a spectre. Before she reached the church she fell senseless to the ground. The humanity of those who observed her triumphed over their fears, and they bore her to a newly finished house hard by.

This was all the missionary could glean from his guide, as they walked swiftly toward the shed pointed out by the peasant.

They found her lying motionless upon a bed in a corner of the room. As they entered, she opened her eyes, and, after keenly scanning the Lord of Hers, raised herself with difficulty upon her arm. Father Omehr started. The wild light of insanity had left her eyes, and her glance, though firm and resolute, was gentle and natural.

"Do you know me, Bertha?" said the missionary, springing trembling to the bedside.

"Oh, yes," was the reply. "I have been in a long, wild dream!" and she passed her hand over her high, clammy forehead. "And I know *you*, Sir Albert of Hers, and I know that God has brought you here at this moment."

The stout warrior, who never quailed before any odds, and whose self-possession was as remarkable as his valor, quivered before the mournful gaze of that weak woman. The room seemed to reel, and he leaned against the wall for support.

"There is one other I must see—Sandrit of Stramen. Father, have him brought here now; there is not one moment to be lost."

The missionary whispered a few words to a youth who was present, and the stripling passed hurriedly out.

"Have you sent for him?" she inquired.

"Yes."

"Will he soon be here?"

"He is scarce a mile off."

"It is well," she continued, lifting up her large black eyes; "God has designed it all! And now," she resumed, after a brief pause, "we must be alone until the baron comes."



At a signal from the missionary, Albert of Hers and the wondering peasants silently withdrew.

The half hour that elapsed before Sir Sandrit's appearance, seemed like an age to the Baron of Hers, who in an agony of suspense paced up and down the clearing before the cottage. At last, however, the two noblemen and Henry of Stramen were admitted.

Bertha was sitting upright in bed, supported by Father Omehr, who beckoned to Henry to assist him. There were traces of recent tears upon her furrowed cheeks, and her form seemed to dilate as she gazed at the nobles before her.

"Listen to me, Baron of Stramen!" she began, looking full at the noble, in whom surprise was gaining a temporary mastery over grief; "listen, for it is God's mercy that permits me to speak and you to hear! Twenty years ago I was young and beautiful. I was loved by your brother and by him who stands at your side."



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Albert de Hers turned pale as death, and drawing the ring from his finger, advanced a step, saying hoarsely, "Are you the Bertha to whom I gave this ring?"

She took the trinket in her hand, and after examining it over and over, replied:

"I *am* that Bertha. But how did you get this?"

"From the Duke Rodolph, to whom you gave it."

The woman knit her brows, as if struggling to recall some confused impression, and at length said: "Yes, I did give it to him; I remember now. Where is he?"

"In heaven, I trust," replied the Lord of Hers.

At the word heaven, the tears started in the eyes of the poor creature, and she hung her head. The silence was profound and painful. She was the first to break it.

"Interrupt me no more," she said, suppressing her emotion. "Hear me through. Robert of Stramen and Albert of Hers were rivals for my love, and they began to hate each other bitterly on my account. I loved neither, for I had promised to marry Albert of the Thorn, and I loved him as much as my vain heart was able to love anything. But I was weak enough to receive the presents they gave me for the sake of wearing the finery, and my lover was pleased, because we were poor. My Lord of Stramen, do you remember the day we brought you your brother's corpse?"

The baron shuddered.

"On that very morning—oh! how distinctly do I see it—I was sitting in the ravine, not far from my mother's house, when a wild boar pursued by hounds rushed madly by me. As I stood trembling, a horseman followed, dashing along at full speed. He reined up when he saw me. It was the Lord of Hers. He began to smile, and asked me to forgive him the fright he had given me, and, untying a scarf which he wore around his waist, threw it over my shoulders. Then he put this ring on my finger and galloped off, crying he must not miss the stand. This much you know, Albert of Hers, but you do not know what followed. Was it not as I have said?"

The noble nodded.

"O God, strengthen me to reveal all!" continued the now agitated woman. "I began to walk down the ravine, when I met Albert of the Thorn. I showed him my presents, and we sat down at the foot of a pile of steep rocks, beside a little spring. Albert was arranging the scarf about my neck, when Sir Robert of Stramen suddenly stood before us. His face was pale with rage, and his lips were all foaming. I screamed at his awful appearance. I knew well that he hated my betrothed, and had threatened his life if he married me. He snatched the scarf from my neck, and shaking it at me, said: 'I know



very well from whom this came!' Then, turning upon Albert, he cried: 'And for you, who pretend to love her, to connive at his guilt! You shall pay for your baseness with your life!' He stopped here, as if rage had choked him, and drew his sword. Albert sprang quickly up the ledge of rocks, and Sir Robert followed. I saw Albert



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stoop, pick up a large fragment of rock, and hurl it—I saw Sir Robert fall, and then I grew sick and dizzy, and fainted. When I recovered, Albert was watching me, trembling and livid. I looked around, and there was Sir Robert, stretched out stiff and still and bloody. He had worn nothing but a light cap on his head, and the stone had made a fearful dent in his temple. I knelt beside him, and prayed, and chafed his hands, and brought water from the spring and poured it upon his face. I hoped he would come to life, even if he would only revive to kill me. It was all in vain. He grew cold: he was dead. Again I looked at Albert—he was shaking like a leaf. ‘Bertha,’ he said, ‘I am a lost man! When Sir Sandrit knows this, I cease to live.’ I saw his danger, which did not until then occur to me, and I lost my concern for the dead in my fears for him. I loved him better than anything in the world, and the devil, who knew my heart, suggested a scheme for his preservation. The scarf of the Lord of Hers, which bore some family device, was grasped in the dead man’s hand, and I saw at once how strongly that circumstance implied the noble’s guilt. I concealed the ring he had given me in my pocket. ‘Come!’ I said to Albert, ‘let us take the body to Sir Sandrit, and tell him that we found it in a spot from which we had just seen the Lord of Hers depart.’ He refused at first, and would not touch the body, but by argument and entreaty, I prevailed upon him to be guided by me.

“Sandrit of Stramen, you know the rest. You know that we swore to have seen the Lord of Hers ride away from the fatal spot just before we found the body. It was the fact; but my lover and I were perjured in the sight of God. I do not wish to lighten my crime before men, when it is written out so plainly against me before Angels. I was a perjured woman—perjured through love and fear. I heard you swear vengeance. I wept, but I was silent. I saw your fury and your wars. My heart bled, but I was silent. There was no rest, no sleep, no peace for me. It was not my husband’s death that drove me mad. Oh, no! It was remorse. There were spectres all around me—I trembled before the innocent, fled before the guilty. The caresses of my child that died at my breast tortured me. I felt as though my breath had withered and defiled it. Every hour was full of misery—day and night there was a gnawing at my heart. At last my mind gave way, and the justice of heaven struck him with death and me with madness!”

Bertha paused an instant, quite exhausted, then again exerting herself, she said:

“I do not ask you to forgive me—but forgive each other.”

“They have forgiven each other already,” said Father Omehr. “They are friends.”

“Friends?”

“The Lady Margaret reconciled them on her death-bed.”



“The Lady Margaret dead!”

“She was buried this morning.”

“Yes,” said Bertha, “it was to her funeral I was going. Yes, she is dead—the beautiful, the young, the innocent—she has been praying for me in heaven.”



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At these words a smile beamed over her sharp features, and she sank gradually back in bed, lowered by Henry and the missionary.

The proud Lord of Hers was, in spirit, in sackcloth and ashes. He attributed the existence of the feud to his indiscretion and guilt, and reproached himself with all its pernicious consequences. He saw in the wreck before him the fruits of his sin; Bertha's misery and madness seemed wholly his own unhallowed work. The strong man shuddered at the consequences of his folly, and beat his breast, and wept like a child.

Sandrit of Stramen also accused himself of having caused the feud by his rash credulity, and driven Bertha to perjury and insanity by his impetuous and uncontrollable temper. For, he reasoned, had she reposed any confidence in his justice and charity, she would have told the truth.

Henry of Stramen saw that all his brilliant achievements against the family of Hers were only unjustifiable murders and robberies, and his haughty spirit was humbled and contrite.

Father Omehr saw their contrition, but he was entirely absorbed in the penitent Bertha.

Bertha lived three days after the revelation, constantly engaged in prayer and acts of contrition. Her profound sorrow affected and edified the missionary and all the neighborhood. On the third day she received the Viaticum, and expired in the arms of the Baron of Stramen, who, together with the Lord of Hers, had repeatedly assured her of their complete forgiveness. Her last words were: "I know she is praying for me in heaven."

She was buried, as she desired, near the Lady Margaret, with nothing but a rude wooden cross to mark her grave.

On the day after her burial, Father Omehr and the three nobles set out for the Castle of Hers. Humbert had already fitted up for his lord some rooms which had been only partially consumed, and Albert of Hers had prevailed upon the baron and his son to remain with him until they could find suitable lodgings at home. The reconciliation between the nobles was complete; and at sunrise the next day they could be seen kneeling together before the altar of the Pilgrim's Chapel, eating the Bread of Life. If the Angels rejoice at such a sight, how much greater must be the joy of the Saints!

But where was Gilbert, that he could not share in the blessed feast?

The Middle Ages abound in characters better entitled to our consideration and esteem than the classic magnates of Greece and Rome. There is not in pagan antiquity such a combination of virtue, constancy, fortitude, and valor as was presented in Matilda of Tuscany, "the heroine of the Middle Ages." She devoted herself to the cause of the Holy



See as early as 1604, and her life was a series of sacrifices cheerfully made for the security of the Church. While wondering at her heroism, you love her for her charity, and revere her for her piety. Let Catholics read her life, and they will embalm her in their hearts. Her unvarnished actions are a nobler eulogy than even the unfading wreath flung by a master's hand on the grave of the martyred Marie Antoinette.



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At the time of the battle of the Elster, this pious defender of the Faith was sorely pressed by the Lombards, who sided with the emperor. The imperial troops had gained a victory at Mantua, which revived the drooping royal cause.

When Gilbert de Hers parted from his father and friends, he turned his horse's head to Matilda's camp. The partisans of the heroic princess took little notice of the nameless knight who came among them without follower or page, and whose shield was simply blazoned with an azure cross. He was silent and reserved, shrinking from observation and mirth, and either engaged in meditation or prayer.

The gloomy aspect of the future was also capable of furnishing the youth with sufficient food for reflection. The death of Rodolph spread consternation over Saxony and Suabia: both circles were crippled by internal dissensions, and unable to profit by their victory. Inspired by this, and by his rival's death, and encouraged by the attitude and successes of the Lombards, Henry meditated an invasion of Italy, and the conquest of Rome itself. He reorganized a powerful army, and penetrated Lombardy, leaving Frederick of Hohenstaufen to hold Suabia in check, while Saxony was convulsed by the rival schemes of Otto and Herman.

Never before had the Holy See seemed in such imminent danger. England and France looked coldly on, and the emperor of the East sympathized with his brother of Austria.

Gregory alone awaited the storm calm and fearless, relying upon the sacredness and justice of his cause, neither dismayed nor discouraged by the fickle course of human events. He deplored the spirit which arrayed itself against truth, but he found in the recollection of the trials of the Apostles and their successors abundant consolation for himself and his friends. Florence, Padua, Cremona, Milan had fallen before the Austrian invader. Lucca swelled the triumphs of the tyrant. Fortress after fortress was wrested from Matilda; Henry sat down before the gates of Rome at last, in the plains of Nero and opposite the fortress of St. Peter. Yet the sublime Pontiff displayed no symptom of uneasiness, though half of Europe was against him.

Gilbert's first impulse was to fly to Rome, but the approaches to the city were all in possession of the enemy. The noble Matilda could ill spare a good lance, and the Romans then displayed so much resolution and gallantry, that the German army was repulsed in every assault. To the young knight's heart, wounded by the siege of Rome and misfortunes of Matilda, the tidings of the reconciliation at home were like a sweet balsam. And though the blessed intelligence was blended with the account of the Lady Margaret's death, it was not the less welcome. Gilbert had long since ceased to regard the Lady Margaret with human love. He revered her as one sacred to heaven, upon whom death had already set the seal of eternity, and, far from weeping over her early grave, he exulted at her triumphant flight to the judgment-seat of God.



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Two long years crept by, and the imperialists were still before Rome. Gilbert looked anxiously for succor to Suabia and Saxony, but the sudden death of Otto of Nordheim laid his hopes in the dust, and Henry, for the third time, invested the eternal city. Hitherto, the Romans, encouraged by the Pope, had made an heroic resistance, and the besiegers had suffered incredibly from their desperate sallies, as well as from the diseases that decimated them. But the fidelity of the citizens was beginning to totter beneath the protracted warfare, and many sighed for a period to their calamities. Henry failed not to profit by these dispositions, and poured in thirty thousand golden florins to inflame them.

The horizon grew darker and darker—the Pope more winning, more eloquent, more determined. Matilda did not fail him in this crisis. The knight of the azure cross had already won the confidence of the princess by his valor, his prudence, and his piety, and she now selected him as the instrument of her generosity. She pointed to a large amount of silver, saying that she intrusted him with the dangerous and difficult duty of conveying it to Gregory. Gilbert gladly accepted the perilous commission. He loaded a number of mules with the treasure, concealed beneath vegetables, and disguising himself as a peasant, took a guide and set out for Rome. During a dark and stormy night he contrived to pierce the hostile lines and enter the city by the Lateran gate.

Gilbert found the Pope seated in the midst of an assembly. He could at last feast his eyes upon the wonderful and sainted man whom he had all his life loved and venerated. When the Pontiff rose and spoke of the virtue and fortitude that ought to sustain them in this crisis, he seemed endowed with supernatural power, and moved all present to tears. It seemed as though his soul foreknew it was the last time his voice should be raised in defence of his grand and holy cause.

Another year passed by; the festival of Easter was approaching. Henry was meditating a return to Germany, when a deputation of the citizens arrived in his camp, offering to surrender the capital. The Lateran gate was opened, and the imperial army began to enter the city. The Roman soldiers, finding themselves betrayed, flew to arms, and Gilbert de Hers was once more contending with the warriors he had met at Fladenheim and the Elster. Godfrey de Bouillon fell wounded before the desperate resolution of the besieged, and as he was brought to his knee, vowed a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. But, outnumbered and confused, the defenders were driven into the citadel, and Henry, with his queen at his side, entered in triumph. The next day Guibert of Ravenna was installed in the Lateran palace in the See of St. Peter, and consecrated on the twenty-fourth of March, by the bishops of Modena and Arezzo. His first act was to crown King Henry in the Vatican. Gregory retired to the castle of San Angelo, and the giddy populace



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greeted the anti-pope with shouts of joy. A severe chastisement awaited their perfidy and inconstancy. Robert Guiscard was advancing with thirty thousand infantry and six thousand cavalry, and Henry fled before the redoubtable prince, whom he had provoked by an alliance with Alexis, the Emperor of the East. Abandoned by Henry, who had returned to Austria, the treacherous Romans barred their gates. Robert asked admission, but in vain; and his irritated soldiers forced their way at midnight through the Flaminian gate. The city was crimsoned with flame and sword. A body of Saracens formed part of the Norman's army, and their fury knew no bounds. From three points of the city the flames were streaming. Scarce could the Papal guards preserve a portion of the churches from pillage and destruction. St. Sylvester's and St. Lawrence were wrapped in fire, and the basilicas, from the quarter of Lateran to the Coliseum, were involved in the red ruin. For three days the conqueror raged like a lion in the capital of the Christian world. The frenzied people again attempted resistance, and again the streets ran with their blood. When, gorged with slaughter and booty, the ferocious conquerors had evacuated the city, Gregory and his attendants reentered Rome and occupied the Lateran palace. He lingered in the venal city only long enough to convoke a council and renew his anathemas against Henry and Guibert, and then retired to Monte Cassino.

Gilbert was not permitted to accompany the Pontiff to his retreat, but was dispatched to Matilda with an account of all that had occurred. He found the magnanimous princess threatened by an army more than treble her own. But she was undismayed and full of hope, meditating a bold enterprise that was crowned with success. In the dead of the night, when the imperialists, secure in their numerical superiority, were plunged in sleep, she led the remnants of her troops into the hostile camp. The sleepers awoke to the cry of "St. Peter! St. Peter!" and perished ere they could grasp their arms. The chivalry and nobility of Lombardy were well-nigh exterminated. In a few hours, corpses and tents alone remained of the hostile array. Why should not Sorbara be as magical a word as Thermopylae? It *would* be, if the Christian chroniclers had shared the pride or shown the polish of Grecian historians, and if modern Christians felt a Grecian enthusiasm for the deeds of their Christian ancestors. Matilda differed from Leonidas but in one respect—in surviving the action and remaining victor on the field.

Some days after the battle, Gilbert was summoned into Matilda's presence.

"I owe you more," she said, "than I can ever repay. Your former voluntary services and fidelity are enhanced by your brilliant exploits in this last victory. Be pleased to style yourself Governor of Modena."

Gilbert advanced a step, and sinking upon one knee, replied:



“Madam, I came to share in your generous devotion to our common Father, and to assist you as best I could. You are now—thanks to your own valor—victorious and secure. I must decline your bounty, for from this moment I renounce the soldier. Here is my sword, madam; since Rome and you no longer require it, I shall not need it; nowhere would I more willingly resign it than thus at your feet.”



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As the morning dawned, Gilbert de Hers, accompanied by a troop of horse, set out for Monte Cassino.

Gregory had retired to Salerno, where he passed his days in the contemplation of heavenly things, and in reading the lives of the Saints and ecclesiastical history. Gilbert soon heard of his increasing weakness. The sun that had poured its light over the world, despite the mists and clouds of error and vice, was setting at last. How his dying words bespeak the Saint: "My best-loved friends, I count my labors nothing. That which gives me confidence is the consciousness of having loved justice and hated iniquity!" When his assistants, groaning in anguish, adverted to their desolate condition after his death, he raised his arms to heaven, exclaiming, "I will ascend there, and plead your cause before a God supremely good!"

On the twenty-fifth of May, 1085, were uttered those memorable words that smote the forehead of guilty Europe as if with a burning hand: "I have loved justice and hated iniquity—therefore I die in exile."

* * * * *

Years passed by. Peace smiled once more in the lordships of Hers and Stramen. A new dwelling had risen from the ashes of Stramen Castle. The Church of the Nativity was repaired, and again rose in beauty over the faithful who flocked there to worship. Yet there was a stranger priest at the altar, and often after Mass the people would gather around a marble slab just before the altar, on which was written:

"Credo quod Redemptor meus vivit."

This was the tomb of Father Omehr; his epitaph was written and treasured in the hearts of all who knew him, and, transmitted from sire to son, required no foreign chisel to deepen the impression upon the living tablet.

The Lords of Stramen and Hers were often together, and were beloved by their vassals for their uniform courtesy and charity. Their hairs were whitening, and when Sir Sandrit walked to the churchyard he leaned upon Henry's arm.

* * * * *

Years passed by. Henry IV, worn down by misfortune and the rebellion of his eldest son, for his own offspring held up the poisoned chalice to his lips, had followed his sainted antagonist to the eternal tribunal, and his body had been cast out as excommunicated from its sepulchre. The male line of the Franconian emperors had expired in Henry V; Lothaire of Saxony, a zealous champion of Rome, had been raised to the throne. Time was revealing that Gregory VII was triumphant even in death, for

the right of investiture was conceded to the Pope, and the celibacy of the clergy strictly enforced.



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The Lords of Stramen and Hers were sleeping with their fathers. The hill on which the Pilgrim's Chapel stood was no longer crowned with a castle, but with a monastery occupied by Benedictine monks. The whole lordship of Hers was blooming under their munificent administration. Humbert, whose long locks had now seen eighty winters, still lived at the foot of the hill, surrounded by a goodly number of stalwart sons and fair-haired daughters. And sometimes in the long winter evenings, when the fire sparkled brightly and the old man was garrulous with joy, he would tell how he once entered a hostile castle as a minnesinger with a noble lover, and how the knight defied the angry father. Yet he never revealed that this knight was the generous abbot who now supplied them with the means of innocent mirth, who ministered to all their wants, and whose life was so meek and blameless. For Gilbert de Hers was abbot in the cells that had once been the halls of his sires.

And one word, reader. It was not after the Lady Margaret's death that he embraced the resolution of dedicating himself to God, but on the battle-field of the Elster, and over the corpse of Rodolph of Suabia. He had proved his sincerity in the wars of Matilda, and when he quitted the princess for Monte Cassino, it was to assume the habit of the novice.

* * * * *

One bright afternoon in the fall of 1126, two aged men were walking arm-in-arm toward the Church of the Nativity. One was attired as a Benedictine, the other as a knight. They stopped at the church and before a cluster of tombs. On one of the slabs was carved a Greek cross with a single tear under it, and beneath the tear the words:

"O crux sancta adjuva nos."

It was the resting-place of the Lady Margaret, between the graves of her father and mother. The monk and the knight knelt down and prayed. As they rose, the bells of the church announced the close of day, and ushered in the TRUCE OF GOD.

With their bosoms heaving with recollections of the past, Gilbert of Hers and Henry of Stramen went into the church where fifty years before they had met in youth and enmity, and they knelt together beside the grave of Father Omehr, with their hearts full of tenderness and hope and love, while the sun of ancient Suabia was setting, and the bells poured forth their silvery peal.

THE END