

In the Fire of the Forge — Volume 06 eBook

In the Fire of the Forge — Volume 06 by Georg Ebers

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CHAPTER V.

The Minorite had gone. Biberli had noticed with delight that his master had not sought as usual to detain him. The iron now seemed to him hot, and he thought it would be worth while to swing the hammer.

The danger in which Heinz stood of being drawn into the monastery made him deeply anxious, and he had already ventured several times to oppose his design. Life was teaching him to welcome a small evil when it barred the way to a greater one, and his master's marriage, even with a girl of far lower station than Eva Ortlieb, would have been sure of his favour, if only it would have deterred him from the purpose of leaving the world to which he belonged.

"True," the servitor began, "in such heat it is easier to walk in the thin cowl than in armour. The holy Father is right there. But when it is necessary to be nimble, the knight has his dancing dress also. Oh, my lord, what a sight it was when you were waltzing with the lovely Jungfrau Eva! Look at Heinz Schorlin, the brave hero of Marchfield, and the girl with the angel face who is with him!" said those around me, as I was gazing down from the balcony. And just think—I can't help speaking of it again—that now respectable people dare to point their fingers at the sisters and join in the base calumny uttered by a scoundrel!"

Then Heinz fulfilled Biberli's secret longing to be questioned about the Es and the charges against them, and he forged the iron.

Not from thirst, he said, but to ascertain what fruit had grown from the hellish seeds sown by Siebenburg, and probably the still worse ones of the Eysvogel women, he went from tavern to tavern, and there he heard things which made him clench his fists, and, at the Red Ox, roused him to such violent protest that he went out of the tap-room faster than he entered it.

Thereupon, without departing far from the truth, he related what was said about the beautiful Es in Nuremberg.

It was everywhere positively asserted that a knight belonging to the Emperor's train had been caught at the Ortlieb mansion, either in a nocturnal interview or while climbing into the window. Both sisters were said to be guilty. But the sharpest arrows were aimed at Els, the betrothed bride of the son of a patrician family, whom many a girl would have been glad to wed. That she preferred the foreigner, whether a Bohemian, a Swabian, or even a Swiss, made her error doubly shameful in the eyes of most persons.

Whenever Biberli had investigated the source of these evil tales, he had invariably found it to be Seitz Siebenburg, his retainers, the Eysvogel butler, or some man or maidservant in their employ.

The Vorchtels, who, as he knew from Katterle, would have had the most reason to cherish resentment against the Ortliebs, had no share in these slanders.

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The shrewd fellow had discovered the truth, for after Seitz Siebenburg had wandered about in the open air during the storm, he again tried to see his wife. But the effort was vain. Neither entreaties nor threats would induce her to open the door. Meanwhile it had grown late and, half frantic with rage, he went to the Duke of Pomerania's quarters in the Green Shield to try his luck in gaming. The dice were again moving rapidly, but no one grasped the box when he offered a stake. No more insulting rebuff could be imagined, and the repulse which he received from his peers, and especially the duke, showed him that he was to be excluded from this circle.

He was taught at the same time that if he answered the challenge of the Swiss he would not be permitted to enter the lists. Thus he confronted the impossibility of satisfying a demand of honour, and this terrible thought induced him to declare war against everything which honour had hitherto enjoined, and with it upon its guardians.

If they treated him as a robber and a dishonoured man, he would behave like one; but those who had driven him so far should suffer for it.

During the rest of the night and on the following day, until the gate was closed, he wandered, goblet in hand, only half conscious of what he was doing, from tavern to tavern, to tell the guests what he knew about the beautiful Es; and at every repetition of the accusations, of whose justice he was again fully convinced, his hatred against the sisters, and those who were their natural defenders and therefore his foes, increased. Every time he repeated the old charges an addition increasing the slander was made and, as if aided by some mysterious ally, it soon happened that in various places his own inventions were repeated to him by the lips of others who had heard them from strangers. True, he was often contradicted, sometimes violently but, on the whole, people believed him more readily than would have happened in the case of any other person; for every one admitted that, as the brother-in-law of the older E, he had a right to express his indignation in words.

Meanwhile his twins often returned to his memory. The thought ought to have restrained him from such base conduct; but the idea that he was avenging the wrong inflicted upon their father's honour, and thus upon theirs, urged him further and further.

Not until a long ride through the forest had sobered him did he see his conduct in the proper light.

Insult and disgrace would certainly await him in the city. His brothers would receive him kindly. They were of his own blood and could not help welcoming his sharp sword. Side by side with them he would fight and, if it must be, die. A voice within warned him against making common cause with those who had robbed the family of which he had become a member, yet he again used the remembrance of his innocent darlings to palliate his purpose. For their

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sakes only he desired to go to his death, sword in hand, like a valiant knight in league with those who were risking their lives in defence of the ancient privilege of their class. They must not even suspect that their father had been shut out from the tournament, but grow up in the conviction that he had fallen as a heroic champion of the cause of the lesser knights to whom he belonged, and on whose neck the Emperor had set his foot.

The assurance which Biberli brought Heinz Schorlin that Seitz Siebenburg had joined those whom he was ordered to punish, placed the task assigned him by the Emperor in a new and attractive light; but the servant's report, so far as it concerned the Ortlieb sisters, pierced the inmost depths of his soul. He alone was to blame for the disgrace which had fallen upon innocent maidens. By the destruction of the calumny he would at least atone for a portion of his sin. But this did not suffice. It was his duty to repair the wrong he had done the sisters. How? That he could not yet determine; for whilst wielding the executioner's sword in his master's service all these thoughts must be silenced; he could consider nothing save to fulfil the task confided to him by his imperial benefactor and commander in chief, according to his wishes, and show him that he had chosen wisely in trusting him to "crack the nut" which he himself had pronounced a hard one. The yearning and renunciation, the reproaches and doubts which disturbed his life, until recently so easy, had disgusted him with it. He would not spare it. Yet if he felt he would be deprived of the possibility of doing anything whatever for those who through his imprudence had lost their dearest possession—their good name. Whenever this picture rose before him it sometimes seemed as if Eva was gazing at him with her large, bright eyes as trustingly as during the pause in the dancing, and anon he fancied he saw her as she looked at her mother's consecration in her deep mourning before the altar. At that time her grief and pain had prevented her from noticing how his gaze rested on her; yet never had she appeared more desirable, never had he longed more ardently to clasp her in his arms, console her, and assure her that his love should teach her to forget her grief, that she was destined to find new happiness in a union with him.

This had happened to him just as he commenced the struggle for a new life. Startled, he confessed it to his grey-haired guide, and used the means which the Minorite advised him to employ to attain forgetfulness and renunciation, but always in vain. Had he, like St. Francis, rushed among briars, his blood would not have turned into roses, but doubtless fresh memories of her whose happiness his guilt had so suddenly and cruelly destroyed.

For her sake he had already begun to doubt his vocation on the very threshold of his new career, and did not recover courage until Father Benedictus, who had communicated with the Abbess Kunigunde, informed him that Eva was wax in her hands, and within the next few days she would induce her niece to take the veil.

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This news had exerted a deep influence upon the young knight's soul. If Eva entered the cloister before him, the only strong tie which united him to the world would be severed, and nothing save the thought of his mother would prevent his following his vocation. Yet vehement indignation seized him when he heard from Biberli that the slanderer's malice would force Eva to seek refuge with the Sisters.

No, a thousand times no! The woman whom he loved should need to seek refuge from nothing for which Heinz Schorlin's desire and resolve alike commanded him to make amends.

He must succeed in proving to the whole world that she and her sister were as pure as they lived in his imagination, either by offering in the lists the boldest defiance to every one who refused to acknowledge that both were the most chaste and decorous ladies in the whole world, and Eva, at the same time, the loveliest and fairest, or by the open interference of the Emperor or the Burggravine in behalf of the persecuted sisters, after he had confessed the whole truth to his exalted patrons.

But when Biberli pointed out the surest way of restoring the endangered reputation of the woman he loved, and begged him to imagine how much more beautiful she would look in the white bridal veil than in her mourning Riese—[Kerchief of fine linen, arranged like a veil]—he ordered him to keep silence.

The miracle wrought in his behalf forbade him to yearn for happiness and joy here below. It was intended rather to open his eyes and urge him to leave the path which led to eternal damnation. It pointed him to the kingdom of heaven and its bliss, which could be purchased only by severe sacrifice and the endurance of every grief which the Saviour had taken upon Himself. But he could at least pay one honour to the maiden to whom he was so strongly attracted, and whose happiness for life was menaced by his guilt. When he had assembled his whole force at Schwabach, he would go into battle with her colour on his helmet and shield. The Queen of Heaven would not be angry with him if he wore her light blue to atone to the pure and pious Eva, who was hers even more fully than he himself, for the wrong inflicted upon her by spiteful malice.

Heinz Schorlin's friends thought the change in his mood a natural consequence of the events which had befallen him; young Count Gleichen, his most intimate companion, even looked up to him since his "call" as a consecrated person.

His grey-haired cousin, Sir Arnold Maier, of Silenen, was a devout man whose own son led a happy life as a Benedictine monk at Engelberg. The sign by which Heaven had signified its will to Heinz had made a deep impression upon him, and though he would have preferred to see him continue in the career so auspiciously begun, he would have considered it impious to dissuade him from obeying the summons vouchsafed by the Most High. So he offered no opposition, and sent by the next courier a letter to Lady Wendula Schorlin, his young cousin's mother, in which, with Heinz's knowledge-nay, at

his request—he related what her son had experienced, and entreated her not to withhold him from the vocation of which God deemed him worthy.

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Meanwhile, Biberli wrote to his master's mother in a different strain, and did not desist from expressing his opinion, to Heinz, and assuring him that his place was on a battle charger, with his sword in its sheath or in his hand, rather than in a monastery with a rosary hanging from a hempen girdle.

This had vexed Heinz—nay, made him seriously angry with the faithful fellow; and when in full armour he prepared to mount his steed to receive the last directions of his imperial master, and Biberli asked him on which horse he should follow, he answered curtly that this time he would go without him.

Yet when he saw tears fill the eyes of his “true and steadfast” companion, he patted the significant St. on his cap, and added kindly: “Never mind, Biber, everything will be unchanged between us till I obey my summons, and you build your own nest with Katterle.”

So Biberli had remained in Nuremberg whilst Heinz Schorlin, after the Emperor with fatherly kindness had dismissed him, granting him full authority, set forth at the head of his troops as their commander, to take the field against the Siebenburgs and their allies.

The servant was permitted to attend him only to the outskirts of the city.

Before the Spitalthor, Countess Cordula, though she was returning from a ride into the country, had wheeled her spirited dappled horse and joined him as familiarly as though she belonged to him. Heinz, who would have liked best to be alone, and to whom any other companion would have been more welcome, showed her this plainly enough, but she did not seem to notice it, and during the whole of their ride together gave her tongue free rein and, though he often indignantly interrupted her, described with increasing warmth what the Ortlieb sisters had suffered through his fault. In doing so she drew so touching a picture of Eva's silent sorrow that Heinz sometimes longed to thank her, but more frequently to have her driven away by his men at arms; for he had mounted his horse with the intention of dividing the time of his ride between pious meditations and plans for the arrangement of the expedition. What could be more unwelcome than the persistent loquacity of the countess, who filled his heart and mind with ideas and wishes that threatened most seriously to imperil his design?

Cordula plainly perceived how unwillingly he listened. Nay, as Heinz more and more distinctly, at last even offensively, showed her how little he desired her society, it only increased the animation of her speech, which seemed to her not to fail wholly in the influence she desired to exert in Eva's favour; therefore she remained at his side longer than she had at first intended. She did not even turn back when they met the young Duchess Agnes, who with her train was returning to the city from a ride.

The Bohemian princess had known that Heinz would ride through the Spitalthor at this hour to confront his foe, and had intended that the meeting with her should seem like a

good omen. The thought of wishing him success on his journey had been a pleasant one. True, Cordula's presence did not prevent this, but it disturbed her, and she was vexed to find the countess again at Heinz Schorlin's side.

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She showed her displeasure so plainly that her Italian singing mistress, the elderly spinster Caterina de Celano, took sides with her, and scornfully asked the countess whether she had brought her curling irons with her.

But she bit her lips at Cordula's swift retort "O no! Malice meets us on every road, but in Germany we do not pull one another's hair on the highway over every venomous or foolish word."

She turned her back on her as she spoke until the duchess had taken leave of Heinz, and then rode on with him; but as soon as a portion of the road intervened between her and the countess the young Bohemian exclaimed: "We must certainly try to save Sir Heinz from this disagreeable shrew!"

"And the saints will aid the good work," the Italian protested, "for they themselves have a better right to the charming knight. How grave he looked! Take care, your Highness, he is following, as my nimble cousin Frangipani did a short time ago, in the footsteps of the Saint of Assisi."

"But he must not, shall not, go into the monastery!" cried the young duchess, with childish refractoriness. "The Emperor is opposed to it, and he, too, does not like the von Montfort's boisterous manner. We will see whether I cannot accomplish something, Caterina."

Here she stopped. They had again reached the village of Rottenpach, and in front of the newly built little church stood its pastor, with the dignitaries of the parish, and the children were scattering flowers in the path. She checked her Arabian, dismounted, and graciously inspected the new house of God, the pride of the congregation.

On the way home, just beyond the village, her horse again shied. The animal had been startled by an old Minorite monk who sat under a crab apple tree. It was Father Benedictus, who had set out early to anticipate Heinz and surprise him in his night quarters by his presence. But he had overestimated his strength, and advanced so slowly that Heinz and his troopers, from whom he had concealed himself behind a dusty hawthorn bush, had not seen him. From Schweinau the walk had become difficult, especially as it was contrary to the teaching of the saint to use a staff. Many a compassionate peasant, many a miller's lad and Carter, had offered him a seat on the back of his nag or in his waggon but, without accepting their friendly offers, he had plodded on with his bare feet.

Perhaps this journey would be his last, but on it he would redeem the promise which he had made his dying master, to go forth according to the command of the Saviour, which Francis of Assisi had made his own and that of his order, to preach and to proclaim, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

“Without price,” ran the words, “have ye received, without price give.” He had no regard for earthly reward, therefore he yearned the more ardently for the glad knowledge that he had saved a soul for heaven.

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He had learned to love Heinz as the saint had formerly loved him, and he did not grudge him the happiness which, at the knight's age, had fallen to the lot of the man whose years now numbered eighty. How long he had been permitted to enjoy this bliss! True, during the last decades it had been clouded by many a shadow.

He had endured much hardship in the service of his sacred cause, but the greater the sacrifice he offered the more exquisite was the reward reaped by his soul. Oh, if this pilgrimage might yield him Heinz Schorlin's vow to follow his saint and with him the Saviour!—if he might be permitted, clasping in his the hand of the beloved youth he had saved, to exchange this world for eternal bliss!

Earth had nothing more to offer; for he who was one of the leaders of his brotherhood beheld with grief their departure from the paths of their founder. Poverty, which secures freedom to the body, which knows nothing of the anxieties of this world and the burden of possession, which permits the soul to soar unfettered far above the dust—poverty, the divine bride of St. Francis, was forsaken in many circles of his brother monks. With property, ease and the longing for secular influence had stolen into many a monastery. Many shunned the labour which the saint enjoined upon his disciples, and the old jugs were often filled with new wine, which he, Benedictus, never tasted, and which the saint rejected as poison. He was no longer young and strong enough to let his grief and indignation rage like a purifying thunderstorm amidst these abuses.

But Heinz Schorlin!

If this youth of noble blood, equally gifted in mind and person, whom Heaven itself had summoned with lightning and thunder, devoted himself from sincere conviction, with a heart full of youthful enthusiasm, to his sacred cause—if Heinz, consecrated by him, and fully aware of the real purposes of the saint, who, also untaught and rich only in knowledge of the heart, had begun a career so momentous in consequences, announced himself as a fearless champion of St. Francis's will, then the St. George had been found who was summoned to slay the dragon, and with his blood instil new life at last into the monasteries of Germany, then perhaps the fresh prosperity which he desired for the order was at hand. The larger number of its recruits came from the lower ranks of the people. Sir Heinz Schorlin's example would perhaps bring it also, as an elevating element, the sons of his peers.

So, bathed in perspiration, and often on the point of fainting, he followed Heinz through the dust of the highway.

Often, when his strength failed, and he sat down by the roadside to take breath, his soul-life gained a loftier aspiration.

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After Heinz rode by without seeing him he continued his way until his feet grew so heavy that he was forced to sit down beside the road. Then he imagined that the Saviour Himself came towards him, gazed lovingly into his face, and turned to beckon some one, Benedictus did not know whom, heavenward. Suddenly the clouds that had covered the sky parted, and the old man fancied he heard the song of the troubadour whose soul had been subdued by love for God, which his friend and master had addressed to his Redeemer. It must come from the lips of his angels on high, but he longed to join in the strain. True, his aged lips, rapidly as they moved, uttered no sound, but he fancied he was sharing in this song of the soul, glowing with fervent, consuming flames of love, dedicated to the Saviour, the source of all love:

“Love’s flames my kindling heart control,
Love for my Bridegroom fair,
When on my hand he placed the ring,
The Lamb whose fervent love I share
Did pierce my inmost soul,”

the fiery song began, and an absorbing yearning for death and the beloved Redeemer, whose form had vanished in the sea of flames surging before his dilated eyes, moved the very depths of his soul as he commenced the second verse:

“My heart amidst Love’s tortures broke,
Slain by the might of Love’s keen stroke,
To earth my senseless body sank,
Love’s flames my life-blood drank.”

With flushed cheeks, utterly borne away from the world and everything which surrounded him, he raised his arms towards heaven, then they suddenly fell. Starting up, he passed his hand over his dazzled eyes and shook his head sorrowfully. Instead of the angels’ song, he heard the beat of horses’ hoofs coming nearer and nearer. The open heavens had closed again; he lay a poor exhausted mortal, with burning brow, beside the road.

Duchess Agnes, after visiting the new church at Rottenpach, rode past him on her return to Nuremberg.

Neither she nor her train heeded the old monk. But the Italian who, as she rode by, had been attracted by the noble features of the aged man, whose eyes still sparkled with youthful enthusiasm, gazed at him enquiringly. Her glance met his, and the Minorite’s wrinkled features wore a look of eager enquiry. He longed to rise and ask the name of the black-eyed lady at the duchess’s side. But ere he could stand erect, the party had passed on.

Disturbed in mind, and scarcely able to set one sore foot before the other, he dragged himself forward.

Before he reached Rottenpach he met one of the duchess's pages who had remained at the village forge and was now riding after his mistress. Father Benedictus called to him, and the boy, awed by the grey-haired monk, answered his questions, and told him that the lady on the horse with the white star on its face was the duchess's Italian singing mistress, Caterina de Celano.

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Every drop of blood receded from the Minorite's fever-flushed cheeks, and the page was about to spring from his saddle to support him, but the monk waved him back impatiently, and by the exertion of all his strength of will forced himself to stagger on.

He had just felt happy in the heart of eternal love; but now the expression of his countenance changed, and his dark, sunken eyes flashed angrily.

The faded woman beside the duchess bore the name of the lady whose faithlessness had first induced him to seek rest and forgetfulness in the peace of the cloister, and led him to despise her whole sex.

The horsewoman must be a granddaughter, daughter, or niece of the woman who had so basely betrayed him. How much she resembled the traitress, but she did not understand how to hide her real nature as well; her faded features wore a somewhat malicious expression. The resentment which he thought he had conquered again awoke. He would have liked to rush after her and call her to her face——. Yet what would that avail? How was she to blame for the treachery of another person, whom perhaps she did not even know?

Yet he longed to follow her.

His fevered blood urged him on, but his exhausted, aching limbs refused to serve him. One more violent effort, and sparks flashed before his eyes, his lips were wet with blood, and he sank gasping on the ground.

After some time he succeeded in dragging himself to the side of the road, where he lay until a Nuremberg carrier, passing with his team of four horses, lifted him, with the help of his servant, into his cart and took him on.

At Schweinau the jolting of the vehicle became unendurable to the sufferer, and the carrier willingly fulfilled his wish to be taken to the hospital where mangled criminals, tortured by the rack, were nursed.

There, however, they instantly perceived that his place was not in this house dedicated to criminal misfortune, and the kind Beguines of Schweinau took charge of him.

On the way the old monk suffered severely in both soul and body. It seemed like treason, like a rejection of his pure and pious purposes, that Heaven itself barred the path along which he was wearily wandering to win it a soul.

CHAPTER VI.

The entombment of the magnificent coffin of Frau Maria Ortlieb under the pavement of the family chapel was over. The little group of sympathising friends had left the church.

Only the widower and his daughters remained, and when he knew that he could no longer be seen by the few who still lingered in the house of God, he clasped the two girls to his heart with a suppressed sob.

Never had he experienced such deep sorrow, such anguish of soul. He had not even been permitted to take leave of his beloved companion with unmixed grief; fierce resentment had mingled with his trouble.

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To remain alone in the house with his daughters after the burial and answer their questions seemed to him impossible.

The meeting of the Council, which would soon begin, served as a pretence for leaving them. Eva was to blame for what he had just suffered; but he knew everything concerning the rumours about the inexperienced girl and Heinz Schorlin, and there fore was aware that her fault was trivial. To censure her seemed as difficult as to discuss calmly with her and the sensible Els what could be done under existing circumstances; besides, he was firmly convinced that Eva had nothing left except to take, without delay, the veil for which she had longed from childhood. His sister, the Abbess Kunigunde, was keeping the door of the convent open. She had promised the girl to await her at home. In taking leave of his daughters, he begged them not to wait for him, because the Council were to decide the fate of the Eysvogel business, and the session might last a long while.

Then his Els gazed at him with a look of such earnest entreaty that he nodded, and in a tone of the warmest compassion began: "I shall be more than glad to aid your Wolff, my dear girl, but he himself told you how the case stands. What would it avail if I beggared myself and you for the Eysvogels and their tottering house? I must remain hard now, in order later to smooth the path for Wolff and you, Els. If Berthold Vorchtel would make up his mind to join me, it might be different, but he summoned the Council as a complainant, and if he is the one to overthrow the reeling structure, who can blame him? We shall see. Whatever I can reasonably do for the unfortunate family shall be accomplished, my girl."

Then he kissed his older daughter on the forehead, hastily gave the younger the same caress, and left the chapel. But Els detained him, whispering: "Whatever wrong was inflicted upon us yesterday, do not let it prejudice you, father. It was meant neither for her whose peace nothing can now disturb, nor for you. We alone——"

"You certainly," Herr Ernst interrupted bitterly, "were made to feel how far superior in virtue they considered themselves to you, who are better and purer than all of them. But keep up Eva's courage. I have been talking with your Uncle Pfinzing and your Aunt Christine. You yourself took them into your confidence, and we will consult together how the serpent's head is to be crushed."

He turned away as he spoke, but Els went back to her sister, and after a brief prayer they left the church with bowed heads.

The sedan-chairs were waiting outside. Each was to be borne home separately, but both preferred, spite of the bright summer weather, to draw the curtains, that unseen they might weep, and ask themselves how such wrongs could have been inflicted upon the dead woman and themselves.

The respect of high and low for the Ortlieb family had been most brilliantly displayed when the body of the son, slain in battle, had been interred in the chapel of his race. And their mother? How many had held her dear! to how many she had been kind, loving, and friendly! How great a sympathy the whole city had shown during her illness, and how many of all classes had attended the mass for her soul! And the burial which had just taken place?

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True, on her father's account all the members of the Council were present, but scarcely half the wives had appeared. Their daughters—Els had counted them—numbered only nine, and but three were included among her friends. The others had probably come out of curiosity. And the common people, the artisans, the lower classes, who in countless numbers had accompanied her brother's coffin to its resting place, and during the mass for the dead had crowded the spacious nave of St. Sebald's? There had been now only a scanty group. The nuns from the convent were present, down to the most humble lay Sister; but they were under great obligations to her mother, and their abbess was her father's sister. There were few other women except the old crones from the hospitals and nurseries, who were never absent when there was an opportunity to weep or to backbite. In going through the nave of the church into the chapel the sisters had passed a group of younger lads and maidens, who had nudged one another in so disrespectful a way, whispering all sorts of things, that Els had tried to draw Eva past them as swiftly as possible.

Her wish to keep her more sensitive sister from noticing the disagreeable gestures and insulting words of the cruel youths and girls was gratified. True, Eva also felt with keen indignation that far too little honour was paid to her beloved dead; that the blinded people believed the slanderers who repeated even worse things of her Els than of herself, and made their poor mother, who had lived and suffered like a saint, atone for what they imagined were the sins of her daughters; but the jeers and scorn which had obtruded themselves upon her father and sister from more than one quarter, in many a form, had entirely escaped her notice. She had accustomed herself from childhood to indulge in reflections and emotions apart from the demands of the world. Whatever occupied her mind or soul absorbed her completely; here she had been wholly engrossed in this silent intercourse with the departed, and a single glance at the group assembled in the church had showed her everything which she desired to know of her surroundings.

Heinz had gone to the field the day before yesterday. Her silent colloquy concerned him also. How difficult he made it for her to maintain the resolution which she had formed during the mass for the dead, since he remained aloof, without giving even the slightest token of remembrance. True, an inward voice constantly repeated that he could not part from her any more easily than she from him; but her maidenly pride rebelled against the neglect with which he grieved her. The defiant desire to punish him for departing without a word of farewell urged her back to the convent. She had spent many hours there daily, and in its atmosphere of peace felt better and happier than in her father's house or any other spot which she visited. The close association with her aunt, the abbess, was renewed. True, she had not urged

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Eva to a definite statement by so much as a single word, yet she had made her feel plainly how deeply it would wound her if her pupil should resolve to disappoint the hopes which she herself had fostered. If Eva refused to take the veil, would not her kind friend be justified in charging her with unequalled ingratitude? and whose opinion did she value even half as much, if she excepted her lover's, whose approval was more to her than that of all the rest of the world?

He was better than she, and who could tell what important motive kept him away? Countless worldly wishes had blended with the devotion which she felt in the convent; and had not the abbess herself taught her to obey, without regard to individuals or their opinion, the demands of her own nature, which were in harmony with the will of the Most High? and how loudly every voice within commanded her to be loyal to her love! She had made her decision, but offended pride, the memory of the happy, peaceful hours in the convent and, above all, the fear of grieving the beloved guide of her childhood, withheld her from the firm and irrevocable statement to which her nature, averse to hesitation and delay, impelled her.

The nearer the sedan-chair came to the Ortlieb mansion the faster her heart beat, for that very day, probably within the next few hours, the abbess would compel her to choose between her father's house and the convent.

She was panting for breath and deadly pale when, just after Els's arrival, she stepped from the chair. It had become intensely hot. Within the vaulted corridor with its solid, impenetrable walls, a cooler atmosphere received her, and she hoped to find in her own chamber fresher, purer air, and—at least for the next few hours—undisturbed peace.

But what was the meaning of this scene? At her entrance, the conversation which Els had evidently just commenced with several other women at the door of the office suddenly ceased. It must be due to consideration for her; for she had not failed to notice the significant glance with which her sister looked at her and then removed her finger from her lips.

The abbess, who had been concealed by a wall of chests piled one above another, now came forward and laid her hand upon the shoulder of a little elderly woman, who must have been disputing vehemently with the old housekeeper, Martsche, for she was flushed with excitement, and the housekeeper's chin still quivered.

Usually Eva paid little heed to the quarrels of the servants, but this one appeared to have some connection with herself, and the cause could be no trivial one, since Aunt Kunigunde took part in it.



But she had no sooner approached the other women than the abbess drew her aside and asked her a few unimportant questions. They were probably intended to keep her away from the disputants. But Eva knew the little woman, and wished to learn what offence had been given modest, humble Widow Vorkler. Her husband had been employed by the Ortlieb firm as a carrier, who had driven his team of six horses to Milan faithfully until killed in the Tyrol during an attack by robber knights in the lawless period before the coronation of the Emperor Rudolph.

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With the aid of Herr Ernst Ortlieb, the widow had then set up a little shop for the sale of wax candles, images of the saints, rosaries, and modest confirmation gifts, by which means she gained an honest livelihood for her seven children and herself. Her oldest son, who on account of hip disease was not fit for hard work, helped her, and the youngest was Ortel, who had carried Eva's basket on the day of her dead mother's consecration. Her daughter Metz was also in the Ortlieb's service as assistant to the chief cook.

When Frau Vorkler had come to see her children, she had scarcely been able to find words which sufficiently expressed her grateful appreciation, but to-day she seemed like a different person.

The brief colloquy between the abbess and Eva already appeared to her too long, and when the former bade her finish her business later with Els and old Martsche, she angrily declared that, with all due reverence for the Lady Abbess, she must inform Jungfrau Eva also what compelled her, a virtuous woman with a grateful heart, to take her children from the service of the employer for whom her husband had sacrificed his life.

Els, who was eager to conceal the woman's insulting errand from Eva, tried to silence Frau Vorkler, but she defiantly persisted, and with redoubled zeal protested that speak she must or her heart would break. Then she declared that she had been proud to place her children in so godly a household, but now everything was changed, and though it grieved her to the soul, she must insist upon taking Metz and Ortel from its service. She lived by the piety of people who bought candles for the dear saints and rosaries for praying; but even the most devout had eyes everywhere, and if it were known that her young children were serving in a house where such things happened, as alas! were reported through the whole city concerning the daughters of this family——

Here old Martsche with honest indignation interrupted the excited woman; but Frau Vorkler would not be silenced, and asked what a poor girl like her Metz possessed except her good name. How quickly suspicion would rest on a lass whose respectability was questioned! People had begun to do so ever since the Ortlieb sisters were called the "beautiful" instead of the pious and virtuous Es. This showed how such notice of the face and figure benefited Christian maidens. Yesterday and to-day she had given a three-farthing candle to her saint as a thank offering that this horror had not reached their mother's ears. The dead woman had been a truly devout and noble lady, and her soul would be grateful to her for impressing upon the minds of her motherless daughters that the path which they had recklessly entered——

This was too much for Ortel, who, concealed behind a heap of sacks, had listened to the discussion, and clasping his hands beseechingly, he now went up to his mother and entreated her to beware of repeating the slanders of evil-minded people who had dared

to cast stones at the gracious maidens, who were as pure and innocent as their saint herself.

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Poor Ortel! His kind young eyes streaming with tears might have softened a rock; but the enraged candle-dealer misinterpreted his honest emotion, and he certainly would not have been allowed to go on so far had not rage and amazement kept her silent. But Frau Vorkler never lost the use of her tongue long, and what a flood of abuse of the degenerate children of the time, who forgot the respect and gratitude due to their own mother, she began to pour forth! But when faithful Endres, who had grown grey in the Ortlieb service, and under whose orders Ortel was placed to help in unpacking, commanded her to be silent or leave the house, and told her son, instead of following her, to stay with his old employer, Frau Vorkler proceeded to lament over the corruption of the whole world, and did not fail to deal a few side-thrusts at the two daughters of the house.

But here also she made little progress, for the abbess led Eva up the stairs, and the two old family servants, Martsche representing the guiding mind and Endres the rude strength, made common cause. The latter upheld Ortel in his refusal to leave the house, and the former declared that Metz must remain the usual time after giving notice. She would not help Frau Vorkler to force the poor child into an unequal, miserable marriage with the old miser to whom she wanted to give her.

This remark was aimed at the master-tailor Seubolt, the guardian of the Vorkler children, who, though forty years her senior, wanted to make pretty Metz his wife, and who had also promised the widow to obtain for his future brother-in-law Ortel an excellent place in the stables of the German order of military monks. Not outraged morality, but the guardian and suitor in one person, had induced the candle-dealer to take her children from their good places in the Ortlieb household. The widow's fear of having her real motive detected spared the necessity of using force. But whilst slowly retiring backwards, crab fashion, she shrieked at her antagonists the threat that her children's guardian, no less a personage than master-tailor Nickel Seubolt, was a man who would help her gain her just rights and snatch the endangered souls of Ortel and her poor young Metz from temporal and eternal destruction in this Sodom and Gomorrah——

The rest of the burden which oppressed her soul she was forced to confide to the street. Endres closed the heavy door of the house behind her with a strength and celerity marvellous in a man of his years.

Ortel was terribly agitated. Soon after his mother's departure he went with his sister to the woodhouse, where both wept bitterly; for Metz had given her heart to a young carrier who was expected to return from a trip to Frankfort the first of July, and would rather have thrown herself into the Pegnitz than married the rich old tailor to whom she knew her mother had promised her pretty daughter; whilst her brother, like many youths of his station, thought that the place of driver of a six-horse wain was the most delightful calling in the world, and both were warmly attached to their employer and the family whom they served. And yet both felt that it was a heavy sin to refuse to obey their mother.

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CHAPTER VII.

Eva was spared witnessing the close of this unpleasant incident. The abbess had led her up the stairs into the sitting-room. St. Clare herself, she thought, had sent Fran Vorkler to render the choice she intended to place before her niece that very day easier for Eva.

Even whilst ascending the broad steps she put her arm around her, but in the apartment, whence the noonday sun had been shut out and they were greeted with a cool atmosphere perfumed with the fragrance of the bouquets of roses and mignonette which Eva and the gardener had set in jars on the mantelpiece early in the morning, the abbess drew her darling closer to her side, saying, "The world is again showing you its most disagreeable face, my poor child, ere you bid it farewell."

She kissed her brow and eyes tenderly as she spoke, expecting Eva, as she had often done when anything troubled her young soul, to return the caress impulsively, and accept with grateful impetuosity the invitation to the shelter which she offered; but the vile assault of the coarse woman who brought to her knowledge what people were thinking and saying about her produced upon the strange child, who had already given her many a surprise, an effect precisely opposite to her expectations. No, Eva had by no means forgotten the pain inflicted by Frau Vorkler's base accusations; but if whilst in the sedan-chair she had feared that she should lack courage to inflict upon her beloved aunt and friend so great a disappointment, she now felt that this dread had been needless, and that her offended maidenly pride absolved her from consideration for any person.

With cautious tenderness she released herself from the arms of the abbess, gazed sorrowfully at her with her large eyes as if beseeching forgiveness then, as she saw her aunt look at her with pained surprise, again threw herself on her breast.

Instead of being protectingly embraced by the elder woman, the young girl clasped her closely to her heart, kissed and patted her with caressing love, and with the winning charm peculiar to her besought her forgiveness if she denied herself and her that which she had long desired as the fairest and noblest goal.

When the abbess interrupted her to represent what awaited her in the world and in the convent, Eva listened, nestling closely to her side until she had finished, then sighing as deeply as if her own resolve caused her the keenest suffering, threw her head back, exclaiming, "Yet, in spite of everything, I cannot, must not enter the convent now." Claspings the abbess's hand, she explained what prevented her from fulfilling the wish of her childhood's guide, which had so long been her own, extolling with warm, sincere gratitude the quiet happiness and sweet anticipations enjoyed with her beloved nuns ere love had conquered her.

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During the recent days of sorrow she had again sought the path to her saints and found the greatest solace in prayer; but whenever she uplifted her heart to the Saviour, whose bride she had once so fervently vowed to become, the Redeemer had indeed appeared as usual before the eyes of her soul, but he resembled in form and features Sir Heinz Schorlin, and, instead of turning her away from the world to divine love, she had surrendered herself completely to earthly affection. Prayer had become sin. The saint's song:

"O Love, Love's reign announcing,
Why dost thou wound me so?
Into thy fiercest flames I fling
My heart, my life below."

no longer invited her to give herself up to be fused into divine love, but merely rendered the need of her own soul clearer, and expressed in words the yearning of her heart for her lover.

Here her aunt interrupted her with the assurance that all this—she had had the same experience when, renouncing the love of the noblest and best of men, she took the veil—would be different, wholly different, when with St. Clare's aid she had again found the path on which she had already once so nearly reached heaven. Even now she beheld in imagination the day when Eva would look back upon the world she had left as if it were a mere formless mass of clouds. These were no idle words. The promise was something derived from her own experience.

On her pilgrimage to Rome she had gazed from an Alpine peak and beheld at her feet nothing save low hills, forests, valleys, and flashing streams, with here and there a village; but she could distinguish neither human beings nor animals; a light mist had veiled everything, converting it into one monotonous surface. But above her head the sky, like a giant dome free from cloud and mist, arched in a beautiful vault, blue as turquoise and sapphire. It seemed so close that the eagle soaring near her might reach it with a few strokes of his pinions. She was steeped in radiance, and the sun shone down upon her with overpowering brilliancy like the eye of God.

Close at her side a gay butterfly hovered about the solitary little white flower which grew from a bare rock on the topmost summit. In the brilliant light and amidst the solemn silence that butterfly seemed like a transfigured soul, and aroused the question, Who that was permitted to live on this glowing height, so near the Most High, could desire to return to the grey mist below?

So the human soul which soared to the shining height where it was so near heaven, would blissfully enjoy the purity of the air and the unshadowed light which bathed it, and all that was passing in the world below would blend into a single vanquished whole, whose details could no longer be distinguished. Thus Heinz Schorlin's image would

also mingle with the remainder of the world, lying far below her, to which he belonged. It should merely incite her to rise nearer and nearer to heaven, to the radiant light above, to which her soul would mount as easily as the eagle that before the pilgrim's eyes had vanished in the divine blue and the golden sunshine.

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“So come and dare the flight!” she concluded with warm enthusiasm. “The wings you need have grown from your soul, you chosen bride of Heaven. Use them. That which now most repels you from the goal will fall away as the snake sheds its skin. Like the phoenix rising from its ashes, the destruction of the little earthly love which even now causes you more pain than pleasure, will permit the ascent of the great love for Him Who is Love incarnate, the love which encompasses the lonely butterfly on the white blossom in the silent, deserted mountain solitude, which lacks no feather on its wings, no tiniest hair on its feelers, as warmly and carefully as the vast, unlimited universe whose duration ends only with eternity.”

Eva, with labouring breath, had fairly hung upon the lips of the revered woman, who at last gazed upwards with dilated eyes like a prophetess.

When she paused the young girl nodded assent. Her teacher and friend seemed to have crushed her resistance.

Like the eagle which had disappeared before the pilgrim’s eyes in the azure vault of heaven, the radiant light on the pure summit summoned her pure soul to dare the flight.

The abbess watched with delight the influence of her words upon the soul of her darling, who, gazing thoughtfully at the floor, now seemed to be pondering over what she had urged.

But suddenly Eva raised her bowed head, and her eyes, sparkling with a brighter light, sought those of the abbess.

Her quick intellect had attentively considered what she had heard, and her vivid power of imagination had enabled her to transfer to reality the picture which had already half won her over to her friend’s wishes.

“No, Aunt Kunigunde, no!” she began, raising her hands as if in repulse. “Your radiant height strongly allures me also, yet, gladly as I believe that, for many the world would be easily forgotten above, where no sound from it reaches us and the mist conceals individual figures from our eyes, for me, now that love has filled my heart, it would be impossible to ascend the peak alone and without him.

“Hear me, aunt!

“What was it that attracted me so powerfully from the beginning? At first, as you know, the hope of making him a combatant for the possessions which I have learned through you to regard as the highest and most sacred. Then, when love came, when a new power, heretofore unknown, awoke within me and—everything must be told—I longed for his wooing and his embrace, I also felt that our union could take root and put forth blossoms only in the full harmony of our mutual love for God and the Saviour. And

though since the mass for the dead was celebrated for my mother—it wounded me, and defiance and the wish to punish him urged me to put the convent walls between us—no further token of his love has come, though I know as well as you that he desired to quit the world, this by no means impairs—nay, it only strengthens—the confidence I feel that our souls belong to one another as inseparably as though the sacrament had hallowed our union.

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"Therefore I should never succeed in coming so near heaven as you, the lonely, devout pilgrim, attained on the summit of your mountain peak, unless he accompanied me in spirit, unless his soul joined mine in the ascent or the flight. It rests in mine as mine rests in his, and were they separated both would bleed as if from severed veins. For this reason, aunt, he can never blend into a uniform mass with the rest of the world below me; for if I gained the radiant height, he would remain at my side and gaze with me at the mist-veiled world beneath. He can never vanish from the eyes of my soul, and so, dear aunt, because I owe it to him to avoid even the semblance——"

Here she hesitated; for from the adjoining room they heard a man's deep voice telling Els something in loud, excited tones.

This interruption was welcome to the abbess; she had as yet found no answer to her niece's startling objection.

Eva answered her questioning glance with the exclamation, "Uncle Pfinzing!"

"He?" replied the abbess dejectedly. "His opinion has some weight with you, and this very day, during the burial, he told me how glad he should be to see you sheltered in the convent from the hateful calumnies caused by your imprudence!"

"Yet—you will see it directly," the girl declared, "he will surely understand me when I explain that I would rather endure the worst than appear to seek refuge from evil tongues in flight. Whoever has expected Eva Ortlieb to shelter herself from malice behind strong walls will be mistaken. Heinz is certainly aware of the shameful injustice which has pursued us, and if he returns he must find me where he left me. I am now encountering what my dead mother called the forge fire of life, and I will not shun it like a coward. Heinz, I know, will overthrow the man who unchained this generation of vipers against us; but if he does not return, or can bring himself to cast the love that unites us behind him with the world from which he would fain turn, then, aunt"—and Eva's eyes flashed brightly with passionate fire, and her clear voice expressed the firm decision of a vigorous will—"then I will commit our cause to One who will not suffer falsehood to conquer truth or wrong to triumph over right. Then, though it should be necessary to walk over red-hot ploughshares, let the ordeal bear witness for us."

The abbess, startled, yet rejoicing at the fulness of faith flaming in her darling's passionate speech, approached Eva to soothe her; but scarcely had she begun to speak when the door opened and Berthold Pfinzing entered with his older niece.

He was holding Els by the hand, and it was evident that some sorrowful thought occupied the minds of both.

"Has any new horror happened?" fell in tones of anxious enquiry from Eva's lips before she even greeted her dearest relative.

“Think of something very bad,” was her sister’s reply, in a tone so dejected and mournful, that Eva, with a low cry—“My father!”—pressed her hand upon her heart.

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“Not dead, darling,” said the magistrate, stroking her head soothingly with his short, broad hand, “by all the saints, not even wounded or ill. Yet the daughter has guessed aright, and I have kept the ‘Honourables’ waiting, that I might tell you the news myself; for what may not such tidings become whilst passing from lip to lip! It is a toad, a very ugly toad, and I would not permit a dragon to be brought into the house to you poor things in its place.”

He poured all this forth very rapidly, for, notwithstanding the intense heat, and the burden of business at the Town Hall, he had left it, though only to do his dear Es a kindness, lie and his worthy wife Christine, the sister of Herr Ernst Ortlieb and of the abbess, had long been familiar with all the tales which slander had called to life, and had striven zealously enough to refute them. What he had now to relate filled him with honest indignation against the evil tongues, and he knew how deeply it would excite and grieve Eva, his godchild, who stood especially near his heart. He would gladly have said a few kind words to her before beginning his story, but he was obliged to return to the Town Hall immediately to open the important conference concerning the fate of the Eysvogel business.

His appearance showed how rapidly he had hurried to the house through the burning sunshine, for drops of perspiration were trickling down his broad, low forehead over his plump, smoothshaven cheeks and thick red neck, in which his small chin vanished as if it were a cushion. Besides, he constantly raised a large linen handkerchief to his face, and his huge chest laboured for breath as he hastily repeated to Eva and the abbess what he had just announced to Els in a few rapid words.

Herr Ernst Ortlieb had gone to the Town Hall, where he attended an examination in his character as magistrate, and had entered the court yard to enjoy the cool air for a short time with a few other “Honourables,” in the shady walk near the main gate.

Just then master-tailor Seubolt, the guardian of Ortel and his sister, who were in service at the Ortlieb mansion, approached the Town Hall. No one could have supposed that the tall, grey-headed man with the bowed back, who was evidently nearing sixty, really meant to make a young girl like Metz Vorkler his wife. Besides, he assumed a very humble, modest demeanour when, passing through the vaulted entrance of the Town Hall, which stood open to every citizen, he approached Herr Ernst to ask, with many bows and humble phrases, for the permission, which he had been refused at the Ortlieb house, to remove his wards from a place which their mother, as well as he himself, felt sure—he had supposed that the “Honourable” would have no objection—would be harmful to them in both body and soul.

Surprised and indignant, but perfectly calm, Herr Ernst had requested him to tell him whatever he had to say at a more convenient time. But as the tailor insisted that the matter would permit no delay, he invited him to step aside with him, in order not to make the councillors who were with him witnesses of the unpleasant discussion.

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Seubolt, however, seemed to have no greater desire than to be heard by as many people as possible. Raising his voice to a very loud tone, though he still maintained an extremely humble manner, he began to give the reasons which induced him, spite of his deep regret, to remove his wards from the Ortlieb house. And now, sheltering himself behind frequent repetitions of "As people say" and "Heaven forbid that I should believe such things," he began to relate what the most venomous slander had dared to assert concerning the beautiful Es.

For a time Herr Ernst had forced himself to listen quietly to this malicious abuse of those whom he held dearest, but at last it became too much for the quick-tempered man. The tailor had ventured to allude to Jungfrau Els "who certainly had scarcely given full cause for such evil slander" in words which caused even the councillors standing near to contradict him loudly, and induced Herr Pfinzing, who had just come up, to beckon to the city soldiers. At that instant the blood mounted to the insulted father's brain, and the misfortune happened; for as the tailor, with an unexpected gesture of the arm he was flourishing, brushed Herr Ernst's cap, the latter, fairly insane with rage, snatched the pike from one of the men who, obeying Herr Pfinzing's signal, were just approaching the tailor, and with a wild cry struck down the base traducer.

Herr Pfinzing, with the presence of mind characteristic of him, instantly ordered the beadles to carry the wounded man into the Town Hall, and thus prevented the luckless deed of violence from creating any excitement.

The few persons in the courtyard had been detained, and perhaps everything might yet be well. Herr Ernst had instantly delivered himself up to justice, and instead of being taken to prison like a common criminal, had been conveyed in a closed sedan-chair to the watch-tower.

The pike had pierced the tailor's shoulder, but the wound did not seem to be mortal, and Herr Ernst's rash deed might be made good by the payment of blood-money, though, it is true, on account of the tailor's position and means, this might be a large sum.

"My horse," said Herr Berthold in conclusion, "was waiting for me, and brought me here as swiftly as he must carry me back again. But, you poor things! as for you, my Els, you have a firm nature, and if you insist upon refusing the invitation to our house, why, wait here to learn whether your father needs you. You, my little goddaughter Eva, are provided for. This sorrow, of course, will throw the veil over your fair head."

The worthy man, as he spoke, laid his hand on her shoulder and looked at her with a glance which seemed to rely on her assent, but she interrupted him with the exclamation, "No, uncle! Until you have convinced yourself that no one will dare assail Eva Ortlieb's honour, do not ask her again if she desires the protection of the convent."

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The magistrate hurriedly passed his huge handkerchief over his face; then taking Eva's head between his hands, kissed her brow, and—turning the shrewd, twinkling eyes, which were as round as everything else about his person, towards the others, said: “Did any one suggest this, or did the ‘little saint’ have the sensible idea herself?”

When Eva, smiling, pointed to her own forehead, he exclaimed: “My respects, child. They say that what stirs up there descends from godfather to godchild, and I'll never put goblet to my lips again if I—”

Here he stopped, and called after Els that he had not meant to hint, for she was hurrying out to get her uncle something to drink. But ere the door closed behind her he went on eagerly:

“But to you, my saintly child, I will say: your piety soars far too high for me to follow with my heavy body; yet on the ride here I, old sinner that I am, longed—no offence, sister-in-law abbess!—to warn you against the convent, for the very reason which keeps you away from your saint. We'll find the gag to stop the mouths of these accursed slanderers forever, and then, if you want to enter the convent, they shall not say, when you take the veil, ‘Eva Ortlieb is hiding from her own shame and the tricks with which we frightened her out of the world.’ No! All Nuremberg shall join in the hosanna!”

Then taking the goblet which Els had just filled, he drained it with great satisfaction, and rushing off, called back to the sisters: “I'll soon see you again, you brave little Es. My wife is coming to talk over the matter with you. Don't let that worthless candle-dealer's children leave the house till their time is up. If you wish to visit your father in the watch-tower there will be no difficulty. I'll tell the warder. Only the drawbridge will be raised after sunset. You can provide for his bodily needs, too, Els. We cannot release him yet; the law must take its course.”

At the door he stopped again and called back into the room: “We can't be sure. If Frau Vorkler and the tailor's friends make an outcry and molest you, send at once to the Town Hall. I'll keep my eyes open and give the necessary orders.”

A few minutes after he trotted through the Frauenthor on his clumsy stallion.

CHAPTER VIII.

The watch-tower was in the northern part of the city, in the corn magazine of the fortress, and the whole width of Nuremberg must be traversed to reach it. Even before Herr Pfinzing had left the house the sisters determined to go to their father, and the abbess approved the plan. She invited the girls to spend the night at the convent, if they found the deserted house too lonely, but they did not promise to do so.

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Countess Cordula, who was on friendly terms with Eva, also emptied the vials of her wrath with all the impetuosity of her nature upon Sir Seitz Siebenburg and the credulity and malice of the people. From the beginning she had been firmly convinced that the "Mustache," as she now called the knight in a tone of the most intense aversion, had contrived this base conspiracy, and her opinion was strengthened by Biberli. Now she would gladly have torn herself into pieces to mitigate the sisters' hard lot. She wanted to accompany them to the watch-tower, to have them taken there in her sedan-chair carried by horses, which had room for several persons, and at last begged for the favour of being allowed to spend the night in the room adjoining theirs. If the girls, amidst all these base suspicions, should find Nuremberg unendurable, she would leave the scene of the Reichstag with them to-morrow, if necessary, and take them to her castle in the Vorarlberg. She had other plans for them, too, in her mind, but lacked time now to explain them to the sisters; they could not obtain admittance to their father's prison after sundown, and in a few hours the long summer day would be over.

It was not advisable to use their sedan-chairs adorned with the Ortlieb coat of arms, which every one knew, so they went on foot with their faces shrouded by the 'Reise' which was part of their mourning dress; and, in order not to violate usage, were accompanied by two servants, old Martsche and Katterle.

From the Fleischbrucke they might have avoided the market-place, but Els wanted to enquire whether the Eysvogel matter was being discussed. One of the "Honourables"—all of whom she knew—was always to be found near the Town Hall, and Eva understood her sister's anxiety and went with her willingly.

But when they were passing the prison she became frightened.

Through the squares formed by the iron grating in front of the broad window of the largest one, head after head, hand after hand, was thrust into the street. The closely cropped heads of the prisoners, many of which showed mutilations by the hand of the executioner, which had barely healed, formed, as separated only by the iron bars, they protruded above, below, and beside one another into the open air, a mosaic picture, startlingly repulsive in appearance; for savage greed glittered in the eyes of most, and showed itself in the movements of the long, thin hands extended for gifts. Bitter need and passionate longing gazed defiantly, beseechingly, and threateningly at the people who crowded round the window. Few were silent; they implored the curious and pitying men, women, and children, who in the presence of their misery rejoiced in their more favoured lot, for aid in their distress, and rarely in vain; for many a mother gave her children a loaf to hand to the unfortunates, and meanwhile impressed on their minds the lesson that they would fare as badly as the most horrible of the mutilated prisoners unless they were good and obedient to their parents and teachers.

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Street boys held out an apple or a bit of bread, to snatch it away just as they touched it with their finger-tips, thus playing with them for their own amusement, but the tribulation of the wretched captives. Then some man who had seen better days, or a criminal whom sudden passion had made a murderer, would burst into a rage and, seizing the iron bars, shake them savagely, whilst the others, shrieking, drew in their heads. Then fierce curses, threats, and invectives echoed over the market-place and, screaming aloud, the boys ran back; but they soon resumed their malicious sport.

Often, it is true, a mother came who placed her gift in the hands of her child, or a modest old woman, tradesman, or soldier, from motives of genuine compassion, offered the prisoners a jug of new milk or strengthening wine. Nor was there any lack of priests or monks who desired to give the consolations of religion to the pitiable men behind the bars, but most of them reaped little gratitude; only a few listened to their exhortations with open hearts, and but too frequently they were silenced by insults and rude outcries.

Whilst the sisters, attended by their maidservants, were passing these pitiable people, Frau Tucher, whose daughter had been very ill, sent, for the love of God, a large basket of freshly baked bread to the prisoners. One of her servants was distributing it, and they greedily snatched the welcome gift from his hand. A woman, who was about to give one of the rolls to the hollow-eyed child in her arms just as a rude fellow who had lost his ears snatched it, scratched his dirty, freckled face with her sharp nails, and the sight of the blood which dripped from his lip over his chin upon the roll was so hideous a spectacle that Eva clung closer to her sister, who had just put her hand into the pocket hanging from her belt to give the unfortunates a few shillings, and drew her away with her.

Both, followed by the two maids, made their way as fast as possible through the people who had flocked hither in great numbers for a purpose which the sisters were to learn only too soon.

It was a long time since they had been here, and a few weeks previously the "Honourables" had had the pillory moved from the other side of the Town Hall to this spot. Katterle's warning was not heard in the din around them.

The crowd grew denser every moment, and Eva had already asked her sister to turn back, when Els saw the man who brought to her father the summons to the meetings of the Council, and requested him to accompany them through the throng to the courtyard; but amidst the uproar of shouts and cries he misunderstood her, and supposing that she wished to witness the spectacle which had attracted so many, forced a way for the sisters into the very front rank.

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The person who had just been bound in this place of shame was the barber's widow from the Kotgasse, who had already been here once for giving lovers an opportunity for secret meetings, and to whom Katterle had fled for shelter. Bowed by the weight of the stone which had been hung around her neck, the woman, with outstretched head, looked furiously around the circle of her tormentors like a wild beast crouched to spring, and scarcely had the messenger brought the sisters and their servants to a place near her when, recognising Katterle, she shrieked shrilly to the crowd that there were the right ones, the dainty folk who, if they did not belong to a rich family, would be put in the place where, in spite of the Riese over their faces, with which they mourned for their lost good name, they had more reason to be than she, who was only the lowly widow of a barber.

Overwhelmed with horror the girls pressed on, and at Eva's terrified exclamation, "Let us, O let us go!" the man did his best. But they made slow progress through the crowd, whose yells, hisses, and catcalls pursued them to the entrance of the neighbouring Town Hall.

Here the guard, with crossed halberds, kept back the people who were crowding after the insulted girls, and it was fortunate, for Eva's feet refused to carry her farther, and her older sister's strength to support her failed.

Sighing deeply, Els led her to a bench which stood between two pillars, and then ordered old Martsche, and Katterle, who was trembling in every limb, to watch Eva till her return.

Before they went on, her sister must have some rest, and Martin Schedel, the old Clerk of the Council, was the man with whom to obtain it.

She went in search of him as fast as her feet would bear her, and by a lucky accident met the kind old man, whom she had known from childhood, on the stairs leading to the Council chamber and the upper offices.

Ernst Ortlieb's unhappy deed, and the story of the base calumnies in circulation about the unfortunate man's daughters, which he had just heard from Herr Pfinzing, had filled the worthy old clerk's heart with pity and indignation; so he eagerly embraced the opportunity afforded to atone to the young girls for the wrongs committed against them by their fellow-citizens. Telling the maidservants to wait in the antechamber of the orphan's court-room, he led the sisters to his own office, helping Eva up the long flight of stairs with an arm which, though aged, was still vigorous. After insisting that she should sit in the armchair before the big desk, and placing wine and water before her, he begged the young girls to wait until his return. He was obliged to be present at the meeting, which had probably already begun. The matter in question was the Eysvogel business, and if Els would remain he could tell her the result. Then he left them.

Eva, deadly pale, leaned back with closed eyes in the clerk's high chair. Els bathed her brow with a wet handkerchief, consoling her by representing how foolish it would be to suffer the lowest of the populace to destroy her happiness.

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Her sister nodded assent, saying: "Did you notice the faces of those people behind the bars? Most of them, I thought, looked stupid rather than evil." Here she hesitated, and then added thoughtfully: "Yet they cannot be wise. These poor creatures seldom obtain any great sum by thieving and cheating. To what terrible punishments they expose themselves both in this world and the next! And conscience!"

"Yes, conscience!" Els eagerly repeated. "So long as we can say that we have done nothing wrong, we can suffer even the worst to be said of us without grieving."

"Still," sighed Eva, "I feel as if that horrible woman's insults had sullied me with a stain no water can wash away. What sorrows have come upon us since our mother died, Els!"

Her sister nodded, and added mournfully: "Our father, my Wolff, your poor, stricken heart, and below in the Council chamber, Eva, perhaps whilst we are talking, those who are soon to be my kindred are being doomed. That is harder to bear, child, than the invectives with which a wicked woman slanders us. Often I do not know myself where I get the strength to keep up my courage."

She turned away as she spoke to wipe the tears from her eyes without being seen; but Eva perceived it, and rose to clasp her in her arms and whisper words of cheer. Ere she had taken the first step, however, she started; in rising she had upset the clerk's tin water-pail, which fell rattling on the floor.

"The water!" she exclaimed sadly, "and my tongue is parched."

"I'll fetch more," said Els consolingly, "Herr Martin brought it from over yonder."

Opening the door to which she had pointed, she entered a low, spacious anteroom, in which was a brass fire engine, ladders, pails, and various other utensils for extinguishing a fire in the building, hung on the rough plastered wall which separated this room from the office of the city clerk. The centre of the opposite wall was occupied by two small windows surmounted by a broad, semicircular arch, and separated by a short Roman pillar. The sashes of both, whose leaden casings were filled with little round horn panes, stood wide open. This double window was in the upper part of the Council chamber, which occupied two stories. To create a draught this hot day it had been flung wide open, and Els could distinguish plainly the words uttered below. The first that reached her was the name: "Wolff Eysvogel."

A burning sensation thrilled her. If she went nearer to the window she could hear what the Honourables decided concerning the Eysvogel house; and, overpowered by her ardent desire not to lose a single word of the discussion which was to determine the happiness of Wolff's life, and therefore hers, she instantly silenced the voice which admonished her that listening was wrong. Yet the habit of caring for Eva was so dear to

her, and ruled her with such power, that before listening to what was passing in the Council chamber below she looked for the water, which she speedily found, took it to the thirsty girl, and hurriedly told her what she had discovered in the next room and how she intended to profit by it.

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In spite of Eva's entreaty not to do it, she hastened back to the open window.

The younger sister, though she shook her head, gazed after her with a significant smile.

To Eva this was no accident.

Perhaps it was her saint herself who, when her sister went to seek refreshment for her, had guided her to the window. Eva deemed it a boon to be permitted to find here in solitude the rest needful for her body which, though usually so strong, had been shaken by horror, and to struggle and pray for a clear understanding of the many things which troubled her; for to her prayer was far more than the petition for a spiritual or earthly blessing; nay, she prayed far less frequently to implore anything than from yearning for the Most High to whose presence the wings of prayer raised her. So long as she was absorbed in it, she felt removed from the world and borne into the abode of God.

Now also, whilst Els was listening, she brought no earthly matter to the Power who guided the universe as well as her own little individual life, but merely lost herself in supplication and in her intercourse with the Omnipotent One, who seemed to her a familiar friend; she forgot what grieved and troubled her and how she had been pained. But meanwhile the prediction she had made to the abbess was verified; she felt as if her lover's soul rose with hers to the pure height where she dwelt, and that the earthly love which filled her heart and his was but an effluence of the Eternal Love, whose embodiment to her was God and the Saviour.

The union of herself and Heinz seemed imaged by two streams flowing from the same great inexhaustible, pure, and beneficent fountain, which, after having run through separate channels, meet to traverse as a single river the blooming meadows and keep them fresh and green. God's love, her own, and his were each separate and yet the same, portions of the great fount which animated, saved, and blessed her, him, and the whole vast universe. The spring gushing from her love and his was eternal, and therefore neither could be exhausted, no matter how much it gave.

But both were still in the world. As he would certainly put forth all his might to show himself worthy of the confidence placed in him by his Emperor and master, she too must test her youthful strength in the arduous conflict which she had begun. Her recent experiences were the flames of the forge fire of life of which her mother had spoken—and how pitifully she had endured their glow! This must be changed. She had often proved that when the body is wearied the soul gains greater power to soar. Should she not begin to avail herself of this to make her feeble body obey her will? With compressed lips and clenched hand she resolved to try.

CHAPTER IX.

Whilst Eva, completely absorbed in herself, was forming this resolution, Els, panting for breath, stood at the open window under the ceiling of the Council chamber, gazing down and listening to the sounds from beneath.

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Directly opposite to her was the inscription

“Feldt Urtel auf erden, als ir dort woltd geurtheilt werden,” in the German and Latin languages, and below this motto, urging the magistrates to justice, was a large fresco representing the unjust judge Sisamnes being flayed by an executioner in the costume of the Nuremberg Leben— [Executioner’s assistant. Really “Lowen.”]—before the eyes of King Cambyses, in order to cover the judgment seat with his skin. Another picture represented this lofty throne, on which sat the ruler of Persia dispensing justice. The subject of a third was the Roman army interrupted in its march by the order of the Emperor Trajan, that he might have time to hear a widow’s accusation of the murderer of her son and to punish the criminal.

Els did not bestow a single glance upon these familiar pictures, but gazed down at the thirteen elderly and the same number of much younger men, who in their high-backed chairs were holding council together at her left hand far below her. These were the burgomasters of the city, of whom an elder and a younger one directed for the space of a month, as “Questioner,” the government of the public affairs of the city and the business of the “Honourable Council.”

At this time the office was filled by Albert Ebner and Jorg Stromer, whilst in the secret council formed by seven of the older gentlemen, as the highest executive authority, Hans Schtirstab as the second and Berthold Vorchtel as first Losunger filled the chief offices.

So this year the deeply offended father held the highest place in the Council, and in the whole community of Nuremberg he, more than any one else, would decide the fate of the Eysvogels.

Els knew this, and with an anxious heart saw him gaze earnestly and sadly at the papers which Martin Schedel, the city clerk, had just brought to him from a special desk. At his side, in the centre of the table covered with green cloth, sat the listener’s uncle, the magistrate Berthold Pfinzing, who in the Emperor’s name presided over the court of justice.

He also appeared in his character of protector of the Jews, and Samuel Pfefferkorn, a Hebrew usurer, had just left the hall after an examination.

Casper Eysvogel was gazing after him with a face white as death. His handsome head shook as the imperial magistrate, turning to Berthold Vorchtel, the chief Losunger, said in a tone loud enough to be heard by all present, “So this is also settled. Herr Casper contracted the great debt to the Jew without the knowledge of his son and partner, and this explains to a florin the difference between the accounts of the father and son. The young man was intentionally kept in the dark about the greatest danger which threatened the business. To him the situation of the house must have appeared critical,

but by no means hopeless. But for the Siebenburgs and the other bandits, who transformed the last important and promising venture

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of the firm into a great loss, and with the sale of the landed property, it might perhaps have speedily risen, and under prudent and skilful management regained its former prosperity. The enormous sum to which the debt to Samuel Pfefferkorn increased gives the position of affairs a different aspect. Since, as protector of the Jew, I must insist upon the payment of this capital with the usual interest, the old Eysvogel firm will be unable to meet its obligations—nay, its creditors can be but partially paid. Therefore nothing remains for us to do save to consider how to protect as far as possible our city and the citizens who are interested. Yet, in my opinion, the entire firm does not deserve punishment—only the father, who concealed from his upright son his own accounts and those of Samuel Pfefferkorn, and—it is hard for me to say this in Herr Casper's presence;—also, when the peril became urgent, illegally deprived his business partner of the possibility of obtaining a correct view of the real situation of affairs. So, in the Emperor's name, let justice take its course."

These words pronounced the doom of the ancient, great, and wealthy Eysvogel firm; yet the heart of Els throbbed high with joy when, after a brief interchange of opinions between the assembled members of the Council, the imperial magistrate, turning to Herr Vorchtel, again began: "As Chief Losunger, it would be your place, Herr Berthold, to raise your voice on the part of the Honourable Council in defence of the accused; but since we are all aware of the great grief inflicted upon you by the son of the man in whose favour you would be obliged to speak, we should, I think, spare you this duty, and transfer it to Herr Hans Schtirstab, the second Losunger, or to Herr Albert Ebner, the oldest of the governing burgomasters, who, though equally concerned in this sad case, are less closely connected with the Eysvogels themselves."

Els uttered a sigh of relief, for both the men named were friendly to Wolff; but Herr Vorchtel had already risen and began to speak, turning his wise old head slowly to and fro, and drawing his soft grey beard through his hand.

He commenced his address as quietly as if he were talking with friends at his own table, and the tones of his deep voice, as well as the expression of his finely moulded aged features, exerted a soothing influence upon his listeners.

Els, with a throbbing heart, felt that nothing which this man advocated could be wrong, and that whatever he recommended would be sure of acceptance; for he stood amongst his young and elderly fellow directors of the Nuremberg republic like an immovably steadfast guardian of duty and law, who had grown grey in the atmosphere of honesty and honour. Thus she had imagined the faithful Eckart, thus her own Wolff might look some day when age had bleached his hair and labour and anxiety had lined his lofty brow with wrinkles; Berthold Vorchtel, and other "Honourables"

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who resembled him; grey-haired Conrad Gross; tall, broad-shouldered Friedrich Holzschuher, whose long, snow-white hair fell in thick waves to his shoulders; Ulrich Haller, in whose locks threads of silver were just appearing, princely in form and bearing; stately Hermann Waldstromer, who had the keen eyes of a huntsman; the noble Ebner brothers, who would have attracted attention even in an assembly of knights and counts—nay, the Emperor Rudolph was probably thinking of the men below when he said that the Nuremberg Council reminded him of a German oak wood, where firm reliance could be placed on every noble trunk.

Herr Berthold Vorchtel was just such a noble, reliable tree. Els told herself so, and though she knew how deeply he was wounded when Wolff preferred her to his daughter Ursula, and how sorely he mourned his son Ulrich's death, she was nevertheless convinced that this man would bear the Eysvogels no grudge for the grief suffered through them, for no word which was not just and estimable would cross his aged lips.

She was not mistaken; for after Herr Berthold had insisted upon his right to raise his voice, not in behalf of Herr Casper but for his business firm and its preservation, he remarked, by way of introduction, that for the sake of Nuremberg he would advise that the Eysvogel house should not be abandoned without ceremony to the storm which its chief had aroused against the ancient, solid structure.

Then he turned to the papers and parchments, to which the city clerk had just added several books and rolls. His address, frequently interrupted by references to the documents before him, sounded clear and positive. The amount of the sums owed by the Eysvogel firm, as well as the names of its creditors in Nuremberg, Augsburg, Ulm, and Regensburg, Venice, Milan, Bruges, and other German and foreign cities, formed the most important portion of his speech. During its progress he frequently seized a bit of chalk and blackboard, writing rapidly on the green table whole rows of figures, and the young burgomasters especially exchanged admiring smiles as the experienced old merchant added and subtracted in an instant sums for which they themselves would have needed twice as much time.

The figures and names buzzed in the ears of the listener at the window like the humming of a swarm of gnats. To understand and remember them was impossible, and she gazed in astonishment at the old man who so clearly comprehended the confused tangle and drew from it so readily just what he needed for his purpose.

When he closed, and with a loud "Therefore" began to communicate the result, she summoned all the mental power she possessed in order to understand it. She succeeded, but her knees fairly trembled when she heard the sum which the house was obliged to repay to others.

Yet, when Herr Berthold lastly gave the estimate of the Eysvogel property in merchandise, buildings, and estates, she was again surprised. She had not supposed that Wolff's proud family was so wealthy; but the close of this report brought fresh disappointment, for including the sum which Herr Casper had borrowed from the Jew Pfefferkorn, the debts of the firm exceeded its possessions far more than Els had expected from the amount of its riches.

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She was wholly ignorant of the condition of her own father's property; but she thought she knew that it was far from being enough to suffice here. And this appeared to be the case, for when Berthold Vorchtel resumed his speech he alluded to Ernst Ortlieb. In words full of sympathy he lamented the unprecedented insult which had led him to commit the deed of violence that prevented his sharing in this consultation. But before his removal he had given him an important commission. Upon certain conditions—but only upon them—he would place a considerable portion of his fortune at his disposal for the settlement of this affair. Still, large as was the promised sum, it would by no means be sufficient to save the Eysvogel business from ruin. Yet he, Berthold Vorchtel, was of the opinion that its fall must be prevented at any cost. The sincerity of this conviction he intended to prove by the best means at a merchant's command—the pledge of his own large capital.

These words deeply moved the whole assembly, and Els saw her uncle glance at the old gentleman with a look which expressed the warm appreciation of a man of the same mind.

Casper Eysvogel, who, lost in thought, had permitted the statements of the Losunger, which were mingled with many a bitter censure of his own conduct, to pass without contradiction—nay, apparently in a state of apathy in which he was no longer capable of following details—straightened his bowed figure and gazed enquiringly into Herr Berthold's face as if he did not venture to trust his own ears; but the other looked past him, as he added that what he was doing for the Eysvogel business was due to no consideration for the man who had hitherto directed it, or his family, but solely on account of the good city whose business affairs the confidence of the Council had summoned him to direct, and her commerce, whose prosperity was equally dear to most of the Honourables around him.

Cries and gestures of assent accompanied the last sentence; but Berthold Vorchtel recognised the demonstration by remarking that it showed him that the Council, in the name of the city, would be disposed to do its share in raising the amount still lacking.

This statement elicited opposition, expressed in several quarters in low tones, and from one seat loudly, and Herr Berthold heard it. Turning to Peter Ammon, one of the Eysvogels' principal creditors, who was making the most animated resistance, he remarked that no one could be more unwilling than himself to use the means of the community to protect from the consequences of his conduct a citizen whose own errors had placed him in a perilous position, but, on the other hand, he would always—and in this case with special zeal—be ready to aid such a person in spite of the faults committed, if he believed that he could thus protect the community from serious injury.

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Then he asked permission to make a digression, and being greeted with cries of “Go on!” from all sides, began in brief, clear sentences to show how the commerce of Nuremberg from small beginnings had reached its present prosperity. Instead of the timid, irregular exchange of goods as far as the Rhine, the Main, and the Danube, regular intercourse with Venice, Milan, Genoa, Bohemia, and Hungary, Flanders, Brabant, and the coast of the Baltic had commenced. Trade with the Italian cities, and through them, even with the Levant, had made its first successful opening under the Hohenstaufen rule; but during the evil days when the foreign monarchs had neglected Germany and her welfare, it sustained the most serious losses. By the election of Rudolph of Hapsburg who, with vigour, good-will, and intelligence, had devoted his attention to the security of commerce in the countries over which he reigned, better days for the merchant had returned, and it was very evident what his work required, what injured and robbed it of its well-earned reward. Confidence at home and abroad was the foundation of prosperity, not alone of the Nuremberg merchant but of trade in general. Under the Hohenstaufen rule their upright ancestors had so strengthened this confidence that wherever he went the Nuremberg merchant received respect and confidence above many— perhaps all others. The insecurity of the roads and of justice in the lawless times before the election of the Hapsburgs might have impaired this great blessing; but since Rudolph had wielded the sceptre with virile energy, made commerce secure, and administered justice, confidence had also returned, and to maintain it no sacrifice should be too great. As for him, Berthold Vorchtel, he would not spare himself, and if he expected the city to imitate him he would know how to answer for it.

Here he was interrupted by loud shouts of applause; but, without heeding them, he quietly went on: “And it is necessary to secure confidence in the Nuremberg merchant in two directions: his honesty and the capital at his command. Our business friends, far and near, must be permitted to continue to rely upon our trustworthiness as firmly as upon rock and iron. If we brought the arrogant Italian to say of us that, amongst the German cities who were blind, Nuremberg was the one-eyed, we ought now to force them to number us amongst those who see with both eyes, the honest, trust-inspiring blue eyes of the German. But to attain this goal we need the imperial protection, the watchful power of a great and friendly ruler. The progress which our trade owed to the Hohenstaufen proves this; the years without an Emperor, on the contrary, showed what threatens our commerce as soon as we lack this aid. Rights and privileges from sovereigns smoothed the paths in which we have surpassed others. To obtain new and more important ones must be our object. From the first Reichstag which the Emperor Rudolph held here, he has shown that he esteems us and believes

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us worthy of his confidence. Many valuable privileges have revealed this. To maintain this confidence, which is and will remain the source of the most important favours to Nuremberg, is enjoined upon us merchants by prudence, upon us directors of the city by regard for its prosperity. But, my honourable friends, reluctantly as I do so, I must nevertheless remind you that this confidence, here and there, has already received a shock through the errors of individuals. Who could have forgotten the tale of the beautiful cap of the unhappy Meister Mertein, who has preceded us into the other world? Doubtless it concerned but one scabby sheep, yet it served to bring the whole flock into disrepute. Perhaps the fact that it occurred so soon after Rudolph's election to the sovereignty, during the early days of his residence in our goodly city, imprinted it so deeply upon our imperial master's memory. A few hours ago he asked for some information concerning the sad affair which now occupies our attention, and when I represented that the public spirit and honesty of my countrymen, fellow-citizens, and associate members of the Council would prevent it from injuring our trade at home or abroad, he alluded to that story, by no means in the jesting way with which he formerly mentioned the vexatious incident that redounded to the honour of no one more than that of his own shrewdness, which at that time—seven years ago—was so often blended with mirth."

When the speaker began to allude to this much-discussed incident a smile had flitted over the features of his listeners, for they remembered it perfectly, and the story of Emperor Rudolph and the cap was still related to the honour of the presence of mind of the wise Hapsburg judge.

During the period of the assembly of the princes a Nuremberg citizen had taken charge of a bag containing two hundred florins for a foreign merchant who had lodged with him, but when he was asked for the property entrusted to him denied that he had received it.

This disgraceful occurrence was reported to the Emperor, but he apparently paid no heed to it, and received Master Mertein, amongst other citizens who wished to be presented to him. The dishonest man appeared in a rich gala dress and as, embarrassed by the Emperor's piercing gaze, he awkwardly twirled his cap—a magnificent article bordered with costly fur; the sovereign took it from his hand, examined it admiringly and, with the remark that it would suit even a king, placed it on his own royal head. Then he approached one after another to exchange a few words and, as if forgetting that he wore the head-gear, left the apartment to order a messenger to take the cap at once to its owner's wife, show it to her as a guarantee of trustworthiness, and ask her to bring the bag which the foreign merchant had given him to the castle. The woman did so and the cheat was unmasked.

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Everyone present, like Els, was familiar with this story, which wrongly cast so evil a light upon the uprightness of the citizens of Nuremberg. Who could fail to be painfully affected by the thought that Rudolph, during his present stay amongst them, must witness the injury of others by a Nuremberg merchant? Who could have now opposed Herr Berthold, when he asked, still more earnestly than before, that the community would do its share to maintain confidence in the reliability of the Nuremberg citizens, and especially of the Honourable Council and everyone of its members?

But when he mentioned the large sum which he himself, and the other which Ernst Ortlieb intended on certain conditions to devote to the settlement of this affair, Peter Ammon also withdrew his opposition. The First Losunger's proposal was unanimously accepted, and also the condition made by his associate, Ernst Ortlieb. Casper Eysvogel, on whom the resolution bore most heavily, submitted in silence, shrugging his shoulders.

How high Els's heart throbbed, how she longed to rush down into the Council chamber and clasp the hand of the noble old man at the green table, when he said that in consequence of Ernst Ortlieb's condition—which he also made—the charge of the newly established Eysvogel business must be transferred from Herr Casper's hands to those of his son, Herr Wolff, as soon as the imperial pardon permitted him to leave his hiding-place. He, Berthold Vorchtel, would make no complaint against him, for he knew that Wolff had been forced to cross swords with his Ulrich. He had formed this resolution after a severe struggle with himself; but as a Christian and a fair-minded man he had renounced the human desire for revenge, and as God had wished to give him a token of his approval, he had sent to his house a substitute for his dead son. Fresh cries of approval interrupted this communication, whose meaning Els did not understand.

Not a word of remonstrance was uttered when the imperial magistrate at last proposed that Casper Eysvogel and the women of his family should leave the city and atone for his great offence by ten years in exile. One of his estates, which he advised the city to buy, could be assigned him as a residence. Herr Casper's daughter, Frau Isabella Siebenburg, had already, with her twin sons, found shelter at the Knight Heideck's castle. Her husband, who had joined his guilty brothers, would speedily fall into the hands of justice and reap what he had sowed. For the final settlement of this affair he begged the Honourable Council to appoint commissioners, whom he would willingly join.

Then Herr Vorchtel again rose and requested his honourable friends to treat the new head of the house with entire confidence; for from the books of the firm and the statements which he had made in his hiding-place and sent to the Council, both he and the city clerk had become convinced that he was one of the most cautious and upright young merchants in Nuremberg. Their opinion was also shared by the most prominent business acquaintances of the house.

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This pleased the listener. But whilst the speaker sat down amidst the eager assent of his associates in office, and Herr Casper Eysvogel, leaning on the arm of his cousin, Conrad Teufel, left the hall with tottering steps, utterly crushed, she saw the city clerk Schedel, after a hasty glance upwards, approach the side door, through which he could reach the staircase leading to his rooms.

He evidently intended to tell the result of the discussion. But the old gentleman would need considerable time to reach her, so she again listened to what was passing below.

She heard her uncle, the magistrate, speak of her father's unfortunate deed, and tell the Council how the name of Herr Ernst's daughters, who were held in such honour, had become innocently, through evil gossip, the talk of the people. Just at that moment the old man's shuffling step sounded close by the door.

Els stopped listening to hasten towards the messenger of good tidings, and the old gentleman could scarcely believe his own eyes when he saw the happiness beaming in the girl's beautiful fresh face, whose anxiety and pallor had just roused his deep sympathy.

It was scarcely possible that anyone could have anticipated him with the glad news, and spite of his seventy-two years the city clerk had retained the keen eyes of youth. When he entered the anteroom with Els and saw the open window and beside it the white Riese which she had removed in order to hear better, he released himself from the arm she had passed around his shoulders, shook his finger threateningly at her, and cried: "It's fortunate that I find only the Riese, and not the listener, otherwise I should be compelled to deliver her to the jailer, or even the torturer, for unwarranted intrusion into the secrets of the honourable Council. I can hardly institute proceedings against a bit of linen!"

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Welcome a small evil when it barred the way to a greater one

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