

Margery — Volume 06 eBook

Margery — Volume 06 by Georg Ebers

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Contents

Margery — Volume 06 eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	4
Page 1.....	5
Page 2.....	6
Page 3.....	7
Page 4.....	8
Page 5.....	9
Page 6.....	11
Page 7.....	13
Page 8.....	14
Page 9.....	16
Page 10.....	17
Page 11.....	19
Page 12.....	20
Page 13.....	21
Page 14.....	22
Page 15.....	23
Page 16.....	24
Page 17.....	26
Page 18.....	27
Page 19.....	29
Page 20.....	31
Page 21.....	33
Page 22.....	34

Page 23.....	35
Page 24.....	36
Page 25.....	37
Page 26.....	39
Page 27.....	40
Page 28.....	41
Page 29.....	42
Page 30.....	43
Page 31.....	44
Page 32.....	45
Page 33.....	46
Page 34.....	47
Page 35.....	48
Page 36.....	50
Page 37.....	52
Page 38.....	54
Page 39.....	55
Page 40.....	57

Table of Contents

Section	Table of Contents	Page
Start of eBook		1
CHAPTER VI.		1
CHAPTER VII.		8
CHAPTER VIII.		18
CHAPTER IX.		25
ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:		34
Information about Project Gutenberg		35
(one page)		
(Three Pages)		37

Page 1

CHAPTER VI.

Shall I now set forth how that Ann and I found Herdegen in his hiding-place, a simple little beekeeper's but in the most covert part of the Lorenzer wald, a spot whither no horseman might pass; how that even in his poor peasant's weed my brother was yet a goodly man, and clasped his sweetheart in his arms as ardently as in that first day on his homecoming from Italy—and how that the dear, hunted fellow, beholding me in mourning dress, took his sister to his heart as soon as his plighted love had left the place free? Yea, for the dead had been dear to him likewise, and his love for me had never failed.

When we presently gave ourselves up in peace to the joy of being all together once more, I weened that his eye was more steadfast, and his voice graver and calmer than of old; and whensoever he spoke to me it was in a soft and heartfelt tone, which gave me comforting assurance that he grieved for my grief. And how sweetly and gravely did he beguile Ann to make the most of this sad meeting, wherein welcome and God-speed so closely touched. In the house once more I rejoiced in the lofty flight which lifted this youth's whole spirit above all things common or base; and his sweetheart's eyes rested on him in sheer delight as he talked with my uncle, or with the magistrate who had come forth with us to the Forest. And albeit it was in truth his duty to the Emperor his master, to fulfil his behest, nevertheless he gave us his promise that he would put off the announcement of the sentence till we should return to the town next day, and prolong our time together and with Cousin Maud as much as in him lay.

My aunt's eyes shone with sheer joy when they fell on her darling with Herdegen at her side, and she could say to herself no doubt that these two, who, as she conceived, were made for each other, would hardly have come together again but for her help. Or ever we set forth on the morrow, she called Herdegen to her once more to speak with him privily, and bid him bear in mind that if ever in his wanderings he should meet another youth—and he knew who—he might tell him that at home in the Lorenzerwald a mother's heart was yet beating, which could never rest till his presence had gladdened it once more.

My uncle rode with us into the town. It was at the gate that the magistrate told Herdegen what his fate should be: that he must leave Nuremberg on the morrow at the same hour; and to my dying day I shall ever remember with gladness and regret the meal we then sat down to with our nearest and dearest.

Page 2

Cousin Maud called it her darling's condemnation supper. She had watched the cooking of every dish in the kitchen, and chosen the finest wine out of the cellar. Yet the victual might have been oatmeal porridge, and the noble liquor the smallest beer, and it would have been no matter to our great, albeit melancholy gladness. And indeed, no man could have gazed at the pair now come together again after so many perils, and not have felt his heart uplifted. Ah! and how dear to me were those twain! They had learnt that life was as nothing to either of them without the other, and their hearts meseemed were henceforth as closely knit as two streams which flow together to make one river, and whose waters no power on earth can ever sunder. They sat with us, but behind great posies of flowers, as it were in an isle of bliss; yet were they in our midst, and showed how glad it made them to have so many loving hearts about them. Notwithstanding her joy and trouble Ann forgot not her duty as "watchman," and threatened Uncle Christian when he would take more than he should of the good liquor. He, however, declared that this day was under the special favor of the Saints, and that no evil could in any wise befall him. My Forest-uncle and Master Pernhart had been found in discourse together, and the matter of which they spoke was my Cousin Gotz. And how it gladdened the father to speak of his far-off son! More especially when Pernhart's lips overflowed with praise of the youth to whom his only child owed her early death.

Most marvellous of all was the Magister. Herdegen's return to his beloved robbed Master Peter of his last hope; nevertheless his eyes had never rested on her with fonder rapture. Verily his faithful heart was warmed as it were by the happiness which surrounded her as with a glory, and indeed it was not without some doubts that I saw the worthy man, who was wont to be so sober, raise his glass again and again to drink to Ann, whether she marked him or not, and drain his glass each time in her honor. My Uncle Christian likewise filled his cup right diligently, and seeing him quaff it with such lusty good will I feared lest he should keep us all night at table, when the time was short for Ann and my brother to have any privy speech together. But that good man forgot not, even over the wine-jar, what might pleasure other folks; and albeit it was hard for him to quit a merry drinking-bout he was the first to move away. We were alone by sundown. The Magister had been carried to bed and woke not till noon on the morrow.

The plighted couple sat once more in the oriel where they had so often sat in happier days, and seeing them talking and fondling in the gathering dusk, meseemed for a while that that glad winter season had come again in which they had rejoiced in the springtide of their love.

Page 3

Thus the hours passed, and I was in the very act of enquiry whether it were not time to light the lamps, when we heard voices on the stairs, and Cousin Maud came in saying that Sir Franz had made his way into the house, and that he declared that his weal or woe, nay and his life lay in Herdegen's hand, so that she had not the heart to refuse to suffer him to come in. Hereupon my brother started up in a rage, but the chamber door was opened, and with the maid, who brought the lamp in, the Bohemian crossed the threshold. We maids would fain have quitted them; but the knight besought us to remain, saying, as his eyes humbly sued to mine, that rather should I tarry and speak a good word for him. Then, when Herdegen called upon him to speak, but did not hold forth his hand, Sir Franz besought him to suffer him to be his comrade in his pilgrimage. Howbeit so doleful a fellow was by no means pleasing in my brother's eyes, and so he right plainly gave him to understand; then the Bohemian called to mind their former friendship, and entreated him to put himself in his place and not to forget that he, as a man sound of limb, would have avenged the scorn put on him by Rochow in fair fight instead of with a dagger-thrust. They were condemned to a like penance and, if Herdegen would not suffer him and give him his company, this would be the death-blow to his blighted honor.

Hereupon I appealed to my brother right earnestly, beseeching him not to reject his former friend if it were only for love of me. And inasmuch as on that day his whole soul was filled with love, his hardness was softened, and how gladly and thankfully my heart beat when I beheld him give his hand to the man who had endured so much woe for my sake.

Presently, while they were yet speaking of their departing, again there were voices without; and albeit I could scarce believe my ears I mistook not, and knew the tones for Ursula's. Ann likewise heard and knew them, and she quitted the chamber saying: "None shall trouble me in such an hour, least of all shall Ursula!" The angelus had long since been tolled, and somehap of grave import must have brought us so rare a guest at so late an hour. My cousin, who would fain have hindered her from coming in, held her by the arm; and her efforts to shake off the old lady's grasp were all in vain till she caught sight of Herdegen. Then at length she freed herself and, albeit she was gasping for breath, her voice was one of sheer triumph as she cried: "I had to come, and here I am!"

"Aye, but if you come as a Mar-joy I will show you the way out, my word for that!" my cousin panted; but the maid heeded her not, but went straight toward Herdegen and said: "I felt I must see you once more ere you depart—I must! Old Jorg attended me, and when I am gone forth again Dame Maud will speak my 'eulogium'. Only look at her! But it is all one to me. Find me a place, Herdegen, where I may speak with you and Ann Spiesz alone. I have a message for you."

Page 4

Hereupon my cousin broke in with a scornful laugh, such as I could never have looked to hear from her, with her kind and single heart; and my brother told Ursula shortly and plainly that with her he had no more to do. To this she made answer that it would be a sin to doubt that, inasmuch as he was now a pious pilgrim and honorably betrothed, nevertheless she craved to see Ann. That, too, was denied her, and she did but shrug her shoulders; then she turned to the Bohemian, who had gone towards her, and asked him with icy politeness to remove from her presence, inasmuch as he was an offence to her. Hereupon I saw the last drop of red blood fade away from the young Knight's sickly cheek, and it went to my heart to see him uplift his hands and implore her right humbly: "You know, Ursula, all that hath befallen me for your sake, and how hard a lot awaits me. Three times have I been plighted to you, my promised bride, and as many times cast off...."

"To spare you the like fate a fourth time; all good things being in threes!" she put in, mocking him. "Verily you have cured me of any desire ever to be your Dame, Sir Knight. And since meseems this day our speech is free and truthful, I am fain to confess that such a wish was ever far enough from me, and even when we stood betrothed. A strange thing is love! 'Here's to fair Margery!' one day, on every noble gentleman's lips; and on the morrow: 'Here's to sweet Ursula!' In some folks it grows inwardly, as it were a polypus, and of such, woe is me, am I. My love, if you would know the truth, my lord Baron von Welemisl, love such I have known I gave once for all to that man Herdegen Schopper; it has been his from the time when, in my short little skirts, I learnt to write; and so it has ever been, till the hour when worthy Dame Henneleinlein, the noble Junker's new cousin—it is enough to make one die of laughing!—when that illustrious lady whispered the truth in my ear that her intending kinsman had thrown me over, and, with me, old Im Hoff's wealth, for the sake of a scrivener's wench. And to think that as a boy he was wont to bring me posies, and wear my colors! Nay, and since that time he has shot many a fiery glance at me. Only lately he wrote to his uncle from Paris that he was minded to make me his wife. Ah, you may open your eyes wide, most respected every-one's-cousin Maud, and you likewise, prim and spotless Mistress Margery! Cross yourselves in the name of all the Saints! A dead wolf cannot bite, and as for my love for that man, I may boldly declare that it is dead and buried. But mark me," and she clapped her hand to her heaving bosom, "mark me, somewhat else hath made entrance here, with drums and trumpets and high jubilee: Hate! —I hate you, Herdegen, as I hate death, pestilence, and hell; and I hate you twice as much since your skill with the rapier brought the combat with the Brandenburger, into which I entrapped you, to so perverse an end."

Page 5

Hereupon Cousin Maud, wild with rage herself, gripped her again by the arm to draw her forth from the chamber, but Ursula went on in a milder tone:

“Only a few moments longer, I pray you; for by the Blessed Virgin and all the Saints I swear that I would not have come hither at so late an hour but to deliver my message to Herdegen.”

My cousin released her, and she drew forth a written paper and again enquired for Ann; howbeit my brother said that he did not purpose to call her in, and desired that she would give him the paper, if indeed it concerned him. To this she answered that he would presently know that much, inasmuch as it was her intent to read it to the company, only she would fain have had his fair mistress among the hearers. Howbeit she had a good loud voice, she thanked the Saints, and the doors in the Schoppers' house were scarce thicker than in other folks' houses. The letter in her hand had been given to her to deliver to Herdegen by the newlymade vicar of his Highness the Elector and Archbishop of Treves, who was lodged with the Tetzels. He had not been able to find him, no more than the Emperor's men-at-arms; so he had bidden her take good heed that she gave it into Junker Schopper's own hand. But verily she would do yet more, and spare him the pains of reading it.

Hereupon my brother, in great ire, bid her no longer keep that which was not her own; yet she refused, and whereas Herdegen seized her hand to wrench away the paper she shrieked out to the Bohemian: “Give him his due, for a knave who offends maidens; that outcast for whom I scorned and misprized you! Help, help, if you are no churl!”

My brother nevertheless had already snatched the letter from her, and the Bohemian, who had laid his hand on his dagger, thought better of it as his eye met my look of warning.

It was a fearful moment of terror, and Ursula, whose hair had fallen loose, while her flashing blue eyes, full of hate, shot lightnings on one and another, stood clinging to the heavy dresser whereon our silver and glass vessels were displayed, and cried out as loudly as she could shout: “The letter is from his lady-love in Padua, the Marchesa Bianca Zorzi. That cunning swordsman's blade made her a widow, and now she bids him return to her embrace. The fond and ardent lady is in Venice, and her intent is to revel there in love and pleasure with her husband's murderer. And he—though he may have sworn a thousand vows to the scrivener's hussy—he will do the Italian Circe's bidding, and if he may escape her snares he will fall into those of another. Oh! I know him; and I feel in my soul that his fate will be to dally with one and another in delights and raptures, till the Saints fulfil my heart's chiefest desire, and he comes to despair and anguish and want, and the scrivener's wench breaks her heart under my very eyes with pining and sheer shame. Away, away, Herdegen Schopper! Go forth to joy and to misery! Go-with your pale black-haired mate. Revel and wallow, till you, who have

trampled on this heart's true love, are brought low—as loathsome in the eyes of men as a leper and a beggar.”

Page 6

And she shook the dresser so that the precious glass cup which the German merchants of the Fondaco at Venice had given to my father at his departing, fell to the floor and was broken to pieces with a loud crash.

We had hearkened to her ravings as though spellbound and frozen; and when we at last took heart to put an end to her wild talk, lo, she was gone, and flying down the stairs with long strides.

Herdegen, who had turned pale, struggled to command himself. Cousin Maud, who had lost her breath with dismay, burst into loud weeping; the wild maid's curse had fallen heavy on her soul. I alone kept my senses, so far as to go to the window and look out at her. I saw her walking along, hanging her head; the serving man carried the lantern before her, and the Bohemian was speaking close in her ear.

When I came back into the chamber Cousin Maud had her arm round Herdegen, and was saying to him, with many tears, that the curse of the wicked had no power over a pious and faithful Christian; yet he quitted her in haste to seek Ann, who doubtless would have stayed in the next chamber, and perchance needed his succor. Howbeit the door was opened, and we could scarce believe our eyes when she came in with that same roguish smile which she was wont to wear when, in playing hide-and-seek, she had stolen home past the seeker, and she cried: "Thank the Virgin that the air is clear once more! You may laugh, but in truth I fled up to the very garret for sheer dread of Mistress Tetzl. Did she come to fetch her bridegroom?"

Herdegen could not refrain from smiling at this question, and we likewise did the same; even Cousin Maud, who till this moment had sat on the couch like one crushed, with her feet stretched out before her, made a face and cried: "To fetch him! Ursula who has caught the Bohemian! She is a monster! Were ever such doings seen in our good town?—And her mother was so wise, so worthy a woman! And the hussy is but nineteen!—Merciful Father, what will she be at forty or fifty, when most women only begin to be wicked!" And thus she went on for some while.

Ere long we forgot Ursula and all the hateful to-do, and passed the precious hours in much content, till after midnight, when the Pernharts sent to fetch Ann home. Herdegen and I would walk with her. After a grievous yet hopeful leave-taking I came home again, leaning on his arm, through the cool autumn night.

When I now admonished Herdegen as we walked, as to the fair Marchesa and her letter, he declared to me that in those evil weeks he had spent in bitter yearning as a serving man in the bee-keeper's hut, he had learned to know his own mind. Neither the Marchesa, whom he scorned from the bottom of his heart, inasmuch as, with all her beauty, she was full of craft and lies, no, nor event Dame Venus herself could now turn him aside from the love and duty he had sworn to Ann. He would, indeed, take ship from Genoa rather than from Venice, were it not for shame of such fears of his own

weakness, and that he longed once more to set eyes on our brother Kunz whom he had not seen for so long a space.

Page 7

I found it hard to see clear in this matter. Yet could I not deem it wise to deny him the first chance of proving himself true and honest; likewise meseemed that our younger brother's presence would be a safe guard against temptation. Under the eye of our parent's pictures I bid him good night for the few hours till he should depart, and when I pointed up to them he understood me, and clasped me fondly in his arms saying: "Never fear, little mother Margery!"

We were with Herdegen again or ever it was morning. While we had been sleeping he had written a loving letter to my grand-uncle, who had yesterday forbidden him his presence, to bear witness to his duty and thankfulness.

The cocks still were crowing in the yards, and the country-folk were coming into town with asses and waggons, when I mounted my horse to ride forth with my brother. He was busied in the courtyard with the new serving-man he had hired, by reason that Eppelein, who for safety's sake had not been suffered to go with him into hiding, had vanished as it were from the face of the earth. Nay, and we knew for what cause and reason, for Dame Hennelein had counselled the King's men to seize him, to the end that he might be put on the rack to give tidings of where his master lay hid. If they had caught him his stout limbs would have fared ill indeed; but the light-hearted varlet was a favorite with the serving men and wenches of the court-folk, jolly at the wine cup and all manner of sport, and thus they had bestowed him away. And so, while we were living from day to day in great fear, an old charcoal wife would come in from the forest twice or thrice in every week and bring charcoal to the kitchen wench to sell, and albeit she was ever sent away, yet would she come again and ask many questions.

While we were yet tarrying for Herdegen to be ready the old wife came by with her cart, and when she had asked of some needful matters she pulled off her kerchief with a loud laugh, and lo, in her woman's weed, there stood Eppelein and none other. Hereupon was much rejoicing and, in a few minutes, the crafty fellow was turned again into a sturdy riding man, albeit beardless.

Eppelein's return helped Cousin Maud over the grief of leave-taking. Yet, when at last we must depart, it went hard with her. At the gate we were met by the Pernharts with Ann and Uncle Christian. My lord the chief magistrate likewise was there, to bear witness to Herdegen's departing; also Heinrich Trardorf, his best beloved schoolmate, who had ever been his faithful friend.

We had left the walls and moat of the town far behind us, when we heard swift horses at our heels, and Sir Franz, with two serving-men, joined the fellowship. My brother had soon found a place at Ann's side, and we went forward at an easy pace; and if they were minded to kiss, bending from their saddles, they need fear no witness, for the autumn mist was so thick that it hid every one from his nearest neighbor.

Page 8

Thus we went forth as far as Lichtenhof, and while we there made halt to take a last leave, meseemed that Heaven was fain to send us a friendly promise. The mist parted on a sudden as at the signal of a magician, and before us lay the city with its walls, and towers, and shining roofs, over-topped by the noble citadel. Thus we parted in better cheer than we had deemed we might, and the lovers might yet for a long space signal to each other by the waving of hat and of kerchief.

CHAPTER VII.

Herdegen's departing marks my life's way with another mile-stone. All fears about him were over, and a great peace fell upon me.

I had learnt by experience that it was within my power to be mistress of any heart's griefs, and I could tell myself that dull sufferance of woe would have ill-pleased him whose judgment I most cared for. To remember him was what I best loved, and I earnestly desired to guide my steps as would have been his wish and will. In some degree I was able to do so, and Ann was my great helper.

My eyes and ears were opened again to what should befall in the world in which my lover had lived; all the more so as matters now came about in the land and on its borders which deeply concerned my own dear home and threatened it with great peril.

After the Diet was broken up, the Elector Frederick of Brandenburg was forced to take patience till the princes, lords, and mounted men-at-arms sent forth by the townships, five or six from each, could muster at his bidding to pursue the Hussites in Bohemia. One year was thus idly spent; albeit the Bohemian rebels meanwhile could every day use their weapons, and instead of waiting to be attacked marched forward to attack. Certain troops of the heretics had already crossed the borders, and our good town had to strengthen its walls and dig its moat deeper to make ready for storm and siege. Or ever the Diet had met, many hands had already been at work on these buildings; and in these days every man soul in Nuremberg, from the boys even to the grey-haired men, wielded the spade or the trowel. Every serving-man in every household, whether artisan or patrician—and ours with the rest—was bound to toil at digging, and our fine young masters found themselves compelled to work in sun or rain, or to order the others; and it hurt them no more than it did the Magister, whose feebleness and clumsiness did the works less benefit than the labor did to his frail body.

Wheresoever three men might be seen in talk, for sure it was of state-matters, and mostly of the Hussites. At first it would be of the King's message of peace; of the resistance made by the Elector Palatine, Ludwig, in the matter of receiving the ecclesiastical Elector of Mainz as Vicar-general of the Empire; of the same reverend Elector's loss of dignity at Boppard, and of the delay and mischief that must follow. Then it was noised abroad that the Margrave Frederick of Meissen, who now held the



lands of the late departed Elector Albrecht of Saxony in fief from the King, and whose country was a strong bulwark against the Bohemians, was about to put an end to the abomination of heresy. Howbeit, neither he nor Duke Albrecht of Austria did aught to any good end against the foe; and matters went ill enough in all the Empire.

Page 9

The Electors assembled at Bingen made great complaints of the King tarrying so far away, and with reason; and when he presently bid them to a Diet at Vienna they would not obey. The message of peace was laughed to scorn; and how much blood was shed to feed the soil of the realm in many and many a fight!

And what fate befell the army whereon so great hopes had been set? The courage and skill of the leader were all in vain; the vast multitude of which he was captain was made up of over many parts, all unlike, and each with its own chief; and the fury of the heretics scattered them abroad. Likewise among our peaceful citizens there was no small complaining, and with good cause, that a King should rule the Empire whose Realm of Hungary, with the perils that beset it from the Ottoman Turks, the Bohemians, and other foes, so filled his thoughts that he had neither time, nor mind, nor money to bestow due care on his German States. His treasury was ever empty; and what sums had the luckless war with Venice alone swallowed up! He had not even found the money needful to go to Rome to be crowned Emperor. He had failed to bring the contentious Princes of the Empire under one hat, so to speak; and whereas his father, Charles IV., had been called the Arch-stepfather of the German Empire, Sigismund, albeit a large-hearted, shrewd, and unresting soul, deserved a scarce better name, inasmuch as that he, like the former sovereign, when he fell heir to his Bohemian fatherland, knew not how to deal even with that as a true father should.

Not a week passed after Herdegen's departing but a letter by his own hand came to Ann, and all full of faithful love. I, likewise, had, not so long since, had such letters from another, and so it fell that these, which brought great joy to Ann, did but make my sore heart ache the more. And when I would rise from table silent and with drooping head, the Magister would full often beg leave to follow me to my chamber, and comfort me after his own guise. In all good faith would he lay books before my eyes, and strive to beguile me to take pleasure in them as the best remedy against heaviness of soul. The lives of the mighty heathen, as his Plutarch painted them, would, he said, raise even a weak soul to their greatness and the *Consolatio Philosophiae* of Boetius would of a surety refresh my stricken heart. Howbeit, one single well-spent hour in life, or one toilsome deed fruitful for good, hath at all times brought me better comfort than a whole pile of pig-skin-covered tomes. Yet have certain verses of the Scripture, or some wise and verily right noble maxim from the writings of the Greeks or Latins dropped on my soul now and again as it were a grain of good seed.

Page 10

Sad to tell, those first letters from Herdegen, all dipped in sunshine, were followed by others which could but fill us with fears. The pilgrims had been over-long in getting so far as Venice, by reason that Sir Franz had fallen sick after they had passed the Bienner, and my brother had diligently and faithfully tended him. Thus it came to pass that another child of Nuremberg, albeit setting forth after them, passed them by; and this was Ursula Tetzl, whose father deemed it well to send her forth from the city, where, of a truth, the ground had waxed too hot for her, inasmuch as she had given cause for two bloody frays; and Cousin Maud, to be sure, had not kept silence as to her unbridled demeanor in our house.

Now Mistress Mendel, her aunt, had many years ago gone to the city of St. Mark, and albeit it was there against the laws for a noble to marry with a stranger maiden, she had long since by leave of the Republic, become the wife of Filippo Polani, with whom she was still living in much ease and honor. In Augsburg, in Ulm, and in Frankfurt, there were many noble families of the Tetzels' kith and kin, yet she had chosen to go to this aunt in Venice; and doubtless the expectation of meeting Herdegen there, whether in love or hate, had had its weight with her.

Thus it came to pass that she found him at Brixen, where he tarried with the sick knight; and he wrote that, as it fell, he had had more to do with her and her father than he had cared for, and that in a strange place many matters were lightly smoothed over, whereas at home walls and moats would have parted them; nay, that in Italy the Nuremberger would even call a man of Cologne his countryman.

For my part, I could in no wise conceive how those two should ever more speak a kind word to each other, and this meeting in truth pleased me ill. Howbeit, his next letter gave us better cheer. He had then seen Kunz, meeting him right joyfully, and was lodged in the Fondaco, the German Merchants' Hall, where likewise Kunz had his own chamber.

Herdegen's next letter from Venice brought us the ill tidings that the plague had broken out, and that he could find no fellowship to travel with him, by reason that, so long as the sickness raged in Venice, her vessels would not be suffered to cast anchor in any seaport of the Levant. And a great fear came over me, for our dear father had fallen a prey to that evil.

In his third or fourth letter our pilgrim told us, with somewhat of scorn, that the Marchesa Zorzi, who had in fact removed thither from Padua, and had made friends with Ursula in the house of Filippo Polani, had bidden him to wait on her, by one of her pages; yet might he be proud—he said—of the high-handed and steadfast refusal he had returned, once for all. In truth I was moved to deeper fears by what both my brothers wrote of the black barges, loaded to the gunwale with naked corpses, which stole along the canals in the silent night, to cast forth their dreadful freight in the grave yards on the shore, or into the open sea. The plague was raging nigh to the Fondaco, and my two brothers were

living in the midst of the dead; nay, and Ann knew that Ursula would not depart from her lover, although the Palazzo Polani, where she had found lodging, lay hard by the Fondaco.

Page 11

Yet, hard as as it is to conceive of it, never had the music sounded with noisier delights in the dancing-halls of Venice, nor had the money been more lightly tossed from hand-to-hand over the gaming-tables, nor, at any time, had there been hotter love-making. It must be that each one was minded to enjoy, in the short space of life that might yet be his, all the delights of long years.—And foremost of these was the Marchesa Bianca Zorzi.

As for Herdegen, not long did he brook the narrow chambers of the Fondaco-house; driven forth by impatience and heart-sickness, from morning till night he was in his boat, or on the grand Piazza, or on the watery highways; and inasmuch as he ever fluttered to where ladies of rank and beauty were to be found, as a moth flies to the light, that evil woman was ever in his path, day after day, and whensoever her hosts would suffer it, Ursula would be with her. Nay, and the German maiden, who had learned better things of the Carthusian sisters, was not ashamed to aid and abet that sinful Italian woman. Thus my brother was in great peril lest Ursula's prophecy should be fulfilled by his own fault. Indeed he already had his foot in the springe, inasmuch as that he could not say nay to the Marchesa's bidding that he would go to her house on her name-day. It was a higher power that came betwixt them, vouchsafing him merciful but grievous repentance; the plague, Death's unwearied executioner, snatched the fair, but sinful lady, from among the living. Ursula lamented over her as though it were her own sister that had died; and it seemed that the Marchesa was fain to keep up the bond that had held them together even beyond the grave, for it was at her funeral that the son of one of the oldest and noblest families of the Republic first saw Mistress Ursula Tetzl, and was fired with love for the maiden. She had many a time been seen abroad with the Marchesa, or with the Polanis, and the young gentlemen of the Signoria, the painters, and the poets, had marked her well; the natural golden hue of her hair was an amazement and a delight to the Italians; indeed many a black-haired lady and common hussy would sit on her roof vainly striving to take the color out of her own locks. It was the same with her velvet skin, which even at Nuremberg had many a time brought to men's minds the maid in the tale of "Snow-white and Rose-red."

Thus it fell that Anselmo Guistiniani had heard of her during the lifetime of his cousin the Marchesa Zorzi, while he was absent from Venice on state matters. And when he beheld her with his own eyes among the mourners, there was an end to his peace of heart; he forthwith set himself to win her for his own. Howbeit Ursula met her noble suitor with icy coldness, and when he and Herdegen came together at the Palazzo Polani, where she was lodging, she made as though she saw my lord not at all, and had no eyes nor ears save for my brother; till it was more than Guistiniani would

Page 12

bear, and he abruptly departed. Herdegen's letter, which told us all these things, was full of kindly pity for the fair and hapless damsel who had demeaned herself so basely towards him, by reason that her fiery love had turned her brain, and that she still was pining for him to whom she had ever been faithful from her childhood up. She had freely confessed as much even under the very eyes of so lordly a suitor as Anselmo Giustiniani; and albeit Ann might be sure of his constancy, even in despite of Ursula, yet would he not deny that he could forgive Ursula much in that she had loved much, as the Scripture saith. Every shadow of danger for him was gone and overpast; he had already bid Ursula farewell, and was to ride forth next morning to Genoa, leaving the plague-stricken city behind him, and would take ship there. It was well indeed that he should be departing, inasmuch as yestereve, when he bid Ursula good night, Giustiniani had given him to understand that he, Herdegen, was in his way; at home he would have shown his teeth, and with good right, to any man who had dared to speak to him, but in Venice every man who lodged in the Fondaco was forbid the use of weapons, and he had heard tell of Anselmo Giustiniani that he, unlike the rest of his noble race, who were benevolent men and patrons of learning, albeit he was a prudent statesman and serviceable to the city, was a stern and violent man. This much in truth a man might read in his gloomy black eyes; and many a stranger, for all he were noble and a Knight, who had fallen out with a Venetian Signor of his degree had vanished forever, none knew whither.

As we read these words the blood faded from Ann's cheek; but I set my teeth, for I may confess that Herdegen's ways and words roused my wrath. In Ann's presence I could, to be sure, hide my ire; but when I was alone I struck my right fist into my left hand and asked of myself whether a man or a woman were the vainer creature? For what was it that still drew my brother to that maid who had ever pursued him and the object of his love with cruel hate—so strongly, indeed, that he would have been ready to cherish and comfort her—but joy at finding himself—a mere townbred Junker—preferred above that grand nobleman? For my part, I plainly saw that Ursula was playing the same game again as she had carried on here with Herdegen and the Brandenburger. She spoke the man she hated fair before the jealous Marchese, only to rouse that potent noble's fury against my brother.

After all this my heart rejoiced when we received Herdegen's first letter written from Genoa, nay, on board of the galleon which was to carry him, Sir Franz and Eppelein to Cyprus. In this he made known that he had departed from Venice without let or hindrance, and he bid us farewell with such good cheer, and love, and hope, that Ann and I forgot and forgave with all our hearts everything that had made us wroth. This last greeting came as a fragrant love-posy, and it helped us to think of Herdegen's

Page 13

long pilgrimage as he himself did—as of a ride forth to the Forest. From this letter we were likewise aware that he had never known what peril he had escaped; for ere long I learned from Kunz that paid assassins had fallen on him the very next evening after Herdegen's departing, in the crooked street called of Saint Chrysostom, at the back part of the German Merchants' House; yea, and they would easily have overpowered him but that certain great strong Tyrolese bale-packers of the Fondaco came to his succor or ever it was too late. And it was right certain that these murderers were in Giustiniani's pay, and in the dusk had taken Kunz for his brother, who was some what like him. The younger had come off unharmed by the special mercy of the Saints, but it might well have befallen that, as of old in his schooldays, he should have borne the penalty for Herdegen's misdoings. And whereas I mind me here of the many ways in which my eldest brother prospered and got the best of it over the younger, and of other like cases, meseems it is the lot of certain few to suffer others, not their betters, to stand in their sun, and eat the fruit that has ripened on their trees.

Howbeit, Herdegen had by good hap escaped a sharp fray; and when Ann and I, kneeling side by side in Saint Laurence's church, had offered up a thanksgiving from the bottom of our hearts, meseemed we were as some Captain who sings *Te Deum* after a victory.

Yet, as oftentimes in the month of May, when for a while the sun bath shone with summer heat and glory, there comes a gloomy time with dark days and sharp frost at nights, so did we deem the long space which followed after that glad and pious church-going. Days grew to weeks and weeks to months and we had no tidings, no word from our pilgrims, for good or for evil.

Verily it was well-nigh a comfort and a help when those who were on the look-out, Kunz and other friends, gave it as certain tidings that the galleon which was carrying Herdegen to Cyprus, and which belonged to the Lomellini of Genoa, had been lost at sea. Saracen pirates, so it was told, had seized the ship; but further tidings were not to be got, as to what had befallen the crew and the travellers, albeit Kunz forthwith betook himself to Genoa and the Futterers, who had a house and trade of their own there, did all they might to find their traces. The eldest and the finest link of the Schopper chain had, we deemed, been snatched away, peradventure for ever; the death of her lover had made life henceforth bitter to the third and least, and only the middle one, Kunz, remained unhurt and still such as it might have gladdened his parents' hearts to behold him. Thus I deemed, at least, when after long parting I set eyes on him once more, a goodly man, tall and of a fair countenance. All that had ever been good and worthy in him had waxed and sped well at Venice, that high school of the merchant class; but where was the smiling mirthfulness which had marked him as a youth? The same earnest calm shone in his wise and gentle gaze, and rang in the deep voice he had now gotten.

Page 14

My grand-uncle had esteemed him but lightly, so long as Herdegen was his delight; but whereas Kunz had done good service at Venice and the master of the Im Hoff house there was dead, and our guardian himself, on whom a grievous sickness had fallen, gave himself up day and night to meet his end, he had, little by little, given over the whole business of the trade to his young nephew; thus it came to pass that Kunz, when he was but just twenty, was called upon to govern matters such as are commonly trusted only to a man of ripe years. But his power and wisdom grew with the weight of his burthens. Whether it were at Nuremberg or at Venice, he was ever early to rise and ready, if need should be, to give up his night's rest, sitting over his desk or travelling at great speed; and he seemed to have no eyes nor ears for the pleasures of youth. Or ever he was four and twenty I found the first white hair in his brown locks. Many there were who deemed that the uncommon graveness of his manners came of the weight of care which had been laid on him so young, and verily not without reason; yet my sister's heart was aware of another cause. When I chanced to see his eye rest on Ann, I knew enough; and it was a certainty that I had not erred in my thought, when old Dame Pernhart one day in his presence spoke of Ann as her poor, dear little widow, and the blood mounted to his brow.

I would fain have spoken a word of warning to Ann when she would thank him with heartfelt and sisterly love for all the pains he had been at, with steadfast patience, to find any token of our lost brother. And how fair was the forlorn bride in these days of waiting and of weary unsatisfied longing!

Poor Kunz! Doubtless he loved her; and yet he neither by word nor deed gave her cause to guess his heart's desire. When, at about this time, old Hans Tucher died, one of the worthiest and wisest heads of the town and the council, Kunz gave Ann for her name-day a prayer-book with the old man's motto, which he had written in it for Kunz's confirmation, which was as follows:

“God ruleth all things for the best
And sends a happy end at last.”

And Ann took the gift right gladly; and more than once when, after some disappointment, my spirit sank, she would point to the promise “And sends a happy end at last.”

Whereupon I would look up at her, abashed and put to shame; for it is one thing not to despair, and another to trust with steadfast confidence on a happy outcome. She, in truth, could do this; and when I beheld her day by day at her laborious tasks, bravely and cheerfully fulfilling the hard and bitter exercises which her father-confessor enjoined, to the end that she might win the favor of the Saints for her lover, I weened that the Apostle spake the truth when he said that love hopeth all things and believeth all things.

Page 15

Notwithstanding it was not easy to her, nor to us, to hold fast our confidence; now and again some trace of the lost man would come to light which, so soon as Kunz followed it up, vanished in mist like a jack-o' lantern. And often as he failed he would not be overweary; and once, when he was staying at Nuremberg and tidings came from Venice that a certain German who might be Herdegen was dwelling a slave at Joppa, he made ready to set forth for that place to ransom him forthwith. My grand-uncle, who in the face of death was eagerly striving to win the grace of Heaven by good works, suffered him to depart, and at my entreaty he took my squire Akusch with him, inasmuch as he could still speak Arabic, which was his mother-tongue. Likewise I besought Kunz to make it his care to restore the lad to his people, if it should befall that he might find them, albeit hitherto we had made enquiry for them in vain. This he promised me to do; yet, often as that good youth had longed to see his native land once more, and much as he had talked in praise of its hot sun, in our cold winter seasons, it went hard with the good lad to depart from us; and when he took leave of me he could not cease from assuring me that in his own land he would do all that in him lay to find the brother of his beloved mistress.

Thus they fared forth to the Levant; and this once again we were doomed to vain hopes. Kunz found not him he sought, but a wild Swiss soldier who had fallen into the hands of the Saracens. Him he ransomed, as being a Christian man, for a small sum of money; and as for Akusch he left him at Joppa, whereas his folk were Egyptians and he deemed he had found some track of them there.

Kunz did not go thither with him, inasmuch as in Alexandria all had been done that might be done to discover and ransom a Frankish captive. Nor was Akusch idle there, and moreover fate had brought another child of Nuremberg to that place.

Ursula had become the wife of the Marchese Anselmo Giustiniani, by special favor of the great council, and had come with him to Egypt, whither he was sent by the Republic as Consul. There she now dwelt with her noble lord, and in many letters to my granduncle she warmly declared to him that, so far as in her lay, all should be done to discover where the lover of her youth might be. Her husband was the most powerful Frank in all the Sultan's dominions, and it was a joy to her to see with what diligence he made search for the lost youth. Herdegen, indeed, had ill-repaid her childish love, yet she knew of no nobler revenge than to lay him under the debt of thanks to her and her husband for release and ransom. These words doubtless came from the bottom of her heart; she were no true woman if she could not forgive a man in misfortune for the sins of a happier time. And above all she was ever of a rash and lawless mind, and truthful even to the scorn of modesty and good manners, rather than crafty and smooth of tongue.

Page 16

Yet she likewise failed to find the vanished wanderer, and the weeks and months grew to be years while we waited in vain. It was on the twenty-second day of March in the second twelve month after Herdegen's departing that the treasures of the realm, and among them a nail from the Cross and the point of the spear wherewith they pierced the Lord's side, were to be brought into the town in a solemn procession, and I, with many others, rode forth to meet it. They were brought hither from Blindenberg on the Danube, and the Emperor sent them in token of his grace, that we might hold them in safe keeping within our strong walls. They had been brought thus far right privily, under the feint that the waggon wherein they were carried bore wine vats, and a great throng gathered with shouts of joy to hail these precious things. Prisoners were set free in honor of their coming; and for my own part I mind the day full well, by reason that I put off my black mourning weed and went forth in a colored holiday garb for the first time in a long while.

If I had, in truth, been able by good courage to shake off in due time the oppressing weight of my grief, I owed it in no small measure to the forest-whither we went forth, now as heretofore, to sojourn in the spring and autumn seasons—and to its magic healing. How many a time have I rested under its well-known trees and silently looked back on the past. And, when I mind me of those days, I often ask myself whether the real glad times themselves or those hours of calmer joy in remembrance were indeed the better.

As I sat in the woods, thinking and dreaming, there was plenty for the eye to see and the ear to hear. The clouds flew across in silence, and the soft green at my feet, with all that grew on tree and bush, in the grass, and by the brink of the pool, made up a peaceful world, innocently fair and full of precious charm. Here there was nought to remind me of the stir of mankind, with its haste and noise and fighting and craving, and that was a delight; nor did the woodland sounds.—The song of birds, the hum of chafers and bees, the whisper of leaves, and all the rush and rustle of the forest were its mother-tongue.

Yet, not so! There was in truth one human soul of whom I was ever minded while thinking and dreaming in these woods through whom I had first known the joy of loving, and that was the youth whose home was here, for whose return my aunt longed day and night, whose favorite songs I was ever bidden to sing to my uncle when he would take the oars in his strong old hands of an evening, and row us on the pool—he who peradventure had long since followed my lover, and was dead in some far-off land.

Ann, who was ever diligent, took less pleasure in idle dreaming; she would ever carry a book or some broidery in her hand. Or she would abide alone with my aunt; and whereas my aunt now held her to be her fellow in sorrow, and might talk with her of the woe of thinking of the dearest on earth as far away and half lost, they grew closer to each other, and there was bitter grief when our duty took us back to the town once more. At home likewise Herdegen was ever in our minds, nevertheless the sunshine

was as bright and the children's faces as dear as heretofore, and we could go about the tasks of the hour with fresh spirit.

Page 17

If now and again grief cast a darker shade over Ann, still the star of Hope shone with more comfort for her than for me and Cousin Maud; and it was but seldom that you might mark that she had any sorrow. Truly there were many matters besides her everyday duties, and her errands within and without the house to beguile her of her fears for her lost lover. First of all there came her stepfather's brother, his Eminence Cardinal Bernhardi—for to this dignity had his Holiness raised the Bishop—from Rome to Nuremberg, where he lodged in the house of his fathers. Now this high prelate was such a man as I never met the like of, and his goodly face, beardless indeed, but of a manly brown, with its piercing, great eyes, I weened was as a magic book, having the power to compel others, even against their will, to put forth all that was in them of grace and good gifts. Yet was he not grave nor gloomy, but of a happy cheer, and ready to have his jest with us maidens; only in his jests there would ever be a covert intent to arouse thought, and whensoever I quitted his company I deemed I had profited somewhat in my soul.

He likewise vouchsafed the honor of knowing him to the Magister; and whereas he brought tidings of certain Greek Manuscripts which had been newly brought into Italy, Master Peter came home as one drunk with wine, and could not forbear from boasting how he had been honored by having speech with such a pearl among Humanists.

My lord Cardinal was right well pleased to see his home once more; but what he loved best in it was Ann. Nay, if it had lain with him, he would have carried her to Rome with him. But for all that she was fain to look up to such a man with deep respect, and wait lovingly on his behests, yet would she not draw back from the duty she had taken upon her to care for her brothers and sisters, and chiefly for the deaf and dumb boy. And she deemed likewise that she was as a watchman at his post; it was at Nuremberg that all was planned for seeking Herdegen, and hither must the first tidings come that could be had of him. The old grand dame also was more than ever bound up in her, and so soon as my lord Cardinal was aware that it would greatly grieve his old mother to lose her he renounced his desire.

As for me, I was dwelling in a right happy life with Cousin Maud; never had I been nearer to her heart. So long as she conceived that her comforting could little remedy my woe, she had left me to myself; and as soon as I was fain to use my hands again, and sing a snatch as I went up and down the house, meseemed her old love bloomed forth with double strength. Meseemed I could but show her my thankfulness, and my ear and heart were at all times open when she was moved to talk of her best-beloved Herdegen, and reveal to me all the wondrous adventures he had gone through in her imagination. And this befell most evenings, from the hour when we unclothed till long after we had gone to rest; and I was fain to keep my eyes open

Page 18

while, for the twentieth time, she would expound to me her far-fetched visions: that the Mamelukes of Egypt, who were all slaves and whose Sultan was chosen from among themselves, had of a surety set Herdegen on the throne, seeing him to be the goodliest and noblest of them all. And perchance he would not have refused this honor if he might thereby turn them from their heathenness and make of them good Christians. Nay, nor was it hard for her to fancy Ann arrayed in silk and gems as a Sultana. And then, when I fell asleep in listening to these fancies, which she loved to paint in every detail, behold my dreams would be of Turks and heathen; and of bloody battles by land and sea.

No man may tell his dreams fasting; but as soon as I had eaten my first mouthful she would bid me tell her all, to the veriest trifle, and would solemnly seek the interpretation of every vision.

CHAPTER VIII.

My lord Cardinal had departed from Nuremberg some long while, by reason that he was charged by his holiness the Pope with a mission which took him through Cologne and Flanders to England. Inasmuch as he was not suffered to have Ann herself in his company, he conceived the wish to possess her likeness in a picture; and he sent hither to that end a master of good fame, of the guild of painters in Venice. We owed this good limner thanks for many a pleasant hour. Sir Giacomo Bellini was a youth of right merry wit, knowing many Italian ditties, and who made good pastime for us while we sat before him; for I likewise must be limned, inasmuch as Cousin Maud would have it so, and the painter's eye was greatly pleased by my yellow hair.

Whereas he could speak never a word of German, it was our part to talk with him in Italian, and this exercise to me came not amiss. Also I could scarce have had a better master to teach me than Giacomo Bellini, who set himself forthwith to win my heart and turn my head; nay, and he might have done so, but that he confessed from the first that he had a fair young wife in Venice, albeit he was already craving for some new love.

Thus through him again I learned how light a touch is needed to overthrow a man's true faith; and when I minded me of Herdegen and Ann, and of this Giacomo—who was nevertheless a goodly and well-graced man—and his young wife, meseemed that the woman who might win the love of a highly-gifted soul must oftentimes pay for that great joy with much heaviness and heartache.

Howbeit, I mind me in right true love of the mirthful spirit and manifold sportiveness which marked our fellowship with the Italian limner; and after that I had once given him plainly and strongly to understand that the heart of a Nuremberg damsel was no light

thing or plaything, and her very lips a sanctuary which her husband should one day find pure, all went well betwixt us.

The picture of Ann, the first he painted, showed her as Saint Cecelia hearkening to music which sounds from Heaven in her ears. Two sweet angel babes floated on thin clouds above her head, singing hymns to a mandoline and viol. Thus had my lord Cardinal commanded, and the work was so excellent that, if the Saint herself vouchsafed to look down on it out of Heaven, of a certainty it was pleasing in her eyes.

Page 19

As to mine own presentment; at first I weened that I would be limned in my peach-colored brocade gown with silver dolphins thereon, by reason that I had worn that weed in the early morn after the dance, when Hans spoke his last loving farewell at the door of our house. But whereas one cold day I went into Master Giacomo's work-chamber in a red hood and a green cloak bordered with sable fur, he would thenceforth paint me in no other guise. At first he was fain to present me as going forth to church; then he deemed that he might not show forth my very look and seeming if I were limned with downcast head and eyes. Therefor he gave me the falcon on my hand which had erewhile been my lover's gift. My eyes were set on the distance as though I watched for a heron; thus I seemed in truth like one hunting—"chaste Diana," quoth the painter, minding him of the reproofs I had given him so often. But it would be a hard task to tell of all the ways whereby the painter would provoke me to reprove him. When the likeness was no more than half done, he painted his own merry face to the falcon on my wrist gazing up at me with silly languor. Thereupon, when he presently quitted us, I took the red chalk and wrote his wife's name on a clear place in front of the face and beneath it the image of a birch rod; and on the morrow he brought with him a right pleasant Sonnet, which I scarce had pardoned had he not offered it so humbly and read it in so sweet a voice. And, being plainly interpreted, it was as follows:

"Upon Olympus, where the gods do dwell
Who with almighty will rule earth and heaven,
Lo! I behold the chiefest of them all
Jove, on his throne with Juno at his side.
A noble wedded pair. In all the world
The eye may vainly seek nor find their like.
The nations to his sanctuary throng,
And kings, struck dumb, cast down their golden crowns.

"Yet even these are not for ever one.
The god flies from the goddess.—And a swan
Does devoir now, the slave of Leda's charms.

"Thus I behold the beams of thy bright eye,
And bid my home farewell,—I, hapless wight,
Fly like the god, fair maid, to worship thee !"

Albeit I suffered him to recite these lines to the end I turned from him with a countenance of great wrath, and tore the paper whereon they were writ in two halves which I flung behind the stove. Nor did I put away my angry and offended mien until he had right humbly besought my forgiveness. Yet when I had granted it, and he presently quitted the chamber, I did, I confess, gather up the torn paper and bestow it in my girdle-poke. Nay, meseems that I had of intent rent it only in twain, to the end that I might the better join it again. Thus to this day it lieth in my chest, with other relics of the past; yet I

verily believe that another Sonnet, which Sir Giacomo found on the morrow, laid on his easel, was not so treasured by him. It was thus:

Page 20

“There was one Hans, and he was fain to try,
Like to Olympian Jove, the magic arts
Of witchcraft upon some well-favored maid.
Bold the adventure, but the prize how sweet!
‘Farewell, good wife,’ quoth he, ‘Or e’er the dawn
Hath broke I must be forward on my way.
Like Jupiter I will be blessed and bless
With love; and in the image of a swan.’

“The magic spell hath changed him. With a wreath
About his head he deems he lacketh nought
Of what may best beguile a maiden’s soul.

“Thus to fair Leda flies the hapless wight.—
With boisterous mirth the dame beholds the bird.
‘A right fine goose! Thou’lt make a goodly roast.’”

Howbeit Giacomo would not leave this verse without reply; and to this day, if you look close into the picture, you may see a goose’s head deep in shade among the shrubs in the back part of it, but clearly to be discerned.

Notwithstanding many such little quarrels we liked each other well, and I may here note that when, in the following year, which was the year of our Lord one thousand four hundred and twenty-six, a little son was born to him, since grown to be a right famous painter, known as Giambellini— which is to say Giovanni, or Hans, Bellini, I, Margery Schopper, stood his sponsor at the font. Yea and I was ever a true godsib to him, and that painter might indeed thank my kith and kin when he was charged with a certain office in the Fondaco in Venice, which is worth some hundreds of ducats yearly to him, to this day.

Thus were the portraits ended, and when I behold my own looking from the wide frame with so mirthful and yet so longing a gaze, meseems that Giacomo must have read the book of my soul and have known right well how to present that he saw therein; at that time in truth I was a happy young creature, and the aching and longing which would now and again come over me, in part for him who was gone, and in part I wist not for what, were but the shadow which must ever fall where there is light. And verily I had good cause to be thankful and of good cheer; I was in health as sound as a trout in the brook, and had good chances for making the most of those humble gifts and powers wherewith I was blessed.

As to Herdegen, it was no small comfort to us to learn that my lord Cardinal Bernhardi had taken that matter in hand, and had bidden all the priests and friars in the Levant to make enquiry for tidings of him.



The good prelate was to be nine months journeying abroad, and whereas five months were now spent we were rejoicing in hope of his homecoming; but there was one in Nuremberg who looked for it even more eagerly than we did, and that was my grand-uncle Im Iloff. The old knight had, as I have said, done us thank-worthy service as our guardian; yet had he never been dear to me, and I could not think of him but with silent wrath. Howbeit he was now in so sad and cruel

Page 21

a plight that a heart of stone must have melted to behold him. Thus pity led me to him, although it was a penance to stay in his presence. The old Baron,—for of this title likewise he could boast, since he had poured a great sum into the Emperor's treasury,—this old man, who of yore had but feigned a false and evil show of repentance—as that he would on certain holy days wash the feet of beggar folk who had first been cleansed with care, now in sickness and the near terror of death was in terrible earnest, and of honest intent would fain open the gates of Heaven by pious exercises. He had to be sure at the bidding of Master Ulsenius the leech, exchanged the coffin wherein he had been wont to sleep for a common bedstead of wood; yet in this even he might get no rest, and was fain to pass his sleepless nights in his easy chair, resting his aching feet in a cradle which, with his wonted vain-glory, he caused to be made of the shape and color of a pearl shell. But his nights in the coffin, and mockery of death, turned against him; he had ever been pale, and now he wore the very face of a corpse. The blood seemed frozen in his veins, and he was at all times so cold that the great stove and the wide hearth facing him were fed with mighty logs day and night.

In this fearful heat the sweat stood on my brow so soon as I crossed the threshold, and if I tarried in the chamber I soon lacked breath. The sick man's speech was scarce to be heard, and as to all that Master Ulsenius told us of the seat of his ill, and of how it was gnawing him to death I would fain be silent. Instead of that Lenten mockery of the foot washing he now would do the hardest penance, and there was scarce a saint in the Calendar to whom he had not offered gifts or ever he died.

A Dominican friar was ever in his chamber, telling the rosary for him and doing him other ghostly service, especially in the night season, when he was haunted by terrible restlessness. Nothing eased him as a remedy against this so well as the presence of a woman to his mind. But of all those to whom, on many a Christmas eve, he had made noble gifts, few came a second time after they had once been in that furnace; or, if they did, it would be no more than to come and depart forthwith. Cousin Maud could endure to stay longest with him; albeit afterwards she would need many a glass of strong waters to strengthen her heart.

As for me, each time when I came home from my grand-uncle's with pale cheeks she would forbid me ever to cross his threshold more: but when his bidding was brought me she likewise was moved to compassion, and suffered me to obey.

Page 22

Nevertheless, if I had not been more than common strong, thank the Saints, long sitting with the sick man would of a certainty have done me a mischief, for body and soul had much to endure. Meseemed that pain had loosened the tongue of that hitherto wordless old man, and whereas he had ever held his head high above all men, he would now abase himself before the humblest. He would stay any man or woman who would tarry, to tell of all his sufferings, and of what he endured in mind and body. His confessor had indeed forbidden him to complain of the evil wherewith Heaven had punished him, but none could hinder him from bewailing the evil he had committed in his sinfulness and vanity. And his self-accusings were so manifold and fearful, that I was fain to believe his declaration that all he had ever thought or done that was good was, as it were, buried; and that nought but the ill he had suffered and committed was left and still had power over him. The death-stroke he had dealt all unwittingly, in heedless passion, rose before his soul day and night as an accursed and bloody deed; and every moment embittered by his wife's unfaith, even to the last hour when, on her death-bed, she cursed him, he lived through again, night after night. Whereupon he would clasp his thin hands, through which you might see the light, over his tear-stained face and would not be still or of better cheer till I could no longer hide my own great grief for him.

Howbeit, when I had heard the same tale again and again it ceased from touching me so deeply; so that at last, instead of such deep compassion, it moved me only to dull gloom and, I will confess, to unspeakable weariness. The tears came not to my eyes, and the only use for my kerchief was to hide my yawning and vinaigrette. Thus it fell that the old penitent took no pleasure in my company, and at last weeks might pass while he bid me not to his presence.

Now, when the pictures were ended, whereas he heard that they were right good likenesses, and moreover was told that my lord Cardinal was minded to come home within no long space, he fell into a strange tumult and desired to behold those pictures both of me and of Ann. At this I marvelled not: he had long since learned to think of Councillor Pernbart's step-daughter in all kindness; nay, he had desired me to beg her to forgive a dying old man. We were well-disposed to do his will, and the Pernharts no less; on a certain Wednesday the pictures were carried to his house, and on the morrow, being Thursday, I would go and know whether he were content. And behold my likeness was set in a corner where he scarce could see it; but that of Ann was face to face with him and, as I entered the chamber, his eyes were fixed thereon as though ravished by the vision of a Saint from Heaven. And he was so lost in thought that he looked not away till the Dominican Brother spoke to him.

Page 23

Thereupon he hastily greeted me, and went on to ask of me whether I duly minded that he had been a faithful and thankworthy guardian. And when I answered yes he whispered to me, with a side-look at the friar, that of a surety my lord Cardinal must hold Ann full dear, if he would bid so famous a master to Nuremberg that he might possess her image. Now inasmuch as I wist not yet to what end he sought to beguile me by these questions, I confirmed his words with all prudence; and then he glanced again at the monk, and whispered hastily in my ear, and so low that I scarce might hear him:

“That fellow is privily drinking up all my old Cyprus wine and Malvoisie. And the other priests, the Plebian here—do you know their worldly and base souls? They take up no cross, neither mortify the flesh by holy fasting, but cherish and feed it as the lost heathen do. Are they holy men following in the footsteps of the Crucified Lord? All that brings them to me is a care for my oblations and gifts. I know them, I know them all, the whole lot of them here in Nuremberg. As the city is, so are the pastors thereof! Which of them all mortifies himself? Is there any high court held here? To win the blessing of a truly lordly prelate, a man must journey to Bamberg or to Wurzburg. Of what avail with the Blessed Virgin and the Saints are such as these ruddy friars? Fleischmann, Hellfeld, nay the Dominican prior himself—what are they? Why, at the Diet they walked after the Bishop of Chiemsee and Eichstadt. In the matters of the city—its rights, alliances, and dealings—they had indeed a hand; there is nought so dear to them—in especial to Fleischmann—as politics, and they are overjoyed if they may but be sent on some embassy. Aye, and they have done me some service, as a merchant trader, whensoever I have desired the safe conduct of princes and knights; but as to charging them with the safe conduct of my soul, the weal or woe of my immortal spirit!—No, no, never! Aye, Margery, for I have been a great sinner. Greater power and more mighty mediation are needed to save and deliver me, and behold, my Margery, meseems—hear me Margery—meseems a special ruling of Heaven hath sent.... When is it that his Eminence Cardinal Bernhardi will return from England?”

Hereupon I saw plainly what was in the wind. I answered him that his Eminence purposed to return hither in three or four months’ time; he sighed deeply: “Not for so long—three months, do you say?”

“Or longer,” quoth I, hastily; but he, forgetting the Friar, cried out as though he knew better than I “No, no, in three months. So you said.”

Then he spoke low again, and went on in a confident tone: “So long as that I can hold out, by the help of the Saints, if I.... Yea, for I have enough left to make some great endowment. My possessions, Margery, the estate which is mine own—No man can guess what a well-governed trading-house may earn in half a century.—Yes, I tell you, Margery, I can hold out and wait. Two, or at most three months; they will soon slip away. The older we grow and the duller is life, the swifter do the days fly.”

Page 24

And verily I had not the heart to tell him that he might have to take much longer patience, and, whereas I noted how hard he found it to speak out that which weighed on his mind, I gave him such help as I might; and then he freely confessed that what he most desired on earth was to receive absolution and the Viaticum from the hands of the Cardinal. Meseemed he believed that his Eminence's prayers would serve him better in Heaven than those of our simple priests, who had not even gained a bishop's cope; just as the good word of a Prince Elector gains the Emperor's ear sooner than the petition of a town councillor. Likewise it soothed his pride, doubtless, to think that he might turn his back on this world under the good guidance of a prelate in the purple. Hereupon I promised that his case should be brought to the Cardinal's knowledge by Ann, and then he gave me to understand that it was his desire that Ann should come to see him, inasmuch as that her presentment only had brought him more comfort than the strongest of Master Ulsenius' potions. He could not be happy to die without her forgiveness, and without blessing her by hand and word.

And he pointed to my likeness, and said that, albeit it was right well done, he could bear no more to see it; that it looked forth so full of health and hope, that to him it seemed as though it mocked his misery, and he straitly desired me to send Ann to him forthwith; the Saints would grant her a special grace for every hour she delayed not her coming.

Thereupon I departed; Ann was ready to do the dying man's bidding, and when I presently went with her into his presence he gazed on her as he had on her portrait, as it were bewitched by her person and manners; and ever after, if she were absent for more than a day or two, he bid her come to him, with prayers and entreaties. And he found means to touch her heart as he had mine; yet, whereas I, ere long, wearied of his complaining, Ann's compassion failed not; instead of yawning and being helpless to comfort him, she with great skill would turn his thoughts from himself and his sufferings.

Then they would often talk of Herdegen, and of how to come upon some trace of him, and whereas the old man had in former days left such matters to other folks, he now showed a right wise and keen experience in counselling the right ways and means. Hitherto he had trusted to Ursula's good words and commended us to the same confidence; now, however, he remembered on a sudden how ill-disposed she had ever been to my lost brother, and whereas it was the season of the year when the trading fleet should set sail from Venice for Alexandria in the land of Egypt, he sent forth a messenger to Kunz, charging him to take ship himself and go thither to seek his brother. This filled Ann and me likewise with fresh hope and true thankfulness. Yet, in truth, as for my grand-uncle, he owed much to Ann; her mere presence was as dew on his withered heart, and the hope she kept alive in him, that her uncle, my lord Cardinal, would ere long reach home and gladly fulfil his desires, gave him strength and will to live on, and kept the feeble spark of life burning.

Page 25

CHAPTER IX.

The month of October had come; the Forest claimed us once more, and indeed at that season I was needed at the Forest lodge. A pressing bidding had likewise come to Ann; yet, albeit her much sitting in my grand-uncle's hot chamber had been visited on her with many a headache, she had made her attendance on him one of her duties and nought could move her to be unfaithful.

Moreover, it was known to us that by far the greater half of the Venetian galleons had sailed from the Lido between the 8th and 25th of the past month, and were due to be at home again by the middle of October or early in November. A much lesser fleet went forth from Venice late in the year and came to anchor there again, loaded with spices, in the month of March or not later than April. Hence now was the time when we might most surely look for tidings from the Levant, and Ann would not be out of the way in case any such might come to Nuremberg.

I rode forth on Saint Dionysius' day, the 9th day of October, alone with Cousin Maud; other guests were not long in following us and among them my brothers-in-law and the young Loffelholz pair; Elsa Ebner having wed, some months since, with young Jorg Loffelholz.

Uncle Christian would come later and, if she would consent, would bring Ann with him, for he held himself bound to give his "little watchman" some fresh air. Also he was a great friend in the Pernharts' house, and aught more happy and pleasant than his talks with the old Dame can scarce be conceived of.

Never had the well-beloved home in the Forest been more like to a pigeon cote. Every day brought us new guests, many of them from the city; still, none had any tidings yet of the Venice ships or of our Kunz, who should come home with them. And at this my heart quaked for fear, in despite of the hunting-sports, and of many a right merry supper; and Aunt Jacoba was no better. The weeks flew past, the red and yellow leaves began to fall, the scarlet berries of the mountain ash were shrivelled, and the white rime fell of nights on the meadows and moor-land.

One day I had ridden forth with my Uncle Conrad, hawking, and when we came home in the dusk I could add a few birds to the gentlemen's booty. All the guests at that time present were standing in the courtyard talking, many a one lamenting or boasting of the spite or favor of Saint Hubert that day, when the hounds, who were smelling about the game, suddenly uplifted their voices, and the gate-keeper's horn blew a merry blast, as though to announce some right welcome guest.

The housekeeper's face was seen at Aunt Jacoba's window, and so soon as tidings were brought of who it was that came, the dog-keeper's whips hastily silenced the hounds

and drove them into the kennel. The serving-men carried off the game, and when the courtyard was presently cleared, behold, a strange procession came in.

Page 26

First a long wain covered in by a tilt so high I trove that meseemed many a town gate might be over low to let it pass; and it was drawn by four right small little horses, with dark matted coats and bright, wilful eyes. A few hounds of choice breed ran behind it. From within the hangings came a sharp, shrill screaming as were of many gaudy parrots.

In front of this waggon two men rode, unlike in stature and mien, and a loutish fellow led the horses. Now, we all knew this wain right well. Heretofore, in the life-time of old Lorenz Waldstromer, the father of my Uncle Conrad, it had been wont to come hither once or twice a year, and was ever made welcome; if it should happen to come in the month of August it was at that season filled with noble falcons, to be placed on Board ships at Venice, inasmuch as the Sultan of Egypt and his Emirs were so fain to buy them that they would give as much as a hundred and fifty sequins for he finest and best.

Old Jordan Kubbeling of Brunswick, the father of he man who had now come hither, was wont to send the birds to Alexandria by the hand of dealers, to sell them for him there; but his son Seyfried, who was to this day called Young Kubbeling, albeit he was nigh on sixty, would carry his feathered wares thither himself. Verily he was not suffered to sell any other goods in the land, inasmuch as the Republic set strait bounds to the dealings of German traders. If such an one would have aught from the Levant he may get it only through the Merchants' Hall or Fondaco in Venice; and much less is a German suffered to carry his wares, of what kind soever, out of Venice into the East, inasmuch as every German trader is bound to sell by the hand of the syndicate all which his native land can produce or make in Venice itself. And in no other wise may a German traffic in any matters, great or small, with the Venice traders; and all this is done that the Republic may lose nought of the great taxes they set on all things.

As to Seyfried Kubbeling, the great Council, by special grace, and considering that none but he could carry his birds over seas in good condition, had granted to him to go with them to the land of Egypt. For many and many a year had the Kubbelings brought falcons to the Waldstromers, and whensoever my uncle needed such a bird, or if he had to provide one for our lord constable and prince elector the Duke of Bavaria, or any other great temporal or spiritual prince, it was to be had from Seyfried—or Young Kubbeling. To be sure no man better knew where to choose a fine bird, and while he journeyed between Brunswick, Italy, and the Levant, his sons and brothers went as far as to Denmark, and from thence to Iceland in the frozen Seas, where the royal falcon breeds. Yet are there right noble kinds likewise to be found in the Harz mountains, nigh to their native country.

Page 27

The man who was ever Kubbeling's fellow, going with him to the Levant now, as, erewhile to the far North, was Uhlwurm, who, albeit he had been old Jordan's serving-man, was held by Seyfried as his equal; and whoso would make one his guest must be fain to take the other into the bargain. This was ever gladly done at the Forest-lodge; Uhlwurm was a man of few words, and the hunting-lads and kennel-men held him to be a wise man, who knew more than simply which side his bread was buttered. At any rate he was learned in healing all sick creatures, and in especial falcons, horses, and hounds, by means of whispered spells, the breath of his mouth, potions, and electuaries; and I myself have seen him handle a furious old she-wolf which had been caught in a trap, so that no man dared go nigh her, as though it were a tame little dog. He was taller than his master by a head and a half, and he was ever to be seen in a hood, on which an owl's head with its beak and ears was set. Verily the whole presence of the man minded me of that nightbird; and when I think of his Master Seyfried, or Young Kubbeling, I often remember that he was ever wont to wear three wild-cats' skins, which he laid on his breast and on each leg, as a remedy against pains he had. And the falcon-seller, who was thick-set and broad-shouldered, was in truth not unlike a wild-cat in his unkempt shagginess, albeit free from all craft and guile. His whole mien, in his yellow leather jerkin slashed with green, his high boots, and ill-shaven face covered with short, grey bristles, was that of a woodsman who has grown strange to man in the forest wilds; howbeit we knew from many dealings that he was honest and pitiful, and would endure hard things to be serviceable and faithful to those few whom he truly loved.

All the creatures he brought with him were for sale; even the Iceland ponies, which he but seldom led home again, by reason that they were in great favor with the Junkers and damsels of high degree in the castles where he found shelter; and my uncle believed that his profits and savings must be no small matter.

Scarce had Kubbeling and his fellow entered the court-yard, when the house wife appeared once more at my aunt's window, and bid him come up forthwith to her mistress. But the Brunswicker only replied roughly and shortly: "First those that need my help." And he spoke thus of a wounded man, whom he had picked up, nigh unto death, by the road-side. While, with Uhlwurm's help, he carefully lifted the youth from under the tilt, my uncle, who had long been hoping for his advent, gave him a questioning look. The other understood, and shook his head sadly to answer him No. And then he busied himself with the stricken man, as he growled out to my uncle: "I crossed the pond to Alexandria, but of your man—you know who— not a claw nor a feather. As to the Schopper brothers on the other handBut first let us try to get between this poor fellow and the grave. Hold on, Uhlwurm!"

Page 28

And he was about to lift the sick man in doors. Howbeit, I went up to the Brunswicker, who in his rough wise had ever liked me well, and whereas meseemed he had seen my brothers, I besought him right lovingly to give me tidings of them; but he only pointed to the helpless man and said that such tidings as he had to give I should hear only too soon; and this I deemed was so forbidding and so dismal that I made up my mind to the worst; nay, and my fears waxed all the greater as he laid his big hand on my sleeve, as it might be to comfort me, inasmuch as that he had never yet done this save when he heard tell of my Hans' untimely end.

And then, since he would have none of my help in attending on the sick man, I ran up to my aunt to tell her with due care of the tidings I had heard; but my uncle had gone before me, and in the doorway I could see that he had just kissed his beloved wife's brow. I could read in both their faces that they were bereft of another hope, yet would my aunt go below and herself speak with Young Kubbeling. My uncle would fain have hindered her, but she paid no heed to his admonitions, and while her tiring-woman arrayed her with great care to appear at table, she thanked the saints for that Ann was far away on this luckless day.

Thus the hours sped between our homecoming from the chase and the evening meal, and we presently met all our guests in the refectory. Aunt Jacoba, as was her wont, sat on her couch on which she was carried, at the upper end of the table near the chimneyplace, next to which a smaller table was spread, where Kubbeling and Uhlwurm took their seats as though they had never sat elsewhere in their lives; and in truth old Jordan had taken his meals in that same place, and whenever they came to the Lodge the serving people knew right well what was due to them and their fellows. And whereas they did not sit at the upper table, it was only by reason that old Jordan, sixty years ago, had deemed it a burthensome honor, and more than his due; and Young Kubbeling would in all things do as his father had done before him. My seat was where I might see them, and an empty chair stood between me and my aunt; this was left for Master Ulsenius, the leech. This good man loved not to ride after dark, by reason of highway robbers and plunderers, and some of us were somewhat ill at ease at his coming so late. Notwithstanding this, the talk was not other than cheerful; new guests had come to us from the town at noon, and they had much to tell. Tidings had come that the Sultan of Egypt had fallen upon the Island of Cyprus, and that the Mussulmans had beaten King Janus, who ruled over it, and had carried him beyond seas in triumph to Old Cairo, a prisoner and loaded with chains. Hereupon we were instructed by that learned man, Master Eberhard Windecke, who was well-read in the history of all the world—he had come to Nuremberg as a commissioner of finance from his Majesty, and Uncle Tucher had brought him forth to the Forest—

Page 29

he, I say, instructed us that the forefather of this King Janus of Cyprus had seized upon the crown of Jerusalem at the time of the crusades, during the lifetime of the mighty Sultan Saladin, by poison and perjury, and had then bartered it with the English monarch Richard Coeur de lion, in exchange for the Kingdom of Cyprus. That ancestor of King Janus was by name Guy de Lusignan, and the sins of the fathers, so Master Windecke set forth with flowers of eloquence, were ever visited on the children, unto the third and fourth generation.

I, like most of the assembled company, had hearkened with due respect to this discourse; yet had I not failed to note with what restless eyes my aunt watched the two men when, after hardly staying their hunger and thirst, they forthwith quitted the hall to tend the sick man; she truly—as I would likewise—would rather have heard some present tidings than this record of sins of the Lusignans dead and gone. Presently the two men came back to their seats, and when Master Windecke, who, in speaking, had forgotten to eat, fell to with double good will, Uncle Conrad gravely bid Kubbeling to out with what he had to say; and yet the man, who was lifting the leg of a black-cock to his mouth, would reply no more than a rough, “All in good time, my lord.”

Thus we had to wait; nor was it till the Brunswicker had cracked his last nut with his strong teeth, and the evening cup had been brought round, that he broke silence and told us in short, halting sentences how he had sailed from Venice to Alexandria in the land of Egypt, and all that had befallen his falcons. Then he stopped, as one who has ended his tale, and Uhlwurm said in a deep voice, and with a sweep of his hand as though to clear the crumbs from the table “Gone!”—And that “Gone” was well-nigh the only word that ever I heard from the lips of that strange old man. As he went on with his tale Kubbeling made free with the wine, and albeit it had no more effect on him than clear water, still meseemed he talked on for his own easement; only when he told how and where he had vainly sought the banished Gotz he looked grievously at my aunt’s face. And Kunz, who had crossed the sea in the same ship with him, had helped him in that search.

When I then asked him whether Kunz had not likewise come home with him to Venice, and Kubbeling had answered me no, Uhlwurm said once more, or ever his master had done speaking, “Gone!” in his deep, mournful voice, and again swept away crumbs, as it might be, in the air. Hereupon so great a fear fell upon me that meseemed a sharp steel bodkin was being thrust into my heart; but Kubbeling had seen me turn pale, and he turned upon Uhlwurm in high wrath, and to the end that I might take courage he cried: “No, no, I say no. What does the old fool know about it! It is only by reason that the galley tarried for Junker Schopper and weighed anchor half a day later, that he forbodes ill. The delay

Page 30

was not needed. And who can tell what young masters will be at? They get a fancy in their green young heads, and it must be carried out whether or no. He swore to me with a high and solemn oath that he would not rest till he had found some trace of his brother, and if he kept the galleon waiting for that reason, what wonder? Is it aught to marvel at? And you, Mistress Margery, have of a surety known here in the Forest whither a false scent may lead.—Junker Kunz! Whither he may have gone to seek his brother, who can tell? Not I, and much less Uhlwurm. And young folks flutter hither and thither like an untrained falcon; and if Master Kunz, who is so much graver and wiser than others of his green youth, finds no one to open his eyes, then he may—I do not say for certain, but peradventure, for why should I frighten you all?—he may, I say, hunt high and low to all eternity. The late Junker Herdegen. . . .”

And again I felt that sharp pang through my heart, and I cried in the anguish of my soul: “The late Junker—late Junker, did you say? How came you to use such a word? By all you hold sacred, Kubbeling, torture me no more. Confess all you know concerning my elder brother!”

This I cried out with a quaking voice, but all too soon was I speechless again, for once more that dreadful “Gone!” fell upon my ear from Uhlwurm’s lips.

I hid my face in my hands, and sitting thus in darkness, I heard the bird-dealer, in real grief now, repeat Uhlwurm’s word of ill-omen: “Gone.” Yet he presently added in a tone of comfort: “But only perchance—not for certain, Mistress Margery.”

Albeit he was now willing to tell more, he was stopped in the very act. Neither he nor I had seen that some one had silently entered the hall with my Uncle Christian and Master Ulsenius, had come close to us, and had heard Uhlwurm’s and Kubbeling’s last words. This was Ann; and, as she answered to the Brunswicker “I would you were in the right with that ‘perchance’”. How gladly would I believe it!” I took my hands down from my face, and behold she stood before me in all her beauty, but in deep mourning black, and was now, as I was, an unwedded widow.

I ran to meet her, and now, as she clung to me first and then to my aunt, she was so moving a spectacle that even Uhlwurm wiped his wet cheeks with his finger-cloth. All were now silent, but Young Kubbeling ceased not from wiping the sweat of anguish from his brow, till at last he cried: “‘Perchance’ was what I said, and ‘perchance’ it still shall be; aye, by the help of the Saints, and I will prove it. . . .”

At this Ann uplifted her head, which she had hidden in my aunt’s bosom, and Cousin Maud let drop her arms in which she held me clasped. The learned Master Windecke made haste to depart, as he could ill-endure such touching matters, while Uncle Conrad enquired of Ann what she had heard of Herdegen’s end.

Page 31

Hereupon she told us all in a low voice that yestereve she had received a letter from my lord Cardinal, announcing that he had evil tidings from the Christian brethren in Egypt. She was to hold herself ready for the worst, inasmuch as, if they were right, great ill had befallen him. Howbeit it was not yet time to give up all hope, and he himself would never weary of his search: Young Kubbeling, who had meanwhile sent Uhlwurm with the leech to see the sick man and then taken his seat again with the wine-cup before him, had nevertheless kept one ear open, and had hearkened like the rest to what Ann had been saying; then on a sudden he thrust away his glass, shook his big fist in wrath, and cried out, to the door, as it were, through which Uhlwurm had departed, "That croaker, that death-watch, that bird of ill-omen! If he looks up at an apple-tree in blossom and a bird is piping in the branches, all he thinks of is how soon the happy creature will be killed by the cat! 'Gone! gone' indeed; what profits it to say gone! He has befogged even my brain at last with his black vapors. But now a light shines within me; and lend me an ear, young Mistress, and all you worshipful lords and ladies; for I said 'perchance' and I mean it still."

We listened indeed; and there was in his voice and mien a confidence which could not fail to give us heart. My lord Cardinal's assurance that we were not to rest satisfied with the evil tidings he had received, Kubbeling had deemed right, and what was right was to him a fact. Therefore had he racked his brain till the sweat stood on his brow, and all he had ever known concerning Herdegen had come back to his mind and this he now told us in his short, rude way, which I should in vain try to set down.

He said that, since the day when they had landed in Egypt, he had never more set eyes on Kunz, but that he himself had made enquiry for Herdegen. Anselmo Giustiniani was still the Republic's consul there, and lodging at the Venice Fondaco with Ursula his wife; but the serving men had said that they had never heard of Schopper of Nuremberg; nor was it strange that Kunz's coming should be unknown to them, inasmuch as, to be far from Ursula, he had found hospitality with the Genoese and not with the Venetians. When, on the eve of sailing for home, the Brunswicker had again waited on the authorities at the Fondaco, to procure his leave to depart and fetch certain moneys he had bestowed there, he had met Mistress Ursula; and whereas she knew him and spoke to him, he seized the chance to make enquiry concerning Herdegen. And it was from her mouth, and from none other, that he had learned that the elder Junker Schopper had met a violent death; and, when he had asked where and how, she had answered him that it was in one of those love-makings which were ever the aim and business of his life. Thus he might tell all his kith and kin in Nuremberg henceforth to cease their spying and prying, which had already cost her more pains and writing than enough.

Page 32

This discourse had but ill-pleased Kubbeling, yet had he not taken it amiss, and had only said that she would be doing Kunz—who had come to Egypt with him—right good service, if she would give him more exact tidings of how his brother had met his end.

“Whereupon,” said the bird-seller, “she gave me a look the like of which not many could give; for inasmuch as the lady is, for certain, over eyes and ears in love with Junker Kunz.....”

But I stopped him, and said that in this he was of a certainty mistaken; Howbeit he laughed shortly and went on. “Which of us saw her? I or you? But love or no love—only listen till the end. Mistress Ursula for sure knew not till then that Junker Kunz was in Alexandria, and so soon as she learnt it she began to question me. She must know the day and hour when he had cast anchor there, wherefor he had chosen to lodge in the Genoa Fondaco, when I last had seen him, nay, and of what stuff and color his garments were made. She went through them all, from the feather in his hat to his hose. As for me, I must have seemed well nigh half witted, and I told her at last that I had no skill in such matters, but that I had ever seen him of an evening in a white mantle with a peaked hood. Hereupon the blood all left her face, and with it all her beauty. She clapped her hand to her forehead like one possessed or in a fit, as though caught in her own snare, and she would have fallen, if I had not held her upright. And then, on a sudden, she stood firm on her feet, bid me depart right roughly, and pointed to the door; and I was ready and swift enough in departing. When I was telling of all this to Uhlwurm, who had stayed without, and what I had heard concerning Junker Herdegen, he had nought to say but that accursed ‘Gone!’ And how that dazes me, old mole that I am, you yourselves have seen. But the demeanor of Mistress Tetzl of Nuremberg, I have never had it out of my mind since, day or night, nor again, yesterday.”

He rubbed his damp brow, drank a draught, and took a deep breath; he was not wont to speak at such length. But whereas we asked him many questions of these matters, he turned again to us maidens, and said “Grant me a few words apart from the matter you see, in time a man gets an eye for a falcon, and sees what its good points are, and if it ails aught. He learns to know the breed by its feathers, and breastbone, and the color of its legs, and many another sign, and its temper by its eye and beak;—and it is the same with knowing of men. All this I learned not of myself, but from my father, God rest him; and like as you may know a falcon by the beak, so you may know a man or a woman by the mouth. And as I mind me of Mistress Ursula’s face, as I saw it then, that is enough for me. Aye, and I will give my best Iceland Gervalcon for a lame crow if every word she spoke concerning the death of Junker Herdegen was not false knavery. She is a goodly woman and of wondrous beauty; yet, as I

Page 33

sat erewhile, thinking and gazing into the Wurzburg wine in my cup, I remembered her red lips and white teeth, as she bid me exhort his kin at home to seek the lost man no more. And I will plainly declare what that mouth brought to my mind; nought else than the muzzle of the she-wolf you caught and chained up. That was how she showed her tusks when Uhlwurm wheedled her after his wise, and she feigned to be his friend albeit she thirsted to take him by the throat.—False, I say, false, false was every word that came to my ears out of that mouth! I know what I know; she is mad for the sake of one of the Schoppers, and if it be not Kunz then it is the other, and if it be not with love then it is with hate. Make the sign of the cross, say I; she would put one or both of them out of the world, as like as not. For certain it is that she would fain have had me believe that the elder Junker Schopper had already come to a bad end, and it is no less certain that she had some foul purpose in hand.”

The old man coughed, wiped his brow, and fell back in his seat; we, indeed, knew not what to think of his discourse, and looked one at the other with enquiry. Jung Kubbeling was the last man on earth we could have weened would read hearts. Only Uncle Christian upheld him, and declared that the future would ere long confirm all that wise old Jordan’s son had foretold from sure signs.

The dispute waxed so loud that even our silent Chaplain put in his word, to express his consent to the Brunswicker’s opinion of Ursula, and to put forward fresh proofs why, in spite of her statement, Herdegen might yet be in the land of the living.

At this moment the door flew open, and the housekeeper—who was wont to be a right sober-witted widow—rushed into the refectory, followed by my aunt’s waiting-maid, both with crimson cheeks and so full of their matter that they forgot the reverence due to our worshipful guests, and it was hard at first to learn what had so greatly disturbed them. So soon as this was clear, Cousin Maud, and Ann and I at her heels, ran off to the chamber where Master Ulsenius still tarried with the sick traveller, inasmuch as that if the women were not deceived, the poor fellow was none other than Eppelein, Herdegen’s faithful henchman. The tiringwoman likewise, a smart young wench, believed that it was he; and her opinion was worthy to be trusted by reason that she was one of the many maids who had looked upon Eppelein with favor.

We presently were standing by the lad’s bedside; Master Ulsenius had just done with bandaging his head and body and arms; the poor fellow had been indeed cruelly handled, and but for the Brunswicker’s help he must have died. That Kubbeling should not have known him, although they had often met in past years, was easy to explain; for I myself could scarce have believed that the pale, hollow-eyed man who lay there, to all seeming dying, was our brisk and nimble-witted Eppelein. Yet verily he it

Page 34

was, and Ann flung herself on her knees by the bed, and it was right piteous to hear her cry: "Poor, faithful Epplein!" and many other good words in low and loving tones. Yet did he not hear nor understand, inasmuch as he was not in his senses. For the present there was nought of tidings to be had from him, and this was all the greater pity by reason that the thieves had stripped off his clothes, even to his boots, and thus, if he were the bearer of any writing, he might now never deliver it. Yet he had come with some message. When the men left us there Ann bent over him and laid a wet kerchief on his hot head, and he presently opened his eyes a little way, and pointed with his left hand, which was sound, to the end of the bed-place where his feet lay, and murmured, scarce to be heard and as though he were lost: "The letter, oh, the letter!" But then he lost his senses; and presently he said the same words again and again. So his heart and brain were full of one thing, and that was the letter which some one—and who else than his well-beloved Master—had straitly charged him to deliver rightly.

Every word he might speak in his fever might give us some important tidings, and when at midnight my aunt bid us go to bed, Ann declared it to be her purpose to keep watch by Epplein all night, and I would not for the world have quitted her at such a moment. And whereas she well knew Master Ulsenius, and had already lent a helping hand of her own free will to old Uhlwurm, the tending the sick man was wholly given over to her; and I sat me down by the fire, gazing sometimes at the leaping flames and flying sparks, and sometimes at the sick-bed and at all Ann was doing. Then I waxed sleepy, and the hours flew past while I sat wide awake, or dreaming as I slept for a few minutes. Then it was morning again, and there was somewhat before my eyes whereof I knew not whether it were happening in very truth, or whether it were still a dream, yet meseemed it was so pleasant that I was still smiling when the house-keeper came in, and that chased sleep away. I thought I had seen Ann lead ugly old Uhlwurm to the window, and stroke down his rough cheeks with her soft small hand. This being all unlike her wonted timid modesty, it amused me all the more, and the old man's demeanor likewise had made me smile; he was surly, and notwithstanding courteous to her and had said to her I know not what. Now, when I was wide-awake, Ann had indeed departed, and the house-wife had seen her quit the house and walk towards the stables, following old Uhlwurm.

Hereupon a strange unrest fell upon me, and when Kubbeling presently answered to my questioning that old Uhlwurm had craved leave to be absent till noon, to the end that he might go to the very spot where they had found Epplein, and make search for that letter which he doubtless had had on his person, I plainly saw wherefor Ann had beguiled the old man.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Page 35

Forty or fifty, when most women only begin to be wicked
Shadow which must ever fall where there is light
Woman who might win the love of a highly-gifted soul (Pays for it)

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