

In the Blue Pike — Volume 01 eBook

In the Blue Pike — Volume 01 by Georg Ebers

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CHAPTER I.

“May a thunderbolt strike you!” The imprecation suited the rough fellow who uttered it. He had pointed out of doors as he spoke, and scarcely lowered the strange tones of his voice, yet of all the rabble who surrounded him only two persons understood his meaning—a fading, sickly girl, and the red-haired woman, only a few years her senior, who led the swearing man by a chain, like a tame bear.

The Nuremberg magistrates had had Cyriax’s tongue cropped for gross blasphemy, and listeners could scarcely comprehend the words he mangled in his gasping speech.

The red-haired woman dropped the knife with which she was slicing bread and onions into a pot, and looked at her companion with an anxious, questioning glance.

“Nuremberg Honourables,” he stammered as fast as he could, snatched his wife’s shawl from her shoulders, and drew it over his unkempt head.

The woman beckoned to their travelling companions—a lame fellow of middle age who, propped on crutches, leaned against the wall, an older pock-marked man with a bloated face, and the sickly girl—calling to them in the harsh, metallic voice peculiar to hawkers and elderly singers at fairs.

“Help Cyriax hide. You first, Jungel! They needn’t recognise him as soon as they get in. Nuremberg magistrates are coming. Aristocratic blood-suckers of the Council. Who knows what may still be on the tally for us?”

Kuni, the pale-faced girl, wrapped her bright-coloured garment tighter around her mutilated left leg, and obeyed. Lame Jungel, too, prepared to fulfil red-haired Gitta’s wish.

But Raban had glanced out, and hastily drew the cloth jerkin, patched with green and blue linen, closer through his belt, ejaculating anxiously:

“Young Groland of the Council. I know him.”

This exclamation induced the other vagabonds to glide along the wall to the nearest door, intending to slip out.

“A Groland?” asked Gitta, Cyriax’s wife, cowering as if threatened with a blow from an invisible hand. “It was he—”

“He?” laughed the chain-bearer, while he crouched beside her, drawing himself into the smallest space possible. “No, Redhead! The devil dragged the man who did that down to the lower regions long ago, on account of my tongue. It’s his son. The younger, the



sharper. This stripling made Casper Rubling,—[Dice, in gambler's slang]—poor wretch, pay for his loaded dice with his eyesight.”

He thrust his hand hurriedly into his jerkin as he spoke, and gave Gitta something which he had concealed there. It was a set of dice, but, with ready presence of mind, she pressed them so hard into the crumb of the loaf of bread which she had just cut that it entirely concealed them.

All this had passed wholly unnoticed in the corner of the long, wide room, for all the numerous travellers whom it sheltered were entirely occupied with their own affairs. Nothing was understood except what was said between neighbour and neighbour, for a loud uproar pervaded the tavern of The Blue Pike.

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It was one of the most crowded inns, being situated on the main ferry at Miltenberg, where those journeying from Nuremberg, Augsburg, and other South German cities, on their way to Frankfort and the Lower Rhine, rested and exchanged the saddle for the ship. Just at the present time many persons of high and low degree were on their way to Cologne, whither the Emperor Maximilian, having been unable to come in April to Trier on the Moselle, had summoned the Reichstag.

The opening would take place in a few days, and attracted not only princes, counts, and knights, exalted leaders and more modest servants of the Church, ambassadors from the cities, and other aristocrats, but also honest tradesfolk, thriving money-lenders with the citizen's cloak and the yellow cap of the Jew, vagrants and strollers of every description, who hoped to practise their various feats to the best advantage, or to fill their pockets by cheating and robbery.

This evening many had gathered in the spacious taproom of The Blue Pike. Now those already present were to be joined by the late arrivals whom Cyriax had seen ride up.

It was a stately band. Four aristocratic gentlemen at the head of the troop were followed by an escort of twenty-five Nuremberg mercenaries, a gay company whose crimson coats, with white slashes on the puffed sleeves, presented a showy spectacle. Their helmets and armour glittered in the bright light of the setting sun of the last day of July, as they turned their horses in front of the wide gateway of The Blue Pike to ride into Miltenberg and ask lodgings of the citizens.

The trampling of hoofs, the shouts of command, and the voices of the gentlemen and their attendants outside attracted many guests to the doors and windows of the long, whitewashed building.

The strollers, however, kept the place at theirs without difficulty; no one desired to come near them.

The girl with the bandaged foot had now also turned her face toward the street. As her gaze rested on the youngest of the Nuremberg dignitaries, her pale cheeks flushed, and, as if unconsciously, the exclamation: "It is he!" fell from her lips.

"Who?" asked red-haired Gitta, and was quickly answered in a low tone

"I mean Lienhard, Herr Groland."

"The young one," stuttered Cyriax.

Then, raising the shawl, he continued inquisitively:

"Do you know him? For good or for evil?"



The girl, whose face, spite of its sunken cheeks and the dark rings under the deep-set blue eyes, still bore distinct traces of former beauty, started and answered sharply, though not very loudly, for speech was difficult:

“Good is what you call evil, and evil is what you call good. My acquaintance with Lienhard, Herr Groland, is my own affair, and, you may be sure, will remain mine.” She glanced contemptuously away from the others out of doors, but Cyriax, spite of his mutilated tongue, retorted quickly and harshly:



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"I always said so. She'll die a saint yet." Then grasping Kuni's arm roughly, he dragged her down to him, and whispered jeeringly:

"Ratz has a full purse and sticks to his offer for the cart. If you put on airs long, he'll get it and the donkey, too, and you'll be left here. What was it about Groland? You can try how you'll manage on your stump without us, if we're too bad for you."

"We are not under eternal obligations to you on the child's account," added red-haired Gitta in a gentler tone. "Don't vex my husband, or he'll keep his word about the cart, and who else will be bothered with a useless creature like you?"

The girl lowered her eyes and looked at her crippled limb.

How would she get on without the cart, which received her when the pain grew too sharp and the road was too hard and long?

So she turned to the others again, saying soothingly:

"It all happened in the time before I fell." Then she looked out of doors once more, but she did not find what she sought. The Nuremberg travellers had ridden through the broad gateway into the large square courtyard, surrounded by stables on three sides. When Cyriax and his wife again called to her, desiring to know what had passed between her and Groland, she clasped her hands around her knees, fixed her eyes on the gaystuffs wound around the stump where her foot had been amputated, and in a low, reluctant tone, continued:

"You want to learn what I have to do with Herr Groland? It was about six years ago, in front of St. Sebald's church, in Nuremberg. A wedding was to take place. The bridegroom was one of the Council—Lienhard Groland. The marriage was to be a very quiet one—the bridegroom's father lay seriously ill. Yet there could have been no greater throng at the Emperor's nuptials. I stood in the midst of the crowd. A rosary dropped from the belt of the fat wife of a master workman—she was decked out like a peacock—and fell just in front of me. It was a costly ornament, pure gold and Bohemian garnets. I did not let it lie there."

"A miracle!" chuckled Cyriax, but the girl was obliged to conquer a severe attack of coughing before she could go on with her story.

"The chaplet fairly burned my hand. I would gladly have given it back, but the woman was no longer before me. Perhaps I might have returned it, but I won't say so positively. However, there was no time to do it; the wedding party was coming, and on that account. But what is the use of talking? While I was still gazing, the owner discovered her loss. An officer seized me, and so I was taken to prison and the next day was brought before the magistrates. Herr Groland was one of them, and, since it

wasn't certain that I would not have restored the property I found, he interceded in my behalf. When the others still wished to punish me, he besought my release because it was my first offence. So we met, and when I admit that I am grateful to him for it, you know all."



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“H’m,” replied Cyriax, giggling, as he nudged his wife in the side and made remarks concerning what he had just heard which induced even red-haired Gitta to declare that the loss of his tongue was scarcely a misfortune.

Kuni indignantly turned her back upon the slanderer and gazed out of the window again. The Nuremberg Honourables had disappeared, but several grooms were unbuckling the knapsacks from the horses and carrying them into the house. The aristocratic travellers were probably cleansing themselves from the dust of the road before they entered the taproom.

Kuni thought so, and gazed sometimes into vacancy, sometimes into her own lap. Her eyes had a dreamy light, for the incident which she had just related rose before her mind with perfect clearness.

It seemed as though she were gazing a second time at the wedding procession which was approaching St. Sebald’s, and the couple who led it.

Never had she beheld anything fairer than the bride with the myrtle wreath on her beautifully formed head, whence a delicate lace veil floated over her long, thick, golden hair. She could not help gazing at her as if spellbound. When she moved forward, holding her bridegroom’s hand, she appeared to float over the rice and flowers strewn in her path to the church—it was in February. As Kuni saw the bride raise her large blue eyes to her lover’s so tenderly and yet so modestly, and the bridegroom thank her with a long joyous look of love, she wondered what must be the feelings of a maiden who, so pure, so full of ardent love, and so fervently beloved in return, was permitted to approach the house of God, accompanied by a thousand pious wishes, with the first and only man whom she loved, and to whom she wished to devote herself for her whole life. Again, as at that time, a burning thrill ran through her limbs. Then a bitter smile hovered around her lips.

She had asked herself whether the heart of one who experienced such joys, to whom such a fate was allotted, would not burst from sheer joy. Now the wish, the hope, and every new resolve for good or ill were alike over. At that hour, before the door of St. Sebald’s, she had been capable of all, all, perhaps even the best things, if any one had cherished her in his heart as Lienhard Groland loved the beautiful woman at his side.

She could not help remembering the spell with which the sight of those two had forced her to watch their every movement, to gaze at them, and them only, as if the world contained nothing else. How often she had repeated to herself that in that hour she was bewitched, whether by him or by her she could not decide. As the throng surged forward, she had been crowded against the woman who lost the rosary. She had not had the faintest thought of it when the bailiff suddenly snatched her from her rapturous gazing to stern reality, seizing with a rude grip the hand that held the jewel. Then, pursued by the reviling and hissing of the populace, she had been taken to prison.

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Now she again saw herself amid the vile rabble assembled there, again felt how eagerly she inhaled the air as she was led across the courtyard of the townhall into the presence of the magistrates. Oh, if she could but take such a long, deep breath of God's pure air as she did then! But that time was past. Her poor, sunken chest would no longer permit it. Then she fancied that she was again standing before the judges, who were called The Five.

Four magistrates sat with the Pfander—[Chief of police]—at the table covered with a green cloth, but one, who surpassed all the others both in stature and in manly beauty, was the selfsame Lienhard Groland, who yesterday had led to the altar the wonderfully lovely girl who had bewitched her. She felt how the blood had mounted into her cheeks when she again saw him who could know nothing of her except that she was a jade, who had stolen another person's property. Yet her glance soon met his, and he must have been blind had he not read in the radiant lustre of her blue eyes, which had early learned to woo applause and promise love, what he was to her, and how gratefully her heart throbbed for him.

After the other gentlemen had treated her harshly, and threatened to put her in the stocks, he interceded for her, and entreated his brother magistrates to let mercy, in this instance, take the place of justice, because she was so young, and perhaps had intended to return the rosary later. Finally he bent smiling toward his companions and said something to them in a subdued tone. The voice was so low that his intention to keep her in ignorance of it was evident. But Kuni's hearing had been as keen as a bird's, and not a word escaped her. He could not help regarding it as an evil omen for him and his young wife if a girl, hitherto unpunished, should be plunged into disgrace and perhaps made miserable throughout the rest of a long life on account of his wedding procession.

How high her heart had throbbed at this request, and when it was granted, the discussion closed, and she herself informed that she would be set free, she hurried after her preserver, who had left the Council chamber with the other magistrates, to thank him. He permitted her to detain him, and when she found herself alone in his presence, at first, with streaming eyes, she was unable to utter a word. He laid his hand kindly on her shoulder to soothe her, and then listened to her assurance that, though she was a strolling rope-dancer, she had never taken other people's property.

Now she closed her eyes to have a clearer vision of the picture evoked by memory, which rose so vividly before her. Again she saw herself seize his hand to kiss it humbly, yet with fervent devotion; again she met the patronizing but friendly smile with which he withdrew it, and a thrill of happiness ran through every nerve, for she imagined she once more felt his slender white hand soothingly stroke her black hair and burning cheeks, as if she were a sick child who needed help. Later years had never granted her aught more blissful than that moment.

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As had often happened before, the memory of it overmastered her with such power that she could not escape it, but recalled his every look and movement. Meanwhile, she imagined that she heard his voice, whose deep, pure tones had pleased her ear, alive to harmony, more than any to which she had ever listened, counselling her to give up her vagrant life, and again received his assurance that he pitied her, and it would grieve him if she, who seemed worthy of a better fate, should be ruined, body and soul, so young. Thus absorbed, she neither saw nor listened to anything that was occurring near her or in the large room of the tavern, but stood gazing into vacancy as if rapt away from earth.

True, Cyriax and the others had lowered their voices, for they were talking about her and the aristocratic couple on whose wedding day Kuni had stolen the rosary.

Raban, a tall, lank vagabond with red-rimmed eyes, whose ugly face bristled with a half-grown black beard, had a few more particulars to give concerning the bride and bridegroom. He wandered about the world and, whenever he stretched out his hand to beg, gave the pretext that he was collecting the price of blood required for a man whom he had killed in self-defence, that his own head might not fall under the axe of the executioner. His dead father had heated the furnaces in the smelting works at Eschenbach, near Nuremberg, and the bride was Katharina, the eldest of the three daughters of the owner, old Harsdorffer of the Council. He had been a man of steel and iron, and opposed Lienhard Groland's father at every point, not excepting even their official business. When he discovered that the young man was carrying on a love affair with his daughter, he had summoned him before a court of justice for a breach of the law which forbade minors to betroth themselves without parental consent. The magistrates sentenced Lienhard to five years' exile from the city but, through the Emperor's mediation, he was spared the punishment. Old Harsdorffer afterward succeeded in keeping the suitor away from his daughter a long time, but finally relinquished his opposition.

"The devil came soon enough and broke his stiff neck," added Cyriax, on whom the vagabond's story had had the same effect as a red rag upon a bull. Spite of the old slanderer's mutilated tongue, invectives flowed fast enough from his lips when he thought of young Frau Groland's father. If the Groland outside resembled his father-in-law, he would like to drink him a pledge that should burn like the plague and ruin.

He snatched a flask from his pocket as he spoke, and after a long pull and a still longer "A-ah!" he stammered:

"I've been obliged to bid farewell to my tongue, yet it feels as if it were sticking in my throat like the dry sole of a shoe. That's what comes from talking in this dog-day heat."

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He looked into the empty bottle and was about to send Kuni out to fill it again. In turning to do so he saw her pale face, wan with suffering, but which now glowed with a happy light that lent it a strange beauty. How large her blue eyes were! When he had picked her up in Spain she was already a cripple and in sore distress. But Groland probably knew what he was about when he released her. She must have been a pretty creature enough at that time, and he knew that before her fall she was considered one of the most skilful rope-dancers.

An elderly woman with a boy, whose blindness helped her to arouse compassion, was crouching by Raban's side, and had just been greeted by Kuni as an old acquaintance. They had journeyed from land to land in Loni's famous troupe, and as Raban handed Cyriax his own bottle, he turned from the dreaming girl, whose services he no longer needed, and whispered to the blind boy's mother—who among the people of her own calling still went by the name of Dancing Gundel—the question whether yonder ailing cripple had once had any good looks, and what position she had held among rope-dancers.

The little gray-haired woman looked up with sparkling eyes. Under the name of "Phyllis" she had earned, ere her limbs were stiffened by age, great applause by her dainty egg-dance and all sorts of feats with the balancing pole. The manager of the band had finally given her the position of crier to support herself and her blind boy. This had made her voice so hollow and hoarse that it was difficult to understand her as, with fervid eloquence, vainly striving to be heard by absent-minded Kuni, she began: "She surpassed even Maravella the Spaniard. And her feats at Augsburg during the Reichstag—I tell you, Cyriax, when she ascended the rope to the belfry, with the pole and without—"

"I've just heard of that from another quarter," he interrupted. "What I want to know is whether she pleased the eyes of men."

"What's that to you?" interposed red-haired Gitta jealously, trying to draw him away from Gundel by the chain.

Raban laughed heartily, and lame Jungel, chuckling, rapped on the floor with his right crutch, exclaiming:

"Good for you!"

Kuni was accustomed to such outbursts of merriment. They were almost always awakened by some trifle, and this time she did not even hear the laughing. But Cyriax struck his wife so rudely on the hand that she jerked furiously at the chain and, with a muttered oath, blew on the bruised spot. Meanwhile Gundel was telling the group how many distinguished gentlemen had formerly paid court to Kuni. She was as agile as a squirrel. Her pretty little face, with its sparkling blue eyes, attracted the men as bacon



draws mice. Then, pleased to have listeners, she related how the girl had lured florins and zecchins from the purse of many a wealthy ecclesiastic. She might have been as rich as the Fuggers if she

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hadn't met with the accident and had understood how to keep what she earned. But she could not hold on to her gold. She had flung it away like useless rubbish. So long as she possessed anything there had been no want in Loni's company. She, Gundel, had caught her arm more than once when she was going to fling Hungarian ducats, instead of coppers, to good-for-nothing beggars. She had often urged her, too, to think of old age, but Kuni—never cared for any one longer than a few weeks, though there were some whom she might easily have induced to offer her the wedding ring.

She glanced at Kuni again, but, perceiving that the girl did not yet vouchsafe her even a single look, she was vexed, and, moving nearer to Cyriax, she added in a still lower tone:

“A more inconstant, faithless, colder heart than hers I never met, even among the most disorderly of Loni's band; for, blindly as the infatuated lovers obeyed every one of her crazy whims, she laughed at the best and truest. ‘I hate them all,’ she would say. ‘I wouldn't let one of them even touch me with the tip of his finger if I could not use their zecchins. ‘With these,’ she said, ‘she would help the rich to restore to the poor what they had stolen from them.’ She really treated many a worthy gentleman like a dog, nay, a great deal worse; for she was tender enough to all the animals that travelled with the company; the poodles and the ponies, nay, even the parrots and the doves. She would play with the children, too, even the smallest ones—isn't that so, Peperle?—like their own silly mothers.” She smoothed the blind boy's golden hair as she spoke, then added, sighing:

“But the little fellow was too young to remember it. The rattle which she gave him at Augsburg—it was just before the accident—because she was so fond of him—Saint Kunigunde, how could we keep such worthless jewels in our sore need?—was made of pure silver. True, the simpletons who were so madly in love with her, and with whom she played so cruelly, would have believed her capable of anything sooner than such kindness. There was a Swabian knight, a young fellow——”

Here she stopped, for Cyriax and the other vagabonds, even the girl of whom she was speaking, had started up and were gazing at the door.

Kuni opened her eyes as wide as if a miracle had happened, and the crimson spots on her sunken cheeks betrayed how deeply she was agitated. But she had never experienced anything of this kind; for while thinking of the time when, through Lienhard Groland's intercession, she had entered the house of the wealthy old Frau Schurstab, in order to become estranged from a vagabond life, and recalling how once, when he saw her sorrowful there, he had spoken kindly to her, it seemed as if she had actually heard his own voice. As it still appeared to echo in her ears, she suddenly became aware that the words really did proceed from his lips. What she had heard in her dream and what



now came from his own mouth, as he stood at the door, blended into one. She would never have believed that the power of imagination could reproduce anything so faithfully.

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Listening intently, she said to herself that, during the many thousand times when she had talked with him in fancy, it had also seemed as if she heard him speak. And the same experience had befallen her eyes; for whenever memory reverted to those distant days, she had beheld him just as he now looked standing on the threshold, where he was detained by the landlady of The Pike. Only his face had become still more manly, his bearing more dignified. The pleasant, winning expression of the bearded lips remained unchanged, and more than once she had seen his eyes sparkle with a far warmer light than now, while he was thanking the portly woman for her cordial welcome.

While Kuni's gaze still rested upon him as if spellbound, Cyriax nudged her, stammering hurriedly:

"They will have to pass us. Move forward, women, in front of me. Spread out your skirt, you Redhead! It might be my death if yonder Nuremberg fine gentleman should see me here and recollect one thing and another."

As he spoke he dragged Kuni roughly from the window, flung the sack which he had brought in from the cart down before him, and made them sit on it, while he stretched himself on the floor face downward, and pretended to be asleep behind the women.

This suited Kuni. If Lienhard Groland passed her now he could not help seeing her, and she had no greater desire than to meet his glance once more before her life ended. Yet she dreaded this meeting with an intensity plainly revealed by the passionate throbbing of her heart and the panting of her weakened lungs. There was a rushing noise in her ears, and her eyes grew dim. Yet she was obliged to keep them wide open--what might not the next moment bring?

For the first time since her entrance she gazed around the large, long apartment, which would have deserved the name of hall had it not been too low.

The heated room, filled with buzzing flies, was crowded with travellers. The wife and daughter of a feather-curler, who were on their way with the husband and father to the Reichstag, where many an aristocratic gentleman would need plumes for his own head and his wife's, had just dropped the comb with which they were arranging each other's hair. The shoemaker and his dame from Nuremberg paused in the sensible lecture they were alternately addressing to their apprentices. The Frankfort messenger put down the needle with which he was mending the badgerskin in his knapsack. The travelling musicians who, to save a few pennies, had begun to eat bread, cheese, and radishes, instead of the warm meals provided for the others, let their knives drop and set down the wine-jugs. The traders, who were hotly arguing over Italian politics and the future war with Turkey, were silent. The four monks, who had leaned their heads against the cornice of the wide, closed fireplace and, in spite of the flies which buzzed around them, had fallen asleep, awoke. The vender of indulgences in the black



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cowl interrupted the impressive speech which he was delivering to the people who surrounded his coffer. This group also —soldiers, travelling artisans, peasants, and tradesfolk with their wives, who, like most of those present, were waiting for the vessel which was to sail down the Main early the next morning—gazed toward the door. Only the students and Bacchantes,—[Travelling scholars]—who were fairly hanging on the lips of a short, slender scholar, with keen, intellectual features, noticed neither the draught of air caused by the entrance of the distinguished arrivals and their followers, nor the general stir aroused by their appearance, until Dr. Eberbach, the insignificant, vivacious speaker, recognised in one of the group the famous Nuremberg humanist, Wilibald Pirckheimer.

CHAPTER II.

At first Dietel, the old waiter, whose bullet-shaped head was covered with thick gray hair, also failed to notice them. Without heeding their entrance, he continued,—aided by two assistants who were scarcely beyond boyhood,—to set the large and small pine tables which he had placed wherever he could find room.

The patched tablecloths which he spread over the tops were coarse and much worn; the dishes carried after him by the two assistants, whose knees bent under the burden, were made of tin, and marred by many a dent. He swung his stout body to and fro with jerks like a grasshopper, and in doing so his shirt rose above his belt, but the white napkin under his arm did not move a finger's width. In small things, as well as great ones, Dietel was very methodical. So he continued his occupation undisturbed till an inexperienced merchant's clerk from Ulm, who wanted to ride farther speedily, accosted him and asked for some special dish. Dietel drew his belt farther down and promptly snubbed the young man with the angry retort; "Everybody must wait for his meal. We make no exceptions here."

Interrupted in his work, he also saw the newcomers, and then cast a peevish glance at one corner of the room, where stood a table covered with fine linen and set with silver dishes, among them a platter on which early pears and juicy plums were spread invitingly. The landlady of The Pike had arranged them daintily upon fresh vine leaves an hour before with her own plump but nimble hands. Of course they were intended for the gentlemen from Nuremberg and their guests. Dietel, too, now knew them, and saw that the party numbered a person no less distinguished than the far-famed and highly learned Doctor and Imperial Councillor, Conrad Peutinger. They were riding to Cologne together under the same escort. The citizens of Nuremberg were distinguished men, as well as their guest, but Dietel had served distinguished personages by the dozen at The Blue Pike for many years—among them even crowned heads—and they had wanted for nothing. His skill, however, was not sufficient



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for these city demigods; for the landlord of The Pike intended to look after their table himself. Tomfoolery! There was more than enough for him to do that day over yonder in the room occupied by the lansquenets and the city soldiers, where he usually directed affairs in person. It roused Dietel's ire. The cooking of The Blue Pike, which the landlady superintended, could vie with any in the Frank country, on the Rhine, or in Swabia, yet, forsooth, it wasn't good enough for the Nuremberg guests. The Council cook, a fat, pompous fellow, accompanied them, and had already begun to bustle about the hearth beside the hostess. They really would have required no service at all, for they brought their own attendants. It certainly was not Dietel's usual custom to wish any one evil, but if Gotz Berlichinger, who had recently attacked a party of Leipsic merchants at Forchheim, or Hans von Geisslingen had fallen upon them and subdued their arrogance, it would not have spoiled Dietel's appetite.

At last they moved forward. The others might treat them as they chose; he, at least, would neither say anything to them nor bow before them as the ears did before Joseph in Holy Writ. Nevertheless, he looked out of the corner of his eye at them as he took from the basket of the round-checked kitchen maid, who had now found her way to him, one fresh brown roll after another, and placed them beside plate after plate. How well risen and how crusty they were! They fairly cracked under the pressure of the thumb, yet wheat rolls had been baked specially for the Nuremberg party. Was God's good gift too poor for the Honourables with the gold chains?

Now, even fragile little Dr. Eberbach, and the students and Bacchantes who had stood around him like disciples, intently listening to his words, bowed respectfully. The ungodly, insolent fellows who surrounded the Dominican Jacobus, the vender of indulgences, had turned from him, while he exhorted them, as if he were an importunate beggar. What did the merchants, artisans, and musicians know about the godless Greek and Latin writings which brought the names of Pirckheimer and Peutinger before the people, yet how reverently many of these folk now bowed before them. Only the soldiers with swords at their sides held their heads erect. They proved that they were right in calling themselves "pious lansquenets." The broad-shouldered knight, with the plumed hat and suit of mail, who walked beside them, was Sir Hans von Oberritz, the Schultheiss of Nuremberg. He was said to be a descendant of the ancient Brandenstein race, and yet—was the world topsy-turvy?—he, too, was listening to every word uttered by Wilibald Pirckheimer and Dr. Peutinger as if it were a revelation. The gray-haired leech and antiquary, Hartmann Schedel, whom Herr Wilibald,—spite of the gout which sometimes forced a slight grimace to distort his smooth-shaven, clever, almost over-plump face,—led by the arm like a careful son, resembled, with his long, silver locks, a patriarch or an apostle.



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The young envoy of the Council, Herr Lienhard Groland, lingered behind the others and seemed to be taking a survey of the room.

What bright, keen eyes he had; how delicately cut was the oval face with the strong, very slightly hooked nose; how thick were the waving brown locks that fell upon the slender neck; how well the pointed beard suited his chin; with what austere majesty his head rose above the broad, plaited, snow-white ruff, which he must have just donned!

Now his eyes rested upon the vagrants, and Dietel perceived something which threw him completely off his balance; for the first time he changed the position of his napkin, jerking it from its place under his left arm to tuck it beneath the right one. He had known Kuni a long time. In her prosperous days, when she was the ornament of Loni's band and had attracted men as a ripe pear draws wasps, she had often been at the tavern, and both he and the landlord of The Pike had greeted her cordially, for whoever sought her favour was obliged to order the best and dearest of everything, not only for her and himself, but for a whole tableful of hungry guests. When she had met him just now he would never have recognised her had she not been in Gundel's company. True, the sight of her in this plight was not unexpected, yet it pierced him to the heart, for Kuni had been a remarkable girl, and yet was now in far greater penury than many of much less worth whom he had watched stumbling along the downward path before her. When he saw Lienhard Groland's glance rest upon her, he noticed also how strangely her emaciated face changed colour. Though it had just been as white as the napkin under his arm, it now flushed as red as the balsam blossoms in the window, and then paled again. She had formerly gazed around her boldly enough, but now she lowered her eyes to the floor as modestly as any demure maiden on her way to church.

And what did this mean?

The honourable member of the Nuremberg Council must be well acquainted with the girl, for his eyes had scarcely met hers ere a strange smile flitted over his grave, manly face.

Now—was it in jest or earnest?—he even shook his finger at her. He stopped in front of her a moment, too, and Dietel heard him exclaim:

“So here you are! On the highway again, in spite of everything?”

The distance which separated them and the loud talking of the guests prevented the waiter's hearing her reply, “The captive bird can not endure the cage long, Herr Lienhard,” far less the words, added in a lower tone:

“Yet flight has been over since my fall at Augsburg. My foot lies buried there with many other things which will never return. I can only move on wheels behind the person who takes me.” Then she paused and ventured to look him full in the face. Her eyes met his



beaming with a radiant light, but directly after they were dimmed by a mist of tears. Yet she forced them back, though the deep suffering from which they sprung was touchingly apparent in the tone of her voice, as she continued:



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“I have often wished, Herr Lienhard, that the cart was my coffin and the tavern the graveyard.”

Dietel noticed the fit of coughing which followed this speech, and the hasty movement with which the Nuremberg patrician thrust his hand into his purse and tossed Kuni three coins. They did not shine with the dull white lustre of silver, but with the yellow glitter of gold. The waiter’s eyes were sharp and he had his own ideas about this unprecedented liberality.

The travelling companions of the aristocratic burgomaster and ambassadors of the proud city of Nuremberg had also noticed this incident.

After they had taken their seats at the handsomely ornamented table, Wilibald Pirckheimer bent toward the ear of his young friend and companion in office, whispering:

“The lovely wife at home whom you toiled so hard to win, might, I know, rest quietly, secure in the possession of all the charms of foam-born Aphrodite, yet I warn you. Whoever is as sure of himself as you cares little for the opinion of others. And yet we stand high, friend Lienhard, and therefore are seen by all; but the old Argus who watches for his neighbour’s faults has a hundred sharp eyes, while among the gods three are blind—Justice, Happiness, and Love. Besides, you flung gold to yonder worthless rabble. I would rather have given it to the travelling musicians. They, like us humanists, are allied to the Muses and, moreover, are harmless, happy folk.”

Lienhard Groland listened till his older friend had finished. Then, after thanking him for his well-meant counsel, he answered, turning to the others also:

“In better days rope-dancing was the profession of yonder poor, coughing creature. Now, after a severe accident, she is dragging herself through life on one foot. I once knew her, for I succeeded in saving her from terrible disgrace.”

“And,” replied Wilibald Pirckheimer, “we would rather show kindness a second and a third time to any one on whom we have bestowed a favour than to render it once to a person from whom we have received one. This is my own experience. But the wise man must guard against nothing more carefully than to exceed moderation in his charity. How easily, when Caius sees Cnejus lavish gold where silver or copper would serve, he thinks of Martial’s apt words: ‘Who gives great gifts, expects great gifts again.’—[Martial, Epigram 5, 59, 3.]—Do not misunderstand me. What could yonder poor thing bestow that would please even a groom? But the eyes of suspicion scan even the past. I have often seen you open your purse, friend Lienhard, and this is right. Whoever hath ought to give, and my dead mother used to say that: ‘No one ever became a beggar by giving at the proper time.’”



“And life is gladdened by what one gives to another,” remarked Conrad Peutinger, the learned Augsburg city clerk, who valued his Padua title of doctor more than that of an imperial councillor. “It applies to all departments. Don’t allow yourself to regret your generosity, friend Lienhard. ‘Nothing becomes man better than the pleasure of giving,’ says Terentius.—[Terenz. Ad. 360]—Who is more liberal than the destiny which adorns the apple tree that is to bear a hundred fruits, with ten thousand blossoms to please our eyes ere it satisfies our appetite?”

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“To you, if to any one, it gives daily proof of liberality in both learning and the affairs of life,” Herr Wilibald assented.

“If you will substitute ‘God, our Lord,’ for ‘destiny,’ I agree with you,” observed the Abbot of St. AEgidius in Nuremberg.

The portly old prelate nodded cordially to Dr. Peutinger as he spoke. The warm, human love with which he devoted himself to the care of souls in his great parish consumed the lion’s share of his time and strength. He spent only his leisure hours in the study of the ancient writers, in whom he found pleasure, and rejoiced in the work of the humanists without sharing their opinions.

“Yes, my dear Doctor,” he continued in his deep voice, in a tone of the most earnest conviction, “if envy were ever pardonable, he who presumed to feel it toward you might most speedily hope to find forgiveness. There is no physical or mental gift with which the Lord has not blessed you, and to fill the measure to overflowing, he permitted you to win a beautiful and virtuous wife of noble lineage.”

“And allowed glorious daughters to grow up in your famous home,” cried little Dr. Eberbach, waving his wineglass enthusiastically. “Who has not heard of Juliane Peutinger, the youngest of humanists, but no longer one of the least eminent, who, when a child only four years old, addressed the Emperor Maximilian in excellent Latin. But when, as in the child Juliane, the wings of the intellect move so powerfully and so prematurely, who would not think of the words of the superb Ovid: ‘The human mind gains victories more surely than lances and arrows.’”

But, ere he had finished the verse which, like many another Latin one, he mingled with his German words, he noticed Lienhard Groland eagerly motioning to him to stop. The latter knew only too well what had not yet reached the ears of Eberbach in Vienna. The marvellous child, whose precocious learning he had just extolled as a noble gift of Providence to the father, was no longer among the living. Her bright eyes had closed ere she reached maidenhood.

Dr. Eberbach, in painful embarrassment, tried to apologize for his heedlessness, but the Augsburg city clerk, with a friendly gesture, endeavoured to soothe his young fellow-scholar.

“It brought the true nature of happiness very vividly before all our eyes,” he remarked with a faint sigh. “In itself it is not lasting. A second piece of good fortune is needed to maintain the first. Mine was indeed great and beautiful enough. But we will let the dead rest. What more have you heard concerning the first books of the Annales of Tacitus, said to have been discovered in the Corvey monastery? If the report should be verified
_____”

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Here Eberbach, delighted to find an opportunity to afford the honoured man whom he had unwittingly grieved a little pleasure, eagerly interrupted. Hurriedly thrusting his hand into the breast of his black doublet, he drew forth several small sheets on which he had succeeded in copying the beginning of the precious new manuscript, and handed them to Peutinger, who, with ardent zeal, instantly became absorbed in the almost illegible characters of his young comrade in learning. Wilibald Pirckheimer and Lienhard Groland also frequently forgot the fresh salmon and young partridges, which were served in succession, to share this brilliant novelty. The Abbot of St. AEgidius, too, showed his pleasure in the fortunate discovery, and did not grow quieter until the conversation turned upon the polemical writing which Reuchlin had just finished. It had recently appeared in Frankfort under the title: The Eye Mirror, and assailed with crushing severity those who blamed him for opposing the proposal to destroy the books of the Jews.

“What in the world do we care about the writings of the Hebrews?” the deep bass voice of Hans von Oberritz here interrupted the conversation. “A new Latin manuscript—that I value! But has this noble fragment of Tacitus created half as much stir as this miserable dispute?”

“There is more at stake,” said Lienhard Groland positively. “The Jewish writings merely serve as a pretext for the Cologne inquisitors to attack the great Reuchlin. He, the most profound and keenest student of the noble Greek tongue, who also forced the venerable language in which the Old Testament speaks to discourse to us Germans—”

“The Hebrew!” cried Hans von Oberritz impatiently, passing his napkin over his thick moustache; “what do we want of it? How can a sagacious man plunge into such annoyances on its account?”

“Because the excess of liberty which you gentlemen grant to the human intellect blinds him,” observed the abbot. “His learning would throw the doors wide open to heresy. The Scriptures are true. On them Tungern and Kollin, whom you mention, rely. In the original Hebrew text they will be given up to every one who wishes to seek an interpretation——”

“Then a new bridge will be built for truth,” declared the little Thuringian with flashing eyes.

“The Cologne theologians hold a different opinion,” replied the abbot.

“Because the Grand Inquisitor and his followers—Tungern, Kollin, and whatever the rest may be called—are concerned about some thing very different from the noblest daughter of Heaven,” said Lienhard Groland, and the other gentlemen assented. “You yourself, my lord abbot, admitted to me on the ride here that it angered you, too, to see



the Cologne Dominicans pursue the noble scholar 'with such fierce hatred and bitter stings.'"—[Virgil, Aeneid, xi. 837.]

"Because conflict between Christians always gives me pain," replied the abbot.

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But here Dr. Eberbach impetuously broke in upon the conversation:

“For the sake of a fair woman Ilion suffered unspeakable tortures. But to us a single song of Homer is worth more than all these Hebrew writings. And yet a Trojan war of the intellect has been kindled concerning them. Here freedom of investigation, yonder with Hoogstraten and Tungern, fettering of the mind. Among us, the ardent yearning to hold aloft the new light which the revival of learning is kindling, yonder superior force is struggling to extinguish it. Here the rule of the thinking mind, in whose scales reason and counter-argument decide the matter; among the Cologne people it is the Grand Inquisitor’s jailers, chains, dungeons, and the stake.”

“They will not go so far,” replied the abbot soothingly. “True, both the front and the back stairs are open to the Dominicans in Rome.”

“Yet where should humanism find more zealous friends than in that very place, among the heads of the Church?” asked Dr. Peutingen. “From the Tiber, I hope——”

Here he paused, for the new guest who had just entered the room attracted his attention also. The landlord of The Blue Pike respectfully preceded him and ushered him directly to the Nuremberg party, while he requested the Dominican monks who accompanied him to wait.

The late arrival was Prof. Arnold von Tungern, dean of the theological faculty at the University of Cologne. This gentleman had just been mentioned with the greatest aversion at the table he was now approaching, and his arrogant manner did little to lessen it.

Nevertheless, his position compelled the Nuremberg dignitaries to invite him to share their meal, which was now drawing to a close. The Cologne theologian accepted the courtesy with a patronizing gesture, as if it were a matter of course. Nay, after he had taken his seat, he ordered the landlord, as if he were the master, to see that this and that thing in the kitchen was not forgotten.

Unwelcome as his presence doubtless was to his table companions, as sympathizers with Reuchlin and other innovators, well as he doubtless remembered their scornful attacks upon his Latin—he was a man to maintain his place. So, with boastful self-conceit, allowing no one else an opportunity to speak, he at once began to complain of the fatigues of the journey and to mention, with tiresome detail, the eminent persons whom he had met and who had treated him like a valued friend. The vein on the little doctor’s high forehead swelled with wrath as he listened to this boastful chatter, which did not cease until the first dish was served. To brave him, Eberbach turned the conversation to humanism, its redeeming power over minds, and its despicable foes. His scornful jests buzzed around his enemy like a swarm of gnats; but Arnold von Tungern pretended not to hear them. Only now and then a tremor of the mouth, as he

slowly chewed his food, or a slight raising of the eye-brows, betrayed that one shaft or another had not wholly missed its mark.



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The older gentlemen had sometimes interrupted the Thuringian, to try to change the conversation, but always in vain, and the guest from Cologne vouchsafed them only curt, dry answers.

Not until a pause occurred between two courses did von Tungern alter his manner. Then, like an inquisitor who has succeeded in convicting the person accused, he leaned back in his chair with a satisfied, long-drawn “So-o,” wiped his moist chin, and began:

“You have showed me your state of mind plainly enough, my young Herr Doctor. Your name is Eberbach, if I am not mistaken. We will remember it at a fitting opportunity. But, pugnaciously as your loud voice summons to the strife, it will never destroy the sacred and venerable things which are worthy to endure. Thanks to the foundation of rock which supports them, and the watchfulness of their defenders, they will stand firmer than the walls of Jericho, whose fate you doubtless wish to bestow upon them. But you, my valued friends”—here he turned to the envoys—“who stand at the head of communities whose greatness is founded upon their ancient order and system, beware of opening your ears and your gates to the siren song and fierce outcries of the innovators and agitators.”

“Thanks for the counsel,” replied Wilibald Pirckheimer, with repellent coldness; but Arnold von Tungern pretended to consider the humanist’s reply an assent, and, nodding approvingly, continued:

“How could you help exclaiming, with us and the pagan Ovid, ‘We praise the ancients!’ And this is merely saying that what time has tested and made venerable is the best.”—
[Ovid. *Fast.*, 1, 225.]

Here Doctor Peutinger tried to interrupt him, but the other cut him short with an arrogant wave of the hand, and in an instructive tone began again:

“The honourable Council of Nuremberg—so I am informed—set a praiseworthy example several years ago. There was a youthful member of one of your patrician families—an Ebner, I believe, or a Stromer or Tucher. He had imbibed in Padua mistaken ideas which, unhappily, are held in high esteem by many from whom we should expect more discernment. So it chanced that when he returned home he ventured to contract a formal betrothal with an honourable maiden of noble lineage, against the explicit desire of her distinguished parents. The rebellious youth was therefore summoned before a court of justice, and, on account of his reckless offence and wanton violation of custom and law, banished from the city and sentenced to pay a fine——”

“A punishment which I endured calmly, Herr Professor,” interrupted Lienhard Groland, “for I myself was that ‘rebellious youth.’ Besides, it was by no means the teachings of humanism which led me to an act that you, learned sir, doubtless regard with sterner eyes than the Christian charity which your clerical garb made me expect would permit.”



These words fell, with the winning earnestness peculiar to him, from the lips of the young man who, at a time when he cared for no other woman than his new-made bride, had seen in the poor, endangered rope-dancer a human being worthy of aid. Only his fiery dark eyes met the professor's sternly enough.



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The latter was still seeking a fitting reply, when the folding doors of the room were thrown wide open, and a belated party of travellers entered. They came opportunely, for they afforded a timely excuse to withhold an answer without attracting notice; yet at the head of the new guests of The Blue Pike was his Cologne colleague Conrad Kollin, who was followed, as he himself had been, by a number of Dominican friars.

Tungern, of course, went to greet him, and this made it easy to part from his table companions in a manner that aroused no comment; for while Kollin was surrounded and respectfully welcomed by the Dominican friars and many other travellers, the humanists left the house.

CHAPTER III.

Dietel did not lose sight of the envoys. After whispering together a short time they had risen and gone out. At the door the Abbot of St. Aegidius left them to greet Professor Kollin, and, with the easy kindness characteristic of him, to say that the room had become too warm for the other gentlemen. They presented their compliments to the distinguished citizen of Cologne, and placed their table at the service of the newcomer.

Dietel's sharp ears had enabled him to catch these words; but then he was obliged to move again, a table had to be set outside the house for the Nuremberg travellers and their companions, and jugs of wine must be filled for them.

Then he was called back to the taproom. While the landlord of The Pike was serving a fresh meal to Professor Kollin at the table vacated by the Nuremberg dignitaries, and Arnold von Tungern was emptying the full vials of his wrath upon the little doctor and the whole body of humanists, the Nuremberg travellers and their guests were now conversing freely, as if relieved from a nightmare, upon the topics which most deeply interested them.

Dietel would far rather have served the Cologne theologians, whom he regarded as the appointed defenders of the true faith, than the insignificant folk at the other tables who had just finished their meal.

How unmannerly their behaviour was! Better wine had been served before dessert, and they now shouted and sang so loudly and so out of tune that the air played by the strolling musicians could scarcely be distinguished. Many a table, too, groaned under blows from the clinched fist of some excited reveller. Every one seemed animated by a single desire-to drink again and again.

Now the last pieces of bread and the cloths were removed from the tables. The carousers no longer needed Dietel. He could leave the task of filling the jugs to his young assistants.



What were the envoys outside doing? They were well off. In here the atmosphere was stifling from the fumes emanating from the throng of people, the wine, and the food. It seemed to draw all the flies from far and near. Whence did they come? They seemed to have increased by thousands since the early morning, when the room was empty. The outside air appeared delightful to breathe. He longed to fill his lungs again with the pure wind of heaven, and at the same time catch a few words of the conversation between the envoys to the Reichstag.

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So Dietel hobbled to the open window, where the strollers were resting.

Cyriax was lying on the floor asleep, with the brandy bottle in his arms. Two of his companions, with their mouths wide open, were snoring at his side. Raban, who begged for blood-money, was counting the copper coins which he had received. Red-haired Gitta was sewing another patch of cloth upon her rough husband's already well-mended jerkin by the dim light of a small lamp, into which she had put some fat and a bit of rag for a wick. It was difficult to thread the needle. Had it not been for the yellow blaze of the pitchpans fastened to the wall with iron clamps, which had already been burning an hour, she could scarcely have succeeded.

"Make room there," the waiter called to the vagrants, giving the sleeping Jungel a push with his club foot. The latter grasped his crutch, as he had formerly seized the sword he carried as a foot soldier ere he lost his leg before Padua. Then, with a Spanish oath learned in the Netherlands, he turned over, still half asleep, on his side. So Dietel found room, and, after vainly looking for Kuni among the others, gazed out at the starlit sky.

Yonder, in front of the house, beside the tall oleanders which grew in wine casks cut in halves instead of in tubs, the learned and aristocratic gentlemen sat around the table with outstretched heads, examining by the light of the torches the pages which Dr. Eberbach drew forth, one after another, from the inexhaustible folds of the front of his black robe.

Dietel, the schoolmaster's son, who had once sat on the bench with the pupils of the Latin class, pricked up his ears; he heard foreign words which interested him like echoes of memories of his childhood. He did not understand them, yet he liked to listen, for they made him think of his dead father. He had always meant kindly, but he had been a morose, deeply embittered man. How pitilessly he had flogged him and the other boys with hazel rods. And he would have been still harsher and sterner but for his mother's intercession.

A pleasant smile hovered around his lips as he remembered her. Instead of continuing to listen to the Greek sentences which Herr Wilibald Pirckheimer was reading aloud to the others, he could not help thinking of the pious, gentle little woman who, with her cheerful kindness, so well understood how to comfort and to sustain courage. She never railed or scolded; at the utmost she only wiped her eyes with her apron when the farmers of his little native town in Hesse sent to the schoolmaster, for the school tax, grain too bad for bread, hay too sour for the three goats, and half-starved fowls.

He thoughtfully patted the plump abdomen which, thanks to the fleshpots of The Blue Pike, had grown so rotund in his fifteen years of service.



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“It pays better to provide for people’s bodies than for their brains,” he said to himself. “The Nuremberg and Augsburg gentlemen outside are rich folk’s children. For them learning is only the raisins, almonds, and citron in the cake; knowledge agrees with them better than it did with my father. He was the ninth child of respectable stocking weavers, but, as the pastor perceived that he was gifted with special ability, his parents took a portion of their savings to make him a scholar. The tuition fee and the boy were both confided to a Beanus—that is, an older pupil, who asserted that he understood Latin—in order that he might look after the inexperienced little fellow and help him out of school as well as in. But, instead of using for his protégé the florins intrusted to him, the Beanus shamefully squandered the money saved for a beloved child by so many sacrifices. While he feasted on roast meat and wine, the little boy placed in his charge went hungry.” Whenever, in after years, the old man described this time of suffering, his son listened with clinched fists, and when Dietel saw a Beanus at The Blue Pike snatch the best pieces from the child in his care, he interfered in his behalf sternly enough. Nay, he probably brought to him from the kitchen, on his own account, a piece of roast meat or a sausage. Many of the names which fell from the moist lips of the gentlemen outside—Lucian and Virgil, Ovid and Seneca, Homer and Plato—were perfectly familiar to him. The words the little doctor was reading must belong to their writings. How attentively the others listened! Had not Dietel run away from the monks’ school at Fulda he, too, might have enjoyed the witticisms of these sages, or even been permitted to sit at the same table with the great lights of the Church from Cologne.

Now it was all over with studying.

And yet—it could not be so very serious a matter, for Doctor Eberbach had just read something aloud at which the young Nuremberg ambassador, Lienhard Groland, could not help laughing heartily. It seemed to amuse the others wonderfully, too, and even caused the astute Dr. Peutinger to strike his clinched fist upon the table with the exclamation, “A devil of a fellow!” and Wilibald Pirckheimer to assent eagerly, praising Hutten’s ardent love for his native land and courage in battling for its elevation; but this Hutten whom he so lauded was the ill-advised scion of the knightly race that occupied Castle Steckelberg in his Hessian home, whom he knew well. The state of his purse was evident from the fact that the landlord of The Pike had once been obliged to detain him because he could not pay the bill—though it was by no means large—in any other coin than merry tales.

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But even the best joke of the witty knight would have failed to produce its effect on the listening waiter just now; for the gentlemen outside were again discussing the Reuchlin controversy, and in doing so uttered such odious words about the Cologne theologians, whom Dietel knew as godly gentlemen who consumed an ample supply of food, that he grew hot and cold by turns. He was a good man who would not hurt a fly. Yet, when he heard things and opinions which his mother had taught him to hold sacred assailed, he could become as angry as a savage brute. The little impious blasphemer Eberbach, especially, he would have been more than ready to lash with the best hazel rod which he had ever cut for his dead father. But honest anger affords a certain degree of enjoyment, so it was anything rather than agreeable to him to be called away.

The feather curler and his table companions wanted Kitzing wine, but it was in the cellar, and a trip there would have detained him too long from his post of listener. So he turned angrily back into the room, and told the business men that princes, bishops, and counts were satisfied with the table wine of The Blue Pike, which had been already served to them, and the sceptre and crozier were of more importance than their twisted feathers. "Those are not the wisest people," he added sagely, "who despise what is good to try to get better. So stick to the excellent Blue Pike wine and say no more about it!"

Without waiting for an answer from the astonished guests, he limped back to his window to resume his listening. The conversation, however, had already taken a new turn, for Dr. Peutinger was describing the Roman monument which he had had put up in the courtyard of his Augsburg house, but, as this interested Dietel very little, he soon turned his attention to the high road, whence a belated guest might still come to The Blue Pike.

The landlady's little kitchen garden lay between it and the river Main, and there—no, it was no deception—there, behind the low hawthorn hedge, a human figure was moving.

One of the vagabonds had certainly slipped into the garden to steal fruit or vegetables, or even honey from the bee hives. An unprecedented offence! Dietel's blood boiled, for the property of The Blue Pike was as dear to him as his own.

With prompt decision he went through the entry into the yard, where he meant to unchain the butcher's dog to help him chase the abominable robber. But some time was to elapse ere he could execute this praiseworthy intention; for before he could cross the threshold the landlord of The Pike appeared, berated him, and ordered him to be more civil in the performance of his duties. The words were intended less for the waiter than for the feather dealer and his friends.

The latter had complained of Dietel to the landlord of The Pike, and, after he had received a reproof, they punished him for his rudeness by ordering him to fetch one jug of wine from the cellar after another. At last, when, with many a malediction, he had brought up the fifth, his tormentors released him, but then the best time was lost.

Nevertheless he continued the pursuit and entered the little garden with the dog, but the thief had fled.

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After assuring himself of this fact he stood still, rubbing his narrow forehead with the tips of his fingers.

The rogue was most probably one of the vagrants, and like a flash it entered his mind that the ropedancer, Kuni, who in her prosperous days, instead of eating meat and vegetables, preferred to satisfy her appetite with fruits and sweet dainties, might be the culprit. Besides, when he had looked around among the guests just before, she was no longer with the other vagabonds.

Certain of having found the right trail, he instantly went to the window below which the strollers lay, thrust his head into the room from the outside, and waked the wife of the tongueless swearer. She had fallen asleep on the floor with the sewing in her hand. The terror with which she started up at his call bore no favourable testimony to her good conscience, but she had already recovered her bold unconcern when he imperiously demanded to know what had become of lame Kuni.

“Ask the other travellers—the soldiers, the musicians, the monks, for aught I care,” was the scornful, irritating answer. But when Diemel angrily forbade such insolent mockery, she cried jeeringly:

“Do you think men don’t care for her because she has lost her foot and has that little cough? You ought to know better.

“Master Dieter has a sweetheart for every finger, though the lower part of his own body isn’t quite as handsome as it might be.”

“On account of my foot?” the waiter answered spitefully. “You’ll soon find that it knows how to chase. Besides, the Nuremberg city soldiers will help me in the search. If you don’t tell me at once where the girl went—by St. Eoban, my patron——”

Here red-haired Gitta interrupted him in a totally different tone; she and her companions had nothing good to expect from the city soldiers.

In a very humble manner she protested that Kuni was an extraordinarily charitable creature. In a cart standing in the meadow by the highroad lay the widow of a beggar, Nickel; whom the peasants had hung on account of many a swindling trick. A goose and some chickens had strayed off to his premises. The woman had just given birth to twins when Nickel was hung, and she was now in a violent fever, with frequent attacks of convulsions, and yet had to nurse the infants. The landlady of The Pike had sent her some broth and a little milk for the children. As for Kuni, she had gone to carry some linen from her own scanty store to the two babies, who were as naked as little frogs. He would find her with the sick mother.



All this flowed from Gitta's lips with so much confidence that Dietel, whose heart was easily touched by such a deed of charity, though he by no means put full confidence in her, allowed himself to be induced to let the city soldiers alone for the present and test the truth of her strange statement himself.



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So he prepared to go in search of the cart, but the landlord of The Pike met him at the door, and, angrily asking what ailed him that day, ordered him to fetch the Erbach, more of which was wanted inside. Dietel went down into the cellar again, but this time he was not to leave it so speedily, for the apprentice of a Nuremberg master shoemaker, whose employer was going to the Frankfort fair with his goods, and who made common cause with the feather dealer, stole after Dietel, and of his own volition, for his own pleasure, locked him in. The good Kitzing wine had strengthened his courage. Besides, experience taught him that an offence would be more easily pardoned the more his master himself disliked the person against whom it was committed.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Arrogant wave of the hand, and in an instructive tone
Honest anger affords a certain degree of enjoyment
Ovid, 'We praise the ancients'
Pays better to provide for people's bodies than for their brains
Who gives great gifts, expects great gifts again
Who watches for his neighbour's faults has a hundred sharp eyes

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