

MARGERY - VOLUME 2.

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Volume 2.

CHAPTER VI.

Summer wore away; the oats in the forest were garnered and the vintage had begun in the vine-lands. It was a right glorious sunny day; and if you ask me at which time of the year forest life is the sweeter, whether in Springtide or in Autumn, I could scarce say.

Aye, it is fair indeed in the woods when Spring comes gaily in. Spring is the very Saviour, as it were, of all the numberless folk, great and small, which grow green and blossom there, wherefore the forest holds festival for his birthday and cradle feast as is but fitting! The fir-tree lights up brighter tips to its boughs, as children do with tapers at Christmastide. Then comes the largesse. It lasts much more than one evening, and the gifts bestowed on all are without number, and bright and various indeed to behold. As a father's tinkling bell brings the children together, so the snowdrop bells call forth all the other flowers. First and foremost comes the primrose, and cowslips—Heaven's keys as we call them—open the gates to all the other children of the Spring. "Come forth, come forth!" the returning birds shout from out the bushes, and silver-grey catkins sprout on every twig. Beech leaves burst off their sharp, brown sheaths and open to the light, as soft as taffety and as green as emeralds.

The other trees follow the example, and so teach their boughs to make a leafy shade against the sun as it mounts higher. Every creature that loves its kind finds a voice under the blossoming May, and the dumb forest is full of the call and answer of thankful and gladsome loving things which have met together, and of sweet tunefulness and songs of bridal joy.

Round nests have come into being in a thousand secret places—in the tree-tops, in the thick greenwood of the bushes, in the reeds of the marsh; ere long young living things are twittering there, the father and mother-birds call each other, singing to be of good cheer, and taking joy

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in caring for their young. At that season of love, of growth, of unfolding life, meseems, as I walk through the woods, that the loving-kindness of the Most High is more than ever nigh unto me; for the forest is as a church, a glorious cathedral at highest festival, all filled with light and song, and decked in every nook and corner with gay fresh flowers and leafy garlands.

Then all is suddenly hushed. It is summer.

But in Autumn the forest is a banqueting-hall where men must say farewell, but with good cheer, in hope of a happy meeting. All that has lived is hasting to the grave. Nevertheless on some fair days everything wears as it were the face of a friend who holds forth a hand at parting. The wide vaults of the woods are finely bedecked with red and yellow splendor, and albeit the voices of birds are few, albeit the cry of the jay, and the song of the nightingale, and the pipe of the bull-finch must be mute, the greenwood is not more dumb than in the Spring; the hunter's horn rings through the trees and away far over their tops, with the baying of the hounds, the clapping of the drivers, and the huntsmen shouting the view halloo. Every bright, strong, healthful child of man, then feels himself lord of all that creeps or flies, and his soul is ready to soar from his breast. How pure is the air, how spicy is the scent from the fallen leaves on such an autumn day! In Spring, truly, white and rose-red, blue and yellow chequer the green turf; but now gold and crimson are bright in the tree tops, and on the service trees. The distance is clearer than before, and fine silver threads wave in the air as if to catch us, and keep us in the woods whose beauty is so fast fading.

The sunny autumn air was right full of these threads when on St. Maurice's day—[September 22nd]—Ann and I went forth to our duty of fetching in the birds which had been caught in the springes set for them.

When birds are early to flock and flee
Hard and cold will winter be,

saith the woodman's saw; and they had gathered early this year—thrushes and field-fares; many a time the take was so plentiful that our little wallets could scarce hold them, and among them it was a pity to see many a merry, tuneful red-breast.

The springes were set at short spaces apart on either side of two forest paths. I went down one and Ann down the other. They met again nigh to the road leading to the town. Balzer set the snares, and we prided ourselves on which should carry home the greater booty; and when we had done our task as we sat on a grassy seat which the Junker had made for me, we told the tale of birds and thought it right good sport. Nor did we need a squire, inasmuch as Spond, the great hound, would ever follow us.

This day I was certain I had the greater number of birds in my wallet, and I walked in good heart toward the end of the path.

Methought already I had heard the noise of hoofs on the highway, and now the hound sniffed the air, so, being inquisitive, I moved my feet somewhat faster till I caught sight of a horseman, who sprang from his saddle, and leaving his steed, hurried toward the clearing whither Ann must presently come from her side. Thereupon I forced my way through the underwood which hindered me from seeing, and when I presently saw Ann coming and had opened my lips to call, something, meseemed, took me by the throat, and I was fain to stand still as though I had taken root there, and could only lend eye and ear, gasping for breath, to what was doing yonder by the highroad. And verily I knew not whether to rejoice from the bottom of my heart, or to lament and be wroth, and fly forth to put an end to it all.

Nevertheless I stirred not a limb, and my tongue was spell-bound. The heart in my bosom and the veins in my head beat as though hammers were smiting within; mine eyes were dazed, albeit they could see as well as ever they did, and I espied first, on one side of the clearing, the horseman, who was none other than Herdegen, my well-beloved elder brother, and on the other side thereof Ann carrying her wallet in her hand, and numbering the birds she had taken from the snares, with a contented smile.

But ere I had time to hail the returned traveller a voice rang through the wood—it was my brother's voice, and yet, meseemed it was not; it spoke but one word "Ann!" And in the long drawn cry there was a ring of heart's delight and lovesick longing such as I had never heard save from the nightingale lover when in the still May nights he courts his beloved. This cry pierced to my heart, even mine; and it brought the color to Ann's face, which had long ceased to be pale. Like a doe which comes forth from a thicket and finds her young grazing in the glade, she lifted her head and looked with brightest eyes away to the high road whence the call had come. Then, though they were yet far asunder, his eyes met hers, and hers met his, and they uplifted their arms, as though some invisible power had moved them both, and flew to meet each other. There was no doubt nor pause; and I plainly perceived that they were borne along as flowers are in a raging torrent; albeit she, or ever she reached him; was overcome by maiden shamefacedness, and her arms fell and her head was bent. But the little bird had ventured too far into the springe, and the fowler was not the man to let it escape; before Ann could foresee such a deed he had both his arms round her, and she did not hinder him, nay, for she could not. So she clung to him and let him lift up her head and kiss her eyes and then her mouth, and that not once, no, but many a time and again, and so long that I, a sixteen-year-old maid, was in truth affrighted.

There stood I; my knees quaked, and I weened that this which was doing was a thing that beseemed not a pious maid, and that must ill-please the

heart of a virtuous daughter's mother; yea, it was a grief to me that it should have been done, and that I knew that of my Ann which she would fain hide from the light. Nevertheless I could not but find a joy in it, and meseemed it was a cruel act to fetch her away so soon from such sweet bliss.

When presently their lips were free, and at last he spoke a few words to her, methought it was now time for me to greet my brother. I called up all my strength and while I walked toward them my spirit's sense came back to me, for indeed it had altogether left me, and a voice within asked: "What shall come of this?"

He put forth his arm to hold her to him again, and forasmuch as I was abashed to think of coming in to their secret, before I stepped forth, from the thicket, I hailed Herdegen by name. And soon I was in his arms; but although that he kissed me lovingly, meseemed that something strange was on his lips which pleased me not, and I yet remember that I put my kerchief to my mouth to wipe that from it.

And then we walked homeward. Herdegen led his horse by the bridle, and Ann went between him and me and gazed up into his face with shining eyes, for in these two years he had grown in stature and in manhood. She listened wide-eared to all his tidings, but once, when his horse grew restive, so that he turned away from us women-kind she kissed my cheek, but in great haste, as though she would not have him see it. We were gladly welcomed at the forest lodge. How truly my uncle and aunt rejoiced at my brother's home-coming could be seen in their eyes, though the mother, who had banished her own son, was cut to the heart by the sight of such another well-grown youth.

The evening before guests had come to the lodge his excellency the Lord Justice Wigelois von Wolfstein, and Master Besserer of Ulm. Now we had to make ready in all haste for dinner, and never had Ann made such careful and diligent use of our little mirror. As it fell, we could be alone together for a few minutes only, and had no chance of speaking to each other privily. This was likewise the case at table, and then, as my uncle had prepared for a hunt in the afternoon, in honor of his guests, and as the supper afterwards lasted until midnight, the not over-strong thread of my good patience was not seldom in danger of giving way. But many things were going forward which gave me matter for thought, and increased the distress I already felt. Ann threw herself into the sport with all her heart, and on the way back fell behind with Herdegen in such wise that they did not reach home till long after the door closed on the last of us.

At supper she nodded to me many times with much contentment; except for that I might have been buried for aught she noted, for she hearkened only to Herdegen's tales as though they were a revelation from above. For his part, he now and again stole a hasty, fiery glance at her; otherwise he of set purpose made a show of having little to do with her. He often lay

back as though he were weary; and yet, when their Excellencies questioned him of any matter, he was ever ready with a swift and discreet answer. He had lost nothing of his wonderfully clear and shrewd wit; nevertheless, I was not so much at my ease with him as of old time. When my uncle said in jest that the wise owl from Padua seemed to wear a motley of gay feathers, his intent was plain as soon as one looked at my brother; and in the fine clothes he had chosen to wear at supper the noble lad was less to my mind than in the hunting weed which he had journeyed in, inasmuch as the too great length of the sleeves of his mantle was in his way when eating, and the over-long points to his shoes hindered him in walking.

When, presently, my Aunt Jacoba left the hall that the men might the better enjoy the heady wine and freer speech, we maidens were bound to follow her duteously; but Herdegen signed to me to come apart with him, and now I hoped he would open his heart to me and treat me as he had been wont, as my true and dear brother, whose heart had ever been on the tip of his tongue. Far from it; he spoke nought but flattery, as "how fair I had grown," and then desired news of Cousin Maud, and Kunz, and our grand-uncle, and at last of Ursula Tetzl, which made me wroth.

I answered him shortly, and asked him whether he had no more than that to say to me. He gazed down at the ground and said to himself: "To be sure, to be sure." But in a minute he went back to his first manner, and when I bid him good-night in anger he put his arm round me and turned me about as if to dance.

I got myself free and went away, up to our chamber, hanging my head. There I found my old Sue, taking off Ann's fine gown; and whereas Ann nodded to me right sweetly and, as I thought, with a secret air, I guessed that it was the waiting-woman who stayed her speech and I sent my nurse away.

Now I should sooner have looked for the skies to fall than for Ann, my heart's closest friend, to keep the secret of what had befallen that very morning; and yet she kept silence.

We were commonly wont to chirp like a pair of crickets while we braided our hair and got into our beds; but this night there was not a sound in the chamber. Commonly we laid us down with a simple "Good night, Margery," "Sleep well, Ann," after we had said our prayers before the image of the Blessed Virgin; but this night my friend held me close in her arms, and as I was about to get into bed she ran to me again and kissed me with much warmth. Whether I was so loving to her I cannot, at this day, tell; but I remember well that I remained dumb, and my heart seemed to ache with sorrow and pain. I thought myself defrauded, and my true love scorned. Was it possible? Did my Ann trust me no longer, or had she never trusted me?

Nay more. Was she at all such as I had believed, if she could carry on an underhand and forbidden love-making with Herdegen behind my back; and this, Merciful Virgin, peradventure, for years past!

The taper had burnt out. We lay side by side striving to sleep, while distress of mind and a wounded heart brought the tears into my eyes.

Then I heard a strange noise from her bed, and was aware that Ann likewise was weeping, more bitterly and deeply every minute. This pierced the very depths of my soul. Yet I tried to harden my heart till I heard her voice saying: "Margery!"

That was an end of our silence, and I answered: "Ann."

Then she sobbed out: "As we came home from the hunt he made me promise never to reveal it, but it is bursting my heart. Oh! Margery, Margery, I ought to hide and bury it in my soul; so he bid me, and nevertheless....."

I sat up on the pillow as if new life had come to me, and cried: "Oh Ann, you can tell me nothing that I know not already, for I saw him dismount and how he embraced you."

And then, before I was aware of her, she leaped up and was kneeling on her knees by the head of my bed, and her lips were kissing mine, and her cheeks were against my face and her tears running down my cheeks and neck and bosom while she confessed all. In our peaceful little chamber there was a wild outpouring of vows of love and words of fear, of plans for the future, and long tales of how it all had come to pass.

I had with mine own eyes seen it in the bud and, unwittingly indeed, had fostered its growth. How then could I be dismayed when now I beheld the flower?

Their meeting this morning had been as the striking of flint and steel, and if sparks had come of it how could they help it? And I took Ann's word when she said that she would have flown into the arms of her beloved, if father and mother and a hundred more had been standing round to warn her.

All she said that night was full of perfect and joyful assurance, and it took hold of my young soul; and albeit I could not blind myself, but saw that great and sore hindrances stood in the way of my brother's choice, I vowed to myself that I would smooth their path so far as in me lay.

All was now forgotten that I had taken amiss that evening in the returned wanderer; and when I gave Ann a last kiss that night how well I loved her again!

CHAPTER VII.

The cocks had already crowed before I fell asleep, and when I awoke Ann was sitting in front of the mirror, plaiting her hair. I knew full well what had led her to quit her bed so early, and, as she met her lover at breakfast, her form and face meseemed had gained in beauty, so that I could not take my eyes off from her. My aunt and his Excellency marked the wonderful change which had taken effect in her that night, and the gentleman thenceforth waited closely on Ann and sued for her favor like a young man, in spite of his grey hair, while worthy Master Besserer followed his ensample.

At the first favorable chance I drew Herdegen apart. Ann had already told him that I had been witness to their first meeting again; this indeed pleased him ill, and when I asked him as to how he purposed to demean himself henceforth towards his betrothed, he answered that matters had not gone so far with them; and that until he had taken his Doctor's hood we must keep the secret I had by chance discovered closely hidden from all the good people of Nuremberg; that much water would flow into the sea or ere he could bid me wag my tongue, if our grand-uncle should continue to bear the weight of his years so bravely. For the present he was one of the happiest of men on earth, and if I loved him I must help him to enjoy his heart's desire, and often see the lovely violet which had bloomed so sweetly for him here in the deep heart of the forest.

His bright young spirit smiled upon my soul once more as it had done long ago. Only his unloving mention of our grand-uncle, who had been as a second father to him, struck to my heart, and this I said to him; adding likewise, that it must be a point of honor with him to give and take rings with Ann, even though it should be in secret.

This he was ready and glad to do; I gave him the gold ring, with a hearty good will, which Cousin Maud had given me for my confirmation, and he put it on his sweetheart's finger that very day, albeit her silver ring was too small for his little finger. So he bid her wear it, and solemnly promised to keep his troth, even without a ring, till the next home-coming; and Ann put her trust in her lover as surely as in rock and iron.

Many were the guests who came to the forest that fair autumn tide; there was no end of hunting and sport of all kinds, and Ann was ever ready and well content to share her lover's fearless delight in the chase; when she came home from the forest the joy of her heart shone more clearly than ever in her eyes; and seeing her then and thus, no man could doubt that she was at the crown and top of human happiness. Albeit, up on that height meseemed a keen wind was blowing, which she did battle with so hardly that through many a still night I could hear her sighs. Withal she showed a strange selfishness such as I had never before marked in her, which, however, only concerned her lover, with constant unrest when

apart from others whom she loved; and all this grieved me, though indeed I could not remedy it.

Strangest of all, as it seemed to me, was it that these twain who erewhile had never spent an hour together without singing, would now pass day after day without a song. But then I remembered how that the maiden nightingale likewise pipes her sweetest only so long as her bosom is full of pining love; but so soon as she has given her heart wholly to her mate, her song grows shorter and less tender.

Not that this pair had as yet gone so far as this; and once, when I gave them warning that they should not forget how to sing, they marvelled at their own neglect, and as thereupon they began to sing it sounded sweeter and stronger than in former days.

Among the youths who at that time enjoyed the hospitality of the Waldstromers, Herdegen's friend, Franz von Welemisl, held the foremost place. He was the son of a Bohemian baron, and his mother, who was dead, had been of one of the noblest families of Hungary. And whereas his name was somewhat hard to the German tongue, we one and all called him simply Ritter Franz or Sir Franz. He was a well made and well favored youth in face and limb, who had found such pleasure in my brother's company at Erfurt that he had gone with him to Padua. His father's sudden death had taken him home from college sooner than Herdegen, and he was now in mourning weed. He ever held his head a little bowed, and whereas Herdegen, with his brave, splendid manners and his long golden locks, put some folks in mind of the sun, a poet might have likened his friend to the moon, inasmuch as he had the same gentle mien and pale countenance, which seemed all the more colorless for his thick, sheeny black hair which framed it, with out a wave or a curl. His voice had a sorrowful note, and it went to my heart to see how loving was his devotion to my brother. He, for his part, was well pleased to find in the young knight the companionship he had erewhile had in the pueri.

After the young Bohemian's father had departed this life, the Emperor himself had dubbed his sorrowing son Knight, and nevertheless he was devoid alike of pride and scornfulness. When, with his sad black eyes, he looked into mine, humbly and as though craving comfort, I might easily have lulled my soul with the glad thought that I likewise had opened the door to Love; but then I cared not if I saw him, and I thought of him but coldly, and this gave the lie to such hopes; what I felt was no more than the compassion due to a young man who was alone in the world, without parents or brethren or near kin.

One morning I went to seek Herdegen in the armory and there found him stripped of his jerkin, with sleeves turned up; and with him was the Bohemian, striving with an iron file to remove from my brother's arm a gold bracelet which was not merely fastened but soldered round his arm. So soon as he saw that I had at once descried the band, though he attempted to hide it with his sleeve, he sought to put off my

questioning, at first with a jest and then with wrathful impatience flung on his jerkin and turned his back on me. Forthwith I examined Ritter Franz, and he was led to confess to me that a fair Italian Marchesa had prevailed on Herdegen to have this armlet riveted on to his arm in token of his ever true service.

On learning this I was moved to great dread both for my brother's sake and for Ann's; and when I presently upbraided him for his breach of faith he threw his arms round me with his wonted outrageous humor and boisterous spirit, and said: What more would I have, since that I had seen with my own eyes that he was trying to be quit of that bond? To get at the Marchesa he would need to cross a score of rivers and streams; and even in our virtuous town of Nuremberg it was the rule that a man might be on with a new love when he had left the third bridge behind him.

I liked not this fashion of speech, and when he saw that I was ill-pleased and grieved, instead of falling in with his merry mood, he took up a more earnest vein and said: "Never mind, Margery. Only one tall tree of love grows in my breast, and the name of it is Ann; the little flowers that may have come up round it when I was far away have but a short and starved life, and in no case can they do the great tree a mischief."

Then with all my heart I besought him that, as he had now bound up the life and happiness of the sweetest and most loving maid on earth with his own, he would ever keep his faith and be to her a true man. Seeing, however, that he was but little moved by this counsel, the hot blood of the Schoppers mounted to my head and thereupon I railed at his sayings and doings as sinful and cruel, and he likewise flared out and bid me beware how I spoke ill of my own father; for that like as he, Herdegen, had carried the image of Ann in his heart, so had father carried that of our dear mother beyond the Alps, and nevertheless at Padua he had played the lute under the balcony of many a blackeyed dame, and won the name of "the Singer" there. A living fire, quoth he, waxed not the colder because more than one warmed herself thereat; all the matter was only to keep the place of honor for the right owner, and of that Ann was ever certain.

Sir Franz was witness to these words, and when presently Herdegen had quitted the room, he strove to appease and to comfort me, saying that his greatly gifted friend, who was full of every great and good quality, had but this one weakness: namely, that he could not make a manful stand against the temptations that came of his beauty and his gifts. He, Franz himself was of different mould.

And he went on to confess that he loved me, and that, if I would but consent to be his, he would ever cherish and serve me, with more humility and faithfulness even than his well-beloved Lord and King, who had dubbed him knight while he was yet so young.

And his speech sounded so warm and true, so full of deep and tender desires, that at any other time I might have yielded. But at that hour I was minded to trust no man; for, if Herdegen's love were not the truth, whereas it had grown up with him and was given to one above me in so many ways, what man's mind could I dare to build on? Yea, and I was too full of care for the happiness of my brother and of my friend to be ready to think of my own; so I could only speak him fair, but say him nay. Hardly had I said the words when a strange change came over him; his calm, sad face suddenly put on a furious aspect, and in his eyes, which hitherto had ever been gentle, there was a fire which affrighted me. Nay and even his voice, as he spoke, had a sharp ring in it, as though the bells had cracked which erewhile had tolled so sweet a peal. And all he had to say was a furious charge against me who had, said he, led him on by eye and speech, only to play a cruel trick upon him, with words of dreadful purpose against the silent knave who had come between him and me to defraud him; and by this he meant the Swabian, Junker von Kalenbach.

I was about to upbraid him for his rude and discourteous manners when we heard, outside, a loud outcry, and Ann ran in to fetch me. All in the Lodge who had legs came running together; all the hounds barked and howled as though the Wild Huntsman were riding by, and mingling therewith lo! a strange, outlandish piping and drumming.

A bear-leader, such as I had before now seen at the town-fair, had made his way to the Lodge, and the swarthy master, with his two companions, as it might be his brothers, were like all the men of their tribe. A thick growth of hair covered the mouth below an eaglenose, and on their shaggy heads they wore soft red bonnets. One was followed by a tall camel, slowly marching along with an ape perched on his hump; the other led a brown bear with a muzzle on his snout.

The master's wife, and a dark-faced young wench, were walking by the side of a little wagon having two wheels, to which an over-worked mule was harnessed. A youth, of may-be twelve years of age, blew upon a pipe for the bear to dance, and inasmuch as he had no clothes but a ragged little coat, and a sharp east wind was blowing, he quaked with cold and shivered as he piped. Notwithstanding he was a fine lad, well-grown, and with a countenance of outlandish but well nigh perfect beauty. He had come, for certain, from some distant land; yet was he not of the same race as the others.

When we had seen enough of the show, my uncle commanded that meat should be brought for the wanderers; and when pease-pottage and other messes had been given them, they fetched, from under the wagon-tilt, a swarthy babe, which, meseemed was a sweet little maid albeit she was so dark-colored.

Ann and I gazed at these folks while they ate, and it seemed strange to us to see that the well-favored lad put away from him with horror the bacon which the old bear-leader set before him; and for this the man

dealt him a rude blow.

After their meal the master went on his way; and when we likewise had eaten our dinner, my dear godfather and uncle, Christian Pfinzing, came from the town, bringing a troop of mercenaries to the camp where they were to be trained that they might fight against the Hussites. He, like the other guests, made friends with the strangers, and in his merry fashion he bid the older bear leader tell our fortunes by our hands, while the young ones should dance.

The man then read the future for each of us; my fortune was sheer folly, whereof no single word ever came true. He promised my brother a Count's coronet and a wife from a race of princes; and when Ann heard it, and held up her finger at Herdegen for shame, he whispered in her ear that she was of the race of the Sovereign Queen of all queens—of Venus, ruler of the universe. All this she heard gladly; yet could no one persuade her to let her hand be read.

At last it was the woman's turn to dance; before she began she had smoothed her hair and tied it with small gold pieces; and indeed she was a well grown maid and slender, well-favored in face and shape, with a right devilish flame in her black eyes. It was a strange but truly a pleasing thing to see her; first she laid a dozen of eggs in a circle on the grass, and then she beat her tambourine to the piping of the lad and the drumming of one of the men who had remained with her, and rattled it over her head with wanton lightness till the bells in the hoop rang out, while she turned and bent her supple body in a mad, swift whirl, bowing and rising again. Her falcon eyes never gazed at the ground, but were ever fixed upwards or on the bystanders, and nevertheless her slender bare feet never went nigh the eggs in the wildest spinning of her dance.

The gentlemen, and we likewise, clapped our hands; then, while she stayed to take breath, she snatched Herdegen's hat from his head—and she had long had her eye on him—and gathered all the eggs into it with much bowing and bending to the measure of the music. When she had put all the eggs into the hat she offered it to my brother kneeling on one knee, and she touched the rim of her tambourine with her lips. The froward fellow put his fingers to his lips, as the little children do to blow a kiss, and when his eyes fell on that wench's, meseemed that this was not the first time they had met.

It was now a warm and windless autumn day, and after dinner my aunt was carried out into the courtyard. When the dancing was at an end, she, as was her wont, questioned the men and the elder woman as to all she desired to know; and, learning from them that the men were likewise tinkers, she bid Ann hie to the kitchen and command that the house-keeper should bring together all broken pots and pans. But now, near by the wagon, was a noise heard of furious barking, and the pitiful cry of a child.

The Junker, who had set forth early in the day to scour the woods, had but now come home; the hounds with him had scented strangers, and had rushed on the brown babe, which was playing in the sand behind the wagon, making cakes and pasties. The dogs were indeed called off in all haste, but one of them, a spiteful badger-hound, had bitten deep into the little one's shoulder.

I ran forthwith to the spot, and picked up the babe in my arms, seeing its red blood flow; but the elder woman rushed at me, beside her wits with rage, to snatch it from me; and whereas she was doubtless its mother or grand-dame, I might have yielded up the child, but that Ritter Franz came to me in haste to bid me, from my Aunt Jacoba, carry it to her.

Who better than she knew the whole art and secret of healing the wounds of a hound's making? And so I told the old dame, to comfort her, albeit she struggled furiously to get the babe from me. Nay and she might have done so if the little thing had not clung round my neck with its right arm that had no hurt, as lovingly as though it had been mine own and no kin to the shrieking old woman.

But ere long a clear and strange light was cast on the matter; for when we had loosened the child's little shirt, and my aunt had duly washed the blood from the wounds, under the dark hue of its skin behold it was tender white, and so it was plain that here was a stolen child, needing to be rescued.

Then the house-stewardess, the widow of a forester whose husband had been slain by poachers, and who labored bravely to bring up her five orphan children, with my aunt's help—this woman, I say, now remembered that when she had made her pilgrimage, but lately, to Vierzehnheiligen, the Knight von Hirschhorn, treasurer to the Lord Bishop of Bamberg at Schesslitz, not far from the place of pilgrimage, had lost a babe, stolen away by vagabond knaves. Then Aunt Jacoba bethought herself that restitution and benevolence might be made one; and, quoth she, this matter might greatly profit the housekeeper and her little ones, inasmuch as that the sorrowing father had promised a ransom of thirty Hungarian ducats to him who should bring back his little daughter living; and forthwith the whole tribe of the bear-leaders were to be bound. The old beldame gave our men a hard job, for she tried to make off to the forest, and called aloud: "Hind-Hind!" which was the young wench's name, with outlandish words which doubtless were to warn her to flee; but the serving men gained their end and made the wild hag fast.

Ann was pale and in pain with her head aching, but she helped my aunt to tend the child; and I was glad, inasmuch as I conceived that I knew where to find Herdegen and the young dancing wench, and I cared only to save his poor betrayed sweetheart from shame and sorrow. I crept away, unmarked, through the garden of herbs behind the lodge, to a moss but which my banished cousin had built up for me, in a covert spot between two mighty beech-trees, while I was yet but a school maid.

Verily my imagination was not belied, for whereas I passed round the pine-grove I heard my brother cry out: "Ah-wild cat!" and the hussy's loathsome laugh. And thereupon they both came forth, only in the doorway he held her back to kiss her. At this she showed her white teeth, and meseemed she would fain bite him; she thrust him away and laughed as she said: "To-night; not too much at once." Howbeit he snatched her to him, and thereupon I called him by name and went forward.

He let her go soon enough then, but he stamped with his foot for sheer rage. This, indeed, moved me not; with a calm demeanor I bid the wench follow me, and to that faithless knave I cried: "Fie!" in a tone of scorn which must have made his ears burn a good while. Before we entered the garden I bid him go round about the house and come upon the others from the right hand; she was to come with me and round by the left side.

I now saw that there were shreds of moss and dry leaves in the young woman's hair and bid her brush them out. This she did with a mocking smile, and said in scorn: "Your lover?"

"Nay," said I, "far from it. But yet one whom I would fain shield from evil." She shrugged her shoulders; I only said: "Come on."

As we went round to the front of the house the elder woman was being led away with her hands bound, and no sooner did the young one descry her than she picked up her skirts and with one wild rush tried to be off and away. I called Spond, my trusty guard, and bid him stay her; and the noble hound dogged her steps till the men could catch her and lead her to my aunt. The lady questioned her closely, deeming that so young and comely a creature might be less stubborn than the old hag who had grown grey in sins; but Hind stood dumb and made as though she knew not our language. As to Herdegen, he meanwhile had greeted Ann with great courtesy; nevertheless he had kept close to the dancing wench, and took upon himself to tie her bonds and lead her to the dungeon cell. He sped well, inasmuch as he got away with her alone, as he desired; for Sir Franz delayed me again, and such a suit as he now pleaded can but seldom have found a match, for I was bent only on following my brother, to rescue him from the vagabond woman's snares; and while the knight held me fast by the hand, and swore he loved me, I was only striving to be free, and gazing after Herdegen and Hind, heeding him not. At length he hurt my hand, which I could not get away from him; and whereas he was beginning to look wildly and to seem crazed, I besought him to leave me free henceforth and try his fortune elsewhere. But still he would never have set me free so hastily if an evil star had not brought the Swabian Junker to the spot.

Sir Franz, without a word of greeting or warning, went up to him and upbraided him for having caused a mischief to a helpless babe through his heedless conduct. But if Sir Franz knew not already that he, to whom he spoke as roughly as though he were a froward serving man, was in truth

son and heir of a right noble house, he learnt it now. His last words were: "And for the future have your savage hounds in better governance!" Whereupon the other coolly answered: "And you, your tongue."

On this the other shrugged his shoulders and replied in scorn that to be sure his tongue was for use and not for silence like some folks'. And I marvelled where the Swabian, who was so slow of speech, found the words for retort and answer, till at length it was too much for him and he laid his hand on his hanger as a second and a sharper tongue.

CHAPTER VIII.

The dancing-wench was locked into the cell with the rest of the wanderers, and as I looked in through the window at the fine young creature, squatting in a corner, I had pity on her, and for my part I would fain have sent her forth and away never to see her more.

I could nowhere find Herdegen; I had no mind for Uncle Christian's jests; and when, at last, I betook me to my own chamber, meseemed that some horrible doom was in the air, from which there was no escape. And matters were no better when Ann, who of late had been free from her bad headache, came up to bed, to hide her increasing pain among the pillows. So I sat dumb and thoughtful by her side, till Aunt Jacoba sent for me to lay cold water on the arm of the little kidnapped maid. The child had been well washed, and lay clean and fresh between the sheets, and the swarthy dirty little changeling was now a sweet, fair-haired darling. I tended it gladly; all the more when I thought of the joy it would bring to its father and mother; notwithstanding the evil nightmare would not be cast off, not even when the clatter of wine cups and Uncle Christian's big laugh fell on my ear.

Seldom had I so keenly missed Herdegen's mirthful voice. The housekeeper told me that he had gone on horseback into the town at about the hour of Ave Maria. My grand-uncle had bidden him to go to him. The vagabond knaves had already been put to the torture in my brother's presence, but they had confessed nothing of their guilt; inasmuch, indeed, as in our dungeon there were none other instruments of torture than the rack, the thumbscrew, and scourges needful for the Bamberg torture, and a Pomeranian cap, made to crush the head somewhat; but in Nuremberg there was a store, less mild and of more active effect.

The air was hot and heavy, the sun had set behind black clouds, yellow and dim, like a blind eye. A strange languor came over me, though I was wont to be so brisk, and with it a long train of dismal and hideous images. First I saw the Junker and Sir Franz, who had fallen out about me, a foolish maid; then it was my Ann, pining with grief, paler than

ever with a nun's veil on her; or standing by the Pegnitz, on the very spot where, erewhile, in the sweet Springtide, a forsaken maid had cast herself in.

The first lightning rent the sky and the storm came up in haste, bursting above our heads, and as the thunder roared closer and closer after the flash I was more and more frightened. Moreover the sick child wept piteously and waxed restless with fever and pain. By this time all was still in the dining-hall; but when my aunt bid me let the housekeeper take my place by the little one's bed and go to my rest, I would not; for indeed I could in no wise have slept.

They let me have my way, and soon after midnight, seized with fresh dread anent Herdegen, I was at the open window to let the rough wind fan my hot head, when suddenly the hounds set up a furious barking, as though the Forest lodge were beset on all sides by robbers. And at the same time I saw, by the glare of the lightning, that the old lime-tree in the midst of my aunt's herb garden was lying on the earth. This cut me to the heart, inasmuch as this tree was dear to my uncle, having been planted by his grandfather; and there was never a spot where his ailing wife was so fain to be in the hot summer days as under its shadow. Aye, and all my young life's happiness, meseemed, was like that tree-torn up by the roots, and I gazed spellbound at the blasted lime-tree till I was affrighted by a new horror; on the furthest rim of the sky, on the side where the town lay, I beheld a line of light which waxed broader and brighter till it was rose and blood-red.

A wild uproar came up from the kennels and foresters' huts, and I heard a medley of many voices; and whereas the distant flare began to soar more brightly heavenward I believed those who were saying below that all Nuremberg was in flames.

Even Aunt Jacoba had quitted her bed, and every soul under that roof looked forth at the fire and gave an opinion as to whether it were waxing or waning. And, thanks be to the Blessed Virgin, the latter were in the right; some few granaries, or stores of goods it might be, had been burnt out, and I, among other fainting hearts, was beginning to breathe more easily, when the watchman's cry was heard once more and what next befell showed that my fears had not been groundless.

It was the vigil of Saint Simon and Saint Jude's day—[October 28th]—in the year of our Lord 1420, and never shall I forget it. The great things which befell that night are they not written in the Chronicles of the town, and still fresh in many minds? but peradventure in none are they more deeply printed than in mine; and while I move my pen I can, as it were, see the great hall of the hunting lodge with my very eyes. Many folks are astir, and all in scant attire and full of eager thirst for tidings. The alarm of fire has brought them from their pillows in all haste, and they press close and gaze through the door, which stands wide open, at the light spot in the sky. Not one dares go forth in the wild

wind, and many a one draws his garment or cloak or coverlet closer round him; the gale sweeps in with such fury that the pitch torches against the wall are well nigh blown out, and the red and yellow glare casts a weird light in the hall.

Then the watchman's call is silent, and the growling and wailing of the forest folk comes nigher and nigher.

Presently a man totters across the threshold, upheld with sore difficulty by the gate-keeper Endres inasmuch as his own knees quake; and he who comes home thus, as he might be drunken or grievously hurt, is none other than my brother Herdegen. The torchlight falls on his face, and whereas my eyes descry him I cry aloud, and my soul has no thought of him but sheer pity and true love.

I haste to take Endres' place while Epplein, his faithful serving-man, whom he had not taken with him as is his wont, holds him up on the other hand.

But touch him where we may he feels a hurt; and while Uncle Conrad and the rest press him with questions, he can only point to his head and lips, which are too weak for thinking or speaking.

Alas! that poor fellow, meseems, bears but little likeness to my noble Herdegen, on whose arm the Italian Marchesa riveted her golden fetter. His face is swollen and bloodshot in one part, and cruelly torn in others. Where are the lovelocks that graced him so well? His left arm is helpless, his rich attire hangs about him in rags. He might be a battered, wretched beggar picked up in the high-road, and I rejoice truly to think that Ann is within the shelter of her bed and escapes the sight.

My aunt, who had long ere this been carried down to the hall, felt all his limbs and joints, and found that no bones were broken, while my uncle questioned him; and he told us in broken words that his horse had taken fright in the forest at a flash of lightning, had thrown him, and then dragged him through the brushwood; it was his man's nag which, as it fell, he had taken out that evening, and it was roaming now about the woods.

He had scarce ended his tale, when one of the warders of the dungeon and the gate-keeper rushed in with the tidings that one of the prisoners, and that the young wench, had escaped, although the door of the keep was locked and the window barred. She was clearly a witch, and only one thing was possible; namely that she had flown through the barred window, after the manner of witches on a broomstick, or in the shape of a bird, a bat, or an owl; nay, this was as good as certain, inasmuch as that the watchman had seen a wraith in the woods at about the hour of midnight, and the same face had appeared to the kennel-keeper. Both swore they had crossed themselves thereat, and said many paternosters. The other captives bore witness to the same, declaring that the wench had never

been one of them, but had joined herself unawares to their company last midsummer eve, without saying whence, or whither she would go. She had flown off some hours since in the form of a monstrous vampire, but had fallen upon them first with tooth and nail; and albeit they were an evil-disposed crew their tale seemed truthful, whereas they were covered with many scratches which were not caused by the torture.

At these tidings my brother lost all heart, and fell back in the arm-chair as pale as ashes. I was presently left alone with him; but he answered nothing to my questions, and meseemed he slept. As day dawned I was chilled with the cold, so, inasmuch I could do nothing to help him, I went down stairs. There I found our gentlemen taking leave, for one was off to the city to make inquisition as to the fire, and the other would fain seek his warm bed.

Hot elecampane wine had been served to give them comfort, when again we heard horses' hoofs and the watchman's call. Everybody came out in haste, only Uncle Christian Pfinzing did not move, for, so long as the wine jug was not empty, it would have needed more than this to stir him. He was a mighty fat man, with a short brick-red neck, cropped grey hair, and a round, well-favored countenance, with shrewd little eyes which stood out from his head.

We young Schoppers loved this jolly, warm-hearted uncle, who was childless, with all our hearts; but I clung to him most of all, since he was my dear godfather; likewise had he for many years shown an especial and truly fatherly care for Ann.

Well, Uncle Christian had peacefully gone on drinking the fiery liquor, waiting for the others; but when they came to tell him what tidings the horseman had brought, the cup fell from his hand, clattering down on the paved floor and spilling the wine; and at the same time his kind, faithful head dropped to one side, and for a few minutes his senses had left him. Albeit we were able ere long to bring him back to life again, I found, to my great distress, that his tongue seemed to have waxed heavy. Howbeit, by the help of the Blessed Virgin, he afterwards was so far recovered that when he sat over his cups his loud voice and deep laugh could be heard ringing through the room.

The tidings delivered by the messenger and which brought on this sickness—of which the leech Ulsenius had ere this warned him—might have shaken the heart of a sterner man; for my Uncle Christian lodged in the Imperial Fort as its warder, and his duty it was to guard it. Near it, likewise, on the same hill-crag, stood the old castle belonging to the High Constable, or Burgrave Friedrich. Now the Burgrave had come to high words with Duke Ludwig the Bearded, of Bayern-Ingolstadt, so that the Duke's High Steward, the noble Christoph von Laymingen, who dwelt at Lauf, had made so bold, with his lord at his back, as to break the peace with Friedrich, although he had lately become a powerful prince as Elector of the Mark of Brandenburg.

The said Christoph von Laymingen, so the horsemen told us, had ridden forth to Nuremberg this dark night and had seized the castle—not indeed the Imperial castle, which stood unharmed, but the stronghold of the old Zollern family which had stood by its side—and had burnt it to the ground. This, indeed, was no mighty offence in the eyes of the town-council, inasmuch as it bore no great friendship to his Lordship the Constable and Elector, and had had many quarrels with him—nay, long after this the council was able to gain possession of the land and ruins by purchases—till, uncle Christian bitterly rued having sent his men-at-arms, whose duty it was to defend the castle, out into the country, though it were for so good a purpose as fighting against the Hussites.

It might have brought him into bad favor with the Elector; however, it did him no further mischief. One thing was certainly proven beyond doubt: that knavish treason had been at work in this matter; at Nuremberg, under the torture, it came out that the bear-master had been a spy and tell-tale bribed by Laymingen to discover whither Pfinzing and his men had removed.

And lest any one should conceive that here was an end to the woes that had fallen on the forest lodge in that short time from midnight to daybreak, I must record one more; for the new day, which dawned with no hue of rose, grey and dismal over the tawny woods, brought us fresh sorrow and evil.

Behind the moss-hut, wherein I had found my Herdegen with the dancing hussy, the Swabian Junker and Ritter Franz had fought, without any heed of the law and order of such combat—fought for life or death, and for my sake. And as though in this cruel time I were doomed to go through all that should worst wound my poor heart, I must need go forth to see the stricken limetree at that very moment when the Junker had dealt his enemy a deadly stroke and came rushing away with his hair all abroad like a mad man. It was indeed a merciful chance that my Uncle Conrad and the chaplain likewise had come forth to the garden, so that I might go with them to see the wounded knight.

The youth was lying on the wet grass, now much paler than ever, and his lips trembling with pain. A faded leaf had fallen on his brow and was strange to behold against his ashen skin; but I bent me down and took it off. By him was lying the uprooted limetree, from which that leaf had fallen, and whereas the rain was dropping from it fast, meseemed it was weeping.

And my heart was knit as it never had been before, to this young knight who had shed his blood in my behalf; but while I gazed down right lovingly into his face the Swabian came close up to him with ruthless eyes, and from those of the wounded man there shot at me a glance so full of hate and malice that I shuddered before it. This was an end, then, to all pity and tenderness. And yet, as I looked on his cold, set face, as

pale and white as dull chalk, I could not forbear tears; for it is ever pitiful to see when death overtakes one who is not ripe for dying, as we bewail the green corn which is smitten by the hail, and hold festival when the reaper cuts the golden ears.

Thus were there three sick and wounded in the forest-lodge, besides my aunt; for Uncle Christian must have some few days of rest and nursing. Howbeit there was no lack of us to tend them; Ann was recovered to-day and Cousin Maud had come in all haste so soon as she knew of what had befallen Herdegen; for, of us all, he held the largest room in her heart; and even when he was at school, albeit he had money and to spare of his own, she had given him so freely of hers that he was no whit behind the sons of wealthy Counts.

Biding the time till my cousin should come—and she could not until the evening—it was my part to stay with my brother; but whereas Ann would fain have helped me, this Aunt Jacoba conceived to be in no way fitting for a young maid; much less then would she grant my earnest desire that I might devote me to the care of Sir Franz; though she had it less in mind to consider its fitness, than to conceive that it would be of small benefit to the wounded man, at the height of his fever, to know that the maid for whose love he had vainly sued was at his side.

Thus I was forbidden to see Ann in my brother's chamber; nevertheless I had much on my heart and I could guess that she likewise was eager to speak with me; but when at last I was alone with her in our bed chamber, she had matter for speech of which I had not dreamed. When I asked her what message she might desire me to give Herdegen from her, she besought me as I loved her not to name her at all in his presence. This, indeed, amazed me not a little, inasmuch as I weened not that she knew of all the grief I had suffered yestereve. But this was not so; I learnt now that she had marked everything, and had heard the men's light talk about the dashing youth whom the dark-eyed hussy had been so swift to choose from among them all. I, indeed, tried to make the best of the matter, but she gave me to understand that, if her lover had not done himself a mischief, it had been her intent to question him that very day as to whether he was in earnest with his love-pledges, or would rather that she should give him back his ring and his word. All this she spoke without a tear or a sigh, with steadfast purpose; and already I began, for my part, to doubt of the truth of her love; and I told her this plainly. Thereupon she clasped me to her, and while the tears gathered and sparkled in her great eyes, expounded to me all the matter; and in truth it was all I should myself have said in her place. She, of simple birth, would enter the circle of her betters on sufferance, and her new friends would, of a certainty, not do her more honor than her own husband. On his manner of treating her therefore would depend what measure of respect she might look for as his wife. And so long as their promise to marry was a secret, she would have him show, whether to her alone or before all the world, that he held her consent as of no less worth than that of the wealthiest and highest born heiress.

All this she spoke in hot haste while her cheeks glowed red. I saw the blue veins swell on her pure brow, and can never forget the image of her as she raised her tearful eyes to Heaven and pressing her hands on her panting bosom cried: "To go forth with him to want or death is as nothing! But never will I be led into shame, not even by him."

When presently I left her, after speaking many loving words to her, and holding her long in my arms, she was ready to forgive him; but she held to this: "Not a word, not a glance, not a kiss, until Herdegen had vowed that yesterday's offence should be the first and last she should ever suffer."

How clearly she had apprehended the matter!

Albeit she little knew how deeply her beloved had sinned against the truth he owed her. They say that Love is blind, and so he may be at first. But when once his trust is shaken the bandage falls, and the purblind boy is turned into a many-eyed, sharp-sighted Argus.

CHAPTER IX.

Every one was ready to nurse the little maid who called herself "little Katie." But as to Herdegen, I was compelled for the time to say nothing to him of what Ann required of him, for he lay sick of a fever. He was faithfully tended by Epelein, the son of a good servant of our father's who had lost his life in waiting on his master when stricken with the plague. Epelein had indeed grown up in our household, among the horses; even as a lad he had by turns helped Herdegen in his sports, and rendered him good service, and had ever shown him a warmer love than that of a hireling.

It fell out one day that my brother's best horse came to harm by this youth's fault, and when Herdegen, for many days, would vouchsafe no word to him the lad took it so bitterly to heart that he stole away from the house, and whereas no one could find him, we feared for a long time that he had done himself a mischief. Nevertheless he was alive and of good heart. He had passed the months in a various life; first as a crier to a wandering quack, and afterwards, inasmuch as he was a nimble and likely lad, he had waited on the guests at one of the best frequented inns at Wurzburg. It came then to pass that his eminence Cardinal Branda, Nuncio from his Holiness the Pope, took up his quarters there, and he carried the lad away with him as his body-servant to Italy, and treated him well till the restless wight suddenly fell into a languor of home-sickness, and ran away from this good master, as erewhile he had run away from our house. Perchance some love-matter drove him to fly. Certain it is that

in his wandering among strangers he had come to be a mighty handy, wide-awake fellow, with much that was good in him, inasmuch as with all his subtlety he had kept his true Nuremberger's heart.

When he had journeyed safely home again he one day stole unmarked into our courtyard, where his old mother lived in an out-building on the charity of the Schoppers; he went up to her and stood before her, albeit she knew him not, and laid the gold pieces he had saved one by one on the work-table before her. The little old woman scarce knew where she was for sheer amazement, nor wist she who he was till he broke out into his old loud laugh at the sight of her dismay. Verily, as she afterwards said, that laugh brought more gladness to her heart and had rung sweeter in her ears than the gold pieces.

Then Susan had called us down to the courtyard, and when a smart young stripling came forth to meet us, clad in half Italian and half German guise, none knew who he might be till he looked Herdegen straight in the face, and my brother cried out: "It is our Eppelein!" Then the tears flowed fast down his cheeks, but Herdegen clasped him to him and kissed him right heartily on both cheeks.

All this did I bring to mind as I saw this said Eppelein carefully and sorrowfully laying a wet cloth, at my aunt's bidding, on his master's head where it was so sorely cut; and methought how well it would have been if Herdegen were still so ready to follow the prompting of his heart.

Understanding anon that I was not needed by this bed, where Eppelein kept faithful watch and ward, and that Sir Franz's chamber was closed to me, I went down stairs again, for I had heard a rumor that the swarthy lad—who had yesterday played on the pipe—was to be put to the torture. This I would fain have hindered, whereas by many tokens I was certain that the said comely youth was not one of the vagabond crew, but, like little Katie, might well be a child knavishly kidnapped from some noble house. Whereas I reached the hall, Balzer, the keeper, was about bringing the lad in. Outside indeed it was dim and wet, but within it was no less comfortable, for a mighty fire was blazing in the wide chimney-place. My aunt was warming her thereat, and Ann likewise was of the company, with Uncle Conrad, Jost Tetzl, my godfather Christian Pfinzing, and the several guests.

I joined myself to them and in an under tone told them what I had noted, saying that, more by token the youth must have a good conscience; for, whereas he had not been cast into the cell but had been locked into a stable to take charge of the camels and the ape, he had nevertheless not tried to escape, although it would have been easy.

To this opinion some inclined; and seeing that the boy spoke but a few words of German, but knew more of Italian, I addressed him in that tongue; and then it came to light that he was verily and indeed a stolen

child. The vagabonds had bartered for him in Italy, giving a fair girl whom they had with them in exchange; likewise he said he was of princely birth, but had fallen into slavery some two years since, when a fine galley governed by his father, an Emir or prince of Egypt, had fought with another coming from Genoa in Italy.

When I had presently interpreted these words to the others, Jost Tetzal, Ursula's father, declared them to be sheer lies and knavery; even Uncle Conrad deemed them of little worth; and for this reason: that if the lad had indeed been the son of some grand Emir of Egypt the bear-leader would for certain have made profit of him by requiring his ransom.

But when I told the lad of this he fixed his great eyes very modestly on me, and in truth there was no small dignity in his mien and voice as he asked me:

"Could I then bring poverty on my parents, who were ever good to me, to bestow wealth on that evil brood? Never should those knavish rogues have learnt from me what I have gladly revealed to thee who are full of goodness and beauty!"

This speech went to my heart; and if it were not truth then is there no truth in all the world! But when again I had interpreted his words, and Tetzal still would but shrug his shoulders, this vexed me so greatly that it was as much as I could do to refrain myself, and hold my peace.

I had seen from the first, in Uncle Christian's eyes, that he was of the same mind with me; yet could I not guess what purpose he had in his head, although to judge by her face it was something passing strange, when he muttered some behest to Ann with his poor fettered tongue. Then, when she told me what my godfather required of me, I was not in any haste to obey, for, indeed, maidenly bashfulness and pity hindered me. Yet, whereas the brave old man nodded to spur me on, with his heavy head, still covered with a cold wet cloth, I called up all my daring, and before the lad was aware I dealt him a slap on the cheek.

It was not a hard blow, but the lad seemed as much amazed as though the earth had opened at his feet. His dark face turned ashen-grey and his great eyes looked at me in tearful enquiry, but so grievously that I already rued my unseemly deed.

Soon, however, I had cause to be glad; the youth's demeanor won his cause. Uncle Christian had only desired to prove him. He knew men well, and he knew that youths of various birth take a blow in the face in various ways; now, the Emir's son had demeaned him as one of his rank, and had stood the ordeal! So my aunt Jacoba told him, for she had at once seen through Uncle Christian's purpose, and presently Jost Tetzal himself, though ill-pleased and sullen, confessed his error. Then, when they had promised the youth that he should be spared all further ill-usage, he opened the lining of his garment and showed us a gem which his

mother had privily hung about his neck, and which was a lump or tablet of precious sky-blue turkis-stone, as large as a great plum, whereon was some charm inscribed in strange, outlandish signs which the Jewish Rabbi Hillel, when he saw it, declared to be Arabic letters.

The bear-leader had called the lad Beppo; but his real name was a long one and hard to utter, out of which my forest uncle picked up two syllables for a name he could speak with ease, calling him Akusch.

With Cousin Maud's assent the black youth was attached to my service as Squire, inasmuch as it was I who at first had "dubbed him knight;" and when I gave him to understand this he could not contain himself for joy, and from that hour he ever proved my most ready servant, ever alert and thankful; and the little benevolence it was in my power to shew the poor lad bore fruit more than a thousand fold in after times, to me and mine.

After noon that same day Ann confessed to me that she had it in her mind to quit the lodge that very evening, journeying home with Master Ulsenius; and when she withstood all my entreaties she told Cousin Maud likewise that she had indeed already left her own kin too long without her succor.

Aunt Jacoba was in her chimney corner, and how she took this sudden purpose on Ann's part, may be imagined.

It was so gloomy a day that there was scarce a change when dusk fell. Grey wreaths of cloud hung over the tree-tops, and fine rain dripped with a soft, steady patter, as though it would never cease; nor was there another sound, inasmuch as neither horn, nor watchman's cry, nor bell might break the silence, for the sake of the wounded men; nay, even the hounds, meseemed, understood that the daily course of life was out of gear.

Ann had gone to pack her little baggage with Susan's help, but she had bid me remain with the child. It was going on finely; it would play with the doll my Aunt had given it in happy pastime, and now I did the little one's bidding and was right glad to be her play fellow for a while. Time slipped on as I sat there making merry with little Katie, doing the dolly's leather breeches and jerkin off and on, blowing on the child's little shoulder when it smarted or giving her a sweetmeat to comfort her, and still Ann came not, albeit she had promised to join me so soon as her baggage was ready.

Hereupon a sudden fear seized me, and as soon as the housekeeper came up I went to seek Ann in our chamber. There stood all her chattel, so neat as only she could make them; and I learnt from Susan that Ann had gone down, some time since, into Aunt Jacoba's chamber.

I was minded to seek her there, and went by the ante-chamber where the sick lady's writing-table and books stood, and which led to the sitting

chamber. I trod lightly by reason that the knight's chamber was beneath; thus no one heard me; but I could see beyond the dark ante-chamber into the further one, where wax lights were burning in a double candlestick, and lo! Ann was on her knees by the sick lady's couch, like to the linden-tree which the storm had overthrown yesternight; and she hid her face in my aunt's lap and sobbed so violently that her slender body shook as though in a fever. And Aunt Jacoba had laid her two hands on Ann's head, as it were in blessing. And I saw first one large tear, and then many more, run down the face of this very woman who had cast out her own fair son. Often had I marked on her little finger a certain ring in which a little white thing was set; yet was this no splinter of the bone of a Saint, but the first tooth her banished son had shed. And, when she deemed that no man saw her, she would press her hand to her lips and kiss the little tooth with fervent love. And now, whereas love had waked up again in her heart, that son had his part and share in it; for albeit none dared make mention of him in her presence she ever loved him as the apple of her eye.

I was no listener, yet could I not shut mine ears; I heard how the frail old lady exhorted the love-sick maid, and bid her trust in God, and in Herdegen's faithfulness. Also I heard her speak well indeed of my brother's spirit and will as noble and upright; and she promised Ann to uphold her to the best of her power.

She bid her favorite farewell with a fond kiss, and many comforting words; and as she did so I minded me of a wondrously fair maiden, the daughter of Pernhart the coppersmith, known to young and old in the town as fair Gertrude, who, each time I had beheld her of late, meseemed had grown even sadder and paler, and whom I now knew that I should never see more, inasmuch as that only yestereve Uncle Christian had told us, with tears in his eyes, that this sweet maid had died of pining, and had been buried only a day or two since with much pomp. Now my aunt had heard these tidings, and she had shaken her head in silence and folded her hands, as it were in prayer, fixing her eyes on the ground.

Cousin Gotz and Herdegen—fair Gertrude and my Ann; what made them so unlike that my aunt should bring herself to mete their bonds of love with so various a measure?

I quitted the room when Ann came forth, and outside the door I clasped her in my arms; and in the last hour we spent together at the forest lodge she bid me greet her heart's beloved from her, and gave me for him the last October rose-bud, which my uncle had plucked for her at parting. Yet she held to her demands.

She left us after supper, escorted by Master Ulsemus. She had come hither one sunny morn with the song of the larks, and now she departed in darkness and gloom.

CHAPTER X.

"By Saint Bacchus—if there be such a saint in the calendar, there is stuff in the lad, my boy!" cried burly Uncle Christian Pfinzing, and he thumped the table with his fists so that all the vessels rang. His tongue was still somewhat heavy, but he had mended much in the three weeks since Ann had departed, and it was hard enough by this time to get him away from the wine-jug.

It was in the refectory of the forest lodge that he had thus delivered himself to my Uncle Conrad and Jost Tetzl, Ursula's father; and it was of my brother Herdegen that he spoke.

Herdegen was healed of his bruises and his light limbs had never been more nimble than now; still he bore his left arm in a sling, for there it was, said he, that the horse's hoof had hit him. Whither the horse had fled none had ever heard; nor did any man enquire, inasmuch as it was only Eppelein's nag, and my granduncle had given him a better one.

My silly brain, from the first, had been puzzled to think wherefor my brother should have taken that nag to ride to see his guardian, who thought more than other men of a good horse. And in truth I was not far from guessing rightly, so I will forthwith set down whither indeed my dear brother's horse had vanished, and by what chance and hap he had fallen into so evil a plight.

He had aforetime met the young wench on his way from Padua to Nuremberg, not far from Dachau and had then and there begun his tricks with her, giving her to wit that she might find him again at the forest lodge in the Lorenzer wall. Now when matters took so ill a turn, he pledged himself to get her safe away from the dungeon cell. To this end he feigned that he would ride into the town, after possessing himself of the key of the black hole and after stowing a suit of his man's apparel and a loaf of bread into his saddle-poke. Then he wandered about the wood for some time, and as soon as it fell dark he stole back to the house again on foot. He had made a bold and well-devised plan, and yet he might have come to a foul end; for, albeit the hounds, who knew him well, let him pass into the cell, within he was so fiercely set upon that it needed all his strength and swiftness to withstand it. The froward wretches had plotted to fall upon him and to escape with the wench from their prison, even if it were over his dead body.

One of the bear-leaders had made shift to strip the cords from his hands, and when my brother entered into the dark place where the prisoners lay, they flew at him to fell him. But even on the threshold Herdegen saw through their purpose, and had no sooner shut the door than he drew his hunting knife. Then the old beldame gripped him by the throat and clawed

him tooth and nail; one of the ruffians beat him with a stave torn from the bedstead till he weened he had broken or bruised all his limbs, while the other, whose hands were yet bound, pressed between him and the door. In truth he would have come to a bad end, but that the younger woman saved him at the risk of her own life. The man who had rid himself of his bonds had raised the heavy earthen pitcher to break Herdegen's head withal, when the brave wench clutched the wretch by the arm and hung on to him till Herdegen stuck him with his knife. Thus the ringleader fell, and my brother pulled up his deliverer and dragged her to the door. As he opened it the old woman and the other prisoner put forth their last strength to force their way out, but with his strong arm he thrust them back and locked the door upon them.

Thus he led the young woman, who had come off better than he had feared in the fray, forth to freedom, to keep his word to her.

Out in the wood, in spite of thunder and lightning, he made her to put on Epelein's weed and mount the nag. Thereafter he led her horse to the brook, which floweth through the woods down to the meadow-land, and bid her ride along in the water so far as she might, to put the hounds off the scent. The bread in the saddle-bag would feed her for a few days, and now it lay with her to escape pursuit. And this good deed of my brother's had smitten the lost creature to the heart; when he was about to help her to mount he dropped down on the wet ground from loss of blood, but as he opened his eyes again, behold, his head was resting on her lap and she kissed his brow. Despite her own peril she had not left him in such evil plight, but had done all she could to bring him to his senses; nay, she had gathered leaves by the glare of the lightning to staunch the blood which flowed freely from the worst of his wounds. Nor was she to be moved to go on her way till he showed her that in truth he could walk.

Thus it befel that I long after thought of her with kindness; and indeed, she was not wholly vile; and every human soul hath in it somewhat good which spurs forth to love, inasmuch as it is love which can cast light on all, and that full brightly; and what is bright is good; and that light dieth not till the last spark is dead.

As to Herdegen, verily I have never understood how he could find it in his heart to peril his life for the sake of keeping his word to a vagabond hussy while, at the same time, he was breaking troth with the fairest and sweetest maid on earth. Yet I count it to him chiefly for good that he could risk life and honor to hinder those who fell upon him so foully from escaping the arm of justice; and it is this upholding of the law which truly does more to lift men above us women-folk than any other thing.

Well, by that evening when Uncle Christian thus pledged my brother, Herdegen was quite himself again in mind and body. At first it had seemed as though a wall had been raised up between us; but after that I

had told him that I had concealed from Ann all that I had seen by ill-hap at the moss-hut, he was as kind and trusting as of old, and he showed himself more ready to give Ann the pledge she required than I had looked to find him, stiff-necked as he ever was. And he hearkened unmoved when I told him what Ann had said: "That she was ready to follow him to death, but not to shame."

"That," quoth he, "she need never fear from any true man, and with all his wildness he might yet call himself that." Then he stretched himself at full length on his chair, and threw his arms in the air, and cried:

"Oh, Margery. If you could but slip for one half-hour into your mad brother's skin. In your own, which is so purely white, you can never, till the day of doom, understand what I am. If ever I have seemed weary it is but to keep up a mannerly appearance; verily I could break forth ten times a day and shoot skywards like a rocket for sheer joy in life. When that mood comes over me there is no holding me, and I should dare swear that the whole fair earth had been made and created for my sole and free use, with all that therein is—and above all other creatures the dear, sweet daughters of Eve!—and I can tell you, Margery, the women agree with me. I have only to open my arms and they flutter into them, and not to close them tight—that, Margery, is too much to look for; yet is there but one true bliss, and but one Ann, and the best of all joys is to clasp her to my heart and kiss her lips. I will keep faith with her; I will have nought to say to the rest. But how shall I keep them away from me? Can I wish that those rascals had put my eyes out, had crippled my limbs, had thrashed me to a scare-crow, to the end that the maids should turn their backs on me? Nay, and even no rain-torrent could cool the hot blood of the Schoppers; no oak staff nor stone pitcher could kill the wild cravings within. There is nothing for it but to cast my body among thorns like Saint Francis. But what would even that profit me? You see yourself how well this skin heals of the worst wounds!"

Hereupon I earnestly admonished him of his devoir to that lady who was so truly his, and with whom he had exchanged rings. But he cried: "Do you believe that I did not tell myself, every hour of the day, that she was a thousand-fold more worth than all the rest put together? Never could I deem any maid so sweet as she has been ever since we were children together; nay, and if I lost her I should utterly perish, for it is from her that I, a half-ruined wretch, get all that yet is best in me!"

And many a time did I hear him utter the like; and when I saw his large blue eyes flash as he spoke, while he pushed the golden curls back from his brow, verily he was so goodly a youth to look upon that it was easy to view that the daughters of Eve might be ready to cast themselves into his arms.

This evening, as it fell, Aunt Jacoba was not with her guests, but unwillingly, inasmuch as we were to depart homewards next morning, and the gentlemen sat late over their farewell cups. It had become Cousin

Maud's care to hinder Uncle Christian from drinking more freely than he ought; but this evening he had made the task a hard one; nay, when she steadfastly forbade him a third cup he got it by craft and in spite of her, nor could she persuade him to forego the dangerous joy. When he had cried, as has been told, that "there was stuff" in my brother, it was by reason of his having perceived that Herdegen had already filled his cup for the fourteenth time, and when the youth had drunk it off the old man sang out in high glee:

"Der Eppela Gaila von Dramaues
Reit' allezeit zu vierzeht aus!"

[An old popular rhyme in Nuremberg. "Eppela (Apollonius) Gaila of Dramaues—or Drameysr—could always go as far as fourteen cups." Apollonius von Gailingen was a brigand chief who brought much damage and vexation on the town. Drameysel, in popular form Dramaues, was his stronghold near Muggendorf in Swiss Franconia.]

"Now, if the boy can drink three times the mystic seven, he will do what I could do at his age."

And presently Herdegen did indeed drink his one and twenty cups, and when at last he paced the whole length of the great dining hall on one seam of the flooring the old man was greatly pleased, and rewarded him with the gift of a noble tankard which he himself had won of yore at a drinking bout. All this made good sport for us, save only for Jost Tetzl, who was himself a right moderate man; indeed, in aftertimes, when at Venice I saw how that wealthy and noble gentlemen drank but sparingly of the juice of the grape, I marvelled wherefor we Germans are ever proud of a man who is able to drink deep, and apt to look askance at such as fear to see the bottom of the cup. And if I had an answer ready, that likewise I owed to my uncle Christian; inasmuch as that very eve, when I would fain have warned Herdegen against the good liquor, my uncle put in his word and said it was every man's duty to follow in the ways of Saint George the dragon-killer, and to quell and kill every fiend; be it what it might. "Now in the wine cup, quoth he, there lurks a dragon named drunkenness, and it beseemeth German valor and strength not merely to vanquish it, but even to make it do good service: The fiend of the grape, like the serpent killed by the saint, has two wide pinions, and the true German drinker must make use of them to soar up to the seventh heaven."

And as concerns my Herdegen, I must confess that when he had well drunk his spirits were higher, his mind clearer, and his song more glad; and this is not so save in those dragon-slayers who have been blessed with a fine temper and a strong brain inherited from their parents.

Every evening had there been the like mirthful doings over their wine; but Sir Franz had been ever absent. He was even now forced to remain in his chamber, albeit Master Ulsenius had declared that his life was out of danger. The damage done to his lungs he must to be sure carry to his

grave, nor could he be able to follow us for some weeks yet. He was not to think of making the journey to his own home in Bohemia during this winter season, and at this farewell drinking bout we held council as to whose roof he might find lodging under. He, for his part, would soonest have found shelter with us; but Cousin Maud refused it, and with good reason, inasmuch as I had freely told her that never in this world would I hearken to his suit.

At last it seemed plain that it was Jost Tetzels's part to offer him a home in his great house; nor did he refuse, by reason that Sir Franz von Welemisl was a man of birth and wealth, and his Bohemian and Hungarian kin stood high at the Imperial court.

Next morning, as we drank the stirrup cup, my eyes filled with tears, and it was with a sad heart that I bid farewell to the woods, to my uncle, and to Aunt Jacoba, whom I had during my sojourn learnt to love as was her due. I, like Ann, rode home in a more sober mood than I had come in; for I was no more a child and an end must ever come to wild mirth.

My new squire Akusch rode behind me, and thus, on a fine November day, we made our way back to Nuremberg, in good health and spirits. The camels, the bear, and the monkeys, which had been taken from the vagabonds, were safely cared for in the Hallergarden, and the rogues themselves had been hanged God have mercy on their souls!

Ann had had tidings of our home-coming, yet I found her not at our house, and when I had waited for her till evening, and in vain, I sought her in her own dwelling. But no sooner had I crossed the threshold of the Venice house than I was aware that all was not well; inasmuch as that here, where there were ever half a dozen pairs of little feet hopping up and down, and no end of music and singing from morning till night, all was strangely silent. I stood to hearken, and I now perceived that the metal plate whereon the knocker fell was wrapped in felt.

This foreboded evil, and a vision rose before me of two biers; on one lay Ann, pale and dumb, and on the other my Cousin Gotz's sweetheart, fair Gertrude, the copper-smith's daughter. Then I heard steps on the stair and the vision faded; and I breathed once more, for Ann's grandfather, the old lute-player Gottlieb Spiesz, came towards me, with deep lines of sorrow on his kind face and a finger on his lips; and he told me that his son was lying sick of a violent brain fever, and that Master Ulsenius had feared the worst since yestereve.

His voice broke with sheer grief; nevertheless his serving lad was carrying his lute after him, and as he gave me his hand to bid me good-day he told me that Ann was above tending her father. "And I," quoth he, and his voice was weary but not bitter, "I must go to work—there is so much needed here, and food drops into no man's lap! First to the Tetzels to teach the young ones a madrigal to sing for Master Jost's fiftieth

birthday. And they count on your help and your brother's, sweet Mistress. –Well, children, be happy while it is yet time!”

He passed his hand across his eyes, and glanced up at the top room where his son lay with aching head, and so went forth to teach light-hearted young creatures to sing festal rounds and catches.

In a minute I had Ann in my arms; yea, and she was as sweet and bright as ever. The stern duty she had had to do had been healthful, albeit she had good cause to fear for the future; for, with her father, the household would lose the bread-winner.

It was an unspeakable joy to me to be able to assure her of Herdegen's faithful love, and to repeat to her the many kind words he had spoken concerning her. And she was right glad to hear them; and whereas true love is a flower which, when it droops, needs but a little drop of dew to uplift it again, hers had already raised its head somewhat after my last letter.

And at this, the time of the worst sorrow she had known, another great comfort had been vouchsafed to her: Master Ulsenius and his good wife, having had her to lodge with them the night of her return from the forest, had taken much fancy to her, and the goodhearted leech, a man of great learning, had been fain to admit her to the use of his fine library. Thus I found Ann of brave cheer notwithstanding her woe; and if heartfelt prayers for a sick man might have availed him, it was no blame to me when her father made a sad and painful end on the fifth day after my home-coming. When I heard the tidings meseemed that a cold hand had been laid on my glad faith; for it was hard indeed for a poor, short-sighted human soul to see to what end and purpose this man should have been snatched away in the prime of age and strength.

To keep his large family, to free the little house from debt, and to lay aside a small sum, he had undertaken, besides the duties of his place, the stewardship of certain private properties; thus he had many a time turned night into day, and finally, albeit a stalwart man, he had fallen ill of the brain fever which had carried him off. It seemed, then, that honest toil and brave diligence had but earned the heaviest dole that could befall a man in his state of life; namely: to depart from those he loved or ever he could provide for their future living.

We all followed him to the grave, and it was by the bier of her worthy father that Ann for the first time met my brother once more. There was a great throng present, and he could do no more than press her hand with silent ardor; yet, at the same time he met her eye with such a truthful gaze that it was as a promise, a solemn pledge of faithfulness.

The prebendary of Saint Laurence, Master von Hellfeld, spoke the funeral sermon, and that in a right edifying manner; and whereas he took occasion to say that our Lord and Redeemer would bid all to be his guests and hold

Himself their debtor who should show true Christian love towards these who henceforth had no father, Herdegen privily clasped my hand tightly.

Kunz likewise was present, and standing by the body of the man who had ever loved him best of us three, he wept as sorely as though he had lost his own father.

The gentlemen of the council were all assembled to do the last honors to one whose office had brought them closely together, and I marked that more than one nudged his neighbor to note Ann's more than common beauty, who in her black weed stood among her young brethren and sisters as a consoling angel, who weepeth with them that weep and comforteth the sorrowing. And so it came about that I heard many a father of fair daughters confess that this maid had not her like for beauty in all Nuremberg. And this came to Herdegen's ears, and I could see that it uplifted his spirit and confirmed him in good purpose.

It soon befell that he might show by deed of what mind he was. Master Holzschuher, the notary, who was near of kin and a right good friend of Cousin Maud's, had been named guardian of his children by the deceased Master Spiesz, and he it was who, in our house one day, said that the widow and orphans were in better care than he had looked for, and could keep their little house over their heads if wealthy neighbors could be moved to open their purses and pay off a debt that was upon it. Then my brother sprang up and declared that the family of an upright and faithful servant of the State, and of a friend of the Schoppers, should have some better and more honorable means of living than beggars' pence. He was not yet of full age, but it was his intent to demand forthwith of our guardian Im Hoff so much of that which would be his, as might be needed to release the house from the burden of debt; and albeit Master Holzschuher shook his head thereat, and this was no light thing that Herdegen had undertaken, he departed at once to seek his granduncle.

From him indeed he met with rougher treatment than he had looked for; for the old man made the diligent stewardship of these trust-moneys a point of honor, to the end that when he should give an account of them before the city council it might be seen, by the greatness of the sum, how wise and well advised he had been in getting increase. What my brother called "beggars' pence," he said, was a well-earned guerdon which did the dead clerk's family an honor and was no disgrace; he was indeed minded to pay one-third of the whole sum at his own charges. As to the moneys left to us three by our parents, not a penny thereof would he ever part with. Moreover, Ann's rare charm had touched even my grand-uncle's heart, and he must have been dull-witted indeed if he had not hit on Herdegen's true reasons; and these in his eyes would be the worst of the matter, forasmuch as he was firmly bent on bringing Ursula Tetzl and Herdegen together so soon as my brother should have won his doctor's hood.

Thus it came to pass that, for the first time, our grand-uncle parted from his favorite nephew in wrath, and when Herdegen came home with

crimson cheeks and almost beside himself, he confessed to me that for the present he had not yet been so bold as to tell the old man how deeply he was pledged to Ann, but in all else had told him the plain truth.

At supper Herdegen scarce ate a morsel, for he could not bring himself to endure that his betrothed should sink so low as to receive an alms. He rose from table sullen and grieved, and whereas Cousin Maud could not endure to see her favorite go to rest in so much distress of mind, she led him aside, and inasmuch as she had already guessed how matters stood betwixt him and Ann, not without some fears, she spoke to him kindly, and declared herself ready to free the Spiesz household from debt without any help of strangers. To see him and her dear Ann happy she would gladly make far greater sacrifices, for indeed she did not at all times know what she might do with her own money.

No later than next morning the matter was privily settled by our notary; and albeit Master Holzschuher did so dispose things as though the deceased had left money to pay the debt withal, Ann saw through this, whereas her beautiful mother did but thoughtlessly rejoice over such good fortune.

Henceforth it was Ann's little hand which ruled the fatherless household with steadfast thrift, while Mistress Giovanna, as had ever been her wont, lived only to take care of the children's garments, that they should be neat and clean, of the flowers in the window and the beautiful needlework, and to fondle the little ones, so soon as she had got through her light toil in the kitchen.

It was granted to her and hers that they should dwell henceforth forever in the house by the Pegnitz, humbly indeed, but honorably and without the aid of strangers. One alms to be sure was bestowed on them soon after the first day of each month, and that right privily; for at that time without fail a little packet in which were two Hungarian ducats was found on the threshold of the hall. And who was the giver of this kind token would have remained secret till doomsday had not Susan by chance, and to his great vexation, betrayed my brother Kunz. My grand-uncle had granted him three ducats a month since he had left school, and of these he ever privily gave two to help the household ruled over by Ann. Our old Susan it was who aided him in the matter, so, when he was by any means hindered from laying the little packet on the threshold, she had to find an excuse for going to the little house by the river.

The worshipful council and many friends whose good-will the deceased scribe had won, got the orphans into the best schools in the town, and what Ann had learned as head of the school at the Carthusian convent she now handed down to her younger sisters by diligent teaching; and, as of yore, she gave her most loving care to her little deaf and dumb brother.