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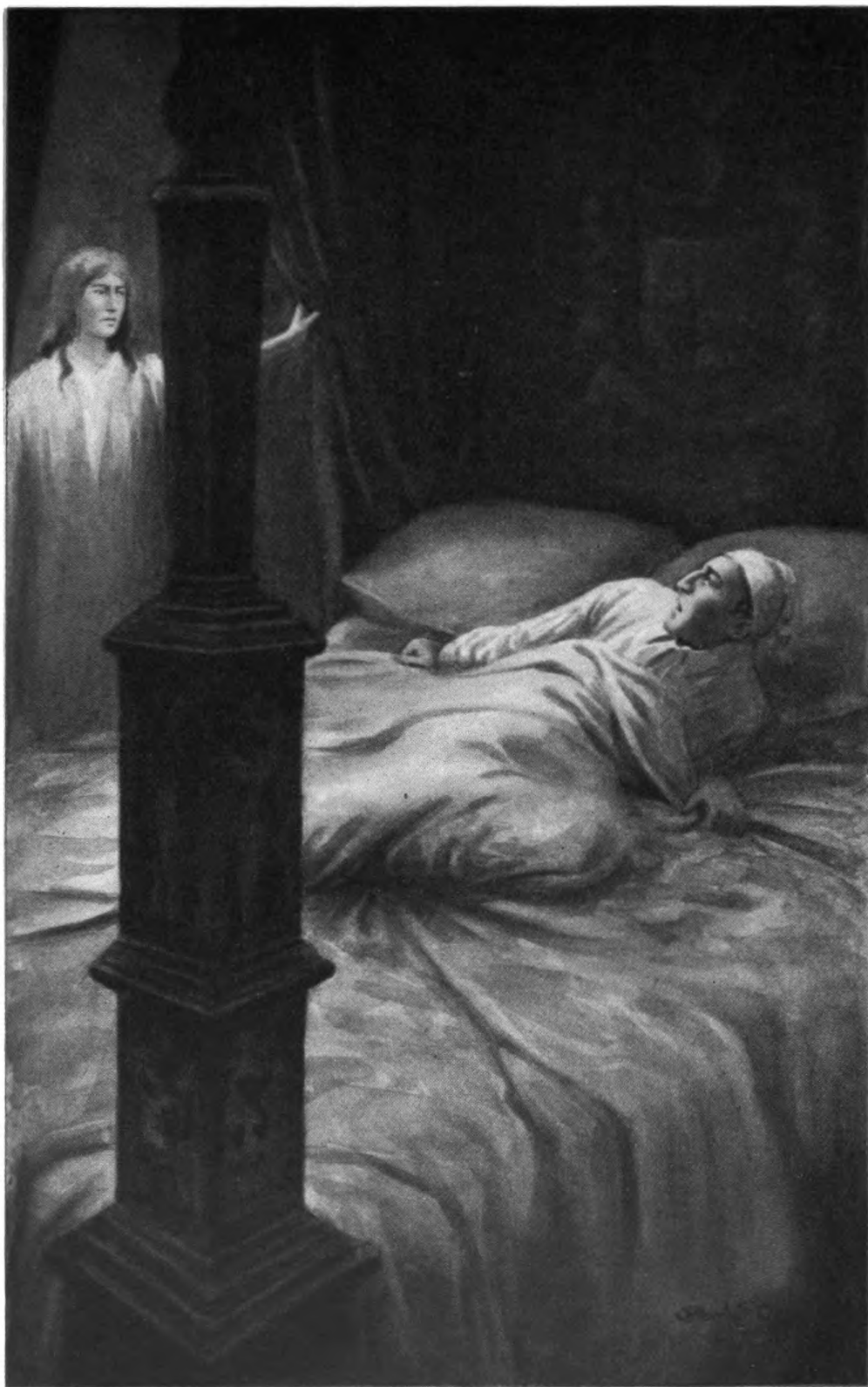
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THE NOVELS OF
ALEXANDRE DUMAS

THE CASTLE
OF EPPSSTEIN

Fig. 27525 .d. (55) $\frac{141}{[3]}$





HE LAY MOTIONLESS AS IF TURNED TO STONE

THE NOVELS OF ALEXANDRE DUMAS

THE

CASTLE OF EPPSTEIN

NEWLY TRANSLATED BY
ALFRED ALLINSON

NEVER BEFORE TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH

WITH THREE ILLUSTRATIONS BY STEWART ORR

METHUEN & CO.
36 ESSEX STREET W.C.
LONDON

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INTRODUCTION

DUMAS, the eternal delight of the reader, is the despair of the biographer, however industrious, and a snare to the bibliographer, however learned. The man who succeeds in recording fully and satisfactorily the amazingly eventful career of Alexandre Dumas will be the Napoleon of biographers, and scarce less credit will be the due of him who compiles a complete bibliography of his works. As it seems right to lighten, even by the weight of one straw, the labours of any fellow-worker, and as the bibliographical history of *The Castle of Eppstein* is a curious one, we shall note here one or two matters concerning it,—well knowing that the reader will only turn to our introduction after he has read the book, and that in consequence we shall not be detaining him from the story.

Mirecourt, the venomous, declared a certain book of Dumas' called *Albine* to be a servile translation from the German. Quérard, the erudite but opinionated author of the *Supercheries Littéraires*, emphatically stated that *Albine* had not achieved publication in France, having been issued in Brussels only. Neither thought of comparing *Albine* with *Le Château d'Eppstein*, with which, however, it is identical.

Two editions of *Albine* appeared in Brussels in 1843, and the following year de Potter issued it in Paris as *Le Château d'Eppstein*. Towards 1860 Lévy included the book in the *Œuvres Complètes* under the latter title. A copy of one of the Brussels editions, that published by Méline Cans et Compagnie, is in our possession ;—the other was issued by Muquardt.

Quérard, who would have been glad to do so if he could, was unable to verify Mirecourt's declaration that the book is a translation from the German, nor has this ever been proved. Dumas, we believe, considered himself in some measure indebted to August Lafontaine for the story. Lafontaine, a German despite his name, who was born at Brunswick in 1759, and died at Halle in 1839, wrote some two hundred and fifty books, nearly all of which are now forgotten. He was so popular in his day that some German works of other writers were translated into French as by him, and it is just possible that Dumas did not know the real source of his material. The authorship of the introduction to the story is not to be mistaken ; the story itself will be to the taste of all who find pleasure in spectres and ruined castles. Although somewhat defective in form, it is told with a certain "naïveté" which has a charm of its own, and while its origin is unmistakably German, it bears signs of French workmanship.

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THE CASTLE OF EPPSTEIN

INTRODUCTION

IN the course of one of those long and delightful evenings which we passed with the Princess Galitzin at Florence during the winter of 1841, it was agreed that each of us should tell a story, which must be of a strange, if not supernatural complexion.

With the exception of Count Elim, we had all told our stories.

The Count was a tall, handsome young man, fair and slender, pale and of a melancholy appearance, which threw into stronger relief the paroxysms of wild mirth which at times possessed him like a fever and which left him as suddenly as they came. Several times already the conversation had turned upon ghosts, and, whenever his opinion had been asked, he had answered with a conviction which it was impossible to doubt:

"I believe in them."

Why did he believe in them? No one had asked him the reason; besides, in such matters, one believes or one does not believe, and it would be difficult to give any definite reason for conviction or incredulity.

Hoffmann, to be sure, believed in the reality of all of his characters: he had seen Floh and had known Coppelius personally.

At all events, when Count Elim, at the mention of the most extraordinary stories of spectres and ghostly apparitions, had replied, "I believe in them," no one for a moment doubted his firm conviction.

When it came to the Count's turn to tell his story, everybody turned to him with the greatest curiosity, determined to insist, if he should attempt to evade the fulfilment of his obligation, and convinced that his story would bear that imprint of veracity which gives the greatest charm to this species of narrative. But the narrator required no urging, and

the Princess had scarcely called upon him to play his part before he bowed in acquiescence and asked us to pardon the relation of a personal adventure.

As may be readily understood, the introduction only served to heighten our interest in the expected narrative, and amidst a general silence he commenced thus:—

Three years ago I was travelling in Germany. I had letters of introduction to a rich merchant in Frankfort, who, having a fine estate on the outskirts of the town, and knowing me to be a keen sportsman, invited me to go shooting, not with him (I must tell you that he had an undisguised contempt for sport) but with his eldest son, whose ideas on the subject were very different from his father's.

On the appointed day we met at the rendezvous, which was at one of the gates of the town, where horses and carriages awaited us, and we set out gaily, some in brakes and some on horseback.

After travelling for an hour and a half, we arrived at our host's farm, where a sumptuous repast awaited us, and I must own that, if our host was no sportsman, he at least knew how to do the honours of the chase.

We were eight in all—our host's son, his tutor, five friends and myself. At table I was placed next to the Professor; we spoke of travel; he had been in Egypt, whence I had just returned. This formed the foundation of one of those sudden friendships which appear so firm when they are first made, but which are as suddenly broken by separation, never to be renewed. On rising from the table we agreed to shoot together. He advised me to form the pivot and to bear towards the Taunus mountains, for the hares and partridges always made for the coverts which clothed the hill sides, and in this way I should not only

secure the game which I put up myself, but even some of that put up by the others.

I was the more ready to follow his advice as we did not begin shooting until past mid-day, and in October the days begin to shorten. But we soon found the game to be so plentiful that we could easily make up for lost time.

It was not long before I perceived the excellence of the advice given me by the Professor; for, not only did I put up hares and partridges every moment myself, but I also saw whole coveys, started by my companions, making for the woods, and I was able to overtake them more easily because of the covert. The result was that at the end of two hours' shooting, having a good retriever, I made up my mind to take to the mountains altogether, resolving to keep to the highest ground in order to keep my companions in view.

But the proverb "Man proposes and God disposes" was especially made for sportsmen. For some time, indeed, I kept the plain in sight; but presently a covey of red partridges—the first I had seen that day—flew off towards the valley.

My two shots brought down a brace: eager as La Fontaine's sportsman, I started in pursuit.

"Please excuse," said Count Elim, interrupting himself and addressing the ladies, "all these sporting details: they are necessary to explain my isolation and the strange adventure which followed."

We all assured the Count that we were listening with the greatest interest, and he continued:—

I followed my birds with intense excitement from covert to covert, from hill to hill, and from valley to valley, with the result that I was drawn further and further into the mountains. I had thrown so much ardour into the chase that I had failed to notice how the sky had become overcast and that a storm was brewing; a peal of thunder roused me to a sense of my position. I looked around me; I was in a valley in the midst of a small clearing which enabled me to see the wooded mountains all around me; on the summit of one of these I perceived the ruins of an old castle, but of the road there was no trace! In the excitement of the chase I had come across country, through

bramble and heather; if I wished to find a beaten track I must seek one . . . but where? I knew not.

Meantime the sky grew darker and darker; the peals of thunder followed one another at closer intervals, and large drops of rain splashed noisily on the autumn leaves, which every breath of wind brought down in hundreds, like flights of birds, from the trees.

I had no time to lose; I turned towards the east as nearly as I could judge, and then walked straight ahead with the fixed intention of keeping a direct course. It was quite certain that a mile or so must bring me to some path or road, and that such path or road must lead somewhere. Besides, there is nothing to be feared in these mountains, neither man nor beast, only timid small game or poor peasant folk. The greatest misfortune which could befall me, therefore, would be to have to sleep out under a tree, which would have been a mere nothing, if the sky had not become more and more threatening every minute. I resolved, therefore, to make an effort to gain some sort of shelter, and quickened my pace.

Unfortunately I was walking, as I have said, in a wood planted on the mountain side, so that I was stopped every moment by some obstacle. Now the underwood would become so dense that even my dog drew back from it, now one of those fissures so common in mountainous countries forced me to make a *détour*; then, to complete my discomfort, darkness descended rapidly and the rain began to fall, making the situation very serious for a man who had no idea where shelter was to be found. In addition to all this, it was a long time since I had lunched, and the exercise I had taken during the last six hours had tended to excite my appetite.

As I proceeded, however, the thick undergrowth gave place to trees. I could now walk with greater ease, but it seemed to me that in the twists and turns I had been compelled to make, I must have deviated from the course which I had set myself. This, however, disconcerted me but little. At every step the trees became larger and the wood a forest. I plunged into this forest and, as I calculated, I had gone hardly a mile before I struck upon a path. Now, in which direction should I follow this path? Should I turn to the right or to the left? There was nothing to determine me; I must

take my chance. I turned to the right, or rather, I followed my dog, who had taken that direction.

Had I been within the shelter of some shed, some grotto or ruin, I could have admired the magnificent spectacle before me. The lightning flashed almost without intermission, illuminating the forest with the most fantastic lights. The thunder growled with increasing reverberations, originating at one extremity of the valley, which it seemed to follow, and losing itself at the opposite end; then great blasts of wind from time to time swept over the tree tops, bending the great beeches, the huge firs and venerable oaks, as the breeze of May bends the blades of corn; but the resistance was so great and the strife so vigorous that the trees groaned as they bent. To the wrath of the hurricane, lashing the forest with wind, lightning and rain, the forest responded with long, sad and solemn wailings, like those of some unhappy wretch unjustly pursued by adversity.

I was, as it were, too intimately concerned in this great cataclysm, and suffering too much myself, to be able to notice all its poetry. The rain fell in torrents, every thread of my clothing was soaked, and my hunger became more and more acute.

The path to which I held tenaciously began to widen out and became more and more clearly marked. It was evident, therefore, that it would lead me to some habitation.

In fact, after an hour's walk in the midst of this terrible upheaval of nature, I perceived by the light of a flash a little hut to which the path I followed led directly. I hastened my steps, at once forgetting all my fatigue in the hope of the expected hospitality, and in a few minutes I stood before the ardently desired shelter. But to my great disappointment I could perceive no light. Although it was not late enough for the owner of the little house to have gone to bed, the door and shutters were tightly closed and they gave a deserted appearance to the whole structure. In spite of the devastation caused by the storm, it was easy to recognise the daily care of some human hand. A vine, which had already lost some of its leaves, ran along the wall, and great rose bushes, on which some late blossoms still remained, adorned the paths of a little garden enclosed within a wooden

trellis. I knocked, convinced that no one would hear me.

If there had been any means of obtaining entrance into the cottage, I should certainly have made use of it; but the doors and windows were not only tightly closed, but also solidly secured, and, however confident I might be of German hospitality, I must say that my confidence did not carry me so far as housebreaking.

One thing, however, consoled me; it was evident that this cottage could not be quite isolated, and it must be near some village or castle. I knocked once more, louder than I had yet done; but this attempt being equally unavailing, I resigned myself to my fate and resumed my quest.

After proceeding two or three hundred paces, as I had foreseen, I came upon the walls of a park which I followed for some time in search of an entrance; a gap appeared before me and saved me the trouble of further investigation. I leapt over the ruins of the wall and found myself in the park.

This park must once have been one of those princely pleasaunces, such as are still to be found in Germany, but which have not been seen in France for the past fifty years. It was something like Chambord, Mortefontaine or Chantilly; but unlike the humble cottage which I had just seen, and the surroundings of which I had taken in at a glance, all of which had borne evidences of careful and assiduous attention, the proud park appeared utterly solitary, uncultivated and neglected.

In fact, as far as it was possible to judge by the occasional clearing of the sky and temporary lulls in the storm when the moon tried to show herself, and nature calmed down a little, this park, which must once have been so splendid, now presented an appearance of devastation deplorable to behold. The tall brushwood had grown up under the forest trees, and the trees, uprooted by the hurricane, or bent with age, blocked the paths in such a manner that a pedestrian was continually obliged to break his way through the branches or leap over the fallen trunks, stripped bare and naked as corpses. The outlook was not cheerful, and offered but small promise of the Château, to which these dark alleys led, being inhabited.

However, on arriving at a species of cross-road where five guide-posts had once stood, of which four lay shattered

on the ground, I perceived a light which passed, as it seemed to me, across a window and then disappeared. Rapid as the flash had been, it sufficed to guide me. I walked towards it, and in about ten minutes found myself beyond the park and, on the opposite side of a lawn, I saw a black mass which appeared to be surrounded by trees. This I presumed was the Castle.

As I advanced I saw that I had not been mistaken; but the light, like a shooting star, had completely disappeared; moreover, as I drew nearer to this strange edifice, it appeared to be entirely deserted.

It was one of those old castles so common in Germany, the general architecture of which, having survived the successive additions which the necessity of the times or the caprices of its owners had made, bore the impress of the fourteenth century. But what gave the massive pile an air of indefinable melancholy was the absence of a single light in any of the ten or twelve windows on its face. Three of these windows had outside shutters, but as half of one of these shutters was broken away and presented a huge gap, it was evident that this room was no more lighted than the others, for had this been the case the light within would have shone through the opening. The other windows, like the three already mentioned, must also, at one time, have been furnished with shutters; but these were now entirely missing, or hung suspended by a single hinge, like the broken wing of a bird.

I paced the entire length of the front, seeking ingress to the inner courtyard, where I hoped to find the light of which I was in quest, and at an angle of the building, between two turrets, I at length found a door which at first sight seemed closed, but which, devoid of lock and bolt, yielded to my first effort to open it.

I crossed the threshold, and passing under a dark vaulted arch found myself in an inner court, overgrown with weeds and brambles, at the end of which, behind a pane of darkened glass, I saw shining as through a mist, the welcome light which I was beginning to think had been a mere figment of my imagination.

By the light of the lamp, I saw two old people warming themselves, husband and wife no doubt. I sought the door; it was beside the window and, as in my haste my hand touched the latch, it flew open and the woman uttered a cry. I hastened

to calm the terror which I had all unwittingly caused these good people.

"Do not be afraid, my friends," I said; "I have lost my way, out shooting; I am tired, hungry and thirsty; I come to beg a glass of water, a morsel of bread and a bed."

"Excuse my wife's alarm," answered the old man, rising. "The castle is so lonely that only an accident could lead a traveller hither; and it is not to be wondered at that poor Bertha should have been frightened at the appearance of an armed man, though, thank God! we need have small fear of thieves, either on our own account or our master's."

"In any case, my friends, you may be reassured on that score," said I. "I am Count Elim M—. You do not know me, I am aware, but you must know M. de R—, to whom I had letters of introduction at Frankfort, and with whom I was shooting when I lost my way in the mountains in pursuit of a covey of red partridges."

"Oh! sir," replied the man, while his wife continued to look at me curiously, "we no longer know anyone in the town; it is, I believe, more than twenty years since either my wife or I have set foot in it; but we want no other reference than those you have already given. You are hungry and thirsty and in need of rest; we will get you some supper. As for a bed" (the old people looked at each other) "that will be a little more difficult; but, anyhow, we will see."

"A share of your supper, my friends, and an armchair in some corner, that is all I ask of you."

"Leave it to us, sir," replied the wife, "warm and dry yourself; meanwhile we will make such arrangements as we can."

The advice to warm and dry myself was not unnecessary; I was soaked to the skin and my teeth chattered with cold; my dog had already set me an example and was lying stretched across the hearth, enduring a heat which would have sufficed to cook the game in the pursuit of which he had become so exhausted.

As I presumed that the larder would only be sparsely furnished, and that in all probability these good people's supper would be limited to the soup steaming over the fire and the stewpan simmering on the hob, I placed my game bag at their disposal.

"My faith," said the husband, as he picked out a brace of partridges and a leveret, "this comes in well, sir; for without it you would have been reduced to sharing our supper; and, considering your appetite, we could not help feeling some anxiety."

The husband and wife then exchanged whispers; the wife began to pluck the birds and to skin the hare, and the husband went out.

About ten minutes passed, during which, by dint of turning round and round before the fire, I began to get dry. Nevertheless, when the husband returned, I was still steaming from head to foot.

"Sir," said he, "if you will go into the dining-room you will find a good fire there, and you will be more comfortable than in here. Supper will soon be served."

I scolded him for the trouble he had taken, telling him that I was very comfortable where I was and would have been delighted to sup at the same table with them. But to this he replied with a bow that he knew too well what was due to me to accept such an honour. Then, as he remained standing near the door, hat in hand, I rose and signed to him that I was ready to go into the room he had prepared. He walked before, and I followed. My dog gave a long whine, rose slowly to his feet, and followed in his turn.

I was so eager to find as good a fire as the one I had left, that I did not pay much attention to the passages and rooms through which we passed, but they all seemed to be in a state of utter dilapidation.

A door opened, I saw an immense fire lighted within a gigantic chimney; I hastened towards it, but quickly as I had moved, Fido, thanks to his four feet, which had recovered all their elasticity, was there before his master.

The fire had claimed my first attention. But as soon as I was installed before the hearth, my eyes fell upon the table laid for me. It was covered with a cloth of that exquisite linen which comes from Hungary, and set with splendid plate.

This unexpected magnificence excited my curiosity; I examined the dishes and plates; all were of handsome workmanship and extraordinary richness. On every piece was engraved the owner's arms surmounted by a count's coronet.

I was still occupied with this investiga-

tion when the door opened again, and a servant, arrayed in gorgeous livery, entered bearing the soup in a silver tureen matching the rest of the service. Carrying my eyes from the tureen to the man who bore it, I recognised the old man who had received me.

"But, my friend," said I to him, "you are really treating me with too much ceremony; and, indeed, the trouble you are giving yourself will take away all the pleasure which your hospitality should give."

"We are too well aware of the respect due to you, sir," replied the old man once more, bowing as he placed the soup tureen upon the table, "not to entertain you to the best of our ability. Besides which, if we did not do so, Count Everard would never forgive us."

I had to let things be. I was going to sit down on the first chair to hand, but the mysterious major-domo brought forward a great armchair, evidently belonging to the master of the house. The back was adorned with a shield bearing the same arms that I had already noticed, and similarly surmounted by a count's coronet.

I took my appointed place. As I have said, I was dying of hunger and thirst, so that I fell to upon the provisions at once. Besides, all that was offered me, even the portion of their dinner which I had taken from the two servants, was excellent; and above all the wine was of the best vintages of Bordeaux, Burgundy and the Rhine.

All this time the old man was pouring out excuses for the way in which he was forced to entertain me.

To relieve the embarrassment that appeared to trouble him, as well as from curiosity, I asked him who his master was, and if he did not live at the Castle.

"My master," he told me, "is Count Everard of Eppstein, the last count of that name. Not only does he inhabit the Castle, but for the last twenty-five years he has never left it. The illness of one for whom he bears a great affection has summoned him to Vienna. He has been gone six days, and we do not know when he will return."

"But," I went on, "what is that neat and charming little cottage which I saw about half a mile from here, which forms such a contrast to the Castle?"

"That is the real home of Count

Everard," replied the old man. "The former inhabitants are dead and, since the death of the last, that is to say of Jonathan, the gamekeeper, the Count has kept it for himself. He spends his days there, and only returns to the Castle to sleep. Thus the poor Castle, as you may have noticed this evening, and as you will see far better to-morrow, is falling into ruins; so much so that, with the exception of the Red Room, there remains not one room in the whole building fit for habitation."

"And which is the Red Room?"

"It is the room which has been occupied from father to son by the Counts of Eppstein; it is in this room they have been born, it is in this room they have died, from the Countess Eleonora down to the Count Maximilian."

I noticed that in speaking these words the old man lowered his voice and seemed to look about him with a certain uneasiness. However, I made no remark and asked no more questions. I mused over this romantic and strange thing—the last Count of Eppstein living in solitude in his old Castle, which would probably fall into ruin after his death.

Dinner was over, and hunger and thirst being appeased, the need of sleep began to be acutely felt. I rose therefore and begged the steward, who had done the honours of the Castle so well, to show me my room. At this request he seemed embarrassed, and murmured some almost unintelligible excuses; then, as if he had at last made up his mind,

"Very good, sir," said he, "follow me."

I followed. Fido, who for his part had been treated to a supper almost equal to his master's, and who had gone back to his place before the fire, rose sullenly and brought up the rear. The old man took me back to the first room, the one, that is to say, which I had first entered. The bed was covered with fine white sheets.

"But," said I to him, "you are giving me your own bed."

"I ask your pardon, sir," replied the old man, misunderstanding my exclamation, "but there is no other habitable room in the whole Castle."

"Where will you and your wife sleep then?"

"In the dining-room, each in a large armchair."

"I will not allow it!" I cried, "I will sleep in an armchair. Keep your bed and give me another room."

"I have already had the honour of telling you, sir, that there is not another habitable room in the Castle except that——"

"Except what?" I repeated.

"Except that of Count Everard, the Red Room."

"And you know it would be impossible for the Count to sleep there!" cried the wife, quickly.

I looked fixedly at both. They lowered their eyes in evident embarrassment. My curiosity, already excited by all that had happened, came to a head.

"And why impossible?" I asked. "Is it against the master's orders?"

"No, sir."

"If Count Everard knew that a stranger had slept in this room, would he be angry with you?"

"I do not think so."

"Then why this impossibility? And what is the matter with this mysterious Red Room, of which I hear you speak with such terror?"

"Sir, it is——" He stopped and looked at his wife, who shrugged her shoulders as if to say, "Do as you will."

"It is——?" I continued. "Come, speak out."

"It is haunted, sir."

As the worthy fellow spoke in German, I thought I had misunderstood him.

"What did you say, my friend?" I asked.

"Ghosts appear in it," said the woman; "that is what is the matter."

"Ghosts!" I cried. "Why, if that is all, I have always longed to see a ghost. Thus, far from thinking your reason a good one for keeping me out of this terrible room, I tell you that it only makes me all the more desirous of passing the night there."

"Pray reflect well, sir, ere you insist."

"Oh, all my reflections are over. Besides, I repeat it, I have the greatest wish to encounter a ghost."

"That did not answer with Count Maximilian," muttered the old woman,

"Count Maximilian may have had reason to fear the dead; I have none. I am convinced that if they return to earth, it is to protect or punish. Now, it cannot be to punish me that they will return, for in all my life I cannot recall

one evil deed with which to reproach myself. If, on the contrary, they come to protect me, I should have no reason to fear a spectre which came with such good intentions."

"Oh! but it is impossible," said the wife.

"If you absolutely insist, sir," continued the husband.

"I do not insist," said I, "because I have no right to do so, and, therefore, I can only beg."

"Well?" said the woman.

"Well, let us do as the gentleman wishes. You know what the Count always says: The guest is master of the host."

"I agree," said the wife to her husband; "but on one condition only; that you come with me to make the bed. Not for all the gold in the world would I go alone."

"All right," said the husband. "The gentleman will perhaps wait here, or in the dining-room, until we have finished."

"Go, my friends. I will wait."

The two old people took each a candle and left the room, the husband walking before and the wife following after. I remained pondering beside the fire.

In my youth I had heard a thousand times of similar adventures befalling travellers in old Castles, and I had always smiled incredulously at these tales, which I looked upon as flights of fancy; and I was, therefore, much astonished at finding myself on the point of becoming in my turn the hero of a story of the kind. I pinched myself to see whether I were not dreaming; I looked around me, to assure myself that I was in an extraordinary situation; I went outside to convince myself that I was really in the very same old Castle whose massive and gloomy outline I had seen dimly through the darkness. The sky had grown serene, and the moon silvered the roofs. All was silent, all seemed dead, and the silence of the night was only broken by the shrill hoot of an owl hidden in the branches of a tree, whose black mass could be distinguished in an angle of the courtyard.

I was really in one of those Castles of old traditions and marvellous legends, and, if the promised apparition failed me, it would be that the spectre was annoyed. The Castle to which William conducted Leonora was not more fantastical in appearance than the edifice within which I was about to pass the night.

Quite convinced that it was no dream, but downright reality, I went back to the old people's room. The wife had already returned to it, so eager was she to finish her task; the husband had stayed behind to light the fire.

Suddenly a bell rang. I trembled in spite of myself.

"What is that?" I asked.

"Oh! it is nothing," replied the woman, "it is only my husband ringing to let me know that all is ready. I will conduct you to the foot of the stairs, sir; my husband will meet you at the top."

"Come along," I returned quickly, "for I am quite anxious to see this famous Red Room."

The good wife armed herself with a candle and walked before me. I followed her, and Fido, who could not understand all these peregrinations, left the fire for the third time and accompanied us. I took my gun, in case of accidents.

We went down the same corridor through which I had passed to go to the dining-room. Only, instead of turning to the left, we turned to the right, and found ourselves near one of those vast staircases with stone balustrades which are no longer to be seen in France save in royal palaces or public buildings. At the top of this staircase the old servant awaited us.

I mounted the wide stairs, which seemed made for giants; then the old man, in his turn, acted as my guide to the famous Red Room. Thither I followed him.

A great fire burned on the hearth, two three-branched candelabra were alight on the chimney piece, and yet, at the first glance, I could not take in the vast extent of the room.

The old man asked if I needed anything, and, on my replying in the negative, he retired. I saw the door shut behind him, I heard his steps in the distance; then the sound ceased, and I found myself not only in solitude but in utter silence.

My eyes, which were fixed upon the door, came back to the room; not being able, as I have said, to take it in at a glance, I resolved to examine it in detail. Taking one of the great candelabra in my hand, I commenced my inspection.

The name of the Red Room was due to large sixteenth century tapestries, in which red predominated; they repre-

sented the wars of Alexander, treated in the manner of the Renaissance, and they were inserted in large wooden panels, which must have been re-gilt in the eighteenth century, and portions of which, being still bright, sparkled as the light of the candles was reflected from their surface.

In a corner, to the left of the door, was a bed surmounted by a canopy with the arms of the Counts of Eppstein; it was furnished with immense curtains of red damask. The curtains of the bed and the gilding of the canopy had evidently been renewed some five-and-twenty years ago.

Between the windows were gilt console tables of the time of Louis XIV., surmounted by mirrors in frames embellished with flowers and birds; from the ceiling hung a large copper lustre with crystal ornaments, but one could see that it had not been used for many years.

I went slowly round the room, followed by Fido, who, each time that I stopped, stopped too, quite unable to comprehend this mania for walking about which possessed me. Between the head of the bed and the windows, that is, along the wall at the end of the room facing the fire-place, Fido stopped suddenly, sniffed at the wainscot, stood erect, then lay down, pressing his nose against the bottom of the wall, blowing loudly and giving visible signs of agitation. I sought to discover the cause of his excitement, but could see nothing that could have induced it. The wainscot showed no break; I pressed my thumb on various spots, seeking a hidden spring, but nothing yielded, and, after ten minutes of fruitless search, I continued my tour of inspection round the room. Fido followed me, but kept turning his head towards the spot to which he had seemed, and still seemed, anxious to draw my attention.

I again approached the fire-place, and the silence, which had only been broken by my own steps, reigned once more; but out of this silence another sound was now heard, the gloomy and monotonous cry of an owl outside. I looked at my watch; it was ten o'clock. In spite of my fatigue, all desire for sleep had left me. The vast room, with its general aspect of a bygone age; the events which must have taken place therein centuries ago; what the two old people

had told me of the ghostly guests who frequented it, all this inspired in me an emotion which I will not attempt to describe. It was not fear; no, it was uneasiness, a kind of discomfort combined with curiosity. I knew not what would befall me in this room, but I felt that something would surely happen.

I remained for half an hour, perhaps longer, in the armchair, with my legs stretched out before the fire; then, hearing nothing, seeing nothing, I determined to go to bed, leaving one of the candelabra alight upon the mantelpiece.

Once between the sheets of the great bed of the Counts of Eppstein, I called Fido, and Fido came and lay down beside me.

There is no one who has not, in a similar case, while awaiting some event, vainly tried to sleep. You know how your eyes close slowly, to open instantly at the slightest sound; how you take in at a single glance the whole room; then, seeing all still and quiet, how the eyelids close once more, only to open again involuntarily. It was thus with me. Twice or thrice already I had almost fallen asleep and then started up again; but little by little, in spite of the light from the candles in the candelabra, everything began to get confused; the large figures in the tapestry seemed to move, the fire seemed to throw forth fantastical and unusual lights, my thoughts grew confused as a tangled skein of thread, and I fell asleep.

I do not know how long my slumber lasted; but I was awakened by a sensation of indefinable terror. I opened my eyes again, the candles had burned down and the fire was out; only a brand had rolled forward and smoked upon the marble hearth; I looked around me, but could see absolutely nothing.

The room was lit only by a streak of moonlight which came through the broken shutter.

Only, as I have said, I felt a sensation of something extraordinary, undefinable, inexplicable.

I raised myself on my elbow. At this moment Fido, who was sleeping on a rug beside the bed, howled dismally.

This lugubrious and prolonged wail made me shiver in spite of myself.

"Fido," I said, "Fido. Good dog, what is the matter?"

But instead of answering me, I felt the

poor dog dart trembling under my bed, from beneath which he gave vent to another howl.

At the same instant I heard a slight noise: that of a door creaking on its hinges.

Then part of the wainscotting moved, and turned upon itself. It was that part in front of which Fido had stopped.

Then I saw delineated against the dark background of the opening, a white, ethereal, transparent form, which, without appearing to touch the floor, without a sound, advanced floating toward my bed.

I felt my hair stand on end, and beads of cold sweat gathered on my brow.

I shrank back in my turn almost into the space between my bed and the wall; the shadow approached my couch, ascended the platform upon which it stood, and looked at me for a moment, shaking her head as though saying, "It is not he."

Then she sighed, descended the step, passed again into the ray of light, by which I was able to assure myself of her singular transparency, returned to my side, gave another sigh, shook her head again and re-entered the opening in the wainscotting, the door of which shut itself upon her, creaking as it had done when it opened.

I must own I lay speechless and motionless, only knowing that I was alive by the redoubled beating of my heart. A moment after, I heard Fido leave his refuge and return to his former place. I called him; he stood up on his hind legs, resting his front paws upon my bed. The poor animal was still trembling all over.

What I saw was very real, it was not a delusion of the senses, nor a dream of the imagination. It was truly an apparition, a shade, a phantom. I was really under the influence of something supernatural.

Without doubt, this room had been the scene of some terrible and mysterious deed. What could have happened in it? My thoughts were thus occupied in vague speculation until the morning, for, as you may imagine, I did not go to sleep again.

At the first ray of dawn, I threw myself out of bed and dressed.

When I had finished dressing, I heard someone walking along the corridor. This time they were human footsteps, I was not mistaken.

The footsteps stopped outside my door.

"Come in," I said.

The old man appeared.

"Sir," said he, "I was anxious as to how you may have passed the night, and I have come to enquire after your health."

"As you see," I answered him, "it is excellent."

"You have slept well?"

"Perfectly."

He hesitated a moment.

"And nothing disturbed your sleep?" he added.

"Nothing."

"So much the better. Now perhaps you would be pleased to give your orders as to the time you wish to depart."

"Directly after breakfast."

"Then I will go and prepare it immediately, and when you wish to come down, if you will just give us a quarter of an hour's grace, you will find everything ready."

"Well, then, let it be ready in a quarter of an hour."

The old man bowed and left the room.

I remained alone a quarter of an hour; it was just the time I wanted to investigate what I wished to know.

No sooner had the sound of his footsteps died away, than I went to the door and fastened the bolt. Then I hurried to that part of the wall which I had seen open.

I counted upon Fido to help me in my search; but this time, though I used threats, and even the whip, to make him leave the place he had taken up, he would not come near the wainscotting.

I searched in all the mouldings of the woodwork, but I could not find any break of continuity visible to the eye. I pressed upon every projection, but none gave way to my touch.

I saw that there must be some spring I did not know of, and that it was for me impossible to make it act, without understanding it.

After twenty minutes of fruitless search, I was forced to renounce my enterprise. Besides which, I heard the old man's footsteps approaching. I did not wish him to find me locked in; I ran to the door, and drew the bolt the moment he knocked.

"The breakfast is ready," he said.

I took up my gun and followed him, casting a last glance at the mysterious wainscotting.

I entered the dining room. My breakfast was served with the same wealth of plate as had been my dinner of the night before.

Although much occupied with my night's adventure, I did not open my mouth; I understood that I must not seek to enquire into their master's secret from servants born in the house and doubtless grown old in his service. I therefore hurried over my breakfast; this finished, I again thanked my hosts for the kind hospitality they had shown me, and asked the old man to point me out the road to the town.

He offered to accompany me as far as a footpath, which would lead me away from the Taunus Mountains, and as I did not wish to lose my way again, I accepted.

We walked a quarter of a mile or so; then we found ourselves in a road, so plainly marked that I need have no fear of losing myself in following it. Half an hour afterwards, I had left the Taunus Mountains behind me; three hours later I was at Frankfort.

I hardly allowed myself time to change my costume; I was in a hurry to see my Professor; I hastened to his house. I found him extremely disturbed by my absence, and he had sent out the two keepers and three or four farm labourers in search of me.

"Tell me," he asked, "where have you spent the night?"

"At the Castle of Eppstein," I replied.

"At the Castle of Eppstein!" he cried, "In what part of the Castle?"

"In the bedroom of Count Everard, who was at Vienna."

"In the Red Room?"

"In the Red Room."

"And you saw nothing?" the Professor asked me, curiosity mingling with hesitation.

"On the contrary," I replied, "I saw a ghost."

"Yes," he muttered, "the ghost of the Countess Albina."

"And who was the Countess Albina?" I asked.

"Oh," he replied, "it is a long story—a horrible, incredible, monstrous story; one of those stories only to be heard in our old Castles of the Rhine and in our Taunus Mountains; a story you would never believe—if you had not slept in the Red Room."

"Yes, but now that I have slept in the

Red Room, I will believe your story, I swear I will. So you may tell it to me, my dear Professor, and I assure you that you will never have had a more attentive listener."

"Well," said my companion, "the recital is rather long; give me the pleasure of your company at dinner and at dessert. With a couple of good cigars and our feet on the fire, I will tell you this dreadful legend, out of which our fantastic Hoffmann, if he had known it, would certainly have made one of his appalling tales."

As you may suppose, I had no sort of wish to refuse such an invitation. Accordingly, at the hour appointed, I found myself at the Professor's house, who, after dinner, told me as he had promised, the story of the Red Room."

"Well, this story?" we all asked Count Elim with one voice.

"I have written a large and tedious book on this story, which I will bring you to-morrow, if you absolutely wish it, and which I will read through to you as quickly as possible."

"And why not this evening?" I asked in my impatience.

"Because it is three o'clock in the morning," replied Count Elim, "and that seems to me a reasonable hour for retiring."

Everyone took the advice of the last speaker, making, however, an appointment for the next night at ten o'clock. At a quarter to ten, all the auditors were assembled; at exactly ten o'clock, Count Elim arrived, his manuscript under his arm. He was hardly given time to sit down, so great was the eagerness to hear the promised recital. We took our places round the reader, and in the midst of the most profound silence, Count Elim began the story so impatiently looked forward to.

CHAPTER I.

IT is September, 1789. Europe still trembles at the fall of the Bastille, and Frankfort, a free town, yet a town where the Cæsars ruled, both welcomes and fears the threatening Revolution. The Castle of Eppstein fears it only, for its master, old Count Rodolph is

entirely devoted to the Emperor, who is about to declare war against us.

Nevertheless, it was not only political troubles which wrinkled his brow and wrung his heart upon the day on which this story opens.

The Count was seated in the great hall of his Castle, with bowed head, and beside him stood his wife. Tears coursed silently down the Countess's thin cheeks. The Count only wept inwardly.

They were a noble and handsome old couple; every movement betokened a proud dignity and a touching benevolence, and their white heads seemed, in the words of Schiller, "crowned by holy deeds."

Gravely and sadly they deliberated.

"We must show forgiveness," said the mother.

"How can I?" replied the father. "If there were no one to see us, I would open my arms to Conrad and his wife; but, alas! *noblesse oblige*. So many eyes are fixed upon us; we owe the world a stern example, and if death were knocking at our hearts, we must die holding up our heads. I have driven Conrad away, we shall never see him again, we shall never again embrace him, Gertrude."

"I could understand such severity better," replied the mother, timidly, "if Conrad were the eldest of our house; but Maximilian will be the head of the Eppsteins after you."

"That makes no matter," said the Count, "Conrad is none the less an Eppstein."

"He will not survive your anger?" the Countess hazarded again.

"Then he will the sooner rejoin us, where fathers may always embrace their children."

And he was silent, for he feared to add another word, lest he too should burst into tears, like his wife.

After a moment's silence there came a discreet knock at the door, and an old household servant, called Daniel, entered at his master's bidding.

"Count Maximilian desires the honour of a moment's interview with his father," said Daniel.

"Show my son in here," replied the Count.

"This one," continued Rodolph, bitterly, when Daniel had gone out, "this one dishonours himself in my heart, but he does not degrade himself in society. He is depraved, but he does not lower him-

self; he forgets how to be virtuous, but he remembers that he is a Count; he remains a nobleman, if not in soul, at least in appearance; Maximilian is my worthy heir."

"Conrad is your only worthy son," said the Countess.

However, when Maximilian entered, all the coarse or fatal expression on his features was for the moment not effaced, but softened by the stern self-control he put upon himself. He knelt before the Count, kissed his hand and that of his mother, and stood in silence waiting for the old man to address him.

Count Maximilian was a man of about thirty, with a gloomy and proud expression, of tall stature and upright carriage. As a rule, his gestures were resolute and impetuous. In the ordinary everyday circumstances of life, his face expressed audacity rather than intelligence. Before him you felt yourself in presence of an implacable will, and by his determined and haughty appearance he was able to overawe minds often superior to his own. With this man, desire immediately became action. One could hardly bear his bold, fixed gaze; one told oneself vaguely that few obstacles could stand in the way of his wrath, and that, perchance, he himself might not be able to restrain his own violent nature at need.

Count Maximilian was, as we have said, about thirty years old, but already premature wrinkles furrowed a countenance on which the cares of ambition had left their consuming traces. The Count had one of those large German foreheads, high, but apparently hollow, full of pride rather than of genius. His hooked nose and thin lips contributed not a little to that domineering aspect which struck one at first sight. The wrinkle on his brow, and he frowned often, was terrible, but at the same time his smile, and he smiled but seldom, was the obsequious, false and avaricious smile of the courtier. His tall, straight figure knew well how to bow before his superiors. Altogether, externally, as well as in his soul, there was audacity without nobility; coldness without repose; disdain without clemency. He was ambitious after the manner of Father Joseph, rather than of Wallenstein, and you saw at first sight that he would avenge his humility towards the great by haughtiness to the poor.

"Before hearing you, my son," said Rodolph gravely, "I have a new wrong wherewith to reproach you. As long as you were young, we were indulgent in laying your ill-deeds to the score of your age; but you are advancing in life, Maximilian. If God has taken away your wife, He has left you your son. Maximilian, you are a father; moreover, in a few days, as my feebleness warns me, you will become lord and master of all our domains, and sole representative of our line. Is it not time to prepare yourself seriously for your destiny and to look henceforth to your conduct, which has caused such scandal in the country and such grief in the Castle?"

"Father, your good nature has ever hearkened too much, it appears to me, to the complaints of the peasants. I am a gentleman; I love pleasure, and the sports of the lion are not those of the lamb, but I have never lowered myself, to my knowledge. Thrice have I fought for the honour of my name; otherwise, it is true, I am not very strait-laced. Pray, what new offence have I committed now? Have my huntsmen laid waste another field of corn? Have my dogs, perchance, got a neighbour's sow by the throat? Has my horse trampled upon a peasant by accident?"

"My son, you have ruined the daughter of the Bailiff of Alpönig."

"Alas, it is too true," replied Maximilian with a sigh; "but, my noble father should not take notice of a thing like that. Do you not know well, that, unlike my brother Conrad, I would never disgrace myself by marrying a daughter of the people?"

"Oh! I have no fear of that," the old man interrupted with a mournful irony.

"Well," continued Maximilian, "what do you fear, sir? Scandal, as you have just observed? Alas! you may be reassured on that score. A terrible accident has occurred. Poor Gretchen was walking alone yesterday on the banks of the Maine; she wished, I suppose, to pluck some wild rose or forget-me-not; her foot must have slipped, and the river bore her away; in short, her body was only recovered this morning. I am in despair at her unexpected death. I loved Gretchen dearly, and—pardon me, father—I wept for her. But, your lordship, you see, can now be assured as to the consequences of my folly."

"Indeed," said the Count, stupefied in the face of such indifference, such egotistical recklessness, which thought more of an accident than of a crime, and blamed fate alone for it all.

The mother raised her hands and eyes to Heaven, asking pardon, doubtless, of God and of Gretchen for her son, who knew not what he did. After a pause, the Count continued:

"You wished to speak to me, my son?"

"Yes, father, I have a favour to ask of you; not for myself, for I have sought never to incur your displeasure, but for my brother Conrad, who, if he is guilty, is very unhappy, my lord."

"That is a good brother! That is well done, Maximilian!" cried the Countess with emotion, delighted to find her son generously disposed for once.

"Yes, mother," pursued Maximilian, "you know I love Conrad; weak and feeble soul, he has yielded to me as to his master, and I have never had cause to be jealous of his sweet and inoffensive nature, which recognised my superiority without question. It is not his fault that he was born to be a philosopher, rather than to bear a sword. I know how ill he has done,—to marry a nobody secretly, because he loved her, to introduce into our family the legitimate child of a common man's daughter, instead of simply enriching it by a bastard. 'Tis a folly, I agree with you; but error is not crime; Naomi is a pretty little maid, and she must have bewitched Conrad, whose first love she was. After all, Father, the thing is less serious than if I had committed the same folly, I the eldest and head of the Eppsteins. I know well that the Emperor would be sore annoyed, if he knew you had accepted such a misalliance: but I will go to Vienna and appease him. We will turn Gaspard the Keeper, Naomi's father, into an old soldier: in time the story will be forgotten. I alone will suffer by your indulgence, is it not so, father? I, who should succeed to your titles and favour at Court! Well, for love of Conrad, I will submit to the consequences. By sheer force of will I will wipe off the slur on our good name, and will regain the Emperor's favour. Of that you may be sure. Therefore, I conjure you, my lord, do not exile Conrad and his wife to France, as you wish; let him be near you; his studious

and thoughtful life will not disturb you. The poor lad is full of tenderness; he loves both you and my mother so dearly; he is so much attached to this place that he could never leave it! Banishment would be almost a sentence of death to him, father."

"You do your duty, Maximilian, in pleading your brother's cause; I will do mine in refusing to grant your request. Conrad is absolutely set against breaking this marriage, is he not?"

"I must acknowledge that on that point he is inflexible, my lord: I believe it is even useless to speak to him about it."

"Well, if I gave way when he insists, will the nobility of Germany, conjointly responsible for the acts of its members, pardon my weakness?"

"Perhaps not; but at least consent to see Conrad, to hear him, father," replied Maximilian.

"It is impossible," answered the Count, who mistrusted his feelings, "impossible!"

"Your lordship must pardon me, then," said Maximilian, "for I have taken upon myself to invite my brother to join me here. Let him not depart without seeing your face for the last time. There he is, no doubt; he is coming; here he is. Pray, receive him, father."

"My lord," said the Countess to her husband in a low voice, "as I have ever been a dutiful and devoted wife to you, grant me (who will know of it?) the supreme joy of seeing my child once more."

"It shall be as you wish, Gertrude; but let it be understood that there is to be no weakness."

Count Rodolph made a sign, Maximilian hastened to the door and opened it to Conrad, who came in silently and knelt at some distance from his father.

The two brothers made the greatest possible contrast. Conrad was as slender and gentle as Maximilian was strong and determined. The pale face of the former, framed in long fair locks, and animated by the fire of his great brown eyes, made the angular features, bronzed complexion, and robust figure of Maximilian stand out even more harshly. He could have held both Conrad's effeminate hands in one of his own. The one almost terrified you; the other charmed.

It was a great and solemn family picture; the eldest son standing motionless, a calm and somewhat indifferent

spectator of this scene, which had been brought about by his calculating clemency; his young brother kneeling upon one knee, agitated, trembling, but sustained by an inner thought, which brought as much light as tears to his eyes; the father, the patriarchal lord, with white hair and beard, seated in a carved armchair, outwardly majestic, but inwardly troubled, and forcing himself to be stern for fear he should become tender; then the mother, sunk upon her knees on a stool, wiping away a furtive tear, and looking alternately at her husband with fear, and at her son with love; for background, the ancient black wainscoting on which the speaking portraits of ancestors seemed to stand out as witnesses and judges.

"Speak, Conrad," said Count Rodolph.

"My lord," said Conrad, "three years ago I was twenty, and of a dreamy nature, susceptible to love. Whilst my brother Maximilian, carried away by his passions, rushed through Germany and France, I was always content to remain with you and my mother, and in my shyness, I not only refused to go to Court, but even to visit at the neighbouring country houses. I needed no wide horizon to my happiness; but, if my feet were sluggish, my thoughts were active and my heart impatient. The only woman I had ever known was my mother; and when I found in my path a young girl as beautiful as *she* must once have been, as good as *she* was still, I did not seek to discover the name of her family—love only knows Christian names—and I loved Naomi, because she was charming and pure."

"Oh! had I but been here," murmured Maximilian, "with what pleasure would I have deprived thy Naomi of this latter quality which tempted thee so sorely, poor brother!"

"Nevertheless," pursued Conrad, "as I wish to say nothing that is not true, my lord, I will avow that I did not give way blindly all at once to the passion which carried me away. No, in measuring the distance which separated Naomi from me, in thinking of your grief, I sought to repress my love, but it burst forth more strongly from the restraint; an irresistible power drew me continually to Gaspar's house, and at length one day, Naomi confessed that she loved me in return."

"The ambitious girl," murmured Maximilian.

"What could I do?" continued Conrad. "Fly from her, you say, mother? I was not strong enough. Wrong her, you say, Maximilian? I was not cowardly enough. Seek you out, my father, and confess everything to you? I did not dare to. I married Naomi secretly; thus I avoided your wrath and spared myself pain for the moment, and it seemed to me that I gave no offence to either God or man. I deceived myself doubly. A son was born to me, and I had to choose between your anger, father, and my wife's dishonour. I chose to brave your anger, which could crush me alone, and, in spite of all the efforts of man to separate those whom God hath joined together, I chose it again to-day, and I will choose it again to-morrow. But, you understand, my lord, that I think your anger just, and I had, alas! foreseen it. It is not, therefore, to turn it aside that I kneel before you. Only, banished from your presence, as I had expected to be, I wished to be sure, ere leaving, that I did not bear your scorn with me."

"Conrad," replied the Count, in a slow and heavy voice, "we come, you and I, of an historical race, to whom it is not permitted to fall. Fate has raised us to a position where the world can see us, and whence we must give an example to the world. Perhaps it is our destiny; we must submit to it, and you have evaded it. You are guilty of treason to the nobility, Conrad. The revolutionary breeze that blows from France, should have warned you to be firm. Now, more than ever, must we defend our privileges when they are endangered. A gentleman, and father of a family, responsible for the actions of my children, my severity must repair your weakness, and the old man must set right what the young man has disturbed. Go, then, go to France, and serve King Louis XVI. well. My wishes will follow you. You ask me whether I will scorn you; I will answer by justifying myself. When your nurse brought you to me, Conrad, I took you in my arms. Raising you above my head, I dedicated you first to God, then to the Emperor, then to the German nobility, then to each of my illustrious ancestors. To-day I am still alive, and it is to my ancestors, to the nobility and to

the Emperor, that I must give an account of you, and I renounce you; to-morrow, in heaven, I may perhaps glorify you before the Lord."

"Father," cried Conrad, "I revere and adore you. You are great, terrible and good, and I glory in your severity. I will be worthy of you, my lord. I owe my family an expiation, and I will bear myself as an Eppstein. Farewell."

Conrad bowed low before his father, but without approaching him. The old man waived him adieu, but did not speak, for his emotion was overpowering him, and he feared he would open his arms to his son. As for the Countess, she did not dare even to look at Conrad. She kept her head bent, tears bathed her face and she prayed with clasped hands. Conrad saluted her from a distance: but in spite of the etiquette tacitly agreed upon for his last interview, he could not resist kissing his hand to the author of his being. With this exception, the proud youth followed the Count's example, and remained imperturbable. The father was pleased with his child.

"Accompany your brother to the threshold," said he to Maximilian, who had remained silent and biting his lips during this strange and impressive scene.

"If your lordship will permit me," replied the heir of the Eppsteins, "I will come back to speak with you immediately."

"I will await you," answered the old man.

And the two brothers went out, one of them never to return.

What passed between the father and the mother when these sorely afflicted parents were left together, no one can say, for God alone saw their tears and heard the groaning of their broken hearts; but, when Maximilian returned a quarter of an hour later, the two old people had again adopted their serene attitude and their assumption of paternal power.

"I acknowledge, my lord," said Maximilian, "now that your decree cannot be revoked, now that I have seen Conrad depart with his wife and his son, that you have done your duty."

"Is it not, Maximilian," returned the Count with a bitter smile, "is it not what you would have done yourself?"

"Yes, father, for the Emperor would never have pardoned your clemency; and

surely, he has withheld his favour from us for long enough."

"I have acted for honour's sake, and not for the sake of honours," said the Count.

"As times go, father, they are much the same."

"Of what do you wish to speak to me, my son?" interrupted the Count gravely.

"It is this, father. Despite your wise severity, your reputation has suffered none the less; I have hopes of restoring it. I only lost my wife Tecla a year ago; and the future of our name being assured by the birth of my son Albrecht, the idea of a second marriage did not occur to me; but the opportunity of regaining the Emperor's good graces concurs with a most desirable match—the daughter of the Duke of Schwalbach, who is, for the time being, all powerful at Vienna."

"Are you speaking of Albina Schwalbach, Maximilian?" asked the Countess.

"Yes, mother; she is an only child, and will bring great wealth to our house."

"My sister, the Abbess," continued the mother, "in the Convent in which Albina was brought up, and from whom I have often asked for news of my friend's daughter, has told me of her matchless beauty."

"And," added Maximilian, "her dower is the magnificent domain of Winkel, at the gates of Vienna."

"My sister added that Albina's grace enhanced her charming virtues."

"Without taking into account," pursued the young man, "that the Duke of Schwalbach could easily obtain—could he not, father?—the right of transmitting to his son-in-law after him his title and wealth."

"What happiness," said the Countess, "to call this child my daughter, and to take the place of the mother she has lost!"

"And what happiness to ally ourselves to the Schwalbachs!" said Maximilian.

"Yes," said the Count, "the Schwalbachs are one of the greatest and best branches of the German tree."

"Then, my father, will you do me the favour to write to your old companion in arms, and ask him for his daughter for your son?"

A long silence succeeded this request.

The old Count sat with his head sunk upon his breast, and seemed to be thinking deeply.

"What! father, you do not reply? My lord, do you hesitate? Such a union, which will add so much to the splendour of our family, cannot, should not, be displeasing to you."

"Maximilian, Maximilian," Count Rodolph answered, sternly, "may I not employ your own distinctions, which I do not recognise, and say that if the gentleman in you is without reproach, the man alas! has often fallen? Maximilian, will this child be happy?"

"She will be Countess of Eppstein, father."

There was another pause. Certainly, these two men were very unlike, and did not understand each other in the least, bound, though they were, even more by the laws of the world than by the ties of blood. The son disdained his father for his prejudices; the father scorned the son for his misconduct.

"Hearken, my lord," continued Maximilian, "the opportunity of adding to the glory of our name presents itself, and you spurn the opportunity—you the guardian of our glory, you who are responsible to us as much for the honour to be acquired as for the stains to be wiped out."

"Your father knows what he should do, sir," returned the old Count, wounded to the heart. "Go to Vienna; on your arrival there, you will find a letter of introduction to the Duke of Schwalbach."

"If you so please, I will leave the Castle immediately," said Maximilian. "So noble an heiress must be in great demand, and now God grant I come not too late."

"Do as you will, my son," replied the old man.

"Do you refuse, my lord, and you my mother, to give your blessing to him who is going away?"

"Bless you, my son," said the Count.

"Maximilian, may God guide you!" said the Countess.

Maximilian kissed his mother's hand, saluted the Count respectfully, and went out.

"The other," said the old man when he was alone with the Countess, "the other, who left first, did not even dare to ask us for our blessing. But he has it, has he not, Gertrude? He has thine and mine, and God hearkens more to the silent heart than to the speaking lips."

CHAPTER II

AND now, let us quit the banks of the Maine and the gloomy Castle of Eppstein, for the delightful suburbs of Vienna, and for the charming villa of Winkel, where we shall find, dancing amidst the flowers, with dishevelled locks and flushed cheeks, Albina von Schwalbach, a pretty child of sixteen. At the end of the alley in which she is flitting about, the Duke, her father, less grave and more expansive than his old friend the Count of Eppstein, is seated on a stone bench watching his daughter, who makes a thousand and one coquettish gestures as she passes to and fro before him. The Duke of Schwalbach has all the look of a true German Councillor of State.

"What has been the matter with you since this morning, father?" asked the girl, stopping suddenly at the moment when, passing before the Duke for the twentieth time, she surprised upon his lips the same smile which had already puzzled her a good deal. "It seems to me that you are looking at me in a very mysterious and singular manner. What are you thinking about?"

"About that large black letter with the black seal which had, according to you, a perfume of the Middle Ages, which came from so far, and which I pondered over for so long."

"Oh, then I will not seek to know your secret, father, for that respectable missive could have no connection with me," said the girl, preparing to go on her way again.

"On the contrary, a very intimate connection," returned the Councillor. "This respectable missive speaks only of my giddypate."

Albina stopped and stared in astonishment.

"Of me?" she said, drawing nearer to the old man, "of me? Oh! show it me quickly, then, father. What is it about? Speak; do speak!"

"It is about a proposal of marriage."

"Oh! if that is all," said the girl, pouting her lips with an air of charming disdain.

"If that is all, indeed!" returned the old man, with a smile. "What will you treat with importance, then, if you speak thus lightly of marriage?"

"But, father, you know quite well

beforehand, that I refuse. All these butterflies from Vienna, Councillors of Legation, Privy Councillors, frizzled empty heads, do not please me the least little bit, and never will please me, as you know, don't you? I have told you so already, and I thought it was agreed, dear little father, that you would never speak of it again."

"But you forget, my child, that the letter comes from afar."

"Ah! true. Then I would have to go far from you, and that is still worse, I don't want to leave you, I don't want to, I don't want to," repeated the girl, chasing a butterfly, which soon rose into the air, like a flower blown upward by the breeze, and disappeared.

The Duke waited an instant: then, when his daughter came again within earshot:

"Little hypocrite," said he, "you omit the true reason for your refusal."

"The true reason for my refusal!" cried Albina in astonishment. "And what is that?"

"Your deep, irresistible passion."

"Oh! you are going to laugh at me again, father," returned Albina, drawing nearer to the Duke as though to disarm him.

"That unhappy and hopeless passion for Goetz von Berlichingen, for the Knight of the Iron Hand, who died, alas! under the Emperor Maximilian."

"But revived by the poet, father, he lives, and lives well, in Goethe's drama. Well then, yes; a hundred times yes; despite your raillery, I do love and admire him, that noble and loyal heart, that simple and sublime hero, who loves so well and strikes so hard. It is unfortunate, no doubt, but old as he is—for you always tell me that he is old, as if such men could ever grow old—well, old as he is, he puts me out of conceit with all the Court dandies. Yes, Goetz von Berlichingen, Goetz of the Iron Hand, there is the man for me, and up to the present, you must agree, father, you have only presented dolls to me."

"Child! child! you are but sixteen," said the Duke, "and yet you wish for a husband of sixty."

"Of sixty, of seventy, of eighty, if he is like my rough, loyal and brave Rhine Knights; like Goetz of the Iron Hand, Franz von Sickingen, or even Hans von Selbitz."



THE DUKE—SEATED ON A STONE BENCH, WATCHING HIS DAUGHTER

"Well, then, my dear Albina," continued the Duke more gravely, "that is very lucky, for it is a man of that stamp, a man such as you desire, who seeks your hand."

"Oh! what nonsense, father; how you do make fun of me!"

"No, truly; look only at the signature of the letter and you will see."

And the Councillor drew the letter from his pocket, unfolded it, and shewed Albina the signature.

"Rudolph von Eppstein," the girl read.

"Well, my pretty Amazon, this will suit you, I hope," continued the Duke. "He fought in the Seven Years' War, and as well, I have heard, as though he had been born in your fabled sixteenth century of barbarous memory. I confess, to be sure, he is a little old; but what is that to you, what if he be sixty, seventy, eighty, provided he resemble your hero, you say . . . Rodolph von Eppstein is seventy-two; that is just right for you, and, as for courage, loyalty and nobility, I hope you will not deny them."

"Do you think, father," replied the girl laughingly, "that I know my Germany so little as not to know that Count Rodolph von Eppstein was married some thirty years ago to the sister of my good aunt, the Abbess of the Holy Linden?"

"Well, then, since it is impossible to deceive you, little wiseacre, it is for one of his sons that my old comrade asks your hand; he has the double misfortune of being barely thirty years old, and has very few white hairs. If he is no hero, he is of their blood, and, moreover, his thirty years will increase in number, his black hair will whiten. To that you can add, foolish one, like the romantic spirit you are, an old Castle in the Taunus Mountains, but a few miles from your old Rhine which you so dearly love, with a most fantastical legend of a Lady of the Castle who re-appears because she died on Christmas night, which does not seem to me a very consistent proceeding. But, as you know, poetry and reason, those two daughters of the gods, are like dreams, some of which emerge from the gate of horn, others from the gate of ivory; they come from the same place, but turn their backs upon each other."

"And what is the legend, father? Do you know it?" asked the girl, whose eyes

had sparkled with curiosity at his words.

"No, not well enough to teach it you; I have heard it told by my old friend Eppstein, during our long bivouacs. Besides, your betrothed will tell it you; I will inform him that it is a means of paying his court to you."

"My betrothed, did you say, father? Then you approve of this union?"

"Alas! yes, poor child, I shall have to be cruel and take the glamour from your love; it would have been so fine, would it not? a thwarted fancy, a secret marriage, a posthumous pardon! But what can we do? Unhappily, age, birth, fortune and the old affection which I have borne for fifty years towards Eppstein, everything combines to make me favour this marriage. The only objection I can find is that the young Count is a widower, and has one son; but my Albina, who has so much to hope for in the future, need fear no comparison with the past; and besides, after all, my dear child, you can judge of your betrothed for yourself; his father's letter will only precede him by a few days."

"And what is the name of this proud pretender to my hand, who should efface my Goetz in realizing him?" asked Albina.

"Maximilian," replied the Duke.

"Maximilian? The name promises well . . . for his enemies, not for me; for, if he realizes my dreams, this man of iron in war should be tender and submissive in love. The charm promised and reserved to women, in exchange for all the sorrows that await them, is that of taming these lions, and of making him who inspires awe with his sword, to blush beneath a look. And listen, father," continued Albina with comical gravity, "upon reflection, I think I should like him better young than old: I will share in his glory; his first victory will be won in my name, and I will be like Elizabeth, the witness and the reward of his emprise."

"Dear child," said the Duke, shaking his head, "do you really think the epic times of great feats of the sword can ever come back again?"

"Why not?"

"Ah! because the invention of gunpowder has killed chivalry. There is no longer a Roland, nor a Rinaldo, nor an Oliver; all men, whatever their strength, are equal before a cannon-ball. Let us look rather for a Marshal Berwick and a great Turenne."

"But instead of great slayers, father, we have great Captains. Genius has replaced strength, and without the Durandal of Roland, the Balizarde of Rinaldo, and the Enchanted Lance of Astolpho, Gustavus Adolphus, Wallenstein and Frederick the Great have their own high merits. I know not whence nor wherefore it comes to me, but I have good hope of the next century."

"That is well," said the Duke gaily; "we will have the prediction put in the 'Almanach de Gotha.'"

Then pulling out his watch:

"In the meantime let us to dinner, my fair young Sybil; for at my age—I am sorry to disenchant you again as to the future—one is no longer nourished upon prophecies and perfumes, poetry and sunshine."

Albina took her father's arm with a tossing of the head that signified that time would have no age for her, and together they entered the villa.

The day after this conversation, in which we have tried to give some idea of Albina's quick and original imagination, her pure and poetical daydreams, Maximilian von Eppstein arrived in Vienna, preceded and prepared, so to speak, by the thoughts of this young and gracious being. We have given his portrait. One can easily understand that the father did not like him as well as did the daughter. The father, a clever diplomatist, in the habit of raising the mask to look at the face, found in him more ambition than real merit, more pride than intelligence, more calculation than love. But in Albina's eyes, thanks to his powerful frame and his pale dark countenance, he cut out her insipid Viennese lovers. She saw him through the glamour of the poetry within her; his bluntness seemed frankness to her, his roughness simplicity, his coldness nobility.

"He has a proud and primitive soul," she said to herself, "and his only defect is that he is three hundred years younger in spirit than the Court gallants."

Then she confided innocently to Maximilian the romance she had promised herself, and Maximilian was careful enough to deport himself accordingly, to affect the most profound scorn for protocols and treaties, and to clink his sword and spurs heroically.

At length, one day Albina, wishing to discover whether the young Count's spirit

responded to her own romantic and poetical one, begged him to narrate the legend of the Castle of Eppstein. Maximilian had studied that part of rhetoric called discourse but little; but his speech was rapid, vigorous and dramatic; besides which he was eager to please. He therefore related the legend of the Castle with a conviction, feeling and spirit which completed the subjugation of the romantic girl. The legend was this:—

The Castle was built in Germany's heroic age, that is to say, in the time of Charles the Great, by a Count von Eppstein, ancestor of those of the same name who still lived there. Nothing was known of those primitive times except a prophecy by the enchanter Merlin, which said that any Countess of Eppstein who died in her Castle on Christmas night would only half die. Like all horoscopes, this was somewhat obscure, and it remained long without being understood, when at last the wife of an Emperor of Germany died. The name of the Emperor is lost, but the Empress was called Ermengarde.

Ermengarde had been brought up with the daughter of the Lord of Windeck, who had since become the Countess of Eppstein, but, in becoming, the one a Countess, the other an Empress, the two young women, despite their difference in rank, had never severed their childhood's friendship, and as the Empress lived at Frankfort and the Countess at her Castle, which was situated only three or four leagues from the town, the two friends saw each other frequently. The Count Sigismund von Eppstein was, besides, popular at Court, and had been specially attached to the Empress's suite by the Emperor himself.

Suddenly, on the night of December 24th, 1342, the Empress died. This unexpected death threw a great gloom over the Court. The Emperor adored the Empress and was overwhelmed with grief. The Empress was laid out, according to custom, on a bier of state, and all the lords and ladies of the Court were allowed to kiss her hand. Etiquette demanded that this custom should be performed thus: The Empress lay alone in the chapelle ardente, laid out on her state bier clothed in her Imperial robes, her crown upon her head and a sceptre in her hand. One of her servants watched at her door, and was relieved every two hours by another servant; they intro-

duced into the mortuary chapel each person desirous of paying homage to the dead, who must kneel, kiss the hand of the late Empress, go back and knock at the door, which would open, let him out and admit another visitor. The courtiers of death only entered one by one.

It was the turn of Count Sigismund von Eppstein to keep watch at Ermenгарde's door. Four and twenty hours had already passed since the death of the Empress; it was Christmas Day. Count Sigismund had begun his watch at mid-day. It was a quarter past one; he had already admitted eight or ten persons to see the dead Empress, when, to his great astonishment, the Countess Leonora von Eppstein, his own wife, appeared at the door. We say, to his great astonishment, because he had not sent to inform the Countess, having intended, when his watch was over, to mount his horse and go to tell her himself; for, knowing the great friendship his wife bore to the Empress, he wished to soften as much as possible the blow that was to fall upon her.

Sigismund was not wrong; the blow must have been terrible, for the Countess Leonora was deadly pale. This pallor was the more pronounced from the fact that she was dressed in flowing black garments.

Her husband sprang towards her, and guessing the pious duty which had brought her there, without asking how she had heard the sad news, he led her, mute and weeping, to the door which he opened and shut again behind her.

Most of the visits were short. The visitor bent a knee and came out at once. But Count Sigismund knew that this would not be the case with his wife. It was not a simple matter of etiquette with the Countess; for she was led thither by the genuine grief that wrung her heart. He was not astonished, therefore, that she did not appear after a few minutes, but when a quarter of an hour had passed, and the Countess had not knocked on the door to be let out, he became uneasy; he feared the excitement had been too much for Leonora's strength; and, not daring to open the door without being asked to do so—which would have been a breach of etiquette—he bent down to look through the keyhole, fearful of seeing the Countess unconscious beside the dead Empress.

But, to his profound surprise, it was quite otherwise.

After gazing through the keyhole for some minutes, he stood up again, his face bathed in sweat, and pale as a corpse himself. The change in his appearance was so apparent, that some of the courtiers who stood near, awaiting their turn, asked what was the matter.

"Nothing," replied Count Sigismund, passing his hand over his forehead, "nothing, absolutely nothing."

The courtiers continued conversing of their own affairs.

Count Sigismund, thinking that his eyes had deceived him, looked again through the keyhole. This time he was convinced that he had not been deceived, and this is what he saw:

He saw the dead Empress, with her crown upon her head and her sceptre in her hand, seated on her bier talking to his wife, Countess Leonora.

It was such an astounding sight the Count could not believe his own eyes; he thought he must be dreaming, and he stood up again, paler than ever.

Almost at the same moment, the Countess Leonora knocked, as a signal that her visit to the Empress was ended. Count Eppstein opened the door and cast a rapid look into the interior of the chapel. The Empress again lay motionless on her bier.

The Count gave his arm to his wife and, as he led her away, he asked her one or two questions to which she made no reply. His duty called him back to the Empress's door for another ten minutes; he left the Countess, therefore, in the ante-room, believing that her silence proceeded from her sorrow, or, rather, quite unable to account for anything, so agitated were his thoughts.

The courtiers continued to go in one after the other. During each visit Count von Eppstein gazed through the keyhole, but the Empress still lay motionless. Two o'clock struck; the Master of the Horse, who was to take his place as usher, entered. The Count, hardly waiting to salute him, gave him the counter-sign, and flinging himself out of the room, rushed to the apartments of the Emperor, whom he found in a state bordering on despair.

"Sacred Majesty!" he cried, "weep no more, but send your physician to the Empress. The Empress is not dead!"

"What do you say, Sigismund?" cried the Emperor.

"I say that I have just seen, with my own eyes, I have seen, sire, the noble Empress Ermengarde, seated on her bier, conversing with the Countess von Eppstein."

"Which Countess von Eppstein?" questioned the Emperor.

"The Countess Leonora von Eppstein, my wife."

"My poor friend," replied the Emperor, shaking his head, "sorrow has bereft you of your senses."

"How so, sire?"

"The Countess von Eppstein—may God give you courage to bear this blow!"

"Well, the Countess von Eppstein?" asked Sigismund, anxiously.

"The Countess died this morning."

Count Sigismund uttered a cry. He ran to his house, leapt upon his horse and galloped through the streets of Frankfort like a madman. Half an hour later he entered the castle of Eppstein.

"Countess Leonora!" he cried, "Countess Leonora!"

But those to whom he spoke, turned away their heads and answered only with tears.

He ran towards the staircase crying, "Countess Leonora! Countess Leonora!"

On his way he encountered servants, but no one replied to his cries. He flung himself into his wife's room. She lay upon her bed dressed in black, and as pale as he had seen her three quarters of an hour previously; the Chaplain was chanting prayers at the foot of the bed. The Countess had died that morning.

The messenger, not finding Count Sigismund at his house, had borne the sad news to the Emperor. The Count asked whether the Countess had made any movement since midnight, when she died.

"None," they answered.

He asked the priest who was praying near whether he had left the bedside at all.

"Not for one second," said the priest.

Then the Count remembered that it was Christmas Day, and that an old prophecy of Merlin's said that the Countess von Eppstein who died during Christmas night, only partially died. Leonora was the first Countess who had died on Christmas night. Sigismund had

been deceived, it was not Ermengarde who was alive, but Leonora who was dead; the dead Countess had come to kiss the hand of the dead Empress, and their two spirits had conversed together for ten minutes. Count Sigismund thought he should go mad. It was asserted that the Countess, to whose soul had been accorded the privilege of communicating with the living, visited her husband frequently during the illness which attacked the Count immediately after these events.

A year later Sigismund entered a monastery, leaving to his eldest son his rank, title and fortune which he renounced in order to consecrate himself to God.

The apparition was visible, it was said, in a room in the Castle called the Red Room, which, by a door in the wall, giving on to a secret staircase, communicated with the tombs of the Counts of Eppstein.

It was added that for three generations the Countess had on special occasions appeared to the eldest of the family, but at length, in the fourth generation, the apparitions had ceased. Since that time the Countess Leonora had not been seen again, but the tradition had been perpetuated in the Castle of Eppstein and the eldest son of the family had retained the habit of sleeping in the Red Room. And, since that time, no Countess von Eppstein had died on Christmas night.

The influence which this story had upon Albina can easily be understood; her poetic soul devoured the fantastic legend word by word and, thinking she would be called Countess von Eppstein, and believing that she was about to inhabit the old Castle which was contemporaneous with Charlemagne, she almost imagined she had returned in reality to the Middle Ages, her favourite epoch.

Maximilian could not have sustained for long the rôle he had adopted in the eyes of Albina, who, however much prejudiced in his favour, was yet clear-sighted enough; but luckily for him, important business called him to his father's side, and he left, bearing with him the vows of the young girl and the consent of the Duke, who, however, postponed the wedding for a year.

Maximilian in this interval came several times to Vienna, but always disappeared again after a brief interval.

First it was his mother who died, then the Count joined her; but before their deaths, the old nobles had written letters to their son's betrothed, as kind and gentle as their own hearts, which not only sustained but augmented the delusion of the poor enthusiastic girl. Through the glamour of absence Albina, faithful to the dear myth which her own pure spirit had created, thought her Maximilian wonderful; she was eager to console all the sorrow which overwhelmed him, to people his sad solitude, and to enliven as queen and fairy the old Castle of Eppstein with her presence. Often too she would think of the legend of the Countess Leonora, and she was overheard asking God to let her die on a Christmas night, in order that by virtue of the ancient privilege granted to Countesses von Eppstein who died on that night, she might, after her death, leave the tomb to visit her husband.

At length, towards the end of the year 1791, the marriage so ardently longed for took place at Vienna. The Emperor signed the contract, and the young people set out for the Castle of Eppstein.

The first thing Albina asked on reaching the Castle was to be shown the Red Room. It was this room that Maximilian had slept in since the death of his father.

You know this room, it is the one already described, and it has remained exactly the same from that time to this. A fortnight after Albina's departure, the Duke of Schwalbach died suddenly, carried off by an attack of apoplexy, as though a father's protection were no longer needed by his daughter. This was the first great sorrow of Albina's life, which was to become a life full of sorrow.

No one was ever heard to speak of Conrad and Naomi, and Maximilian, the new Count von Eppstein, never so much as mentioned them.

CHAPTER III.

A YEAR later all was changed in Eppstein Castle, as in the world; Albina trembled before Maximilian, and Europe trembled before France.

The Revolution had not yet broken out in all its fury, the French king was not

dead, but he was already a prisoner; the growlings of the thunder announced what the storm would be, and like a rising sea beating on its coasts, France already overflowed into the Rhenish provinces previous to inundating the Continent. Custine had taken Mayence and menaced Frankfort.

At the Castle of Eppstein the fierce, turbulent temper of Maximilian, though it had not yet led him into the excesses of former days, had already shown itself, and Albina saw all her pretty fancies vanish one by one. The noble and poetic knight of whom she had dreamed soon appeared to her in his true colours—that is to say, as an ambitious schemer and a vulgar libertine, to whom marriage was but a stepping stone and his wife a plaything.

Albina had suffered profoundly at first, then she grew more resigned and now allowed all the delicate flowers of her soul to be trampled beneath this brutal foot without a murmur. Moreover, she had hardly time for ennui or regret, for political events marched quicker than her thoughts.

Mayence taken, the banks of the Maine were occupied and the old Imperial troops retreated, fighting, before the young soldiers of liberty. Frankfort could hold out only a few days longer. Count von Eppstein, whose Castle was so near the theatre of war, would have been a prisoner of importance, and he thought himself even more important than he really was. But he was recalled to Vienna, and was obliged to leave the country until the tempest should be overpast. To attempt to remain in his Castle was impossible, and bravery in such circumstances would only have been foolhardiness.

But already Maximilian had delayed too long; French scouts had intercepted the road to Vienna, his escape was already doubtful, and his way was beset with all sorts of dangers. The presence of Albina would only have added to the dangers of his flight; Maximilian resolved therefore to leave his wife behind at the Castle.

Albina did all she could to make her husband consent to take her with him. At length, on the eve of his departure, she conjured him by all he held most sacred, not to leave her alone. Alas! the resolutions taken by Maximilian were

irrevocable, he was insensible to tears, deaf to prayers. His wife pleaded with him in vain.

"What have you to fear?" said he to her. "What is the meaning of this childish terror? Together we should both be lost, separate we shall both be saved. You know I am to escape to-night with Daniel, dressed as a peasant, and when the day comes, if we are stopped, it will certainly not be easy to avert suspicion. But how would it be if you were with us? Once I am out of reach, what could they do to you? What! do they take women prisoners? No! Nor are the French wanting in chivalry. Make yourself respected and they will respect you. Besides, all discussion is useless, for we have no choice. If my life belonged to myself alone, I would assuredly hold it cheaper, but I do not hold it useless to my country. Come, courage, Albina, and believe me, I confide to you all that I hold most precious in the world, my son and my honour. To-morrow, Albina, you may be alone and a widow, but," he added in an almost tender tone, as he embraced the poor desolate creature, "let us forget to-morrow, since to-day is still with us."

As usual Albina submitted obediently to her master. Maximilian set out the next day, and three days later Albina received a letter announcing his safety. But during these three days an event had already occurred at the Castle which was to exercise a terrible influence on the life of the unhappy Albina.

Before marching on Frankfort, Custine, for fear of surprise, had wished to explore all the environments of the town. Two companies were ordered to examine the defiles of the Taunus. The precaution was necessary; an ambuscade laid in the wooded mountains was discovered by the French, not far from the Castle of Eppstein.

In the ensuing engagement, our men were forced by numbers to retire on the main body, but the enemy's design was discovered, and they were able without fear of being taken between two fires to march on Frankfort, which, as a matter of fact, they captured next day. But in their daring skirmish, the two companies had to regret the loss of a large number of soldiers and some of their best officers.

One of their number was a young captain, known only as Captain Jacques,

and remarkable in this respect, that at the time of the passage of the Rhine, that is to say, the moment he set foot in Germany, he flung his sword into the river, and wore the empty scabbard at his side. Although deprived of this defensive weapon, which, however, is really and truly as much a mark of their rank among infantry officers as any actual protection, the young Captain had done good service by his courage, his coolness, and knowledge of the country. It was he who marched straight into the ambush; and he received the reward of his boldness in the first shots with which the Imperial troops saluted the Republicans; he fell, struck in the head by a ball, and was left for dead upon the battlefield, not only by his own side, but likewise by the enemy.

It was not till towards evening that one of the new servants at the Castle (upon the death of his father the Count, Maximilian had renewed his whole household with the exception of Daniel the old steward, and Jonathan the old keeper) heard groans as he was returning from Falkenstein, and found Captain Jacques, who was still breathing. With the help of two peasants, whom he summoned to his assistance, he immediately carried the wounded man to the Castle, where Albina ordered the most kindly hospitality to be shown him. The Chaplain was an expert surgeon; he examined the young man's wound, applied a first dressing, and on the following day believed he would be able to answer for his life.

Albina concerned herself greatly about the wounded man; in the first place because she was a woman and affected by suffering, further because the Captain's presence was a safeguard for her against the marauders of the French Army; and the conquerors, it must be owned, did not make use of their victory with the moderation that Maximilian, with his easy selfishness, had promised his wife. When the pillagers appeared at the gate of the Castle, Captain Jacques, who was informed of it, got up, in spite of all the entreaties of the Chaplain and Albina, and dragging himself down to them, deadly pale from his wound, was able to raise his voice effectively, to save the Castle and its mistress from all danger.

From that time gratitude as well as pity caused the young Countess to redouble her consideration and care for him

who had saved her life, and perhaps more than her life.

Captain Jacques had, besides, the most generous, the most ardent heart and one most sympathetic to Albina's tender and enthusiastic nature. The only fault to be found in him was a tinge of almost perpetual melancholy and a little too much effeminacy for a military man, but sadness suited his pale face well, and he was known to be as brave as a lion. He had been seen so calm and almost unconcerned in the midst of shot and shell, that his men felt an admiration amounting to respect for his nature, so feeble in appearance and so strong in reality. On the other hand, Captain Jacques was greatly liked by the officers on account of the stores of information which he was always obligingly ready to impart, and which induced them to overlook those crotchety ideas of a perverse philosophy which often prevented his companions in arms from following his fancy through the imaginary realms traversed by this wild and poetical nature. While the soldiers called their Captain Jacques the Brave, his brother officers called him Jacques the Dreamer. It was evident, in fact, that Jacques fought for an idea, and that the individual quarrels of Sovereigns entirely disappeared in his eyes in view of the general National question.

It can readily be understood how such a character would harmonise with Albina's. Jacques was indeed the man of her dreams; brave, loyal, and daring as Goetz von Berlichingen, handsome and poetical as Max Piccolomini.

Thus, to the great wonder of the Chaplain, who knew how reserved Albina was, an undoubted friendship was soon established between the young officer and the Countess. After a few days the Captain called the young wife Albina, while she called him Jacques.

More, at the same time, as Jacques did not apparently wish to be seen by anyone in the neighbourhood of the Castle, he hardly ever left the apartments where Albina kept him company. The Castle servants could enter at any moment into the room where the young people sat, they found them always talking and laughing. The perfect innocence of their thoughts was their safeguard. One would have said that these white, twin souls had known each other in a better

world, and now met once more in this. Long hours slipped by in pleasant conversation without Albina or Jacques being aware of the flight of time.

Jacques seemed to wake from a dream when he was warned that in two days he must leave the Castle to return with his corps to France. Two months of convalescence had passed like an hour.

Albina conducted the young officer to the steps, where he took his leave of her, kissing her hand and calling her sister. Albina wished him all prosperity, and called him brother; then she followed him with her eyes as long as he was in sight, waving her handkerchief the while.

A fortnight after Jacques had left, Albina received a letter from her husband. The retreat of the French enabled Maximilian to return to his Castle, and he wrote therefore to say that he might be expected at any moment.

As the Castle could not be approached by a carriage, Albina sent Tobias (who momentarily and on the departure of Daniel filled his place at the Castle) to await Maximilian at Frankfort with two horses. Maximilian recognised in this one of Albina's habitual attentions, but his was one of those proud spirits which always imagine that whatever is done for them is merely their due. He mounted one of the horses and Tobias the other, the rest of the suite having to make their way to the Castle as best they could.

The conversation turned naturally on the sojourn of the French in the neighbourhood, and hardly had the Count and Tobias started on their way before the former beckoned to Tobias, who kept respectfully behind, to take his place beside and keep step with him.

Tobias obeyed.

"Well," asked Maximilian, "the French—those, at least, of whom the Countess wrote to me—respected the Castle?"

"Yes, Count," replied Tobias, "but only thanks to Captain Jacques' protection; for I believe that without him things would have gone very wrong."

"Who is this Captain Jacques?" returned Maximilian. "The Countess mentioned him to me in one of her letters. He had been wounded?"

"Yes, sir; Hans found him dying, a hundred yards from the Castle, and carried him to Eppstein. For a whole night he lay between life and death, but

the Chaplain treated him so skilfully, and the Countess attended him so assiduously, that at the end of a month he was perfectly cured."

"And then he left the Castle?" asked Maximilian, who frowned imperceptibly at mention of the care the Countess had bestowed upon the wounded man.

"No, he stayed another month."

"Another month! And what did he do?"

"Nothing, sir; he remained nearly the whole time in my Lady's apartment, and when he sometimes went out, it was in the evening, to take a turn in the park. One would have said he was afraid of being seen."

Maximilian's lip blanched, but without making the least alteration in his voice,

"When did he leave?" he asked.

"Only about eight or ten days ago."

"And what kind of man was he?" asked the Count. "Young or old, handsome or plain, dull or gay?"

"Well, sir, he was a young man of about twenty-six or twenty-eight, fair, pale, and slender, and he always appeared very sad."

"In fact," said the Count, biting his lips, but continuing the conversation almost in spite of himself, and with the persistence with which the heart insists on knowing what will wound it, "in fact, he must have been very much bored at the Castle."

"No, sir; he looked sad, but not bored."

"Yes," Maximilian went on, "his companions came to see him, and that created a diversion for him."

"Oh! as to diversion, he only sought it twice during the whole time he stayed at the Castle, when his quartermaster-sergeant came to Eppstein; again, not because he was invited to come, but to bring him orders from his colonel."

"Then, I suppose, he went out shooting?"

"He did not touch a gun or mount a horse once, and Jonathan told me yesterday that he had never once seen him during those two months."

"But what did he do, then?" continued the Count, trying to control himself, for, in spite of his efforts, he was aware that his voice was becoming agitated.

"What did he do? Oh, that is soon told. In the morning he played like a

child with Count Albrecht, who grew very fond of him, and who used to go to his room as soon as he got up, or he would converse like an old man with the Chaplain, who was astonished at his learning; in the afternoon there was music, he accompanied Madame on the harpsichord and also sang himself, and then it was our idle time, for we listened outside the drawing-room doors to their voices, which seemed like those of two angels; then, the concert finished, they almost always read aloud, and in the evening, as I have told you already, sir, but only rarely, they walked in the garden."

"A strange officer, indeed," said the Count, bitterly, "who plays with children, philosophises with old men, sings with women, reads aloud, or walks alone."

"Alone? No," replied Tobias, "the Countess always accompanied him."

"Always?" returned the Count.

"Yes, or, at least, nearly always," continued Tobias.

"And that is all you know of this officer? Nothing of his birth, nothing of his family? Is he noble or plebeian, rich or poor? Answer."

"As for that, I know nothing, my lord; but the Countess will, no doubt, be able to give your Excellency every information you require."

"And from where, if you please, do you get that idea, Master Tobias?" said Maximilian, throwing a side-long glance at the indiscreet narrator, in order to assure himself what motive he had in making this reply.

"I believe it, my lord," replied Tobias, with that affectation of simple goodwill which the hatred they almost invariably bear their masters gives to servants, "because I think the Countess and this young officer have known each other for a long time."

"And by what signs were you able to judge, Mr. Physiognomist?" returned Maximilian, in a bantering tone of voice of which Tobias could not understand the drift, "that this young officer and the Countess were acquainted with each other before the events which brought them together?"

"Because the Countess called the officer Jacques, and he called her ladyship Albina."

Maximilian mechanically raised the whip he held in his hand, intending to lay it across the face of the perspicacious observer at his elbow, but almost immediately restraining his anger:

"Very good," said he, striking his horse instead of striking Tobias; "good, that is all I wish to know at present. You are quite right, Tobias; the Countess will tell me the rest."

The horse bounded forward, and Tobias found himself again in the rear; then, as his master made no further sign to him, and ceased from that moment to address a word to him, he followed at a respectful distance.

Maximilian's countenance remained calm, but frightful suspicions gnawed at his heart, that heart so insensible to love, so prompt to wrath and accusation. However, certainty was still lacking, and he muttered to himself, as he lashed his horse:

"A proof, a proof of her dishonour, a proof that shall enable me to crush the guilty!" And he almost desired this proof.

On arriving at the end of the avenue which leads to the Castle, he saw Albina on the steps, awaiting him joyfully and impatiently, and with a convulsive movement he dug his spurs into his horse's sides.

The poor wife believed that the Count made his horse gallop in his impatience to see her once more.

As the Count leapt to the ground, Albina threw herself upon his neck.

"Pardon, my dear," she said to him, "pardon me for not coming to meet you; I am ill. But what is the matter, Maximilian? How careworn and preoccupied you look! Politics, no doubt. Oh! I will bring back the serenity and happiness to your brow. Come, Maximilian, let me whisper a secret to you, a sweet secret which I repeat to myself with intoxication, and which has helped me to support your absence; a charming secret which I did not wish to confide to a letter because I wished to have the joy of telling it to you myself; a secret that I could not tell you before you left, as I did not know it then. Listen, Maximilian, and put away your gloom. You remember that farewell night, so sweet, and yet so cruel? Quick, kiss your wife now, Maximilian, and in six months you shall kiss your child."

CHAPTER IV.

WE must now leave for a while the old-world towers of Count Maximilian's Castle, for the modest abode of Jonathan the keeper. Castle and cottage have already had, and will have again, as will appear in the course of this narrative, more than one connection with one another; and the story of the latter will go side by side with, and in more than one place explain, that of the former.

The cottage of the Eppstein keeper, situated a hundred paces from the park railings and at the entrance to the forest, stood with its back to a small wooded hill, which sheltered it from the north wind. The little house was old and dilapidated, yet it looked young and smiling owing to the harmonious shades which its red bricks, deep green shutters, and the vine which ran along its walls had taken beneath the hand of Time, the great artist. The green ante-chamber of four large lime trees planted before the door, the hospitable bench beside the threshold, the streamlet, the tidy yard, the garden, small, but gay and full of flowers and birds, all attracted and charmed the eye. Within, there was the same order without formality, the same cleanliness without depressing bareness. Below, the living room and father's room, above, that of the children, white, coquettish, well kept, brightened by a caged singing bird and perfumed with flowers in pots. Whenever you see upon a window sill a rose and a bull-finch, you may know the inhabitants are wiser and better than their neighbours.

Since 1750, Jasper Muden had been keeper to Count Rodolph of Eppstein; in 1768, at the age of forty, he took a wife. At the end of five years of the calmest and happiest union, the housewife died, leaving poor Jasper with two little daughters, Wilhelmina and Naomi.

Jasper was a man as firm as loyal, a man according to the Lord: he read over in his Bible the history of Ruth, and vowed to live for his two orphans; so he lived, and lived simply and worthily, a noble example to his children, who, under his honest and paternal guidance, grew in virtue and in grace.

Wilhelmina and Naomi were both pretty, both industrious; only Wilhelmina was merrier, Naomi more pensive. When Wilhelmina, who was the eldest, was sixteen, the question was which of the lads of the countryside should have her in marriage. Jasper chose Jonathan, whom he loved for his bravery and skill in hunting, out of all the aspirants. Sport was old Jasper's passion, and he obtained for his son-in-law the reversion of his place. In the meanwhile, Jonathan was raised to the position of under-keeper.

Wilhelmina accepted obediently the husband chosen by her father and the match turned out well; Jonathan was the best creature in the world, a little simple, perhaps, a little careless, save in aught that concerned the deer or wild boars, but after all, a devoted husband, and one that saw only with his wife's eyes. He came to live with his father-in-law.

As for Naomi, the spoilt child of Jonathan and her elder sister, she was much less submissive than Wilhelmina and rejected all offers; for the gentle looks of Conrad von Eppstein had already penetrated to the depths of her soul. The pale and melancholy young man whom she had met several times in the woods, and who, at each meeting, had gone out of the way to avoid her with so much trouble, unwittingly occupied all her thoughts.

One day, a violent storm brought the shy wanderer into the keeper's house, and, from that time, emboldened by the cordial welcome of the father, fascinated by the beauty of the daughter, Conrad came every week, then presently, every day.

Jasper, with his rustic common sense, did not fail to remark Naomi's emotion when the young man arrived, her dreaminess when he was gone. He would, certainly, have sent a recognised libertine like Maximilian about his business, but the grave appearance, the stern and dignified character of the young student, as they called him, inspired the keeper with confidence and almost with respect. When Conrad was not there, Jasper spoke of him angrily, to Naomi's great fear, and swore he would no longer receive within his cottage the young and noble lord of Eppstein, whose rightful place was at the Castle. Conrad would come, and Jasper would pull awkwardly at his hat and retire grumbling.

We know the rest. When Jasper learnt of his daughter's secret marriage, the honourable man had no more to say, but the faithful servant trembled at the idea of his master's anger. However, he justified himself easily before the high-minded and noble-hearted Count Rodolph; but the father within him had to suffer sorely, for he had to bid farewell to his dear Naomi, who was banished because she had loved. Naomi was so like his wife, that he suffered her loss a second time in taking leave of his daughter.

Nevertheless, in this second trial, the Christian bowed his head again before the decrees of Providence. He embraced his daughter without tears, the daughter whom he would never see again, and read over once more in his Bible the story of Hagar.

Naomi set out, and days, months, years passed away without a single letter from her; all that they knew was that Naomi was in France.

When she thought of her sister, Wilhelmina wept; but, it must be acknowledged, she only wept when she thought of her. Otherwise, she was happy and loved her husband, who adored her.

We have told of the death of Count Rodolph and his wife. Maximilian in re-organising his house, excepted Jonathan and Jasper from the general measures. In the service of another master, Jasper might speak of his son-in-law and Jonathan of his brother-in-law; by keeping them, the Count obliged them to be discreet.

When Albina came to live at the Castle of Eppstein, she found the good and sweet Wilhelmina very much to her taste. The nascent jealousy of Maximilian forbade his wife the neighbouring country houses, but did not prohibit the cottages, and Albina was less bored in the keeper's gay cottage than in the dark, dismal fortress. In Wilhelmina's garden she had her flowers, which she tended herself, her birds which knew her; the small amount of air, sunshine and liberty left her, she found at Wilhelmina's. There, and there only perhaps, the happy days at Winkel shone for her again.

But when the arrival of the French constrained the Count to go to Vienna, he advised his wife sternly not to leave the Castle. Household duties kept Wilhelmina at home, and poor Albina was

sadder and lonelier than ever, at the moment when Captain Jacques arrived at the Castle.

Those who suffer from troubles of the heart have a tender pity for all suffering. Albina took a great interest in the poor, wounded man. He, for his part, showed a singular sympathy for Albina. One evening, Captain Jacques related the story of his life to Albina. There was, doubtless in this story, which has not come down to us, something profoundly interesting, for, from that moment, a very real friendship appeared to draw these two young hearts to each other.

From that time, Albina seemed to have some food for thought, and her life had an interest. She no longer regretted her forest rambles, nor urged Wilhelmina to come and see her at the Castle. The keeper's wife did not even once see the wounded officer during his sojourn at Eppstein, she only caught a glimpse of his uniform the day he left to join his regiment at Mayence.

When Captain Jacques failed her, Albina was drawn again to Wilhelmina, and begged her to get away from her little house as often as she could. These two young women, separated by birth and education, understood each other's souls, and were sisters in spirit. The Countess had recovered some of her gaiety, the sweet hope which made her happiness she confided to Wilhelmina, but to Wilhelmina alone. Jonathan's wife was also about to become a mother, almost a month before the Countess. What projects they had, what dreams, what fond, foolish thoughts!

"Our two children," said Albina, "will be brought up together, and shall have the same masters; I wish it, do you understand that, Wilhelmina?"

"Yes, my lady," replied Wilhelmina, "but I have thought of something. You are too delicate to nurse your child yourself. Well, I will nurse it with my own. I am a peasant woman, strong and healthy; and, make your mind easy, neither of them shall want care, and I shall never think which of the two is my own child."

In the midst of all these plans and all these hopes, Count Maximilian returned from Vienna.

The day after his return, when Wilhelmina presented herself, as usual, at the Castle, she was told that the Countess

would no longer receive anyone, by order of his lordship. She insisted, and was almost driven away. She returned home anxious and weeping.

From this moment, Count Maximilian, who up till then had been anything but an enthusiastic sportsman, went out after game almost every day, accompanied by Jonathan; for old Jasper hardly left the house, and was pleased at seeing his place filled by his son-in-law. In this daily sport, Count Eppstein showed a ferocious cruelty, which had not been noticed in him hitherto, and which increased every day, answering apparently to the need of causing suffering which was in his heart. When a stag or doe was run down, instead of sparing them a prolonged agony by a ball from his gun or a stab with his hunting knife, he allowed them to be devoured by his dogs, but not before the best of his pack had been ripped open, while he, usually so gloomy, laughed aloud at the sight. At other times, he would remain silent for whole days together. Once, Jonathan, yielding to his wife's entreaties, had asked him for news of the Countess. Then Maximilian had grown visibly pale, and in an abrupt voice and with a menacing look,

"Hold your tongue," he had said, "what concern is it of yours what the Countess does or does not; what has my lady to do with you, pray?"

And from that moment the poor keeper had not dared to venture on such ill-received enquiries.

Several weeks went by; it was the end of December, the time of Wilhelmina's accouchement was at hand. The Count had told Jonathan to meet him on Christmas morning, the latter waited for two hours, but Maximilian did not appear.

Presently, instead of Maximilian, Jonathan saw a messenger approaching, who announced that Wilhelmina was calling for him; Wilhelmina was about to become a mother. Jonathan hurried along the road to his house; as he entered, Wilhelmina brought a little daughter into the world.

Wilhelmina's first thought was for her husband, her second for Albina.

"Send word to the Countess," she cried, radiant in the midst of her sufferings.

But no one replied, save by tears and silence.

Indeed, an appalling scene had occurred at the Castle that very morning.

CHAPTER V.

ALBINA had imagined that when she broke the glad news which filled her maternal heart to her husband, Maximilian would share in her delight, take his wife in his arms, utter one of those heartfelt exclamations which the heart understands and welcomes, and that a new era of their love would date from that auspicious moment.

"I have misunderstood the Count," said Albina, in the generous prepossession of her heart. "He is noble, good, devoted; only I compared him to dreams, to childish fancies. I wanted life to realise the fantastical caprices of the imagination, as though a statesman were a hero of romance, as though the men of the eighteenth century could resemble those of the sixteenth. I was mad, but now I am serious, strong, a mother; no more unreasonableness, I have duties; I must no longer be unforgiving, for I have responsibilities; besides, I feel I must forgive everything in the father of my child, he who has given me my maternal happiness, the purest happiness there is in the world."

It was, therefore, with the greatest impatience that Albina longed for the Count's return. It was with eager unreserved joy that she smilingly whispered the cherished secret in his ear; it was with the naïve and graceful archness of a child that she watched for the effect of her good news upon her husband's face. She hoped he would embrace her delightedly, call her by the sweetest names, put a thousand tender and anxious questions to her. But instead of this, Maximilian became deadly pale, angrily wrung the hand Albina had given him, then, seeing Tobias and his suite at some distance behind him, and feeling the necessity of restraining himself, he passed, mute and unconcerned before his distracted wife and hurried away.

Albina remained standing, cold and still, on the spot where the Count had left her, like a statue of grief. She passed her hand over her brow. Yes! she was really awake, this was no frightful dream. With a heart full of agony and fear she regained her own room.

What had she done? What fault had drawn upon her the anger of her master,

or rather what crime? For if that anger was to hold good before the joyful news she had announced, it must indeed be a grave one.

In vain Albina questioned herself severely; she could discover nothing in her life to merit such harshness. Perhaps she had been wrong to keep silent so long, but if she had done so, it was only that she might tell the Count the news herself, and so trivial a fault did not deserve so rough a treatment. The poor Countess, lost in a thousand terrible speculations, alone in her room, knew not what to imagine, and trembled at the slightest sound. At the end of an hour, the door opened, a servant entered and handed her a letter. It was from Maximilian, and read as follows:—

"Madam,—I will confine myself to making known to you my wishes,—my express wishes, you understand! They are these:—

"You will not leave the Castle walls; you will never appear before me; you are at liberty to walk in the courtyard and garden when I am out, and I shall go out every day; but I command you, upon your life, not to move a step further. I intend also that you shall write to no one, and that your Wilhelmina shall never again show herself at the Castle. You know who and what I am, obey and do not rouse my anger, or I cannot answer for the consequences of an outburst, which you alone will have caused.

"MAXIMILIAN VON EPPSTEIN."

After reading this letter, of which she understood not a word,—unless it were that she was lost and undone, the Countess stood like a woman thunder-struck.

We have spoken of that species of violent authority exercised by Maximilian's implacable will, and how every one submitted almost in spite of themselves to this rough and fatal power which no one sought to evade, any more than the blind and inevitable decrees of fate. It was thus that Albina, though certain of her own innocence, bowed her head, as one does before death, and waited. But it must be admitted that in the calm attitude she took up, there was as much dignity as resignation. After all the knowledge of her innocence sustained her, and no longer loving her husband, she cared more for her own self-esteem than for the Count's regard.

"If Maximilian no longer respects his wife," said Albina to herself, "it is for the wife to keep her self-respect, and to protest by her strong and confident tranquillity against an unjust condemnation. I do not even know of what crime Maximilian accuses me, but the future bears a torch wherewith it illumines the past. A day will come when he will recognise his error: until then it behoves me to remain quiet and proud."

Did she not count too much on her strength, this tender soul, who, until the time of her marriage, had seen everything yield to her weakness? The anger of a man like Maximilian could certainly not be lightly treated, for this anger, once roused, would not stop half-way, and could be turned aside by no obstacle; no, rather would it break down the obstacle and attain its end.

The Count knew it so well that he was afraid of himself and trembled before his own wrath. Seized with rage when his wife announced to him what was a happiness to her, but what he believed was a dishonour for himself, he had in a way fled before his own vengeance. If he had only listened to his violent instincts, he would upon the spot have killed his wife who had wronged him, and who, having wronged him, now insulted him. But this would have been to proclaim his own shame; he suppressed his anger and, for the time being, condemned his wife to prison as one would condemn a criminal.

His menacing letter written to Albina, he too waited.

Both continued to live beneath the same roof; every morning and evening Albina heard Maximilian passing along the corridor; always with the same slow and heavy steps. On no single occasion did this step stop before her door, nor did it even show the least desire to stop. For many weeks, for many months, they never once met; but if they did not meet, they thought of each other as much or even more than the most devoted lovers.

The Count tried in vain to banish the sombre reflections which possessed him; it was impossible; the outrage of which he believed himself the victim was one which men of his stamp feel too deeply to forget or forgive. The Countess, for her part, in vain sought refuge in her conscience, and put aside all thoughts that were not of her child or of her God.

The mystery of Maximilian's conduct terrified her in spite of herself, and ceaselessly troubled her thoughts by day and her dreams by night.

The calmness they enforced upon themselves was that false calm which precedes the storm; both were, as they both knew well, under the sad and feverish influence of expectation. Maximilian and Albina suffered horribly; with a calm look on their faces, but with death in their hearts, they often shuddered at the oppressive terror that crushed their souls. He trembled, without knowing why, before the aureole of purity surrounding his wife's head. She, knowing her husband's violence, knew not what violence to expect the first time they should meet.

But it was to Albina that this state of things first became intolerable; strong in her innocence, she resolved to get to the bottom of the unknown danger which she felt to be menacing her. She had so great a conviction of this danger that, after some days of doubt, having at last resolved to ask Maximilian for an explanation, she wrote the following before asking to see him. It was, as we shall see, more a testament than a letter.

"I am not only forbidden to see you, my good Wilhelmina, but even to write; therefore, this letter will not be sent unless I die. Death must surely release one from obedience.

"Do not be surprised at these melancholy apprehensions, Wilhelmina; one must foresee everything in such a situation as I am in, and I would not wish to leave this world without having left you, you who have ever been so faithful to me, a loving legacy such as the dying who have loved always cling to.

"My God! I know not why my pen writes these sad words; for believe me, my friend, I am calm and gay. Why, I even smile at this moment at the plans we laid two months ago.

"Do you remember? In any case, I am going to repeat them once again, those plans which were almost engagements.

"Wilhelmina, you have promised to nurse my child if I cannot. Do not forget that promise, for I count upon it. I shall live, I hope I shall live, to remind you myself; anyhow, I shall be calmer when I have reminded you of it here, and at a moment which is rendered solemn by a resolution I am about to take.

"This is not all, Wilhelmina. Listen; if God calls me to Him, I am sure that Count Maximilian will bring up my child nobly and carefully. But the education of the soul, do you understand? the education a child receives at its mother's knee, only a woman can give that. Men teach life well, but only women can teach the way to Heaven. For instance, you who know me can speak better to him of me than his father, who has never known me. Speak to him of me, Wilhelmina, often, always, try to make him know me as well as though he had seen me; and, my good Wilhelmina, do not refuse him those tender caresses which are as necessary as milk to little children. Poor orphan, may he grow up in your love and tenderness. In a word, be not only a nurse to him but a mother.

"Is that all I have to say to you, Wilhelmina? Yes; moreover, if I have forgotten anything, your own heart will guess the remainder of my thoughts.

"But doubtless you will think me very egotistical; I have not said a word yet of yourself. Forgive me, I was speaking of him, of him who is part of me.

"Nevertheless, in recommending my child to you, you will see I have not forgotten yours. Beneath this cover you will find two letters, one addressed to the Mother Superior of the Holy Linden, the other to Major von Kniebis at Vienna.

"If you bear a daughter, you will send her, when she is five or six years old, with the first of these letters, to my dear Aunt, the Abbess Dorothea, who has been a second mother to me. At my request, Wilhelmina, she will at once admit your daughter into the Convent where I was brought up with the greatest heiresses in Germany. Oh! happy times when I sang the Psalms of the Lord so joyously, and when the death of my pet dove was my greatest sorrow. There, Wilhelmina, you may rest assured, your daughter will receive a good and holy education.

"If you have a son, send him to the Major, who will enter him at a fitting College, or place him in the Military School. This dear Major was my father's intimate friend; he never failed to come every day to Winkel. I remember what pleasure I took in teasing him, and with what pleasant good nature he lent himself to my innocent tricks, or even provoked them. Who would say, on seeing

me now, dear Wilhelmina, that I was the maddest and giddiest of girls?

"The Major will certainly not have forgotten his little Albina, and for love of me he will welcome your son as though he were my own.

"I wish we could each have a son or each a daughter, our children would then be brothers or sisters.

"Do for mine, if I die, what I will do for yours if I live.

"Adieu, my Wilhelmina! In any case, I am convinced our souls do not die, and mine will not desert the friend who is too noble to desert my child.

"I am putting a lock of hair, for my poor little angel, inside this letter, which will never reach you, unless I am taken from this world.

"Adieu, once more adieu! Forget nothing, forget nothing!

"ALBINA VON EPPSTEIN,
NÉE SCHWALBACH.

"24th December, 1793.

"P.S.—I was forgetting. One more trifle; if I have a son, I wish him to be called Everard, after my father; if I have a daughter, I desire that she shall be called Ida, after my mother."

After this letter was written, Albina felt somewhat calmer.

Nothing relieves the mind like coming to a decision; and Albina had decided to make Maximilian break this sombre, obstinate, terrible silence, even should his first word, fatal as a thunderbolt, kill her.

That day slipped by more quickly for Albina than the others had done, for she thought that every moment that passed brought nearer the decisive hour, the supreme moment. The last hours had wings.

Night came. The Countess had many candles lit; it seemed to her that the better the room was lighted, the more noticeable would be her calm bearing and the innocence of her soul—in fact, she would be stronger. Then she listened; at the accustomed hour she heard the sound of Maximilian's step. She opened the door and walked into the corridor.

Maximilian appeared at the head of the stairs, preceded by a servant bearing a light. When he saw Albina, he stopped for a moment in astonishment. The valet continued on his way, bowing as he passed before the Countess; then came Maximilian's turn.

He was going to pass her without a word; but, with a firmness of which

Albina would have thought herself incapable, she laid her hand upon his arm.

At its touch the man of iron trembled.

"What do you want, madam?" asked Maximilian.

"A moment's interview, Count," replied Albina.

"And when?"

"At once, if you will."

"What! this evening?"

"This evening."

"Beware, madam!" said Maximilian threateningly.

"I beseech you."

"You remember the advice I gave you, to let my anger sleep; you are about to rouse it, it is you who wish it, madam. Well, so be it; I am at your orders."

They looked at one another in the fitful light of the torch; each was as pale as the other. The decisive moment, so long dreaded, but which they knew to be inevitable, had arrived. Perhaps in their hearts, after having often wished for it, both may have wished to put it off; but it was too late; a force stronger than themselves urged them on.

"Madam," said the Count, in a flattering voice, after a pause, "there is yet time, tell me to retire to my own apartment; I know that you are not well and, to tell you the truth, I warn you, I cannot answer for my self-control, Madam; so take heed. Now, do you still wish that we should have an interview at once, or shall we still adjourn our explanation?"

"No, let there be no adjournment," replied the Countess; "I have waited long enough, and I have nothing to fear, myself. Therefore, follow me, if you please."

The Count signed to his valet to take the light into his room, and followed his wife into hers. The Countess entered first and closed the door behind the Count.

Such firmness almost amazed Maximilian; he looked at his wife in astonishment; then, seeing the Countess place herself opposite to him, with her calm eyes fixed upon his,

"Madam, madam," said he, "take care! I have to ask you for an account of your actions, of all of them."

"And so have I, sir," said the Countess. "I have to accuse you; after that you shall calumniate me if you wish."

"Speak first then," said the Count; "but you are pale and ill. Pray sit

down," he added with a terrible courtesy, pushing a chair towards the Countess.

The Countess sat down; Maximilian remained standing with arms crossed, lips compressed and sombre looks.

They were in that large Red Room, the family room, which the Countess had continued to use during Maximilian's absence, and which Maximilian had left to her on his return.

This room was lit by four candles; but so vast was it, that the light hardly reached the opposite wall. The bed loomed in the semi-darkness with its great hangings, and the curtains shook before the windows, through which the wind was whistling.

There was a moment's silence. Then in a firm, steady voice, the Countess continued:

"Sir, I was with my father, an innocent girl, adored and happy; I laughed, I ran, I played. My heart overflowed with joy and enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is not a common virtue, believe me, and yet it is the virtue which has been my ruin. You came, and I, poor fool that I was, I thought you realised my dreams. In you I saw a true gentleman, chivalrous, brave, ardent; but you, sir, you married me for money and a title . . ."

"Madam!" interjected the Count in a harsh, mocking tone.

"Since I have been your wife," continued Albina, "you have not even taken the trouble to deceive me, or to sustain the illusions which were no longer useful to you . . . My God! yet I think something might still have been made of my life."

"Indeed!" cried Maximilian, bursting into a bitter laugh.

"I saw, sir," pursued the Countess, "I saw vanishing, one by one, all the hopes without which I had believed it was impossible to live. Then I recalled something my good mother, the Abbess of the Holy Linden, had said to me: 'My child!' she said when I was leaving her, never to see her again, 'if ever happiness fails you, take refuge in duty.'"

"Oh! indeed!" interrupted the Count again. And there was something terrifying in his sardonic tones.

"In accordance with this remembrance," continued the Countess, with angelic serenity, "I put all my life into obedience, all my virtue into resignation; but I was armed against neglect and not against

hatred, against indifference, and not against scorn. I do not blame you, sir, for disappointing my youth, destroying my dreams and spoiling my life; I do not ask of you an impossible love. But I have at least the right to demand your respect; I do not wish to blush before my servants. Is it too much to ask, my lord? Tell me; speak!"

"You have finished, have you not?" replied Maximilian. "Then it is my turn, if you please."

"I am listening, sir," returned the Countess.

"I shall begin by telling you that I cannot concern myself with the school-girl puerilities with which you have just entertained me; a man's time is too precious, I consider, to be wasted over such fancies, and if I have not realised your tender dreams, have you yourself realised the projects of my ambition?"

"Oh, father! father! You warned me!" cried Albina. "An ambition for orders, an ambition for titles, the whole aim of which was to be a Grand Cross instead of a Commander, to be Duke instead of Count! And he calls that ambition! And he talks to me of his ambition!"

"Listen, madam," said the Count reddening with anger and tapping on the ground with his foot: "and after all, that is not in any way the question at issue, as you know very well."

"No, I do not know; and that is just why I wished to have this interview with you."

"Well, I am going to tell you. I confided to you my name and my honour; what have you done with them, madam? Do not lie, do not prevaricate, do not put on any saint and martyr airs; they are useless. The question is a plain one, answer it plainly."

"Even in trifles I have never lied."

"Well then, tell me, loyal spouse, tell me who was this man, this Frenchman, this Captain Jacques?"

At these words, Albina understood everything; she smiled and looked at the Count for a minute pityingly.

Then she said:

"This Captain Jacques, sir, was a wounded man whose life, it may be, I saved, and who certainly saved my honour."

"And that is why he called you Albina; why you called him Jacques;

why you called him 'dear friend'; why he, not daring to give you the same name, called you 'dear sister'; why he was always in this room with you; why you never left each other; why you wept openly when he went away?"

"Sir!" cried the Countess rising.

"Oh! never play at pride and simulate indignation, madam," returned Maximilian, his excitement rising with his words; "never smile so disdainfully, never look so scornfully, I warn you. If one of us should scorn the other, it is the outraged husband, not the guilty wife."

"Poff Maximilian!" murmured Albina.

"Ah! now she pities! Take care, madam! Do not drive me too far with your insolent indifference; take care, madam, take care! My blood is not cool. This man was your lover, I tell you he was; but rest assured I will have my revenge, I have sworn it to myself and I repeat my oath to you. Therefore, madam, instead of smiling, I think you would do well to tremble."

"But I do not tremble, sir," said Albina impassively. "Look at me."

"Then what do you do?"

"I pity you!"

"Oh! that is enough. Stop!" burst from the Count. "Stop, and bend rather beneath my rage. You stand there, haughty and insolent, hoping, no doubt, to dupe me by dint of impudence. But, I repeat, I know all, I am not so easily deceived as you believe; you gave yourself to this man, and the child you bear is not mine, but the child of adultery. Do you hear, madam? Do you dare look me in the face now? You do dare . . . you do, abandoned woman! Will you cast down your eyes? You will not, infamous harlot! Still that smile. Ah! . . ."

Maximilian advanced furiously towards the Countess, glaring, blind with rage, a cloud of blood before his eyes. Albina, calm, with steady gaze, a sad smile upon her lips, saw the storm coming without stepping back, without saying a word, without making a movement to evade it. The Count stopped within a foot of her, quivering, on fire; for one second they stood thus face to face, both desperate; he invoking hell, she praying to heaven. But Maximilian could not long brook the mute insult of such serenity, and placing his two hands upon his wife's shoulders:

"One last time," he cried in a voice of thunder, "bend, ask pardon on your knees."

"Unhappy madman!" said Albina.

She had not finished when a terrible imprecation was heard, and the Count's violent and impious hand had bent like a reed the frail creature who dared his wrath, and thrown her roughly to the ground. Albina's head struck the corner of the armchair upon which she had been seated a moment before. The blood gushed forth, and she fainted, murmuring:

"My child, O God! my child!"

Maximilian stood staring an instant before the lifeless body, motionless, and as if stupefied by his own crime; then, rousing himself from this torpor, he rushed from the room crying:

"Help! help!"

The servants ran up at the noise. The Countess was borne, still unconscious, to her bed, and they went for the Chaplain, who, as we have already remarked when speaking of Captain Jacques, had studied medicine.

"I do not know how it happened," stammered the Count; "she fell and her forehead struck the furniture; her foot must have slipped."

And, in speaking these words, Maximilian remembered poor Gretchen, the bailiff's daughter, whose foot had also slipped, and who had died the victim, not of his anger, but of his love. Thus did the man ruin all the lives he came in contact with.

Maximilian grew frightfully pale at the thought and leant against the chimney-piece, trying to recover himself; for his servants were looking at him, and the Chaplain had just entered the room.

So violent had the shock been that Albina did not recover her senses. But it was even more the soul than the body that had been bruised. The Chaplain could not revive the Countess; cold water was of no avail, salts useless. Soon, however, the miracle which art could not accomplish, was worked by nature. The pangs of childbirth overcame the Countess; Albina opened her eyes, but they wandered; she recovered her speech, but not her reason; delirium seized her, and the incoherent words which she let fall in her fever, incomprehensible to the servants, had for her husband, and for him alone, a terrible significance.

The Chaplain declared that if some clever physician from Frankfort did not soon come to his aid, he would answer neither for the mother nor for the child. One of the servants set out at once for the town, taking a led horse, in order to bring the doctor without delay.

The delirium increased.

"I am dying," said Albina, sad cries interrupting her sad words, for though reason was shattered, the capacity of suffering remained. "I feel my soul leaving me . . . Oh! let it not go to Thee entirely, my God! Let me leave half to my child! My child! Yours, Maximilian! Do you understand? Yours . . . Oh! upon the threshold of eternity, I swear it! . . . Maximilian, where are you? Maximilian, you have deceived yourself cruelly, oh! yes, very cruelly. My God! How I suffer! If you knew, if only you knew, Maximilian; but the secret is not mine, he made me swear not to tell it. Some day, you will know . . . some day, from himself . . . some day he will come back. Death! . . . Death!"

. . . But Death is not the end, is it, Sir Chaplain? The coffin is the cradle of heaven. And you, father, good father, give me your hand . . . Father, I have a prayer to make you, to you alone; see that Maximilian does not hear what I am going to tell you. Listen, father: under my pillow you will find a letter for Wilhelmina. In Christ's name, give it her! Tell her, father, tell her that I am dying, but that I will return to see if she has done as I have asked her. You know, father, that the Countesses von Eppstein who died during Christmas Day or Night, only die in part . . . Oh, my child, my poor child! God hear me! God hear me! My child is more to me now than my own life. I give it my heart, I transmit my life to it. Oh, Sir Chaplain, Sir Chaplain! save him and never trouble yourself about me . . . I am lost . . ."

At this moment, midnight struck, and the Count shuddered. In fact, as Albina had said in her delirium, Christmas Day was beginning.

The Countess was growing gradually feebler.

"Adieu! adieu! . . ." said she. "I forgive you, Maximilian; but love your son, love him! Father, I am here . . . Ah! it is Christmas Day! Ah! I am dying!"

Albina, who in a last agonised movement had raised herself almost to a sitting posture, fell back upon her pillow and expired.

Maximilian flung himself upon the bed and took Albina in his arms; but, though she was dead, he felt the child move within her, and recoiled as though in terror. At this moment the physician from Frankfort arrived. Everyone was turned out of the room, even Maximilian. The child must be saved by a terrible operation.

An hour later, from the already cold body of the mother, a living child was taken; strange mystery which allows life to rise thus from death. Is not the sympathy between mother and child more intimate in such a case? And the child's soul, tell us, oh ye philosophers, reply ye physicians, does it not seem to be the last sigh of the dying mother's being?

The Chaplain entered the Count's room, and found him with his face bathed in sweat. Handing him the letter found beneath the Countess's pillow, addressed to Wilhelmina:

"My lord," said he to him, "you have a son."

The Count opened the letter, which was not sealed, ran his eyes over it, and replied:

"Very good; you will call him Everard."

The same day that a son was born to Maximilian at the Castle of the Counts von Eppstein, Wilhelmina's daughter came into the world.

CHAPTER VI.

THE next day the Countess was decked out in her richest clothes, and laid out in state upon her bed. Three days she remained thus; then she was placed in the coffin arrayed as she was, and lowered into the vault of the Eppstein family.

The day after Albina was buried, the Count left for Vienna, where he remained a month. During this time all traces of death were effaced, so that, when he returned, except for the little orphan, whose mother Wilhelmina had become, one might have thought poor Albina had never existed. The servants had under-

stood by instinct that it would please their master to remove from his sight anything that could recall the memory of the Countess.

However, in spite of all their care, Maximilian's emotion was great at finding himself alone in the old Castle: Albrecht, his beloved son, was at school in Vienna.

It was above all when he entered that old family room which was called the Red Room, when he found himself beside the armchair against which the Countess had struck her forehead; before the bed on which she had died; then it was that the memories which clung to Albina rushed upon him, and he shuddered in spite of himself.

At any time, and even for those whose minds were at ease, there lurked a certain icy terror, impossible to describe, in its sombre wainscotes—a terror intensified this evening by the raging of the wind outside. A huge fire burned on the hearth, where great oak logs crackled; and yet it was as cold as ever in the vast deserted room. A candelabrum with four branches blazed upon a table, but no lights seemed able to illuminate the gloomy walls and lofty ceiling. All was exactly as on that terrible evening when the scene of Christmas night had been acted; only, the chair in which Albina sat was empty.

Each moment the tempest increased in violence; the wind howled as it broke against the angles of the walls, like long moans which only died to be born again, which only decreased to recommence once more.

The Count was certainly brave; if you had told him that a man had shuddered at the murmuring of the wind, he would have laughed at that man and called him a coward. Yet the Count shuddered in spite of himself.

He walked up and down thoughtfully, his head sunk upon his breast and his chin supported in his hand; he walked up and down, without, however, passing beyond the circle of light which the candles shed around him.

At the same time it must be acknowledged that from time to time he threw a look into the dark corners or upon the thick swaying curtains.

"'Tis an appalling fancy," muttered the Count in a low voice, "which puts into the fury of the wind the despairing wail of those who have left this world;

that ever-increasing cry of souls which hovers at certain moments over inanimate nature; that impotent anguish which shatters the forests and cleaves the mountains; that dismal appeal of those beneath the earth to those above it; it is terrible—terrible!”

The Count stopped, shuddering, and leant his elbow upon the chimney-piece; then, as always happens in suchlike cases, once it had taken hold of the idea, his mind persisted in probing it to its deepest depths.

“Among those weeping dead,” he told himself, “those who lament so sadly in the corridors of the Castle are perhaps my own kin. Alas! they are very numerous, the implacable scythe has reaped an ample harvest here. Alas! alas! Let us see. . . . Not counting ancestors, without going back to those I did not know, there was first of all my mother. Holy woman! I often grieved her when she was alive! The sweeter and gentler she was, the more headstrong and wilful was I. What nights my mother spent upon her knees between my father and myself, exhorting the one, appeasing the other. And he, my father, he, too, is also there, and if he likewise were laid within his tomb before his time, perchance, oh, my God! it was I who shortened his last days. Count Rodolph was a noble old man, but very austere and very rigid; he should not have taken the tempestuous freaks of my youth as seriously as he did. My brother is there, no doubt, for since the day of his departure I have had no news of him. My poor Conrad! Oh! in spite of anything my father and mother could say, I loved him well—the weak, poetical youth, whom his father cursed because of his més-alliance, and who is probably dead, because his father cursed him. Are these all whom I should mourn? No, no; the dismal survey is not ended: there is still my first wife, Bertha; a name rather than a memory; a shadow even when she was alive, an insignificant figure who only paused to leave, God be praised! an heir to the house of Eppstein. And then lastly there was . . .”

Count Maximilian stopped, panting and feeling that, supported as he was against the mantelpiece, his legs were yet failing beneath him; he sank into an armchair. Then, in his thoughts, which accompanied the movement of his lips:—

“There was the other,” he continued, breathing hard, “there was Albina, Albina, who deceived me. . . . Oh! she should lament more bitterly than the others, for her death was not a natural one, like Bertha’s; the illness which killed her was my jealousy; for I killed her, not with my sword, but with my anger. Well, what then? I killed her, or rather I punished her, and I do not repent it; no, if it had to be done over again, I would do it.”

At this moment the wind howled more dismally than ever.

The Count rose, pale and shivering.

“How cold it is in this room!” he said aloud, and he pushed a great oak log onto the hearth with his foot.

“How dark it is!” he went on, and he lit a second candelabrum upon the chimney-piece.

But all in vain. The cold was in his heart, the night in his conscience.

However, he tried to chase away the black thoughts which hurled themselves against his soul like owls against the walls of a vault. He called to his assistance his most powerful distraction, his ambitious dreams.

“Come now,” said he, passing his hand over his forehead, “come now, Maximilian, have you lost all your spirit? To the devil with these fancies! Come, let us write that letter to Kaunitz.”

He sat down before a writing table, took a pen and wrote the date, “January 24th, 1794.”

The pen fell from his fingers.

“It is a month to-day since she died,” he murmured.

And pushing back his chair abruptly, he rose.

His heart was wrung by a strange agony.

He began to walk up and down distractedly, trying in vain to marshal his benumbed thoughts. I know not what dismal echoes whispered to him that something terrible, supernatural, unexpected, was about to take place; something he could not overcome by fighting, or evade by flight. Then he contrasted the agitation within himself with the gloomy silence around him, broken only by the dying moans of the wind; and it terrified him.

There are moments when even the strongest minds are overcome by fear. In the deadly silence, the warning of the

clock as it prepared to strike midnight, the twelve strokes themselves, the last of which announced that the twenty-fifth day of January had begun; a piece of wood which leapt from the hearth to the floor, each and all caused an electric shock to this brave man; the distant howling of one of his dogs in the kennel shed an unconquerable fear over this resolute heart. Soon he began to dread the heavy sound of his footsteps on the parquet floor, and he stood leaning against the wall without moving. But then he became afraid of his own immobility even; he rubbed his hands; he jerked his head nervously.

He waited, feeling instinctively that something terrible was coming.

It was the invisible world which surrounds us, which escapes our sight, which flies from our touch, which deceives our senses, that cast around him its mute terrors in this silent, gloomy room. All the horrors which Dante put into poetry, Michael Angelo put into painting, Weber into music, quivered over Count Maximilian's head; they were part of the very air he breathed.

What could his poor reason do against the sinister visions of his imagination?

A terrible memory, moreover, formed a vague background to all. Maximilian recalled the sombre legend of the Countess Leonora, who died on Christmas Day; he remembered that the Countess Albina died on the same day as Countess Leonora, and he recollected that the legend said that the Countess who died on that day only died in part.

Then, in the bleak depths of his soul, Maximilian heard Albina's voice, saying:—

"Supposing I was not guilty after all, but your victim, your innocent victim? And you, Maximilian, who deemed yourself a righteous judge, supposing you were but a common murderer?"

These slow and solemn words were repeated twenty times by the voice; twenty times they fell upon the Count's conscience, heavy and corrosive as the drops of molten lead of which Dante tells us in "The Inferno."

The Count gathered all his strength to tear himself from this anguish of the damned.

"Strange and foolish illusion!" he said aloud, no doubt to drown the murmur of the voice in his heart by the sound of his own.

But, suddenly, as he spoke, the cry of a little child rose in the silence, and seemed to continue the wail of the dead. Only this time, he could not be mistaken; the noise was real. It was the prolonged wailing of an infant, and it came from the room immediately above Maximilian's.

"Come now," thought the Count, "first the mother, then the child, her son, her Everard, a stranger to me, an enemy whom I must bring up under my eyes, in my house, as my own child, or else the shame of the mother will fall upon me . . . But," he continued angrily, "he must be silenced! Can Wilhelmina have gone out? Can she have left him alone in his cradle? Is it thus," he added with a bitter smile, "that she follows her friend's last wishes?"

Now that he had to deal with a material sound, Maximilian waited with less fear, but perhaps with more impatience. However, the child's cry did not cease, and Maximilian took his sword, stood upon a pair of library steps, and knocked upon the ceiling with the hilt, to awaken the nurse, who was, no doubt, asleep.

The cries continued.

Maximilian's anger soon began to give place to fresh anguish; his heart, which had dilated for a moment, was again oppressed as before. This uninterrupted wailing, which seemed to complain to God of the death of the mother and the neglect of her son, disturbed and maddened the Count.

He wished to go out, but where?

He tried to call someone; his voice strangled in his throat.

He took up the bell, and put it down again upon the table. All within the Castle slept, save the orphan and the murderer.

The fire, which Maximilian had forgotten to keep up, had gradually gone out upon the hearth, and darkness pervaded the room, the flickering light of the candles alone being left to pierce the gloom; without, the wind still moaned; above, the wailing of the child continued unabated. The Count was cold and frightened; and when, in his terror, he put his hands to his head, he withdrew them hastily, for it seemed to him that his fevered brow burned his icy hands.

Then, as though recalled to himself by the very force of his fear, he began to laugh, a dismal, terrible laugh, as he said:

"Damn me! but I believe I am losing my senses. Let's see why the child is crying; it's simple enough."

Then with deliberate step he walked to the wall, put his finger upon a hidden spring in the tapestry, and pushed open a little secret door.

This door gave upon a narrow stone stair, known from father to son by the Counts von Eppstein alone, and having no other issue except in the upper floor, where the infant was crying, and in the lower floor, whence it led to the vault in which Maximilian's ancestors slept. It was like a giant spy, standing there all along the Castle wall—a spy nothing escaped.

As the secret door opened, an icy blast from the tomb struck Maximilian's face, extinguishing the light he held, and the Count, pale as a corpse, with hair on end, stood petrified upon the threshold.

Upon the stair of which he alone knew the secret, where none could enter, he heard distinctly the rustling of a woman's dress, and saw a white form glide lightly through the gloom before him.

The child still cried. The accumulation of horrors was too much. The Count, feeling his knees giving way beneath him, leant against the wall for support.

How long Maximilian remained unconscious he could not have told himself. There are moments which last for years. After a minute, perhaps an hour, he came to himself, bathed in a cold sweat, and listened to the silence.

The child no longer cried. The wind had ceased to whistle.

Maximilian, with a supreme effort, gathered all his courage. He picked up the candelabrum he had let fall, re-lit it, drew his sword from the scabbard, and, springing to the stairway, went up to the child's room.

On opening the secret door giving on to the upper storey, the light which the Count held in his left hand was again extinguished, and this time, not by a draught nor by a blast of wind, but by a supernatural influence. However, the moon, which at that moment broke from behind a cloud which had obscured it, cast its pale rays through the high casement—and this is what the Count saw by the light of its wan illumination.

Wilhelmina, the nurse, was not there; but the dead Albina stood beside the

cradle of her son, rocking it gently, and the child, still murmuring softly, was falling asleep again. It was, indeed, Albina rocking the cradle, the dead Albina! Maximilian recognised her instantly.

She wore the white robe in which she had been buried; upon her neck was the golden chain with large rings, which had come to her from her mother, and which, in her letter to Wilhelmina, she had wished might be buried with her.

Albina was as beautiful as in life, perhaps more beautiful; yes, death had enhanced her beauty. Her long black hair flowed over her shoulders, whose whiteness seemed transparent; there was a sort of luminous vapour about her head; but it was above all her glance which diffused a soft flame; it was her smile which shone forth with a strange brilliancy.

When Maximilian appeared upon the threshold, she raised her calm, proud eyes to meet his, and putting her finger to her lips, as if to impose silence, she continued to rock the child.

The Count crossed himself mechanically with the hand which held the sword; but his other hand remained on his forehead, as though paralysed.

The dead woman's lips moved!

"It is demons who are conjured, not the blest," she said sadly, and her voice sounded like celestial music. "Do you believe, Maximilian, that God would have permitted me to return to my child's cry, had I not been among the elect?"

"Among the elect?" murmured the Count.

"Yes, Maximilian, for God is just, and He knows well that I was always a chaste and faithful wife. I told you so with my last breath, and you did not believe me; I repeat it to-day, when the Lord has taken me to his bosom; and the dead do not lie. Maximilian do you believe me now?"

"But this child . . ." murmured the Count, indicating Everard with the point of his sword.

"This child is yours, Maximilian," replied the Countess. "In life, appearances were against me; in death, it seems to me, that my presence here justifies me. I tell you, Count, that this child is ours, and he belongs to you as much as to me."

"Is it true? Is it true?" repeated Maximilian, wildly, almost beside himself,

and speaking as though urged by an irresistible power.

After a moment's silence, he continued, stammering:

"But then, this man, this Captain Jacques, who was he?"

"You will know one day, but probably, too late. All that I can say is, that I have sworn an oath which binds me dead as well as living; this man never was, and never could have been to me, anything but a brother."

"But, in that case," cried Maximilian, "in that case, I must have suspected you unjustly. Why, then, do you not avenge yourself?"

Albina smiled at the word vengeance.

"Oh! I forgive you for my death, Maximilian," she replied; "the storms of human passion do not agitate the celestial sphere in which we rest. Only, try to soften your silent and fierce temper toward your son. Maximilian, never raise your hand to him as you raised it against me; for, you must know, the Lord has granted me, even beyond the tomb, the privilege of continuing my maternal cares, and of watching over father and son, to protect the one at need, to punish the other, if necessary, for I died on Christmas night."

"Almighty God!" murmured the Count.

"Thus," continued the dead woman in a grave and solemn voice, "thus, as Wilhelmina, Everard's dear nurse, was kept this evening, in spite of herself, with her wounded husband, as my child was crying, I came to rock and comfort him . . . But here is Wilhelmina coming back; I will return to my tomb, ready always to leave it—remember that, Maximilian, at my child's first cry. Farewell!"

"Albina! Albina!" cried the Count.

"Farewell, Maximilian!" replied Albina in a solemn voice, "farewell! and take heed that you do not force me to come again; good-bye and silence. Remember! remember!"

The shadow left the cradle of the child, who was asleep again, and smiling and advancing towards Maximilian, who moved aside to make room for her, she passed with her finger on her lips before the astonished Count, and disappeared by the secret staircase.

Maximilian, exhausted by so many emotions, could not account for his actions

from that moment. No doubt, on hearing the sound of the nurse's steps, he closed the mysterious door mechanically, and, guided by that blind instinct which sometimes outlives reason, he regained his room noiselessly. At any rate, on waking the next day, after a feverish slumber, he found himself fully dressed upon his bed, and said to himself:

"I have had a terrible dream."

However, he found that Wilhelmina, whom he questioned, had been in reality detained for part of the night in her cottage, by a wound that Jonathan, her husband, had received during the day; a wild boar which the dogs had pulled down, had attacked the keeper, and with a blow of his powerful tusks, had ripped open his thigh. On her return, Wilhelmina had found the child as calm as when she left it.

It was not a dream then, but an apparition; but this thought was too terrifying for the Count, and he repeated:

"I was dreaming! I was dreaming!"

CHAPTER VII.

EVENTS which had, ill or well, more often ill than well, marched so quickly at Eppstein during the last five years, went something more slowly after Albina's solemn apparition. Since that sad Christmas night, life at the Castle had become insupportable to Count Maximilian; every night he started out of his sleep, thinking he heard steps upon the stairs in the wall. During the day he trembled every time Wilhelmina and her charge crossed his path. At last he could bear it no longer and fled from his remorse. One morning he called for his coach, and an hour later was on his way to Vienna, taking with him his son Albrecht.

It was upon this eldest son that all the Count's hopes and tenderness were henceforth concentrated. This child, at least, was certainly his own, and Maximilian loved to tell himself that by birth and by right, he would one day be head of the house of Eppstein, that he would continue the ambition and succeed to the titles of his father. The Count had resolved to give Albrecht the most finished and brilliant education, the education of a

gentleman, an officer and diplomatist—but above all of a diplomatist. Moreover, this cherished only son, for his younger brother did not count, had lost nothing, any more than his father had, by the alliance with the Schwalbachs—an alliance disastrous, doubtless, from the domestic point of view, but advantageous in its political results. The Schwalbachs were all-powerful and very well connected. All that was known at Vienna of Albina's sad end, was that she died at the birth of her child; and the poor Count was much pitied for being left a widower for the second time, after only two years of married life.

"What is it, after all, but a scandal unknown to all the world?" said Maximilian to himself.

And, as his conscience was not over and above sensitive, he did not hesitate to drown his thoughts in all the noisy pleasures of the Court, and all the grand projects which he had formed for himself and his beloved Albrecht.

As for the stranger, as for Everard (this was the name under which the Chaplain had baptised Albina's son), the Count of Eppstein did not care for him at all, and thought no more of him than of his brother Conrad, his first wife or Gretchen. An accommodating rumour had been spread in Vienna; the child's delicate health, it was said, made it desirable that he should be left in the pure mountain air; consequently, here was another reason to pity this unhappy father, who was forced to be separated from one of his sons.

Luckily, whilst Maximilian received these compliments and condolences, and made the utmost use of Albina's relations, Everard had found a mother. Wilhelmina read and re-read the Countess's letter every day, and piously executed the sacred testament of her benefactress. Accepted as a nurse by the Count's indifferent disdain, she had, in an exaggeration of sentiment common to generous hearts, given more care, if not more love, to Albina's son than to her own daughter. At the end of seven months she had weaned her little Rosamond; but for more than a year, she continued to nurse the adopted child of her heart.

"Listen, Jonathan," she said to her husband, who was a little jealous of this preference, "our daughter is our daughter, and we have not to answer to any one for

her; but this poor orphan, who has only ourselves and God, if we neglect him when his mother is dead, and his father has forgotten him, what would Madam think? And then he is so feeble, poor little thing! whilst Rosamond is strong and healthy."

Wilhelmina was, therefore, the most tender and devoted mother to Everard, and, save for the fatal evening when she was forced to leave him to tend her wounded husband, she never left him for more than a quarter of an hour at a time. Thanks to this constant care, the child grew so strong it was a wonder to behold, and it was indeed a pretty sight to see Rosamond and him, both so fair and sweet, playing together on the grass.

Years passed, and Everard developed wild and not very studious tastes. He learnt to read and write well at the same time as his foster sister Rosamond; but, as Rosamond did not learn Latin and History, he did not care to hear about either History or Latin, which Dom Aloysius, the Chaplain, tried hard to teach him. He would much rather run about in the woods with Rosamond, or follow Jonathan when out shooting, on his little legs; and it was a great happiness for him to listen in the evening, sitting beside Rosamond at Wilhelmina's feet while she spun, to some ghost story or fairy tale, related by Jonathan or old Jasper.

But if the education of the mind was lacking, that of the heart, that which his mother had especially asked of Wilhelmina for him, was largely bestowed upon him. At first he had only to look at the keeper's saintly wife to be instructed in sweetness and piety; then, every morning and evening, as soon as Everard was old enough to understand, Wilhelmina took him to say his prayers in the funeral vaults of the Castle, upon his mother's tomb, and the prayers finished, she spoke to him of that angel whom he had lost upon earth, but who still watched over him in heaven.

"Remember, Everard," she said to him, "that your mother sees you, is ever with you; she knows all your actions; she smiles at your good thoughts and weeps for your faults. Remember that her body is within the tomb, but her soul is wherever you are."

The child tried to be always good and obedient so as to please his mother. When he committed some childish fault,

he blushed and turned away, as though he had encountered the pained looks of his invisible witness. This thought became for him a second religion. His young imagination impressed, he thought even that he saw more than once, or, who knows? perhaps he really did see in the silence of the night, a white shadow, which did not frighten him, standing beside his bed and looking at him lovingly. Then he held out his arms towards her, but she said to him:

"Go to sleep, Everard, go to sleep; sleep is good for little children."

And he fell asleep again softly, and on those nights had the most charming dreams.

Next day he did not fail to tell Wilhelmina all about it, and Wilhelmina did not deceive him; she saw no danger in it, worthy woman—and, truly, was there any? Where was the risk for this young soul, in believing in the presence of a celestial guardian of his infancy? Besides, Wilhelmina believed it herself. "Madam told me," she thought, "that she would never, never leave either the nurse or her charge."

Often she would speak to the dead woman, and ask help or counsel of her. Everard followed her example and was accustomed to invoke her, saying, "My mother," as one says "My God." She still lived in their hearts.

We have not spoken of little Rosamond; nevertheless, she grew up pretty as love and good as an angel. A graceful, tender creature, she was all sweetness and goodness. Everard adored her and gave way to her in everything. On Sundays in the chapel, Wilhelmina wept with joy to see the two children kneeling before her, and praying for her who prayed for them both.

Count Maximilian remained absent seven years; he had been caught in the whirl of politics. At the end of that time, he came to Eppstein for a fortnight, not to see his son, but to collect rents and renew leases.

He hardly asked to see Everard even; he had no eyes for anyone but his Albrecht, who, moreover, resembled him in everything, and who played mischievous tricks upon his brother and the servants at the Castle.

The Chaplain thought he should make the Count acquainted with Everard's resistance to all instruction.

"Oh! Good Lord, let him alone!" said Maximilian, to the great astonishment of Dom Aloysius, "let him alone; let him do as he pleases and become what he will, it matters little to me. What need has he to know anything when he is not destined for anything?"

After staying a week at the Castle, Maximilian returned to Vienna with Albrecht.

Two more happy, calm years passed over the under-keeper's house, enlivened by the frank laughter of the children. Everard and Rosamond were both ten years old. Sorrow announced its return to Eppstein by the almost sudden death of Dom Aloysius. The venerable old man, full of years and honour, passed peacefully away while turning over the leaves of a folio, so that they thought him sleeping when he was really dead. It was Everard's first grief, and he could not help weeping for the dear master, who had been only too weak and indulgent with him.

This sorrow, alas, was nothing to that which awaited him, poor child! Dom Aloysius had lived a long life, after all; his death was in the nature of things, and he was the last of his line. He was the contemporary of old Count Rodolph and Countess Gertrude, who had been in their graves for six years. He ended the epoch of ancestors. But Wilhelmina, the good, useful housewife, was not her young life still necessary to the two children? Did not all her family cling to her?

But God called the woman of twenty-nine to Himself almost at the same time as the old man of eighty. Her mother too had died prematurely, as had, doubtless, her sister Naomi, and Wilhelmina went to join them and the mistress, whom she had served so faithfully, to the tomb.

Her health had caused much uneasiness for some time past. All red and white as she was, Dom Aloysius had recognised in her symptoms of the disease that so often attacks feeble bodies and sad hearts. For a long time Wilhelmina had grown paler day by day, and yet, day by day, at the slightest emotion, the brightest colour would suffuse her face. Every autumn she grew visibly weaker. One would have said that, living the same life as the flowers, she would disappear with the lilies, whose modesty and purity she shared, and with the roses

of whose pale glow and perfume she partook. Every spring, as though that regenerating life which is diffused over all nature was shed upon her likewise, she made an apparent recovery, which was in reality only a more consuming fever. The two children, ignorant of the causes of this feverish brilliancy, gazed at her and said as they wound their arms round her neck:—

"Oh! how beautiful you are to-day, little mother!"

Then Wilhelmina would smile sadly, for she was not deceived as to her state of health. She clasped her children to her heart; and when they asked, looking at her in astonishment,

"Why do you weep, mother?"—she replied, "Because I am too happy."

However, towards the beginning of the year 1802, Wilhelmina felt, by her increasing weakness, that the disease was making more rapid progress. Then, so as to preserve the little strength left to her, Wilhelmina gave up the long forest rambles which had been the delight of the two children, and remained in her own room without complaining; a complaint from her would have aroused suspicion and, in consequence, distressed the whole family. She remained, as we have said, in her own room, which, with its white curtains and Easter palms, presented the appearance of one of those field altars set up in villages on Corpus Christi Day, where God stays a moment between the perfume of the incense and the perfume of the flowers.

Alone of all the household, the old grandfather, himself so near his end, felt the approach of death. On fine summer evenings, when they were waiting for Jonathan's return, and the old man sat before the door in the last rays of the setting sun, watching the children running about plucking the daisies in the woodland grass, or chasing the insects borne upon the evening breeze, Wilhelmina would appear suddenly upon the threshold of her door like a pale vision, and noiselessly seat herself at her father's feet with her head resting against his knee. Then, without taking his eyes from the sky, the old man would let his hand fall upon his daughter's head. Wilhelmina would feel the hand tremble, and without changing her position, would reply to his silent thought with scarce audible words:

"What would you, father?" she would murmur; "it must be well, since God wishes it!"

But the old man would make no answer, for a father can never understand that God wishes his child to die.

The two children saw nothing; they played, they sang and were happy.

At length, Jonathan too remarked his wife's weakness, and fear seized him. He spoke a few words to his father, who then told him what he had long ago divined. Next day Jonathan departed as though on his forest round and, towards mid-day, returned with a doctor whom he had been to Frankfort to seek. At sight of him Wilhelmina shivered, for she understood that her husband knew all, and the poor woman suffered in his grief.

The doctor would have dissimulated with the rich, and given hope, so as to find an occasion for coming again; but the poor are truth's favourites.

The doctor told the worst.

At first, Jonathan refused to believe him. He had feared an illness, nothing more. The idea that his dear Wilhelmina might be taken from him in the prime of her life, had never crossed his mind. He then examined the poor invalid more carefully, and perceived at last the frightful ravages already made by the disease. Then, like all strong men accustomed to physical fatigue, but whose spirit has never had to strive with mental troubles, Jonathan let himself go suddenly. He spent the rest of the day and the whole evening looking at Wilhelmina in silence; all night he watched outside his wife's door. Then, when morning came, he took down his gun as usual, and took four steps from the door. But he had not the strength to go further; he came back, put his gun in its place, and, when Wilhelmina came down (every day she rose a little later) she found her husband seated on a stool before the hearth, his head bowed between his hands.

The unhappy woman walked straight up to him.

"It cannot be helped, Jonathan!" she said. "You must have courage."

Jonathan tried to answer; but, feeling he was going to burst into sobs, he rushed from the house.

From that moment the poor keeper's life was utterly disorganised. Every morning he went out with his gun; but

he never went far from the little house, of which he could not lose sight. In spite of all the precautions he took to hide himself, Wilhelmina would often see him passing across some clearing, or the two children would come back sorrowfully, holding each other by the hand, and ask Wilhelmina :

"Little mother, what is the matter with Jonathan? We saw him lying at the foot of a tree, weeping."

At length the time came when Wilhelmina ceased to get up at all. But in the evening, when the sun was setting, they would open her window, and the dying woman would smile sadly at its last rays. Then they would all assemble in her room. The children brought great bouquets of flowers, which they placed on the bed, Jonathan brought the Bible, which he would hand to his father, and the old man would read some sublime and holy story; whilst Wilhelmina prayed, Jonathan wept, and the two children sat silent side by side in an arm-chair drawn up beside the invalid's bed.

One morning, Wilhelmina felt more than usually sick, and she herself asked Jonathan not to go out. The two men remained with her nearly all day. The children spent their time, as they often did now, coming in and out, taking away the faded flowers and bringing in fresh ones. The nearer Wilhelmina drew to her death, the more she loved flowers. For some days she had seemed to live on their perfume alone.

In the evening the reading took place as usual; but, when it was over, Wilhelmina fainted. They noticed it by a light sigh. Jonathan rushed to her. For a moment he thought she was dead, and he uttered a startled cry.

Wilhelmina heard it, even in her swoon, and opened her eyes again.

"My poor dear husband!" she said, holding out her cold and clammy hand to Jonathan, "believe me, it wrings my heart, too, to be leaving you so soon when you still have need of me, you who have loved me so well; but it is the Lord's will. Be brave, be a man. Happily, the main part of my task is finished; the children are growing up, and are healthy and strong. I never had the courage to separate myself from Rosamond; but I was wrong, and, when I am no longer here, dear heart, I beg you take her to Vienna, to the Convent of the Holy

Linden, whither you must bear a letter from my mistress to the Mother Superior. There they will continue our child's upbringing in the Lord. You will not fail me? Watch over Everard, take my place with him, and his mother will be with you always as she has been with me. Everard, you must listen, too. You are tall and sensible, you can go very well without me every morning and evening to pray at your mother's tomb. Do not fail once, so long as you are here, my child. Respect your father, but love your mother. I recommend your sister Rosamond, my daughter, to your care. And you, Rosamond, my dear daughter, be ever pious and charitable, show yourself worthy of the holy house you are about to enter, and keep ever before your eyes the example of the noble protectress, whose virtues I have so often told you of."

The children began to weep, without knowing exactly why, but chiefly because everyone was weeping.

Wilhelmina turned next to Jasper, standing behind her husband (he was a head taller than his son-in-law), calm and motionless like an old oak which sees all its offshoots perish.

"What shall I say to you, my father? to you who must bury all your children!"

"Tell me we shall meet again, my daughter," replied the old man, gravely, "for I shall be the first to rejoin you. If my old hands must sew your young shroud, at least our separation will not be for long, and the sanctity of your death is my consolation. We shall meet again, Wilhelmina, at the footstool of the Lord. I would go quite tranquilly, did I but know, alas! that your sister Naomi had made as holy, as Christian, an end as yours."

"Do not doubt it, father, do not doubt it. I shall only die, but Naomi has suffered as well. But speak not yet of rejoining us, father; live to teach Jonathan resignation, live to watch over my two children; they can only have you in this life, while Naomi and I have eternity in which to await you."

Then feeling she was growing weaker, and wishing to spare her husband the pain of the last good-bye, she said :

"I feel a little better; leave me, I would fain sleep."

Jonathan was about to take the two children with him.

"No, leave them," said Wilhelmina; "they can sleep in the armchair."

The poor woman did not wish to die alone.

Jonathan retired, thinking she would really sleep; but Jasper had discovered the truth; he bent over his daughter's bed, kissed her forehead, and, pressing her hands, he said:

"We shall meet in heaven!"

Wilhelmina trembled, then she replied softly, so that her husband should not hear her:

"Farewell, father!"

The two men went out; Jonathan, spent with fatigue, fell asleep; Jasper prayed.

Hearing no sound at the end of an hour, he went upstairs and opened the bedroom door softly. Wilhelmina seemed asleep; one would have thought it was a beautiful waxen Madonna laid upon her bed and smothered in roses. She held Rosamond's and Everard's hands clasped in hers.

The two children were not asleep; they were watching her face.

"Oh! grandfather," they said on perceiving Jasper, "we are so frightened! Little mother will not answer us, and her hand is so cold that it freezes ours."

Jasper approached his daughter's bed; Wilhelmina was dead.

Next morning, on returning from burying his wife, good Jonathan, weaker than old Jasper, fell upon his knees upon the spot usually occupied by her. Suddenly he felt little arms embracing him, and red lips were pressed against his brown, tear-stained cheeks. He looked at the two children and found a little consolation.

That very year Count Maximilian of Eppstein likewise found consolation: he was made Privy Councillor.

CHAPTER VIII.

IT was a new and terrible grief to Everard when he was separated from Rosamond; he had just become acquainted with death, he was now to learn the meaning of absence.

However, in spite of Everard's prayers and tears, Jonathan, to carry out Wilhelmina's last wishes, took his daughter to Vienna. As poor Albina had

foreseen, her letter opened the gates of the Convent to her godchild, and Rosamond was received by the Abbess as though she had been the Countess of Eppstein's own daughter.

Everard had hoped at one time to be taken on the journey; but the Keeper had given him to understand that he had not the right to take him to Vienna without the Count's permission.

Everard had therefore remained alone, and very miserable, with old Jasper.

Jonathan's return even had not cheered him; but Everard made him repeat twenty times over where the Convent was, and what Rosamond's room was like. The cottage, once so happy, so full of sounds and singing, was now dismal and silent; its three inhabitants for the most part sat opposite each other gloomy and taciturn,—the old man, the young man, and the child.

Jasper never left the house and garden. When it was fine, he was always seated on the bench at the door, and when it rained, on a chair beside the fire, where he sat pensively with closed eyes, living again in his memories and the smiles of his two daughters, Naomi and Wilhelmina.

Jonathan, whatever the weather, took his gun upon his shoulder in the morning, whistled to his dogs, plunged into the forest, and often returned in the evening with no game; he had spent the day wandering in the most gloomy spots, or he had let time slip by while he lay at the foot of a tree. The souls of these two men were like clocks that were out of order, stopped, so to speak, by sorrow. Since this sorrow had come upon them, they seemed no longer to live; they breathed, but that was all.

As to Everard, he was too young for his spirits and vigour to remain thus frozen by sorrow; but, in his profound retreat, far from all human intercourse, without family, without a confidant, having seen nothing of the whole world save the Castle and the forest of Eppstein, having known no men but Jasper and Jonathan, knowing no love but the filial love he bore the dead Wilhelmina, and the brotherly love he bore the absent Rosamond; cloistered, as it were, in his own thoughts, which had no heart on which they could pour themselves out, he allowed his spirit to obey the direction of his instinct and his character, and though

by nature generous-hearted and straightforward, he grew gradually irritable, shy and difficult. Living much alone, his first childish impressions became the convictions of his youth, he formed prejudices and unchangeable opinions, innocent, but false sentiments which would not have stood the test for a moment if he had found some point of comparison in books, some counsel or guide in life.

His imagination in consequence took the place of his judgment. Faithful to the terrors and to the loves of which good Wilhelmina had in a way laid the foundation in his heart, he saw his mother everywhere and always; he had no other friend, no other thought, no other happiness than his mother; he lived entirely with the dead woman; so much so that his whole existence was a vision.

The witness, the confidant, the accomplice of this constant and holy apparition was the green forest of Eppstein.

We have already tried to paint this vast wood, dark, black, deep, solitary, sublime, a veritable sacred grove of which the wind seemed the saddened soul. There was a little of everything in this forest, something to suit the genius of every man; there were ravines the bottom of which the daylight never reached, there were murmuring streams which babbled to the birds; huge blocks of granite, as white as the moon, as grey as the sun, ruins of nature; there were remains of crumbling walls, of unroofed dungeons and uncovered vaults, ruins of man's handiwork. The ancient keeps that threatened the valleys and stood sentinel over the roads, seemed to be watching still against the return of the Hunnish hosts. Ghosts loved to haunt these historical remains, relics themselves of a bygone age.

Everard soon knew this verdant world in all its windings; clearings, thickets, underwood had no secret from him; he had climbed all its trees, descended into all its depths, scanned all its horizons. He might be seen running on the brink of its abysses; descending the beds of its cascade; leaping with one bound from oak to poplar. He played with the forest as a child with its nurse, and the forest admired him, loved him, and smiled upon him.

All was familiar and friendly to him, while on his side he was kindly and in-

offensive to all that surrounded him. He did not break the branches from the trees, he did not crush the flowers beneath his feet, he did not, like Jonathan, hunt the deer; he pitied the owls, and had compassion even on the adders; willingly would he have said, like sweet Saint Francis of Assisi (of whom he had never heard), "My brothers the deer, my sisters the swallows!" Even the deer, who came to quench their thirst in the stream near which he was sitting were not frightened away, and the birds did not fly from the trees under which he rested, but went on preening their wings and singing their songs. All the denizens of these shadowy places did the honours of their home to him, recognising in him no doubt a being as good and innocent as themselves.

The old wood was not, moreover, merely a retreat, a home, a nest for the young man; it was more than this, it was like the Castle vault, the place where he saw his mother. In the tomb, his mother was dead; in this wood, she lived like him and with him.

When Everard plunged into some quiet pathway, he had only to shut his eyes if he wanted to see Albina; sometimes, indeed, he saw her, celestial spirit! with his eyes open, with his mortal eyes. She sustained him when he hung by the roots of a tree over some precipice, when he leapt across an abyss, when he risked his life upon crumbling rocks, and she was not content to appear to him and to help him, but would often speak to him, and would always advise him. The voice she then assumed was that of the forest itself, a voice sometimes sweet and tender, sometimes grave and serious, sometimes admonishing and terrible.

At dawn, for instance, the dawn of a May day, when the sun, glowing upon the horizon, made a diamond of each drop of dew, of each tree a feathery orchestra, of every flower a fragrant censer; when all was song, perfume, and brilliancy, and when the breeze, soft as a lover's lips, caressed the lonely wanderer's brow, Everard, extended on the grass, bathed in light and intoxicated with nature, believed himself in his mother's arms, giving her a thousand kisses, and, as he listened, he could hear her say "Everard, my boy, my dearest boy, you are good and handsome; I love you, Everard! smile at me, I love you! I love

you!" and all those tender and caressing words with which mothers are accustomed to rock their children to sleep, as they hold them on their knees. And the higher the sun rose, the more ardent and tender became the mother's expression, and the more the boy's mind was animated and heated by the flames of this love; it was a happiness, a delight; if any one had told Everard he was an orphan, he would have been astonished.

He loved certain winter days, especially snowy ones, nearly as much as the beautiful summer days. Snow, which is so dismal in towns, is charming in the woods. The white robe which covers the earth is nearly as gay as the green robe of springtime. And on these days Everard believed that his mother was pleased with him, so he was happy.

Albina did not always talk like a mother to her son; she was not only a mother to him but an instructress as well, and there were moments when, in serious conversations, she tried to make him better and stronger. In the solemn hours of eventide, for instance, when shadows descend upon the earth and reflections upon the heart; everything goes to sleep, but man thinks. When with the last rustling of the leaves, with the last warbling of the birds, with the last rays of the sun, the mother gave wise counsel to her son, her theme some ruins they had visited, some tree, upright and strong the night before, now shattered by the tempest. Often, too, the horizon widened before Everard; he had come to the summit of a mountain, and at the moment when the whole forest was disclosed to his view, he heard, far below in the distance, a loud continuous murmuring which seemed like the sound of eternity. It was the Maine, flowing calm and strong, silvered by the first moonbeams. Thus everything served as an interpreter between the dead woman and the dreamer, everything, even the rain and its grey monotony, the fog and its gloomy melancholy, which made him creep into himself—everything, even to the storm, in which he heard just reproaches, and which caused him a wholesome fear, soon scattered by a kiss from the sun, as it pierced the clouds.

Thus was Everard educated, and his soul had only the caprices of the wind and the shadow of a dead woman as teachers.

But he did not see or hear anyone. As to his father, he only knew he had one. From time to time it was repeated around him: "The Count will not return to Eppstein this year." What did it matter to him? The words awoke no echo, no remembrance, in his soul. He was neither sad nor pleased at the way in which he was forsaken: he was accustomed to it, it did not astonish him, nor did he complain of it. He did not say, "My father"; he said, like everyone else, "The Count."

There were two or three servants at the Castle, whose duty it was to air the rooms and keep up the garden; but Everard took no thought of them any more than they did of him. He had, indeed, a room at Eppstein, but he very rarely used it; more often he spent the night under Jonathan's roof. There he was nearer to his dear forest; and, besides, all through the summer, when it was fine, his room was the forest itself.

In the thickest part of the wood, on the border of a stream which was larger and more impetuous here, and became almost a torrent, he had found a sort of natural grotto formed by the undermining of a very high and steep rock. This wild spot had enchanted him immediately, and when he discovered in it a charming retreat hidden from sight by a hawthorn bush and a wild fig-tree, he believed himself in paradise. On the opposite bank there rose an almost perpendicular mountain side, covered with gigantic fir-trees; the sombre verdure of these trees, together with the roaring of the torrent, added to the scene an indescribable mournful sublimity. It was grand and awe-inspiring.

The sadness of the place was, moreover, sometimes enlivened by a lovely golden reflection that descended from the mountain tops and bathed the craggy declivities, and by faint perfumes which the tempest left behind—faint and elusive as a good deed done in secret. Nowhere else did Everard hear better that sweet and mysterious music, which, he said, accompanied him everywhere and gave the tune to all his actions and ideas.

"Do you not hear it?" he would ask.

"No."

"Ah, well, I hear it; it leads me, it envelops me; it is within that melodious cloud which goes everywhere with me,

that I dare to confide in my mother, to tell her all my wishes, my fears, and my joys, and to ask her advice."

In this hidden valley nook Everard spent the greater part of his nights, and half his days. It was there that he grew, it was there that he lived happily. In the memories of his mother and Wilhelmina, and let us say, in expecting, in hoping for Rosamond. A regret, a dream, is not that the whole of life? And had our dreamer sought emotions and pleasures in travel, in movement, in excitement, could he have found anything more than he did in his balmy solitude?

Yes, he wished ardently for Rosamond's return; the little companion of his childhood had never left his memory. He saw her always before him, with her black cap, from which her fair curly hair escaped, with her little rosy face, her pouting lips and bright, mocking smile. He remembered their games, their quarrels, and the sedate protection with which he surrounded her. It was of her, and her only, he spoke to Jonathan, and to old Jasper; when they replied, it was of her only they spoke. Rosamond was thus the only bond which attached Everard to the life of this world. For the rest, he was in every way the counterpart, in spite of being only fourteen, of Jonathan, who was forty, of Jasper, who was eighty. Grave and taciturn, like the two men, he came and sat near them by the hearth without saying a word, and they did not question him, nor ever asked him where he came from, what he did, or what he was going to do.

When, by chance, a letter was received from the Convent of the Holy Linden, it was a great day in the Keeper's house. The child jumped for joy, the father wiped away a tear of emotion, and the grandfather himself came out of his profound abstraction. Then Jasper and Jonathan listened thoughtfully to the reading of the welcome letter, a task which their young friend always took upon himself. Rosamond spoke of her companions, of the progress she was making, of the care that was taken of her, as if she had been a Duke's daughter. She learnt history, French, drawing, music, and sciences of which Everard scarcely knew the name. But, what he liked best, was when Rosamond turned her thoughts to Eppstein, to her old grandfather, to her father Jonathan,

and to her dear brother Everard. The letter read once, was read again; then they discussed it, and read it again. On those evenings the lamps and fires burned late in Jonathan's woodland hall. The next day, the three solitary folk each thought much of the absent girl, but they did not speak of her again.

It was in this profound retirement, in this absolute liberty amid phantoms and apparitions, amid the world-old pines, on the borderland of the other world and its marvels, that Everard's dreamy childhood passed away. For some years he did not open a book, other than the volume Nature presented to him at every hour, he did not address a word to anyone except his two silent and serious friends, Jasper and Jonathan. When a wood-cutter or a peasant from the vicinity crossed his path, he fled like a frightened deer. When old Jasper's Bible fell into his hands, he did not disturb the marked page, and was content to follow mechanically with wandering eye the characters on which he had seen Wilhelmina place her fingers, near to Rosamond's, when the young mother was teaching her children to spell them out.

But was it really dumb, this soul so sublimely ignorant, which had learned to spell from the Bible and to read from a grave? Was it barren, this mind made up of faith and love, as fruitful in bright visions, in surprises, in superhuman enchantments as a tale from the "Arabian Nights"; this pure and open mind, chivalrous as a legend from the banks of the Rhine; like one of those Gothic cathedrals, where fancy blossoms in such charming flowers of arabesque on a background of Christian severity.

However, the days passed quietly by. He found, one morning, that five years had passed away without bringing, as we began by saying, any change at Eppstein; only, Everard and Rosamond were now fourteen, and Jonathan, to Everard's great joy, was talking of going to fetch Rosamond home from the Convent.

During these five years, that is to say from 1803 to 1808, Napoleon had accomplished the greater part of his Iliad. But the great and terrible drama played by France and Europe does not concern us here. We are but the historians of a castle and a cottage between Frankfort and Mayence; and these five years, so fruitful for the world, were so barren for

the castle and cottage in question that they need scarcely be mentioned.

About this time, old Jasper, who grew weaker every day, found one morning that he was not strong enough to leave his bed to go and sit on the bench beside the door, or even in his armchair near the fire. So he called Jonathan.

"Good friend," said he, "I feel I am dying. I feel the coldness of death overtaking me."

"A moment's weakness, father," replied the Keeper, more concerned than he cared to show; "we shall keep you with us a long time yet."

"No, Jonathan," replied the old man, calmly and firmly, "I have, I think, but a few days to live; I do not complain, rather do I rejoice; nevertheless, before leaving this world, I would wish still for two things. What would you have? Man is for ever asking; even the death agony has its desires. I wish, first, to know what has become of my daughter Naomi, who disappeared during the French trouble; if I shall meet her on high, and if her death was as holy as her sister's. This wish will never be realised, alas!—though God knows that the accomplishment of it would make my death more peaceful. But you can satisfy my second wish, Jonathan."

"Tell me what it is, father."

"Jonathan, shall I not see Wilhelmina's daughter for the last time?"

"Father, I will set out for Vienna to-morrow."

"Thank you, Jonathan; God will bless you for comprehending at a word the wishes of the dying, and will grant me, I hope, strength to await her return."

The very next morning the Keeper started. Everard followed him for half a day; he would fain have accompanied him all the way, and no doubt he could easily enough have carried out his wish, for who would have noticed his absence at the Castle? Jonathan refused to permit it, however; someone must stay to look after the grandfather. At three o'clock, then, after having shared a modest meal with him, Everard kissed the traveller, gave him a thousand messages and tender words for the little Rosamond, and slowly took the road back to Eppstein.

When he arrived at the forest, it was nine o'clock; the night had come, but it was a night of June, limpid, calm and

blue. From the height on which Everard stood, he could see at a glance all the harmonious undulations of the wood whitened by the light of the moon. The group of hills and dales looked exactly like a sea; not a sound was heard save the chirp of the cricket, and the shivering of the wind scarcely touched the tree-tops; the stars twinkled in the sky; down below, a still pond glistened like a silver mirror. In this transparent shade, the moonlit houses seemed to sleep, and the quiet fields to dream. The fantastic landscape induced a brooding reverie, and a religious peace penetrated the heart.

Everard was sitting dreaming upon the grass. A neighbour had promised to stay the night with the sick man, and the air was so sweet, so warm, that the young man decided not to return until the morning.

He wanted to stay alone to think, to talk to his mother, who wafted him caresses on the breeze; he wanted to go over his life, to conjure up the past, look into the future; it seemed as though a new era were about to open for him, and, as a traveller who has gained the summit of a mountain throws a last glance over the valley through which he has passed, he threw a farewell look upon the days that were gone. Very few events, but many thoughts and feelings filled his life; he had the simple mind of a child with a man's ardent heart. To-night, both heart and mind were troubled, as in a crisis of his fate; the dear or indifferent shadows that had filled his days, passed again before his eyes, and he greeted them. Whilst Albina, faithful witness of his joys and sorrows, stood before him; he saw in a kind of misty dream, first Wilhelmina, his second mother, then his good old master, Aloysius; then, in the distance, his father, with a frown on his brow, and his brother, scornful and malicious; but he turned his eyes away from them in fear, to look with love upon the noble and beautiful face of old Jasper, and the sad, sweet face of Jonathan.

Then sinking more and more into introspection, this child, beloved only by two dead women and two silent men, found himself alone indeed in the world, and felt that something was lacking; there was an unfilled void within him, and his soul called for another life. He

reproached himself bitterly for this thought, he combated it, but it returned in spite of himself. He imagined that his mother would be vexed at his ingratitude, and he dared not close his eyes or turn his head for fear of seeing her stern and angry; he was wrong—he found her smiling and calm. The dead have not the paltry jealousy of the living.

Happy at finding he was not blamed for desiring something he did not possess, Everard dreamed of the little friend of other days, whom he was about to see again, and an indescribable gladness filled his heart. He did not imagine her grown-up and changed; no, he thought of her, childish and merry as when, five years ago, he had carried her in his arms, a timid little creature, across the streams. Once more he might dare to be young and laugh heartily; they were the same age, born on the same day, they would understand each other, talk to each other. Everard would not think of being silent and thoughtful with Rosamond, as with saddened men and silent nature; how he would run about with her, live with her, and love the lively, happy companion of his childhood; how he would do the honours of the familiar forest!

He could see nothing else. For the moment, this idea sufficed him, and at this idea a thousand hopes and joys sang within him like birds at the first rays of the sun. His future was no less infinite, because it only extended over a few days; he was intoxicated by a divine expectation, and, in his fruitful fancy, it seemed to him that henceforth he would have two hearts.

However, the hours of this poetic vigil passed quickly away, and dawn crowned with a blaze of light the summit of the mountain upon which Everard sat. The youth passed his hand before his eyes, offered his soul to God, as was his custom every morning, and prepared to descend the valley towards the village of Eppstein.

The beloved grotto was on his way; Everard did not wish to pass it without greeting his favourite retreat, which he might not see again perhaps for some days, if he were detained by Jasper. It was not long before he heard the murmur of the stream which watered his kingdom—a kingdom of some two hundred feet square. Soon he could see the

whole of it. But he recoiled abruptly, uttering a cry of surprise and indignation; a man, a stranger, was seated beside the stream with his head in his hands.

Everard's first movement was one of jealous anger. He walked quickly up to the stranger; his footsteps were deadened by the thick velvety grass, and he thus got close to the profane intruder without the latter perceiving him. Then, in a moment, the tender-hearted child's indignation vanished; the man was weeping.

He might be thirty-six or forty years of age; he was small and delicately made, but seemed sinewy, and had a fine and strong face. His costume was as serious as his face; his green riding coat was buttoned up to the throat, showing an end of red ribbon. There was something military in his attitude and bearing.

CHAPTER IX.

AN instant sufficed Everard to make these observations, and he instantly felt an inexplicable sympathy for the stranger; perhaps on account of the tears he saw running down his cheeks.

After gazing at him for some minutes with a pity mingled with respect, he said in his gentlest tones:

"Blessed are they which mourn!"

"Who speaks to me thus?" said the stranger, turning. "A child! . . . Do you belong to these parts, my friend?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you can perhaps give me the information I seek. Tell me . . . but presently . . . my voice fails me; let me compose myself a little."

"Yes, compose yourself, sir," said Everard, touched by this real grief. "compose yourself and weep as much as you will; tears are almost always good. You know the legend of the waters of this mountain?"

He went on, speaking as though to himself: "A wicked and impious knight recounted his evil life to a holy hermit, not from penitence, but in derision.

"What could I ever do, my father," he said scoffingly, 'to blot out such and so many crimes!'

"You need only fill this gourd with water," replied the holy man.

"What, so little! and for this penance you will absolve me?"

"When the gourd is full, you will be absolved; but give me your word as an honourable man, that you will fill it," said the hermit.

"I give it! Yonder spring, the sound of which I hear, cannot be far off."

"But the spring dried up at the knight's approach."

"He went to the brook; the brook was dry."

"He went to the torrent; the torrent had ceased to flow."

"He went to the river; its water would not run into the gourd."

"He went to the stream; the gourd still remained empty."

"He went to the sea; the gourd was not even wetted."

"Then, after a year of fruitless quest, the wicked knight returned to the hermit."

"Old man," he said, "you have mocked me; but you shall not go unpunished."

"And he struck the holy man on the face."

"Have mercy on him, oh, God!" cried the hermit.

"Rather ask mercy for yourself," retorted the knight.

And he pushed the hermit roughly, so that he fell on the ground.

"Oh, God," said the recluse, "take all my life of prayer to expiate his life of sin."

"I will silence you, before all is done," cried the knight, beside himself with anger.

"And he dealt the holy man a blow with his sword."

"Oh, God," said the hermit falling, "pardon him, oh, God! even as I do!"

"Then, at last, as he heard this pious prayer, and looked upon the old man who prayed thus for his persecutor, great anguish rent the knight's heart; he began trembling like a child, and fell on his knees beside the holy man, and then, one by one, his tears fell silently into the empty gourd and it was soon full. However, the knight still continued to weep, and not only did his weeping save and absolve him, but his tears of remorse mingling with the spring which was formerly dried up, gave to all the waters of these mountains the property of healing bodily wounds as it had healed those of the spirit."

"So weep on," added Everard, "tears bring peace, tears bring consolation."

The stranger, heedless at first, had soon raised his head in surprise, and gazed smilingly at the little country lad who spoke in this mystic language. Everard, indeed, wore the dress of a peasant of these mountains; gaiters and belt of leather, loose breeches reaching half-way down the leg, a brown velvet jacket, with a shirt turned back upon the shoulders and fastened at the neck with a gold link; a grey felt hat with a big black feather; but under these coarse clothes an innate distinction was apparent. The firm and thoughtful look was certainly not that of a rustic; the pallor of the brow had a strange poetry: under the frail exterior of the delicate body a strong will was manifest, while honesty and perfect sincerity were visible in the timid and simple awkwardness of his attitude.

It was, consequently, with a certain deference that the traveller asked the child:

"And who are you, my friend?"

"The son of the Countess Albina of Eppstein," answered Everard.

"Albina's son And where is she, your mother?"

"Dead to everyone except, of course, to her son," replied the boy, gravely.

"What do you mean?"

"Are not the dead always alive to those that love them?"

"Albina lives then for me!" cried the stranger, in a solemn voice; "for God knows that I loved her, that noble and saintly being. And when did you lose her, alas?"

"The day that I was born."

"Some part of her, at least, remains on earth; so let me give to you, my child, the affection I felt for her."

"I love and acknowledge you who have known and loved my mother," said Everard.

And the simple child and the grave man clasped hands like two old friends.

"You are certainly like Albina," continued the stranger.

"Really? Ah! what pleasure you give me by telling me that."

"Yes, there are her beautiful clear eyes, the mirror of her saintly soul; it is her voice I hear when you speak, and which goes to my heart as in the old days. My child, what is your name?"

"Everard."

"Everard, I tell you, your mother lives again in you."

"And she lives again for me, sir, for I repeat it, she is dead only to other people, I hear her, I see her; she is my confidante and my support. It is she who now gives me the confidence and sympathy which I feel for you, I who am so shy. You could not have deceived me; I see clearly through my mother."

Then Everard related to his new friend his whole life, if life it could be called, that existence between the tomb and the earth, that continual vision where the dead shared the existence of the living, where the living seemed to share in the death of the departed, where the child seemed almost a phantom and the mother almost a reality.

Gentle sprites of Teutonic lands, angels and nymphs of nature and of life, sylphs, water-nymphs, wood-nymphs, salamanders, I ween ye must have loved and spoilt this child, who was not less graceful than yourselves! And thou, old Germania, wide-hearted pantheist, thou to whom are dear religion and the ideal, thou, European sister of the Indies, shouldst recognise thyself in this romantic child of the floods and clouds, enamoured of the palpable infinite of nature, and so tenderly dutiful to an unseen yet ever present mother.

The stranger listened to Everard's quaint story gravely and without a smile, like a man who has fathomed the uncertainty and feebleness of the human soul, yet without having measured the all-powerfulness of God. Everard, as usual, said little of the Count of Eppstein. The facts of Maximilian's jealousy and of Albina's last hours had remained a secret between herself and God, and the traveller wept at her strange and sudden death, without suspecting it to have been due to violence.

He seemed not less interested in all that concerned the Keeper's family.

"Then you knew my mother, Wilhelmina, too, since her early death grieves you so deeply?" Everard said to him. "You weep for her and my mother as for two sisters."

"As two sisters, in truth. . . . But you tell me that old Jasper Muden is still alive, and Wilhelmina has left Jonathan a daughter?"

"Yes, my sister Rosamond. Jonathan

started off yesterday to fetch her from Vienna, and, as I told my mother to-night, it seems to me that her return will be the commencement of a new era to me."

"And will Jonathan soon be back?"

"Ah! I hope so. He must make haste if he wishes to fulfil one of the last wishes of Jasper, who is lying on his death-bed, and who longs to see his grandchild again before he dies. Whatever man can do to please the dying should be done. Old Jasper's other wish depends on God alone; it is to know whether his second daughter, Naomi, died a pious death, or is living a prosperous life. But Naomi is in France, and this wish of the poor old man's cannot be fulfilled."

"Indeed it can," said the stranger.

"And who will do it?"

"I will."

CHAPTER X.

EVERARD offered the stranger hospitality in the Gamekeeper's house and his new friend eagerly accepted the offer.

"Only," said he, "I do not wish to meet old Jasper until Jonathan returns! Then, at the same time that the presence of his grand-daughter realises one of the old man's desires, I will undertake to fulfil the other."

The unknown traveller spoke with so much confidence and authority, that Everard raised no objection to his wish, and walked thoughtfully with him towards the cottage. As they drew near, the man slackened his pace and seemed to breathe with some difficulty, and a strange emotion oppressed him; when he arrived before the vine-clad cottage, he stopped suddenly, unable to proceed. Everard gazed at him in astonishment but dared not question him. At last the stranger recovered himself, and entering the cottage allowed himself to be conducted by his young guide to a room at some distance from that of the sick man; where he spent the remainder of the day in resting, and writing letters. Then, when night fell, a night as fine and clear as the last, he asked Everard, who had come to pay him a visit, to show him over the Castle. The boy had the key of the little gate

leading into the park and, as we know, the few servants left at Eppstein by Count Maximilian were neither astonished nor uneasy at the presence or absence of their master's son; so that Everard could grant the stranger's wish and take him to the ancient dwelling-place of his family.

The man and boy went first into the garden.

There Everard had his first surprise; this garden seemed to recall to his companion a thousand memories. He paused beside each bush, and each group of trees; in passing by an arbour, he sat down upon a bench, and broke off a piece of honeysuckle, which he raised to his lips. From the garden they passed on to the Castle. Nothing had been changed there since Albina's death. The stranger went straight to the oratory; the little chapel was lighted by a moonbeam which shone through the stained glass window and fell directly upon the velvet prie-dieu where the Bible lay still open at the place where the dead woman had last been reading. The stranger knelt at the prie-dieu, laid his head on the Holy Book and prayed earnestly.

Everard remained standing by the door, watching this man whom he had never seen before, and yet for whom every object seemed to hold a memory. After praying for a quarter of an hour, the stranger rose. And now it was no longer Everard who led him, but he who led Everard; he made his way towards the great room, the ancestral family room.

At the door, as he was turning the key, Everard put his hand on his.

"This room was my mother's."

"I know it," said the stranger.

And he entered. The boy followed.

This room too was only lighted by the rays of the moon, but they gave a strong enough light to enable every object to be distinguished.

The stranger leaned against the large oak armchair.

"That armchair belonged to my grandfather, Count Rodolph," said the boy.

"I know," replied the stranger.

Then he drew the armchair beside another exactly like it.

"That second armchair belonged to my grandmother Gertrude," said Everard.

"I know that too," answered the stranger.

Then the stranger turned towards the door, and from there, looking at the two

armchairs, which, placed as they were, doubtless by their very position brought back to him some memory of the past, he put his hands up to his face and began to weep.

Then, after a moment's silence,

"Now," said the stranger, "let us go to the tombs."

Everard started to leave the room, for he knew of no other entrance to the family vaults than the one through the Chapel; but the stranger stopped him, and taking his hand, said:

"Come this way."

The astonished boy allowed himself to be led by this man who seemed to know the Castle of his forefathers better than he did himself. The stranger went up to a part of the tapestry between the window and the head of the bed, and pressed his hand against the wall. To Everard's great astonishment, the wall gave way; he felt a rush of damp air against his face, and his eyes, accustomed to darkness like those of the wild creatures among which he passed his nights in the forest, detected the first steps of a flight of stairs.

"Follow me," said the stranger.

The boy, more and more astonished, followed his unknown guide.

As the two nocturnal visitors went down the steps of this passage contrived in the thickness of the wall, a faint light seemed to go before them. It came from the lamp which lighted the vaults and which, by the special order of one of the family ancestors, had to be continually kept burning.

Everard and the stranger soon came to a little iron-barred door. This grating was closed; the stranger stretched out his hand and taking down a key which hung upon a nail behind a pillar, opened the door. Everard remembered having often noticed this door from inside the vaults, but without ever having troubled himself as to where it led.

The boy knelt down by his mother's tomb and the stranger by that of Count Rodolph. From this tomb the stranger passed on to that of Countess Gertrude, then he came to Albina's. The boy was so absorbed in his prayers that he did not hear the stranger's footsteps as he approached.

Standing by Everard's side he listened to the boy's prayer; but to his great astonishment, it was not a prayer, it was a conversation. The child was not pray-

ing as one prays at the tomb of a dead mother; he was talking as one talks to a living mother. Every now and then there was a pause during which he listened and smiled. The stranger knelt at the other side of the tomb.

They remained thus for some time, each apparently oblivious of the other.

At last the stranger rose from his knees and touched Everard on the shoulder. "Come," said he, "it is late and you must need rest."

But the boy had fallen asleep, on his mother's tomb.

During the days that followed the stranger became more and more familiar and fatherly to Everard who, on his part, since the scene at the tomb had shown him much affection. The stranger took advantage of the feeling shown towards him by the boy to ask about his father, Count Maximilian. But on this subject alas! Everard was very ignorant.

"Indeed," said the child, "I do not know if I should recognise him; it is so many years since I saw him, and he went away so soon. All his affection was centred, as was only right, upon my elder brother, Albrecht. I am not complaining; he left me entirely to my mother, and she loves me enough for both."

The stranger had already noticed that the boy spoke of his mother not as if she were dead but as if she were still alive. This kind of struggle, in which a child seemed to contend with death for a mother's love, rendered still more interesting in his eyes the youth whom he already appeared to love deeply.

But on getting to know Everard better, the stranger, much to his astonishment, began to find out the ignorance of this mind, so deep, so thoughtful, and at times so subtle. One day the stranger mentioned the name of Napoleon and the boy asked him who he was. Everard was perhaps the only person in Europe who did not know the name which was being echoed throughout the world at that time. The stranger then told him of the magnificent career of which Egypt and Austerlitz were but episodes; he told him too that Napoleon was one of those rare geniuses who appear at ordained epochs, heaven-sent meteors who illuminate a people and are called Cæsar or Charlemagne. But the boy was as ignorant of the names of Charlemagne or Cæsar as of that of Napoleon.

Thus, when the stranger told him of the Alps, of Italy, and of Egypt, he listened with innocent surprise to this first echo of history in his solitude as he would have listened to a story out of the "Arabian Nights." But his thoughts were wide and deep, his life had prepared him for the marvellous and infinite; he soon ceased to wonder, and only admired.

CHAPTER XI.

JASPER MUDEN made a happy and a noble ending,—a death such as kings, surrounded by princes and servants, seldom have. On either side of his pillow were Conrad of Eppstein and Rosamond, each holding one of his hands, representing on earth the dying man's invisible guardian angels, Wilhelmina and Naomi; at the foot of his bed mourned Everard and Jonathan.

The two desires of Jasper's last days were thus realised. The gentlest death crowned his troubled life, and his last sigh was lightened by a divine smile, a heavenly dawn reflected on his face here on earth.

Thus, the children's sorrow at losing their father was tempered by a certain serene confidence. His end, peaceful and beautiful as the setting of an autumn sun, seemed to them a fitting reward, and when next morning at break of day, as is the custom in hard-working country places, they accompanied their grandfather's body to the tomb, their tears did not lack a certain sweetness full of hope.

It was through these tears, softened by love and faith, that Everard first saw Rosamond's fair and radiant face. As we have said, he had expected in his innocent heedlessness to see the gay, laughing child he had known of old; he imagined he would take her hand and accost her familiarly, as he used to do, and that he would begin by greeting her with a brotherly embrace. But the child had grown into a young girl, and when he met her again, as beautiful as a dream, Everard remained shy and silent, not daring to advance towards the sister thus transformed; and his silent ecstasy must have been very deep indeed, for it made him forget, only for a moment, it is true, but, entirely for that

moment, both the old friend whom he had lost and his father's brother whom he had just found.

Rosamond was indeed a ravishing creature; tall and gracefully formed, while even at fifteen years old, what first attracted attention in her appearance, was a brilliancy mingled with charm, an air of goodness and kindness, something at the same time, both stately and pleasing. There was an admirable purity in her bearing and an infinite repose in her fine and delicately cut features. Her smooth forehead and blue eyes seemed the abode of all peace and goodness; she was beautiful with the eternal beauty of a statue, animated by a proud charm and a modest spriteliness such as Raphael has given to his divine Madonnas.

The stupefaction may be imagined, which the descent of this radiant vision into his solitude, caused our shy Everard. However simple Rosamond might be in her behaviour and dress, she could not but appear a queen, a fairy, an angel, to the young dweller in the forest of Eppstein, and this first revelation of ideal beauty filled his heart with an unknown trouble. It seemed to him, to him the son of a Count, that this peasant child was on a height to which he could never attain. The innocent admiration with which she inspired him seemed like an abyss between them, and one which he told himself that he could never bridge.

So it was Rosamond who, seeing that her childhood's friend did not seem to recognise her, advanced towards him and held out her little white hand, saying softly,—

"Good-day, Everard."

The spell was broken, but the few words which Everard exchanged with Rosamond, were still marked with the strange feeling of awe and respect which had seized him at the first sight of her, whom, till now, he had called his sister. This short conversation, carried on in low voices and with blushing faces, was soon interrupted. Besides, the day of Jasper's death must be spent in prayer, in solemn thought and in tears, and though the evening meal was eaten together, it was in silence.

The next day, after their return from the cemetery, when Rosamond was kneeling at her mother's prie-dieu in the room formerly occupied by Wilhelmina, Conrad of Eppstein took Everard and

Jonathan aside, to tell them his story, and at the same time to bid them farewell. He had to return immediately to France, whither duty called him; he had only delayed long enough to be present at the funeral of Naomi's father; but he did not wish to leave Albina's son and Wilhelmina's husband without telling them something of his past life and of his future.

"I am an outcast," he told them, "both from my family and from life; apart from you, no one in the world takes any interest in me; you alone, know that I live. I resolved to die, while still alive, to obliterate my name and my person, to efface myself from the earth. My history is sad and tragic; you know part of it already, I will now complete it. My father banished me, because I loved with a holy and pure affection. Then I sought refuge in France, and shut myself up with my love. A gentleman, I concealed my rank and took a common name, a fictitious name. Thus was I forgotten, and, indeed, for some time, I almost forgot myself. But the roar of Revolution was already making itself heard in France, and it is difficult to preserve the pure flame of love against the blast of a whirlwind. All unwittingly, I breathed the electric ideas with which the stormy air was charged; I read Jean Jacques, I read Mirabeau; I made myself familiar with the bold thinkers of the 18th Century. The studies and dreams of my youth had equally prepared me for this apprenticeship. A German, banished by Germany, a noble repudiated by the nobility, I adopted philosophy for family and liberty for country. Freed from the instincts and prejudices which had been forbidden me, I judged better at a distance than those who had cast me out from their ranks, and I saw clearly at the same time both their glory, the faults of the past and the adverse tendencies of the future. I then put on, not a Count's sword, but a soldier's sabre, and I placed all that remained of my life at the service of the young Republic. Naomi, whose tender heart knew better than my proud will, let me go without jealousy, and only smiled sadly. That noble-hearted woman was almost happy at seeing me live again in this enthusiasm. I had only done my duty towards her; but she had sworn to reward me by constantly sacrificing her happiness, her

soul, her life to me. Gallantly did she keep her word! She encouraged me in what revived my hopes, and seemed to share my dreams, without ever complaining of the way in which I abandoned her. How blind I was! I did not understand her self-sacrifice, and I went—I went without being made uneasy by her unnatural calmness. I was not long in finding out my double error. The richest wines bring intoxication. The first fumes of liberty were clouding the reason of France, and I soon recognised the emptiness of my dreams as I lay on the straw of a dungeon.

"You know the rest of my misfortunes. Naomi was not to be turned from her devotion by death, and for the name which I had given her she gave her life. For three or four years I do not know what I did; what my actions and thoughts were during those terrible days of mourning I do not recall; what dreams disturbed my rest I know not.

"It was at the news of Buonaparte's first victories that I shook off this torpor. A living corpse, my admiration and enthusiasm gave me new life. The principles to which I had formerly clung were not then idle fancies, for had they not made a man and sent him forth to the conquest of the world? I felt that my life, though desolate and lost, might yet become good for something, and that at great epochs one can always fill one's place and do one's duty, were it only by self-devotion, like Curtius.

"I was entirely unfettered, entirely my own master. I gave myself up as a cypher to what was called the Emperor's ambition; I relinquished my past, my old convictions and personality, to lose myself in the man who personified the thought of his century, and to become an instrument for his plans, a tool of his genius. It seemed to me that in obeying him I was obeying an invincible destiny. He led me, God led him.

"There are many of us who thus follow him at a word, a gesture. All who come under his influence are fascinated, all who live within his sphere fly to him as steel to loadstone. But I am proud to think that I have given myself to him by judgment, as others have by instinct.

"Whither will he lead us? I know not; I would go with him to the ends of the earth. I have an idea that I shall

not die until my task is accomplished and he has no further need of me.

"It was not long ere he noticed my passive yet intelligent obedience, for he is a man whom nothing escapes; he knows that he is my master, my family, and my country. He says to me, 'Go there,' and I go; 'Do that,' and I do it. When he says to me, 'Die,' I shall die—all without a murmur. His will has absorbed mine.

"It may astonish you, perhaps, that a descendant of the Counts of Eppstein should act and think in this servile manner; but I am no longer Conrad of Eppstein, Conrad is dead. How came you to call me by that name, Jonathan, and how was it you recognised me? Conrad is dead, I tell you, doubly dead, trebly dead—dead the day his father cast him off, dead the day his wife died. He who stands before you and speaks to you is a French Colonel in the service of the Emperor, on his way back from a secret mission to Vienna.

"Napoleon, who up to the present had only asked my blood on the battle field, now wished to employ my brain in negotiation, and I fulfilled his commands, as always. They received me better there under my simple baptismal name than they would have done had I presented myself as one of the sons of Rudolph of Eppstein. It appears that Austria has resolved to make of Germany another Spain, and that, an old dynasty, jealous of an Empire of a day's growth, she means to second the patriotic rising in the Peninsula; she has filled Germany with agents and flooded her with pamphlets, got ready an army of 400,000 men, and renewed her alliance with England. I went to demand an explanation, and was met with protestations. This is why, within a year, within six months perhaps, war will be declared against my old country. But I love the country of my choice better than the country of my birth; and the true mother, to whom above all, I owe my life, is thought.

"Jonathan, Everard, you now know all. I felt myself obliged to comfort the last moments of Naomi's father, and I could not refrain from revealing the secret of my life to you, who are so simple and affectionate. But keep my secret, I beg of you. There are two men within me, and I would fain forget the first. The month passed in this

cottage I wish to look upon as a dream. The awakening is come, and I must no longer remember the sweet fancies which have possessed me; once more I take up my work and play the part which has become my second nature. My friends, I pray you again, say no word of what has passed between us. Let me remain buried in your hearts; above all, do not let my brother know anything of my journey. If I had found him in trouble, like you, Jonathan, I probably should not have been able to resist the desire to make myself known to him: but I know he is prosperous, therefore we will not disturb his happiness. Now, farewell, my friends, I must set off immediately. Shall I see you again? That is as God wills. However, something tells me that I am not leaving Eppstein for the last time. So *au revoir*, Jonathan. You will tell Rosamond to keep the secret, will you not? And you, Everard, to whom I have still something to reveal, will you come up the Rhine, as far as Worms, and travel with me for a few days?

"We will talk of your mother," Conrad added, softly.

"Ah! dear uncle, I desire that, as much as I love you."

"Very well, that is settled; we will leave in an hour; in a week you will be back."

Everard was especially pleased to leave Eppstein, to get away from Rosamond—incredible as this appears. He was afraid of her and of himself; he trembled at the idea of again appearing before the charming girl, and joyfully accepted anything which would delay the moment when he must find himself alone with her. His preparations were, therefore, briskly and joyfully made. His farewell to Rosamond was made without too much embarrassment at the same time as Conrad's, and he did not perceive the innocent disappointment which the girl's face betrayed, when she saw him going away so soon and so cheerfully.

CHAPTER XII.

A WEEK later, as Conrad had calculated, Everard was on his way back from Mayence, having seen more of the country during this one week than in all his life before.

Before returning he lingered, as was his custom, in the forest, and, when he came to his favourite retreat, he began to dream.

How much had happened in a month! Jonathan's departure, Conrad's arrival, the Colonel's marvellous tales, Jasper's death, Rosamond's return, his uncle's disclosures about the first journey to Eppstein, which took place six months before his own birth; a glimpse of the real world, light thrown on the past, the future still in shadow; how many events! how many new ideas!

His mind was chiefly occupied with what Conrad had just told him about his mother. Old Jasper and Jonathan had certainly often spoken to him about Albina; but they saw her, the one with the dim vision of old age, and the other through the coarseness of his mind; while as for Conrad, it was with a brother's eyes, a poet's heart, and a dreamer's spirit, that he spoke to him of his mother.

Then this strange tale of the loves of Conrad and Naomi, this union of castle and cottage, this past history of another, which might have been the revelation of his own future, made his heart beat violently. It is a strange thing, but this remembrance which was as a beacon to warn him of danger, instead of daunting him, drew the child's heart on, like a charm, like a promise, like madness; and this terrible example, which appeared to have been sent expressly by God to warn him, seemed to him vaguely a ready-made justification. Conrad had loved Naomi. A young man, a Count of Eppstein, left the Castle one day, met a maiden, poor and of lowly birth, coming from the cottage of Jasper the Keeper; he fell in love with her and made her his wife, that was all Everard thought about.

All this disturbed, tormented, and weighed down his youthful mind; he was in a fever; he felt that he was changed, exalted, older; he felt himself to be stronger, and was proud of his strength; vague transports, confused hopes, new pangs, he confided them all to his mother in a sort of frenzy hitherto unknown and now experienced for the first time. Everard was happy without knowing why; he had lived and dreamed before; now he felt the need for action. He had understood so completely and so quickly the great things which had been

shown him for the first time that, without comprehending them by experience, he seemed to be able to reach to every conclusion by sheer force of thinking. What would he not undertake now? What obstacle would stop him? Of whom would he be afraid?

At this moment he realised that he was not more than a league from the Gamekeeper's cottage, and that he was going to see Rosamond again; he stopped, and turned pale.

Yes, without doubt, he would have braved all the rest of the world; but she, Rosamond, so beautiful, so tall, so learned now, dare he even appear before her? And, by instinct, without accounting to himself for his action, instead of going as usual to the Gamekeeper's house, he made his way towards the Castle.

Evening was coming on when Everard arrived at the little gate in the park, and the dreamer, quite occupied with the great things which he had seen and the great things which he had dreamed, did not perceive an unusual stir in the courts and corridors.

Absorbed in his own thoughts, which made him entirely oblivious of his surroundings, when these surroundings were not his well-beloved forest, he entered the Great Hall, seeing and hearing nothing; his head was bent, but his heart was proud and strong, and his whole being seemed renewed.

"Here is Mr. Everard," said a valet, opening the door in the corridor leading into the Red Room.

The boy went in without knowing why he was announced. A tall man, whom Everard did not know, was seated by the fireplace, where a great fire was burning; for in this room, with its thick walls, a fire was needed all the year round. But as the fire gave very little light, the servant lighted the four candles in a candelabrum, making a circle of light which illuminated barely one-third of the apartment, and throwing only a feeble light upon the rest of the dark shadows of the vast chamber.

"Ah! yes, indeed! there is Mr. Everard," came in sardonic tones from the stranger, who rose at the same time, and who, to the great astonishment of the boy, seemed to have established himself in this room, where his mother had lived and died.

"Yes," he said, "I am here. What is the matter, and what do you want with me?"

"What is the matter? What do I want with you? I want to know where you come from, vagabond!"

"I come from where I please," replied Everard; "and on this point it seems to me that I have always been free and have never given account to anyone."

"What insolence is this?" said the stranger, frowning, and grasping the back of his chair with a heavy hand. "Do you not know, sir, to whom you are speaking?"

"No, in truth," said Everard, with the utmost frankness, more and more surprised.

"What, you do not? Ah! you scoff when I question you; you jest when I blame you."

"Doubtless; for I do not know by what right you question or blame me."

"By what right . . . Are you mad, sir? . . . I, Count Maximilian of Eppstein . . . I . . . your father?"

"You are the Count of Eppstein? you are my father?" cried Everard, stupefied.

"Ah! you did not recognise me, then? The excuse sounds good, and, above all, filial."

"My lord, pardon me, but I swear to you that in the gloom and darkness and at first sight . . . and, besides, it is such a long time since I have had the honour of seeing you . . ."

"Silence!" cried the Count, furious at this justification, in which his conscience accused him. "Silence! and endeavour to answer as an obedient son, instead of talking like a rebellious child."

There was a pause; Everard, his head bared, stood waiting with a red face and a tear trembling on his eyelashes. On his side, Count Maximilian, whose anger rose like a tide, strode up and down, pausing at times to gaze on him whom, by a great effort, he had brought himself to call his son, and that in his mother's room—in Albina's room, in the very place where, fifteen years before, he had crushed her whom he believed to be guilty with the weight of the same anger which, springing up afresh, choked him again to-day. Maximilian hated this boy as if he were an enemy; he could not forgive him for the awful terror he had experienced that night when he had a dream in which he saw the dead

Albina rocking her sleeping child. Therefore he stopped suddenly before Everard, with folded arms, and, as if the child ought to have been able to follow the stormy thoughts which rushed through his mind and set fire to his brain,

"Answer me!" he cried.

"I thought that you had told me to be silent," replied the boy.

"Did I say so? Very well, now I order you to speak. Let me hear, where have you been? Why do you leave the Castle thus for weeks at a time? I arrived five days ago; I ask for you, where you are; they tell me they do not know where you are; that after attending the funeral of some peasant, you went off with some vagabond or other."

"Sir, it was Jasper Muden who died, and——"

"And you, Count of Eppstein, you took part in the funeral rites of this peasant; that is good! But, after having performed this act of popularity, what became of you? where did you go? Answer—God in heaven! will you answer?"

"Pardon me, sir," replied Everard, softly; "but when I left the Castle for days, even weeks, I knew quite well that no one would be anxious about me."

In these words, simple in themselves, but all the more powerful by their very simplicity, the Count imagined a bitter allusion to the way in which he had deserted his son; and, indeed, the position of the father towards the son was such that Everard could not say a single word which did not wound him. Now, we know what Maximilian's anger was like, and can imagine the rage produced by this unintentional irony from one whom he looked upon as an intruder in his family. He marched up to Everard, and cried in a voice of thunder:

"Will you cease from insulting me? No one would be anxious about you, you say? And, in God's name, do you deserve that anyone should be alarmed about you, accursed brat, who shame us by your ignorance and low tastes? Are you worthy of your place in the family circle and a father's heart? Have you earned your portion of the heritage of love? Who are you, sir? who are you?"

"They tell me that I am your son, Count Maximilian of Eppstein, and unfortunately I know nothing but what they have told me."

"They tell you! impious scoffer! they tell you," repeated the Count, whose suspicions were aroused by these words, which also aroused his anger, "Ah! they have told you you were my son. Are you sure," he continued, bringing his clenched hand down on the boy's shoulder, "are you sure that those who have told you so were not lying?"

"Sir," cried the boy, indignantly. "Sir!—Ah! by the sacred memory of her who is watching us both, it is you who lie, for you slander my mother."

"Miserable bastard!" cried the Count.

At the same instant Count von Eppstein, unable to resist the violence of his anger, raised his hand and brought it down on Everard's face, who fell under the blow.

Maximilian, frightened at his own act, recoiled a step. But the boy rose slowly, and looked at his father.

There was a terrible moment of silence. Then, pale with humiliation, his chest heaving, his burning eyes full of tears, his hand clenched on his throbbing breast, Everard said, in a broken voice, these simple words—simple, yet full of meaning, innocent at once, and terrible, the words of a child, more terrifying than the threats of a man:

"Beware, sir, I intend to tell my mother!"

CHAPTER XIII.

EVERARD rushed distractedly from the room, and out of the Castle.

For a time he wandered straight on without knowing whither he went, and only became a little calmer and more reasonable when he had thrown himself weeping upon the flowery turf around his cherished grotto.

Two hours earlier he had felt proud and happy. His new thoughts had made him much older; friendship and love had so happily entered his lonely life; and, all of a sudden, an outrage, a single blow, had made him a child again. He wept. Between Rosamond's love, which he feared, and his father's scorn, of which he was ashamed, he seemed alone upon earth. Castle and cottage were alike closed to him; no refuge remained to him save his little solitary vale, no friend

but Albina's guardian shade—a desert and a phantom.

"Oh, mother, mother!" he sobbed, "how we have both been insulted! Mother, art thou there? Dost hear me still? Or wilt thou, too, fail me and renounce me? Thou knowest how ill-treated I have been. It is not so much the odious injustice of the blow, but to be humiliated with thy name, to be chastened with thy memory, to see what I love tarnished, what I respect profaned, that is grief indeed and ignominy! Mother, advise me. Is my anger impious? Is my rebellion a sacrilege? Advise me, mother, and, above all, console me; for my pain is terrible to bear!"

Laments, cries, and prayers burst simultaneously from Everard's heart; but the never-ceasing stream of tears that accompanied them by degrees diminished the bitterness of his anguish, so that he was able at last to listen, to look around him, and to question himself with some tranquillity.

The night was calm and fresh, the stars twinkled in the sky, the silver moonbeams sparkled like diamonds in the stream, the hawthorn's penetrating perfume scented the breeze; in the dark thicket an enraptured nightingale sang of the peace and beauty of nature; all was joy, love, and ecstasy in the forest, and Everard's soul, delivered as though by a higher power from the sad thoughts that had at first shaken it, hushed by secret melodies, soothed by the soft light, gradually became calm. Soon he raised his head, looked at the lovely heavens, and the tears dried upon his cheeks in the soft evening breeze.

"Yes, mother, yes, dear mother," he murmured, "thou art right; I was wrong to be afflicted, I was wrong to look upon his insults as an offence. The affront he wished to put upon thee could no more touch thee than my hand can grasp this impalpable moonbeam. I was a fool to be unhappy at any reproach or punishment which came not from thee. Thou dost love me, mother. Yes, I hear thee, I feel thee, mother, on this still night; thou dost give it its tender and sacred harmony, thou art its hidden soul. I thank thee, I thank thee, mother; all is calm within me, because I feel that thou art not angry with thy son, and that, on the contrary, thou dost pity and caress him. The murmur of the stream is thy voice; the breeze thy

breath. I thank thee: One more word, one more kiss, mother, upon the balmy breeze, and I shall sleep calm and happy beneath thy holy gaze."

And, in fact, as he murmured these words, the boy closed his eyes, and his soft, regular breathing soon proved that he was fast asleep.

Let us see now whether sleep was as tranquil in the Castle as in the forest.

Count Maximilian had remained crushed, dumbfounded, at Everard's simple speech: "I intend to tell my mother." To his remorse, ever wakeful and uneasy, these words had a terrible significance.

Who had taught the child this "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin" of a troubled conscience? He stood there asking himself this, pale with horror, and with trembling hands. He staggered forward a few paces, rang the bell violently, and sank into an armchair.

The servants ran in.

"A fire! Lights!" cried the Count. "Quick, this very instant!"

The servants obeyed. A bigger fire than ever soon burned upon the hearth, six candles were lighted in the candelabra upon the chimney-piece.

"Light up the lustre, too!" cried the Count. "And you," said he to another lackey, "run and look for Everard and bring him here."

At that moment he felt such terror in his heart that he wished to have the lad brought to him. If he retracted his insult, the boy, he thought, would on his side take back the threat. But presently the man returned to say that they had sought in vain for the young Count, he was nowhere to be found.

"Then," said Maximilian, "tell my secretary to come here; I have work for him."

The secretary was called. Count Maximilian, under pretext of verifying his farmers' accounts, made him remain until nine o'clock. At nine supper was announced. Count Maximilian went down alone, telling his secretary to go on working and to wait for him. It seemed to him that the presence of a stranger in the room would keep away phantoms.

Albrecht was waiting for his father in the dining-room. He was a tall young man, morose, impertinent and insolent, a weariness to himself and a weariness to others. The Count was so pale and

agitated that Albrecht looked at him in astonishment, asking with more affection than usual if any accident had happened. Maximilian answered gaily and loudly in the negative; then he seated himself at the table, moving the chairs roughly, talking, laughing, eating and drinking a great deal. For a moment the Count thought of making himself drunk, so as to drown his terror in intoxication; but he suddenly thought that perhaps intoxication might produce the spectres he feared. He stopped eating and fell into so deep a reverie that he did not hear Albrecht leave the room. Roused from this torpor by a servant who asked him if he was not ill, he threw a haggard glance around, saw that he was alone at the table, and asked what had become of his son; then, on learning that he had gone to his own room, he decided that he would also return to his.

He found his secretary at work, seated before the writing table.

"You have not seen or heard anything, Wilhelm?" asked the Count as he entered.

"No, your Excellency," replied the secretary. "Why?"

"Oh! nothing," said the Count, "I thought I heard someone else walking about."

"You are mistaken, sir," returned the secretary. And he returned to his work.

The Count walked up and down the room, stopping from time to time before the secret door and looking at it with an invincible horror.

"Wilhelm," asked the Count, coming behind the secretary's chair, "how much longer do you think your work will take?"

"Three or four hours, your Excellency," said the secretary.

"I should much like to have the work done by to-morrow morning."

"I can take it to my room and sit up all night over it."

"You can do better," said Maximilian; "finish it here."

"But should I not prevent you from sleeping?"

"No. Besides, I am not feeling quite well, and should not be sorry to have some one near me."

"I will do as you wish, sir."

"Very well, then, do as I say; I think it will be best."

The secretary bowed in token of obedience, and really believing his master

was anxious to verify the calculations he was making, he returned to his labours.

As for Maximilian, delighted at having discovered a pretext for keeping someone with him, he called his valet to undress him, and went to bed.

Despite his precautions, Maximilian had the greatest difficulty in sleeping at first. The room was lighted, Wilhelm was there, he could hear his pen scratching the paper; but his own thoughts supplied the place of ghosts. One thing, however, reassured him, and this was the serenity of the beautiful June night, very different from that dismal Christmas night, so squally and tempestuous. Now, on the contrary, a profound calm reigned without; all nature seemed to sleep, and through the half-open shutters, the Count, from his bed, could see the stars twinkling.

Laughing at his foolish fancies and reassured by Wilhelm's presence, the Count drew the curtains to shut out the light and fell at last into a feverish slumber.

He could not tell how long he had slept, when he awoke suddenly with a start and apparently for no reason; he sat up, an icy sweat bedewed his forehead; then, strange to say, he saw through the opening of the curtains the candles in the candelabra and the lustre go out one by one.

As for Wilhelm, overcome by fatigue, no doubt, he had fallen asleep in his chair. The Count tried to call out to wake him, but his voice stuck in his throat; it was as though an invisible hand seized him round the neck. He tried to spring out of bed, but he was chained to the spot. All this time the candles continued to go out with a startling regularity. Only three remained alight; they, too, went out, and left the room in total darkness.

Almost immediately the sound of a door turning slowly on its hinges was heard. The Count threw himself back in the bed, turned his eyes to the wall, and drew the sheets over his head.

Someone was certainly approaching the bed; he felt it in the air rather than heard it, and in spite of himself, as though governed by an irresistible power, he drew his head from under the bed-clothes and fixed his haggard eyes upon the spot from whence the thing came.

In vain did he struggle: he could neither speak nor rise, he could neither

repel nor escape the apparition which menaced him. At length the curtains of his bed were drawn aside, and he lay motionless as if turned to stone, recognising Albina's pale shade, the same as he had already seen it once before.

The ghostly visitor seemed, however, to be more stern and angry this time than the first, and when her impassive, marble gaze rested on Maximilian, the guilty man turned colder than the dead woman, his accuser, and his hair stood up in abject terror.

Then, in the silence of this starry night, as fourteen years before amid the roar of the tempest, a stern, angry voice was heard.

"Maximilian! Maximilian!" said the voice, "so you mean utterly to disregard the protestations of the dying and the commands of the dead? You strike my child and insult my tomb! Take care, Maximilian, take care! The child will condemn you, the tomb will punish you. For the last time, hear me, and try to remember, and, above all, to believe what I say: for, if you will not believe the words of my dead tongue, my cold dead hand must endeavour to convince you."

The Count made as though to speak; but, with an authoritative gesture, Albina imposed silence and continued:

"Listen, Maximilian; Everard is your son, as he is mine, your son as much as Albrecht is. Yet you cherish Albrecht and neglect Everard. Well, so be it. I watch over my child and do not require your help to make a man of him. Go, if you wish; leave this Castle if it so please you, without a thought of Everard; go back to Vienna and your ambition; I consent, I not only authorize you, I compel you. But I forbid you, in the name of the living God, to raise your hand against my son or to touch a single hair of his head; abandon him, but do not threaten him. Indifference, yes; violence, no. You do not wish to be his father; be not his executioner. You have no right to claim him now or to punish him, and I do not wish you to touch my Everard. You understand me? Now, if you disobey me, Maximilian, take heed: in this world you are lost; in the next you are damned, yes, damned and lost! The first time you beheld me after my death was there above in the child's room. To-day, it is here in your own room, in the Red Room. Next time

it will be underground, in my room, in my vault, in my tomb. Remember!"

"Spare me!" groaned the Count, overwhelmed with horror.

"One word more, Maximilian, and I return to my granite home. My soul really and truly speaks to yours, no illusion of slumber deceives your senses; yet you may say to yourself on awakening to-morrow, as you did fourteen years ago: 'It was a dream.' Now, for Everard's sake and for your own, I am fain not to leave you in this fatal error. Maximilian, do you recognise this chain, which twenty years ago you placed round the neck of your betrothed, and which four years later was buried with the cold remains of your wife? To-morrow morning, Maximilian, when you find this chain around your shoulders, you will have no right left to believe you have but had a terrible nightmare; you will be unable to relapse into your blind and fatal carelessness, for you will see with your own eyes, touch with your own fingers, the proof and token of my presence and of my words. Take this chain from the dead, even as you gave it to the living."

So saying, Albina took the chain from her neck and placed it round Maximilian's, who was petrified with terror.

The Count's lips moved, but no words issued from them.

"And now," continued Albina. "I have spoken. *Adieu* or *au revoir*, Maximilian. Remember!"

The Count only vaguely heard the words; he did not even see the phantom disappear; his eyes were closed, his breathing stopped, and he sank motionless and unconscious upon his pillow.

All this time Everard, stretched upon the woodland moss, slept the sleep of the happy.

Next day, when, with the first rays of the sun, Maximilian awoke, or rather recovered from his swoon, his first movement was to raise his hand to his neck; he felt the cold chain beneath his icy fingers and became whiter than the sheets he lay on.

"Wilhelm," he cried, "Wilhelm, awake; awake, faithless wretch!"

Wilhelm woke with a start.

"What is it, your Excellency?" asked the astounded secretary.

"I wish to speak to Jonathan, the game-keeper. Go downstairs and tell a servant to fetch him to me at once. I must speak to him."

"And this work," asked Wilhelm timidly, "is it needful I should finish it here?"

"No, take it to your room, I wish to be alone."

Quick as Wilhelm was to obey the Count and the servant to obey Wilhelm, when Jonathan, informed that the master wanted him, entered the Red Room, he found Maximilian up and dressed. His first movement was to recoil in terror, seeing his master's face so pale and drawn. But Maximilian tried to smile.

"Jonathan," he said to him, "come here, and do not attempt to deceive me. You were present when they wrapped my wife, Albina, in her shroud, when they laid her on her bier, when they nailed down her coffin?"

"Alas! yes, my lord."

"How was she dressed?"

"In her white wedding-dress; and, in spite of death, she was still beautiful. I assure you on my oath."

"Jonathan, did you remark, did you see whether there was anything round her neck?"

"Yes, my lord, a gold chain, given to her by your Excellency, and which she had desired should be left upon her."

"Would you be able to recognise that gold chain?"

"Yes, my lord, yes, if she were not buried in a triple coffin of pine, oak and lead, sealed by a marble slab."

"Look well, Jonathan; is this it?" asked Maximilian.

"Profanation or miracle, my lord," cried Jonathan, "it is the same!"

The Count grew paler still, replaced the chain upon his neck, and signed to Jonathan to withdraw.

A quarter of an hour later, Count Maximilian's equipages having been got ready in hot haste, the Count, accompanied by Albrecht, set out with headlong speed for Vienna, without asking for Everard, without once looking behind him.

CHAPTER XIV.

TIRED out by three days' walking and by the cruel emotions of the previous day, Everard did not wake until late next morning. The sun was already high, the birds sang loudly; all was

bright and gay. Nevertheless, in the blue sky, a black cloud gathered slowly to the northward.

Everard cast his eyes over the beautiful sky; then, from time to time, his gaze wandered to the cloud.

"Behold," said he, "the symbol of my destiny; calm and happy to-day, since my mother so wishes it, but troubled and uneasy to-morrow. Where shall I be to-morrow? I will not remain longer at the Castle of Eppstein, where my father treats me worse than a beggar; I cannot now return to the cottage where Rosamond has taken my place, and where, I know not by what instinct, I tremble to find myself with her. What shall I do? What refuge remains to me? You alone, you alone, can tell me, mother!"

The lad let his head fall into his hands and mused. He did not weep, but he was very serious; a thousand projects and a thousand thoughts contended within him. At length he thought he had made a firm resolve, and rose, saying:

"Come, that's it, no more weakness; all that remains to me is to join my uncle Conrad. What can I do, alone, and without resources? I do not know; but I will go, none the less. I will leave for ever the country which I left for the first time a week ago; God, the universal Providence, and my own special Providence, my mother, will not fail me. With their help I shall be strong and courageous, I hope; and if, after all, some insurmountable obstacle stops me, if some unforeseen event prevents me, if I am obliged to come back and abandon my intention, it will be because God and my mother so will it, and I shall submit. I do what seems right to me; let them do with me what seems good to them. I rule my conduct as best I can; let them govern my fate as they wish."

Everard's preparations did not take him long; he carried with him his whole fortune, his whole future; he had only to take a stick and set out on his way. But before leaving, before deserting his dear forest, his valley, his grotto, he threw himself upon his knees, and addressed a fervent prayer to his mother.

He rose up determined and happy, and, without wishing to reason too much, without permitting himself to reflect, he started bravely to climb the hill, to regain the road which would lead him to Mayence. It must have been nearly mid-day

when he reached the great olm-bordered road which skirted the forest on one side, and on the other, the valley of the Maine and the way to France. He was about to quit for ever the Castle of his birth and the forest, his foster-mother; at the first turn of the descent, he would be almost in a foreign country. Once more before he reached that point, he turned for a last look, a last good-bye to the sparsely scattered houses of Eppstein.

Yes, Everard was right in taking Providence into consideration in his projects, for, as he threw one last glance upon the ascent, which, a minute later he would no longer be able to see, the young man saw Jonathan the gamekeeper issuing from the forest glade, his gun upon his shoulder, and his other hand leading by the bridle his pony, upon which Rosamond was proudly seated, laughing merrily. The little group of father and daughter was depicted vividly against the background of blue sky and green trees.

Our traveller, who had, he told himself, but one last look to cast upon his native land, stood there motionless, watching Jonathan and Rosamond, as though he saw them in a dream, and as though the approaching friends would not inevitably end by perceiving him in their turn. He remained without stirring a muscle, watching them coming nearer and nearer; and with them appeared quite another life from that which he had projected a moment earlier. Had Everard passed that way five minutes later, his whole future would have been changed.

But ere the worthy grey-headed Jonathan and beautiful Rosamond of the blonde tresses reach Everard, let us look into the young girl's life, and enquire into the secrets of her heart and thoughts.

The two characteristics of her childhood, passed at the Convent of the Holy Linden, had been penetration of mind and purity of soul. Rosamond returned to Eppstein very well instructed and very innocent,—a rare combination. Languages, history, music, she had studied everything ardently; but evil she knew nothing of; with her marvellous aptitude for acquiring knowledge she had yet never been able to understand vice; at fifteen years of age, a woman in thought, she remained a child at heart.

Moreover, until now, few events had filled her life; ardent studies and lively

friendships, that was all—many feelings and ideas, few deeds. Amongst all her companions—and her companions were the richest and noblest heiresses of old Austria—she was always first in intelligence, and, what is not so usual, likewise the best beloved of them all. She caused her superiority to be forgiven on account of her sweetness. Her friends—and all the girls were, or sought to be, her friends—consulted her, gave way to her, and without envy. She was queen, worthy, good, gracious, of this fresh and charming people, and, withal, loved by her mistresses, who looked upon her as one of themselves; so that when she left, there was real grief amongst both nuns and pupils.

Moreover, there was not much left to teach her at the Convent of the Holy Linden; it was she who taught the others. At fifteen, the inquisitiveness of her mind had been so great, that knowledge held no further mysteries for her. But, let there be no misunderstanding, her grace and modesty had not been in the least spoilt thereby. Without affectation, and with the most perfect simplicity, she was able to relate in broad outline, no less than in minute detail, the history of nations and individuals. It was with sincere enthusiasm, with touching vivacity, that she spoke of Corneille or of Klopstock, of Goethe or of Shakespeare. A musician, she did not enter less deeply into the genius of Gluck or Palestrina, Mozart or Paisiello; and, believe me, this poetical appreciation, this precocious musical intuition, did not, in any wise, prevent her from skipping marvelously well, or from playing battledore-and-shuttlecock to perfection. Grave and thoughtful as the nuns found her on the benches of the schoolroom, her friends found her no less merry and gay beneath the great chestnut trees in the garden; it was the charming combination of expansive gaiety and reflective application which made her beloved and respected by all.

Among all her friends, and, as we have said, Rosamond possessed as friends all the school girls of the Convent, from the eldest to the youngest,—among all her friends, the one whom Rosamond preferred was the daughter of a former Ambassador at the Austrian Court, who had retired from the intrigues of diplomacy some years previously. Lucile von

Gansberg had had an English mother; consequently, Lucile, whose mother tongue was English, taught that language to her inseparable companion, almost in play. Besides which, the nobleman's daughter took the gamekeeper's daughter home with her several times. Thus, Rosamond had glimpses of the life of the great world, but she always returned to the Convent with her peace of mind undisturbed; she saw the world and was seen by it through the veil of her innate purity. Such were the events of this simple and tranquil existence. We are omitting one, however, which perhaps filled Rosamond and Lucile's young heads, more than all the insipid compliments of the nobles of the Viennese Court: this was the reading of "Romeo and Juliet," accomplished secretly beneath a bower of honeysuckle. The pure and ardent love poem carried the two terrestrial angels into an ideal world, a thousand times more dangerous than the real world. The passion which Shakespeare could paint so powerfully left the two sisters dreamy and troubled; but the innocent light-heartedness of their fifteen years would soon have outweighed the dreamy musings of their hearts. Rosamond's pure and chaste soul was the first to awake from this perilous dream, and this vague revelation of love was the only shadow which mingled with the radiance of these two dawning lives.

When Rosamond had to go away with her father, to leave her Convent, her friendships; when the time came for the two inseparables to be parted, their grief can be imagined. Moreover, their regrets were shared by all who knew Rosamond: she was fêted, embraced, wept over.

"We shall always love you," she was assured by everybody; "we shall never cease to think of you. Who, alas! will now reconcile us? Who will counsel us? Who will ask pardon for us from the Sisters? Our guardian angel is leaving us, our guide is going away."

And then there were a thousand protestations, a thousand presents, a thousand caresses; they wished to keep her for a few days at least, they could not make up their minds to let her go so suddenly; and this was what had kept Jonathan at Vienna longer than he wished.

Superiors and Sisters were no less genuinely sorrowful than the pupils.

"If, later on, when far away from us, you are not happy," they said to Rosamond, as they took leave of her, "come back to the Holy Linden; there you will always find a place in the dormitory, and in the classes, and in the motherly affection of our hearts."

"Thank you, good mothers, thank you!" Rosamond answered, weeping. "Oh! indeed, if my father did not want me, if I had not a brother who expected me, I would never leave you; it seems as though I were about to leave behind all the calm and joy of my life here; if, some day, I should be in trouble, or if I were no longer necessary to anyone, oh! indeed I should return, and something, alas! good mothers, tells me, that I shall return."

However, she was obliged to go; her grandfather was dying, and could not wait; she had to leave the Convent, the nuns, her companions, she had to leave Lucile. After embracing each other a hundred times, and promising to write to one another, the two friends said a last good-bye; but, as a remembrance, Lucile insisted that Rosamond should take away a little cherry-wood bookcase full of their favourite authors, and an English Shakespeare was hidden in the corner.

"In reading our great poets," Lucile said to her, "you will recall, Rosamond, the days when we read them together, and the friend who read with you. Adieu, darling sister! Adieu! or perhaps *au revoir*."

And the heavy door of the Convent closed behind Rosamond.

"Will it ever open again for me?" said the young girl, as she walked pensively away, leaning on her father's arm; "shall I ever again see those peaceful walls, the good nuns, my dear friends? . . . Oh! I dare not say: 'God grant it!' I was happy there because I was young: I shall only return, if I am in trouble; and, when our joys become our consolation, they are almost melancholy; when our paradise becomes our refuge, it is almost sad; so, sweet nest of my childhood, may it please the Lord that I never see thee again!"

Soon, however, the movement of the journey, new impressions, succeeded in distracting Rosamond a little. Silent at first, she soon replied to Jonathan, and at length, after two days' travelling together, it was she who questioned him about

Eppstein, on the life led there, and as to all she would see there.

The worthy Jonathan asked nothing better than to satisfy the curiosity of his beloved child on all points. He had been a little jealous of Rosamond's regrets, poor father! He told her, not how happy she would be, but how much she would be loved; that, first of all, she would be all his pride and joy, and then, that she would be quite free at home, and her own mistress as of old, when she was a small child, and her mother spoilt her so much. He then spoke of her young comrade whom she would see again, of Everard, who awaited her with so much impatience, and who was so simple, so sad, so good. It was unnecessary. If Rosamond could have forgotten the fair companion of her infancy, the brotherly letters she had received from him would have recalled him to her recollection; but she had his memory in her heart, and often thought of Everard, an orphan like herself, born on the same day.

He was her own age, he was lonely and unhappy, and a soft pity mingled in Rosamond's heart with the affection she had retained for him; she would console him, she would fill his solitude. She plied Jonathan with questions about the young man, and all Jonathan's replies showed our dreamer to be poetical and charming: she was eager to see him, without understanding her own impatience. Besides, she told herself, innocent young maiden, that this impatience was quite natural. Everard was her brother, Everard had been nourished on the same milk as she had, Everard had been brought up with her, had been treated exactly the same by her mother; Everard was the son of her benefactress, the son of Albina, whose memory was still fresh at the Holy Linden; Everard, in fact, by birth, and no doubt by education, would be the only one to understand her, the only one with whom she would be able to speak, not only heart to heart, but mind to mind. Her father said that he was simple and good, she did not ask if he were intelligent and well-instructed; that was a matter of course in her dreams; the main thing was, that he was not proud and scornful. As for the distance of rank which separated them, would not their common sorrow efface it? And, I ask you, does one think of such a thing at fifteen?

Rosamond, good and innocent child, dreamed then, without scruple, and in all innocence of him whom she called brother to herself; she longed with all her heart, for the moment when she would hold Everard's hand, and tell him the thousand things she had to say to him.

Must it be added that the hope of seeing her young friend again almost consoled Rosamond in the sorrow which filled her heart at the thought of her grandfather's approaching death? But why should it not be confessed? This selfish forgetfulness of youth, which sees nothing but itself in the world, and cares only to look into the future, is so natural, we were about to say so charming, that we pardon it and even willingly encourage it. Let it ignore the past, care not for yesterday, it is so easy; the kingdom of youth is to-morrow, is the future!

We have spoken of Rosamond's arrival at Eppstein, and of her first interview with Everard. He was not only modest, he was timid. Not only did he show no pride, he was afraid. This sweetness and embarrassment did not come amiss to Rosamond's firm and serious turn of mind; what she had most contempt for was the impertinence of high and mighty airs. But her joy turned to sorrow, when she found that Everard avoided her. Did he not guess? When he sat with his uncle Conrad, hardly looking at her even, she could scarcely restrain her tears. The sympathy which she had at first felt for this tender and melancholy nature was crushed. It had seemed to Rosamond that she could help and sustain Everard, and she suffered in renouncing the sweet rôle of beloved sister, which she could so well have filled. This coldness, which she little deserved, bruised her heart; what could she do to bring back Everard, who seemed to be trying to escape her?

All the time he was away, she was uneasy, preoccupied, though her father surrounded her with attentions, diversions and tenderness. Every morning, whether she would or no, she must mount his horse and visit with him some part of his forest kingdom, and Jonathan was happy when he could make her smile, and draw from her an exclamation of surprise, admiration or joy. He also spoke to her as much as possible of Everard, for he had discovered that this subject of conversation pleased his daughter, and that

when they spoke together of the absentee the colour came into the girl's face, and a light into her eyes.

But, enough of Rosamond. Besides, she has had time to join Everard now, whom we left mute and motionless at the foot of a tree, watching the girl approach like an apparition. Let us return to them; we shall find them together.

CHAPTER XV.

IT was Rosamond who first noticed Everard, and she uttered a cry of surprise at seeing him.

"Ah! my brother Everard!"

She sprang immediately from her horse and ran towards the young man, holding out her hand. Truly, she was in a charming mood! her father had just been telling her how one day Everard had jumped into the Maine in his clothes to save a poor woman's child that had fallen into the water whilst playing on the bank.

"Ah! there you are, Everard! What a long time you have been! We were really beginning to get uneasy. It was too bad of you not to have sent us any news; but here you are, and all the rest is forgotten."

By this time Jonathan had come up to the young people.

"Ah! so our absent friend has returned," said the worthy gamekeeper. "You do not know, Everard, that your father came to Eppstein in your absence and made urgent enquiries about you for several days, but this did not prevent him leaving without having seen you."

"He has gone?" cried Everard.

"Yes, indeed! and this morning when getting out, I must own, he did not speak much about you. Furthermore, he seemed much agitated and in a great hurry to be off. All the same, it is very strange that he did not even mention your name. I was there, for he had sent for me to ask for some very strange information, and I said to him, seeing that he was getting ready to start, 'Will not my lord wait for Mr. Everard's return?' He bid me be silent in a voice of thunder."

"Gone!" repeated Everard, "gone!"

"Yes, but in return, you have come

back," said Rosamond, in her sweet voice.

Everard glanced at her with a curious mingling of tenderness and embarrassment; she lowered her eyes and smiled.

"And since he has come back," continued the father, "faith, I will leave you, if it pleases you, to continue your walk together. For a whole week, Rosamond, while I have held my horse's bridle and been telling you anecdotes, my gun has, naturally, been idle, and the wolves and the poachers have had a fine time. So, Everard, take my place, my good knight, and lead this child by the most flowery paths; you know them better even than I do. Perhaps you have not broken your fast? You can breakfast together. She has brought all that is necessary in the wallet; for dessert you can gather blackberries and wild strawberries, and you can get water from some woodland spring. So now I will leave you, children; I shall see you this evening at dinner. There is no need to tell you to look after your sister. A pleasant walk to you, my friends."

The gamekeeper threw his gun over his shoulder, waved a farewell to the boy and girl, and disappeared into the bushes, whistling a tune.

Rosamond and Everard remained alone, both equally embarrassed; it was Rosamond who first broke the uncomfortable silence.

"Since we are to breakfast, Everard, we will, if you like, choose this turf for our table, and the shade of this great oak as our roof and make a royal repast here on the grass, while the birds will provide us a concert."

No sooner said than done. Everard tied the horse to a tree, while Rosamond spread out the provisions on the grass, and there our two friends made an excellent meal. Everard, however, hardly spoke a syllable, and during the quarter of an hour their breakfast lasted they only exchanged a few insignificant words. But Rosamond, who was looking at him, found his eyes more eloquent than his tongue; she read his thoughts in his looks and understood him as well as if he had spoken. Despite his simple and rough mountain garb, Everard, as we have already said, was very handsome, with that inward beauty, which is as much a matter of expression as of features. The pride and dignity of his

soul pierced through the stiffness of his manners; his steadfast and gentle gaze both charmed and convinced. In spite of his awkwardness and his silence, no one but a simpleton could have taken him for a fool. Now, Rosamond was as shrewd and as penetrating as an innocent young girl could be; besides, there is between honest and pure hearts a secret sympathy which never deceives.

"When we have finished breakfast," said Rosamond, "you shall show me the parts of the wood that you love best; tell me, Everard, do you agree? Will it be a trouble to you to act as my guide and companion?"

"A trouble!" cried Everard.

"Or perhaps," continued Rosamond, "I have disturbed your walk and your solitude? For I see now that you like being alone. I, who pitied you——"

"You pitied me, Rosamond?"

"Yes, and I said to myself: 'Henceforth, at least, he shall have a sister, a friend!' I thought we should understand one another. I recalled former days, and it seemed to me that we might take them up again and continue, in these solitudes which seem as lovely and as peaceful as paradise, the companionship of our childhood. Life ought to be happy and pure. In fact, I dreamed a romance like that of 'Paul and Virginia,'" she added, first laughing at the idea, and then blushing.

"What is 'Paul and Virginia'?" asked Everard.

"A beautiful French book by Bernardin de Saint Pierre. Do you not know it? I will lend it to you. I dreamed a dream of happiness; we would live unknown, but so happy, in the mountains and in the forests, my good father and we two. I thought about it all through the journey. Ask my father, whom I overwhelmed with questions about you, and who answered me in such a way as to encourage my fancies and hopes. However, I arrived, and I saw at the first glance that all my plans were illusions. I held out my hand to you as to a brother, and you greeted me as a stranger. This was not pride, I know; my father has assured me that your heart is as noble as your birth; what is the reason, then, of your coldness and indifference?"

"Oh! it is not coldness," said Everard quickly, "it is not indifference. But

what can you expect! I am but an awkward boy, a savage son of the forests, and your presence awed me like the sight of an angel or a fairy."

"What! Really? Am I so majestic and terrible as all that?" laughed the girl. "Everard," she went on gravely, "let there be no misunderstanding between us; I tell you frankly and in the simplicity of my heart that I am drawn towards you; and it is because I believe you to be loyal and good that I ask you to be my friend and comrade. Since we can be together, why remain apart, alone? Nature, in the midst of which we live, and the sacred memory of the dead, sanctifies our affection in some measure. Let there be no false shame or misunderstanding; here in the presence of our two mothers and of these old oaks, I ask you to be my brother. Will you?"

"Will I? Ah! your soul is great and generous, Rosamond, and I will endeavour not to be unworthy of your friendship. I blush now at having been so cowardly and fearful; but the startled fawn is now tamed, my beautiful saint, and the deer, instead of fleeing from you will come to lick your feet."

"Just as if I were Geneviève de Brabant," said Rosamond, laughingly.

"Who is Geneviève de Brabant?" asked Everard.

"Ah! you take a great load off my mind," went on the girl, without heeding the unlucky question. "So it was from timidity that you avoided meeting me, that you went off with your Uncle Conrad, almost without saying good-bye. . . ."

"And that I was going to leave Eppstein and Germany for ever, and without seeing you again," continued Everard, "when Providence and my mother sent you across my path."

"But now you will stay!" said Rosamond quickly; "now we are going to understand one another and love one another. . . . Well, what is the matter with you? What are you thinking of?"

"I am thinking," went on Everard dreamily, "that it was perhaps not shyness alone that made me wish to go away, to join the Emperor's army. There was my father who . . . but he has gone back to Vienna. There was something else. . . ."

"What was it?" asked Rosamond, anxiously.

A silence followed. Everard, with

fixed eyes, seemed to be gazing into the depths of his thoughts and shook his head with a meditative air.

"Rosamond! Rosamond!" he continued, in a slow voice, "a charm draws me towards you; yet a voice cries to me, 'Fly, fly.' You do not understand me? But you must not judge me like other people. I am a being apart, a strange nature. I do not live the life of others. You see, I begin to speak with confidence. Yes, I have confidence, and . . . I am afraid; I have a presentiment that our friendship will be fatal, and that there is misfortune before us! Instinct warns me that I would do better to go away, and yet I shall not go. There is such a thing as predestination, Rosamond."

"There is a God," said the pious girl.

"Yes, God!" continued Everard, sinking back into his dream. "Ah, well, my God," he went on, clasping his hands as if he were alone. "My God, Thou who dost illumine me with these imperfect rays of light, Thou who givest me this vague desire to depart without giving me courage and strength, I obey Thee, Lord; do with me as Thou wilt. Why should my spirit be troubled since it is Thy hand that guides me? It is my mother perhaps who counsels me to depart; but if fate orders me to stay, what can I do?"

"Oh! yes, stay, stay," said Rosamond with gracious persistence; "we could be so happy together! My father tells me that you have secret nooks in the woods. You shall take me there and you will see, dear Everard, that it is better, much better, to be two than one. Oh! alone without you, parted from my father, who spends his days in the forest, I am sure I should die of ennui, while together we two could talk, exchange ideas and feelings, read together and study together. You appear surprised; you think me an ignorant little girl, no doubt? Well, you are wrong: I have learned a great deal and I could understand you and answer you about nearly everything. I confess that I have not been able to study thoroughly, like you, who are a man, French, Greek, Latin, History, and above all mathematics, which I do not like very much."

"Rosamond! Rosamond! but I do not even know the names of all these grand things."

"What do you say?"

"I say the simple truth. Your mother taught me to read and the Chaplain to write; but they are dead, and I have stayed here alone, deserted, as you know well, having no master but the forest, no education but that of nature! Who should have taught me? No one. I have opened only the Bible, and that seldom. The trees and the birds do not reproach me with my ignorance; I only became aware of it for the first time a month ago, when my uncle came; I am ashamed of it for the first time to-day."

"Is it possible!" cried Rosamond. "Yes, without doubt, I ought to have known, I ought to have thought. . . . Poor boy, I ask your pardon for having perhaps involuntarily wounded you."

"You have not wounded me, Rosamond, but you see plainly that my company would neither give you pleasure nor be of service to you, that I am not on a level with your mind and that my conversation would tire rather than amuse you; you see it is better to leave me alone in my solitude and dulness; you see that I am right and that the best thing that I can do is to go away, to go and fight."

"Everard," said Rosamond, gravely, "you have too lofty a soul to listen to false pride and to obey a paltry susceptibility. Stay, and we can be useful to one another. You are learned at heart, Everard, and the fields, the woods, the sky must have given you good and salutary instruction. You will share it with me, and that will be good for me; I, for my part, since I owe my education to chance, or rather to the protection of Countess Albina, cannot deny myself the pleasure of giving to the son a little of what I owe to the mother. Accept me for master; will you? It would really be delightful."

"No, it is too late, Rosamond, too late."

"Good gracious! Do you think, then, that science is very formidable and difficult? It is very simple, very interesting, Everard; you will find nothing new in it; you will see nations rise like water-springs, genius grow like an oak, revolutions break out like tempests. There are books which will rejoice you like an evening of May; there are epochs which will distress you like a rainy

December day. Languages are not more difficult to decipher than the signs of the sky and wind, and you will recognise God in history as in nature. And then, will you not be proud and happy to come across the annals of your glorious family in the annals of Germany, to find at each step of our Chronicles the name of your ancestors—your own name, the name of Eppstein?"

"Am I an Eppstein?" interrupted Everard, with a melancholy bitterness. "You are wrong, Rosamond; I am a deserted child, denied by his father; that is all. Of what use is it to teach me, why raise me to make me feel my abasement all the more? Rosamond, I know enough for what I have to do here on earth. My mother guides me, it is enough. You do not understand me; if you would enter further into my confidence and into my life I would reveal things which would strike you with astonishment and even with fear. I repeat it, my soul and my fate are strange; God has marked me out for a future which he alone knows, and I cannot escape it. I feel that His will moves me, and since He sees for me, of what avail is human science? My instinct suffices to obey His will, but I should fear my reason; the best thing for me would be to go away, or to remain ignorant, as I am not going?"

We will not repeat all Rosamond's supplications, all Everard's replies, all the strife of enlightened instinct and blind prudence. The part of little mother went marvellously well with the serene character of the schoolgirl of the Holy Linden; she told Everard how delightful their studies would be, beneath the shade of the old trees and in the solitudes of the perfumed glades. Everard hesitated, almost gave way, then drew back.

The whole day was spent in discussion while they walked about and admired the imposing and lovely views of the countryside. Deliberation was thus, it must be owned, intermingled with sport and gay defiance, and it happened again and again that they interrupted a dissertation on the advantages of science to chase a painted butterfly. It must not be forgotten that the eldest of the pair was not yet fifteen. In short, between childish play and solemn sermons, evening fell, and Everard was obliged to conduct his

sister home to the Keeper's house. However, his indecision was not yet overcome, and he still swore that he would set out next day.

He did not tell Rosamond all, he did not tell her that it was a shameful affront received from his father that drove him away thus, and that he could never return to the Castle, from whence this affront banished him. But although he was silent upon this subject, he certainly thought of it, and each time he recalled it he felt the quick blood rush to his face.

It was in this state of irresolution that he returned to Jonathan's house, which that very morning he had promised himself never to see again.

"How long you have been out of doors!" said Jonathan; "I was uneasy. Everard, here is a letter from the Count addressed to me from Frankfort, and which an outrider has just brought in hot haste. Read it; it concerns you."

Everard took the paper with a trembling hand and read. Maximilian wrote to Jonathan that he was about to establish himself permanently at Vienna and that in future he would never be seen at Eppstein.

"Tell this to my son Everard," he added, "and inform him that he may make use of the Castle and a fourth part of its revenues. My steward will go each year to collect the surplus; but tell Everard that he must not leave Eppstein nor attempt to rejoin me. Our two destinies must be separate, and I forbid him to seek to unite them. On this condition, and this only, I leave him free and master of my house during his life. He can do as he pleases, provided he does not come near me. I will not disturb him, but neither must he disturb me. I will not ask him for an account of his actions, nor must he ever ask the reason of mine. Such is my express and formal resolution, and woe to him if he resist!"

When the letter was finished, Everard let his head fall upon his breast; sad and joyful at the same time, he seemed to shrink into himself for a moment.

"Well?" Rosamond asked him anxiously.

"Well, Rosamond," said he, with sparkling eyes, but with a sigh bursting from his breast; "well, God wishes it; I will stay."

CHAPTER XVI.

ABOUT a mile from the hamlet of Eppstein, and two hundred paces from the house of Jonathan the game-keeper, there was a large green lawn on the verge of the forest, where the peasants of the vicinity came together on Sundays. This circle of green was the verdant hall and thick carpet for the country balls, and, near by, a group of century-old lindens served as a rendezvous for the elders and village wiseacres. Between the trees a fountain was to be seen bubbling from the ground, to which the descent was by a flight of moss-grown stone steps.

Around this spring benches were set, and an encircling wall, convenient to lean on when drawing water.

Three years after Jasper's death, one soft, sad morning in September, a young man was seated on the grass at the foot of the largest of the lindens, with a drawing book open upon his knees, sketching the gnarled and knotted old trunk of a tree, which a swarm of bees had chosen for their kingdom. The young man frequently interrupted his work to look in the direction of the lawn. It was, however, a week-day, and not a soul was to be seen there; nor was there a sound to be heard save the ceaseless dripping of the fountain and the song of a thrush hidden in the foliage of the trees.

However, after waiting a quarter of an hour, a girl appeared at the end of the lawn, and the artist rose to go and meet her; but, after walking a few paces, he stopped and watched her without her seeing him.

The young man was Everard, the girl Rosamond.

Everard, always handsome and distinguished-looking, wore his picturesque costume with more elegance and distinction than of yore; he had the same grave, sweet look, but it was sadder and more profound; he had the same high and serious brow, but it bore still more visibly the seal of a tragic fate and an inexplicable secret fatality.

Rosamond, always ravishing and modestly proud, was dressed in a red bodice and black skirt; the pleated edge of her chemisette came up to her sweet face. She carried a pitcher of stone upon her shoulder, and a smaller one in her hand, and was making her way to the fountain.

When he had descended the well-worn steps, Everard left the group of trees and ran to join her.

"Good morning, Everard," she said on seeing him, in a tone which showed she had expected to meet him there.

They sat down together upon the bench.

"Look, Rosamond," said Everard, opening the drawing book, "I have almost finished my sketch, and, in truth, thanks to your good advice yesterday, it is not so bad, I think; I have tried to express the horror which you say was lent to the forests by our great Albert Dürer, whose simple and sublime history you related to me the other day."

"It is really very good," said Rosamond; "only the shadow thrown by this branch might produce a better effect."

And, taking the pencil from his hand, she set the fault right with a few strokes.

"Now, that is magnificent," said Everard, clapping his hands, "and I am twice as proud of my work of art since you have touched it up. You must be as good as you are beautiful, Rosamond, to have so much patience and indulgence with your stupid pupil."

"What a child you are!" said the girl as he kissed her hands softly and looked at her with simple admiration, "is there not a charm about our studies? Are our lessons anything but pleasures? Is my pupil not my companion? And then I should be so proud, Everard, of having restored, or having almost given to the German nobility one of its most historic representatives, a gentleman called by his rank to so high a destiny, but who languished in ignorance and dullness! I have done for you—ah! how proud I feel when I think of it—what your mother would have done, what Count Maximilian ought to have done. And what progress in three years! How quickly you seized hold of everything! How you understood completely what I only half knew! Now, where would all the gilded butterflies of Vienna be beside you?"

"Alas!" returned Everard, sadly, "it is not by science that you have made me happy, sister Rosamond. Of what good is it to enlarge the mind when the life is so narrow? Of what use are wings to a caged eagle? Of what avail a brilliant name and an obscure fate? I never understood my isolation so well until I understood the world, and, if I did not

bless you for your presence, I would do it for your lessons. Since I saw you I have lived; but, since I have been able to think, I have suffered. Some day perhaps, Rosamond, we shall deplore the fatal gift you have given me."

"No," replied Rosamond, "I shall never repent having restored an Eppstein to himself and to his country."

"Ah! I am a renounced, a forgotten Eppstein," said Everard, shaking his head sadly; "I shall never be an illustrious general like my grandfather, Rodolph, whom Frederick feared, nor a profound diplomatist like my maternal grandfather, who taught Kaunitz; I shall be, at most, the hero of some terrible and sombre legend, and, if I am famous some day, it will not be either in camps or colleges, but perchance at peasant vigils."

"Everard, my brother, still these foolish fancies!" interrupted Rosamond.

"Oh! You may well say so, I feel there is something sinister in my fate. Ever since you enabled me to enter into realities I have become aware of the strange life God has ordained for me, side by side with a corpse. By the light of truth which you have let in upon me, I can well perceive that I am, as it were, without the pale of humanity—a shadow, a phantom, perhaps a menace and a vengeance; everything, in fact, except a man."

"Oh! Everard!"

"Ah! You cannot gainsay this. You are before me, Rosamond, but my mother Albina is behind me; you would be a bright future, but she is so formidable a past! But come, let us talk of something else."

There was a pause, full of emotion.

"Have you finished the 'History of the Thirty Years' War'?" said Rosamond.

"Yes, and Wallenstein is a great general, as Schiller is a great poet. My thanks to you, Rosamond, for having introduced me to the study of past times, for having, so to speak, added all these fertile and brilliant lives to mine; thank you for teaching me enthusiasm. Ah! when I speak bitterly to you, forgive me, do not listen to me; I am unjust, I am wicked. But, at heart, I love you as a sister, and I venerate you as much as my mother."

"Everard," said Rosamond, and in

truth her grave voice and serious attitude made her appear like a young mother exhorting her son; "Everard, I know you are good and sweet, but I blame you, indeed, for being sad and discouraged. Why will you believe in fatality and not in Providence? It is wrong. Do not God and your mother watch over you? Only one thing was lacking in you, the education of the mind; I was chosen to bring it to you, and in winter beside the hearth, in summer in your grotto or beside this little fountain, we have talked, read, meditated. You learnt quickly all I knew, and then, reaching beyond my imperfect instruction, you in your turn showed me what I was still ignorant of. Now, whether you remain here in your retreat, or whether you go into the world, at Vienna, at Court, you will take everywhere a clear and highly developed intelligence. Now, you could yourself direct and counsel others. Therefore, I pray you, do not trouble, by your doubts and fears, the joy I felt in thinking that in my feeble way I have helped to make you worthy of the name you bear and of the future which awaits you."

"Well, I will be happy, if you wish it, Rosamond, happy while you are there, as the flowers are happy while the sun shines."

"That is right, Brother!" said Rosamond. "Now let me draw the water which I must take back to the house, and then, if you please, we will finish reading again together the history of the Hohenstaufens."

"I should think it *would* please me!" cried the young man gaily. "Rosamond, I promise not to think of to-morrow, if I can stay with you to-day."

And the two friends pressed each other's hand with a smile full of true affection. Then the girl took the smallest pitcher and bent down to fill it with water. Everard seized the other pitcher, and bent also towards the fresh spring. The sky was blue above their heads, and the two charming faces were reflected in the mirror of the stream.

Surrounded thus by the azure element, they approached each other in the water, and laughed and saluted one another softly.

When they rose, Everard said gaily:

"Let me drink."

Rosamond presented the pitcher to him and he drank. A sculptor who had

caught their graceful attitude would have found it the happiest group possible to imagine.

"We must look like a picture out of the Bible, of Eliezer and Rebecca," said the girl.

She walked slowly up the stone steps to leave the fountain, carrying the small pitcher upon her shoulder. Everard with the other pitcher in his hand, and his drawing-book under his arm, hastened to rejoin her, and both turned their steps towards the Keeper's house.

They looked at each other often as they walked; Everard's eyes were full of admiration and tenderness, but in Rosamond's look there was rather an expression of kind sagacity and goodness than of love.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE description of this one morning will give you an idea of what Everard and Rosamond's pleasant life together had been for three years.

The characters and destinies of the gentle dreamer of the Taunus woods and the grave schoolgirl of the Holy Linden had both developed. Rosamond had taught Everard, Everard had loved Rosamond. Henceforward the solitary wanderer was never alone. He had someone to whom to give his thoughts, to whom to consecrate that part of his heart and life left empty by his mother. All his happiness was to obey Rosamond, what she gave him to do he accomplished without effort: she had sovereign jurisdiction over this wild spirit; all was hers in this rude and devoted nature.

The one thing that Everard kept to himself was his religion for Albina's shade. Rosamond was his confidante in all else; but he spoke with reserve, even to her, of those visions of the night and day. The secret of the apparitions and of the counsels of the dear phantom was only half revealed. Like true love, Everard's filial respect had its modesty, which prevented him from betraying this tomb, closed to all save himself.

From henceforth Everard had a double existence and a double love, and his mother did not seem to him to be vexed by the division. When

Rosamond was there, he worked with her, happy in listening to and understanding her. When she was gone, he plunged into the forest and into his dreams, and it was his mother to whom he called, his mother who came, who recovered her old authority over him, and who spoke to him in the wind or in the breeze, always to instruct and improve him.

But he was silent as to the object and details of these conversations, as a discreet lover who does not speak of his mistress's kisses. The only witnesses were the cold moonbeams or the faint light of the stars, and they were his only confidants; but we must believe that his mother pitied, if she did not blame him, and that if he did not incur her reproaches, he was troubled by her apprehensions and her pity: for he frequently returned from his grotto melancholy and even gloomy, and, when Rosamond questioned him, he would gently refuse to answer her; he would afterwards weep bitterly and speak vaguely of a future he dreaded. On these days her attempts at consolation were vain.

But in all else he was entirely Rosamond's, and yielded every day with greater pleasure to the girl's growing influence.

It must also be admitted that she made use of it with infinite wisdom and sweetness, as if her maternal instincts were, alas, to find no other outlet. She had undertaken with joy, and accomplished with love, the education of Everard's young and uncultivated spirit. With him she re-trod the rough and thankless paths of science; she had taught her pupil, with patience and kindness, all she knew—history, geography, drawing, and music—besides familiarising him with the French and English languages, to say nothing of the national literature. Upon several points he had outstripped her, on others she was his superior; but truly it was a charming and touching sight to see one child teaching another, and the transformation of a rough and ignorant peasant into an elegant and lettered man, achieved by this young girl, was a strange mystery.

However, it would be impossible to describe the events of these three years at Eppstein. Nothing could be more simple than the life led by Rosamond and Everard, an existence barren perhaps

of events, but fertile in ideas. One could describe it in two words, and to spend a day with them was to have known them for three years.

In the morning Everard quitted the Castle where he had permanently taken up his abode, and, after a long prayer at his mother's tomb, he would knock at good Jonathan's door, and while Rosamond, the best and most orderly of house-keepers, arranged and put the house in order, he studied and looked over his lessons of the day before. They all lunched together, simply and gaily. Then followed animated and serious hours of work, spent in the house if the weather was threatening, and when fine in the woods, in the open country and at the spring; and their lessons were none the worse for having been learned beside the cornfields, their reading none the less intelligible for having been accompanied by the songs of birds. If the flowers picked on their way were used to mark the books, the books thus scented were not less profitable to their readers.

The evening was devoted to rest and conversation. In winter they sat by the blazing fireside; in summer on the bench in the porch beneath the honeysuckle and jessamine. In winter they listened to falling rain and snow; in summer they watched the sun set and the stars come out.

Then good old Jonathan or Rosamond had always some marvellous tale or some charming legend to relate. The Game-keeper, in particular, who was the greatest story-teller of the country-side, never came to an end of his recollections, from which, in the purity and sincerity of his heart, he was not always careful as to stories of love and love-making, dangerous perhaps for such young listeners as his, if he had not neutralized the effect by his chaste candour and holy simplicity.

When there were no stories, Rosamond sat down to her harpsichord and played the best pieces of Gluck, Haydn, Mozart, and even Beethoven, who was just beginning at that date to make a sensation. It is impossible to describe the effect which these immortal melodies had upon the mind of Everard—an effect as vague and deep as the sea or the music itself. Whilst Rosamond's nimble fingers ran up and down, the young man's thoughts wandered fast and foolish over the boundless plains of fancy.

We have already related how he believed himself surrounded by an eternal harmony and what celestial voices he heard in the silence at all hours, and he recognized in the sublime inspirations of the masters the scattered notes of his dream concert. Rosamond, too, at these moments appeared to him, as Albina had done before, to be heralded by the sounds of seraphic harps and wrapped, like her, in a veil of melody. He would have willingly adored her at that moment as a Saint, and the voice of Jonathan was necessary to awake him to realities and prevent his thinking himself in paradise.

Rare as events were in his solitary life, the beautiful is really so simple that in certain sonatas or symphonies our attentive dreamer often thought he traced his own humble story. Yes, that bass, so continuous, so majestic, and so grave was indeed the sad and dark background to his existence, the ever-present thought of his dead mother, the dull rumbling menace of an unknown future, whilst the sparkling and lively fantasias, the light arabesques of sound embroidered upon uniform harmonies, recalled his sunny life and Rosamond's smile, the fields and the woods and his studies intermingled with play. Everard smiled and rested, rocked by the caprices of harmony; but suddenly a thundering note brought back, like a bolt from the blue, the terrible foreboding of some sinister catastrophe.

When neither music nor fiction occupied them, Rosamond and Everard read aloud. These readings were the real and the only events of their retreat. Thus one evening Rosamond read "Hamlet." Everard listened in silence to the dark drama, rose without a word when it was finished, and went out bending under the weight of his thoughts.

The following day he confided to Rosamond the impressions which the dreadful epic of doubt had left on his soul. Did there exist a strange conformity, a sort of moral relationship, between himself and the hero of scepticism? Both unceasingly saw a shadow at their side. Both were young, melancholy, weak. Each felt that they had some dreadful deed to do, and that fate had chosen him as its special instrument. What Everard dared not add was that, like Hamlet, he hesitated in face of life, he was afraid to hope or believe, above all

he feared to love; and that in his bitter discouragement he was willing to say to Ophelia, "Get thee to a nunnery."

"There is one point, however," said Everard pensively, "upon which the Prince of Denmark and I, the poor exile, differ: he knew the fearful mission he was charged by destiny to fulfil, whilst I am ignorant of mine. He sees the end toward which he goes, the dagger with which he must strike, and he is appalled. What would happen if he walked, as I do, in darkness towards a crime, if he knew himself an executioner, but a blind one?"

"Everard, what are you saying?" cried Rosamond, terrified.

"Yes, Rosamond, you are afraid of me and pity me, is it not so? But I am not mad, my revelations do not deceive me. Hamlet was the instrument of vengeance; I must be the means of punishment. My mother is sad because of it, and drops continual tears from her wasted eyes. Perhaps I myself may not strike the blow, but God will strike because of me. For that alone, I came into this world, Rosamond. There are men who are great, who do great deeds, and who change the face of the world. I am not destined for any such exploits. Alas! I am not free like my fellow-men, I shall only serve as an instrument in the hands of the Lord or of the devil, to punish some one. Like a stone thrown down upon the road side, my only use is to cast a soul into hell. To that my life tends, the life you strive to make intelligent and useful, Rosamond. Ah! you are wrong! Great God! where is the use of it all? Let them illuminate palaces, but the lamp in the dungeon serves only to show up misery."

Such were, at times, the bitter complaints of this desolate soul, and Rosamond's smile hardly availed to bring back hope and resignation to it. The generous girl succeeded, however, by dint of courage and goodness. She counteracted the effects of "Hamlet" with the "Imitation of Christ," and "Werther" with the "Life of Saint Theresa."

Who would prevail in this conflict between love and destiny? Which would prove justified—the hopes of Rosamond or the fears of Albina, the living or the dead? God alone could tell.

You now know the touching and terrifying, the childish or lugubrious,

details of these three years in the life of Everard and Rosamond. Let us add that if we have sometimes made use of the word love, the two children themselves had never pronounced it. Everard was too sad, Rosamond too pure for that; they loved each other without knowing it, without owning it to themselves. A revelation from without might possibly enlighten them; certainly nothing in themselves would acquaint them with it.

So they continued living innocently and alone beneath the blue sky, in their rustic dwelling in the shade of the great trees, always and everywhere together, hand in hand, their two heads touching as they read from the same book. And to see them thus, posed so gracefully yet unaffectedly, you might well have taken them for some antique marble group.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE worthy Jonathan had a candid and honest heart, but his not very clear-sighted intelligence was incapable of guessing a hidden passion, or foreseeing and arresting its progress. Everard and Rosamond, although now grown up, still seemed children to him. He was not, perhaps, quite wrong, and their innocence, as we have seen, justified his blindness. Had they really been brother and sister, according to the affectionate names they gave each other, a greater purity could not have existed in their conversation and in their diversions. Had they been asked if they loved each other, they would have answered, with all frankness, yes; but, as in the case of Paolo and Francesca, an accident, a word, would have sufficed to reveal to them what was in their hearts.

This accident was sent by Providence, at the hour appointed to precipitate the end of this simple story. One day the Gamekeeper found a letter awaiting him at home. It was from Conrad. The Emperor's companion, of whom no news had been heard at Eppstein for three years, spoke little of himself to the inhabitants of the cottage, and only sent them a remembrance. However, he hoped to surprise them some morning

before long; in his glorious career through Europe, he thought continually of the poor little family sheltered in a fold of the Taunus; he said kind words to them all. They were the only relations he had now in the world. When bivouacking, and when the trumpets called to battle, recollections of them passed before his mind. Did they, on their part, ever think of the absent one? Did Jonathan ever name him at eventide? Did the children pray for him? His young host and companion, Everard, who, after having done the honours of Eppstein, had accompanied him to Mayence, was he still shy, solitary, and a dreamer? or had he, like Racine's Hippolyte, been tamed at last?

All this Conrad asked.

"Oh, yes, indeed! he has remained in our hearts and in our memory," cried Jonathan, quite touched. "Worthy Conrad; how good and beautiful of him not to have forgotten us. To table, and let us drink his health, my children."

Good old Jonathan, indeed, drank several bumpers more than usual to the memory of Conrad, and after having emptied his Sunday goblet two or three times, he felt his heart expand and his tongue loosened.

It was the end of December. Evening had fallen during the repast. Great flakes of snow fell outside; but in the cottage a good fire blazed, and, as we know, when the wind whistles outside in winter, the fireside disposes one to talk almost as much as wine does.

When the meal was finished and the table pushed aside, Jonathan folded his hands and lay back in a great leathern armchair; the children sat down, side by side, opposite him, on a bench against the foot of the bed, and chatted to him.

Conrad was, of course, the subject of the conversation. Jonathan was almost the same age as his brother-in-law, and had known him when quite a child; he spoke of his solitary walks, of his serious tastes, and little by little he told them how he, a Count of Eppstein—that is to say, one of the greatest lords in Germany—had become a guest in the house of old Jasper the gamekeeper and the lover of Naomi, the peasant girl.

It was a story too closely resembling theirs for Everard and Rosamond not to listen to Jonathan with the greatest attention. The room was only lighted

by the fire, so that the Gamekeeper, seated luxuriously under the high chimney piece, alone was in the circle of light; the two young people sitting in a corner remained hidden in the shadow. Without knowing why, they held their breath and felt moved as if at the approach of some great event.

"Do you know," said Jonathan, slyly, "how and when I began to perceive that my lord Conrad loved Naomi? It was by remarking how chance always led to their meeting each other. Naomi had a little white goat that she herself took to browse on the outskirts of the wood. Well, however impossible it may seem, whatever the hour she chose or whatever the road she took, one was always sure to find my lord Conrad near by, walking, apparently quite aimlessly, with a gun or a book in his hand. He casually accosted Naomi, and the conversation was begun. If it was not the goat, it was a visit; if not a visit, it was the service on Sunday that took Naomi out of doors, and it was always love that drew Conrad after her; and at that time, when I was young, like them, there was no great merit in discovering that after all these walks were always virtually assignations."

Everard and Rosamond looked at each other with a sudden movement, although the darkness prevented their seeing each other with their bodily eyes. For they also, drawn by an invisible magnet, had many times found themselves on the same road without explaining to themselves how it happened; they had given each other no warning, they believed themselves alone, they were thinking of each other, when suddenly, at the turn of a path, on jumping a hedge, they met full of joy, but surprised at the same time at this secret-sympathy which brought them together without their will having any part in it.

"I also remember," continued Jonathan, "a certain day when Father Jasper's dog killed Naomi's pet bird with one snap of his teeth. The child began to weep bitter tears; she dearly loved this little warbler that flew about the forest like a wild bird, and at its young mistress' first call would return to sing its melodious song perched on her finger. Conrad, without a word, disappeared into the copse; he returned in the evening, his clothes in rags and his hands bleeding; he had been into the depths of a thicket,

where my dog had not penetrated, to find a nest of singing birds, which he brought back to the grieving Naomi. It was five birds for one, the future for the present. The child's regrets were soon changed to joy; but this exploit of Conrad's was so little in keeping with his character that really, if Jasper had been less blind——"

Rosamond and Everard did not hear the end of the sentence. Their hands had met and clasped, for Rosamond had remembered at that moment a surprise that her brother Everard, on his part, had prepared for her.

One day she had drawn him the exact plan, upon a scrap of paper, of a little garden which she had formerly cultivated at the Convent, and that she regretted very much; it was a garden ten feet square at the least, and contained a white rose tree, a gooseberry bush, an abundance of strawberries, and an innumerable quantity of flowers in their season. Next day, when walking in Jonathan's garden, Rosamond gave a cry of joy and surprise. A little plot exactly like the one she had left at the Holy Linden bloomed in a charming corner. Raising her head, she perceived Everard near her, watching her astonishment. She was all the more delighted at this kindness because it was the first time Everard had touched a spade or rake.

Now, it must be admitted that the story of the bird had much in common with the story of the little garden, and the two children were delighted and confused by it. Rosamond pressed Everard's hand, as if to thank him again for the pleasure he had given her that day. Their burning hands remained joined; carried away into another existence, they imagined they were listening to a dream which Jonathan related to them, returning almost in spite of himself to the stirring memories of youth.

"Theirs were truly noble hearts," he continued. "They were pure as angels, and it was not their fault, after all, if they were young and beautiful and loved each other. I was about their age, and was wooing my good Wilhelmina, and understood them better than they understood themselves. Naomi happened to fall ill, not dangerously, thank God! but the doctor said she must not go out for several days, or even leave her room. Conrad had no need for anxiety, only he

was lonely. He fell into a deep melancholy, out of which nothing could rouse him. I sometimes took Jasper's place as gamekeeper; well, upon all my excursions I met this poor Conrad, so broken-hearted, so afflicted, I felt sorry for him. He concealed his tears when he perceived me, and would not admit his grief to anyone, not even to himself. So when I questioned him with all the reserve that his rank inspired, and at the same time all the paternal tenderness that I felt for him, he said, 'What do you mean, my good Jonathan? I do not know what is the matter with me. I cannot account to myself for the singular uneasiness I feel. Everything offends me, everything irritates me without reason.' That is what he said to me, and I pretended to believe him; but the truth is, I knew perfectly well the cause of this sadness, and could have told him what it was, if he did not know himself; for I, too, loved Wilhelmina as he loved Naomi, and had been separated from her."

Had the shadow in the shelter of which they sat not been so deep, Everard and Rosamond, who already endured much, would have suffered still more, for at the father's words their colour came and went twenty times a minute. A month ago, in fact, Rosamond had spent a few days at Spires with a cousin of her father's, and on her return Everard had told her how intolerably dull the long days had been without her, assuring her that she had carried away his soul and that he had wept for hours together, without knowing why.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" they both said to themselves, "when one is continually attracted by and always returns to another, when one would give one's happiness and one's life to satisfy another's wish, when one can live and breathe only in the presence of another, does that mean love? Good heaven, then is the word of the enigma that we looked for 'love'?"

And a whole unknown world was revealed to the two astonished and distracted children. They were hot, yet shivered at the same time. Their bodies were touching, their hands still clasped; they would have heard the beating of their hearts, had they been able to listen to anything save their tumultuous thoughts.

Meantime the night without had be-

come quiet and serene. The wind that had lashed the cottage had ceased to blow. The moon shone in a cloudless sky and sent some scattered rays through the cracks of the shutters. The forest appeared to sleep. The breathless silence surrounding Rosamond and Everard began at last to frighten them.

"And how did Conrad and Naomi understand each other at last?" asked Everard, in a voice that proved to Rosamond by its trembling that the young man was not less agitated than she was.

"They understood each other without words," said old Jonathan. "Lovers have no need of words. But when I say lovers, I am wrong. One ought not to apply to some people the same words one would use for everyone. What I say is true; they were so pure and so holy that they seemed to me to be married even when they were not, and I always believed God had united them before the priest. And then they suffered so much afterwards that pain and death have still more purified all these sacred recollections; the story of their innocent and beautiful affection inspired me with as much reverence as the life of the Saints and Martyrs, and when I think of it, it is a second religion to me. I revered them perhaps even more than I loved them, and that is saying a good deal. They knew that I was devoted to them and they looked upon me as one of the family and made a confidante of me. Oh! with what tenderness and sweetness they spoke to me of each other! And Naomi told her sister Wilhelmina, who, after she became my wife, told me, that one day they were alone, seated on the same bench hand in hand. I believe they were reading, but in reality the only book they read was that of their hearts—so well that, without knowing how, their pure breath mingled, their soft lips approached each other, and, upon my word, they thus said, without a word, what they had both known for long, that they loved each other."

While Jonathan spoke thus in the simplicity of his heart and the purity of his thoughts, Everard and Rosamond, their hands clasped, their souls mingling, pressed close to each other, intoxicated, breathless, hidden by the darkness. No one saw them, neither did they see each other. The young man's arm was round the trembling girl's waist, and Rosamond

herself, drawn on by an irresistible fascination, had neither strength nor desire to resist; their hair at this moment touched, their breath mingled, their lips approached tremblingly, their mouths met, but the kiss, their first happiness, lasted but an instant. Frightened at themselves, they drew back hastily, and then as if he had only waited for this moment,

"Come, come, children," said the Forester, "the fire is out, let us separate. It is time for you, Count, to return to the Castle, and for you, Rosamond, to go to your chamber."

The Forester's voice awoke the two children from their ecstasy and brought them suddenly down from paradise to earth.

All three rose. Everard and Rosamond were so dizzy and trembled so that they were obliged to lean upon each other. After a few words and a clasp of their hands they separated, Jonathan tranquil and dreaming of the past, Rosamond and Everard agitated and thinking of the future.

How wildly the hearts of the two poor innocent things beat. How quickly their breath came and went, as if they had been running long and fast! And, in truth, had they not rapidly travelled over a long road on that steep slope of youth called love.

And that is how Everard and Rosamond learned what was passing in their souls. Fate seemed to wish to make use of the unfinished sketch of the loves of Conrad and Naomi to continue the same story in their nephew. To what dreadful catastrophe was this story destined?

As we have said, only God knew!

CHAPTER XIX.

THE following day, the two lovers, for henceforth we may give them that name, met for the morning lesson in the moss-carpeted grotto, warm even in winter. Everard's heart and eyes were full of joy; Rosamond appeared more thoughtful and serious than ever.

Needless to say, neither of them had slept.

The young man, after the first moment of surprise, had passed the night in a

kind of delirious rapture. Loved! He was loved! And he himself, he too, loved! What had filled the thoughts and lives of both, the trouble, the languor, the involuntary longing, was this what men call love? A new existence was revealed to Everard; a thousand bright, sweet recollections were understood in a new light, a thousand bright hopes shone in the future. Oh! now he would never be sad again. If his fate must be dark, what did it matter? Was there not one near him with whom to take refuge?

To Rosamond, her wakeful night had been full of agony and fears; not that her courageous soul repented having given way to irresistible temptation, but she could not forgive herself for having brought fresh misfortune upon Everard, for having given Maximilian's injustice a new excuse for severity. Ought she thus to repay her benefactress Albina for all her kindness? For her love, though pure in the eyes of God, was reprehensible in those of the world, and the example of Conrad and Naomi, that had fascinated Rosamond the evening before, frightened her now. Where had their holy passion led them? To exile, to despair, to death. And yet Count Rodolph did not hate his son as Count Maximilian hated Everard, and Naomi did not owe her education, that life of the soul, to Conrad.

This was why Rosamond, on arriving at the grotto, was sad, whilst Everard was full of joy.

As soon as the young man perceived Rosamond, for whom he had long been waiting, trembling with impatience, he ran to meet her.

"Oh!" cried he, "Rosamond, is that you? Oh! words fail me; but listen, let me speak one single word, but one which contains the whole world. I love you! And another that contains heaven: Rosamond, you love me!"

And the young man fell on his knees before her, his hands clasped and gazing at her with rapture.

"Everard, my friend, my brother," said Rosamond, with an accent and a gesture full of dignity, which never left her, "Everard, get up and let us talk like brother and sister, according to our custom. I will never retract the tacit avowal which escaped me; yes, I love you as you love me, Everard."

"Angels in heaven! you hear her!" cried the impetuous lad.

"Yes," continued the pensive Rosamond, "yes, I repeat it, for these words have I know not what charm in which the soul delights. I love you as Naomi loved Conrad; but think of Conrad and think of Naomi. I give you my life, but alas! I cannot accept yours. You sometimes say that you perceive a great misfortune on your horizon; if this misfortune should be due to me, ah, Everard! it would kill me. I do not mind being unhappy myself, but to suffer in you would be beyond my strength, I warn you. It would be best therefore to forget the dangerous dream that we had last evening."

"I would forget my life then," answered Everard, "for that dream is my breath, my being, my existence; that dream is myself. Henceforth, nothing can separate us, Rosamond, and you are mine, as I am yours."

"Who speaks of separating us?" said Rosamond, her soul steadfast, but her ignorant heart obeying unhesitatingly the subtle counsels of an imperious passion. "We can remain together, Everard, but on condition that we live as in the past, that we both efface that feverish evening from our memories, that we return to the calm, the holiness of our former relations; on condition, Everard, that my brother is my safeguard and support, and these two saints, our mothers, remain always with us. If you wish it to be thus, we shall still have many happy days, for I confess that it would be too much for me to renounce our pleasant intimacy all at once. But, if we do our duty with courage and resignation, God will love and sustain us, and we must remember that the future is in His hands."

"The future! That's it!" said Everard with bitterness. "Let us put off our happiness, as one puts off a creditor one is unable to pay."

"Everard, my friend, my brother!" said Rosamond, looking sadly at Everard. "Why this irony and injustice? Are the pure and peaceful joys which sufficed yesterday to be despised to-day? Do you not wish your friend and sister to be sacred to you, honoured by all?"

"Yes, Rosamond, yes, the whole world must honour and venerate you, and for that very reason we must not restrict ourselves for the future to uncertain words. Listen! my surrender which God and my mother know, has caused

me so many tears, pleases me and helps me to-day. My father decided that, on condition he should be nothing more to me, I should be nothing more to him; therefore I am free, and master of my life. Well then, my life is yours; it is not I who give it you, but God; because in making me an orphan, he has given me the right of disposing of it. Accept it, Rosamond: only accept it, I implore you; be my wife."

"Alas! alas! Everard, that is what Conrad must have said to Naomi. . . . And Naomi . . . remember, Everard. . . ."

"Naomi died on the scaffold, did she not? . . . But it is no secret marriage I propose, Rosamond: no, it is a marriage in the full light of day, in the Chapel of Eppstein, a marriage recognised by men and by God, a marriage that I shall not hide even from my father. The books which you have made known to me have taught me a little of the world, and I think I can almost guess Count Maximilian's designs and sentiments. If I tried to raise myself, to come to the front, if I sought my share in his glory and the renown of his name, if I claimed my place in the sunshine of the Imperial favour, he would curse and crush me; but, let me bury myself in obscurity, close against myself the doors of the Court and of fame; let me according to his narrow ideas, lower myself to make a misalliance. That will not offend him, I promise you; far from deterring me he would urge me on if he could. I am in the way of his ambition and his vanity, and he will be happy, believe me, Rosamond, to be relieved of me by my own act. From the moment I shall have placed this barrier between us, when he will no longer have to give anyone an account of me that would make him blush, from the moment he can blame me and pity himself, he will have the best of it, and will be secretly pleased with me for having given it to him. He can then think tranquilly of his own fortune in the present, and of that of my elder brother in the future. From that moment Albrecht will be his only son. I can then no longer come, an unwelcome third, to throw myself in the way of their sublime projects! I shall be a rebellious child, who, like Conrad of Eppstein, will have married a simple peasant, and whom his father will have justly renounced. Like

Conrad, I shall be forgotten by the world to-day and to-morrow; but, unlike Conrad, we shall not be obliged to fly, nothing forces us to change our life or to shift the scene of our happiness. The Count of Eppstein lives at Vienna, and according to the letter he wrote me, he will never move from there; and we can remain here, Rosamond, in your father's house, alone and ignored, that is to say calm and happy. Come, Rosamond, come, you may very well consent; it is not the rich heir of Eppstein who offers you his hand! it is a poor outlaw, very poor, very miserable, and very obscure, to whom you, generous girl, bring the joy of your beauty, the treasure of your love. See, does not the devotion which I exact from you make you smile? Will our union not be paradise, Rosamond; have you the courage to refuse that paradise when it is I, Everard, your brother and your friend, who offer it to you?"

"Everard, Everard, do not tempt me," said Rosamond, in a troubled voice, but firmly repulsing the young man; "yes, it is heaven that you offer me, but we are on earth and you are a child and a madman to hope for perfect happiness; as you were a blasphemer and impious when, without hesitation, you foretold a future of misery. Alas! poor dreamer that you are, do you not know that the best thing here below is not to dream but to wait?"

"Rosamond, Rosamond," cried Everard, "do not cast me back into the agony of my fate. That misfortune which my instinct foresees, it seems to me you will have the power to turn aside, and like a good fairy to annihilate all my doubts by a sign. If, on the contrary, you repulse me, I shall think that you are afraid to share the dowry of suffering that fate has in store for me."

"Oh! do not say that, do not believe that," returned Rosamond quickly; "I am only afraid of provoking your troubles; but to associate myself with them, I swear to you, would be a real joy."

"Well, it is understood then, you are mine, Rosamond, you are my wife; after that, let trouble come, let death come! One day of paradise with you on earth, and then, what matter if it continue here below or in heaven above?"

And the young man spoke with so much force and so much eloquence, he had so much fire in him, that Rosamond felt fascinated and carried away as on the

previous day. She had sunk down upon a boulder, he found himself, as if by enchantment, at her knees. She looked vaguely around her, at the grotto, the mossy seats, the place that was witness of so many calm and delicious hours spent together. In her heart she felt the happiness of angels and yielded, the immaculate and noble child, to the perilous emotions, the strange spell of this happiness; the very silence that surrounded them was full of trouble and seduction.

It was just the liveliness and the novelty of these emotions that roused the proud and chaste virgin. Passing her hand over her fair forehead to efface the very reflections of the thoughts sent up from her heart, she rose suddenly and ordered Everard, by a firm gesture to do the same. Then, standing before her vanquished lover, she said to him with a calmness full of strength and decision:

"Brother, no weakness or dangerous dreams! We ought not, like headstrong children, to pledge—I will not say our souls (alas! our souls have long been pledged), but our lives, in a minute without reflection. Courage, brother, and coolness, and let us look quietly at the future which God gives us, at the path we must follow."

"Ah, you reflect!" cried Everard, "therefore you do not love me."

"I love you in holiness, Everard, God knows it, and there is something sweet and intoxicating in my heart when I think of you, but there is something proud too, and, so to say, maternal."

"You do not love me, you do not love me," repeated Everard.

"Listen, Everard," answered the strong-hearted, sincere Rosamond, "it seems to me, indeed, that if I love you, it is not with a love like your own. I love you according to my nature, probably; nevertheless, I can prove to you one thing; for having got over my agitation last night, I thought much and took the measure of my soul. So listen; I promise you and I swear it, Everard, that if I am not yours I shall belong to no one in this world but God, and that the idea of uniting my destiny to another but you, Everard, is insupportable! If that could console you and calm you a little, I should be very happy."

"It rejoices me to-day, Rosamond, but is it enough for the future?"

"In the future, as now, my life is

yours, Everard; but believe me, do not let us remove the sanction of suffering and of time from our love; let us keep the right of unhappiness. I imagine that if we accept our joy without submitting ourselves to any proof, fate will be angry; besides, I have been taught to give God a share in all. What do I ask of you? Patience. I am wrong, perhaps, to leave you a chimerical hope, and to be only partly reasonable, and that only for the present; but although you say I do not love you, the effort is beyond my courage, and I cannot renounce all the happiness of which I have had a glimpse. . . . Forgive me, God! Oh! my mother, oh! Albina, forgive me!"

"Oh! Rosamond, my mother not only forgives you, but thanks you for her son, for you are going to make my life, that was dark and sad, beautiful and bright. And here, Rosamond, in her name—and may that reverent name sanctify my action—in her name accept this ring which she wore as a girl; take it for the love of herself and me, and since you deign not to close the future to me, may this token betroth you to me, my beloved, my adored one!"

"Everard, Everard, you wish it?"

"I beg and implore," said Everard.

"Listen, then, to my conditions," continued Rosamond.

"Oh! I am listening, I am listening."

"First of all, if I engage myself to you, and I do it with all my heart, I intend that you shall remain free, entirely free."

"Ah! Rosamond!"

"I wish it, Everard; further, whilst keeping the memory of this solemn morning in our souls, we will never speak of it again; we will become once more what we were yesterday, brother and sister; and we will take up our lessons and our peaceful intercourse again. Never let the word love be spoken between us; and thus we will wait, calm and confident, for the changes of time and Providence."

"But, great heaven! is this painful trial to have no end?"

"In two years, on the day when we shall both be twenty, Everard, you shall declare your intention to your father, and we shall see."

"Two years! In two years?"

"Yes, brother. Do you accept my express and irrevocable wish?"

"I resign myself, Rosamond."

"Then put your ring on my finger, Everard. Thank you. From this day I am your betrothed, my heart; but from this moment I become again your sister, in words."

"Dear Rosamond."

"Now show me the end of your translation of 'Hamlet,' Everard."

It will readily be understood that in spite of the heroic determination of the young people, that day's lesson was short and troubled, with many distractions. Nevertheless, they remained firm, and when they parted, had been faithful to their promise and to themselves.

CHAPTER XX.

ROSAMOND was happy with a peaceful joy; she believed, poor child, that in gaining time she had gained everything, and because she had compromised between love and duty, because she had compounded with her passion whilst satisfying her conscience, she was pleased with herself and told herself that God and Albina must be pleased too.

"Two years, — such a long, long time!" she repeated; "between now and then, Everard, alas! will most likely have ceased to love me. Still, I shall have saved him all remorse, and in the meantime I can keep him near me. . . . But heaven is my witness, that I am quite convinced he will love me no more."

As for Everard, he left Rosamond, intoxicated with love and wild with joy.

"Two years,—it is such a short time," said he, "especially as I shall be here all the time; I shall make use of these two years of probation to convince her of my love and tenderness. I do not believe I am mistaken about my father's feelings. I will prove him, however; I will try—God will pardon me the deception—to alarm him about my future projects and make him believe in my ambition. He will then be happy in finding, instead of legitimate demands which would alarm him, a love which will reassure him; he will let me do as I wish, heaping reproaches upon me the while, and Rosamond, who is too proud to accept me while I am noble and powerful, is too

devoted to turn from me when lonely and abandoned. Yes, that is it, to-day I will write to my father and alarm him with a few vague sentences. Let me read over first, for my guidance, the note he once wrote to Jonathan, in which he renounces all authority over me if I will give up my rights."

Everard had carefully put this note away in his room at the Castle. With bowed head he made his way towards the high towers of the family mansion, composing as he went the terms of the letter he intended to write to the Count. He had almost finished it in his mind when he reached the gates of the Castle.

"Yes, that is the way to take him," said he, "that is the string to harp upon; my success is almost certain, and I must do it by letter, since my father has sworn never to come back to Eppstein."

While he thus spoke, Everard, with joyful heart, crossed the threshold of the great door, and, raising his head, he perceived Count Maximilian standing before him, proud and gloomy, in deep mourning. A shudder ran simultaneously through the veins of father and son alike.

Count Maximilian of Eppstein belonged to that crooked and crafty race in politics that looks upon a straight line as the longest way from one point to another. A stranger observing the attitude and the accent that he assumed in receiving Everard would have had a presentiment that the wily diplomatist, amidst the thousand subterfuges and circumlocutions of his language, had a hidden end of which he never lost sight; one could see that he, so artful and adroit, wished to sound his son before pronouncing some mysterious words, which he kept upon his lips and controlled as a dramatic author controls his *dénouement*.

"My Lord of Eppstein!" murmured Everard at last, stupefied.

"Say your father, Everard, and come and kiss me, my son," answered the Count.

Everard hesitated.

"I was in a hurry to see you again," said Maximilian, "and it is to see you that I have come from Vienna in four days."

"To see me, sir?" stammered Everard; "you return to see me?"

"Remember, my son, it is three years

since I saw you, three years that I have been kept away from you at Vienna by the hateful cares of politics. But allow me to compliment you, Everard; I left a child, and I find a man. You have a manly and charming bearing which delights me, and in finding you so different to what you were, my fatherly heart is filled with happiness, with pride and with joy."

"My Lord," said Everard, "if I could believe you sincere, you would make me very proud and happy."

Everard could not get over his surprise; was this really Count Maximilian, who was formerly so hard and cruel, and who now spoke to him with sweetness and kindness? But in spite of the candour of his nature, Everard, warned by the instinct of love, suspected a trap and was on his guard. The Count, on his side, read these impressions and thoughts on Everard's face.

It was a singular spectacle, this interview after three years of absence, this father and son suspecting while embracing each other, acting to each other with carefully calculated skill, with a thousand protestations, and scrutinising each other's looks and movements like gamblers or duellists, with cards or rapiers in their hands, in the midst of their paternal and filial speeches.

"Yes, Everard," continued the Count, in the same quiet tone, and with the same enquiring look, "you cannot imagine with what satisfaction I approached Eppstein, and what a glad day it is to me to see a son that I had somewhat misunderstood, and perhaps neglected too much; but who will forgive me this apparent neglect, I hope, on taking into consideration the troubles by which I am overwhelmed. In your isolation, which I now bitterly deplore, Everard, the science of books and knowledge of the world would not have reached you; but, with a nature as generous as yours certainly is, education never comes too late. Here is the learned Doctor Blazius, whom I will introduce to you, and whom I have brought from Vienna to see what you know and educate you to the necessary extent."

At this moment Everard saw advancing through a door of the hall a tall man, meagre and dark. This man, when his name was pronounced, bowed deeply to Everard, and mumbled some words of

which Everard only made out "my lord" and "devotion."

"That is it," thought Everard, "and the respect of my professor, like the caresses of my father, enlightens me; they wish to know whether I have by chance become dangerous, or whether I have indeed remained the ignorant and inoffensive child of former days. The moment has come to instil a few fears into their suspicious hearts, and to show them that I can, if needs be, understand and see through these plans."

"Father," answered the young man, bowing, "I am very grateful to you, as well to this gentleman, for wishing to bring to a poor recluse that science of which I am all the more greedy, in that so far I have been able to gather so small a portion of it."

"Alas!" replied Maximilian, "it is more of a reproach to me than to you; but all can still be repaired. Is that not so, Doctor Blazius?"

"Without any doubt, my lord, without any doubt," answered the Professor; "and I would a thousand times rather address myself to a new mind, like a clean slate or a clean sheet of paper upon which no sign has yet been traced, than to an intelligence falsified by erroneous doctrines and principles. We shall have everything to do, but nothing to undo, and that is a great deal gained."

"I thank you for hoping," said the Count.

"And I for not despairing," said Everard, whose firm and loyal spirit was indignant at the comedy which he thought he was witnessing, and who took a singular and bitter pleasure in mingling his irony with their falsity.

"We are going to take everything from the beginning, and I congratulate myself on it," replied the doctor—"history, languages, sciences, and philosophy."

"So as not to lose time," said Everard, observing the effect of his words on his father's face. "We should do well, my dear Professor, to leave the results, of which I believe I am in possession, and to go back at once to the principles. Thus, to take history: I do not believe that you will have much to teach me upon its facts; but I shall be pleased to talk to a man as enlightened as you are upon the philosophy contained in its events. Are you, like myself, for Herder against Bossuet, Doctor?"

The Count and the doctor looked at each other in astonishment.

"As for languages," said Everard, "I know French and English well enough to translate Molière and Shakespeare at sight; but if you will be so kind as to lead me deeper into the thoughts of these mighty geniuses, and study the spirit after the letter with me, I promise you will find in me, doctor, if not a very intelligent pupil, at least one who is very attentive and full of zeal."

Maximilian and Blazius could not get over their surprise.

"Everard," cried the Count, "who could have made you so learned in your solitude?"

"My solitude itself," said Everard, who felt that here more than anywhere he must be extra prudent. "Yes, I carried the books from the library into the woods—grammars, chronicles, treatises, mathematics. I did not leave them till I understood them; while I fertilised my readings by reflection. It gave me much trouble, of course; but, by dint of patience and courage, I triumphed over difficulties, and I had the pleasure of seeing one day, on putting my hand on the syllabus of the knowledge necessary for the Government schools, that I could present myself with confidence at the examination for the military schools, as well as those of the Universities; and that, even if I followed you to Court, my father, far from making you blush for me, I should perhaps do you honour."

"Is it possible?" cried the Count; "but this is a miracle, Doctor, a real miracle! Question him, for I cannot believe it. Let us go in immediately, Doctor. I am in a hurry to be reassured. And you, Everard, you, my dear son, come, come!"

And the Count carried Everard off into the dining-room, which lay on their way.

There the doctor examined his so-called pupil; but he soon saw that it would be wiser not to go too far with the young scholar, for on many subjects the apprentice was, if not more learned, at least better instructed than the master. The really remarkable aptitude of Everard had, in truth, upon many points overtaken Rosamond's rather superficial knowledge, and it amused him, in spite of his habitual modesty, to astonish the classical pedantry of Doctor Blazius with his assurance.

"It is a miracle," said the astonished Professor, finally, "a miracle that heaven owes you, Count, not, indeed, out of pity, but as a consolation."

"Therefore," replied Maximilian, "it has given me so much joy, that I had, for an instant, almost forgotten the mourning of my spirit and of my garments. Alas! yes, my dear Everard, learn the sad news that I did not wish to announce until I knew whether you were worthy of your ancestors and of yourself. Your elder brother, my poor Albrecht—"

"Well?" said Everard.

"He is dead, Everard—killed as by a thunderbolt, in three days, by brain fever, at twenty-one, when such a fair future was before him, prepared by my care and by his talent. For poor young man, he was so clever already, had a mind so full of resources, he knew so well how to stand on that slippery ground, a Court; he got so cleverly out of the most complicated intrigues; he unmasked, at a glance, the ruses of our enemies, and returned blow for blow so adroitly! And God has taken him from me, Everard, do you understand? But He has struck me with one hand only, for He has given me another son as worthy as Albrecht was of my affection and the favour of his Imperial Majesty. Your brother will live in you, my child; you are now the eldest and only heir of Eppstein, and you are aware to what high honour that pledges you. A new life is commencing for you; let us forget the past and see only the future, shall we? Reckon confidently henceforward on all the tenderness and all the protection your father can bestow. I have made projects by which you shall regain lost ground and lost time; set your mind at rest, my son, set your mind at rest!"

Everard turned pale, and felt his knees tremble beneath him. Instantly he had seen what a change the event his father announced would bring into his life; however, as, in spite of this inward struggle, his face remained impassive, the Count continued:

"Everard, from this day you are an officer in the Austrian service. Here is your commission; and that is not all."

The Count went towards a chair upon which lay a sword, and presented the weapon to his son.

"And here is your sword," he went on. "I ought not to have given you either the

one or the other for six months: but as you really merit them from the present moment, receive them from my hands. And now, Everard, believe me, the favour of the Emperor will not end there. But we will speak of all this another time; for the present the recollections that the sight of you have awakened in me, the memory of my dear Albrecht, awakened by my regrets, the happiness I feel in seeing you just such as I could have wished you; all these emotions, pleasant or painful, have exhausted me. I will leave you to talk to Doctor Blazius. Before the end of the day I will see you again, my dear Everard; I will tell you of great designs in which I wish you to take part, and which you will, I am sure, understand. Be happy in the meantime and dream bright dreams, my child; your fondest dreams will never surpass the destiny which awaits you at the Court of Vienna, whither you will follow me in a few days."

Then the Count went away, after embracing Everard, who was quite crushed by the suddenness of the blow, and making a patronising sign to the doctor, who bowed to the ground.

"In a few days to the Court of Vienna!" repeated Everard, dumb-founded, looking sadly at his commission and his sword, "in a few days—Oh! God! God! What will she say when she knows of this?"

And he fled from the Castle, in spite of the cries of Doctor Blazius, who, not having the right to follow him, cried:

"My lord of Eppstein, do not forget that the dinner is in an hour, and the Count, your father, expects you."

Everard made one bound only from the Castle to the cottage. He found Rosamond walking in the garden that he had arranged for her. Pale and breathless, he suddenly appeared before her, holding his commission and his sword in his hands.

"What is the matter, Everard?" asked Rosamond.

"The matter," said Everard, "the matter, Rosamond? The Count has arrived, and, as usual, he brings misfortune with him."

"What do you mean, Everard?"

"Look, look!" cried the young man. And he showed the commission and the sword to Rosamond.

"What does it all mean?" she asked.

"You cannot guess, Rosamond?"

"No."

"My brother Albrecht is dead, and I am the eldest son now, and my father, who brings me this commission and this sword, has come to take me to Vienna."

The young girl grew as pale as death, but still a melancholy smile passed over her lips.

"Give me your arm, Everard," said she, "and let us go indoors."

The two young people went into the cottage, and whilst Rosamond fell into Jonathan's armchair, Everard placed the sword in a corner and threw the commission on the table.

"Well, Everard," said Rosamond, "did I not tell you this morning that misfortune must have its turn. Only it has come to claim it sooner than I expected."

"What does it matter to me, Rosamond!" answered Everard; "do you think I am going?"

"Without doubt I think so."

"Rosamond, I shall never leave you; I have sworn it."

"You have never sworn that, Everard, for it would have been swearing to disobey your father, and you have no right to do that."

"The Count abandoned me; he wrote so to me himself; I am not his son, he is not my father."

"A wicked thought separated him from you, Everard; a good one brings him back. It is God himself who will not suffer this division between father and son. You will obey, Everard; you will go to Vienna."

"I have told you, Rosamond, never."

"Then it is I who will return to the Convent of the Holy Linden; for indeed, Everard, I will not be the accomplice of your disobedience."

"Rosamond, you do not love me."

"On the contrary, Everard, it is because I love you that I wish you to accept what your father offers you. There are some duties imposed on men the day of their birth and from which they cannot turn. As long as you had an elder brother, as long as the glory and the name of the Eppsteins rested on another head than yours, you could remain ignored and happy. Now not to accept the illustrious and painful heritage that heaven sends you would be a crime towards your ancestors and at the same

time towards your descendants. The career of arms that your father offers you is great and honourable; you will go then, Everard."

"Rosamond, Rosamond, how cruel you are!"

"No, Everard; only I speak to you as if I did not exist, because in comparison with such interests the existence of a poor girl like me must . . ."

"Very well, Rosamond, swear one thing," said Everard.

"What?"

"It is that if I cannot turn my father from his resolution of taking me to Vienna, if I am forced to embrace this career of arms into which I shall only bring a disgust of life and a scorn of death, if by this career I arrive at being free, and my own master, the sole and single arbitrator of my will, Rosamond, you will fulfil your promise sworn this morning—you will be mine."

"I have sworn, Everard, to belong to you or else to God; I swear it to you a second time, and you may depend on me to keep my promise."

"And I," said Everard, "listen well, Rosamond, I swear by the tomb of my mother to have no other wife but you."

"Everard! Everard! . . ." cried Rosamond, terrified.

"The oath is taken, Rosamond. I will not retract it; mine or God's, yours or nobody's."

"Oaths are terrible things, Everard."

"For the perjured, yes; but not for those who wish to keep them."

"Remember one thing, Everard, and that is that you need not come back to me to be absolved from your oath; for from this moment I absolve you."

"That is well, Rosamond. Hark! there is the supper bell to call me; till to-morrow."

And Everard went out, leaving the young girl half frightened at the cold, stern resolution of her lover.

CHAPTER XXI.

AFTER supper, at which the Count showed himself more lively and even more affectionate towards his son than he had been earlier in the day, Count Maximilian gravely invited Everard to follow him into his room. The

young man obeyed his father's order with a troubled mind and beating heart.

When they were in the Red Room, Maximilian offered his son an armchair, into which the young man sank in silence; he himself began to pace up and down from the window to the secret door, covertly observing Everard, to whom, until then, he had shewn so little fatherly affection. Almost intimidated by his placid face and innocent expression, he evidently sought for words with which to open the subject. At last he thought he did marvellously well to adopt the pompous tone and solemn air which he employed so successfully in diplomatic relations.

"Everard," said he, as he seated himself opposite his son, "I beg you will allow the father to efface himself for an instant, and give place to the statesman, to one charged with the fate of a great empire. Everard, you are called upon to fill at my side the place left void by your brother's death; in your turn, you too will one day govern people and ideas, my son; but in accepting so glorious and perilous a mission, you must understand the difficult duties which this destiny imposes upon you. You must divest yourself of your passions and your personality; you must tell yourself that you will live no longer for yourself, but for all; in your sublime self-abnegation, you must renounce your desires, your inclinations, even your pride, and place yourself above social convention, above good and evil, above systems and prejudices, above everything human in a word, in order to guide impartially, as God does, if I dare say so, the world and the universe,—the great nation to whom you will be responsible for that part of its administration which will devolve upon you."

Satisfied with this majestic exordium, the Count paused to note its effect upon his auditor. Everard seemed attentive, but not wonder-struck, and his attitude might equally well have been the expression of ennui or respect.

"You must surely have pondered these grave subjects, and no doubt you share my opinion upon them, Everard?" questioned Maximilian, a little disturbed by his persistent silence.

"I am, indeed, of your opinion, father," replied the young man with a bow, "and I admire with all my heart those who so well understand their dignities."

but I think, and I am sure you must think with me, that in sacrificing one's feelings, inclinations, even one's happiness, one should maintain the rights of one's conscience, and that in setting aside one's vanity one should preserve one's honour."

"Young man, those are but empty words," replied the Count with a disdainful smile; "subtle distinctions whose worthlessness you will not be slow to recognise. Have a larger heart and stronger mind."

"I do not know, father," returned Everard, "whether the words virtue and probity are but empty sounds for some, and those men in high places; but, for me, in my humble retirement, they are sentiments and instincts to which I cling as to my life, and I will even say, more strongly than to my life. And permit me to remark here, my lord, that I fear you may have wrongly entertained too high an opinion of me. You must remember that, after all, I am but an educated peasant, a wild child of the forests and mountains, and that I should have much trouble in accommodating myself to the theories and usages of society. I might well, without too great a disadvantage, show myself in the world for an instant; but to live there habitually and conduct myself without awkwardness, would, I believe, be impossible. I know myself, and since this morning I have pondered deeply. Accustomed to the air of my forests, I should suffocate behind town walls. Made for truth and liberty, I should soon die in the midst of intrigue and dependence. I should have bursts of indignation and revolt that would ruin me and perhaps compromise you, father. I pray you therefore, my lord, renounce your brilliant plans for me, and since you have only my happiness in view, return alone to the Court and leave me to my rustic fields."

"I have not only your happiness in view, Everard," replied the Count in a tone in which severity already began to be perceived, but without as yet giving himself up to the anger which began to agitate the depths of his heart; "I have also in view the glory and fortunes of our house, of which you are unfortunately now the last heir. Ah! heaven knows, I too at one time loved rather to roam about and hunt over my estates,

than to harness myself to the yoke of public affairs; but one is not called Eppstein for nothing. My father forced me to sacrifice my tastes, and I thank him to-day, as you will thank me too some day. I have subdued both my inclination towards indolence and my headstrong habits; for I was once as wild and passionate as you now see me, my son, moderate and patient. But it is not well to oppose me obstinately, Everard, and it would be dangerous to push me too far, especially where my family is concerned, where I consider myself as chief and supreme judge. The old Adam sometimes awakes in me; and know that my rage is terrible."

The storm growled, the Count's words became short and stern.

"But it is not with you, Everard, I hope, that I must use threats? You will yield to my paternal exhortations and, to make you listen to reason, I need say but one word: Everard, my child, I have need of you."

"What! father," cried Everard, carried away by the innocence of his heart and touched by the unaffected good nature with which the Courtier pronounced these words: "what! *you* can have need of *me*!"

This expression of devoted feeling did not escape Maximilian; he resolved to profit by it.

"That is to say," he continued, laying his hand upon his son's, "that is to say, Everard, that you are necessary to me. You know not what this slippery ground of a Court is like, and what eternal intrigues push us backwards from our aims. Well, two months since, one of these intrigues brought me within two steps of ruin. The devotion of your brother was going to save me, when God took him away. Then, Everard, I, who had forgotten you, my poor child, I thought of you and came back to you."

"Tell me, father, tell me;" cried Everard eagerly, "and I will do what my brother would have done."

"Yes, you will do it, Everard," replied Maximilian, "for you will understand that men called by their birth to the supreme places in the State must pay for that glory by a complete self-abnegation, and only obtain their painful dignities by many sacrifices and many trials. The probation for honours is rough and painful, Everard; titles must be bought by much

solicitude, much disgust, many sleepless nights and hard-working days. Princes and their Ministers impose difficult conditions upon us, sometimes by caprice, but more often it must be acknowledged in order to prove us. But the end is so brilliant, so fine, so exalted," continued the Count enthusiastically, "that we forget the difficulties that strew our path."

This time the diplomatist failed in his effect. At this picture of ambition, Everard recovered his self-possession; he sought for some means of evading his father's terrifying offers.

The latter took his reverie for close attention, and continued:

"Well, my son, while many obstacles lie in the way of those who wish to succeed, you, while at play, you, in your sleep, will find yourself carried to a point to which a score of other men can only attain after twenty years of effort! For your success depends upon a mere formality, a mere nothing, an insignificant act. It is only necessary for you to marry."

"I to marry!" cried Everard, "I to marry! What are you saying, father?"

"Yes, I know you are rather young, but that is no matter. Come, hear me to the end," continued the Count, replying to Everard's startled movement. "You may be astonished afterwards, if you will; but I answer for it, all will be for your happiness. Everard, your poor brother was on the point of concluding the marriage I propose to you, when I lost him. Then I thought of you, for this marriage is a magnificent future, an un hoped-for happiness, a broad path which leads you near the throne, nay! I will say even more, Everard, to the throne itself, if the reality of power is equal to its appearance. Well, you are silent? Does not this future dazzle you?"

"Father, I tell you, that was not my dream."

"What the devil was it, then? Well, Everard, the dream which you scorn has been the dream of the whole Court. The noblest lords have disputed the honour of being the husband of the Duchess of B——, but all knew that they must give way to the name of Eppstein, and they have all withdrawn."

"And who, then, is this Duchess of B——, whose name I have never even heard?" said Everard, "and who must

marry the heir of one of the oldest houses in Germany?"

"The Duchess of B——, Everard, is everybody and nobody; she is a simple woman without a name—yes, for they created a Duchy for her—but she is the real and veritable Empress. Do you not understand, Everard, what it would be for the man happy enough to become the husband of this woman and for his family?"

"No, father, no!" replied Everard, "I do not quite understand."

"What? You do not understand that this woman is free, and that for the sake of appearances she should be married. Well, the husband of this woman could wish for everything and give everything. Her greatness and that of her family will be a necessity for the State. Look at the results of this social act, Everard, and answer me, if your brain is not in too great a whirl."

"What must I answer, my lord?" asked Everard.

"Why, my proposition."

"What proposition?"

"Oh, good Lord! This proposition of marriage. Is this affectation or stupidity?"

"Neither one nor the other, my lord; it is stupefaction. What, you, the Count of Eppstein, you suggest to your son . . . Oh, but pardon me, father, it is either a jest or a trial of my mettle; you were not speaking in earnest, were you?"

"Everard! Everard!" said the Count, through his clenched teeth.

"No, my lord," cried Everard, without hearing him, "no, I do not believe it. You love titles and honour more than glory; it seems strange to me, but still I understand it; but to speculate with your ancestors, to sell the name which will be borne by your children is an ignominy I cannot understand, and it is not you, Maxmilian of Eppstein, who can ask me such a thing! If you wish to excite me to ambition, so be it; but you would never wish to make me infamous."

"Miserable creature!" cried the Count, turning pale with fury.

"No, not miserable, but mad, to allow myself to be deceived as to your intentions up to this point, my noble father. Oh! pardon me. What would you? You must not rely too much upon my penetration. I take everything too literally, and I make strange blunders. I

tell you, my lord, you would do much better to leave me here in my corner and to pursue your great designs alone. You see that I am good for nothing; because I speak two or three languages, I should not be able to speak that of the Court. Leave me, my lord; return without me to Vienna, and do not force me, I beg you, to leave this poor village, where I have centred my ambitions and my vows."

For some moments, in the midst of his anger, struck by a sudden idea, the Count had been observing Everard's face. At last he seemed to make up his mind.

"If you had not been mistaken, Everard," he said to him, "if this project of marriage were not a simple supposition, but a reality, would you still refuse?"

"Yes, my lord," replied the young man, firmly. "Only I will begin by conjuring you and saying to you: Father, in the name of Heaven! (and he had upon his lips 'In the name of my mother!' but, without knowing why, he dared not recall her memory) do not shame me! This debasement of your only son could not make you as happy as it would make me miserable. Father, take my life if you have need of it, but spare my conscience. And if you persist in your wish, my lord, I will raise my head and say to you: Count von Eppstein, what right have you to ask my honour of me? My life is yours, perhaps, but my virtue is not; and since I bear one of the proudest and noblest names in Germany, you will not place me, if you please, below the meanest workman, to whom at any rate his wife gives herself entirely. I would disobey you, my lord."

Everard spoke with the heat of passion. The Count held him under his cold and penetrating gaze, and smiled.

When the young man had finished, he took his hand and, with a satisfaction which seemed perfectly sincere, so well acted was it, he said,

"Good, Everard, very good! Come here, my dear boy, that I may embrace you, and pardon me for having doubted your loyal heart. But I have only really known you from to-day. You must make me the happiest of fathers, my noble child; for I see now that you are indeed worthy of her for whom I intend

you, the purest and most charming girl in Vienna. She shall be yours, Everard. Yes, one of the richest and noblest hieresses of Austria, a treasure of chastity and beauty; Lucile von Gansberg shall be your wife."

The name Count Maximilian had just mentioned to Everard was one which Rosamond had mentioned a hundred times.

"What! father," cried the young man, astounded; "what, Lucile von Gansberg, that beautiful and virtuous girl. . . ."

"It is all settled; you shall marry her within a month. I suppose your honour finds objection to making this union."

"Even in my solitude," said Everard, lowering his eyes, "I knew that Lucile von Gansberg was the most enviable and most envied match in all Germany."

"Well, Everard," said the Count, "I am waiting for your thanks. A chaste wife, a sword without a blemish, are two fine gifts, which surely deserve a thank-you."

"Yes, father, I thank you," said Everard, kissing the hand which Maximilian held out to him; "yes, you are the best and most far-seeing of fathers. I do not know how to express to you all the gratitude with which I am filled; but I cannot . . . I dare not . . . I could neither love nor marry Lucile von Gansberg."

"Hah! now I have you, my young master!" cried Count Maximilian in a terrible voice, as he rose with flashing eyes. "Ah! hypocrite, you have fallen into the trap then! You are really admirable. It is not honour then which prevents you from marrying the woman I have chosen for you, eh? It is not the woman, but simply the marriage you object to. Who then is the secret love, if you please?"

The comedy was turning to tragedy. Everard, pale and trembling, had not the strength to utter a word. The Count laid his hand upon his shoulder, a hand which felt like lead, and in a quick, imperious voice, he said between his teeth:

"Listen, my dear son; now, I do not ask, I command; I do not say, 'Will you?' I say, 'I will.' The Prince has my word, the marriage is announced. Were it not for my fifty years, I would readily take your place, foolish rebel, but it must be a young man; you are my

son, and I choose you. Not a word; for, if I get at the bottom of the reason of your refusal, of which the suspicion alone fills me with rage, take care; I am a terrible enemy when I am pushed too far. Ha! you would fain stammer some excuse; well! I advise you to hold your tongue and drop your eyes. Believe me, there are memories which enrage me more even than they frighten me. Go, and I will give you till to-morrow to reflect. Go, I tell you, go with all haste. Leave me till to-morrow, and please God the night bring you good counsel; for, believe me, your injured father will be an implacable judge."

And the Count, pale and trembling, motioned Everard to the door. The man's anger was really hideous: he stamped his foot, he trembled with rage, foam gushed from his mouth. Distracted by this terrible wrath, vanquished by the paternal ascendancy, and convinced moreover that he could obtain nothing from a passion so deaf and blind, Everard staggered from the room.

This all occurred on Christmas Eve.

CHAPTER XXII.

EVERARD flung away from the Castle and plunged into the forest. The night was cold but fine, the sky deep blue, the wind sharp and cutting. It had snowed on the preceding days, and all the earth seemed covered with a great shroud. The pines alone raised their sombre verdure above the sinister whiteness of the fields. Everard, with bared head and disordered locks, went panting onward, without aim, without thought; he felt neither cold nor wind. His instinct, rather than his reason, led him straight to the cottage; but it was near midnight, all was closed and dark. Five or six times he walked round it; but, seeing that all seemed asleep, he ran to his grotto, and falling upon his knees on the threshold, burst into tears and called upon his mother.

"Mother!" he cried, wringing his hands in despair; "Mother, where art thou? Dost know what they wish to do with thy child? Dost know into what shame they wish to drag him? Dost know what dangers surround him? Wilt

thou permit his dishonour or his ruin? Thou wert here this morning, on this spot where I am weeping, and thou didst see that I was mad with joy. Didst thou disapprove of my happiness? I think not, and yet thou hast not spoken to me all day. It is true that, lost in my delight or in my trouble, I have not questioned thee; but I question thee now—pardon and answer me."

Everard listened. He heard nothing save the whistling and dry crackling of the branches of the fir tree; he remained some moments without uttering a word, seeming as though he feared the sound of his own voice.

"Mother!" he continued, softly at length, "thou wilt say nothing to me, then, or if thou art speaking in the mournful plaint of the north wind, I do not hear thee, I no longer understand thee. Art thou angry because of my love? Dost thou turn from me? Or hast thou terrible news to reveal to me, and wouldst thou rather be silent? My God! My God! is it perchance that the crisis of my life approaches? Wilt thou not counsel me then? Tell me, should I do better to fly? But perhaps it is already too late? Ah! nothing! nothing! . . . Mother thou dost say nothing. And all the time the wind moans! It is horrible! Alas! hast thou for the first time in my life withdrawn thy love from me? I am alone and tremble; is it that God is taking thee away from me to deliver me over to fate, or to my bad angel? Is it that thou art dead, shade of my mother?"

But all continued silent, save the icy blast from the north, which ran moaning from the hills to the valleys.

"Heavenly mercy!" he murmured, utterly depressed, and in a voice choked with sobs, "I am certain that my guardian angel is no longer with me. What will happen now? What will the Count do? What shall I do myself? Ah! I should have gone away three years ago! But is there not time still? Yes, let me go; let me go and join my uncle Conrad. He is my only, my last help; he was thy friend. Mother! come let me fly before my fate."

And he rose wildly, making as though to fly.

"And Rosamond! Rosamond!" he cried; "I must see Rosamond again. At any rate she is my betrothed, she is

my bride. Go without her? . . . Oh! it is indeed cruel of thee, Mother, to chastise me and to abandon me thus. . . . How I suffer! Thou didst pity me, that I must be the executioner, but so far I have only been the victim."

A more than usually violent squall, so violent that it uprooted one of the old oaks which shaded the grotto, seemed to reply to Everard's wail, and struck terror into his heart. The remainder of the night was passed in alternations of fear and prostration, of resignation and revolt. Sometimes he walked rapidly up and down, then he would sink down again sobbing; sometimes he threw himself in despair on his face on the ground, biting the moss of the grotto. When the pale and tardy light of dawn gilded the summits of the Taunus, he was whiter than the snow-clad earth, colder than the frost-bound rocks; anyone seeing him would have taken him for a ghost, so pale and chilled was he. For all night long, despite his prayers, despite his supplications, Albina had remained silent.

The sun, a dull December sun, a dying sun, sent its wan rays through the leafless trees, and Everard, worn out, took his way towards the cottage. The only resolution he had come to was to see Rosamond and ask her advice; he told himself indeed that the best thing would be to flee far from his father, far from Germany; but he wished to see Rosamond again.

As he walked along, plunged in thought, he raised his head suddenly on hearing the sound of a horn and the barking of dogs; then through the thicket he saw the huntsmen and hounds, and finally, Maximilian, who was following the chase on horseback. He had only time to leap a ditch and throw himself into the depths of the wood. When once more he continued his way, he thought several times he could distinguish, at a turn in the road, one of the Count's servants who seemed to be following him; but this was perhaps only another illusion of his delirium. He was, without doubt, in a high state of fever.

In this state of terror he arrived at the Keeper's house. Jonathan, warned early, had of course gone to accompany his master in the chase. Everard found Rosamond alone therefore. The girl uttered a cry on seeing her lover enter,

looking so pale and worn. Everard recounted all that had passed at his second interview with his father. The tale was long, a score of times words failed him, twenty times tears interrupted him. Rosamond was, as ever, sublimely sensible and devoted.

"Friend," said she to Everard, "if Lucile von Gansberg were really to become your wife, I should tell you: 'Everard, Lucile is a noble girl; obey your father, marry Lucile, and if you are not happy, at least you will be noble and honoured.' But this union with the Duchess of B—— is monstrous, Everard, and I have the right to dissuade you from it, for it is not I alone whom the Count of Eppstein wrongs in this; he offends God and justice. He is your father, Everard, yet he has, they say, a heart full of violence and tyranny; it would therefore be impious and dangerous to struggle against him; and the best thing to do is certainly to go away. Do not trouble about me, Everard, I knew well that our dreams were vain, and that unless the world came to an end, I could never be your wife. No matter! I am yours and shall belong to no other. I will stay here or elsewhere to pray for you, to love you without hope. Without hope! for you are now rich; you are now a Count, and even were your father to consent to our union, which is quite impossible, I should refuse. I repeat, however, that all my life I shall be as faithful to you as though I were your wife. But you, Everard, go, be free; remain great and good; pacify the Count of Eppstein from afar; force him, by your noble deeds, to pardon you, to call you his son, —and then forget, if you will, the poor girl who can never forget you."

"Rosamond, my angel of life, you will not abandon me!" cried Everard with tears in his eyes. "Speak! Oh! speak again; sweet and merciful thoughts sink into my spirit with your words. Yes, I will obey you, dear guide of my heart, and your last lesson shall not be lost any more than the others. I will go, not to save myself but to save my father; for, Rosamond, you have recalled me to wisdom and mercy. My mother has not replied all night: to-day is Christmas day, and I am frightened, I fear for him. I will fly before his danger, perhaps before his damnation."

"Everard, what is this you would

say?" asked Rosamond, disturbed by the change in the young dreamer's features.

"Nothing, nothing," murmured Everard; "the dead know, the living are ignorant. Let me go, Rosamond; only one last kiss. Oh! fear not, a sister's kiss, a kiss upon the brow, a kiss which I will receive upon my knees."

Everard knelt down, and Rosamond, as she had been accustomed to do after each lesson, pressed on his forehead a sweet and chaste kiss like a sister's—a kiss mingled with a sigh. At that moment, behind the pure and handsome children, a bitter sneer was heard. They turned quickly and saw Count Maximilian standing on the threshold in hunting dress, a whip in one hand and his gun in the other.

"Good, very good," said he, saluting them ironically.

And he advanced into the room, after having thrown his whip and cap upon the table and set his gun against the wall. Rosamond blushing and motionless, stood with downcast eyes, and dared not move. Everard had thrown himself before her, and with a proud and decided look braved the Count's insolent and mocking glance.

Maximilian slowly drew off his gloves, whistling a hunting song and looking jeeringly from one lover to the other; then he threw himself into an armchair, and crossing his legs carelessly, he said:

"This, then, is the solution of the riddle; a very pretty solution in truth! This, then, is the reason of the Spartan virtue; a very charming and tempting reason it must be confessed!"

"My lord," said Everard, "if your anger. . . ."

"My anger?" interrupted the Count quickly. "Heaven and earth! who speaks of my anger? It might well be a question of that. I am a gentleman, Everard, and more, a son of the eighteenth century. I am not a hermit, thank God! and it runs in the blood. No, my children, I do not ask it of you. If I have had you followed, Everard, it was for your interest, believe me, and not to annoy you. I have sent your father to the town, my pretty child, upon some pretext; your father, whom I like to think is not in the secret, and who might have spoilt your friendly interview. You see I am not a tyrant. But I do not

wish to be a dupe, and I do not intend that your love affair . . ."

"Pardon me, my lord, if I interrupt you," returned Everard firmly, "but there is a misunderstanding here, which it is my duty to set right. Deign to accord me a moment's attention, I beg of you. You abandoned me in the old Castle of Eppstein alone, without a guide, without masters, without support. I grew up at haphazard, like a tree in the forest. Were you my father? Was I your son? One could hardly believe it from your indifference,—I was almost going to say your hate. One day you wrote that I must give up all pretensions to your kindness, as you gave up all your rights to my obedience; then, faithful to your resolution, from that time you no longer troubled yourself whether I were alive or dead, worthy or unworthy of you. The peasant teaches his son to read, that he may at least know the Word of God; you did not even enquire whether I knew how to read; you left me idle, vagabond, and you went far away with your son Albrecht, the only son of your affection, to gain for yourself places, titles, honours. Now it has happened that your well-beloved son has been taken from you by God, whose justice is sometimes terrible. Then you remembered that abandoned son, because you had need of an associate in your plans who must be your son. You expected to find an uncultivated mind, a savage soul, and you brought I know not what official professor to make me presentable to serve your purpose. You were surprised at finding a liberal education, which left you hardly anything to do, and you rejoiced, not for me, but because the success of your plans would thus be advanced by a year or two. Well, do you know who taught me science, life, and God, who has formed my head and heart, who, by her lessons, has taken the place of my absent father and of my dead mother, by her counsels? Do you know who it was, my lord?"

"My faith, no," replied the Count. "You spoke to me, indeed, of solitude, but she is rather a vague mistress."

"Well, my lord, it was Rosamond here—Rosamond whom you were but now ready to insult; it was this noble and pious child who returned to the son the benefit of the education which she owed to the mother, and who, day by day, hour by hour, patiently received the ele-



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men's of each branch of knowledge with me. She has made a man of your son, of whom you had hardly made a dog; she has brought me to dignity, to hope, and, I can say it boldly, to love; she has, in fact, prepared me for the deepest misfortune as for the highest destiny. Insult her, therefore, now!"

"You are eloquent, Everard," said Maximilian, "and I note it with pleasure. However," he added, sneeringly, "that which results most clearly from the discourse you have just delivered with so much fire, is just what I had myself conjectured from the first, that is to say, that this dear child has taught you. Ah! it was very good of her, and I cannot say how grateful I am to her; I hope, however, that in exchange for her lessons, you have given her others; you are no longer ignorant; but is she still innocent?"

Rosamond, firm and upright, tried to speak, but her lips moved without her being able to articulate a single word, and she stood there pale and motionless as a statue.

"Heaven and earth! Will you still persist in your mistake?" cried Everard, trembling with indignation.

"In my mistake, no; but in my contempt, yes," replied the Count.

Rosamond, still mute, raised her arms to Heaven with a sublime gesture.

"Take care, my lord," continued Everard, shaking with fury; "you have forgotten for so long that you were my father, that I in my turn, God pardon me, might well forget that I am your son."

"Oh! indeed, sir, shall we come to that?" said Maximilian, dropping his insulting laughter and becoming suddenly serious and haughty again. "It would in truth be a curious sight to see. Young man, young man, I beg you to calm yourself; your childish anger will soon become weak beside mine; restrain your fury, therefore. It will be more prudent, and let me finish with your Dulcinea, who, although not a Duchess, does none the less pursue on a small scale, it seems to me, the same profession as her whom you refused this morning."

"God in Heaven!" cried Rosamond, as she sank swooning upon a stool.

"By hell!" cried Everard, seizing his sword, which he had left overnight in the chimney corner.

Then, half drawing it, he advanced toward the Count; but, two paces from

him he stopped, and pushing the sword back into the scabbard, he said:

"You gave me my life, we are quits."

Maximilian, for his part, had made a dash for his gun, with which he had armed himself.

At this moment the father and son, looking at each other with eyes flaming with rage, were more like two demons than two men.

"I gave you your life, do you say? You are wrong, wretch; I have given you nothing, and you owe me nothing. Draw your sword then. Our anger thus restrained will choke us. Come then, let them out, sword and anger! . . . Ah! you recoil, coward, you recoil. Well, I will not recoil."

He went to the door and called in four or five servants whom he had brought with him.

"Seize this girl," said he, "fainting or no; seize her, and throw her outside of my domains."

Everard placed himself before her, and, drawing his sword,

"If one of you touches her," said he, "he is a dead man."

The servants were cowed, and hesitated.

"Cowards! Will you come on?" said Maximilian, raising his whip to them.

They took a step forward, but Everard stopped them with the point of his sword.

"My lord," said he, "I declare to you that I, Everard of Eppstein, will follow this child wherever she goes, whether by will or by force; do you understand?"

"As you will," replied Maximilian. "Do what I tell you, knaves," he went on, addressing his servants.

"My lord," continued Everard, placing the point of the sword upon the heart of his still unconscious betrothed, "rather than allow one of these men to touch Rosamond, I swear that I will kill her before your eyes."

"Do it, if your point is good," said the Count. "Ah! ah! you are still afraid? Take away that woman, or I shall take it upon myself to do so."

"My lord," cried Everard, "take care, I will defend her against all the world."

"Even against your own father?" said the Count, advancing upon Everard, his gun in his hand.

"Even against the murderer of my mother," cried Everard, blinded by I know not what frenzy.

Maximilian, carried away by the mad-

ness of his wrath, aimed at his son and fired.

"Mother, mother, have pity on him!" cried Everard, as he fell.

Count Maximilian remained standing, cold and pale, with staring eyes, as though thunderstruck, for he seemed to see Albina and Conrad alive near the unconscious Everard and Rosamond.

It was indeed Conrad whom Maximilian saw in his strange hallucination, Conrad, who, according to his promise, had come back to visit the Eppstein family; he entered in time to turn aside his brother's gun and to save his nephew's life, turning what might have been a mortal hurt into a slight flesh wound.

The Count, on coming to himself, perceived him at his side. At first he thought he was the sport of some horrible dream, and glared about him with startled eyes. He found himself in the same room, but alone with Conrad; all the others had gone out, the floor was stained with blood.

"Where is Everard?" said Maximilian, shuddering.

"Upstairs; be reassured, he is only wounded in the shoulder, and not dangerously," replied Conrad.

"And Rosamond?"

"She has recovered her senses, and is looking after Everard."

"But you, are you Conrad? Conrad, changed and grown old like myself? How comes it you are here? What is the meaning of this French officer's uniform?"

"Yes, I am Conrad! At present I am one of Napoleon's generals. I will tell you all when you are quite recovered."

"Then you are alive! I was not dreaming; but the other! but the other!"

"Of whom do you speak, Maximilian?"

"Of her who stood near Everard, one hand extended towards him as though defending him, the other extended towards me as though in menace."

"Of whom do you speak?" repeated Conrad, uneasily.

"Oh! I recognised her," pursued Maximilian, "her glaring eyes, her fierce expression and implacable looks. I recognised her quite well; I am condemned. Everard might well have said, 'Have pity on him, mother.' I can expect no mercy."

"I do not know what you are saying?" replied Conrad. "But Everard asked

me to tell you that, for his part, he forgave you, and would pray for you."

"What good of that, what good of that?" said the Count, anxiously. "She was there, I tell you."

"Who is she?"

"She, the chastisement; she, the expiation; she, Albina! But, come, come, brother; come, let us get away from this. Cannot you hear the blood, blood speaking and crying out for vengeance? Do you not see that I am almost mad, mad with fever, murder, and fear? Come! It seems to me that air would do me good, the pure fresh air of the fields! But perhaps my breath will corrupt it? Oh! I am accursed!"

"Do you not wish to see Everard and give him your forgiveness in return for his?"

"No, no, I wish to see no one; I am no longer a father, I am no longer a man, I belong no more to the earth, but to hell. . . And then, of what use is my pardon? The pardon of one accursed is an anathema! Come, Conrad, let us go out of here, I tell you."

Maximilian left the room and Jonathan's house with his brother, who could hardly keep up with him. He tore along, dashing himself against the stones and rough places by the way, and anyone who had seen him rushing thus with dishevelled locks and wild eyes would have thought he fled from some avenger. He fled indeed before remorse, which can always catch up and outstrip its victim.

Soon the two brothers arrived at the Castle of Eppstein, and Maximilian, still as though pursued, took refuge in the Red Room, signing to Conrad to follow him. With a startled air he closed and double locked and bolted the door.

"Now, I am safe," said he, falling into an armchair; "look, I am wide awake now, and I collect myself and call reason to my aid. But tell me, is all that has just happened a terrible reality or a feverish vision?"

"Alas! it is only too true," said Conrad.

"But you who assure me of it, say, are you not yourself a phantom?"

"My life is a secret, but I am alive," said Conrad. "I came to Eppstein to keep a promise I had made to Everard and Jonathan. Chance, or rather Providence, brought me here just in time to turn aside your bullet and save you

from a crime—and what a crime! The murder of a son!”

“Is it possible?” stammered Maximilian, still a little delirious.

“Yes, and in order to save you from madness, brother, in order to restore to you a sense of reality, I will tell you my sad story. Besides, we meet again under such strange and terrible circumstances that all rules are upset, and I do not even think it necessary to obtain from you a promise of inviolable secrecy. This mystery, without being absolutely needful, has become habit and almost a necessity with me. I have lived so much outside the usual conventions, and the motives which influence my actions would be so ill understood and so falsely interpreted, the judgment of the world could so easily calumniate and condemn all my conduct as it appears on the surface, that I prefer to have only God for my Judge, God who sees in my conscience the purity of my intentions. And then, I love the shadow in which I conceal myself, because by dint of hiding the early part of my life from others I sometimes succeed in forgetting it myself.”

Conrad then entered upon the story of his stormy and gloomy existence. He began it gravely and ended in tears. Maximilian gave him a sustained attention. Little by little his features grew calm and placid; he took a flask of spirits from his dressing-case and drank two or three glasses.

“Thank you, Conrad,” said he to his brother, when the latter had ceased speaking, “thank you for having recalled me to realities. Yes, strange though your story is, marvellous as is the man whose companion you have become, at least I find myself, in listening to you, back again with beings I know, who live and breathe. I was mad just now, Conrad; I had I know not what wild visions and puerile terrors. My anger had intoxicated me, I believe. I spoke to you of Albina, of apparitions, of vengeance, did I not?”

“You did, indeed,” said Conrad, surprised at Maximilian’s sudden recovery.

“My God,” continued the latter, smiling bitterly, “can it be that the strongest minds have sometimes these moments of weakness and terror? To think that I, Maximilian of Eppstein, I who am admitted to the Council of Cæsar’s heir, could have submitted for an instant to

the influence of an old wife’s tale. I must have amused you, brother.”

“You made me feel for you and pity you,” said Conrad; “your terror and fury alarmed and distressed me, as much as your irony and selfish coldness afflict and annoy me now.”

“Come, come!” said Maximilian, wiping his brow, still full of gloomy thoughts and doubts, “come, come! I must be a man and not be influenced by visions. I admit I was wrong to give way to such terrible anger, and I thank God and you, Conrad, for having saved me from murder. But, in truth, I was not master of myself, and that insolent youth heated my blood a little over much. But did you not tell me he had got off with a slight wound? It will teach him a lesson and induce him to obey me better, I hope. As to the threats of the dead, as to the visions in which she appears, I am neither young enough nor foolish enough to persist in such chimeras; and you, Conrad, a superior man, a soldier of Napoleon, you believe, with me, that these dreams are false and vain, is it not so?”

“Who knows?” said Conrad, pensively.

“What!” returned Maximilian, “you believe in ghosts and phantoms?”

“Jesus,” said Conrad, “commanded the living to pray for the dead. Why should not the Gospel of the Dead command them to watch over the living?”

“Peace, peace,” interrupted the Count, again pale and trembling. “No! it cannot be. All the bonds between life and death are broken, I am sure they are—I hope they are. Brother, brother, do not throw me back into my delirium and fear.”

In one second and at one word the man who so lately boasted of his strength of mind became again more timid and nervous than a child or a woman. But he made an effort, and, raising his head, he said:

“And if that were so, if God should make the elect of Paradise guardian angels upon earth, would He accord this miraculous gift to the lost? And I believe, Conrad, I am certain, in spite of everything, that Albina is not worthy of Heaven, and that an adulterous woman could protect no one, not even the child of her crime.”

“Albina!” cried Conrad, “is it the pious, the chaste, the noble Albina, of whom you dare to speak thus?”

"Did you know her?" asked Maximilian.

"I have been told . . ." replied Conrad with embarrassment.

"Ah! you have been told! Yes, she had a fine outward appearance of sanctity, and knew well how to deceive men, the hypocrite! But to you, brother, I will, and I ought to tell her shame . . . Yes," continued Maximilian, getting heated and wild, "yes, after all it is my duty to justify myself by condemning her. And you will agree with me that I was and am right, that I must brave her menaces, that she is infamous, that the trouble of my mind has alone produced all my fears, that my remorse was wrong. Yes, I am right and not guilty; if my words killed her like a knife, it was well done. Everard is no son of mine, he is the son of Captain Jacques, whom God curse!"

"Of Captain Jacques!" cried Conrad, stepping back.

"Yes, a Frenchman, who was full of chivalrous affection for her; a mysterious adventurer of whom she would tell me neither the name nor the history; a stranger whom she publicly called her friend and her brother."

"And who was in truth her brother and her friend, wretch!" said Conrad, in a voice of thunder; "for that adventurer, that Frenchman, that Captain Jacques, was I, Conrad of Eppstein, your brother and hers."

Maximilian leapt up as though impelled by a spring and remained standing, pale and rigid.

"It was I," continued Conrad, "who foolishly asked of her to maintain a discretion which her generous soul promised me until death. I who, with and like you, but at least unwittingly, am her murderer; I who was silent just now as to my first and fatal return twenty years ago, so as not to revive your fears, and who now tell you that you killed an innocent woman. Brother, you will answer to God for this!"

Conrad stopped, for truly the misery of Maximilian, of that proud and energetic man, was terrible and pitiful. The Count was pale as death; the hand of an incensed God seemed to weigh down his shoulders. He hardly dared raise his eyes, full of an unspeakable terror. He thought he saw distinctly standing beside him the avenging angel, sword in hand.

A long silence followed the last words. Conrad had no more strength to curse; Maximilian muttered: "I am lost." And he repeated the words several times in a dull, heavy tone.

It was four o'clock, and night began to fall. Great black clouds, chased by the wind, flew across the sky, the fir trees creaked, the ravens flew in cawing circles around the turrets of Eppstein. Suddenly Maximilian awoke from his stupor.

"Call some one! Make them come! Why are we alone?" he cried. "Conrad, order all the men in the Castle to assemble in the Great Hall downstairs. Let them light all the torches and candles; let there be music and noise; prevent me from seeing her and hearing her!"

"You are saved, if you repent," said Conrad softly to him, pitying in spite of himself the sight of such frenzy.

"I repent! . . . I am afraid," returned Maximilian. "You understand, do you not, Conrad? Lights, noise!"

. . . Can I remain alone here in this room, in the Red Room, below the nursery, beside the staircase to the vaults? Do you see nothing sinister in those moving curtains, in the flickering light of this lamp, in this crackling hearth, in the very air and the silence? Do you not see upon my neck a gold chain, last and fatal warning of my icy creditor? Do you forget that we are at Christmas Eve? Quick, then, song, lights, a crowd! . . . Or rather, order my carriages and tell my men to mount their horses. I wish to leave at once for Vienna."

"Brother," said Conrad, "of what use is flight? Of what use is it to surround yourself with servants? It were better to repent, since already you feel a little salutary fear."

"Who says that I am afraid?" cried Maximilian, suddenly recovering himself. "It is a lie."

He fell back into his chair, with clenched fists and his teeth set. A strange battle went on within him between shame and terror. The pride of Satan carried him away.

"The Eppsteins know no fear!" he went on, bursting into laughter; and his laugh was like a hiss.

Conrad shook his head pityingly, and this silent pity enraged Maximilian.

"The Eppsteins know no fear!" he continued, more forcibly. "Alive, this

woman trembled before me, and dead, shall she make me tremble? No, indeed, I defy her and her vengeance, and her rebellious son!"

"Blasphemy!" . . . cried Conrad, terrified.

"Oh, no, but sound, good sense. I believe in God, that is indispensable at the Austrian Court, but I do not believe in ghosts, by the devil! and the legend of this Castle has always made me shrug my shoulders. Leave me, I would be alone. Your dreams have made me wild. One night when my nerves were irritated, I had nightmare; there is no need to torment myself about the matter."

"Ah! Maximilian," said Conrad, "I would rather see in you the terror you forbid yourself than this sacrilegious gaiety."

"What terror do you speak of? Are you the same dreamer as ever? It is you yourself, your sudden appearance, your silly trash, and your pity for my victim which have troubled my brain; but I fear nothing, do you hear, neither ghosts nor devil, and I will prove it. Go, leave me alone and warn Everard at once, if you please, that he must leave his Infanta and prepare to follow me to Vienna to join the Duchess."

"Brother, do not dream of it. I will not leave you," said Conrad.

"By hell! but you shall leave me, for you exasperate me. I am no child to tremble and draw back, and I intend to remain here alone, to send my instructions and my acceptance in Everard's name to Vienna."

"Take care, Maximilian!" said Conrad, again.

"Take care yourself!" replied the Count, stamping his foot. "You should know that I have scant patience. I wish to remain alone!" he repeated with the obstinacy of a madman, "I wish to remain alone!"

"Must the justice of God be allowed to have its way then?" said Conrad to himself.

"Will you go?" cried Maximilian.

"Yes, poor unhappy man! For you will only escape this night, so that she who could go swiftly, and yet goes slowly because she has an eternity of patience, may claim you to-morrow."

"Hell!" returned Maximilian, advancing toward his brother, with flashing eyes and clenched fists.

But Conrad stopped him short by the calm and imposing look of an honest man, which can quell the most hardened and impious.

"Farewell," he said to him, shaking his head with a bitter pity. He walked slowly to the door, opened it, and went out.

"Good night!" cried Maximilian after him, drawing the bolt noisily. "You see I give the spectre fair play, since I shut myself in with it. Ha! ha! ha! I say, if I do not come down by eight o'clock to-morrow morning, be so kind as to force open the door! Good night, and may the devil who fills you with so fine a terror go with you, coward!"

Maximilian had no strength to say more; he fell on his knees, trembling, spent, livid.

Conrad, who listened in the corridor, heard no more. He wished to say one last good-bye to his brother, but the words froze on his lips. He thought of watching at the door, but a power greater than himself drove him away, and he felt the will of God was pushing him from the spot. He descended the staircase with tottering steps, and went to join Everard at Jonathan's cottage.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CONRAD, Everard, Rosamond and Jonathan spent together, at the Keeper's house, a night of sleeplessness, terror and tears.

Everard had wished to rise as soon as the first dressing had been applied to his wound. He was half lying on a couch; Conrad, seated beside him, held his hand; Rosamond came and went, preparing beverages for the invalid. Sometimes, in an outburst of piety, she would throw herself upon her knees and pray fervently. As for the worthy Jonathan, whom these events—which he might, in part at least, have foreseen—struck like a thunderbolt, he could only weep and sob during the whole lugubrious vigil.

Between these four persons, united by the same agonising thoughts, there were, during the long night, silences which lasted for hours: nothing was to be heard save Jonathan's sobs, the regular ticking of the wooden clock and the wind raging without, and threatening to tear off the frail roof of the cottage. Then, exclamations, prayers, invocations to God

would break into this gloomy waiting and make it all the more awful.

"Let us pray for him," said Conrad.

"Jesus have pity on him!" said Rosamond.

"Mother, forgive him," murmured Everard.

Midnight struck. A question of Conrad's made them all shudder: "Does he still live?" he asked.

"Alas! he is lost," replied Everard, after a pause. "My mother has always told me so; he must perish, if not by my hand, at least through me. I have not been the executioner, but I am the axe. My poor mother, she pitied him, but fate was too strong for her. Everything led up to this preordained event, everything; not only all that was impure and bad—as the Count's ambition and my brother's vices, which killed him—but all that was good and religious—as the confidence of Jonathan and our sacred love. Fate willed it, the horrible passions of which my father was the prey have claimed their victim. He is lost!"

An hour later Everard resumed:

"What is happening yonder, now? What dreadful calamity awaits us? My God! we were so happy yesterday morning, we had such beautiful dreams! But now, what hope remains to us, and what is our life henceforth?"

"Let us pray," said Conrad and Rosamond simultaneously.

The dawn, the sad December dawn, darker than a night in May, was slow in coming that day.

As soon as the pale light brightened the window of the room, Conrad rose.

"I am going," he said.

"We will all go," returned Everard.

No one objected. Everard leant upon his uncle; Rosamond and Jonathan walked behind them, and all four made their way to the Castle. Eight o'clock struck as they arrived at the great door; the servants were beginning to wake.

"Have any of you seen the Count of Eppstein since last evening?" Conrad asked of them.

"No," they replied, "the Count shut himself up in his own room and forbade anyone to disturb him."

"Has he rung this morning?" continued Conrad. "I am Count Conrad, your master's brother, and here is his

son Everard, whom you know. Follow us."

Conrad and Everard, followed by two or three servants, went up to Maximilian's room. Rosamond and Jonathan remained downstairs. Arrived at the door, Conrad and Everard looked at one another, and each was startled to find the other so pale.

Conrad knocked; there was no reply. He knocked louder; the same silence. He called, first softly, then loudly, then despairingly. Everard and the Count's men joined him. All was still silent.

"Bring a crowbar," said Conrad.

The door was forced.

The room was empty.

"We will enter alone, Everard and I," said Conrad.

They entered, shut the door again, and looked around them. The bed had not been disturbed; nothing seemed to have been disarranged, only the secret door was open.

"See!" said Everard, pointing to it with his finger.

Conrad took from the chimney-piece a candle which was still alight. Then the uncle and nephew entered the narrow passage and descended the funeral stairs with slow steps. The door of the vault was open. Then Everard, taking the light from his uncle's hand, led Conrad to his mother's tomb. The marble slab on the top had been raised, and the hand of the skeleton issued from it, holding Count Maximilian strangled by two turns of the golden chain.

The next day, after paying the last honours to the Count of Eppstein, Conrad, Rosamond, and Everard found themselves face to face.

"Farewell," said Conrad. "I go to give my life for the Emperor."

"Farewell," said Rosamond. "I have promised to be the Lord's, or yours, Everard. I cannot be yours, so I shall return to the Holy Linden."

"Farewell," said Everard. "I shall stay here alone."

Conrad, shot through the heart, fell at Waterloo. Rosamond, a year later, took the veil at Vienna. Everard lived alone at Eppstein, continuing to inhabit the room in which occurred the terrible events we have just related.

The soldier's death, the virgin's prayers, the lonely man's tears—have they won mercy for the murderer?

THE END.

