



Bodleian Libraries

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

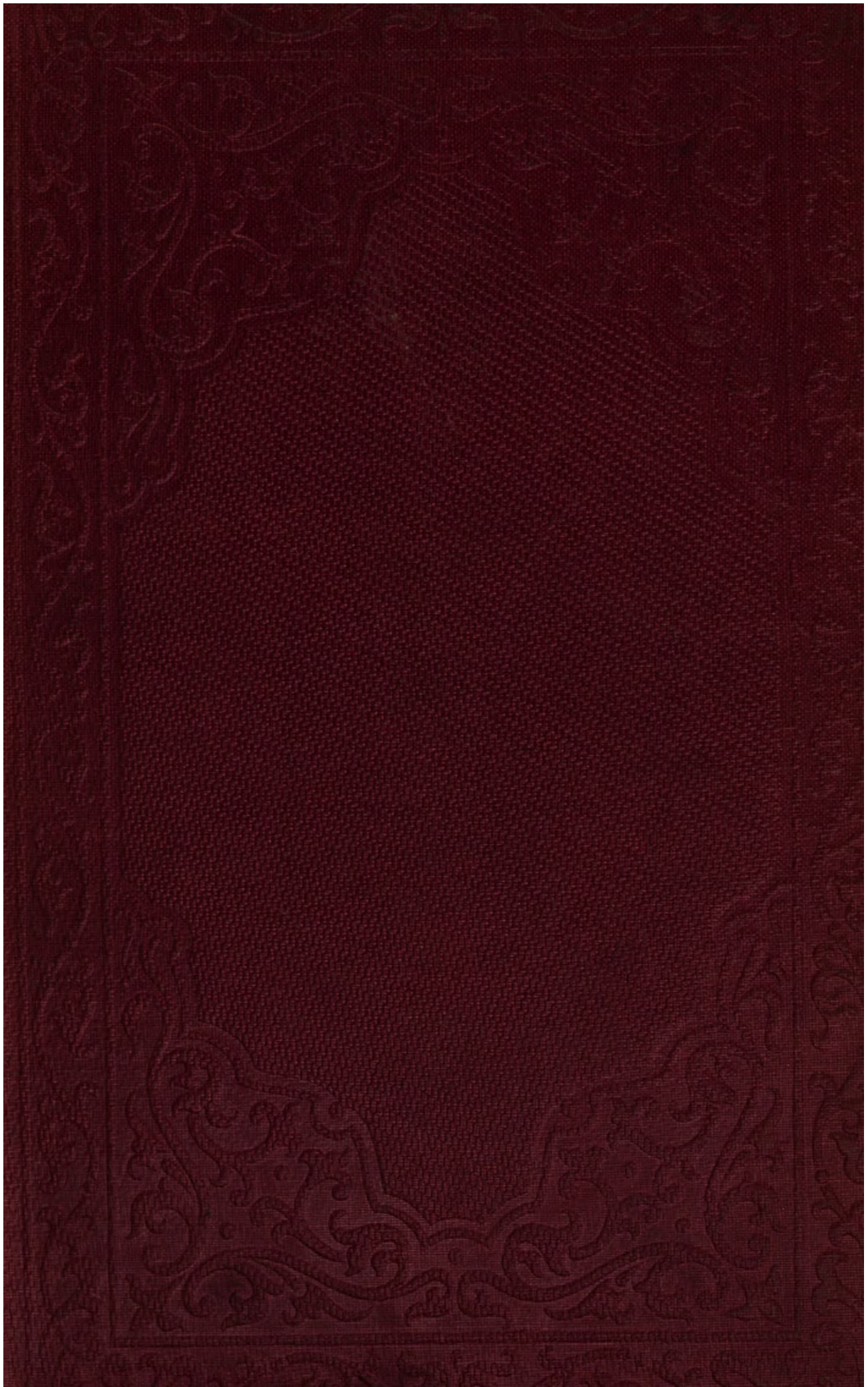
This book is part of the collection held by the Bodleian Libraries and scanned by Google, Inc. for the Google Books Library Project.

For more information see:

<http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/dbooks>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0 UK: England & Wales (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) licence.

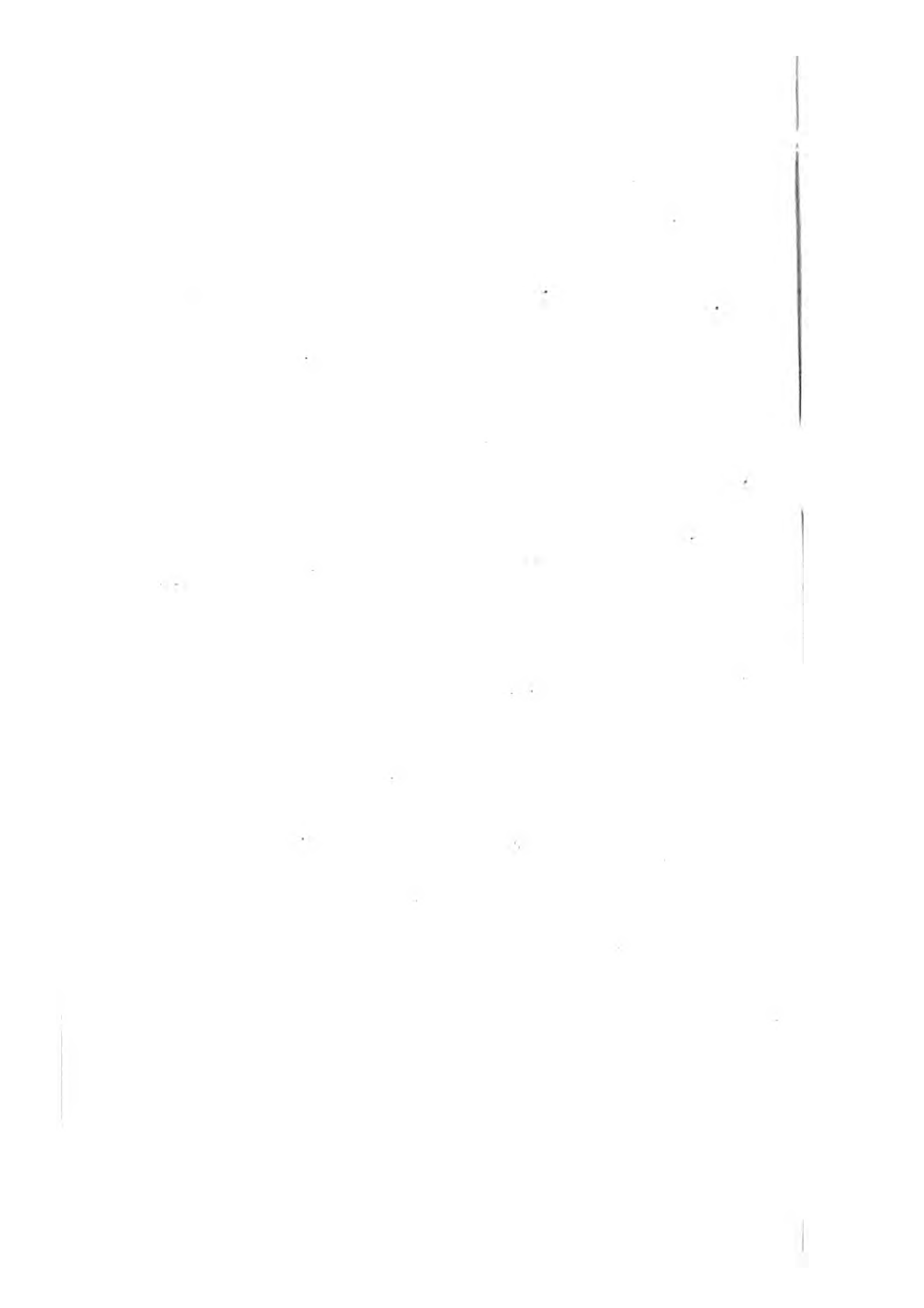




6000215041







CLARA;

OR,

SLAVE LIFE IN EUROPE.

With a Preface

BY SIR ARCHIBALD ALISON, BART.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

MDCCCLVI.

249. v. 539.



CLARA;

OR,

SLAVE LIFE IN EUROPE.



CHAPTER I.

HIM!

“WHAT is that?” said the young girl, with a start of horror, raising herself and listening eagerly.

“It is the man in the black coat, who spoke to you. He is coming, as he told you.”

“But I never allowed him to come,” cried the girl, in a tone of despair. “Never! never! Heaven have mercy on me! Oh! help me, help me! What shall I do?”

“Promise to go with me, and to place yourself under my care,” said the harp girl, composedly, without raising her head. “Or would you rather go with him?”

“I would rather die! I will throw myself out of the window!”

“Are you really so virtuous?” said Nanette, with a doubtful smile.

The other made no answer, but kept her distended eyes fixed on the door.

“Now you are really and truly good and innocent?” continued Nanette, more urgently, raising herself to hear her companion’s answer more distinctly.

The latter seemed at first, in her anguish, not to understand her, but then she started, looked at her steadily, and, lifting her hand, she said, “I will swear it! I have always been innocent!”

“Oh! if that is the case,” said Nanette, “we will soon get rid of this blockhead.”

The door now slowly opened, and the man who had defended the girl down stairs appeared, and looked cautiously into the room. He had an extinguished candle in his hand. “What a dreadful storm there is,” said he; “wherever the wind finds the smallest opening it rushes in.”

“What’s the matter?” said Nanette. “Do you want a light? I can’t give you one, I can tell you. Be off with you. We have paid for our room, and we don’t choose to be disturbed.”

“Oh, you are a wild cat!” said the man. “I don’t want to have anything to do with you.”

“Perhaps with my sister!” said Nanette, starting up, and advancing towards him, her eyes flashing and her hands clenched. “But take care, Strauber. The night is not over, and Johann is coming, and then I will see what he will say when I tell him of your insolence.”

This threat seemed to make some impression on Herr Strauber. He tried to smile, and said, “You are certainly the boldest woman I ever saw in my life. Did not the girl beside you say yes to me down stairs?”

“Yes,” said Nanette, “but you know she was afraid of the other man. She never intended to encourage you, and you know it. You are not such a fool as not to know that.”

At this moment a clear bell was sounded several times distinctly in the house, and its peculiar tone echoed sharply through the vaulted passages.

Herr Strauber started violently.

“That must be at the little back-door,” said Nanette; “Johann will be here immediately.”

“No, no,” answered Strauber, eagerly, while he again took hold of the handle of the door; “that is something else. Hush! I know that bell.” As he said this he visibly shuddered, like some one suddenly chilled by frost or seized by sudden terror.

“What is the matter?” said the young girl, who had observed the sudden change in Strauber.

“I don’t know,” said he, in a low whisper, “but something is wrong—listen!” So saying, he put his head out into the passage. “Extinguish your light,” said he, hastily; “it must not be seen on the stairs.”

“Is that not a new scheme of yours?” said Nanette, suspiciously.

“No! no! Hold your tongue this instant. If you won’t put out the candle, come with me outside the door, or stay in, as you choose. So, gently.”

The harp girl, who saw no expression but that of extreme fear in the man’s face, went out with him into the dark passage to satisfy her curiosity.

For a moment there was a deep silence in the whole building, then the sound of the little bell was heard again, a door was opened in the story below, and heavy steps were heard on the stone corridor, and a trembling voice asking eagerly,

“Now, what has happened? Don’t play me any foolish tricks!”

“The man in livery,” said the girl.

“Yes,” said Strauber, shuddering. “Poor wretch!”

The voice now changed from a trembling and imploring tone to an angry and resisting one. “What do you mean?” he was heard to say. “If I choose to go home I can do so, I suppose? Who has a right to prevent me?”

The steps were heard again, but instead of regular paces much trampling and scuffling, and then a groan, and a sound as of dragging along some heavy substance.

"Heaven have mercy on us!" said the girl; "something dreadful has happened."

"Not yet," said Strauber, shuddering, "but it will happen." On which he listened with increased eagerness. After the dragging along had continued for a few seconds, a deep voice was heard to say,

"Now, if you choose to go on your own feet I am quite willing, but don't attempt any resistance, for it is quite useless."

On which the lacquey was heard to answer, with a deep sigh, "I will do what you tell me." The footsteps died away in the distance, a door closed, and all was as still as death.

Strauber and Nanette listened for a few minutes at the door, and then returned slowly to the room.

"Speak to me," said she; "what is going on below?"

"How do I know?" said he, in a confused manner.

"You know more than you choose to tell. Did you understand what the sound of that bell meant?"

"Hush! hush!" said Strauber, drawing the girl into the room; "*he* is in the house."

“He!” said Nanette, starting.

“Yes, yes, I tell you *he* is here,” answered the other; “and if the doors are opened again to-night I shall be off instantly. Good night! Go to sleep. What need you care about what goes on in the house?”

So saying, Strauber left the room and crept softly along the passage and down stairs.

The young girl had half raised herself on the bed, and was the picture of terror and anguish. Her long fair hair fell over her pale face without her attempting to smooth it away. She, too, had heard confused voices and hurried steps, and had naturally thought that it was some danger which threatened her, and she was trembling violently. When Strauber left the room, however, she became more quiet and composed.

Nanette approached the bed, and said, thoughtfully, “You may lie down now safely, and go to sleep. No one will molest us to-night; so make a little room for me that I may also lie down. But first I will put out the candle.”

“Oh no, let it burn,” said the young girl.

“No, I dare not; it would be contrary to the regulations of the house,” said the other, eagerly. “The light might be seen in the window from the court below, and not for the world would I have any blame in the matter—on no account what-

ever." So saying she blew out the candle, and stretched herself beside her companion on the little hard camp bed, where there was scarcely room for both; but they shared the coverlet and the couch as they best could, and soon the deep and regular breathing of Nanette showed that she was sound asleep.

The other poor girl was too agitated to sleep; she pressed her hand on her beating heart, closed her eyes, and tried to chase away every thought of past days, till a light slumber stole on her weary eyes like a thin mist. But soon dread reality startled her out of her sleep, when she raised herself, trembling, pushed her hair back, and looked round her anxiously, but she could distinguish nothing.

The thickest darkness pervaded the room, and only a very faint dim glimmering of light indicated the position of the windows, and now as before the snow drifted in through the broken panes, and the howling of the wind round the corner and in the chimneys showed what a storm raged out of doors. The only friendly or cheering sound was a clock striking ten in its clear, silvery tones.

She then lay down again and tried to compose her nerves. Long, long she remained awake and terrified, but at last friendly sleep compassionately closed her eyes.

CHAPTER II.

A SECRET TRIBUNAL.

THE girl had slept for some time more quietly, when in her sleep she thought that some one seized her hand. She awoke instantly, groped for her companion, and laid hold of her arm, and found it was Nanette, who was sitting up beside her in bed, holding her wrist.

“What is it?” said the girl, in terror.

“Hush!” whispered Nanette. “The sound of the clock must have awakened me; it has just struck eleven; but as I was going to sleep again I heard some one coming up-stairs softly. Listen, now, in the passage.”

“Who can it be?”

“Perhaps some one who has arrived late, and is now going to his room. But no—it is a woman’s step. I have quick ears; such a life as mine sharpens the faculties.”

And she was right;—slow, dragging steps approached the door. Both listened, scarcely daring to breathe. A hand seized the latch of the door, it slowly opened, and a ray of light darted into the room. The girls could not at first recognise the bearer of the light, the glare of which fell into the room.

“What’s the matter?” asked Nanette, as firmly as she could, but her voice trembled a little. Then she recovered her presence of mind, and jumped out of bed to meet the danger, whatever it might be; but the young girl clung to her arm and prevented her moving.

“Yes, I am right enough,” said a voice at the door. “I was not sure of the number. I see it is 24.”

“Oh! it is you, portress,” said Nanette, with a sigh of relief, for she had recognised the old woman of the tavern; “you frightened me by opening the door so slowly.”

“Oh!” said the old woman, crossly, “you are none of the timid kind.”

“Not generally, but there was such a stir in the house to-night. What do you come to us for?”

The old woman closed the door carefully, put down her candle on the table, and went up to the bed. “Is the other girl asleep?” whispered she.

“No, no, I am not asleep,” said the girl.

“ All right, my dear, then I need not waken you.”

“ Waken me! Merciful powers! what is it you want with me?”

“ Oh! *I* don't want you at all, child, but——”

“ Woman! let the poor thing alone,” said Nanette; “ Strauber was here, and we had trouble enough to get rid of him. Don't you see how the poor creature is shaking from terror?”

“ Strauber!” said the woman, contemptuously; “ do you think I trouble my head with such a fellow? A very different affair brings me here. *He* is in the house,” said she, in a low voice.

“ I heard so,” answered Nanette, “ but that can't concern us. I don't believe he knows we are in the world.”

“ He knows everything,” said the woman, gravely, “ and the best proof is my being here. I have his orders to bring that girl to him instantly.”

“ She! that young girl?” springing aside from her companion as if a snake had stung her. “ Blessed saints! *he* has sent for her?”

The old woman nodded.

“ Then you must have done something far worse than you told me,” continued Nanette, turning to the girl. “ Why should he send for you? Who are you? What have you done?”

The girl looked round helplessly, as if still fettered

by some frightful dream. "Some one has sent for me?" said she at last with difficulty; and as the old woman answered, "Yes, yes, I tell you, rise this moment," she could only wring her hands piteously, and say, "Where am I to go? Oh! have mercy on me. Let me alone. I never did you any harm."

"There is not a moment to lose," said the old woman, coldly; "get up and dress as fast as you can."

"Oh! you were so kind to me," said the poor creature, appealing to the harp girl, who was standing a few paces from her, looking with sympathy at her former companion. "You said you would protect me; don't let them take me away from you. Who can want me? There must be some mistake. I don't know a soul in the house except yourself."

"*He* has said he wants you," said the old woman, "and go you must."

The poor girl looked beseechingly at Nanette, who shook her head and said, "Resistance is of no use. Come, rise quickly. God help you!" added she, in a low voice.

Then the girl allowed Nanette to assist her to rise and to smooth and plait up her long hair. The old woman fastened her dress, urging her all the time to make haste; and after throwing her shawl over her shoulders, she took her hand to lead her away. Nanette went to the door with them, and when the

girl thanked her warmly for all her kindness, the bright eyes of the harp girl were dimmed by tears.

The girl went unresistingly along with the old woman, though her strength was failing, and her knees trembled, so that she was several times obliged to stop and lean against the wall for support. The old woman, seeing her terror, tried to console her.

“Don’t be afraid,” said she; “nothing will happen to you. This is the first time you have ever been in this house, is it not?”

“Yes, certainly.”

“And you don’t know any of those men you saw to-night below stairs? You never had anything to do with them?”

“Never!—never in my life,” answered the girl, shuddering.

“Then I can’t guess what he wants with you; but I don’t think you have any cause for fear. But we must make haste; we have lost too much time already.”

So they walked on quickly, up and down steps, along passages, sometimes to the right and sometimes to the left, till at length they crossed a court, ascended a stair, and at last stopped at a door. The old woman knocked three times. It was instantly opened, and the girl felt herself pushed into a lighted room, the door of which suddenly closed, and she found, on looking round, that the old woman had not followed her.

The room was spacious, and was furnished with some good tables and chairs, and a large stove warmed the room. A tall man, who was walking up and down, made the girl a sign to take a seat, and then continued to pace backwards and forwards, without taking any further notice of her.

The reader must now accompany us to another room, separated from the one we have just described by a small dark closet. This apartment was larger and loftier than the others, and panelled with dark oak like the one in the tavern; but it had an air of greater care and comfort, and there were some old pictures in gilt frames on the walls. It was not easy to discover where doors and windows were situated, for all were covered by dark curtains, which hung down from the ceiling to the floor. In one corner was a large chimney, in which some lighted fagots of wood were blazing. An old carved oak table, covered by a green cloth, stood close to it, and an easy-chair.

Opposite these, in the other corner, were several men of strong-built frames, bold countenances, and fierce eyes. Some had large beards, others were closely shaved. In the midst of them was the man in livery, whom we first saw in the public room of the tavern, and whose voice we so recently heard in the passage; but he did not stand carelessly and upright like the others; he was bent together, his knees trembled, and his pale face was convulsed by

terror. All, however, had their eyes steadily fixed on the corner of the room we first described.

In the large easy-chair was seated a young man, rather tall, but slender, and whose form and movements showed the utmost strength and agility. He wore close-fitting leathers, with long black riding-boots and heavy spurs ; they were all splashed with mud, as if he had just returned from a long ride. He had on a dark-blue woollen blouse, with wide hanging sleeves, and when his small sunburnt hand was by chance raised, the sleeves fell back and showed white fine linen underneath.

He had a leather strap round his waist, and in the left side was stuck a Circassian dagger, ornamented with steel and inlaid with gold ; one of those deadly weapons, about a foot and a half long, wide at the top, and tapering off to a sharp point. The sheath was of dark leather, and the handle of white ivory, inlaid with gold, and on the top a heavy iron knob, evidently for the purpose of knocking down an opponent in an affray. The head of this man was as pleasing as his form, but his complexion was as brown as that of a gipsy, which harmonised with his jet-black hair, and his long beard of the same colour, to which, however, his blue eyes formed a strange contrast.

At the moment when we have invisibly entered the room, he was leaning his right arm over the

back of the chair, and his left was resting on the iron knob of the handle of his dagger.

“Thus the matter stands,” said he, in a clear, ringing voice; “and as I wish to condemn no man unheard, you can now state if you have anything to bring forward in your defence; or any one that can testify in your favour may do so.”

The lacquey groaned, and looked imploringly at the other men who stood round him, none of whom vouchsafed him even a glance, or uttered one syllable.

“Speak, then, for yourself.”

“Oh! sir,” said the accused, “what can I say? If it was ever so wicked of me to give that unnecessary stab with my knife, punish me, but don’t be too hard on me, I beseech of you.”

“For once in your life,” said the other, “tell the truth. That shameful, cruel murder is indeed wicked enough; but I will be less severe if you will honestly confess what else you have been guilty of against *us*.”

“I guilty of anything against you!” said the lacquey, starting and looking round at the men. “May I die this instant if I ever have been a traitor to any of you.”

“Be honest,” said the questioner, sternly. “I warn you, be honest, and confess, or you will come to a fearful end.”

“What am I to confess? I have done nothing.”

“Nothing?”

“No, no,” said the man, convulsively. “Don’t glare at me in that horrible way. I have done nothing.”

“Your last chance is gone, and now I will speak for you,” continued the young man, rising from his chair to his full height, placing one arm on his side, his left still playing with his dagger. “Men, attend to me! and remember what I told you long ago of this fellow—how you begged him off when, six months ago, I proposed punishing him—remember that!” He spoke these words in a slow, distinct tone, but with such fearful emphasis and coolness, that each word fell like the blow of a club on the head of the unfortunate culprit.

Then, seeing his agony of fear, he added, in a softer tone, “Have you nothing yet to confess?”

“Nothing,” said the other, while his teeth chattered from terror.

“Well, then, I say once more I will speak for you. I learned a few days ago, by chance, that he, that very man, had gone to the chief of the police——”

These words were like a clap of thunder to the accused, as well as to the men standing round. Two of them, with one impulse, seized him by both shoulders, as if they thought he might attempt

to escape, which, however, the poor wretch never thought of, for his knees shook so that he would have sunk on the ground, if the men had not held him up between them.

“He went to the head of the police, and spoke there of an association of dangerous men who were known to him, and pledged himself to disclose their names, their residence, and places of refuge—in short, everything connected with them—if a large sum of money were paid to him. He demanded two thousand gulden. The chief of the police, however, a sensible man, who was convinced that no such band could possibly exist within the district of the police, did not give much credit to this tale, and, instead of holding him fast, as I would have done, he let him go, telling him to return and bring proofs of the truth of his story, and holding out to him some hope of then receiving the proposed reward. You see, my men, that I watch over your safety, for I knew of this proposal the very day it was made. Your life and your liberty hang by a thread. Don't forget that. I speak only of *your* life, for I am a being who does not exist. I only appear at intervals to protect you, or to punish and reward; the guardian of your freedom, as this circumstance fully proves. The secretary of police,” continued he, more composedly, “was not quite so unsuspecting as the director. He commissioned a

police-officer to watch every step and every action of that traitor. But have no fear," continued he, as he saw the men look at each other uneasily, "I put him on the wrong scent, and his agents are at this moment watching an entirely innocent man. Now, traitor, speak! Have I told the truth to the letter?"

"It is all a mistake," cried out the accused—"a dreadful mistake. How could I act so?"

Instead of any answer, the unknown thrust his right hand into his blouse, drew out a pocket-book, took a sheet of paper from it which he unfolded, and then calmly said, "What is your name?"

The man hung down his head, and gave no answer.

"Well, you all know his name, therefore read this paper, which he gave to the chief of the police when asked for his address. Perhaps some of you know his handwriting; but at all events you know his name."

He made a sign, and one of the men stepped forward, took the paper, examined it, and then gave it to his neighbour, and so it passed into the hands of all present. The last, who had closely examined the writing, gave it back, saying, "Yes, sir, it is true; we are all thoroughly convinced."

"Then you know how to punish a traitor. Take him away—off with him!"

In vain did the condemned man try to soften the heart of his judge; he could utter no connected sentences, and only stammered confused words, while sobbing convulsively, and writhing in the hands of the two men who held him fast by the arms and shoulders. "Mercy! mercy!" he cried out, and tried to throw himself at his accuser's feet, who turned away his head with abhorrence, and looked gloomily into the fire. He then raised his right hand, and making a resolute sign to the men, he said:

"My mind is made up: put him out of the way quietly."

While two of the men dragged away the condemned criminal between them to a door in an opposite direction from that where the girl was waiting, a person entered that room, and advanced to the man, who was still walking up and down. He now stopped short, and said:

"How is it?—has he confessed?"

"Nothing! but the master has fully convicted him."

"So he will disappear?"

"Yes, I was to tell you so. But privately."

"Of course," said the other, with a repulsive sneer. "It is late at night, and the streets are deserted—take him away. He may be quite satisfied, for he will certainly furnish a paragraph for

the papers to-morrow. We shall read that a most unfortunate circumstance has occurred; that a man in livery, apparently the servant of a respectable family, who had probably been coming home intoxicated from a tavern, had fallen into the canal, and was found drowned."

CHAPTER III.

CHASSEUR AND LADY'S-MAID.

AFTER the people had left the room, the unknown took several quick turns, and then advancing to the lofty chimney-piece, he leant his arm on it, and sank into deep thought. "Ah, well!" said he, after a pause, "let the affair stand as it is. One man is the slave of another, and the stronger is always in the right. I do not deny the idea of retaliation, and one day I may stand before these wild, lawless beings, to be judged by them in my turn." After this gloomy soliloquy, he sank again into a deep reverie, but he suddenly started up and pulled a bell-rope which was in the corner.

Immediately a man entered, to whom he said a few words. In a minute the door opened again, and the man with the black beard and hair, whom we saw sleeping in the tavern, entered. He re-

mained standing, shyly stealing an occasional glance at the young man who was standing again beside the arm-chair. At last, looking up, he said, "I hear your affairs are in a bad way, Joseph?"

"Very bad, sir," answered he.

"It is strange, but true, that when the devil seizes a man even by one hair, he does not let him loose in a hurry. But we are all wretched slaves—slaves of our actions, slaves of our consciences."

"None of these things brought me back here, though they have often tormented me," answered Joseph.

"I am sorry to see you here again, for I am certain you don't come back voluntarily."

"Certainly not, sir; but I know you to be so kind and generous, and you allowed me at once to go when I told you I could no longer endure my companions in this house, and that I longed to become a better man."

"A better man, Joseph?" said he, smiling.

"Forgive me, sir; another man, then. Your recommendations got me a good situation, and I thought of you and blessed you, but after that unlucky shot I once more found myself a banished man, so I felt a longing desire to return to you——"

"To your old companions?"

"If I can't avoid it, what else can I do?"

“You know, Joseph, I have always had the best opinion of you, but I fear you have not conquered your greatest fault—I mean, being so passionate; people don’t generally shoot at their overseers.”

“But when he treats us like beasts of burden, like slaves? Oh! sir, if you had been so shamefully used!”

“Indeed I would not answer for myself. You are married?”

“Yes, sir; to a pretty young woman.”

“That was foolish, Joseph. This is a wicked world. An under-keeper, living in a solitary cottage in a wood, ought to live alone, and his family should consist of a couple of watch-dogs only.”

“If he had left me alone in my district of the wood that would not have signified. My cottage was in the centre, and I could, by proper activity, have looked to it all myself.”

“And did he send you into other districts?”

“Miles away! so that I was obliged to stay away days and nights from home. It was unwise to send me to these solitary places. When I stood there alone for hours leaning on an old oak, thinking of my wife and my home, and when evening came and I was obliged to remain where I was, and the thought would force itself on my mind that perhaps at that moment some other might be creeping into my house, I assure you I suffered torments too great for

a human heart to endure. The blood rushed to my head, and I seemed to hear distant cries for help. But it was a delusion, for the dog lay quietly at my feet, and never pricked up his ears: besides, it was too far away."

"And one day you left your post and went home?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you find anything wrong?"

"I don't exactly know, but I thought so, for I saw the overseer leave my house at night; so, no longer master of myself, I seized my gun——"

"Enough," said the young man, turning to the fire, "enough; I know the rest. The keeper who fired that shot is now across the seas."

"I, sir?"

"The keeper—so the papers said. His deed seemed so far justified by the provocation, that people pitied the poor fellow. So now you are become quite another man, and your name henceforth his Franz Karner. Here are the papers which will legitimise you."

With these words he again took out his pocket-book, and gave him a folded sheet of paper. "Here is also a letter," continued he, "which you are to present to-morrow. Read the address."

"To the Baron von Brand."

"Precisely. This gentleman will tell you where

you are to go ; and from what he said to me, I think he has secured the situation of chasseur for you in a family of distinction."

"Oh! sir, how can I thank you sufficiently?" said Joseph ; "may Heaven forget me if I ever forget you. But," said he, suddenly, in a grave tone, "how can I serve my new master and you too ?"

"As easily as possible. You have only to report to me all that occurs in the house, and then to receive my orders."

He rung the bell, and when he heard the door open, he called out to the servant in the ante-room, "The chasseur is to be properly dressed, and you are to take care that he leaves this house to-morrow unobserved. Send the young woman here." Then he made a friendly sign to Joseph, who withdrew.

Immediately after, the girl entered the room. She had dried her tears, but her face was frightfully pale, and her eyes wandered in terror round the room, first attracted by the blazing logs, and then by the young man, who had purposely placed himself behind the arm-chair. She started back in alarm, and he came a few steps forward.

"Come nearer, my child," said he ; "nearer, quite near ; have no fear."

The trembling girl did as she was desired, but so slowly that she remained standing half-way.

“Listen to my words, and answer my questions distinctly, will you?”

“Yes,” said she, “I will.”

“You came here this evening in company with a harp girl?” But when he saw the girl’s terrified look, he said, kindly, “You need not answer all my questions if they give you pain. I will consider your silence as assent. You met the harp girl by chance this evening in A——, and you came from N——, where you had run away from a respectable house, after having stolen some valuables?”

“No, sir; indeed, no!” answered the girl, eagerly. “Believe me, it is not true.”

“You were accused, however, of stealing, and on this account you were dismissed, and all who heard the story believed your master, and considered you to be a thief.”

“But, sir, I will swear I am no thief.”

“Possibly,” answered the young man; “but you must bring proofs—there are enough against you. You are rejected by the world, every one will turn away from you with abhorrence, what resource have you? You must seek the protection of that harp girl—and to what does her protection amount? I will tell you. She will teach you some chords on the guitar, then a couple of light songs; she will take you with her to inns and taverns, and if you are no thief now you will become one in a short time, or worse.”

The girl looked at him with an expression of grief and surprise, for he seemed omniscient in thus unveiling to her the past and the future.

“Perhaps,” said he, “the life I have described may be of a kind to suit you better than if I could put you in the way of earning an honest livelihood?”

“No! no!” exclaimed the girl; and for the first time the tones of her voice expressed hope.

“Well,” said he, “I feel compassion for you, and will endeavour to rescue you from the precipice over which you must otherwise inevitably fall. You shall have an opportunity of leading a respectable life. I will get you a situation in an excellent family, and it will depend on yourself whether your future life shall be good or bad.”

The girl raised her trembling hands and covered her eyes, and seemed to think for a moment, as if uncertain whether she was dreaming and still in reality stretched beside Nanette on the camp bed; but when she let her hands slowly sink down, and saw that she was still in the same room, the fire still blazing, and her companion looking at her with compassion and sympathy, she felt as if he were an angel from heaven sent to her rescue. Tears rushed from her eyes, and with a loud cry she sank at his feet. He raised her and said, “I believe this emotion.”

On which the girl answered, "May Heaven reward you for not thinking ill of me. I never stole anything—I am not wicked—I am only a poor, unfortunate, defenceless creature."

"I have arranged everything for you," said he. "You are to be one of the subordinate attendants of a lady of distinction. I suppose you don't know much, but if you are willing and diligent you will soon learn your business. Can you speak any foreign language?"

"A little French," said the girl, "which I learned from my mother, who emigrated from France with her parents."

"Good! You will be taken to a comfortable room, where you will find proper clothes, and to-morrow, early, you will receive the address of the house to which you are to go, a passport, and instructions. You must study the latter attentively, and your future name, for you must of course change your present one, and also learn carefully by heart where you have formerly been, whence you originally came, who your parents are, &c., for you will be probably closely examined on these points. Efface entirely your former name and your past life from your memory; that is absolutely necessary to your safety. Do you thoroughly understand me?"

"Certainly," answered the girl; "but how can I

express my gratitude? how can I prove to you, my benefactor, my sense of your great kindness, which has rescued me from a life of misery and disgrace, and which enables me once more to look my fellow-creatures in the face without shame?"

"How can you thank me?" said he. "I will tell you. In your instructions you will find another address, the number of the house of a man to whom you must go once a week and answer all his questions with the most perfect truth. For example, he may wish to know when your lady goes out, where she goes, who comes to her, what she does at home, to whom she writes, &c., and probably he may occasionally give you a commission which you must punctually execute."

This speech evidently had a very depressing effect on the girl. She drew a deep breath, looked up at the speaker, and as she saw no trace of jesting in his countenance, on the contrary, the deepest gravity, she hung down her head, sighing heavily.

"My wish may appear hard to you," continued he, "but one service deserves another, and what I give you is far more than what I ask of you; but you may still make your choice. Say 'No,' and you may at once return to the room you left, and to Nanette and her companions in the Fuchsbau."

He waited for an answer, but as the girl only shook her head sadly, he raised his voice, and said,

in a solemn tone, "If you accept my conditions, swear solemnly to fulfil them without shrinking."

The poor creature panted and hesitated. When she saw, however, that in spite of his startling words he was looking at her with kindly sympathy, when she recalled the picture he had drawn of her future life if she rejoined Nanette, and of the house from which she had been cast forth as a thief, she looked hastily round as if she felt a pursuer was near, and advancing to him, she stretched out her hand and said, "I swear it!"

So many horrors had oppressed the heart of the young inexperienced girl during the last twenty-four hours, that her strength suddenly seemed to desert her. She saw the fire blaze up, she felt her limbs give way, a thick veil seemed to cover her, and she sank down in a swoon.

When he saw that she had fainted, he raised her gently, and fanned her face with his handkerchief, and as he bent over her to see if she was recovering, he for the first time remarked the sweet face of the young creature, and her pretty, regular features; he felt that face could not deceive, and that she was indeed good and innocent.

In a few minutes the girl slowly opened her eyes. "That never happened to me before," said she, colouring; "within the last few days I have become very weak."

“It is all you have suffered,” said he, kindly. “You will soon recover. Now you may return to the ante-room, and there you will find the old woman who brought you here. She will take you to a room with a comfortable bed. You may go to sleep without fear. You could not be safer in your mother’s arms than you are now in this house.”

The girl, when about to obey this command, remained for a moment standing at the door, and then said, timidly, “And may I not return to thank you at some future time?”

“No, no,” said he, decidedly. “I hope and believe we shall never meet again.”

“Then I will pray for you,” said she—“from my heart I will pray for you, and always think of you with the deepest gratitude. May Heaven shield you from all harm !”

“Amen!” said he, when the door had closed and the curtain had fallen behind her. “If I had met with such a good, innocent girl in my early youth, things might have been very different.” He then took a broad-leafed hat from the table, went behind the arm-chair, and suddenly disappeared from the room without the smallest noise of any door, or the slightest movement of any curtain.

As we live in an enlightened age, when we no longer believe in witchcraft, and as we have no

intention to write a fairy tale, we can assure our reader that this occurred in the most natural way in the world. There was a secret door near the fireplace; by pressing a particular spring the door opened and closed without noise. He descended a winding stair, went along some passages, and passed through a door similar to the one near the fireplace into the open air, but before leaving the house he cast a large cloak over him, to hide both blouse and dagger. He then went hastily through the streets, where wind, rain, and snow were still playing their wild pranks, and soon disappeared in the darkness.

CHAPTER IV.

THE NEW MAID OF HONOUR.

WE must now return to the house of young Count Fohrbach, whose turn it was to do duty in the ante-room of her majesty. He was just stepping into the carriage to go to the palace, when he was detained by his old valet, who wished to present his new chasseur to him. He was, as we already know, a tall, well-proportioned man, and now, in a handsome livery, and his beard and moustaches carefully trimmed, looked remarkably well. His face had a good expression, and he replied to the count's questions without hesitation, and intelligently.

At a quarter before eleven o'clock, Count Fohrbach drove to the palace, and ascended its wide staircase, through numbers of attendants. A smart-looking valet advanced to open the door. "Any-

thing new to-day?" asked the count. "Nothing particular," answered the valet; "the ladies and gentlemen in waiting are to breakfast in the yellow gallery, and the new maid of honour of her majesty appears to-day for the first time."

The count passed through several rooms, which, like all apartments in palaces, were exactly alike, only differing in the colour of the walls and the furniture—in one room alabaster and marble vases, in another china and japan. The pictures on the walls were generally devoid enough of all merit.

In the yellow gallery, where breakfast was to be served, there were, with the exception of servants arranging china and plate, only one old, silent equerry, who, after carefully examining the barometer, was now studying the heavy clouds of snow in the grey sky, and Major von S——, whom Count Fohrbach was to-day to replace. He was standing at a window, when the count went up to him: "How are you?" said he.

"So-so. The weather is not quite clear; some dark clouds seem to be hovering about; and we have had as yet no audiences, which is a bad sign. The director of the royal theatre was appointed to come at one o'clock."

"We must waylay him."

"There is not much for you to do to-day. There are some audiences. You will find a list of

the names in the next room. The paper is in the desk."

"I will attend to it. Are you going to breakfast with us?"

"No; I am not inclined to do so. I am going home. *A propos*, you will make a new acquaintance. Her majesty's new maid of honour breakfasts here."

"Is she handsome?"

"Handsome!" said the major. "She shines like a bright star in the dark sky."

"I think such stars will enlighten us much, for it is sometimes dark enough here. What is her name? Is it not Fräulein von S——, a distant relation of yours?" said the count.

"Very distant. Her name is Eugenie von S——. She is of a distinguished but poor family; scarcely nineteen; tall and majestic; a figure like that of her majesty; dark hair, bright eyes, and teeth so white! it is a pleasure to see her open her mouth."

"Only on account of her white teeth?" said the count, laughing.

"Oh, no, for she is one of the best-informed and most charming girls I have seen for a long time."

"I suppose she will be a great deal at your house?"

"I hope so. You know she is a relation."

“I will take good care to put your wife on her guard.”

“So that you may have a pretext to come frequently yourself,” answered the major, smiling. “Beware, young man! When she glances at you, if you chance to be in a susceptible mood, it is all over with your peace of mind. But perhaps you know her already?”

“No, indeed.”

“You did not know she was so extremely charming and lovely?”

“No, upon my word. I have only heard her spoken of in general terms. But why this question?”

“I was last night talking to Frau von B——”

“The mistress of the robes?”

“Yes. We were speaking of the arrangements to be made for the young lady, of her apartments, &c.”

“Is she to live in the palace?”

“Certainly. A very good apartment has been selected for her—No. 16; the windows look on the inner court, where you, my dear count, can't come caracoling on your prancing chargers. But listen. We were speaking, also, of the young lady's servants. She brought with her an elderly waiting-maid, and she is to get a younger one here.”

“Well! What have I to do with that?”

“A younger lady’s-maid, who is recommended by you.”

“By me! Through whom?”

“Don’t you remember having recently spoken to Frau von B—— of a waiting woman who wanted a situation?”

“Oh! now I recollect,” said the aide-de-camp. “I don’t know her myself, but Baron Brand asked me to recommend her.”

“So, Baron Brand!” said the major, thoughtfully. “He is a dangerous man with ladies. Even the old Frau von B—— praises him up to the skies—very unlike her in general. He met Eugenie von S—— in her apartment at tea last night. The conversation turned on this waiting-maid, and whether she was likely to suit the new maid of honour. Frau von B—— shook her head, smiling, and hinted that she did not consider your recommendation of much value in such a case; but Baron Brand remembered the girl; I believe she served one of his relations, who gave her the highest testimonials. So the girl is installed in her place. But hush! here come the ladies.”

The folding-doors of the salon were now opened, and the ladies in waiting appeared. They were chiefly full-blown beauties, well-preserved flowers, but without fragrance, like their sisters of paper and silk, and, like them, they were stiff and rustling.

Eugenie, who came last, did not require to be so exceedingly beautiful as she really was to shine among her companions like the sun breaking forth from grey clouds. Count Fohrbach was indeed astonished by her loveliness, and somewhat confused when presented to her by the major. She bowed courteously, and, in the course of conversation, said she knew she was indebted to the count's mother for her situation at court, for which she felt most grateful.

Then they all sat down to breakfast, knives and forks clattered, servants darted about like busy swallows, and as soon as breakfast was over the ladies returned to their apartments. The silent equerry and the aide-de-camp accompanied them to the door, and here the latter hoped to obtain a glance from Eugenie. She bowed to both gentlemen, but so impartially that the count felt rather mortified.

CHAPTER V.

GOLDEN FETTERS.

THE new aide-de-camp placed himself, according to the instructions he had received, in the ante-room. Soon after carriages arrived, doors opened, and the ministers of state appeared. Count Fohrbach advanced to meet them, receiving each according to his rank and importance.

The prime minister took the aide-de-camp's arm, and retired with him into the recess of a window, where some of his intimate friends, after saying a few civil words to the rest, followed him. The others went to the opposite side of the room, and either walked in couples up and down conversing in a low voice, or remained standing beside the marble chimney-piece holding their hats and papers in their hands, with long faces, grave looks, and dignified air. They only ventured on suppositions,

and hemmed, and coughed, and nodded their heads impressively, and anxiously watched the clock and the door.

The group at the window was more lively and animated ; they talked of the state of the weather in-doors and out of doors.

“ Will his majesty ride to-day ? ” asked the comptroller of the household of the master of the horse, who met this question by significantly shrugging his shoulders and saying :

“ I don't know if it is advisable.”

“ His majesty's horse is ordered at three o'clock,” whispered the valet who was keeping watch over the door and the clock.

The grand chamberlain gave him a severe glance for his interference, and the man shrunk back into his corner.

“ His majesty must really not ride out in such weather,” remarked the minister of the interior. “ The king has a cold, and his physician informed me that such weather as this is peculiarly trying to his majesty's constitution.”

“ But when his majesty has once issued his commands,” said the grand chamberlain, in a subdued voice, “ his gracious majesty is not easily dissuaded.”

The comptroller of the household looked significantly at the master of the horse, who coolly said :

“It is impossible that his majesty should ride in such weather. His majesty does not know how cold the wind is to-day.”

“Oh yes,” said the grand chamberlain; “his majesty had a short walk before breakfast.”

Both their excellencies, after this concealed sparring, turned to look out of the window, and the others, understanding the movement, discreetly drew back. “His majesty must really not ride out to-day,” said one minister. “I am going to solicit an audience at three o’clock. I have some important business to transact, which will occupy at least half an hour.”

In the mean time the other ministers had been received in succession in the royal audience-chamber, and returned. One, as the door opened, looked very much annoyed, but he strove hard to assume a smiling countenance when he re-entered the ante-room, that his colleagues might not suspect his defeat.

Another returned radiant with joy, but followed an exactly opposite course, as it was of the utmost consequence to him that the other ministers should not surmise the important measure he had just carried through.

The director of the theatre had now joined the group in the window, looking cross and dissatisfied. “I am in great embarrassment,” said he; “his ma-

jesty has thought fit to command the 'Domino Noir' this evening, which throws my whole *repertoire* into confusion."

"How so, my dear baron?" said the master of the horse. "It must be quite the same to you what piece is given this evening. The wish of his majesty is easily fulfilled. The 'Domino Noir' has been given five times during the last month, so there can be no difficulties in the way."

"I beg your excellency's pardon; there are more obstacles than you imagine. This opera certainly has been given several times lately, and precisely for that reason I wished to reserve it for next Sunday."

"To fill your coffers better, I suppose?" said the comptroller, laughing.

"Not entirely, your excellency; more with a view to oblige the prima donna."

"How so?"

"As you know, the opera was repeatedly given on week days to a very moderately-filled house, so of course without much scenery or spectacle, and consequently with no great applause; on which Frau Wiesengrün, my bravura singer, declared that next time she would not sing in the 'Domino Noir' unless on a Sunday."

"Who has the chief command at the theatre?"

"I have, nominally, your excellency; but in

reality all the actors and actresses, the manager, the inspector, the machinists, the tailor, and the carpenters."

"Yes, it is a strange state of things," said the master of the horse, smiling. "I know it of old, and the high-class *artistes*, both in singing and dancing, would soon turn a man's hair grey by their airs and caprices."

"That is indeed reversing the order of things," said the comptroller, "for then you become the slave of your own subjects."

"And what a slave!" said the director, sorrowfully. "To what humours and whims am I obliged to submit! I will not speak of events which may at any time occur, of an indisposition which cannot be prevented, of a violent cold which the prima donna may bring on by choosing on the first damp cold spring day to take her coffee in the open air. I do not complain of the interruptions caused in the regular course of the theatre, by the commencement or the breaking-off of some love affair, or of a severe headache, which usually occurs when a rival has pleased the public more, or been more applauded. I willingly submit to all these things. But in my bureau, in my house, at every hour of the day, I am irritated, tormented, plagued, on account of some silly caprice—a fancy about a new dress, or the trimming of an old one; about a bow of ribbons;

about a hasty word that the manager or the chief of the orchestra may have addressed to these princesses; on account of a criticism in the newspapers; and a thousand similar things.”

“You really are much to be pitied,” said the master of the horse, smiling; “but, my dear baron, no rose without thorns, you must admit that, and roses enough grow in your garden.”

“Your excellency may jest,” answered the director, “but I assure you again, the state of slavery in which I live is unbearable. I sit down to my coffee in fear and trembling. There is a ring at the bell—the messenger from the theatre. The piece announced for this evening cannot be given; Herr H—— is unwell, and will not appear; that means, in reality, that the sky-blue waistcoat he expected from Paris is not yet arrived, or his wife has persuaded him that he has been overworked lately, and that it is high time some one else should take his place. At dinner, the same story. Often I don’t hear a word my wife or children say to me; I am listening only for the fatal signal of the bell. I am thus tormented the whole day, and my very dreams disturbed at night, for in them sometimes the messenger from the theatre appears to announce to me that my whole company have run away or are dead, and that I must myself play ‘Robert le Diable’ quite alone this evening.”

“That is all very tiresome, my good baron,” said the master of the horse, “but I assure you I have quite as disagreeable announcements.”

“Oh! your excellency cannot compare your department with mine,” answered the director, eagerly. “You have to do with quiet, well-disciplined, I may almost say reasonable creatures, whereas I——”

“Hush, hush!” said the comptroller. “My dear baron, if your prima donna heard that speech we would have no good opera for six months to come. But to return to the ‘Domino Noir.’”

“Your excellency seems quite infatuated with this opera—or with the prima donna!”

“Oh! my dear friend,” said the minister, highly flattered, “an elderly man like me!” At the same time he stole a look at the glass, and thought that his new toupee of hair had an excellent effect. “What I was going to remark,” continued he, “was, that his majesty was prevented being present the last three times that opera was given.”

“I really cannot assist his majesty on this occasion,” said the director, shrugging his shoulders. “I have already done all I could with Madame Wiesengrün, but at the first hint she pressed her hand over her eyes and declared she should faint.”

During this conversation the grand chamberlain had again joined them, but was disturbed in his attention to their excellencies’ discussion by a court

pated much pleasure from the opera this evening."

"And his majesty said to me," said the director, in a piqued tone, "that he preferred the blue dining-room to all others, and that he intended to dine there to-day."

"Let every one do their best," retorted the grand chamberlain; "but I think the small size of the room has not occurred to his majesty."

"Indeed it is our duty each to please his majesty in every way," said the master of the horse, pompously; "but it is also our duty to guard the health of our royal master, and his riding to-day would have been highly dangerous."

So their excellencies departed arm-in-arm, after taking leave of Count Fohrbach. The director of the theatre went on his way, sighing.

Here the audiences terminated, and the kind reader who has accompanied us thus far may also desire to know how this day at court ended. We are happy to comply with his wish, because we shall still further display the object of this work, which is to prove that no man in this world escapes slavery, and that none can accomplish all his wishes, whether a beggar, or the loftiest on earth.

His majesty the king did not ride as he wished, nor did he drive with the black horses, as the stud-groom had another purpose in view, and so he de-

clared they were not safe. Moreover, the dinner did not take place in the small blue dining-room, but in the large red one. The day ended as it began, for when his majesty entered the theatre it was announced to him that Madame Wiesengrün was suddenly seized with illness, and that Fräulein Topf would sing in "Norma," which is, undeniably, a very beautiful opera.

CHAPTER VI.

A GARRET AND THE CANAL.

IN the house of the bookseller Blaffer there were some small whitewashed garrets, and one of these was inhabited by Herr Beil. There was very little furniture in the room—a torn curtain, a small iron stove, an old bed, and two chairs; on these were seated Herr Beil and Auguste, the pale apprentice.

It was about seven o'clock in the evening. On a small rickety table, which we forgot to include in the inventory of furniture, was placed a tallow candle in a tin candlestick, and its dim red rays diffused an uncertain light in the room. The draughts of air on every side made the candle flicker, and cast long dark shadows here and there.

Herr Beil was leaning his head against the wall, and looking up vacantly at the ceiling. The apprentice was leaning forward, with his head sup-

ported by his hands. There was a third person in the room at this moment—an old maid-servant, who was clearing away the remains of a frugal supper. She soon wished them good night, and left the room; and then all was still. Nothing was heard but the ticking of Herr Beil's silver watch, which was on the table, and then the whistling of a rush of wind against the slates of the roof.

“So it is all over, and you are really going to leave us to-morrow,” said the apprentice, sighing.

“What need you care,” answered Beil; “some other clerk will come who will, perhaps, be less strict with you than I have been.”

“Perhaps,” said the youth, dolefully; “but who won't like me half so well. What has happened between you and Herr Blaffer?”

“I will tell you as well as I can,” said Beil; “but you cannot understand what it is to devote every hope, and thought, and feeling to a woman.”

“I know that you love my sister Marie.”

“That would be no misfortune; but my love is hopeless, because I am a poor wretch, and have no chance against a rich man. Only another fine tale of slavery. The master orders this charming girl to leave her garret and her fellow-slaves, and to occupy one of the best rooms in his house—all for her happiness! A fellow-slave, whose hard life has only been endured because he could see her, and

occasionally receive a kind word from her, ventures to remonstrate, so he is turned out of the house in the cold wintry weather like a dog. Oh! I can understand now how men are driven mad. I had intended to leave this house to-morrow, but I have made up my mind to go to-night."

"But it is pitch dark," said the apprentice, starting; "and where are you going to?"

"Oh, I shall find a quiet place where I shall be received kindly," said the other, with a melancholy smile. "I shall take very little with me. You shall be my heir, and if any of my little property can be of use to you, you are welcome to it. Give this watch to your sister Marie, and tell her it stopped at the hour I last saw her."

"Why leave all your things here, as you don't return?"

"I intend to enter on a different career," said Beil, "and the few things I leave are not required. Let us say no more; do as I have asked you, and allow me to go my own way without further remonstrance."

"But you will write to me?" said Auguste, eagerly; "or you will at least leave your address, for you would like to hear of our welfare."

Beil stretched out his hand to the lad, and said, in a low tone of anguish, "I can no longer remain to see an innocent angel such as she was now living

in vice and shame." He then rushed out of the room into the dark, cold, wintry night.

It was near midnight when Beil hurried along the solitary streets. He was so absorbed in his misery that he never felt the cold, sharp wind blowing on his uncovered head. He did not seem even to know whither he was going, and started in surprise when he felt himself stopped by a barrier with which he came violently in contact.

This barrier was a good way from the centre of the city, in a deserted quarter, where there were very few houses. The canal was close by, and the barrier was placed there to prevent any heedless passenger from falling into the water, for the canal was very deep, and there was a considerable current at this spot, as it joined the river a hundred paces further on which encircled the town.

Our night wanderer leant both arms on the railing, and gazed gloomily into the dark water. It was necessary to accustom the eye to the darkness below before being able to distinguish the current running on between the narrow banks, or to wait till the flying clouds in the sky unveiled a glimpse of the moon or a few stars, whose light fell on the dull water, and brightened it for a moment.

Herr Beil looked down at the canal, and his eyes followed the course of its waters. It seemed to him as if they made him a sign to follow, and after

having long stood in this dreamy mood he had overcome all dread of a cold, watery grave, and felt a longing to follow the whispering waters.

At first, they seemed to his ear to rush monotonously past, but by degrees a certain tune and measure were audible, a simple melody of his youth, which the floods chanted in a low tone on and on. He thought he remembered the air as one which his dead mother had often sung beside his cradle in his childhood. They were the same soft, lulling tones, and after listening a little longer he thought he could distinguish words, but not those of his cradle-song. These sung of bright regions to which the waters were hastening away from the gloom of night, of smiling fields covered with fruits and flowers, far different from the cold, dismal banks which now encircled them. "Peace, peace," they whispered, "is found beneath; sweet and calm repose. Come and follow us."

He bent deep down towards the waters, and recalled vividly his youthful days, when he had frequently bathed in a spot whose strong current engulfed everything, but which he, in the pride of his strength, had often defied; but one day, when he boldly plunged in, the river-god seemed to resent his audacity, and held him down fast by the foot. That was his first thought as he felt he could not rise to the surface. In reality, his foot was caught

in a bunch of sea-weeds, and he could not disentangle himself. The few seconds when he was struggling to get loose appeared to him long years, but when he found that his efforts were all vain, he resigned himself to his fate, opened his eyes, and looked down with wonder into the green waters, the light of the sun playing on the surface, the river appearing like a green crystal vault—a fairy palace, with strange, mysterious sounding music—for here, too, the waters sung snatches of that well-known melody. By degrees the tones became fainter and more broken and unconnected, though the invisible singers seemed to come nearer, till at last they surrounded him and deafened him with wild cries and laments, though always in low tones, yet perfectly distinct and impressive as they approached; and then he died without pain, without a groan—at least, so it was supposed at the moment—but a bold diver brought him to the surface again, and he was with difficulty restored to life. He thought of this, and that drowning was not a painful but a peaceful death.

To-night, indeed, it was dark—no rays of sunshine brightened the waters, but he rejoiced in the gloom. He saw nothing to remind him of life and happiness; he could close his eyes in peace, to wait till that mysterious song came nearer and nearer. “To sleep! to sleep! to rest!” it whispered from

underneath the waters, and another voice also spoke consolingly to him.

He had raised his eyes to the sky, and there he saw one clear, brilliant star, which shone forth in its pure blue light from amid the dark masses of clouds. He thought of her whose bright image had so long filled his whole soul, and then of the dark waters, which made him shudder; but the reaction was the stronger. The star vanished, the light in his heart was extinguished, and all was again gloom.

He bent once more over the stream, and heard the waters whispering, "She will follow you; she will come to this spot to seek for rest and peace; we will sing to her, and entice her to come to us; we will tell her you are awaiting her. Yes, she will come, and we are compassionate, and will purify her soul, that she may appear before you in all her original brightness and innocence."

His glance was fascinated. He climbed over the barrier, but before throwing himself in he cast one glance backwards on the city, whose houses lay in gloom and darkness.

As he looked, he involuntarily seized the barrier with his hands, for, with mysterious horror, he saw, not two steps from him, the dim outline of some one leaning on the barrier, in exactly the same spot he had just left.

The figure was wrapped in a wide, dark mantle,

and either had drawn one end of it over his head, or wore a large hood, for neither neck nor shoulders were visible. The whole formed a shapeless black mass, but Beil saw distinctly two eyes shining, which appeared to watch him attentively.

His nerves were naturally in a state of the greatest excitement, and he was not a little startled, at a time when he imagined himself far from every human being, to find himself so unexpectedly watched in the deep solitude of night. A few moments before, his soul, in spite of his dreadful purpose, had felt at rest, but now his heart beat violently; an indescribable sensation of fear overpowered him, and seemed to constrain him to gaze at the two fiery eyes, which continued steadily fixed on him.

Did this mysterious being know what had impelled him to come here? Had he read his thoughts? Could it indeed be a human being who stood there motionless, as if eagerly waiting for the moment when he should end his life by suicide?

He involuntarily moved to one side, still holding the railing fast with both hands, but so fascinated by the glare of those strange eyes that he could not turn away. His terror every instant increased, and, though strange, it was true, that he who, a moment before, had sought death, was now afraid to turn his back on this mysterious figure, for

he thought he might, perhaps, attack him unexpectedly and throw him into the canal.

But he remained standing composedly on the same spot. Nothing about him moved. His spectral eyes continued to stare fixedly at Beil.

The latter had familiarised himself with the idea of death, but he wished to die alone in the calm, silent night—not with a mocking spectator to enjoy the spectacle of his death-agony, and that he should hear his loud and fiendish laugh as the waters closed over him.

A pause ensued. At last the figure made a slight movement, raised itself, and folded its arms under the cloak. Then it uttered, in a deep, sonorous voice, one solitary word, “Well!”

“Well!” repeated Beil. “What do you mean?”

“I mean, when is it to be?” answered the strange being. “I have waited long enough.”

“What have you waited for?” said Beil, shuddering, in a timid voice. “I called no one hither to witness what might happen.”

“Certainly not,” said the other, “but I felt irresistibly attracted to this spot, and as I am here I don’t wish to wait any longer needlessly.”

“And who are you,” said Beil, with increasing horror, “who seem to take a fiendish pleasure in seeing how a wretched man, whose life is a burden to him, makes an end of his misery?”

“Who I am is no matter,” answered the other. “Perhaps I am the guardian angel of self-murderers, and have the power to grant you an easy death, or perhaps I am one of those beings who take particular delight in the follies of men.”

“Follies!” repeated Beil. “You can scarcely call a deed folly without knowing its motives.”

“Self-destruction is always folly and cowardice,” said the phantom, coolly, while leaning forward on the barrier. “Only a fool and a coward voluntarily leaves this world. The first, because he allows himself to be mastered by circumstances; the other, because he has not courage to bear the weight of a sorrowful life till its natural end.”

“Oh! you have never felt how hard it is to say farewell for ever to the light of the sun and to life, however joyless, or you would not say such a deed was cowardly.”

“The courage of a suicide is no true courage. It is rather an outburst of despair, supported by excited nerves. One spring into the water and all hope is for ever gone. You can no longer repent on earth, and you voluntarily throw away all hope of heaven. Now tell me your story before you end your sorrows.”

Beil felt as if constrained to obey this command, and related his melancholy life, his sickly youth, his being left an orphan and apprenticed to the book-

seller, whose tyranny he had so long endured. Then his voice softened when he spoke of Marie. He trembled, and tears trickled over his cheeks, when he described in glowing colours his devotion to the girl and the secret hopes he had cherished. He told in few and bitter words her sin and her degradation through the vile acts and tyranny of Blaffer, which had made him resolve to end his wretched life. "Now can you say my purpose is folly?"

At these last words he covered his face with his hands. For some minutes he heard nothing but the rushing of the water, but at last the voice of his singular companion sounded close to him.

"I have listened to your history," said he. "You have suffered much, but not enough to commit so great a crime. Promise me to live till we meet again, and, believe me, it shall be soon. Be assured I will watch over you for good, and I think I may safely prophesy many bright hours are yet in store for you. Farewell."

The voice was silent, and when Beil looked up the figure had vanished, though he had heard no step or sound. He was once more alone in the dark night, but the sky looked clear, and the one solitary star streamed down from the heavens in all its brightness.

At this moment the church-clock struck distinctly the hour of midnight.

CHAPTER VII.

HERR STRAUBER'S WALK.

THE weather changed in the latter part of the night; the wind veered round to the east, chasing away all heavy clouds, and sweeping the sky fresh and bright, for a brilliant winter's sun, which, though late at this season of the year, now rose clear and cheerily.

How different everything appeared in its light from what it had done in the shade of night! There was the canal, and there the barrier where Herr Beil had seen the strange figure who had so fortunately dissuaded him from his dreadful purpose; but this morning nothing looked mysterious, and if ever so many beings in black mantles and with still more fiery eyes had leaned there, no one would have troubled their heads about them.

The waters of the canal looked clear and bright;

its banks were covered with hoar-frost, from which the rays of the sun called forth innumerable brilliants. The bare branches of the trees were lit up on one side as if with gold, and the other had a bluish shade. The barrier, too, was in sunshine, and cast a deep shadow on the path which led past it. The houses, which the night before seemed far apart, for in the dim light and fog their outlines had been scarcely visible, were now apparently closer together, and stood out cheerfully against the sky with their glittering window-panes and their sharp, red roofs, which looked like morning-caps, and from their pointed chimneys the bright blue smoke curled up like a long, gay feather.

There was no lack of variety, either, in the background. Little boys were rushing about, and anxiously looking at the canal to see if there was any hope of its soon being covered with ice; dogs of every kind were taking their morning walks, biting, snapping, quarrelling, and racing about; women, with baskets filled with linen on their heads, crowded the steps which led down to the canal, and had no small quantity of gossip to exchange before beginning their work; peasants were every moment arriving from the country with butter and eggs for the market, usually from a considerable distance, and looking weary and sleepy, and when they stopped for a moment their breath was like a blue

cloud. They were all hastily moving along, no one taking notice of their neighbour. The boys ran home or to their playgrounds, the dogs went back to the warm stoves, and the washerwomen began their work, chattering all the time as fast as possible.

It was about nine o'clock, when two persons were seen approaching the town talking eagerly together. They were a man and a woman, the latter in the dress of a peasant; and we may mention to our reader that both are old acquaintances of ours. She was the peasant whom we saw at Madame Becker's, when she announced to the unhappy sempstress the death of her child; and when we say of the man walking beside her, that, in spite of the cold of the morning, he wore a very thin, shabby, threadbare black coat, very yellow high shirt collars and a foxy hat, and that he walked along with a very self-sufficient air, our reader will quickly perceive that it is the respectable Herr Strauber, with whom we had the pleasure of becoming acquainted one evening at the Fuchsbau.

Herr Strauber, by way of perfecting his toilet, had grey woollen gloves, and a cigar was in his mouth. He went along looking very dignified, and when he occasionally bowed stiffly, he had the air of a gentleman walking with a person of inferior degree, and resolved to be very condescending.

When they came to the barrier where Beil had stood the night before, and where now the laundresses were washing and splashing, Herr Strauber endeavoured to make a circuit so that he might avoid passing close to these ladies. The peasant woman paid no attention, as she was at this moment very busy talking.

“Hush!” whispered one of the washerwomen to the other, as these two approached. “Look at that man; he is a seller of souls—a slave-merchant.”

“Really!” said another woman, who looked particularly sturdy. “Shall we put him among the foul linen, and give him a ducking in the canal to wash him clean?”

“It would be no use,” said the first; “if he was sunk a hundred years in the canal he would always emerge as black as ever, both in body and soul.”

Frau Bilz, who heard these words, went slowly on purpose. Her companion, on the contrary, took some long steps, and hurried on before her; and when she overtook him a short time afterwards, he looked round savagely, and said, shaking his fist, “The beasts!”

“I don’t understand,” said Bilz, “why you are in such bad odour with these people; all the world seems to know you, as if you were a spotted dog.”

“I know why,” answered the other, in a rage. “I don’t choose to be familiar with such a pack. I

choose to maintain a respectable exterior. If I went about in a greasy jacket like the others, they would like me well enough; but that I can never make up my mind to do."

"Yes," said Bilz, "it's all very well to look respectable, but I shouldn't like to be as cold as you are for the sake of vanity."

Strauber looked rather offended, and said, stiffly, "As I value appearances exceedingly, and we are now entering the better part of the town, I propose, Frau Bilz, that we should separate for a short time. I will go to Master Schwemmer's half an hour hence, and there we shall meet again."

"With all my heart," said the woman, laughing; "but don't stay too long with your elegant acquaintances, and come punctually to Schwemmer's." So saying, she disappeared down an alley.

Herr Strauber pursued his way with an air of great composure, looking right and left at the houses, then standing before a shop, and observing the people who went in and out of a coffee-house, always returning to the middle of the street. There he looked round on every side, and constantly changed the direction of his steps.

At last he shot down into a side-street, examining intently a particular spot on the pavement. When he reached it, he looked cautiously round, bent down and snatched up something from the ground,

which he quickly put in his pocket. It was a little purse which some one must have lost: indeed, Herr Strauber had started from some steps when a young girl rushed out of a house, and looked anxiously at the pavement, and then asked the passenger in the back seat if he had found anything, upon which he shrugged his shoulders and regretted he had not.

"That is but beginning," said he to himself, when he had turned into a larger street: "and as chance seems to be favourable to me, perhaps I may make a pretty good day of it."

Herr Strauber, a few moments afterwards, placed himself before a large print-shop, at which a number of people were already standing; he appeared to be entirely absorbed in the engravings and lithographs, but in reality he was examining the physiognomies of his neighbours, and at last he seemed to have found his man, for he shoved himself behind a young gentleman who had a lady leaning on his arm, and was eagerly showing her the beauties of a large engraving.

The lady wore a velvet cloak edged with fur, and had a grey muff, out of which the end of a pretty embroidered handkerchief was hanging. Herr Strauber, who seemed full of enthusiasm for the print of a penitent Magdalen, pushed himself between the young lady and a fat old gentleman,

asking pardon very politely, when exactly what he had foreseen occurred.

The lady in her courtesy, probably fearing that her muff took up too much room, changed it lightly into her left hand ; on which Herr Strauber stooped down as if to read the name of the engraver of the Magdalen, at the same moment contriving, by an almost imperceptible pull, to get hold of the richly-embroidered pocket-handkerchief ; on which he lost no time in slipping out of the crowd and quickly entering a shop near, where he bought a couple of cigars with his new-found money.

He lighted one of them very deliberately, asked the price of various articles, desired to be shown some tobacco, and conversed with the simple-looking shopman on various subjects ; and when he left the shop a few minutes afterwards, and was again walking along the streets, casting, of course, a side-long glance as he passed the print-shop, he found, to his great astonishment, that by some strange chance a large packet of cigars had found its way into the pocket of his coat of its own accord.

Herr Strauber now quitted the principal streets, and turned towards the more obscure and distant part of the city. He went thoughtfully along a narrow alley which led into a large square, where there was a church. The church adjoined an old

cloister, from which a narrow-covered passage connected with the other streets.

Herr Strauber lounged towards this passage with loitering steps—indeed so slowly, that he did not even overtake a little girl about eight years old who was walking before him with a basket in her hand, but remained close behind her, and reached almost at the same moment the solitary dark passage. He then looked sharply in front and behind him, and as he saw no human being either in the square or in the street, with one long stride he reached the little girl, seized her roughly by the neck, and said, “If you call out I will murder you!”

The poor little creature stood as if paralysed, and though she opened her mouth convulsively, she uttered no sound, but began to cry bitterly, as he dragged her to the middle of the passage, and there with great agility tore out her little gold earrings, and, threatening her with his clenched fist, he was off in a moment.

He went as fast as possible to another quarter, which he reached in about ten minutes. Here he went more slowly, pulled down the waist of his coat, which had become rather deranged by the quick pace at which he had come, pulled up his shirt collars, and placed his hat straight on his head.

He had now come to an old wall of the city

where the houses were more separate, and little gardens before them. He advanced to one which was surrounded by a high wall, and the door of which stood ajar. He opened it, and went among some deserted flower-beds towards a small tumble-down-looking house, apparently uninhabited, and used by the gardener as a tool-house. The foundation had given way on one side, for it stood quite crooked, and on this account, as well as from most of the window-shutters being closed, the house looked most desolate. Its whole appearance gave the impression that some one had committed suicide there, and had remained, forgotten, hanging there for many long years.

The lower part of this house was only used for straw and old tools, and above, only one room was habitable, and that was tenanted by our old theatrical acquaintance, the tailor Schellinger. Herr Strauber entered, closed the door carefully behind him, and passed through a narrow passage to a back door, which opened on a court, at the end of which there was another and rather less decayed-looking building.

The deserted house evidently formed a kind of shelter to the latter, which, built in an angle of the city walls, and screened from view in front by the garden house, was completely hid from the eyes of the curious.

CHAPTER VIII.

RECEIVERS OF STOLEN GOODS.

AFTER Herr Strauber had crossed the court he knocked gently at the door of the other house, which was instantly opened, and he passed into a room, the atmosphere of which was most stifling.

Frau Bilz was seated near the window, talking to a man who was leaning back in an old, dirty, leather easy-chair, close to the stove. This man was not more than forty, but in such bad health that he looked sixty at least. He wore a dark faded dressing-gown, and his feet, in thick list shoes, rested on a small footstool. He had spread a red checked pocket-handkerchief on his knees, which he held to his mouth when a fit of coughing seized him, which it did almost every minute. It was a very distressing cough, and seemed to torment him much as it

took away his breath, and coloured for a few seconds his pale, emaciated cheeks.

Herr Strauber went up to him, giving him his hand carelessly, but not taking off his hat. The other smiled and nodded, and offered him a pinch of snuff, which he affected to take, but in reality scattered on the floor. "It is confoundedly hot here," said he, seating himself close to the window, taking off his hat and wiping his face with the lace pocket-handkerchief we saw him appropriate so cleverly.

The woman near him observed it, and stretching out her hand, said, "What does such a thing as that cost?"

"I did not offer it to you," answered Strauber, affecting to put it back into his pocket. "You're a very greedy, uncivilised woman, Frau Bilz, but I will forgive you, as you have never enjoyed the smallest cultivation, otherwise silence would be the only resource against your impertinent curiosity. However, I will tell you the handkerchief cost two gulden—no less."

"Two gulden!" said the woman, with a depreciating air, at the same time seizing the lace of the handkerchief to examine it more closely.

"Not so fast," said Strauber, coolly; "first, the two gulden, and then the handkerchief."

"But I may look at it first?"

“Not on any account whatever. It is well worth ten times the sum I ask. Besides,” said he, sighing, “a lovely duchess gave it to me, who——”

The man near the stove burst out laughing, but a violent fit of coughing stopped his mirth.

“I’ll tell you what,” said Frau Bilz, “I will give you one gulden, and add thirty kreuzers in memory of the lovely duchess. Here is solid money; take it, for I know you are run dry.”

“Wrong there,” said Strauber, composedly, drawing out the purse he had found. “See this. I am in funds—the fee given me by a client for whom I won a lawsuit. The point was to deceive two of the cleverest lawyers in court. I did it.”

“Oh! if you have money,” said the woman, “I must give you two gulden.”

“And twenty-four kreuzers,” said Strauber, gravely; “its value rises with every bid.”

“Then take it, and be done with this haggling,” said Bilz, in a rage, snatching the handkerchief; but when she saw its value she looked delighted with her bargain.

“Do you want earrings?” asked Strauber, after a pause. “Almost new gold earrings?”

“Also from a duchess?”

“No; duchesses only wear brilliants—but how should you know that! I ordered these for a god-child of mine, but they were too large, and now

the rogue of a jeweller will only take them back for their actual value in gold. Here they are."

"Gold!" said the man. "They are my affair. Let them alone, Bilz, and be satisfied with your rags. Give me the earrings."

"Here they are," said the woman. "But," said she, turning to Strauber, "your godchild must be a careless creature, for though you say she only tried them on, they are a good deal worn. I see a spot of blood on them too."

"Don't talk such nonsense," said Strauber, angrily. "Blood! blood! You know I can't endure the very name of blood."

Master Schwemmer at this moment raised his stick, and knocked on an iron plate behind the stove, on which a woman's voice from the next room asked,

"What do you want?"

"Bring me the test and the gold scales."

At the stroke on the plate Strauber gave a start of terror. Probably the allusion to blood had irritated his nerves, for he turned suddenly, and muttered something about rough people, of want of refinement and cultivation, and of the misfortune it was to a well-educated man, through unfortunate circumstances, to be obliged to associate with such *canaille*.

"The gold is good," said Schwemmer—"sixteen

carats. I will give you one gulden and thirty kreuzers. Will you take it ?”

“With all my heart,” said Strauber, hastily, “though I am a sad loser, for they cost me six gulden.”

Both parties seemed quite satisfied with the transaction. Strauber pocketed the money, and Schwemmer sat polishing the earrings with his red checked pocket-handkerchief, till they looked as bright as possible. A pause ensued, only interrupted by the constant low coughing of the man at the stove, or by a clatter in the next room, where the woman who brought in the scales was knocking about all sorts of pans, and kettles, and iron ware. Sometimes the half-suppressed crying of little children was heard, sometimes loud screams, and then low whimpering.

“I was appointed to come here at nine o’clock,” said Strauber, “and it is now half-past nine. My time is precious—I can’t wait.”

“Matthias will be here immediately,” said the man, “and we want to use your clever pen to assist us in writing some letters, to report the health and welfare of the children who board with us.”

“I must say,” said Strauber, “that I don’t like Matthias—we don’t at all suit each other.”

“That’s true enough,” said Frau Bilz, laughing; “you live like cat and dog.”

Strauber was going to make an angry answer, but he put his hands to his ears, as his tender nerves were so disagreeably offended by the incessant screeching of the children, which had certainly now reached a most deafening pitch.

Schwemmer knocked again on the iron plate, and called out, "What is the meaning of this horrid screeching to-day? Let us have a little peace! Where is Catherine, the lazy wretch?"

"I have sent her out," answered the voice in the next room. "I can't always have a maid waiting on these little beasts."

"Go to them for a moment, Frau Bilz," said Schwemmer, "and keep them in order."

Bilz rose and went to the next room, where Madame Schwemmer was, a filthy-looking old woman. She had on a faded cotton gown and a bedgown, once white, but now yellow from age; her bare feet were in slipshod shoes, and on her head she had an old cap, under which her rough, coarse grey hair escaped in all directions. The lady's face quite suited the rest of her appearance. She had cunning grey eyes and a very red nose—a redness which was easily accounted for by a bottle of schnaps which stood beside her on the table. Madame Schwemmer was at that moment standing beside a trap-door which was in the floor, and which led to a cellar, and she was occupied in throwing into it all sorts of old iron and copper implements.

“Go into the stable,” she called out to Frau Bilz; “but take the whip with you. It is hanging on a nail there. Lay about you well. Can people never have half an hour’s peace!”

“But the infants are screaming too,” answered Bilz, “and the whip won’t silence them.”

“Look on the hearth, and you will find the poppy-tea Catherine has left there. Pour some down their throats to make them doze off again.”

“But if they have had some already this might be too much.”

“Oh! nothing is too much for them,” replied Madame Schwemmer. “I tell you, the less trouble you take about the whole pack, and the worse you use them, the better they thrive. Take the whip and the tea.”

“As to thriving,” said Bilz, “I think the less we say on that point the better.”

“Thriving,” said Madame Schwemmer — “I mean they thrive as we wish, by going gently to another world. You would not have the creatures grow up? A pretty business ours would be if that was the case. One must make room for another, and then we get fresh entrance-money, and we make a good profit by their funeral expenses also.”

Frau Bilz went towards the door, but turning round, she said, “Is that one among them?—the one I brought to you eight days ago?”

“Certainly,” answered Madame Schwemmer, while she quickly hid her bottle of schnaps, which she was preparing to put to her lips as soon as Bilz’s back was turned. “She is as tough as iron, and does not look much worse than when you brought her here. You had kept her too well. I know you can’t help doing that, and therefore you will never be good for anything in our business.”

“Indeed, I have quite given it up,” said Bilz. And then she left the room, the whip in one hand, and in the other the poppy-tea, which serves to stupify poor infants, and with which reckless nurses sink their charges into a disturbed and nerve-destroying sleep.

The woman went through the dark passage till she came to a door with a large iron bolt. This was the stable, as Madame Schwemmer called it, and certainly it deserved its name. It was a small, low-roofed room, with walls which had once been whitewashed, but which had gradually assumed a yellowish-grey tinge from the unwholesome air.

There was only one window, and its few panes were covered with dirt and cobwebs, which cast a dull green and yellow light into the room, which was dark enough, but still there was sufficient light to see all the misery it contained.

CHAPTER IX.

AN INFANT ESTABLISHMENT.

THERE were six children in this room, three of whom were infants about a year old, lying on miserable, torn, damp straw-sacks, placed on trestles. An old soiled coverlet was spread over the three, and fastened down with cord on both sides, to prevent the infants, who were often left alone, from trampling on it and casting it off. As they could not do this, two of them had, probably tormented by pain, and left alone without help, thrown themselves about in all directions, so that they had crept out at the sides, and their little naked, emaciated feet and legs hung down from the straw-sacks, and their heads were thrust under the coverlet. Thus the poor little things ran every risk of being smothered.

The third of these wretched infants lay so quiet

and so motionless, that Frau Bilz, after extricating the two others, busied herself with it. It started convulsively, its forehead was damp and cold, and its heart scarcely beat, and sometimes stopped altogether when the child opened its discoloured lips and drew a faint breath.

“There is no more to be done here,” said Bilz to herself, while she looked at the unfortunate little creature; “your sufferings will soon be over.”

The screaming of the older children ceased when she entered the room. They were two boys and a girl; the oldest of the boys about six, and the other five years old, had tried in vain to free the children from the smothering coverlet, and as they could not succeed, they had both begun to shriek as loud as they could.

The girl was about two years old, and dressed in a torn, faded blue frock; she was sitting on the floor near the door, and was leaning her head on the fragments of a wooden horse, and was clasping its neck with her little arms. She was trembling from cold and terror, and cowered down when the woman entered with the whip.

But in a moment the child remarked that it was not the red face of Madame Schwemmer which was looking at her, but a well-known, kind face. She recognised Frau Bilz, who had nursed her before she came to this horrible place, and a light

shone in the poor child's dim eyes, perhaps from the remembrance of former happier days, or perhaps from the hope of being taken away again. The child lifted her head, opened her eyes as wide as possible, and then began to cry bitterly.

"Yes, yes, it is I," said Frau Bilz, whose heart was touched with a momentary emotion while she stooped to look at the child. "Be quiet; I will take care that no one shall do you any harm."

"But you have brought the whip," said the oldest boy, coming up to her, and looking boldly in her face:

"Perhaps for you," said she, "for there is no other way of managing you."

"Not here," said the boy; "but before, I used to do all I was told."

"But you see the consequence," said Bilz; "they have taken away all your good clothes as a punishment, and now you are in rags."

"Yes," said the boy, colouring, "they have stolen my clothes and beat me, and I am always cold and hungry. But wait till I grow up!"

"Till then," said she, "I advise you to be quiet, or you will get more blows."

The other boy had cowered timidly into a corner. He was a pitiful sight, for the child was like an old dwarf; his hair was thin, his eyes sunk, and the under lip of his large mouth hung down. He looked

with terror at the whip, and crept slowly backwards, without taking his eye off it till he disappeared under the trestles on which the straw-sacks lay.

Frau Bilz had taken up the little girl, her former nursling, poor Catherine's child; her frock was dirty, torn, and shabby, and there were marks of blows on the child's discoloured skin. "Do you never go out in the evening?" asked she, after a pause. The child looked at her in surprise, as if she did not understand her.

"I was only allowed to go out once," said the boy; "only once since my clothes were stolen; but that little girl has never been undressed at all; the woman with the red nose said she was not worth the trouble."

"I said that, you little wretch!" cried out Madame Schwemmer, who had entered the room unperceived. She then placed her arms a-kimbo, and turning to Bilz, she said, "Did you ever see such a little beast?—a wild beast, for he bites."

"Yes," said the boy, "but only you."

"I'll drive it out of you," said the half-intoxicated woman, and snatched up the whip, which was lying beside Bilz; but in her rage, she took the lash instead of the handle, and as in her fury she rushed at the boy, she struck him with the handle so heavily on the head that the blood trickled over his face.

The boy stood for a moment, thunderstruck and

stupified by the blow ; then he sprang up and rushed like a wild cat on the woman, and seized her hand with his teeth. Madame Schwemmer called out "Murder!" and in a moment Matthias, a tall, muscular man, hastened into the room, and saying, "Hallo, young sir, what's the matter?" seized him by the neck and lifted him up.

The child, feeling the strong hand that grasped him, looked up to see who it was. "Now," said the man, "can two grown-up women not keep one boy in order? Ah! what a blow on the child's head. How did it happen, you old wretch?" said he, turning to Madame Schwemmer, and setting the boy down on the floor.

"What has happened?" said the woman, holding out her hand. "The little brute has bit me."

"After you had beat him on the head," said Matthias, crossing his arms and looking gloomily at her. "You will never rest till you make this place what people say it is—a den of murder. For shame!" said he, in a low voice, going up close to her, "you miserable, drunken creature! Speak, Frau Bilz; tell me the truth."

"What can I tell?" answered she, in some embarrassment. "The boy said all sorts of rude things to her."

"And what did you say, boy? Speak the truth."

"I always do," said the boy, boldly. "I said

they had stolen my clothes, and that they never undressed the little girl, and the woman with the red nose overheard me."

Madame Schwemmer, at this very unflattering description of her personal appearance, raised the whip again to strike the child, but Matthias interposed his arm, saying angrily, "Be quiet." And turning to the boy, he continued: "If you say such rude things you will be beat again."

"And I will bite again," said the child.

"Me too?" said the man.

"Not you, but her. She beats us when we have done no harm; and those little things, too, who can't speak a word. You need not lift your whip at me, for it's quite true. When she comes in, and her nose is very red, she lashes us, even when we are sitting quietly on the floor—as quiet as possible. We dare not say we are either cold or hungry."

"Yes, I believe every word," said the other.

"And what have I done," continued the child, "to be locked up here for four weeks without seeing any of the boys I was at school with? But I know she wants to kill me, like that baby."

The woman darted a furious glance at him. Bilz looked down.

"What! How!" said Matthias, approaching the trestles on which the child was lying, apparently in the last agonies. "That poor thing does look dread-

ful," said he to Bilz. "Surely you might have found a less frightful hole than this, where there is not even a stove! And then the smell! I am not very particular, but anything to equal this I never saw. Beware!—beware! If *he* hears one word of this history it is all up with you. You may just as well swallow arsenic at once. That poor infant is past all help." He turned to go away.

"And must I stay here?" said the boy, bursting into tears. "Must I be locked up again, and not go back to old Fischer, whom I loved so much?"

"We will see what is to be done," said Matthias. "To-day I can do nothing; but be a good boy, and I won't forget you. I promise you that." Then making a sign to Madame Schwemmer to follow him, he left the room.

In the passage he stood still, and said: "I warn you I will often come to inspect this place; it is a perfect disgrace the way things go on here. Have you no fear that the devil will fetch you away some day? Woman, woman, take warning! Leave Bilz to look after that dying child, and take care that I hear no more screeching and crying in that room, or it shall be worse for you. I will keep my ears open, I warn you."

The woman stared at him, and then tottered back to Frau Bilz, who was bending over the baby, and said, "You are to stay where you are for a

time, and if you want anything you can get it, only don't put me to unnecessary expense: there is nothing more to be done for the child—you must see that yourself." With these words she left the room, and stumbled back into her kitchen.

Frau Bilz shook her head, and said to herself, "No, indeed, all the wealth of the whole world could do it no good now." But she took off her woollen shawl, folded it together, and put it under the head of the child, who opened its eyes suddenly, and fixed them on the woman with a strange expression.

The little thing had pretty blue eyes, and as it looked up it was as if the last flickering spirit of life shone forth once more in its hitherto dim eyes before they were for ever closed. It was a melancholy lament over its wretched existence, or gratitude for the help received from the woman in its last moments, who was deeply affected by this dying glance. She sighed heavily as the child drew its last breath; the pretty eyes became dim and glassy, as if the hand of death had strewn white sand over them. She stooped down and pressed her face to its cold forehead for a few minutes, and thought she felt warmth return, but it was her own tears which ran down over the cold cheeks and blue lips of the dead infant.

She knew this child well, but she had felt no

particular interest in it more than in many others who had passed through her hands; but now she retraced in her memory the commencement and the end of this wretched little life, and it was a fearful contrast.

She had seen this child and nursed it in her arms when it was only a few days old. It was a touching history, which, though not an uncommon one, must sadden every heart. The mother was a lovely young blooming girl, the daughter of rich, respectable parents; the father was wealthy and of good family. They met by chance; he paid her a great deal of attention, rode constantly past her windows on handsome horses, and she, neglecting the warning of her parents, smiled on him, and at last agreed to meet him, at first making open appointments, according to the custom in society, then private ones, which were granted without thought of evil.

The Carnival arrived, with its mad follies and excitement, with its balls, masquerades, and other pleasures which deaden the heart and excite the senses. One night the girl appeared in a charming costume at one of these balls, under the protection of some respectable friends, but she was soon persuaded by her lover to leave their sheltering care. He had secured a private corner, where, undisturbed, they could talk of love.

From this day they met repeatedly in secret. She left her parents to accompany her lover, and then this child was born: an existence which commenced on silk cushions and in splendour, was now extinguished on wooden trestles, on a decayed and mouldy straw-sack.

The unhappy mother had luckily not survived; she died a short time after the birth of her child, and the father had left the city, distressed at the time, but soon consoled for the misfortune he had caused. He had, indeed, commissioned his agent to provide for the child, but never troubled himself further on the subject; and now the poor thing was dead from starvation and misery.

Perhaps he sometimes thought of the masked ball, and of the innocent, unfortunate girl who had sacrificed herself and all her happiness to him.

CHAPTER X.

CORRESPONDENCE.

HERR STRAUBER, in the mean time, had written some letters, chiefly to relations of the children, or agents connected with them, to whom Madame Schwemmer was directed to apply for the money due for their board.

They were differently expressed, but the object of all was the same—to squeeze out as much money as possible for the board of the poor infants. One letter spoke of a new course of expensive nourishment to be tried, another of a nurse or maid; and as they knew pretty well what the receiver of the letter liked to hear, the contents either were, “The child’s health improves every day,” or, “The child is gradually pining away, and in spite of the utmost care and attention, we fear there is little hope of its recovery.”

It is sad to be obliged to say that most of the letters were couched in the latter style. While this correspondence was going on, Matthias stood beside the stove and whistled an air, occasionally listening when Strauber read aloud a letter.

“Now comes the most important of all,” said Meister Schwemmer, “and it would be as well if I dictated every word of it myself. It is about the infant whom my wife tells me this morning is dangerously ill.”

“Oh! at this moment she is very well,” said Matthias.

“How so?”

“Because by this time probably her sufferings are over. It is a pity, for you lose a good sum for board.”

Meister Schwemmer made an impatient gesture, and looked angrily at Matthias, as much as to say, “What is it to you?” Then he answered, in a cross tone, “Don’t believe it; the little creature has been six months in the same state, every moment supposed to be dying. You’ll see she will get through this time also.”

“If not, you will take care to fill up her place.”

“For shame, Matthias,” said Schwemmer, laughing, and then going off into a violent fit of coughing. “Business mysteries! who would talk of such matters? Don’t let us talk of them at all.”

“One thing does puzzle me,” said Matthias, disregarding this remark—“how you manage always to substitute other children. How is it done? Come, out with it!”

Schwemmer moved uneasily in his chair, and said, “That is my wife’s affair. I have nothing to do with it.”

“It is certainly no affair of mine,” answered Matthias. “I only asked through curiosity.”

“Now, Strauber, pay attention,” said Schwemmer, hastily, interrupting these disagreeable allusions. “Write thus: ‘Honoured Sir,—I received the money safely for last month, and I thank you much for the additional sum in the name of the poor child——’”

“‘In the name of the poor child,’” repeated Strauber, winking violently.

“‘Its state of health,’” continued Schwemmer, “‘continues the same. The child is a delicate, sickly creature, whose existence can only be prolonged by the most careful nursing and tender treatment——’”

“‘Careful nursing and tender treatment,’” said Strauber.

“‘You cannot think what trouble and attention my excellent wife has bestowed on her; but in spite of it all, I must, with a sorrowful heart, confess that a long life cannot be looked for. Our physician, who visits us several times every week, says it must have been delicate when it was born. We

know you grudge no expense, so my wife has given the child a separate, comfortable room——’ ”

“ ‘ Comfortable room——’ ”

“ ‘ And a nurse,’ ” said Schwemmer, angrily, when he saw Matthias shake his head.

“ ‘ And a nurse,’ ” repeated Strauber, coolly.

Matthias laughed, turned round, and looked steadily at Schwemmer, who, however, did not seem the least embarrassed, and went on dictating: “ ‘ As the usual sum does not suffice to provide these luxuries, we request you to send us the same addition we received last month.—Your obedient servant.’ ”

“ ‘ Your obedient servant,’ ” said Strauber, making a great flourish at the end with his pen, and leaning far back in his chair to contemplate from a distance the general effect of his penmanship. Then, without rising, he stretched out his hand to give Schwemmer the letter, but as he was too far off, and Matthias was standing between them, he gave it to him.

“ But explain one thing to me,” said the latter, shaking his head. “ It must occasionally happen that some one of the many to whom you write this humbug may think fit to come and judge for themselves how the child is kept. How do you get out of the scrape then ? ”

“ Oh ! we have plenty of spies. So when we get a hint of such a visit, we know people in the

neighbourhood who, for a small bribe, will hire us a respectable room and healthy children. I assure you it often happens that some who come with their minds prejudiced against us by evil reports, when they see so comfortable a house and such fine children are famously taken in."

"Not a bad trick," said Matthias; "but if by chance a mother comes to satisfy herself about her child, no possible art could persuade her that another person's child was her own!"

"Oh! my good Matthias," said Schwemmer, "it seldom or never occurs with these children that mothers inquire about them. Either the mother is dead or in miserable circumstances, when our treatment is quite good enough for what they can afford to pay us, or she leads a life of splendour, and then she is only too glad never to hear or see anything which reminds her of the past."

"Tell me," said Matthias, after a pause, while Strauber was folding up and directing the letter, "I saw a fine, bold boy down stairs among your nurslings. What is his history? Are you to keep him or to send him away again? If the latter, I should like to take him myself, and earn a few dollars at the same time."

Schwemmer shrugged his shoulders, and answered, "I would only be too glad to give him up to you, for he is a troublesome creature, but I dare not! I must keep him myself."

“How is that?” said Matthias.

“It is a strange history, and one which I don’t very well understand myself. It appears the boy’s mother is a lady of rank, which, indeed, you may see from the whole appearance of the child himself. Most of those who come to us are half-bred, but this boy is thorough-bred, I’ll swear.”

“But if both parents are rich, why don’t they keep the child and not send it to your miserable den? Don’t be offended, but you well know very few survive who come to you.”

“The mother of this child,” said Schwemmer, was still unmarried when this boy was born. Perhaps the father could not marry her—who knows?—but they resolved to educate the child as well as possible, and gave him a good portion; at last, however, the mother married another—a very rich man.”

“Ah! ah!” said Matthias.

“This was some years ago, and at first all went on smoothly, but at last the husband of the lady got some hint of the affair, took information, and by bribing highly he soon was put on the right scent. The mother discovered it, and removed the boy from the house where he had hitherto lived, and through the mediation of a third person he was brought here.”

“But a good sum is paid for him, I suppose?”

“Yes, a very good sum; but on condition that

we should keep him out of sight; and," said Schwemmer, laughing and coughing, "we do that strictly, as you saw."

"You do, indeed," said Matthias; "but take care; that boy will some day give you the slip and run into the town and tell all he has seen here."

"I'm not afraid," said Schwemmer; "we will bring down his spirit by hunger and hard usage; and if nothing else will do, I'll chain him up like a dog."

Herr Strauber, during this conversation, had been looking out of the window, apparently paying no attention to the men, but in reality not a word escaped him: "A rich lady of degree," thought he, "who wishes to keep the boy out of sight, and an equally rich gentleman of rank who is trying to find him out—these are two customers who would pay pretty well for information; besides, it is too bad to leave a poor child in such a den of iniquity."

At this moment Frau Bilz came in. She looked pale and depressed, and there were traces of tears on her face; but as no one here cared about such trifles, she sat down in silence at her old place near the window.

Matthias now took up his hat, and bidding them a gruff farewell, he left the house. Strauber looked after him, and when he was fairly out of sight, all his loquacity returned. "It is disagreeable," said

he, "for a man of education like me to be obliged to associate with such a fellow as Matthias. He would sell us all for a bribe of ten gulden, and yet presumes to talk to us of fine feelings."

"He not only speaks of what is good," said Bilz, "but he practises it also."

"I am curious to hear an instance," said Strauber.

"A few days ago, in the suburb where we live," said Bilz, "a poor weaver, with six children and a few sticks of furniture, were turned out of their home into the streets in this dreadful weather—you cannot imagine their misery."

"Yes, I have seen such things often," said Schwemmer, composedly.

"The woman," continued Bilz, "was nursing a baby, and both were blue from cold. Then came Matthias, and arranged quite a comfortable room for them himself in an outhouse."

"Well, I detest him," said Strauber. "He will sell us all some day, and walk off safe himself."

"Take care," said Bilz, with contempt, "that such words don't pass these doors, and by chance reach his ears."

"Now for business. I have two commissions from our friend Madame Becker," said Schwemmer. "She says she has discovered, twelve miles from here, two young girls between seventeen and

eighteen, pretty, healthy country girls, who want to get a situation in this town. Madame Becker has made them believe that she has secured excellent places for them in a respectable house. They are to arrive by the railway. But of course the addresses are false, and no such families exist. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly," said Strauber, laughing.

"Make acquaintance with them by saying you are sent by the master of the house to bring them home. You know what to do; it is not the first time you have played that part."

Strauber nodded, put on his hat and his woollen gloves. "I am to be well paid, of course?" said he.

"Assuredly," said Schwemmer. "Come here to-morrow, and you shall have money and a description of a couple of very pretty girls."

CHAPTER XI.

CHRISTMAS PLEASURE.

CHRISTMAS had once more arrived, this gay and happy time for old and young—to the former from giving, to the latter from receiving—and which enjoys the most pleasure it would be difficult to say. How anxious children are for weeks before to be on their best behaviour. All goes on more quietly both at school and at home than at any other period of the year; and for grown-up people, too, it is a pleasant time when anonymous gifts can be exchanged.

How agreeable for a young lady to find on her plate, or to see hanging on the Christmas-tree, a pretty morocco-case, which, when it is opened, discloses a ring, a locket, or a bracelet. Mamma, to be sure, sometimes raises her eyebrows and looks suspicious, and the younger sisters, who as yet re-

ceive no bracelets, and the older ones, who no longer receive them, look disdainfully at the lucky girl. But that's no matter; everything is permitted and considered correct on this evening.

"Oh! this beautiful present must be from Uncle Charles," says the young lady, who cleverly hides a small paper in the same case with the bracelet. "Oh, Uncle Charles, how good of you! but indeed it is too much!"

Uncle Charles, a stingy old bachelor, looks foolish and surprised, but he thinks it best to say nothing, and to receive the grateful kisses of his niece in behalf of another.

Few can recal such happy memories without emotion; and even if the soul is buried in thick dust, or the heart covered with a hard rind, both disappear on such an evening. Then go into the streets, and look at your happy fellow-creatures, even if it is misty, or if thick flakes of snow are dancing in circles round your head, or melting on your face.

Such weather is very usual on Christmas-day; the wild snow seems to pursue the thousands of fir-trees uprooted from the dark forest. But who cares about the weather? No one. An umbrella is seldom to be seen, and ladies shelter themselves only under thick hoods and wear good clogs. No one has time to look at the sky, or to be bored by holding up an

umbrella, and great care is required not to knock against your neighbours, who are carrying their precious wares anxiously home.

The most interesting hour of the day is immediately after twilight, when the shopmen have lighted the gas-lamps, tempting crowds to gaze through the shop windows at the gay toys displayed, when all looks brighter than by daylight, for the sun cannot penetrate into the dark corners where rocking-horses stand, or where wooden swords, guns, sabres, and whips are heaped together. Now, however, all is light and splendour. The gold on the helmets and harness of the knights, the manes of the horses, too, seem to flutter wildly, and the windows of the miniature fortresses and castles glitter attractively. How swiftly the horses are galloping in that gay, rich coach, how pleasingly the lady seated in it seems to smile, and how terrifically that noble nutcracker distorts his ugly face! We can't help thinking that he is squinting over his left shoulder at that lovely large doll in white embroidered satin, with real shoes on her feet, and real hair on her head. Her face is well worth the trouble of being examined: her round, snow-white cheeks, touched with a delicate red; her screwed-up mouth, so small that it is scarcely visible; her insignificant nose, and, above all, her large, blue eyes—magnificent eyes, with an indescribable expression

—she stares in wonder round the shop, and, as if absorbed in thought, she fixes her eyes on no human being, but gazes earnestly far away into the immeasurable distance.

Every one, however, is in haste on this evening, and has no time even for their best friends. Every one has forgotten something; and as all servants, male and female, are fully occupied, their masters are obliged to run about themselves to fetch what they require.

“A pretty affair it would have been!” said a fat gentleman to a thin one, who was buying wax candles; “my wife wished for a porte-monnaie like her friend Madame A——; Russian leather, with a steel clasp. I assure you, my dear friend, it is lucky I remembered it, or I would have had an unpleasant evening.”

“Such a provoking accident,” said another gentleman, rushing hastily into the shop. “Give me some new glass balls,” said he to one of the shopmen. “Christmas presents are hard work,” continued he, turning to the fat gentleman. “I went from here to the milliner’s, for she had not yet sent home my wife’s velvet mantilla. I was told to wait, so I sat down—and on the glass balls! It is wonderful the fragments did not cut me. How much?”

“One gulden and twelve kreuzer.”

“Here is your money. Good night, gentlemen. A happy Christmas.”

Those who are not, however, rich enough to purchase glass balls, porte-monnaies, or velvet mantillas, and can scarcely manage to have a dwarf fir-tree with some gilded nuts, still enjoy the evening with their families, and are all merry together. The wooden horse, which was once the father's, is now skilfully repaired ; the mother makes a new bridle, the father fabricates a superb woollen tail, and dyes it black out of the ink bottle. Some rolls or little cakes are suspended by strings on the tree, and on the table are placed new warm stockings, or a new waistcoat with bright buttons ; and all is stared at with delight by the children, even to the rod which waves from the tree, and which attracts many stolen and respectful glances.

The poor, too, for whom no Christmas-tree exists at home, whose father and mother have nothing to give them but hunger and thirst, rejoice in the universal pomp and splendour on this evening, and an unusually benevolent feeling pervades all men, suppressing envy and malice. The little children outside the windows, who are passing along the street, shivering from cold, now suddenly stand still as they see the lighted room, climb on the window-sills on the ground floor, and stare with sparkling eyes at the splendid vision of the lighted and decorated Christmas-tree, till their own breath dims the window-panes, and everything disappears in a thick mist.

When, however, a good-hearted child within the room sees these poor little creatures standing outside the window, he begs from his parents some playthings and pastry, opens the windows gently, and gives it to the poor children. They take it, and dazzled and blinded by the light, they almost believe that the Holy Child himself has bestowed these gifts on them, and they hurry joyfully home to show their treasures.

Then the bells of the churches ring, the deep tones of the organ are heard through the open doors, and crowds stream in and out to see the cradle of the Holy Child, which is unveiled before the high altar. The pavement of the church is damp, and footsteps resound on the stone flags. Wet umbrellas and cloaks diffuse a damp odour, and the well-known hallowed fragrance of incense ascends through the edifice. People finish their devotions and hurry out again, gazing upwards at the sky from the church door to see if the heavens are smiling, and promise fine holidays.

Alas! there are many black clouds there, but one spot becomes brighter. A blue, twinkling star appears. It is, perhaps, an omen of good weather, or perhaps it is that star which always watches over the Holy Cradle, and which guided the Three Kings.

When the purchasers begin to leave the shops, about six in the evening, most of them are closed;

so that the people who have been so busy the whole day serving others may also begin to enjoy their holiday. Sometimes one solitary shop-girl is left to superintend the whole, who seats herself, very much out of humour, at the table, leans her head on her hand in melancholy mood, probably thinking of her distant home, where all are now standing happily round the Christmas-tree, while she is obliged to sit alone for a couple of hours to come. The shop must not be closed, for perhaps some late customer may yet arrive.

This precaution was far from unnecessary in one of the largest shops in the town, and the young lady was very unjust in her little soliloquy when she spoke of superfluous trouble, hard service, and the needlessness of sitting here when every one had long since gone home, for scarcely had she finished her complaint when a carriage drew up close to the door of the shop, and a gentleman opened the door himself, sprang out, and entered.

“I was sadly afraid the shop would be shut,” said he, in a loud, cheerful voice, “and that would have vexed me very much. I am sorry to trouble you at so late an hour, but I wish you to show me what you have newest in ladies’ silk shawls.”

“Oh! Herr Doctor,” said the girl, “I fear we shan’t be able to distinguish the colours so well by candlelight; things look so different in daylight.”

“ You are quite right,” said the doctor, “ but my time is very precious during the day, especially in winter, when I have so many patients. Besides, I trust to your taste. Bring also some parcels of ladies’ gloves. I had nearly forgotten it was Christmas-eve.”

“ Your lady would not have liked that,” said the young woman, smiling, while she placed the parcels on the counter. “ But you are jesting, and I dare say you have already bought all sorts of things for your dear little children.”

“ That I have,” said the other. “ Children are easy to please ; something is always to be found which they like. But with older people it is not so easy,” added he, in a low voice.

“ These shawls are very pretty, Herr Doctor, and the last fashion.”

“ Yes, they are pretty. I will take two—a red and a blue. I don’t know which colour my wife prefers. Now for the gloves.”

While the girl opened the parcel another gentleman came into the shop, and taking off his hat, shook it to get rid of some heavy flakes of snow on it, as he had no umbrella. This gentleman wore spectacles.

“ Choose for me,” said the doctor, stooping over the gloves. “ I will take two dozen for my wife ; her number is seven. You can choose the colours.”

The gentleman in spectacles, on hearing his voice, looked round and touched him on the shoulder. The doctor turned, and said, "Oh! it is you, Alphonse. What brings you here so late?"

"Probably the same cause which brings you," said he. "I want some trifles for this evening. You are coming to us, of course?"

"When the tree is lighted up; we have none of us ever failed to be present then."

"These colours are pretty," said the shop-girl, placing the gloves she had selected before the doctor. "They are of the same quality your brother-in-law chose this morning, only I have varied the colours."

"So you have also bought gloves for your wife?" said the doctor. But as he was examining his own he did not perceive that Alphonse looked rather foolish at this remark.

"Yes, I also bought gloves—for Marianne, of course," said he, after a pause, "but not for this evening. I have much prettier things for that purpose. I will give her the gloves some other day. Have you given your children their presents yet?"

"No," said the doctor, "that is yet to come; and I look forward to it with as much pleasure as if I were still a child myself."

"But the Herr Doctor," said the shop-girl,

smiling, "has already given some pretty gifts to-day; I saw such a number of pretty things put into the carriage this afternoon from the shop opposite."

"Ah! ah! Herr Doctor!" said Alphonse, with a disagreeable sneer.

"They were only children's toys," said the girl.

"And not for your own?" said Alphonse.

"Oh no," said the doctor, coolly, while he fixed his clear, honest eyes on his brother-in-law's cunning face. "I see many poor children in the course of my practice who never receive anything, and I have the custom of giving them some little gifts on this evening. It distresses me when I see poor creatures with their bread and potatoes, often in a cold room, when I think of my own home, and of Oscar and Anna, with all their comforts, and who have only to express a wish to have it fulfilled."

"But my good friend," said Alphonse, "these disparities in human life cannot be smoothed away. It must be so."

"It must, indeed," said the doctor; "but it is our duty, so far as we can, to relieve the wants of the poor."

"Amen!" said Alphonse, sarcastically. He then purchased a silk handkerchief for his wife, and turning to his brother-in-law, said, "You may as well take me home; it is not much out of your way, and it is snowing heavily."

“Certainly,” answered the doctor, paying his bill. “Let us get into the carriage.” The weary horses, who had been all day trotting about the town, took them slowly to the banker’s, where the doctor deposited Alphonse.

The Christmas-trees were mostly lighted up now in the various houses, the shouting of the children in their glee was distinctly heard, and everywhere there was joy and gladness. The doctor enjoyed looking out of the window, especially every time that he passed by brightly-lighted windows, through which so many blazing wax candles glanced like flashes of lightning, quickly again vanishing as the carriage drove on.

It was seldom he came home so late on Christmas-eve, but some dangerous cases of illness had detained him. In general he was the person who arranged and lighted up the tree, and then called in his children. Not to give up this last pleasure, he had left orders that the tree was not to be lighted till he came; and after all it was not very late yet, only just seven o’clock, and the hopes of a Christmas-tree and its glories are sufficient to prevent children’s eyes closing.

CHAPTER XII.

CHRISTMAS SORROWS.

AT last the doctor arrived at home; he jumped out of his carriage and ran hastily up the steps. To-day, though contrary to his orders, he was glad that the glass door was standing open, it saved him ringing, and he could go straight into the passage, when the children would instantly recognise his step, and rush out to meet him as they always did on such occasions.

But this time no one came. He coughed, he knocked with his stick on the stone passage—in vain! Neither Oscar nor Anna were to be seen.

Shaking his head, he opened the door of the dining-room where the Christmas-tree was always placed, but all was dark; he perceived, however, a strong smell of singed fir-branches and burnt-out wax candles, but much more powerful than usual.

He hastily went to the nursery, opened the door suddenly, and was entering, when the nursery-maid came towards him with her finger on her lips, saying, "Hush, Herr Doctor. Come quietly, for they are asleep."

"Who are asleep?" said he, in surprise.

"The children; at least they are lying quite still."

"What, so early, and before I have lighted the tree for them?"

"Yes, yes, Herr Doctor," answered the girl, stammering. "A little misfortune happened to us this evening, or rather to my mistress."

"Is my wife ill?" said the doctor, wishing to hasten to her.

"Oh no, she is perfectly well." ↓

"Where is Frau Bendel?—and what is the matter?"

The nurse now came forward from the children's beds, looking exceedingly cross. "Don't make such a fuss," said she to the girl; "any one would suppose we were all at the last gasp. It is not much," turning to the doctor; "the children had a little accident, but Dr. A—— has been here, as I saw him passing the door at the moment, and he says it is nothing to signify."

The doctor's patience now gave way. "Woman!" said he, angrily, "tell me this instant what has happened."

“Oh, nothing very bad,” said Bendel. “The Christmas-tree was ready, and all the toys, and as soon as it was dark Madame desired it should be lighted.”

“But my orders were that it was not to be lighted till I came home.”

“I can’t help that, sir. Madame said she would come after the children had got their presents, and their first noisy joy was over. The children were in ecstasies. I left the room just for a moment,” said Bendel, hesitating, “and Annette there stayed with the children.”

“No! no! that is not true,” said the nursery-girl. “My mistress had rung her bell, and I was helping her to dress.”

“I am quite sure you were in the room,” said Bendel, obstinately, “or I certainly would not have left it.”

“To the point, Frau Bendel! What happened to the unfortunate children when they were left alone with the lighted tree?”

“We were not long away,” said the nurse, whimpering, “when we heard loud cries, and when we rushed back into the room we saw that the tree had fallen from the table on the floor. Oscar had probably given it a pull.”

“And it fell on my children?”

“Only the point fell on Oscar; he had his hair a little singed, and one ear.”

“They might have been burned to death,” said the father, in horror. “And Anna?”

“She sprang to one side, stumbled over a footstool, and cut her forehead.”

The doctor hurried into the next room, where both the children were lying in bed. The poor things would gladly have waited for their father to light the tree, but as their mamma desired they should go on without him, they naturally did so. Then Oscar wanted to take down a knight on a horse from the tree, and as he gave him a rather violent pull, the tree, heavy with *bonbons*, playthings, and lights, overbalanced, and instead of the joys of Christmas, Oscar and Anna were obliged to go to bed, well scolded, and in pain and sorrow.

But they did not go to sleep; they were anxiously watching for their father. When he therefore approached their beds, and, bending over them, said kindly, “My poor dear children!” they both began to cry bitterly, and stretched out their little arms to him. “Never mind,” said he, soothingly, “we’ll have another tree to-morrow; but you must now promise me to lie quiet, and go to sleep like good children.” They then held up their little red lips to be kissed, saying, “Good night, dear papa!”

The doctor then went into the next room, and said to Bendel, “Where is my wife?”

“Madame is at a party below stairs, at Madame B——’s; but she will be home immediately.”

“When she comes, say that I am here,” said the doctor, who then went to the drawing-room.

At last Madame appeared. Whether she greeted her husband by any sign we don't know, but certain it is that she never uttered a syllable in return for his kind “Good evening.” She shut the door violently, went slowly up to the table, and leaning one hand on it, she said, in a loud voice, “Well! here I am; what do you want now?”

“A strange question,” said he, “particularly on this evening.”

Madame tossed her head, and made no answer.

The doctor felt his wrath rising, but he endeavoured to speak kindly, and said, “Had I been in your place, I would not have left home this evening, both because your children have met with an accident, and also that you might tell your husband, as soon as he returned, how it happened that children he left well and healthy a few hours before had met with such a misfortune.”

“And ask forgiveness, I suppose?” said she, bitterly.

“Certainly, if you felt you had done wrong,” answered he; “and it would be no disgrace to you to do so, if you knew you had acted contrary to my express wishes.”

“It is very easy to act contrary to your wishes,” answered his wife, “for you do nothing but com-

mand all day long. It's no wonder I should forget one half of your orders; besides, I did not at all see why I should wait till you thought fit to come home."

"You know well," answered he, reproachfully, "that I am not master of my own time."

"I won't argue with you," said she, angrily; "nothing is so easy as to come home in bad humour, and then to get up a scene on purpose."

"Then you don't choose peace," said the doctor, indignantly. "If you knew, Bertha, how fondly I had, during this long, weary day, looked forward to the happiness of being with you and the children! And now what a sad change!"

"If this scene is to continue long," said she, "perhaps you will be so good as to permit me to sit down, for I can enjoy your agreeable conversation as well sitting as standing."

The doctor, enraged, seized her wrist, and said, "No, you shall hear me standing." But he suddenly let go her hand, and said, "I will not reproach you, Bertha, but if you knew how miserable your indifference makes me!"

Madame, who had been a little alarmed, now recovered her composure, and said, shrugging her shoulders, "I am sick to death of these scenes, and I am resolved to endure them no longer. I see I am superfluous here, and that, do what I will, I never

can succeed in avoiding scolding, and strife, and reproaches; so I will return to-night to my mother, and consult with her as to the best means of arranging a separation." She turned without a word more, and left the room.

The doctor remained standing beside the table. Then he sank into a chair, and said, "She may act as she thinks proper. I will throw no impediments in her way."

CHAPTER XIII.

A MOTHER AND HER CHILD.

THE doctor remained long sunk in thought, reflecting on the recent distressing scene with his wife. He had no cause for self-reproach. One word of regret on her part, and he would again have taken her to his heart; but now he was utterly miserable, for she had spoken of a separation in so cool and decided a manner that he saw her mind was made up. She was the mother of his children, and he loved her still; but if she persisted in her resolution, all happiness was at an end for him henceforth.

Overcome by these painful thoughts, he fell into that state of mind when there is no longer the power to think, but a waking dream, as it were, confuses all images.

The bell at the glass door was at this moment gently pulled. The servant opened the door, and a

low voice uttered a few words, to which the other replied, "The doctor can only be seen from two to three o'clock every afternoon, and Wednesdays and Saturdays from six to seven."

The person made no answer.

"Besides, you ought to know that it is Christmas-eve, and now past eight o'clock. I cannot venture to disturb the doctor; you must return early to-morrow."

"I will certainly do so," said the voice, "and beg you will excuse me."

The doctor started out of his reverie, and rang the bell near his writing-table. A person in suffering was waiting outside, and about to be dismissed. It appeared to him as if it would tranquillise him to hear the misfortunes of others, and perhaps to alleviate them. The sound of the voice, too, attracted him, it was so low and so melancholy. The servant came into the room. "Who is outside?—who rang the bell?"

"A person of no consequence—a poor-looking woman, whom I desired to return to-morrow morning."

"Tell her to come in now."

"Oh! she must be gone."

"Then run down the steps and fetch her back."

In a few moments the servant returned to the doctor's study, and brought with her a woman, who

remained standing timidly at the door. "You wished to speak to me this evening?" said the doctor, gently.

"Yes, but I must ask your forgiveness," said the woman; "I know that I have come at a very unfitting time."

"When a person is ill they cannot attend to such minor considerations. How can I assist you? Do you come in behalf of another, or are you ill yourself?"

The girl was silent for a moment, but then approaching the physician with slow steps, she clasped her hands and said, "Neither, sir; I was sent by no one, nor am I ill myself."

"Then you want my assistance in another way," said the doctor, laying his hand on a drawer in his writing-table, for he thought his charity was required.

Whether the girl understood the doctor's gesture or his words, she eagerly said, "I have come to ask your aid, but in words—in advice."

"Ah! ah! a kind of medical consultation? I beg you will sit down. On which he got up and placed a chair for her, removing also the shade from the lamp, that its full light might fall on the girl's face. One glance at her features showed the physician that he had not only a patient before him, but an incurable one.

It was Catherine the sempstress, who now sank down on the chair, her breath fluttering, and evidently drawn with difficulty. Her cheeks were even paler than formerly, and the two red spots darker and brighter.

“Above all things,” said she, “I must ask your forgiveness for intruding on you on this evening; perhaps it was wrong, but I thought that Christmas-eve, with its joys, and the happy hours with your children, would make you more kindly disposed towards every one, and perhaps more inclined to assist me.”

“If it is in my power to do so, I will,” answered the doctor. “Now tell me your case.”

Catherine drew a deep breath, she loosened her shawl with trembling fingers, and then said, casting down her bright eyes, “It is difficult for me to begin, sir; but a physician, like a priest, should be told everything. I had a child, a little darling child——”

The doctor was going to ask her a question, which Catherine anticipated with feverish haste—“No, no, I am not married.”

“Well, go on,” said he, kindly.

“I entrusted the child to a woman who nursed it carefully! it thrived with her—at least so I thought—for when I went to see her every Sunday, I saw her daily improving—a mother quickly sees that.”

“And did you pay for its board from your own means?” asked the doctor. He was leaning back in his chair and attentively observing the person before him.

“From my own means, certainly,” answered she. “I don’t require much for myself, and when I was working for my child I could sew from early morning till late at night without feeling fatigued.”

“But the father of the child?” said the doctor.

“Ah! I wanted nothing from him,” said she, colouring—“nothing, after he had forsaken me.”

“Poor thing! I understand.”

“I was so happy with my infant!—happier than I can express. I must tell you that, sir, that you may understand the dreadful shock I received when one day I was told that my child was dead.”

“And you knew nothing of its being ill?”

“Nothing whatever. They never sent for me. They had even buried it before I heard of its death, and they gave me this certificate.”

“Show it to me.”

Catherine gave the physician the paper, who unfolded and closely examined it. “According to this,” said he, “there is no doubt that in the house of Frau Bilz a little girl, two years old, died suddenly during the night. All is regular here, and every form correct.”

“But the child is not dead for all that,” said the girl, with a strange smile.

“What do you mean?” said he. “Perhaps that the child did not die but was killed? But rest assured that this paper would not have been granted without the closest inquiry as to the cause of death.”

“Oh no,” said the girl, “nothing worse has happened than that they have removed my child and substituted one in her place, for whom this certificate was granted.”

“I don’t quite understand you,” said the doctor. “What motive could any one have had to send away the child and then to make you believe it was dead?”

“Motive enough,” said Catherine, coughing painfully. “The father of the child, who is highly connected, is going to be married, and his relations have resolved to put my child entirely out of sight.”

“But that is a crime!”

“Heaven be praised that it is no worse, and that, at all events, they have spared my child’s life. But we have the most undoubted proofs that they have sent away the infant. We know where the child is, but the difficulty in having it restored will indeed be great.” She then related the scenes in Madame Becker’s house, and that her friend Marie,

the dancer, had discovered through Richard that there were several houses in the town where infants were received for a moderate compensation. She concluded her melancholy tale by saying, "Do you know of any of these establishments for infants?"

"Alas! there are too many, and it has been hitherto found impossible either to suppress them or even to place them under *surveillance*."

"And are the children there ill-used?" said Catherine, in a trembling voice.

"I fear so," said the doctor. "Out of every ten seven or eight die."

"Oh Heavens! But you speak of those who are actually infants?"

"Yes; when they are older they can endure more. How old was your child?"

"More than two years old."

The physician shook his head as he saw the girl's eager, shining eyes watching his face. "Don't agitate yourself, my good young woman," said he; "it will depend much on the place where your child is. There are some among these people who wish to do what is right."

"The dancer Marie," continued Catherine, "heard that Schellinger, who is one of the tailors in the theatre, lives in a house in the suburbs, where there is such an establishment."

"What suburb, and what house?"

“When you are at the E’schen Door, by the river, the house is situated between some gardens, close to the old wall of the city, and is so hidden from sight that the neighbours scarcely ever hear what goes on there. The name is Schwemmer.”

“Oh, Schwemmer!” said the doctor, starting up in his chair. “Do you think your child is there?”

“Is it one of the worst houses?” asked the girl, shocked by the expression of the physician’s face.

He hesitated for a few moments, and then said, “I will not conceal the truth from you. This Schwemmer has a very bad name. I never was in his house; they don’t allow people like us to come to them; but I believe it is a sad den.”

“And are they capable of killing my child?”

“Certainly not by force, or openly, but——”
He sighed and was silent.

“Oh, I understand,” said she, wringing her hands, and panting in the most distressing way. “They don’t grant a speedy death without pain to the poor innocents, but let them perish miserably of cold and hunger. And my darling child is there!” said she, sobbing violently.

“Be composed,” said the doctor. “Do not give way thus; things do not proceed so quickly with a child two years old. If you are really on the track, we must rescue it as quickly as possible.”

"Yes, you are right," said Catherine, striving to regain composure. "Herr Schellinger, who is a kind old man, promised to make every inquiry, and he has discovered that my child lives, and has been conveyed to that house. He saw it, though he would not tell me if it looked ill. She still wore her little blue woollen frock, the last which I made for her, and was seated on the floor, playing."

"There, you see," said the doctor, kindly, "it was playing. She cannot be ill in that case."

"Perhaps not yet," said the girl; "but I cannot see my child, nor embrace her. Perhaps I may never see her again, for they will never give her up to me except by force."

"I believe that," said the doctor; "for then they would be obliged to confess their fraud, and their having substituted another child to procure the certificate. But it will be almost impossible to rescue the child by force, for these people are so much on their guard."

The doctor reflected earnestly, and, after a pause, said, "As you have entrusted me with your secret and asked my advice, you must first tell me if you have any plan in view yourself."

"Yes; Schellinger sometimes visits Schwemmer. He goes there and relates all his amusing stories, and all Schwemmer's companions like to listen to him, and sometimes they put him in a rage by

laughing at him, which often causes quarrels; but as Schellinger is an old, feeble man, he is of course obliged to give way. But his intention is to go there one evening, raise a quarrel, and provoke them till one of them seizes him; then he will call for help, and the carpenter and his friends, who are to be hidden close to the door, will hasten in, set him free, and visit every part of the house."

"It is very good of the old man," said the doctor, "to venture into such a hornet's nest; but I do think the plan appears to be very feasible. Be sure you let me know a couple of days before the time fixed for the attempt; I will then place within reach those who can assist, if your friends are overpowered; but do not mention the subject to any human being. Go quietly home, and don't forget to give me timely notice."

The doctor then rose, and so did Catherine, vainly endeavouring in her agitation to express all her gratitude. He accompanied her to the glass door, which he opened, and saw the poor girl pursue her way home with faltering steps. He then put on his great-coat and left the house, first desiring his servant to tell Madame, who had gone back to Madame B——'s, that he intended to spend the rest of the evening with his parents.

CHAPTER XIV.

RICH AND POOR.

IT had been the custom for many years in the house of the banker, that all his family should assemble on Christmas-eve. The mamma, who arranged the Christmas-tree, as well as everything else in the house, had always a beautiful one, surrounded by small tables covered with gifts for each of her children, including her son-in-law.

The tree was invariably placed in Madame Erichsen's own sitting-room, and when all was ready the old lady seated herself in a stately position on the sofa, sounded a small silver hand-bell, the servant opened the door, and her children came in.

The banker himself entered their ranks on this particular evening; and, indeed, he was the only one who expressed his delight with child-like joy. He usually stood at the door as if dazzled, and each

successive year he called out, "Oh! this evening surpasses all former years a thousand times over! Mamma, you have been most lavish in your gilded nuts and wax candles. Children," said he, gaily, while, according to the rights of seniority, he first kissed his wife's hand, "thank your mamma, for the tables seem to me to be superbly covered."

Each knew where his own particular table was placed, and after they had all examined their various presents, they followed their papa's example, and kissed their mother's hand. The *cadeaux* for the ladies consisted chiefly in rich silks for gowns and cloaks, handsome furs, or valuable jewellery, sometimes in articles of plate, carpets, bronze ornaments, or embroidery.

Arthur, being the youngest, came last, but on this occasion, when he approached his mother, she affected not to see him, and was seized with a very opportune fit of coughing. But Arthur would not allow himself to be discouraged by this symptom of the continued disgrace he had incurred by his conduct at the tableaux, but patiently waited till the fit of coughing ceased, when he seized his mother's hand and kissed it affectionately.

"That's all right, mamma," whispered the worthy banker, confidentially to his wife; "take him into favour again; anger can't last for ever, and Arthur, I am sure, now sees his error."

“Yes, mamma,” said Arthur, coaxingly; “forgive anything I have done to displease you. Your *soirée* will be most brilliant, and will be talked of for months to come. The tableaux cannot fail to be successful, and the Decamerone best of all.”

“*Might* have been,” said his mother, coldly; “but I have determined to give up the tableaux altogether.”

“Oh! that is a different thing,” answered Arthur, angrily; “then I have no more to say.” And he drew back from the table. An unpleasant pause ensued, and though all present seemed occupied in examining their presents, no exclamations of pleasure or admiration were exchanged; each remained silent, and for several minutes nothing was heard but the ticking of the clock.

It was the custom of the family all to sup together, and they did so this evening as usual; but the Christmas-eve which had begun so frosty and cold, ended in the same way for these rich people.

The banker himself was the only one who did not seem at all chilled by the frozen atmosphere. He pronounced the supper excellent; spoke of the holidays and their pleasures, but fervently hoped there would be snow, quoting the old proverb, that a green Christmas made a full churchyard. He talked in a vague manner, too, about politics and the speculations of his neighbours.

Alphonse alone gave the old gentleman any fitting answers, or any encouragement to speak. The others seemed all more or less thoughtful and silent. Madame Erichsen sat bolt upright in her chair, and bowed loftily each time that the servant offered her a dish. She only took a spoonful of jelly and a glass of water, and her fits of coughing were incessant.

Arthur was the most silent of all. His mother's intention to give up her *soirée* altogether distressed him exceedingly, as he knew it would wound the susceptible feelings of his friend Dr. F—— and his charming wife.

There seemed some other cause, also, why Arthur was so uncomfortable in his family circle, and so anxious to get away. He supped as quickly as possible, without his impatience in the slightest degree influencing the others to more haste. He looked constantly at the clock opposite him, which, however slowly its hands seemed to Arthur to move, at last pointed to half-past nine o'clock. "Late! late!" muttered he, impatiently.

Even Marianne, who usually chattered incessantly on all points, enlivening the family circle, was now thoughtful, and sat with her eyes fixed steadily on her plate, starting if her father asked her a question; but it was not the stupidity of the evening which oppressed her, but an unpleasant circumstance which had occurred.

Two hours previous, in passing her husband's room, she had seen, through the half-opened door, a packet of ladies' gloves—ladies are not easily deceived on such points—they were wrapped in white paper and fastened with a pink string; she further saw her husband direct and seal the parcel. At first she thought they were intended as a little surprise to her this evening, but why seal and address a parcel to her when living in the same house? She could not forget this, and when she went to the table on which her gifts were laid out, her first anxious glance was in search of the gloves; but there was nothing resembling the parcel she had seen on any of the tables. She shook her head, and could not drive the circumstance from her memory.

If our courteous reader will kindly follow us, we will leave the banker's handsome dining-room, with its well-covered table and splendid plate and porcelain, its beautiful cut crystal and costly exotics, and its melancholy faces, first glancing from the door as we leave the room towards Arthur, who, with his eyes fixed on his mother, was impatiently watching for the moment when her rising is to give the signal for dispersion.

We quit the house, and wander through the now silent streets towards the Balken-Gasse; we enter a well-known house there, but before we ascend the stairs we will cast a retrospective glance on our

friends here, and the mode in which they have passed their Christmas-eve.

As Herr Staiger only inhabited two rooms, which were so situated that you must pass through one to reach the other, it would have been difficult to prepare the Christmas-tree in private, if Clara in this, as in all other things, had not been clever enough to discover an expedient.

She made all her preparations in the outer room, and there also stood the small fir-tree, which she had bought cheap, and covered with apples, gilt paper, a few *bonbons*, and some small, coloured tapers. That these preparations might not be seen by the children, Clara had strictly enjoined on them to shut their eyes close when they passed through the room, which they conscientiously did. We must confess, Clara had this year spent more than usual, and she did not require to use her own salary, for her father, a few days before, had returned in high spirits from a visit to Herr Blaffer, bringing with him a rouleau of fifty gulden for his translation. Not only was his fee much larger, but his generous employer had given him an additional sum for his previous translations.

The source whence this money came we know better than the old man and his daughter. They suspected nothing, were most grateful to Blaffer, and how the money was to be employed had caused

a discussion between the father and daughter. Clara insisted that a new great-coat for winter was absolutely indispensable for her father; he, on the contrary, maintained that a cloak for Clara was much more necessary; but the great-coat carried the day, for Clara said it would be a sin, and the height of folly, to purchase a cloak for her merely to go the short distance from her home to the theatre.

Though Herr Staiger gave his daughter unlimited command over his finances, yet on this occasion he reserved a few gulden for himself, and confidentially informed Clara that he intended presenting his friend Arthur, who had promised to come, with some slight memorial of kindness. Not a word did the sly old gentleman say about the fur cuffs he intended to buy for Clara, and was as pleased as a child that his deception had so fully succeeded, for when he had named Arthur, Clara's eyes sparkled, and she declared it was a very happy thought—indeed, that she had already embroidered a little cigar-case for her father's friend, but that it would look too insignificant all alone.

When it became dark the children were sent to a neighbour's, with strict injunctions to stay there for at least an hour. When they were gone, Clara assisted her father in fastening *bonbons* in coloured paper on the tree, and then she brought all the little gifts for the children.

First came what was useful—a new apron for the little girl, and a woollen shawl; and for the boy, a slate and pencil—as his last one had been entirely smashed in a battle in the streets—a pen-holder, and a pair of leather boots, which had long been the object of his ambition, and which his godfather the schoolmaster had now presented to him. Then came the ornamental—a doll for the little girl, which Clara had dressed from all sorts of scraps and bits of silk her companions had given her. The doll had a smart pink ball dress, and well-frizzed curls; like her legion of sisters she stared out into the world in surprise, and her feet and arms were rather turned the wrong way. The former were placed quite square, and as for her hands, she held her fingers like those of the Prussian infantry, all apart and stiff. Clara had been a long time undecided between a drum and a rocking-horse for the boy, but by her father's advice she had chosen the latter; “for,” said Herr Staiger, “he would make a fearful rattling with his drum, which would by no means be in favour of my ‘Uncle Tom.’”

Clara took a great deal of trouble to arrange the tree, which now assumed a most imposing effect. “I feel to-night,” said the old man, “as happy as a king. This little Christmas *fête* reminds me of my youth, and also of the days when your dear mother was still alive. Clara,” continued he, in a tone of

emotion, "a kind Providence has guided my life, and I feel assured will grant me a tranquil evening of existence. I don't know how it is, but such is my presentiment. My youth was happy and bright; then came evil days, and I wandered long in the dark, cold shadow; but now I feel as if I stood on the summit of my life—I mean that summit which, when we have once attained, must soon be followed by unbroken rest; but I am permitted to look down once more on the peaceful valley, brightened by the setting sun. Yes, my child! if my life is to be yet happy, I shall thank God for it on your account, and look on it as a reward to you for the constant affection and anxiety you have shown for your old father and your brother and sister, to whom you are everything in this world."

While Herr Staiger spoke thus, his voice trembled, though a peaceful smile brightened his countenance. Clara ceased her work, and listened to the old man's words with a smile of hope. She felt that perhaps his presentiment might be verified, but her thoughts scarcely ventured to form themselves into a decided shape. "Oh no! no!—impossible!" And tears began to trickle over her cheeks.

"Ah! tears of joy are not to be regretted!" said Staiger, after a pause. "But now we must be gay; finish your work, for the children will be here im-

mediately. Our room to-day is so warm and comfortable, and then what a splendid supper awaits us!—roast veal and potatoes. But take care, Clara, that all goes well in honour of our guest; the little we are able to give must be good.”

“Do you think he will really come?” said Clara, shyly, turning to the tree to fasten on a paper net.

“Certainly,” said Staiger, in a decided tone; “he promised me he would, and what he promises he will perform.”

A happy smile played round the corners of Clara’s pretty little mouth.

“I’ll tell you what,” said Staiger, “suppose we don’t light up the tree till he comes; I think he would like to see it.”

“Do you think so, papa?” said the girl, turning quickly. “I fear it is too insignificant to please him. Besides, the children would not like to wait so long.”

“Oh! the children will gladly wait if we tell them Herr Arthur is coming—they are so fond of him.”

“But he may arrive very late.”

“He said it might be eight o’clock, for there is a Christmas-tree also at his father’s, but he hoped to get away before supper, and seemed so pleased at the idea of coming to us.”

“Really,” said Clara; “but after all the fine things at his father’s, he will despise ours.”

“Not at all, my child,” answered the old man; “you must see that he likes to be with us, for there is no occasion he should come so often on account of the illustrations.”

“Well, papa,” said Clara, in a joyous voice, “I hear the children returning, and we will ask them if they choose to wait, for they have a right to decide.”

“Certainly; but you will see how gladly they will do so.”

Indeed, such was the case; they said they would wait any length of time—“a whole quarter of an hour,” said the boy.

They then were led through the room, with their eyes closed, by their father, and Clara took advantage of her father's absence to spread on the large table his presents, with those for the children. And on a small work-table lay the cigar-case and a miniature Christmas-tree, about a foot high, which Clara had made out of green paper, and ornamented prettily with *bonbons* and coloured wax tapers. Her father's gift to Arthur, which was a cigar-lighter, was placed also on the table. Clara, when she examined it, said, shaking her head, “So papa gave two gulden for that! I fear he does not understand making a good bargain!”

In the mean time, Staiger had sat down with his children in the next room; the little girl was on a footstool with her head on her father's knee, the

boy was on the floor at his father's feet, listening, with large round eyes, to all sorts of terrific stories.

Herr Staiger was to tell, for the hundredth time at least, the tale of the mighty sea-serpent, which follows ships on the wide ocean, every day demanding a new victim, and who at last wanted to swallow the cabin-boy, which was a catastrophe particularly interesting to Karl; for the cabin-boy, after seeing a great many officers and sailors swallowed, be-thought him very cleverly of throwing the huge medicine-chest of the ship into the serpent's jaws, on which the monster became instantly sea-sick, disgorged the crew, and suddenly died.

But as a great many similar legends of horror were yet to be related by Herr Staiger on this evening, we request our reader, during the time when the little family are waiting for Herr Arthur's arrival, to accompany us for some minutes to the apartments of our old acquaintance Madame Wundel, exactly opposite those of Herr Staiger.

CHAPTER XV.

MODEST POOR.

CHRISTMAS-EVE was not celebrated here in the same cheerful way as in most families. Madame Wundel, one of the meek widows protected by the Institution for the Modest Poor, considered it unfitting to make any show on this evening. Both her daughters were grown up, consequently a Christmas-tree could give them no pleasure; to make each other presents, too, was quite superfluous, therefore they celebrated the festival quietly, and devoted themselves to pious contemplations.

To us, who know the character both of mother and daughters, this sounds almost incredible; nevertheless it was so.

There was very little fire in the stove, so that the room was scarcely comfortably warm. The table

was covered with a coarse cloth, and on it was a dish of potatoes in their skins, a salt-cellar, a piece of rye bread, and a bottle of pure water. Madame Wundel was sitting at the table, and her eldest daughter, Emilie, opposite her, and both had hymn-books before them, which they seemed to be reading attentively. We say seemed, for on close examination it was evident that the widow was alternately contemplating her hands and the ceiling, while Emilie, holding her head on one side, was listening anxiously in the direction of the stairs and the passage, for which purpose the door had been left ajar.

“I think he is down stairs by this time,” said the mother, after a long pause.

“Yes, I think I hear him scuffling along in the lowest story,” answered the daughter.

“Exactly so; I hear him coughing. I wish it would choke him!—a tiresome, vexatious old wretch,” said the widow.

“And he creeps about like a cat,” answered Emilie. “I was so startled when he came into the room a little while ago, without any noise, and said, ‘Accept my blessing,’ in his croaking tones—the old hypocrite!”

“I was not startled,” said Madame Wundel, laughing. “I knew, from old experience, that he would come this time on Christmas-eve, for last

year he came on Christmas-day itself, and he changes every year. Let that be a lesson to you," continued she, plunging her hand into her pocket and rattling her money, "that you should always follow your mother's advice. You were very anxious to begin stewing and roasting; and if I had allowed you to do as you wished, the secretary for the poor would have surprised us, and while bringing with him 'a small gift for wood and bread' (imitating his nasal tones), he would have found us with a capital cake on the table and a good bottle of wine."

"It is, alas! a very ill-natured world," said Emilie, sighing; "and in return for the few miserable gulden they throw at our heads, when I pass certain houses I must walk along meekly, casting down my eyes, and looking modest with all my might. I am sick to death of it."

"But then we live well," said the mother, with a broad, comfortable grin. "Don't be ungrateful, Emilie; you don't know yet how hard it is to gain your bread by the labour of your hands."

"But in that case I should be free, and could do as I liked."

"Go along with your freedom! If you went into service you would be dependent on the humours of your master and mistress, and then you would find out what it is really to be a slave."

“I lately went into a shop,” continued Emilie, spitefully, “and wanted to buy a couple of yards of checked silk to match my gown. Luckily, I suddenly perceived the secretary for the ‘Modest Poor,’ who was watching me askance. A large roll of silk was before me, and he asked, in his repulsive manner, ‘I hope you are not buying such idle vanities?’ What could I do? I cast down my eyes, and walked off with half a yard of grey calico.”

“Which was very well judged on your part,” said Madame Wundel. “Luckily these spies seldom go out at night; and in those places where we amuse ourselves best they are never to be seen.”

“Oh, if that were not the case I could never stand it,” said Emilie. “Well! what did he bring us?”

“On that point I have no cause to complain,” said the mother, simpering. “People become very charitable about Christmas time, thinking thus to pay off the sins of the year, so money flows freer then. Oh the hypocrisy of this world! They often do it, too, from vanity, that their names may appear in the papers, or in the public lists of charity. I have got six gulden from the overseer of the modest poor, four gulden from the citizens’ fund for succouring needy widows—and I reckon myself among that number since the death of your lamented

father. His misconduct was a sad pity; but I will not blame him, for here is a gulden and thirty kreuzer from the widows' fund of those who died in office."

She did not choose to say "for the widows of those who died in the house of correction," which the respected Herr Wundel assuredly did, having made the small mistake of employing the funds entrusted to him for others to his own benefit.

"That makes eleven gulden and thirty kreuzer," said Emilie, looking pleased; "that will last out the holidays."

"Oh, famously," said the mother; "and then Christmas-day itself is to come, when I present myself all in black to the clergyman of the new union, and from him I shall get good recommendations to Christian families who take pleasure in assisting all desolate and respectable widows."

"Oh yes, that will do," said the daughter. "Then comes the new year, and we will manage to squeeze out sufficient alms from that day to amuse ourselves well during the carnival."

The mother, who had taken out her money to dazzle her daughter's eyes, now put it back into her pocket, and said, after a pause: "There is another capital institution in this town to which we might soon apply; if you choose, I could get something out of them now."

“What is it?” asked Emilie.

“Moreover, a friend of yours is employed there—Herr Schwarz is the secretary.”

“Oh, mother,” said Emilie, frowning, “I beg you won’t say that.”

“What, not that Herr Schwarz is an acquaintance of yours?” asked mamma, coolly.

“No, not that,” said Emilie, indignantly, “but that you should propose to me to have recourse to the charitable institution for old maids.”

“Is there anything so bad in that?”

“It is bad enough to live in circumstances which render it almost impossible to make a respectable marriage.”

“If your friend will support your claim,” said Madame Wundel, pulling her cap straight, “does that make you an old maid? Look at me, I receive alms intended for the modest poor—am I either modest or poor? No one shall ever say that to my face! But you girls are strange creatures; if the least hint is given about being old maids, you are offended. It is, however, a most respectable state in itself; and when the time comes when you must be an old maid, then be one with a good grace. You can’t help yourself. You are now past nine-and-twenty, and you will soon be thirty, do what you will. You can’t swim against the stream. Bosh!”

“But I won’t do it,” said the daughter, in answer

to this maternal tirade. "I will have recourse to any institution you like, be they for what they will; indeed, I showed that, for when the institution was formed for poor betrayed and forsaken girls, then——"

"Let us say as little about that as possible," interrupted the mother, frowning; "it provokes me to death to think of it. You never hesitated to represent yourself as forsaken, though you had no right to do so, for to be forsaken you must first find some one to forsake you; and that you never did, in spite of all your efforts with we know who."

Emilie sighed, probably in memory of her failure.

"Yes, if you had been clever enough to hook that young man, we might have made a good thing of him; but you are neither clever nor cunning, only conceited—I have told you that often. Yes! yes! mademoiselle has no objection to be considered any day betrayed and forsaken, but an old maid—never! Ah! the folly of girls!"

Madame Wundel, in her indignation, had risen from her chair and was pacing the room, and then, as if she were glad to find something on which she could vent her wrath, said, "Throw away these stupid potatoes and that odious water! There is the key of the cupboard; fetch out the large cake and some glasses."

“And no wine with it?” said the daughter, in a grumbling tone, while preparing to go.

“No, bring no wine; but stir the fire, so that we may have our room once more comfortable. I have been shivering long enough to please that odious secretary. Put on water to boil, for Madame Becker is coming, and is to bring some essence, that we may make some good strong punch.”

“So, she is coming?” asked Emilie. “Do you wish to be alone? Am I in the way, or shall I stay?”

“How silly you are,” said the mother; “of course you can stay, but I don’t want Louise to come in.”

“You need not be afraid of that; she won’t be home to-day before eleven o’clock; she knows well how to amuse herself.” And, so saying, she left the room, and was heard rattling about the plates and dishes, and stirring the fire, which soon blazed up, and diffused an agreeable warmth through the room. In the mean time, Madame Wundel had, with her own hands, thrown out the potatoes into the kitchen, removed the coarse tablecloth and spread a finer one, and given, in short, an appearance of comfort to the whole room; and when Emilie at last came back, and placed a large cake on the table, some dried fruit, and some glasses, the apartment assumed quite a festive appearance,

worthy of the visitor who was expected, and who was soon heard ascending the stairs.

Madame Becker, for it was she, went along slowly, for mounting stairs was hard work to a woman of her years and size. She coughed at the first flight, panted at the second, and by the time she arrived at Madame Wundel's room she could scarcely say good evening, she was so entirely breathless, and sank instantly into a chair they placed for her. "You do live high up, Wundel," said she, after panting and puffing for some minutes, and looking round—"very high, but clean, respectable rooms."

"So-so," answered the widow. "One can't have everything. If in our circumstances we chose to live in the second or third *étage*, we would be obliged to be satisfied with a couple of small dark holes, without any view, and without air, so I prefer being here."

"I can quite understand that," said Becker, with an important air. "You have no business, and few people come to you; but I am obliged to live in the first *étage*; there are some of my visitors whom I could not expect to mount so many steps."

"Oh! that is quite proper," said Wundel, "with your extensive acquaintance. "But come, take off your shawl, or you will be too warm."

"I only waited till I recovered my breath again,"

answered Madame Becker, while she took a huge brass pin out of her shawl and gave it to Emilie, who put it on a chair. After this envious veil had fallen, the shining aspect of a bottle was visible, which the woman held in her hand. She had a little parcel under her arm, too. The bottle she gave to her friend Wundel, with a gracious smile, saying, "It is capital—genuine Dusseldorf essence of brandy. Don't let us add too much water. I like strong punch."

With these words she had settled herself comfortably in all her breadth at the table. She leant her head on her hands, placing her parcel beside her. "It is long since we have met," said she, after a pause. "I often thought of visiting you, but somehow I never made it out, so I thought to-day, this is a quiet, peaceful evening, well suited to see a friend."

"For which I am much obliged," answered Madame Wundel. "I think Christmas-eve heavy work. I never know how to get through it."

Emilie had brought the hot water, and poured some of it on the punch essence, which diffused an agreeable fragrance. She then cut some large slices of cake, so all three eat and drank, and enjoyed themselves thoroughly.

After some time, Madame Becker, leaning back luxuriously in her arm-chair, began playing, as if

unconsciously, with the parcel on the table. It was a white paper parcel, rather long, and fastened with pink tape. There was an address on it, written in firm, clear characters.

“Purchases?” said the widow, whose curiosity was roused.

“Oh no,” rejoined the other. “It is a present for my niece Marie, the dancer; she has every year some anonymous *cadeau*. A servant brought it to me in the street, and as he knew me I took it from him.”

“So Marie has not yet seen it?” said Emilie.

Madame Becker shook her head. “Oh, tomorrow morning will be time enough, if indeed she sees it at all, for that will depend entirely on her own behaviour.”

“And pray what is in it?” said Wundel.

“Gloves, I think,” said Becker, feeling the parcel; “but we will soon find out, by simply opening it, which we will do forthwith.” She then untied the pink tape, opened the paper, and Emilie saw with sparkling eyes at least two dozen pairs of French kid gloves of different colours.

“Oh, they are beautiful!” said she. “Marie is a lucky girl to get such a present—and she only a dancer!”

“They are really pretty,” said Madame Becker. “Do you like them, Mademoiselle Emilie?”

“Who would not like them? And they are exactly my size. See, mother! they are my number.”

“Then,” said Becker, “do me the favour to accept half a dozen pairs from me as a Christmas gift.”

“Oh, that would be too much!” cried Emilie. “Do you hear, mother? I am to have six pairs of these lovely gloves. But no! I really cannot take them; I would be ashamed to do so.”

Madame Wundel, who was alarmed lest her daughter Emilie should be seized with a sudden and unusual fit of modesty, and refuse anything offered to her, which she had never before been known to do, now interposed her authority, and said, with dignity, “If the excellent Madame Becker chooses to make you a present of the gloves, it would be very improper of you not to accept them with gratitude.”

Madame Becker selected six pairs and gave them to the delighted Emilie, having, as we know, her own private reasons for conciliating the family; moreover, she made a condescending motion with her hand, saying, “To Mademoiselle Emilie—a Christmas gift.”

“Charming,” said Wundel; “it is easy to see that Frau Becker has genteel acquaintances, and frequents good society, from her agreeable manners.”

The other shut her eyes affectedly, shrugged her shoulders, and said with a sigh, “Oh yes! I do see

many distinguished gentlemen, and it is a pleasure to be so much esteemed as I am by so many respectable, rich people; but it is sometimes hard work to satisfy them—very hard work.”

Emilie had left the room to put away her gloves, perhaps also feeling, with proper tact, that the two friends might have subjects to discuss during which her presence would be quite superfluous.

Madame Becker repeated then, in a mournful tone, “Yes! hard work, indeed! and I am so alone in the world, and have no one to whom I could sometimes confide my purposes.”

“You see,” said Wundel, striving to show emotion, “how wrong you are not to come more frequently to see me. Did not we always suit each other admirably, and have we not given each other many a useful piece of advice?”

“Indeed that is true, Wundel,” answered the other, “and to day, in my perplexity, you suddenly occurred to me as an old tried friend, Wundel, whom I knew as a child! Don’t you remember how we used to play together, and then we lived far away from each other. You married the blessed Wundel, and I married the blessed Becker, and you know the two couldn’t hit it off at all. I may tell you, now, that your Wundel rather made love to me, and my excellent Becker wouldn’t stand it. That’s the queer way of men; still we grieved to lose them.”

When Madame Wundel saw Madame Becker wiping her eyes, she too tried to squeeze out a few tears, by the help of the strong punch. "Becker, I always loved you," said she, with a loud sob.

"Really, Wundel, how glad I am."

"I so often thought of you."

"And I too of you, dear old friend."

The old hypocrites embraced, and filled up their glasses with hot punch.

"Ah!" rejoined Becker, after a pause, "there are queer cases where a friend's help is needed."

"Such as——?" said Wundel, curiously.

"I have at this moment an affair on hand, but you won't care about it, for you don't know the people."

"Tell me who they are."

"There is a certain Staiger, a kind of copyist, I think—but what care you for the story?"

"I know him."

"You know him!" cried Madame Becker, with well-acted surprise. "You know Staiger? Then the story will interest you. Ha! ha! that's capital!"

"Why he lives just opposite me, on the very same floor."

"Now isn't that odd? Is it possible? You know the daughter, too?"

"The dancer?—saucy thing!"

"How saucy?"

“A conceited monkey!”

“You must tell me all about it. Has she any lovers?”

“Not a vestige till quite lately.”

“And now——?” said Becker, eagerly.

“A good-looking young man has for some days been in and out of the house constantly. He has business with the father, certainly; but I know such tricks—I am up to them all.”

“Yes, yes, we know a thing or two,” said the other. “Who is the young man?”

“I don’t know his name—but rich and genteel.”

“An officer, I suppose?”

“No, not at all; a civilian, certainly. He often comes in a droschky.”

“And the girl?”

“I don’t know how far she has gone with him. I see very little of any of them, though she comes sometimes to us.”

“So! she comes sometimes?” said Becker, anxiously.

“Yes, but I don’t talk to her on such matters, and don’t trouble my head about any of them; but my Emilie (for the girl is a nice girl) has once or twice run out quickly on the stairs, and caught them saying good-by.”

“Well, what did she see?”

“Not much. He once kissed her hand, but she

snatched it away quickly and ran back into the room."

"Oh! they are still at that stage of the affair," said Becker, with a sneer. "Rely on it, she is a deep one, and has her own views to take him in, if she can."

"Yes, I told you she was a proud, airified thing. If a prince came, I believe she would think he meant to marry her."

"Ah!" said Becker, laughing, "they all think that. But who can the man be?"

"My Emilie thinks he is an artist, but well to do."

"The girl is pretty?"

"No one can deny that."

"And not a word against her?"

"Not a word, as yet."

"Ah! a bad business!" sighed Madame Becker; muttering to herself, "If that seal had not been on the letter I would have nothing to do with the business."

While Becker sat lost in thought, Wundel had again filled both their glasses. "Come along, Becker!" said she, slapping her on the back, the punch making her more expansive; "out with it! Tell me where the shoe pinches. I may help you over the stile yet!"

Madame Becker shook her head; then taking a

good gulp of punch, said, "This is one of my secret matters of business, Wundel—one of the difficult commissions I am tormented with by my genteel acquaintances. I am at a stand-still, I own."

"You are so clever!" said Wundel.

"Oh! practice," said Becker, evidently much flattered by the compliment; "but cleverness can't help me here."

But, nevertheless, she told her dear friend all the particulars of a certain count's note, who wished to make the acquaintance of the dancer, but she did not name the gentleman. "You know Clara," said she, "and you have heard the whole story, and may judge if I have not cause to be vexed. What a pity! A capital thing it would have been!"

"Really?" asked Wundel, stretching eagerly across the table—"a real good thing? and lots of money to drop in?"

"Lots! Two doubloons for each person who helped!"

Madame Wundel sat silent for a time, and then, giving a thump on the table which made old Becker jump, she said, triumphantly, "I have it, Becker. Lucky you came to me."

"What do you mean?" said the other.

"I undertake it, and will get the girl for you."

"Get along, Wundel; the punch is too strong; don't try tricks on me."

“I’ll tell you nothing,” said Wundel, rubbing her hands; “but I must have money; you mustn’t be stingy.”

“Well! what do you think of two doubloons, as I said before?”

“Ten dollars more to begin with.”

“You shall have them. You *are* a knowing one!” said Becker; “but take care what you are about, and don’t get me into a scrape.”

“Don’t be afraid. I’ll send to you in a few days, and tell the count to send his carriage, and when it comes Clara shall be ready and willing to go in it.”

At these words Becker drew out her purse, and saying, “Wundel, I honour you!” she counted out the sum agreed on, which the latter clutched and pocketed instantly. Then the conversation came suddenly to an end, for the bargain was made, and Emilie came into the room; so Madame Becker folded up her parcel of gloves, Emilie lighted a candle and accompanied their guest down stairs, where they parted.

When Emilie came back, her mamma held up the money, and said, “Do I know how to squeeze out money or not?”

“Did you get that from Becker?” said the daughter, in surprise. “What has come over the close-fisted old wretch to-day? She gives you money, and she gives me six pairs of gloves!”

“But I must earn my money. Shut the door, and I will tell you all about it; but not a word to a living soul. Do you remember the milliner’s girl who lives in the corner of the Kastell-Strasse—a tall, thin girl, with light hair? She is always in the shop.”

“Yes! I know her quite well.”

“Don’t you think she is like some one?”

“Yes! Clara Staiger,” said Emilie.

“The two are as like as two peas!” cried Madame Wundel.

“For those who don’t know them,” said Emilie. “But what’s that to you?”

“I mean to substitute one for the other, that’s all.” On which she told Emilie the state of the case. “We’ve no chance of success,” said she, in conclusion, “with that proud thing, but I know the milliner’s girl, and she’s up to anything. She’ll understand how to hold her tongue and do as she is bid.”

“Capital!” said Emilie, spitefully; “and when Clara’s admirer finds it out, he’ll have no more to say to her. So much the better! puffed-up thing—a regular tragedy queen, with her airs and graces!”

CHAPTER XVI.

A CHRISTMAS-TREE.

WHILE such a vile conspiracy was proceeding at Madame Wundel's against the innocent Clara, she was impatiently pacing her room. At one moment she went into the inner room, where her father had already repeated again and again his whole store of fairy tales to the children, and only the very interesting catastrophe of the red cow swallowing Tom Thumb, and their love for Herr Arthur, whom they were still expecting, enabled the little creatures to keep their eyes open.

Clara went to the window, anxiously looking out into the darkness, and pressing her forehead against the cold panes of glass. Flakes of snow and rain, driven by the wind, rushed along, and heavy dark clouds, in torn, fanciful forms, chased each other wildly across the sky. The moon had now risen

behind them, and its full, soft light rendered them visible. This light and the dark clouds struggled strangely together. At one time the white silvery light was victor, and for a few moments brightened kindly the dripping roofs and the weathercocks, which seemed to take a rest for a moment, till a sudden gust of wind sent them round creaking with redoubled force, and then larger and blacker clouds gradually overspread the horizon, extinguishing the light of the moon, and casting black shadows on the streets so recently bright and clear.

All was still around. After the pleasures of the evening most of the neighbours had gone early to bed. Here and there a solitary window was still lighted up, and sometimes a distant sound was heard—the echo of carriage wheels, or the steps of some passenger hurrying along, or the hammering of a shoemaker in a neighbouring garret, busily preparing the boots he had promised for the next morning's *fête*.

Clara's heart was as disturbed and gloomy as the stormy night; and even when, like the sudden rays of the moon breaking forth and illuminating the dark houses, a happy thought brightened her despondency—when she strove to think that Arthur was detained against his will—this faint consolation soon disappeared, and the fear that he had no wish to come, and that he only thought of the poor

dancer as a passing acquaintance, forced itself on her mind.

The festive Christmas-eve she had prepared so busily, and looked forward to so anxiously, was now turned into gloom and disappointment. There stood the Christmas-tree unlighted, the gifts of affection still covered up, and while all other children had gone to bed after a happy evening, her little brother and sister were banished to a dark, cold room. For, unlike Clara's usual thoughtful care, she had gradually allowed the fire to go out during the last half hour. The wood in the stove had fallen down, though the white heaps of smouldering ashes still had some red sparks, and under such circumstances the supper, the prospect of which had so highly rejoiced old Staiger, was of course destroyed. The potatoes no longer smoked, the roast veal was burnt to a cinder, the sauce dried up, and Staiger himself sat shivering in a dark room, patiently and composedly relating the valiant deeds of Tom Thumb to his sleepy children.

Clara had placed herself at the window, her hands crossed in her lap, looking disconsolately at the light before her, its long wick with a head like a black cabbage, its red light now flickering up and then dying away. Suddenly hasty steps were heard on the pavement approaching the house.

Clara listened. Yes, it must be Arthur; he must now have reached the door. It was indeed Arthur, who, as we know, could not manage to escape from his parents' house till ten o'clock. He could find no carriage in the street, consequently it had taken some time to arrive at the Balken-Gasse.

We can imagine how he hurried into the house, and in his haste he nearly knocked over a woman coming out. The full light of a gas-lamp from the opposite side of the street fell on her face, so that Arthur could see her, though his own features remained in deep shadow. With an apology, he drew aside to allow her to pass. He was certain he had seen her before—but where? A painter's memory is acute, and amid the chaos of innumerable features he had to recal, he soon found the right ones. "Exactly so," said he to himself; "the woman in the old barrack, to whom I took a note from Count Fohrbach—Madame Becker."

Clara had continued to listen eagerly, and as soon as she recognised Arthur's step, she dried the tears which were in her eyes, and hurried to the next room to announce his arrival.

This news had a wonderful effect on the little girl; she yawned, rubbed her weary eyes, then jumped up, and clapping her hands, said, "Now for the Christmas-tree at last!" The little boy was not so easy to rouse; and when his father placed him on

his feet, he would have tumbled over if Clara had not got hold of him and propped him up.

At this moment Arthur entered the room, and stood at the door in surprise at finding the whole family assembled in this cold, dark room. He had hoped to find the father and daughter in a warm, comfortable apartment, that Clara would receive him with a kind smile, and that he should pass a happy hour with her.

“Oh!” said little Karl, “what a time you have been coming. I’m sure we have waited fifty hours at least.”

“Waited for me?” said the painter. “How, Herr Staiger! I hope that is not the case?”

“Yes! we thought it would please you,” said the old man, good-naturedly.

“But it is so late.”

“Yes, it is late,” said Clara, in a low voice.

“I am so grieved,” said Arthur; “it is now ten o’clock, and you waited for me—the children, too?”

“Indeed, we had hoped you might have been able to come sooner,” said the old man.

“I could not, believe me,” said Arthur. “I came away as soon as possible; besides, I told you, my good Herr Staiger, that if I did not arrive by eight o’clock, you would know I was obliged to remain for supper.”

“Yes, I now remember you said so; but, as you are here at last, we will have a splendid tree. Now, little ones, see how glad you should be; all other children have had their tree and are in bed, asleep, and you have all your pleasure still to come.”

Clara had gone into the next room, to light the tapers on the tree. Arthur, whose pockets were filled with toys, followed, begging her to allow him to assist her. She agreed, and showed him the places for her father's gifts, and for those of the children. He put various parcels on the tables; but he turned his head every minute to look at Clara, who was arranging her things, and never looked up.

He felt that he had caused her pain, which grieved him. With what kindness had this excellent family thought of him in his absence, and delayed all the pleasures of their evening till he could enjoy them along with them. Though he could not blame himself for the delay, still, had he known he was expected so much earlier, he would have found some pretext to get away sooner.

“I am afraid, Clara, you are displeased that I came so late,” said Arthur, after vainly trying to catch her eye.

“Not at all,” said she, carelessly; “you know you are always welcome. But I am too busy to

“ speak ; perhaps, afterwards, we may have a little conversation.”

“ Yes, dear Clara, I hope we shall,” said he, gladly. And seizing her hand, he pressed it to his lips.

She did not draw her hand away, but she started, so that he let her hand drop to look into her eyes; but she turned from him and said: “ Now, Herr Arthur, all is ready; but you must go to the door, and not look round till I have uncovered the things on the tables.”

“ So I am to get something also ?” said he.

“ Certainly,” said Clara.

Arthur went to the door, opened it softly, and called out in a minute: “ Now, children, attend. Clara is ready; she will count one—two—three, and then I will open the door wide. Won’t you do that, Clara ?”

“ If you wish, Herr Arthur. One—two—three !” cried Clara, slowly, and the children rushed in; but they remained at the door.

A perfect sea of light—a degree of splendour yet unknown to them—dazzled their eyes. Such a Christmas-tree they had never seen. What had any former one been compared to this!—not worth talking about; this one reached quite to the ceiling, and both the children were so transfixed with delight, that their father was obliged to give them a good shove to make them move on.

Karl, in his wonder, had spread out all his fingers and opened his eyes wide, and was quite unable to understand all the marvels he saw. At last he said, drawing a deep breath, "A rocking horse!"

"And a doll!" said little Marie. Then they both walked slowly round the tree, hand in hand, scarcely at first venturing to touch all the pretty things; they thought almost they were in a dream, and that, if they touched anything, it would instantly vanish and dissolve into nothing.

The old man looked at his warm winter coat with as much satisfaction and astonishment as if he had never seen it before. Arthur had placed a box of cigars beside it, and a lighter of amber, which were accepted with cordial thanks.

Clara had, by this time, uncovered the table, on which her miniature Christmas-tree stood; and Arthur, whose eyes followed all her movements, saw, by the glance she gave him, that it was intended for him. On the table also lay the cigar-case she had embroidered, and the lighter of Herr Staiger.

The young man received the pretty gift with real pleasure, for when he looked at the pearls and gold-thread, and thought of the time she had bestowed on it, he felt with joy how many kind thoughts of him had been interwoven with the work. He

gazed at her with delight and gratitude, which made Clara quickly cast down her eyes. She tried to smile, but her eyes filled with tears.

Arthur well understood the sensation of sorrow which filled her heart; he knew she loved him in truth and sincerity. She was not ashamed of her love, but she dreaded it, for she saw the gulf which separated them—a gulf which his loving words and tender speeches hid when he was by her side, but which she again saw in all its blackness and hopelessness when he left her. Arthur read her thoughts. Should he sacrifice this fair and loving creature, with all her goodness and all her charms, to the prejudices of society? Should he desert her because she was only a dancer, and her family not inscribed in the golden books of the city? No! she should be his wife, and he would love and cherish her through life, and she should be esteemed by all. He would follow the genuine impulses of his heart.

While he thought thus, he had continued to gaze at the embroidery till Clara at last looked at him in perplexity. She feared that her tears had annoyed him; she therefore again strove to look cheerful.

Arthur roused himself from his reverie with a feeling of perfect happiness. His mind was made up as to the course he was to follow. “Ah, dear Clara,” said he, “how grateful I am to you for your

precious gift! I also have brought you an offering, but so small and insignificant, that perhaps you may scarcely consider it worth your acceptance."

"Oh! it is sure to please me," said Clara, allowing her hand, which he had seized, to remain in his, and blushing deeply.

"But you must guess what it is," cried he.

"How is that possible?" said Clara, smiling. "No, no, I won't attempt to guess; I showed you my present honestly and openly, and you must do the same."

"Well, yours was at first covered; and that you may not see mine too soon, shut your eyes till I tell you to look. Clara may do so, Herr Staiger, may she not?"

"Certainly," said the old man.

"Besides," said Arthur, significantly, "your father will see what passes."

Clara consented, but she became very pale, her heart beat violently, and she started as she felt Arthur place a ring on her finger; and when Arthur desired her to open her eyes, she saw a plain gold circlet, a ring without jewel or ornament, but the form of which she knew well. What could it mean? The father looked inquiringly at Arthur, and Clara trembled so violently that she was obliged to lean against the table.

"What does it mean?" cried Arthur, with emo-

tion—"it means that I adore Clara, and that she and no other shall be my wife if she will."

Our kind reader will forgive us for closing this chapter, for such moments of happiness are not easy to describe. We will only add, that Herr Staiger, even in the midst of his joy, shook his head and expressed great fears as to the consent of Arthur's parents, but that Clara felt a degree of happiness seldom granted to any one. She no longer was forced to conceal her love; she could confess it to him without reserve; she was perfectly happy; every hope and every wish was more than fulfilled. If she had died at that moment she would have passed into another world at the happiest moment of her existence, a pure and innocent angel.

CHAPTER XVII.

A NIGHT GUEST.

AFTER such an evening as Arthur had passed in the chapter we have just closed, when his eyes were beaming with happiness, having for the first time pressed his beloved to his heart, everything appeared joyous to him, whether a clear sky or a troubled one, moonshine, snow, or rain. If the latter had dropped heavily on him, he would not have been annoyed; if the wind had carried off his hat or turned his umbrella inside out (that most trying of all visitations), he would have borne it without a sense of injury. Though no catastrophe actually occurred to Arthur, he was so absorbed in joy, that he did not appear to observe that snow and sleet were driving in his face, and that—we suppose to cool himself—he was holding his hat in his hand. He looked dreamily at the dark sky, and stared at

the gas-lamps with a pleased expression, as if saying to them, "If you only knew what I know!" At last, he put on his hat again, and went on more quickly, not to escape the cold of the night, which rather refreshed his burning cheeks, but that he might get a pencil and paper at home to sketch Clara's lovely features half a dozen times at least.

It was near midnight when he approached his home. He passed the principal door, for when he returned late at night he could get in by a small back-door in the narrow street behind, and his room was reached in a moment.

There was a gas-lamp exactly opposite the door, which it lighted up brightly. As Arthur drew near, he put his hand in his pocket to take out the house-key. He suddenly stopped, for he thought he saw a human figure leaning against the lamp-post.

"Strange!" said the painter, looking more closely. Yes, it was a man who seemed to be waiting for some one.

To reach his own door, Arthur was obliged to pass close to this lamp-post. Before doing so, however, he took the heavy pass-key out of his pocket, grasped his stick more firmly, and walked slowly forward.

When he came nearer, the figure moved a step towards him. They were so close now that they

could not avoid each other; in fact, the unknown had placed himself exactly in front of the door, so that Arthur thought it best to ask him, in a firm but civil tone, what his object was in placing himself so directly in his way?

At [this question the figure said, in a low and timid voice, "Ah! Herr Erichsen, you probably don't at all recognise me?"

"There you are right," said the painter, laughing. "I should like to know how it is possible to recognise any one standing under a gas-lamp with his head turned away? But what do you want? If your designs are honest, don't be ashamed to show your face openly."

"I ought to have done so at once," answered the figure. So saying, he shook back the long black hair from his face, and stepped out of the shadow.

"Herr Beil!" said Arthur, surprised. "Is it really you? And what brings you here, my good Beil?"

"Yes, it is Beil," said he, mournfully, "but only the shadow of what he once was."

"But tell me quickly what brings you here at such a late hour. Do you come by chance, or were you waiting for me?"

"I was waiting for you," answered Herr Blaffer's former clerk. "I have been here on two different evenings, but each time on hearing your footsteps

I drew back. I had almost done the same this evening; but you looked so happy, and were singing such a gay tune as you walked along, that I took courage and waited to see you."

"How can I serve you, my good fellow? But why don't you come in the daytime?"

"If you will be so good," said Beil, "as to allow me to go with you to your room, you will soon see why I don't face daylight."

"With pleasure," cried Arthur; "but make haste, for I begin to feel that the air is very cold and frosty."

"Yes, very cold and frosty!" echoed Herr Beil.

Arthur opened the door, and when both had entered, he closed it again carefully. A light was in the passage, and they went up to Arthur's rooms in the first *étage*. There were four rooms, all very comfortably arranged, but in his painting-room considerable disorder reigned, which was, however, excusable enough in an artist. Weapons, stuffs, statuettes, vases were heaped together in every corner, so that it was no easy matter to make a path through them without a collision.

Arthur's comforts were much studied at home, so that though very late this evening there was a cheerful fire blazing in the chimney. Arthur lit a pair of wax candles, and when they lighted up the room he looked with some curiosity at his com-

panion, who stood shivering and rubbing his hands before the fire.

“Indeed,” said Arthur, after a pause, in a grieved tone, “indeed, my good Herr Beil, you must forgive me for saying that I now perfectly understand why you come to me by night.”

“You understand now?” answered the latter, casting a disconsolate glance over his own person. “Though you never saw me very well dressed, still I never formerly looked like a beggar—as I do now.”

And Beil spoke the truth, for his exterior certainly was most melancholy. His hair and beard looked uncombed and rough; he seemed to have his own reasons for making his linen invisible, for he had buttoned his coat up to his chin, and even pulled up the collar over his ears. His trousers were a mass of mud up to the knees, and his boots creaked as he moved, and left wet marks on the carpet each time that he changed his place.

He was going to tell Arthur his history, but he interrupted him, saying, “Let alone all explanations just now; I see some strange misfortune has overtaken you, which you will relate to me afterwards; but the chief thing at this moment is that we should both have dry clothes, for the rain and snow to-night have thoroughly wetted me also. Come with me to my bedroom, and I will find something that will do for you.”

Herr Beil attempted to decline this kind offer, but Arthur laid his hand on his shoulder, and continued: "Don't refuse; believe me, at any time I should have been happy to assist you in a difficulty, and how much more this evening, when I am myself unusually happy?"

At these kind words Herr Beil, without answering, seized Arthur's hand, and pressing it gratefully, followed him to his room.

A complete transformation was speedily effected, and in the course of a quarter of an hour both were seated near the fire, after Arthur had brought out of his bachelor cupboard some cold meat and a bottle of wine, to which Herr Beil did ample justice.

He then related to Arthur his intended suicide, when the phantom had appeared to him and dissuaded him from so criminal an action. "And he was right," said Beil, sighing; "I now wonder how any man can voluntarily make an end of the glorious gift of life."

"That was no evil spirit," said Arthur, "or he would have urged you to fulfil your purpose."

"But I heard no sound when he vanished," said Beil, shuddering. "I looked up, it struck one o'clock, and he was gone!"

"Well, my good friend," said Arthur, "forget such things for the present. It is past one o'clock.

I will make up a very tolerable bed for you on my sofa here, and we will discuss your affairs tomorrow." So saying, he wished his *protégé* good night, and went to his own room.

Herr Beil slept soundly, and did not awake till the sun was shining into the room, when Arthur came in already dressed, and sent him into the next room to make his toilet.

When they had breakfasted, Arthur said, "I have been thinking what is best to be done in your case. I remember, you have the pen of a ready writer, and are careful and punctual in your work. Even Herr Blaffer admitted that, and gave you the highest character for integrity. I will speak to my father, in the hope of getting some situation for you in the house."

"No words can express all my gratitude," said Beil, with much emotion. "I will never dishonour your recommendation, believe me."

"You must allow me, too," said Arthur, smiling, "first to restore your outward man and make you more presentable."

And this was quickly arranged. Arthur sent for the various tradespeople; and when Herr Beil looked at himself in the glass, he seemed extremely delighted with the favourable change in his personal appearance.

Arthur had placed himself at his easel, on which

a large piece of canvas was displayed. "I am going to give the reins to fancy," said he, gaily, "and to make various sketches."

"Portraits?" asked Beil.

"Yes, and no," answered Arthur, sketching a female head, in chalk. "It is to be an ideal figure, but with features dear to my memory— But," said he, stopping to listen, "I am always disturbed at my work. I am sure I heard the sound of wheels in this narrow street: a visit to me, I fear, for this is no thoroughfare for carriages. Be so kind, Beil, as to go to the window, and see if the carriage has stopped at the end of the street, or if it has passed on."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A PAINTER'S STUDIO.

HERR BEIL looked out of the window, and said, "It is a small close carriage, and is turning the corner; now it is stopping at your door."

"But I don't choose to be disturbed," cried the painter, impatiently. "Do go and shut the door for me." But it was too late. Two gentlemen were half-way up-stairs already, so Beil could not possibly be so rude as to shut the door in their faces.

One was a little, thin, restless man, who was talking loud and quick, and stopping every moment to impress his meaning on his companion, who merely nodded in answer to this flow of words.

"Is Herr Erichsen at home?" said the latter visitor to Herr Beil, who was standing with the lock of the door in his hand.

The little man pushed past him ; and then, looking earnestly at Herr Beil, he said : “ We met one evening lately at Count Fohrbach’s. You requested me to visit your studio—now, you see, here I am. Oh ! no thanks. I have managed to find an hour for you, and I do assure you that is a very great proof of my wish to please you, for my time is so fully occupied. But Baron Brand told me it would not be time wasted, and that I should see some good paintings.”

Herr Beil had patiently allowed this stream of words to flow—indeed, it would have been of no avail to interrupt him, for it was his usual habit to talk on without caring for an answer. He was looking round the room, too, all the time, first at one thing and then at another, but never at the person whom he was supposed to address. He never could look any man straight in the face, nor could he endure a steady glance fixed on himself.

The other gentleman, too, let him chatter on ; but when he stopped to draw breath, he said, “ You are mistaken, Herr von Dankwart, this is not Herr Erichsen. Probably a friend of his ? ” added he, with a bow and a courteous smile.

Herr Beil also bowed, and requested both gentlemen to go to the room where Arthur was still busy at his easel.

Herr von Dankwart tripped through the room with his little legs, standing first before one picture and then before another, or examining a rare cabinet, or a dagger, or a pistol, asking incessant questions, and, like many of the great of this earth, not waiting for an answer. At last they arrived at the door of Arthur's studio, and Herr von Dankwart, in his absent fit again, mistook Herr Beil for Arthur, and clapped him on the shoulder, while saying, with an air of protection, "Yes, here we are indeed. I am happy to see your works. You have attracted attention in the highest quarter. The duchess highly admires your wonderful landscape of Carrara."

Herr Beil bowed in considerable embarrassment, for he did not know whether it was any use his endeavouring to state who he was, as the baron's attempt had proved so fruitless.

In the mean time the little man had thrown himself into an arm-chair, and after settling himself comfortably, he looked round at the walls, on which some studies and sketches were hanging. "Indeed, I can assure you," said he, after a short pause, "this landscape of Carrara has made some sensation. I wish you joy. The duchess condescended to say the picture was a good one. If you go on as you have begun, I think I may

venture to promise that you will receive some orders from us."

"But you are mistaken, Herr von Dankwart," said Arthur, coolly, and continuing to sketch at his easel; "the landscape of Carrara is not by me. I don't paint landscapes."

"Of course not by you," said Dankwart, somewhat piqued, "but by Herr Erichsen there." And saying these words he bent towards Herr Beil.

"My good sir," cried the baron, laughing, "you are in a very absent fit this morning. The gentleman at the easel is the artist whom we came to visit—Herr Erichsen—but he paints no landscapes, as you may remember. The view of Carrara is by Herr Becker.

Dankwart looked round for a moment as if in surprise, put his hand to his forehead, shut his eyes for two seconds, and then said, "Ah! see, gentlemen, how absent a man may be! I am unfortunately too often so. I have too much in my head," added he, sighing; "but excuse me, Herr Erichsen, I am really happy to renew my acquaintance with you." On which he bowed patronisingly to the artist, and made a condescending movement with his hand.

The baron was now seated, and Arthur gave him a cigar; he offered one to Herr von Dankwart also, who, however, refused it, but took out of his

pocket his own cigar-case, and began smoking one of his own cigars.

“I am so difficult to please in cigars,” said he. “I have a large stock of them, and only smoke those that are six years old.”

“Which I certainly could not offer you,” answered Arthur. “You know we artists live only from day to day; we buy to-day the cigars we smoke to-morrow, and never have a stock.”

“But you might, Herr Erichsen,” rejoined Dankwart. “I am told you are rich enough to enjoy all the luxuries of this life. I know your papa well. I sometimes transact business with him.” Here he screwed up his mouth and puffed away the fumes of his cigar horizontally. “*A propos* of affairs, I must look in my pocket-book, where I somehow think I put a memorandum which regards you. Excuse me for a moment.”

Arthur bowed, while Herr von Dankwart busily turned over the leaves of his pocket-book.

Herr Beil in the mean time had left the room.

“Who is that young man who has just quitted us?” asked the baron, negligently. “I never before saw him in your society. He has a remarkable countenance, expressive eyes—a face which inspires confidence.”

“He is an excellent creature,” said Arthur. “Herr Beil is a man of integrity, and the kindest

heart in the world, in whom I would trust unreservedly."

"Oh!" said the baron, "he certainly looks clever—what is his profession?"

"He is—he wishes," said Arthur, hesitatingly, "to get a situation, for at this moment he has none."

"Is he a man of business?"

"A most punctual and regular one."

"Has he the pen of a ready writer? Can he speak foreign languages?" asked the other.

"I may certainly say yes to the first question; and I know he speaks French fluently, and understands English."

"That sounds as if he might answer," said the baron, after a moment's reflection. "Will you recommend him? Will you guarantee his integrity and good conduct?"

"Certainly," said Arthur, looking rather in surprise at the baron. "Have you any employment to propose for him?"

"Yes, I have," replied Herr von Brand. "You know, my dear Arthur, that I don't like trouble. It is a great fault to be lazy, I know, but we can't make ourselves different from what we are by nature, and my papers and my correspondence suffer sadly. If I could find some one in whom I could safely rely, I would be truly rejoiced."

“Nothing can be more fortunate,” cried Arthur, who was delighted to find such an excellent position for his friend. “I will be his guarantee on all points; and moreover, in taking him, you do a good action—for he is alone in the world, poor fellow!”

“So much the better for me,” answered the other. “I must honestly say I prefer my dependents having as few connexions as possible—at least, in the city where I reside; entire discretion is a quality I particularly value, and when I find it, I am willing to pay well for so rare a gift.”

“I believe,” said Arthur, “that I may answer for my friend in that respect as I would for myself. His is an honest, faithful nature, full of devotion to any one who shows him kindness, silent where he ought not to speak, and full of wit when he sees that his conversation will be appreciated.”

“Then I will at once decide, my dear Arthur,” replied Herr von Brand, “to engage the young man. His situation shall be a lucrative one. He is to be my secretary, and when required, perhaps my confidant, and I hope we shall be mutually pleased; so that matter is settled. Tell him to come to me three days hence, at seven o’clock; and now we will say no more. I hate all excitement of my nerves, and I consider any one thanking me in that light.”

“But I may thank you quietly myself?” whispered Arthur, taking hold of his hand.

“Oh! if you choose, my good fellow!” said the baron, raising his hand in a languid and affected manner. He then looked at his watch, and said, “Eleven o’clock already! Cœur de rose! Herr von Dankwart, we must go.”

The latter seemed absorbed in a reverie, and to have forgotten all about his memorandum, so he closed his pocket-book with a *distract* air, rose from his chair after glancing at the clock, then looked at the sketches on the walls in a careless manner, placing his head to one side, half closing his eyes, and then opening them suddenly, saying, “Good! —good! Superb, really! Excellent, indeed. I will not fail to remember your name, and to bring it before the duchess, assuring her that you deserve to be assisted on the road to fame.” Saying this, he extended both hands, as if intending to bestow them on Arthur in a condescending shake, but luckily he remembered in time that it was only an artist who was standing before him, so he allowed his left hand gently to sink down by his side, while with his right he seized his hat, and with a formal bow glided out of the room.

“Don’t forget I am to have Herr Beil,” said the baron, smiling, for he had observed and understood the peculiar look with which Arthur regarded the

departing patron of the fine arts in high quarters. "By such instruments, however," whispered he to Arthur, "talent often finds a protector and an advocate with the great of the earth." He pressed the young painter's hand kindly, and followed his conceited little companion, who began chattering again at the top of the stairs, and continued to do so, without intermission, till they reached the *coupé*.

As soon as Baron Brand closed the door Herr Beil reappeared, and looked at his friend with so droll a smile that both burst out laughing.

"After all it is no laughing matter," said Arthur, again taking up his chalk; "he comes here, makes me lose my best morning hours, never looks at my works, and then afterwards joins a distinguished circle, where he will not hesitate to pronounce on my capabilities as an artist! Deuce take them all! It is sad, indeed, that we artists can never enjoy freedom, but that we are more or less dependent on the whims of such people—their slaves, in short. But why does not the carriage drive away?" continued he, after making a few strokes on the canvas. "Don't I hear my name called? These double windows deaden all sound. Be so kind, dear Beil, as to look out. Yes, yes, some one is calling me."

And it was so, indeed. Scarcely had Beil put his head out of the window than he quickly drew it in again, laughing, and said, "Herr von Dankwart is stretching his neck out of the *coupé* as far as he can, and is calling you."

"Let him call!" answered Arthur, impatiently. "He has detained me half an hour already with his senseless speeches, and now am I to go downstairs to him and humbly ask what may be his pleasure?"

"But he saw me," said Beil, soothingly; "and he turned to me the last time he called your name."

"But what can he want?"

"Perhaps he has just discovered what he was searching for in his tablets."

"Confound him and his tablets too! I won't go down stairs."

"Yes do, pray," said Beil. "Remember, you are an artist, and even if you don't require money, as so many do, at all events you work for fame, and that you cannot acquire in portrait-painting unless you have sitters. Besides, you have been in no particular hurry to go to him, which saves your pride."

"Yes, you are right," answered Arthur, in a provoked tone. "I see I shall be obliged to go out

to the carriage in all this rain and bow my head courteously. Who can swim against the stream long without sinking? Yes, I feel my fetters; I feel that, like the others, I am the slave of circumstances."

After these words the painter went down stairs, without, however, hurrying himself at all, and went up to the carriage, from which little Herr von Dankwart was gesticulating violently, while he called to him, "Pray pardon my forgetfulness, but when a head is so overburdened as mine these omissions will occur. I had quite forgotten my commission. See, here it is distinctly written." So saying he stretched out his pocket-book for Arthur to see, who, however, turned away his head with a silent bow.

"The duchess, my dear sir," continued the little man, in a pompous tone, "has been told that you have just finished a couple of admirable portraits. Indeed, we have seen one—that of young Count Fohrbach—extremely well done indeed! We could not have done it better. I assure you we consider it an excellent painting."

"The personal advantages of the count himself, and not my talent, render it a pleasing portrait," said Arthur, in a cool tone.

"You are too modest, my dear young friend," said Herr von Dankwart, making an attempt to pat

Arthur on the shoulder; but as his arms were so short, and Arthur stepped back, the attempt failed. "The affair in question," continued Dankwart, "is no less than the portrait of his Highness Duke Alfred, the son of the duchess, a royal youth of most pleasing exterior. His highness wishes, therefore, to be painted by you, and if you can begin the portrait immediately——"

Arthur bowed in silence.

"The duke would, I am sure, at my request, appoint a time to give you sittings."

"I only hope I shall be able," said Arthur, "to arrange my time so as to suit the orders of his highness. I am at this moment fully occupied."

"But if his highness wishes it, my dear sir!" answered Herr von Dankwart, in a tone of amazement, and with a peculiar emphasis on the word *wishes*.

"Ah! yes, indeed," said the baron, with an ironical smile, in the corner of the carriage, "if his highness wishes it! Cœur de rose! that's another matter!"

"I will await his highness's commands," said Arthur, endeavouring to return into the house.

But the little courtier called him back with a hasty gesture.

"Stop! stop!" cried he; "only one thing more, my' good Herr Erichsen. I had very nearly for-

gotten the principal point. The duchess, though thoroughly satisfied as to your talents for making a good likeness, wishes—you will forgive the precaution—to see some well-known face sketched by you before you undertake his highness's portrait. Only a sketch, or a little water-colour drawing—not an oil-painting.”

“I understand,” said Arthur, with praiseworthy equanimity; “the duchess only wishes to see if I succeed in a resemblance?”

“Exactly so, my good friend. That is precisely her wish; and though my time is immensely occupied, I will offer myself for your subject, and will give you a sitting in my own house when you fix a time. Will it be difficult to make a good likeness of me?”

“Oh no! not at all,” said Arthur, with a bitter laugh. “I could hit you off at once, without any sitting; for, on the two occasions when I have had the honour of seeing you, your image has been indelibly impressed on my mind.”

The little man threw himself back into the carriage, and said, in a dignified tone, “Then it is settled. First a slight sketch of me, and then probably a portrait of Duke Alfred. Home!”

The horses trotted on, but before they set off the baron exchanged a glance of amusement with the painter.

Herr von Dankwart's adieu consisted in waving two fingers out of the window.

In spite of the pouring rain, Arthur remained standing a few minutes at the door, and said, "I think I have proved to-day that I can hold up both cheeks to be smitten. Uncle Tom himself might have been satisfied with me!"

CHAPTER XIX.

NEW YEAR'S DAY AND COURT INVITATIONS.

THE old year was passing away, the new year just about to commence. No season is more gay and agreeable, every one striving to part gaily with the good old year, and joyfully to welcome the new. As usual, in spite of all the watchfulness of the police, various robberies and crimes had taken place, to the great despair and wrath of the president of police, who had in vain endeavoured to discover the malefactors.

A bright new year had followed a noisy New Year's-eve. The sky was blue and frosty, and the keen air had dried the earth in mercy to all the polished boots, and black coats and white stockings which were to be seen at mid-day swarming in the streets. All were hastening along, walking, and pushing, and hurrying here and there with pleased

faces, now calling to a friend, now snatching off a hat to greet a distant acquaintance, then quickly disappearing into some stately mansion, where black coats and white gloves followed each other in quick succession. Most of these persons carried parcels neatly tied up and fastened with blue or red string, gilt boxes of *boubons*, or large bouquets, carefully guarded from the press of the crowd, that all might arrive fresh and uninjured at their destination.

Numbers of carriages were rattling along the principal streets, the horses in their best harness, the coachman and footman in state liveries, and looking very important. In passing the different ministers' houses, the rattling and rolling of wheels was quite deafening, the loud noises of the servants, and the shutting of doors.

But the greatest crowd of all was at the gates of the royal palace; and although the royal family had declined receiving any formal court of congratulation, still one carriage after another continued to deposit officers in rich uniforms and with jewelled swords, and hats and feathers, at the principal entrance, whence a magnificent marble staircase led to an ante-room, where there was a book to inscribe the names and titles of all visitors.

The audiences on New Year's-day were not numerous, and as soon as they were over, every one hastened to leave the palace to get rid of close-fitting

uniforms, to be able to breathe while making the tour of friendly visits so indispensable on this day.

The suite then breakfasted alone, as their royal master did so, and because there was some preparation necessary for the great dinner at court, where every one was obliged to make agreeable speeches to his neighbour.

The palace always looked peculiarly melancholy and deserted on New Year's-day, especially in fine weather, as on the present occasion. The royal dignities were driving, and in the ante-room, usually so crowded, there were only a few discontented-looking faces, gazing out at the noisy, busy streets. There was profound silence in all the stairs and passages; nothing was heard but occasionally a distant door shutting, a footman sneezing, or a sentry coughing.

The aides-de-camp's room was peculiarly dull and melancholy on such days, when the sun was shining brightly on the streets and houses. Its aspect was north, and it looked into a small, gloomy, closed court, through which no one could ride or drive, and where few persons ever passed, and which on winter days was covered with cold, frosty shadows. The principal building which adjoined it obstructed all light, and the only moving object to be seen was a gilt weathercock, on which the sun's rays were

reflected, and which looked mockingly down on the dark court below.

It may seem strange to the reader that every time we enter the aides-de-camp's room Count Fohrbach is on service, but it is more agreeable to us only to visit this spacious and gloomy room when we are sure of finding an acquaintance.

The count was sitting in an arm-chair in the recess of an oriel window, concealed from without by heavy curtains, and as if anxiously on the watch. He was steadily gazing from his hiding-place at some windows on the second *étage*, and in spite of the extreme cold he had opened a window to enable him more distinctly to see his opposite neighbours.

But no one was as yet to be seen—not a human being; all was still and desolate; and had it not been for the bright silk curtains of these windows, and the brilliant green leaves of some flowers in vases, the court would have looked most gloomy. The count at last seized a book, and attempted to read, but he could not fix his attention.

This afternoon was peculiarly tiresome; he consulted his watch—only two o'clock. So four long hours still to dinner. He opened the window once more, and again looked in vain at the opposite windows, when he was startled by a loud laugh.

He turned, and saw his friend Major von S——.

“Welcome!” said he; “how kind of you to

help me to pass away the tiresome hours. This side of the palace seems to suffer under some evil spell—not a creature is to be seen.”

“You have plenty of leisure to make the closest researches through the opposite windows, in the hope of catching a glimpse of the fair Eugenie,” answered the major, laughing.

“My dear friend,” said Fohrbach, gravely, “I am in no jesting mood. I must confide to you, in strict confidence, what, however, you seem to have already discovered, that Eugenie von S—— has made a deep and lasting impression on my heart.”

“Do you say that to the friend, or to the relation of the fair maid of honour?”

“At this moment to the friend.”

“So you have really lost your illustrious heart at last, my gallant count?”

“Entirely,” said the other, “and irrecoverably.”

The major looked thoughtfully out of the window, and, after a pause, said: “My wife suspected your attachment, for you are always so timid in Eugenie’s presence. You must endeavour to regain your self-possession, for no one appreciates talent more than our lovely maid of honour; and you have a rival. The duke has great powers of conversation, and devotes himself entirely to her. He is clever and insinuating, and, what is worse, most unscrupulous in attaining his object, whatever it may be.”

“Tell me the truth,” said the count, in an agitated voice. “Do you think that she takes pleasure in listening to him, or in receiving his attentions?”

“My dear friend,” said the major, “that is rather a difficult question to answer. I can only repeat my former words. He is a royal duke, and he is crafty and clever.”

“Have you any proofs that he distinguishes Eugenie? Does she encourage him?—does she like him?”

“How can you for a moment imagine that so good and innocent a creature as Eugenie would sanction the addresses of such a man? She would turn from him with abhorrence. But enough of this. If you choose to plead your own cause, you may come to us this evening.”

“Is Eugenie to be there?” asked the count, joyfully.

“Yes, Eugenie, and no one else.”

“Major, you are a capital fellow!” cried the young man. “So we four shall be alone?”

“Quite alone. Come at eight o’clock, when dinner is over, and your waiting also. We will play whist, and drink tea, and talk; and, as it is New Year’s-day, you may bring my wife and Eugenie each a small *cadeau*.”

He then shook hands with the count, and went

away. The count accompanied him to the ante-room, where the sentries were pacing up and down, and where the one solitary lacquey, who could find no pretext to go away, was comfortably snoring beside the stove.

Our young aide-de-camp returned to his room, which he paced with light and joyful steps. He thought of the happy evening which awaited him, and his heart beat with delight; but sometimes he stood at the window, looking out thoughtfully and frowning. At such moments the rivalry of the duke recurred to him, and its possible consequences. He knew what influence a royal title possesses over most female hearts. The duke was not handsome, nor fascinating; but he was gay, lively, and unscrupulous. Then he thought of the hours he had passed with Eugenie, both at court and at the house of his friend, and he erected a fair fabric of happiness on the kind looks and words he had received from her. "This evening," said he, "I will ascertain my fate. I could not have a more favourable moment. For joy or for sorrow, I will know her feelings this night."

At this moment the door opened, and the grand chamberlain entered the room, and, though it wanted still two hours to dinner, he was in full uniform, his hat under his arm, his face, as usual, full of pomposity.

The count offered him his hand, his excellency responding, according to his usual rule, by granting two fingers in return, which, however, the count cordially pressed. "Your excellency has arrived early," said he; "I take things more easily. I dress half an hour before dinner, and I arrive to the moment."

"You are a free man, my dear count," said his excellency, sighing; "you have occasionally a little duty to perform, which, however, is over in a few hours, and you may forget it all as soon as you have taken off your uniform and your sword. But I! duty, duty, duty! from early morning when I open my eyes, till late at night when I again close them, and even then I have no rest, for I dream of my duties. Slavery indeed!"

"But your excellency is too anxious. I would take things more quietly."

"Perhaps you might," said the grand chamberlain, with a pompous smile, "but pardon me for saying that there would be considerable confusion in the arrangements."

"Very possibly, but I would not plague myself by trying to remedy every *contretemps*."

"Oh, it is easy for you young people to talk, but we find it necessary to hold the reins as tight as possible, for if relaxed for a moment all goes wrong."

“To-day, for example, why not take a little rest? There is no more to be done till dinner. The invitations are sent out, dinner prepared, and the apartments in order.”

The grand chamberlain, who was standing at the window, looking very much out of humour, now turned to the aide-de-camp, and shrugging his shoulders, said, “I will give you a proof of how short-sighted you young people are. You say the invitations are all sent out; they are so, and have been all accepted. But is it my fault that three persons should be taken ill this afternoon and send apologies? Three persons! And one of them will be instantly missed by his majesty. What is to be done?”

“Well,” said the aide-de-camp, “make the table smaller, I suppose.”

“Make a table of a hundred and twenty covers smaller in a few minutes! Count Fohrbach, you are an excellent aide-de-camp, and a most exemplary officer, but as to your ideas of court regulations! However, it is not to be expected from you.”

“Invite some other people.”

“As if court invitations on New Year’s-day were so easily made! The society to-day is especially selected by his majesty; any one I may add to the number must be on my own responsibility; and for three persons whom I invite I make thirty enemies

at least, who all think they had a much better right to be invited. Oh! mine is a hard service."

"I would in that case always have a reserve, military fashion."

"So I have," answered his excellency, "but even the reserve sometimes fails us. You know the old half-pay adjutant-general, Baron von Weiss, who lives in the rooms opposite?—he never will come to court. I went to him myself half an hour ago, to persuade him to come. In vain. Indeed, I was sure of it, for even in the ante-room I heard him roaring out so loud that he could be heard all over the palace."

"Is he in pain?" said the aide-de-camp.

"In pain?" answered the other. "You know well enough what kind of pains, he suffers from."

"Oh, a domestic scene, I suppose?"

"Yes; indeed, they never seem to have an end."

"Poor little woman, she avoids all young people, and at balls only dances with old generals or ancient court officials, who cannot possibly inspire the most suspicious husband with any feeling of jealousy."

"How," said the grand chamberlain, in rather a piqued tone, "because she only dances with persons in high positions at court! But," continued he, "people don't speak of the present, but——" Here he coughed significantly, as if having already said too much.

"Oh! of the past," said the aide-de-camp. "An

evil world, your excellency, has very little scruple in talking scandal of any pretty woman. But what do they say of the baroness? Her family is well known, I believe?"

The other shook his head.

"No? I thought she was of a distinguished Scotch family?"

"*On le dit,*" said the old gentleman, after a pause.

"Well, let them say what they will," said the count, "she bears a good name, and even supposing there may have been something not quite correct in her previous life, she has suffered enough in her miserable matrimonial lot to atone for it a thousand times over. To be in the power of the old general is no light sorrow. He treats her more like his slave than his wife."

The count having spoken these last words in rather a loud tone, the grand chamberlain looked cautiously round the room to observe if they were overheard. Then, as if this subject of conversation appeared rather too dangerous for their present locality, he hastened to change it, by saying, "I was in hopes that his majesty would have returned by this time; but now I must rely on my own choice."

"May I propose two invitations?" asked the aide-de-camp, smiling, after accompanying his excellency to the door.

“Some of your young companions, I suppose?” said the chamberlain, contemptuously.

“At all events, those who are sure to come.”

“Well!”

“Eduard von B——, the assessor, who was yesterday made *Regierungsrath*. This would be a favourable occasion for him to express his gratitude. I know where he is to be found.”

“I cannot do so without permission.”

“Or Baron von Brand. I am sure you will find them both at this moment at the club, playing piquet.”

“The Baron von Brand!” said his excellency, as if a sudden cramp had seized him. “No! no! pardon me, he is no particular favourite of mine. Nothing annoys me more, to tell you the truth, than to see him in our society. I have the impression that he is out of place at court.”

“I think you are unjust towards him. I really consider the baron a finished gentleman.”

“Yes, outwardly, outwardly,” said the other, in an irritated tone. “You will find it out some day.”

“But he associates with the most distinguished persons. For instance, you know that he is constantly with the duke.”

“Unfortunately he is! I wish it were not so. Rely on it, his highness has not become more steady or regular in his conduct since his great intimacy

with this baron." So saying, he walked off with a pompous air.

The count at this moment saw through the open door his chasseur, evidently awaiting the departure of the grand chamberlain to give him a letter he held in his hand. He made him a sign to come in, and took it from him.

The direction was in a woman's hand, but quite unknown to him. He opened it and looked at the signature—"Emilie Becker."

"HONOURED SIR" (thus ran the letter), "though with much trouble and expense, I have at last succeeded in fulfilling the commission with which you honoured your humble servant. It has cost me much time and money; but of that I say nothing, being too happy to oblige you and your distinguished friend. The ballet will be over to-night at ten o'clock, so you must, honoured sir, provide a carriage at that hour at the corner of the Prinzen-Strasse; but you must come yourself, or send a confidential person, that the young woman may not be alarmed. I beg you will tell your distinguished friend the trouble I have taken to obey him.

"Your humble servant,

"EMILIE BECKER."

The aide-de-camp, after reading this letter, threw

it on the table with an air of disgust. "How quickly things alter!" said he. "A short time ago I was absorbed by this caprice; but now—now! Heaven forbid! When I think of Eugenie, the very sight of this letter I feel to be a desecration of her image. But what can the woman mean by her allusions to my 'distinguished friend?' I have no idea what she can mean. Oh! now I guess; Arthur promised to deliver the note. I will send him to make my apologies. I am sure he will not refuse to do me this small service—indeed, he will probably consider it a very agreeable escapade." So saying he enclosed Madame Becker's note to Arthur, desiring his chasseur to take it immediately to his house.

"You are," said he, "to ask for an answer, Yes or No. If 'Yes,' then go home; but if Herr Erichsen says 'No,' you are to bring back the note, and wait in the large hall for me till dinner is over, sending me a message that you are there." The count and the chasseur left the room, and both went their different ways.

CHAPTER XX.

BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER A DINNER AT COURT.

THE great New Year's dinner at court dragged its slow length along as in all similar festivities. The rooms were filled with the most superb uniforms, with stars and orders, with rustling silks and brocades, all kinds of gold embroidery, brilliants, and jewels.

Before dinner, the guests were placed according to their rank and position, and all had their eyes directed towards the royal personages who had just entered through the opposite door, and who were returning, with condescending inclinations of the head, the respectful bows and deep curtseys of their subjects. Their majesties then passed round the circle, addressing some gracious words to the more highly favoured, bowing to the less fortunate, granting a passing glance to others, and entirely

passing over some as if they did not exist in the world.

It is rather amusing to watch at such moments the change in the physiognomies when one of the royal personages slowly passes along.

It is just as when the moon rises and gradually illuminates with her soft light here a fresh meadow, a murmuring stream, or an ancient ruin, there a gloomy ravine, bleak rocks, and monotonous, stiff firs.

Just as these objects are brightened by the moon, so the faces around are lighted up by the reflexion of royalty—all eyes are steadily fixed on the rising planet, the fresh meadow coquets with a pair of pretty arms while she plays with her fan, the stream ceases to murmur, and collects its waters suddenly, to let loose a sluice of words.

The ruins think of former days, when they once stood in the first ranks, and glance with longing eyes at the moon, which is now hid behind a cloud, without bestowing one kind glance on the stately ruins.

The gloomy ravines and bleak rocks—alas! there are too many such—shrug their lean shoulders, shake mockingly their ancient, jewel-bedecked heads, and say to each other, confidentially, that nothing in the world is such a bore as these formal circles before dinner. Indeed, for these ladies they

are tiresome enough. No brilliant ray ever shines on them; these withered, dead landscapes can never again be lighted up.

But the stiff firs stand in close phalanx with proud, defying, and withering smiles. These are strong trees, with sharp, bristling points, and if the moon does not choose to shine on them, they coolly say, "The good moon becomes very forgetful; how can he overlook us in our stateliness?"

As soon as the royalties have passed on, all subside into their former obscurity. An occasional bright face is to be seen—generally that of a young maid of honour, or a newly-made chamberlain, who appear for the first time at a court dinner, and who have been honoured for the first time by a few condescending words from royal lips.

Count Fohrbach, with some officers, had withdrawn modestly into a corner. They were standing behind the portly person of the grand chamberlain, who, with his hat under his arm and his wand in his hand, stood with great pomposity watching with one eye the door of the dining-room, and with the other every movement of their gracious majesties.

At last the folding-doors were thrown open, their majesties entered, followed by the grand chamberlain and the whole circle. The dinner proceeded like all other dinners, only the tight uniforms and

splendid toilettes made every one more stiff and uncomfortable than usual; but at last it came to an end, and a circle was again formed after dinner, but not so formal and ceremonious as previously.

The aide-de-camp, whose duty was now about to end, asked if his chasseur was returned, but on being told that he was not, he felt at ease about his note, and retired into the recess of a window, whence he could see the Kastell-Platz, and also watch those around, though himself unseen. We can guess whither his eyes were directed, and not his only, for most of the young men gazed at the lovely maid of honour, whom, however, no one could approach, as her place was close by her majesty.

Eugenie eclipsed all the circle by the beauty of her figure and the charm of her face, as well as by the elegance yet simplicity of her dress. She wore a dress of white silk, almost devoid of ornament, but on her left arm was a superb emerald bracelet, which she had inherited from her mother. Her black hair was wound in glossy plaits round her classical head, and the expression of sweetness, intelligence, and modesty of her countenance won all hearts.

The young duke alone had the privilege of approaching his mother, the duchess, and consequently Eugenie also; and on this occasion he made such

good use of his rights, that Count Fohrbach, who was anxiously watching him, involuntarily seized his sword, as if he wished to draw it against such a dangerous enemy.

As yet the duke had addressed his conversation to the whole group of ladies round the duchess, but now, to the despair of our aide-de-camp, he contrived so to manœuvre that he separated Eugenie from her companions, and stood aside with her.

“What does he mean? What is he going to say to her?” thought the count, anxiously.

The duke asked a question; Eugenie looked down and gave him a short, though apparently polite answer, on which his highness seemed annoyed, but after a moment's reflection he recovered his equanimity. He advanced a step towards Eugenie, and whispered a few words in a respectful manner; she bowed slightly, but stepped back decidedly. The duke went away, and the count breathed again.

“The report is by no means without foundation,” thought he; “at all events on the part of the duke. If I could only approach her! Her majesty and the duchess really seem fastened to that same spot. Ah! at last they are moving; the ladies are curtseying, but Eugenie must follow. How unfortunate I have been this day! I have not been able to address one word to her, either before dinner or since. But she has stopped in the doorway. Ah!

if she would only look round—perhaps in search of the duke ; but if she does so I shall see it.”

The duke was standing at the opposite side of the room, and Eugenie was the last of the long, brilliant train, and the loveliest. She did turn her bright eyes in search of some one, but not the duke, as her glance scarcely rested on him, but was directed all round the room.

Oh! if she were thinking of him! How his heart beat! He could no longer remain concealed by the curtain, and as he quickly advanced his sword slipped out of his hand and struck against the *parquet*. A sweet smile at this moment lit up her face. Oh joy! oh happiness! Did she not slightly bend her graceful head to him before she disappeared? He scarcely dared to think it; but at this moment a circumstance occurred which was more convincing. Eugenie dropped her cambric handkerchief by accident at the door, on which various officers and courtiers near rushed to pick it up; but we need not assure our reader that Count Fohrbach would rather have sacrificed his life than have allowed another to seize the handkerchief, and he succeeded in snatching it just as the duke came up.

He stretched out his hand to the aide-de-camp, as if to receive the handkerchief. “It does not belong to your highness?” asked the count. “I may

be permitted to restore it myself to the young lady?"

"Of course," answered the duke, with a sneer, drawing back. "The victor has earned thanks, and those I have no wish to dispute with you."

If our count had been a thorough courtier he would have presented the handkerchief respectfully to the duke, and been satisfied by his acknowledgments; but he was in love, and jealous, so he only made a passing bow, and hurried on through the suite of rooms.

Eugenie had passed through several apartments, and was just entering the vestibule, whence a staircase led to her room, when she heard hasty steps approaching.

She looked round, and on seeing Count Fohrbach, who held her handkerchief in his hand, she seemed, for the first time, to discover her loss, and advanced a few paces towards the fortunate finder.

The count, as the moment had now arrived when he must restore his precious prize, could not resist pressing it gently to his lips, while bending almost on one knee to present it to Eugenie.

"Thank you so much, count," said the lovely girl, receiving it. "I have just discovered the loss of my handkerchief, and rejoice that you should have found it."

"A happy chance for me, certainly, mademoi-

selle," answered he, "for it gives me the long wished-for opportunity of approaching you and exchanging a few words with you."

"You were on duty to-day?" said she, smiling.

"Which rendered it more difficult than ever to enter the royal circle where you shone as queen."

"No flattery, count, especially here," said Eugenie, glancing anxiously round.

"You are right," said he, hastily; "no one can be too guarded in his words or actions within these walls; but thought is free, and even your severity will not prohibit me that consolation?"

"I must first know the nature of your thoughts."

"I think of you—and you alone—and," added he, "I also hoped that perhaps you perceived my respectful greeting in the salon."

"When you so suddenly came forth from the recess in the window?"

"Ah! you did remark me then, mademoiselle?" said he, enchanted, for he thought, "As she saw me, that glance and that bend of the head were intended for me."

"That recess," said she, evading his question, "is an excellent corner for observation."

"Oh! I did observe a good deal."

"You must tell me what you saw another time," said she, with a fascinating smile, "but very soon, I hope—this evening, perhaps. You are coming to Major S——'s?"

I shall certainly be there, mademoiselle. And you?"

He looked at her passionately, and anxiously awaited her answer.

"Yes, I too am looking forward with much pleasure to my visit to Madame von S—— this evening." And casting down her eyes and playing with the bracelet on her round white arm, she added, "Especially this evening, as I hear there are no strangers to be there."

At this moment steps were heard in the adjoining room, on which Eugenie bade a hasty adieu to the count, and hurrying along the vestibule soon disappeared.

It was fortunate that she left him at that moment, for he had so fairly lost his head from delight, that he was on the point of making a regular declaration of love to one of her majesty's maids of honour in a passage with every door open; and certainly a less fitting locality could scarcely have been selected, especially as Eugenie was scarcely out of sight when the duke came, followed by some officers, all laughing and talking together.

"Ah! our gallant knight!" said his highness. "Have you found your lady? But of course you have, for I no longer see the pledge of victory in your hand."

The count was too happy to care for the mocking

and rather offensive tone of the duke. Besides, it was a royal personage who condescended to jest with him, so he simply replied, with a courteous bow, "I had indeed the pleasure to restore Mademoiselle Eugenie von S—— her handkerchief."

The duke passed on with his suite, making a haughty bow to the aide-de-camp, who took his sword under his arm, and returned through the brilliantly-lighted rooms to the dining-room, saying, "I am thankful my duty is now over, and my carriage waiting; when I am once more in my *coupé* I shall be, thank Heavens, a free man again. And this evening, I hope, Eugenie will resume the interesting conversation so suddenly broken off. Perhaps my happiness for life may this night be secured."

So thought his majesty's aide-de-camp as he approached a room where the servants were occupied in removing the plate. One of them, as he entered, said to another, "Here comes the count." On which the latter came up to him and said,

"His excellency the grand chamberlain has asked several times for you, sir, and will return here in a moment."

"What is the matter?" said the count, in a provoked tone. "My duty is over for the night; there can be nothing more to do; indeed, his majesty is in the theatre."

“Yes, sir, but her majesty and the duchess have commanded a whist party, to consist of the duke and the grand chamberlain.”

At this moment the latter appeared, and on seeing the young officer he called out, in a pleased tone, “Ah! there you are, Fohrbach; I have been looking for you everywhere.”

Saying these words, he took his arm, and went to the corridor. The count, who knew court well, felt uneasy, as he thought his excellency would not have taken the trouble to look for him without good cause. Perhaps some order from his majesty for him to execute, for he could not bear to admit the possibility of an idea which suddenly occurred to him.

They had gone some steps in the dimly-lighted corridor before his excellency spoke, and the count had not courage to question him. “I do indeed rejoice that I have found you,” said the grand chamberlain; “you know I always protect your interests when I can, and I have given you a proof of it this evening. Fortune favours you, count; I assure you she does.”

“Not that I know of, your excellency,” answered the other. “I am rather anxious to hear in what respect I am so fortunate?”

“All in good time. Her majesty has commanded a whist party.”

“I know that,” said the aide-de-camp, hastily; “the duchess, the duke, and yourself.”

“These were named,” said his excellency, smiling, “but the duke has excused himself. The master of the ceremonies might have supplied his highness’s place; but see, my dear count, what a true friend I am, I proposed you.”

“Me!” said the unfortunate young man, in a voice of despair.

“Yes, you,” repeated his excellency. “You, young man; learn to prize such a friend!”

“A friend!—my greatest enemy, my destroyer!” thought the count.

His excellency continued, in a self-satisfied tone: “Come with me now; I can tell you it is no slight favour to be chosen to play at her majesty’s own table. I beg you will mention this to-morrow, early, to your respected father.”

“Oh! that this man were at the bottom of the sea, and his whist party too,” said the aide-de-camp to himself. “How long will the party last?” said he, after a pause, to his excellency, who, taking his hat under his arm, answered coolly:

“How do I know?—probably till ten or half-past, and then a small, delicate supper, to which it is possible his majesty may come. Are you not highly delighted?”

“Oh! *I* am delighted beyond all measure,” said

the miserable aide-de-camp. "And pray where is the duke?"

"I don't know," answered his excellency; "probably occupied in some important business—a tender rendezvous, possibly. He thinks of nothing else, and he naturally prefers that to making the fourth at whist with his mother and his aunt. This is very well for him, but for us the affair is very different. I do assure you that to-morrow, count, you will be the envy of the whole court. But here is the aides-de-camp's room. Lay aside your scarf and other appendages, and come up as soon as possible. No thanks; I have gladly done you this service."

"Oh! I thank you heartily," said the young man, violently shaking the two fingers his excellency extended to him. "You have prepared a most enjoyable evening for me! May the devil fly away with you!"

This last phrase he did not speak aloud, but he would have sincerely rejoiced if this civil wish had been fulfilled half an hour before. There was only one light burning in the large room, which left great part of it in deep shadow. The count paced up and down, angrily, like a lion in his den. "Oh, freedom! freedom!" sighed he. "Am I not as truly fettered as if I had chains riveted on my feet, or as if enclosed by an iron grating, from which

I contemplate enchanting landscapes which I can never attain, shut in here like a wild beast or a miserable slave? Yes! slavery is the right word, and even though the chains are made of silver and gold, they remain not the less chains. I dare not even look sad. What a stroke is this! My Eugenie's sweet eyes will glance towards the door in expectation of my arrival, and in vain. I may wait long before I shall again have such an opportunity to finish the interesting conversation on which hangs all the happiness of my life. No man on this earth can call himself a free man! Each drags his chain with him."

He threw open the window and leant out, and gazed up at Eugenie's windows, but all was dark. At this moment he heard the voice of a servant calling out, "The duke's carriage!" the door open, the steps let down, some one get in. Then the former voice said, in a loud tone, "To the house of Major von S——." At the same instant a servant opened the door of the aide-de-camp's apartment, and whispered, "Permit me to say, sir, that eight o'clock is striking. Her majesty is on her way to the salon."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE DUKE'S MARKERS.

THE whist party was in the apartments of the duchess. These were not of such spacious dimensions as those of her majesty, but better calculated for a small society, as the duchess liked comfort more than show. She had, therefore, banished from her rooms the one everlasting stiff sofa, with its inevitable accompaniment of twelve hard chairs, the usual furniture of palaces, which bear a close family resemblance.

The young duke's taste had also assisted a good deal in modernising these rooms, for he liked thick carpets, rendering footsteps inaudible, as well as easy-chairs, recesses of windows filled with flowers and *chaises longues*, and shaded by heavy curtains.

Eight o'clock struck as the count entered, scarcely in time, as her majesty was just passing into

the room where the whist party was to assemble. There were few persons present—only the suite of her majesty and the duchess, and some of the ex-ministers, whose passion it was to watch the royal game.

The queen named the grand chamberlain as her partner, and Count Fohrbach played with the duchess.

At the moment when he was about to seat himself, the duke's valet glided up to him like an eel, and gently drew towards him four counters for marking which were on the table, whispering to the count, "I did not till this moment know that the duke was not to be of this party."

"Leave them," said the duchess, who had observed him. "I know that my son always gives them to you after the game is over, but you shall have them then."

The valet bowed and drew back, but evidently with reluctance, casting an anxious glance as he retreated at the gold markers.

"Is there any peculiar history attached to them," said her majesty, "that the duke values them so highly?"

"They were probably a *cadeau*," said the duchess. "The workmanship is pretty."

"Let me see them," said her majesty.

The count rose and took the four markers to the

queen, who examined them, and said, "They seem to be hollow; they are probably made to open. Don't you remember," said she, turning to the duchess, "at my father's court, an old chamberlain who had markers like these, and who used to enclose little notes in them to different ladies? All the four unscrewed, but only one of them had a false bottom. On pressing the enamel representing the card, a hollow appeared." Her majesty then gave them back, and desired the game should commence.

"Hearts are trumps," said the grand chamberlain, with infinite humility.

Gracious reader, we conclude you have often played whist in the course of your life. It is a very harmless game in itself, interesting and agreeable when played with good-natured people, who, like yourself, throw down one after another their thirteen cards, happy when they chance to make the trick, and who don't observe if you trump their king of spades, while you have the three and four of that suit still in your hand; who don't care when a card too much remains at the end of the game, or when you allow your adversaries to count honours while you have had in your own hand ace and king.

But whist is by no means so pleasing when you play with people who imagine they have a profound knowledge of the game, and who are not of a very

amiable or patient nature, who easily flare up, and insist on always being right.

You may do as you will, you always do wrong. If you follow the strict rules of the game, and this does not chance to suit your partner's hand, he shrugs his shoulders impatiently, fidgets uneasily on his chair, casting an angry glance at you. If it is a lady, she looks at you reproachfully, and says, in a resigned tone, "There are cases when people should know how to make an exception to rules." Then if the next time you do make an exception, it turns out to be the very case when the strict laws of whist should have been adhered to. If you play hearts, a convulsive smile crosses your partner's face, for spades were what should have been played. A child might have understood that a spade was the right thing to play, and not to play a spade on this occasion showed you were the worst player that ever touched a card. If, next time, your wits sharpened by this severe lecture, you do under similar circumstances triumphantly play a spade, sure you are playing admirably, and appealing to your partner by a self-satisfied glance, he answers you with a look of horror. He shakes his head dolefully, as much as to say, "Such stupidity as this is too much for human patience!" and when after the deal is over you ask, quite crestfallen, "Was I not right in playing spades this time?" your partner

smiles bitterly, and with a contemptuous look, says, in a compassionate tone, "My good sir, it was no fault to play spades, but how on earth could you think of playing the ten when you had the knave in your hand? throwing all my calculations into confusion. That was really too bad!"

It is very agonising, too, to play whist with royal personages, when you dare not venture to justify yourself: if you hold bad cards, you feel as if you were the guilty cause; and if you win, your royal partner's skill is of course the happy means of extricating you. On such occasions no reproaches are uttered, but an inquiring look puts you to shame; a slight cough is easily understood; a scarcely perceptible shrug of the shoulders or a low sigh knocks you flat on your back.

All this anxiety is the fate of even good players, who anxiously concentrate their whole attention on the game, and never allow their eyes or thoughts to wander for a moment from their cards. But the torments endured by an unhappy, jealous, *distract* lover at a whist-table, we hope, gracious reader, you may never have been in a position to understand.

Yet such was the case of the unfortunate Count Fohrbach. He made, however, superhuman efforts to leave no weak point open to the watchful eyes of the royal duchess, and, according to the proverb, the good fortune which had this evening forsaken

him in love now beamed on him at whist, and he held most wonderful cards, as his excellency assured him with a sigh at every deal. The duchess smiled graciously, for she had won a rubber of eight points.

Not only the lost *soirée* at Major S——'s occupied the thoughts of the unlucky count—not only the duke who had gone there instead of him—but his highness's markers, which lay before him on the table, also excited his attention, and he looked at them again and again, as if they concealed some important mystery. Why had the valet been so anxious to remove them? They were hollow, her majesty had said, and made so as to conceal *billets doux*.

The rubber was over, and her majesty seemed in no haste to begin another, for she leaned back in her chair conversing with the duchess. The four colours of the cards were enamelled on the markers. The count took up the one with clubs on it, let it fall, as if by accident, under the table, and, when picking it up, he tried to screw it round. Her majesty was right; the counter opened and disclosed a hollow space, but on pressing the enamel it showed nothing more. He then quietly took up diamonds, with the same result; but hearts!—it was not empty, for on pressing the enamel a small, closely-folded bit of paper was seen!

The count looked round cautiously to see if any one was observing him, but the two ladies were conversing together, and the grand chamberlain was absorbed in calculating on a paper how many ducats the last rubber would cost him.

The count debated whether he had any right to abstract the paper? Certainly not; but to read it and put it back he considered quite justifiable. "It is a mere stratagem of war," thought he. "I am only making a reconnoissance in the enemy's territory; for on this point the duke is my enemy, and we are openly at war. Why spare him? To his arts I very probably owe being here this evening." With these thoughts he screwed the counter together, and placed it again on the table, first taking out the note.

But how to read it? And it must be done quickly, for as soon as her majesty rose there would be no time to replace the paper in the marker, and the cunning valet would be on the watch, and instantly discover the loss. The grand chamberlain luckily assisted him in this difficulty by giving him the paper with his calculation of his losses at whist, and a pencil, and saying to him, "There is an error somewhere there, count; do see if you can find it out for me."

"Let me see it," said the count, eagerly seizing the paper. Then he put the note he had abstracted

on it, and instead of troubling himself about the calculation, he read as follows: "Report as usual, at eleven o'clock—fourth door of the blue gallery." These words he impressed on his memory.

"There is a mistake, I think?" asked his excellency.

"Let me look again," said the aide-de-camp. "Oh yes! here it is. You must take five from these figures. You see now it is right."

"Exactly so," said his excellency.

It was fortunate that the count had contrived to read the paper without attracting observation, and to replace it so quickly in the marker, for her majesty seemed not disposed to continue the game, and desiring his excellency to discharge her debts, she rose along with the duchess. His excellency and the aide-de-camp made deep obeisances. The former went into the adjoining library, the latter into an ante-room, where he placed himself almost behind a curtain.

Scarcely was the whist party dissolved, when the duke's valet appeared and collected the duke's markers carefully, looking cautiously round to see if any one observed his anxiety to secure them. The count, however, had watched him; and after seeing him leave the room, he muttered to himself: "'Report as usual, at eleven o'clock—fourth door of the blue gallery.' As the duke has thought fit to

supplant me this evening, I shall not hesitate to take my revenge, and to discover this mystery, which savours strongly of some love affair. I am resolved to go to the blue gallery this night, for I feel as if some plot will then come to light which I may yet defeat."

He then emerged from his quiet corner, and mixed again with the society. The evening passed slowly on; the royalties had called a few ancient excellencies to converse with them, but her majesty's frequent glances at the clock proved that the announcement of supper would be a considerable relief; this occurred at half-past ten o'clock, and restored some degree of animation to the society.

The ladies and gentlemen in the corners of the room ceased their suppressed yawns, the constant fluttering of fans was at an end, and hats were no longer turned round and round in the white gloves of the weary gentlemen. A sigh of general relief was heard through the room, the servants busied themselves in covering numbers of small tables with cold meat, fruit, ices, and wine, and soon no sounds were heard but those of knives and forks, and dishes and glasses.

But the manner in which these courtiers supped was far from comfortable. The gentlemen ate their supper standing, and the ladies directed their eyes alternately to the contents of their plates and to

the royal personages near. There was no peace during the meal, for the danger was always present of losing, through a momentary inattention, a gracious smile or a condescending greeting. Hence arose the constant attention to the royal plate or the royal mouth; and not till it was evident that the latter was fully occupied, did any one venture hastily to gulp down a good-sized morsel, again to be prepared for battle.

Sometimes the gentlemen suffered more, for an untimely question on her majesty's part was the cause of the most fearful embarrassment. Let any one try to answer a royal question clearly and distinctly with nearly the wing of a capon in their mouth—no easy matter to get quit of in a hurry. But to allow royalty to wait a second for an answer! The possibility of choking would be nothing to that!

Our kind reader will therefore admit that eating and drinking at court has its disagreeables, and that those who do so are by no means to be envied. Most of those who had been obliged to attend the whist party (we say obliged, advisedly), did so with the same feelings as Count Fohrbach.

They dragged a chain with them, and were more miserable, at all events more bored, than thousands who, in a well-warmed room, sit down to a dish of

potatoes and a piece of dry bread, but enjoy entire free will.

Here people traverse the brilliantly-lighted apartments, after having perhaps uttered a deep sigh of regret at the door, on thinking of the pleasant evening they have missed elsewhere; but instantly the face assumes a pleased expression—a mask which must be carefully worn through the whole course of the evening, though many of these fair ladies are more disposed to shed bitter tears in solitude.

The smiles must continue till her majesty, with a gracious bend of her head, says, “It is eleven o’clock, I think,” till the maid of honour has placed a white bournous on the royal shoulders, and till her majesty has embraced the duchess and taken leave of her with an “Adieu, ma chère.” Then deep curtseys follow all round the favoured circle, and another edition when the royal duchess withdraws.

The doors of the ante-room are thrown open, servants bring in masses of shawls and cloaks, the gentlemen take a hasty leave, the ladies descend to their carriages, or hurry along the dark, deserted passages to their rooms in the palace; and then the mask falls at last, the bright face becomes sad, some think of the evening they have lost, others shudder

when they recal so many equally tiresome ones, and still more when they think of the innumerable evenings awaiting them equally trying to their patience.

And thus this is also another specimen, dear reader, of slave life.

The *soirée* was at an end, and in a few minutes the apartments were entirely deserted. As for the duke, he had not appeared at supper, which caused the count many heavy sighs and muttered imprecations, and still further strengthened his resolution to visit No. 4 in the blue gallery this evening. After he had taken leave of his friends, his chasseur, who was waiting, came forward to put on the count's cloak.

“ Did you see Herr Erichsen ? ” said he.

On which Franz answered, “ I gave the note into his own hands, sir.”

“ He read it, I suppose ? ”

“ He did so, my lord, and said, with a smile, ‘ I will attend to it. ’ ”

“ Very well. Go home with my carriage. I shall not require it again, and will probably come back on foot in the course of an hour; but first go to the aides-de-camp's room and get my scarf and accoutrements.”

CHAPTER XXII.

A REPORT.

IT was now eleven o'clock. Count Fohrbach drew his cloak closer round him and descended into the vestibule, which was dimly lighted. The blue gallery was situated on the other side of the palace, and to reach it, it was necessary to cross a long corridor, which was at this moment nearly dark, being only lighted from each end by two feeble, flickering lamps; but he knew the way perfectly, and though he stepped along cautiously, it was only that his spurs might not strike on the stone passage, and thus excite the attention of the sentry or any of the servants below.

It is strange to observe how every tone echoes in the stillness of night, and a sound quite inaudible, or which at least attracts no attention in the daytime, is then distinctly noted. Thus the

count heard each of his own quiet footsteps, and when his sabre moved it sounded as if some one were rattling a chain.

He soon reached the end of the corridor, and after ascending a winding stair he arrived at the entrance of the blue gallery. Here it was more difficult to find the way, for there was no light whatever burning, and the night was so dark that it was scarcely possible to distinguish the high windows from the wall. This was certainly the blue gallery, but now the difficulty was to find the fourth door. He could see nothing, so he was obliged to feel along the wall. "In this Egyptian darkness," thought the count, "a sudden remembrance occurs to me. I now perfectly understand why I saw the duke lately purchase a little dark lantern. Such a thing would be very useful to me at this moment. That was the second door; now comes the third; but stop! probably to have the fourth opened some secret sign will be required, which would puzzle me not a little. Perhaps I must announce my presence by a louder step. I think no one lives here, so I may venture to make myself heard."

This he did, and the manœuvre was attended with immediate success. Close to him, about where the fourth door was likely to be, a small bright spot of light was visible, as if some one was

approaching the door with a candle, the light of which was seen through the keyhole. Two more steps and the count had reached the door, and, to his great satisfaction, he saw it slowly opened. He seized the handle, pushed the door open, and found himself in a small room opposite a young girl, who, when she saw him, started so violently that she nearly dropped the wax candle in her hand. The count prevented the shriek which would inevitably have followed by raising his hand quickly and calling out "Silence!" He then closed the door and bolted it, letting fall a thick curtain, which showed him why no trace of light had been perceptible.

After he had done this he advanced towards the girl, who, with a face of terror, had drawn back. "A strange adventure," thought he, "but the girl does not look as if it were a rendezvous. I will endeavour to obtain the report by my diplomacy."

The girl had placed the candle on the table, but still holding it, her hand trembling violently. She had a slender figure, a pale, delicate face, and fair hair, which was wound round her head in two thick plaits. Her simple but carefully-arranged dress was that of a waiting-maid to a lady of distinction. She was obviously unable to utter a word, and fixed her large blue eyes on the intruder in evident surprise and distress.

“Don’t be alarmed, my good girl,” said the count, gently; “I will do you no harm; upon my honour I will not. Leave your candle on the table, and sit down on that chair in the far corner if you choose, while I remain here, a long way off. Now pray do what I ask. I come with no evil intentions, I assure you.”

After some hesitation, she at last complied with his wish, and went towards the chair he had pointed out, but remained standing, leaning on the back of it.

“You did not expect me?” said the count, after looking at her for a moment.

“No, no, I certainly did not,” said she, in a frightened tone.

“But you expected some one else? Don’t shake your head. I know all. You expected him at eleven o’clock—it’s no use denying it. You had something to communicate to him. There! you look down. Well, I come in his place; tell me what you have to say.”

The girl again shook her head distrustfully, clasped her hands, and pressed them to her eyes.

“You distrust me,” said he, after a pause, “which is very natural. You expect one whom you have known a long time, and suddenly a stranger appears. This of course takes you by surprise. When, however, I tell you,” said he, in a slow and impres-

sive manner, "that his Highness Duke Alfred was expected here, that he is not at this moment in the palace, and that I come in his place, you will acknowledge it to be the fact?"

The girl let her hands sink down, and looking at him steadily, said, "There is no use in denying it. You have me in your power."

"In my power!" said he, impatiently; "don't use such a term. Grant me your confidence freely, and you shall find I am not ungrateful."

An expression of pain crossed her face, while she sighed and said, in a low voice, "Nothing is so rare as gratitude. I have only too well proved mine."

"So you expected the duke?"

"Yes," said the girl, after a pause, in a resolute tone.

"Very well; now I am here in his place, so tell me, without reserve, what you have to say."

"It is not my duty to speak," said she, gently; "I am only required to answer the questions put to me. So ask what you choose."

At these words the count was embarrassed, and thought: "A fine scrape I am in! What on earth shall I ask? But I must make the attempt." Then turning to her, he said, "Is your lady at home?"

"My young lady returned half an hour ago."

"Oh, my young lady!" thought he; "that is something gained."

“What did she do on her return?”

“She went to bed.”

“Probably, for it is late. And where did she pass the evening?”

“Do you ask merely about the evening, or the whole day?”

“The evening principally,” said the count, who felt that his questions must soon come to an end; “but say also if anything particular occurred during the day.”

“My young lady was at dinner from six to half-past seven, and then she went to Major von S——’s to spend the evening.”

“How!” exclaimed the count, starting with astonishment, and approaching the girl—“to Major von S——’s? Am I dreaming?”

“I am telling you the exact truth,” said the girl, humbly.

“Then your young lady is Mademoiselle Eugenie von S——?”

“Of course; did you not know that? Then the duke did not send you?”

“No, no, he never sent me, but I thank Providence that I did come. This report, then, concerns her—Eugenie! Speak, girl!” said he, sternly, seizing her wrist. “Now I will question you in earnest, and I insist on immediate and true answers. You expected the duke here?”

“Yes; I told you so already.”

“And you have often met him here before?”

“Sometimes here, sometimes elsewhere, according to his directions.”

“To report to him all the actions of your mistress! What frightful treachery! Do you not feel your guilt? Does not the odious occupation of a spy weigh heavily on your conscience? Wretched girl!”

At first she stared at the young man in amazement, then she covered her face with her hands; but when he reproached her with her guilt she looked up, while the whole expression of her face brightened. “Then you are Count Fohrbach?” cried she, eagerly.

“I am. But how did you guess my name?”

“I have heard it often from my young lady.”

At any other time these words would have enchanted the count, but at the moment when he had discovered such odious treachery towards the beloved of his heart, he scarcely noticed them—her words and actions watched, her steps surrounded by snares and spies!

The girl continued: “I anxiously prayed that the hour might come when I should be able to fall at your feet and to implore your protection.” With these words the girl did in reality sink at his feet and seize his cloak.

“A strange comedy,” said he, coldly. “How can I protect you? You seem to have much higher help. I beg you will rise, unless, indeed, you feel that you deserve that humble posture for your base betrayal of your good and gentle mistress.”

“She is, indeed, good and gentle,” said the girl, with tears. “She never said an unkind word to me; she is an angel!”

“And yet,” said the count, still more surprised, “it is thus you reward her trust and confidence!”

“I could not help myself,” said the girl, sobbing. “I was forced to it.”

“Who could force you?”

“One to whom I owe implicit obedience.”

“One who forces you to betray your mistress?”

“Yes, yes.”

“And to report her actions to the duke?”

“Yes, to the duke, or to whom he will.”

“And who is this being who exercises such power over your free will?”

“I know not,” said she. “I don’t even know his name. I only remember the dreadful place in which I first saw him, from which he rescued me, and where he commanded me to act as I have done.”

“And where is this place?”

The girl started, hastily rose, and listened, raising her hand deprecatingly, and saying, “Hush! I hear steps.”

The count turned his head, and could also hear some one creeping gently along the blue gallery.

“The duke!” whispered the girl, in a tone of dismay.

“Yes; I do not doubt it is he,” said the count, composedly. “Remain quite still; put the light on the window-sill, the curtain will prevent its reflexion being seen.”

The steps drew nearer; and now some one stopped, coughed gently; then came a low knock at the door; and as no answer followed all these signals, a hand was heard trying to turn the lock, but of course in vain. The attempt was several times repeated, but with the same result; on which some muttered words were heard, the person retreated, and his steps soon died away in the deep silence of the palace.

The count, turning to the girl, said: “This danger is over; the duke won’t return to-night; finish your history.”

She now related her adventures in detail to the count, describing the young man who had offered her the situation with Eugenie, giving her a letter to a friend of his, who would recommend her.

“And who was this friend?” said the count.

“Baron von Brand,” replied she.

“Strange!” said the other, “for I remember, now, the baron applied to me to assist in placing

you in the palace. I do beg you will endeavour to recal every look and movement of this stranger. Did he speak in a low and affected manner? All this is of importance."

"No!" answered she; "on the contrary, in a bold, clear voice, like one accustomed to command."

"And you can tell me no more?"

"Nothing worthy of attention."

"Everything is of importance in this case."

"I remember that when I recovered from my swoon I was sensible of a peculiar fragrance, as if from freshly-plucked roses."

"Ah!" said the count, starting up. "Ah! cœur de rose."

"Believe me," said the girl, "that I have carefully avoided reporting anything of my young lady that was of the smallest consequence. Now I await your directions what course to pursue."

"Continue to make your reports as before, and be careful not to give your mistress's enemies power over her actions by any disclosures of yours, but do not fail to let me know any fresh commands you may receive, and remain faithful to your lady. Accompany me only to the staircase, and then I can find my way alone."

She did so, and after traversing endless passages, the count at last found himself in the open air.

The night was dark and cold, so he drew his cloak closely round him when he crossed the *Kastell-Platz*. There were two ways by which he could reach home—one by the more elegant part of the city, through wide streets and across solid bridges, but much longer than the other, which went through the old town; but the latter had the disadvantage of narrow streets and dark passages, and the canal, with its tottering, decayed foot bridges, but, as it was freezing hard, the streets were dry and clean, so the count chose to go through the old town. He had a kind of wish to contemplate that gloomy mass of buildings the *Fuchsbau*, though he had so frequently seen it. He therefore loitered slowly towards it.

There was no creature to be seen or heard. The sentries were in their boxes, and there was not a trace of a watchman. There was no moon visible, and night veiled everything in darkness. As he went along, the count reflected on all he had this evening heard. "Is it possible," thought he, "that the baron is really concerned in this plot, and that his affectation and silly manner are only a mask assumed to conceal the mysterious reality? This fragrance of roses is, however, the only suspicion against him; yet there are many who think there is something strange about this baron. Perhaps he is in the duke's confidence, and unscrupulously endea-

vouring to throw Eugenie into his power. I shall watch him closely; but, if it be so, it will be no easy matter to convict so crafty a villain."

While these thoughts were passing through his mind he had arrived at the Fuchsbau, the windows of which were all dark. The only light near proceeded from the gas-lamp in the vaulted passage with the iron door. At this moment steps were heard, and the count pressed closer to the wall. A person came out of the Fuchsbau, and appeared to have no idea that he was watched, for he went on his way with firm and even steps, without looking right or left, and soon disappeared in the dark; but when he passed the gas-lamp the count saw that he had high black riding boots with spurs; the rest of his figure was enveloped in a cloak, but he seemed tall and active.

"I have no right to intercept him," thought the count, "but I have now a trace which will one day lead me to the truth." He left the Fuchsbau. There was deep silence all around, but in a few seconds he heard distinctly the sounds of a horse's hoofs trotting along.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PREPARATIONS FOR A STRUGGLE.

AMONG the many houses where Baron von Brand left his card on New Year's-day, that of the minister of police was one where he was resolved to obtain admittance. When the servant, therefore, assured him the family were not at home, he expressed his regrets in so loud a voice, and left so many messages, that he accomplished his purpose by Mademoiselle Augusta appearing, whom the baron instantly approached, and kissing her hand tenderly, he said, "How cruel in you, mademoiselle, to exclude so devoted a friend on New Year's-day. Is there no hope of my seeing you again soon?"

"Mamma is out, and has given orders to admit no one; and, alas! she has made no exceptions."

"Will your father, then, receive me?"

"He is occupied to-day with important business,

and only admits officials. They are at this moment making their reports."

"Cœur de rose!" said the baron, "then I am just in time, for you may remember your papa gave me permission to be present on that very occasion. I will at all events make the attempt, for then I shall have a chance of being allowed to visit you afterwards."

"Yes, do so," said she, eagerly. So saying, she drew back hastily and closed the door. The baron assumed an air of importance, and desired the servant to request an audience for him from the president, on business. And a few minutes afterwards he was introduced into the minister's private room.

The president looked inquiringly at the baron, as if wishing to know why he intruded on his time at such a moment. But the latter was not a man to be easily discomfited, so, with a respectful bow, he coolly said, "As your excellency kindly permitted me some day to be present when you received your police reports, I present myself to-day, that I may also express to you my heartfelt good wishes on this auspicious occasion." He then seized the president's hand so cordially, that the old gentleman forgot that he had forced himself into his presence, and responded in a most friendly manner to his felicitations.

"You come rather late, however," said he, "for

the police reports; there is only one yet remaining." The door opened and the police-officer appeared, but seemed to hesitate in making his report, first looking at the president and then at the baron.

"You know I am to be one of your excellency's private secretaries," whispered the baron.

"Speak on," said the president; "this gentleman is in my confidence. I have no secrets from him."

The report was quite uninteresting to the minister, but not so to Baron von Brand. It related to the house of a certain Master Schwemmer, which, the police-officer said, was the resort of many of the vagabonds from the Fuchsbau. "It has been reported to me," said he, "that a riot is expected to break out there in a day or two, so I think it right to watch this distant and dangerous place."

The president approving, and having no observation to offer, the police-agent retreated to the door, first endeavouring to impress on his memory the countenance of the baron, who, however, had turned away his head.

The president's business was over for the day, and, as the baron had anticipated, they went together to visit the ladies, with whom they conversed agreeably for more than an hour. But as nothing occurred affecting our story during this visit, we leave the baron to his fate—that is, to the sharp

tongue of the president's lady, and to the fire of the dangerous eyes of his fair daughter.

Some days later, in the afternoon of a clear, bright day in the same month of January, about five o'clock, two men were walking together towards the suburbs, where the regular streets ended, and where only solitary houses, with gardens, were to be seen. One was young Richard Hammer, the theatre carpenter; and the other Herr Schellinger, the theatre tailor. They exchanged few words, and at last arrived at the city wall, close to Master Schwemmer's charitable institution for deserted children, which we have already visited with our gracious reader.

Hammer and Schellinger crossed the little garden and entered the tumble-down house, which, as we already know, was the dwelling of the tailor, who opened the door of his miserable room, with scarcely any furniture, and no trace of a stove. They both seated themselves on two rickety chairs, and Richard said:

"You know the matter in hand. We wish, if possible, to restore her child to poor Catherine, and you say it is in Schwemmer's house."

"According to her description, I should certainly say I saw the child in the momentary glimpse I had of the children there, and she had on a blue woollen frock, as Catherine had described her."

"You know exactly what you are to do?"

“Yes, quite well,” said Schellinger. “As soon as it is a little darker I will go to Schwemmer’s.”

“Yes, and pick a quarrel with him. Have you got your pistol with you?”

“Here it is,” answered the tailor, drawing a rusty stage blunderbuss out of his pocket. “The inspector has lent it to me, and put a small charge into it.”

“No shot, I hope?”

“Heaven forbid! Only a little gunpowder. Moreover, I will fire at the ceiling.”

“Quite right! and call loudly for help, and we will rush to your assistance instantly; but don’t forget first to throw open the door and the window.”

The sun had gone down bright and red, leaving a crimson hue in the westerly horizon so deep and glowing, that even the mist, which quickly enveloped the city, was tinged with red.

The carpenter looked out of the window, and said, “It will be a cold night. I am glad that I am warmly dressed, for we may have to wait a good while outside.”

“Yes, it will be a bitter night,” said the tailor. “See how blood-red the mist is. If we believed in omens, we might fear that no great success would attend our enterprise.”

“Schellinger,” said Richard, “don’t talk in that faint-hearted manner; I thought you had more pluck. Are you afraid?”

“Afraid!” answered the tailor, angrily; “I beg you will remember that I was messenger at the theatre for two years.”

“I know that; but you required no great courage for that post, I think?”

“Courage and resolution too! Go to a prima donna when she chances to be in a bad humour and chooses to fancy herself hoarse because she does not want to sing—go to her then, and announce some particular character in which she is to appear; or convey to a high class artist the command of the director to play what he considers a subordinate part, or tell him the costume he asked for is refused!—then is the time to show courage and stand fast. To quarrel with Schwemmer is child’s play in comparison.”

“But it is not only Schwemmer himself, but the little tavern in the court behind,” said Richard, “is the resort of every kind of vagabond.”

“That is true enough,” answered Schellinger, thoughtfully, “but I know them all; and as for Schwemmer himself, he can scarcely stir from his chair, as his cough pretty nearly chokes him. Strauber is always there, a precious rogue, and full of airs, but not an atom of courage.”

“In any event,” said Richard, after a pause, “we have good friends to support us.” At these words he leant out of the window and looked to-

wards the town, which was looming darkly in the distance, and where already some lights were here and there to be seen. "Catherine lately went to a doctor, and confided her story to him. He is a good, charitable man, and he privately warned the police-officer of this district to place some men near in case we should require their help."

"I don't like the police meddling with the matter," said Schellinger; "they pounce upon you so suddenly, and in the dark they often seize the wrong man, and don't let him go in a hurry. Where is Catherine?"

"Close by," said Richard. "In the confusion, when we rush in to help you, she will get into the house and carry off her child."

"Very good. That is well arranged. Now let us begin to carry out our plan."

"Is it not too early yet?"

"No; if we wait till later they won't let me into the house."

"And how long do you think it will be before we shall have anything to do?"

"I think about half an hour or three-quarters. If they are not in a particularly good humour, that will be sufficient time to get up a row with them."

"Then go along, Schellinger," said the carpenter; "behave boldly, and mind you cry out loud enough for help when the time comes."

The tailor nodded, and said, "Never you fear." He stretched out his hand to Richard, and then went carefully down the decayed stairs. Richard heard nothing for some moments but the echo of his friend's footsteps, and the creaking of the door as he left the house.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN AFFRAY.

MASTER SCHWEMMER was seated as usual near the stove, his swollen feet in list shoes, and on his knees his everlasting checked pocket-handkerchief. Opposite the master of the house was Strauber, astride on a chair; his hands were placed on the back of it, on which he was rubbing his long, sharp chin backwards and forwards. Madame Schwemmer was in a corner of the room peeling potatoes, but was constantly going to the kitchen, for the purpose, as she said, of looking if the children's broth was ready, which was simmering on the stove, but in reality to swallow a drop of comfort.

Herr Strauber had evidently been relating something which startled Schwemmer, for he looked terrified, and said, "What! how! disappeared without leaving a trace?"

“No trace,” said Strauber, pulling up his yellow shirt-collar—“no trace, so far as a living man is concerned. They pulled him out of the canal next morning dead enough.”

“Oh! that is another matter! we know what has become of him, at all events. Whose duty is it to search out the cause of such an event?”

“Hush! my good friend; these are affairs we had better let alone. I believe no one knows exactly who acts the part of judge and executioner; but I know it has happened several times.”

“And he pronounces sentence of death himself?”

“After he has assembled several of his men, and he finds they are of his opinion.”

“Well, that is a kind of jury, and not so unjust.”

“Exactly so,” said Strauber; “but he really is too hard on us with his tyrannical ways. Can one of us do as he chooses? Has one of us a will of his own? No! no! I tell you a thousand times no! I don’t suit this confederacy; I have had an education and a certain success in society. Don’t you think we are no better than this man’s slaves?”

“Why, yes,” said Schwemmer; “you of the Fuchsbau are, but I am left here in peace.”

“Wait a little till he catches you tripping! I

hear he said lately to Matthias, 'What do you know about Schwemmer's house? I have heard some bad stories. Tell him, with my compliments, to take care what he is about.' "

"Did he really say that?" replied Schwemmer, with a start, which he tried to hide by coughing. The woman let her knife and potato drop into her lap, and stared at Strauber anxiously.

"Yes! he said it," answered Strauber, apparently quite pleased with the effect his words had produced. "And he spoke of me, too—and not in a very flattering manner—and that he meant to take me to task for some of my doings in a way I would not like. Now, is not that slavery? Must we submit to so hard a master as that?"

The other waved his hand, as much as to say, "Hush! hush!" and then he asked, in a low voice, "Who tells him these stories?"

"The devil alone knows," said Strauber; "but it's not easy to hide anything from him. I have always suspected Matthias of playing the spy."

"No, certainly not!" answered Schwemmer, in a tone of conviction. "Matthias is a rough fellow, but he'll sell no one. What a strange, mysterious man he is."

"Who? Matthias?"

"No, no! *Him*. Have you seen him lately?"

"Heaven be praised, I have not. I only heard

by chance that he was in the Fuchsbau the night of that affair with the lacquey."

"Have you ever spoken to him?"

"Only once; and I must confess he made a strong impression on me. He is not unusually tall, but his voice vibrates through you; and when he walks or moves, his limbs seem to be made of iron or steel."

"Yes, yes, it is so indeed," answered Schwemmer, resting his head thoughtfully on his hand. "But do you think," continued he, after a pause, "that any of the others know him well?"

Strauber shook his head, and said: "No one is intimate with him; but Matthias is best acquainted with him, and Joseph, whom, I dare say, you remember."

"To be sure I do. But what has become of Joseph?"

The other coughed, and looked up in a hesitating manner.

"You need not fear to tell me anything, for he and I have been pretty long well acquainted."

"True," said Strauber; "I have long wanted to talk to you about him, but——" He cast a glance at the woman in the corner, which the master of the house seemed quickly to understand, for he instantly said, in his hoarse voice: "Go and look after the children. I hear them crying."

She rose with an impatient gesture, and left the room.

“Well!”

“Joseph disappeared entirely, and was away a whole year. One evening he returned to the Fuchsbau, but looking miserable, and his clothes shabby and torn; and that was on the very evening when *he* was in the Fuchsbau. He must have spoken to Joseph, for, at a sign from the old woman, Matthias took him out of the tavern, and neither came back.”

“I suppose,” said the other, “he has gone on his travels again?”

Strauber leant forward, and, winking, said in a whisper: “Between ourselves, Schwemmer, he remained in the town. I would bet a hundred gulden to a sour apple that I saw him again lately.”

“Ragged?”

“Oh no! on the contrary, he was standing behind a very handsome carriage, smartly dressed as a *chasseur*.”

“That’s all very well. He has got a place like the *lacquey* of blessed memory.”

“No; he, poor wretch, always contrived to come to see us, and to nod to us in the street; but Joseph is become proud and grand—quite another man—and turns away his head if we look at him rather sharply.”

“Ah, my friend Schellinger!” cried Strauber, joyfully; “you must let him in immediately; he is a most amusing fellow.”

“If you like,” said the master of the house, “I don’t object. He may sit for half an hour; but Matthias is coming, and you know he can’t endure these long stories.”

The woman opened the door, and Herr Schellinger entered. He rubbed his hands, shivering, and said, “Good evening to you all. This is a bitter cold night, so I thought I would come and warm myself for a bit by your stove before going to bed.”

“Indeed you bring a good deal of frosty air in with you,” said Schwemmer, coughing violently; “sit down on that bench, and thaw yourself.”

The tailor did as he was told, and sat down on a stool beside the stove, close to the door of the room.

“A long time since I have had the pleasure of seeing you, Herr Schellinger,” said Strauber; “you seldom visit your friends.”

“A man who comes too often is a bore,” said Schellinger, smiling. He then turned to the master of the house, and said, “How pleasant such a stove is! You really must have one put up in my room.”

“The floor won’t bear it,” said Strauber, laugh-

ing. "I always expect to hear that you have come crash through it, and have been found hanging in the under story from the ceiling."

The tailor leaned his head on his hands, and looked sideways at Strauber with a peculiar expression, saying, "Very possibly I may hang myself on purpose some day, but I am waiting for one thing."

"And pray what may that be?" said Strauber, laughing.

"Till some one else first hangs you," said the tailor, coolly. "I should like to see how a man of good education and genteel manners like you would behave on such an occasion."

"For shame! Schellinger," said their landlord; "don't speak of such things." And he offered him a pinch of snuff.

"Thank you," said the tailor. "How is your health lately?"

"I can't say much for myself," answered Schwemmer; "the winter is very severe on me."

"We ought always to think of our end," said the tailor. "You are not afraid of death, are you? He is a guest who comes often enough into this house, I should think."

Schwemmer began to shiver at these words, and stared at the tailor with wide-open eyes and mouth, while his thin cheeks sank in. But he tried to

smile, and after coughing, said: "That old buffoon, Schellinger, he must have his joke."

The tailor appeared not to observe the irritation of the other, and turning to Strauber, said, in a provoking tone, "You will die a lofty death, suitable to your dignity, high up, and looking down on your more humble fellow-creatures."

We must confess that at these words Strauber, with all his vaunted courage; turned pale, and said, "Do not say such horrible things; you make me quite nervous, I declare."

The tailor, charmed to see them getting into a rage, said to Schwemmer, "Do you know what people say?—though, to be sure, it is nothing to me."

"Well, what do they say?"

"What should they say? That you have a stable behind your house, where poor little children, forsaken by all, and therefore fallen into your hands, are starved to death."

"Ah!"

"Yes, they say that; and, moreover, that human souls are sold here, and therefore I am come to-night to give you notice that I mean to give up my lodging, for if I stay longer I fear my good name will be lost."

On hearing these strange words, Strauber had risen from his chair, and looked at the tailor with

eyes that glittered like glass. His right hand groped on the chair as if searching for some instrument to knock him down. Then he looked at the door, as if in doubt whether it would not be better at once to leave a house of which such dreadful things were said.

“For my part,” continued Schellinger, quite coolly, “I don’t at all understand why you both stare at me with such astonishment. Did you not know before how people talked of this house?”

“Nó, no,” said the master of the house, with difficulty; “no one says such a thing but you.”

“I! What is it to me? Do you think that any one taking a quiet evening’s walk on the ramparts can’t hear the laughing and singing of your nurslings—laughing and singing which would make any honest man’s hair stand on end?”

“No, no! I tell you they can’t hear it,” cried Schwemmer, furiously. But as the exertion made him quite hoarse, he continued in a whisper, which was scarcely audible, “No one but a spy could hear them, and that’s what you are—you!—you!” He cast himself forward so violently in saying these words, that his sharp nose was only a few inches from the tailor’s face; and at each repetition of the word “you!” which he gasped forth with difficulty, he shoved his head forwards, as if he wished each time to stab his adversary.

In the mean time the woman had returned to the room, and came forward with tottering, uncertain steps. Her nose was deep red, and drunkenness shone in her eyes. She had thrown away the potatoes, but still held the kitchen-knife in her hand.

Schellinger really showed courage, for in the face of all these threatening gestures he said, with wonderful composure, rising from his stool, "I was sure of it; whoever tells you the truth is no longer welcome, so I think I had best go home."

Saying this he stood up, but seized the stool on which he had been sitting, and used it as a kind of shield, holding it before him, and leaning with his back against the wall. These precautions were necessary, on account of the infuriated and intoxicated woman, whose wild passions he knew well; and he wisely thought, "If I call out for help, she can thrust her knife a couple of inches into me before any soul can come."

"No—no—he is not—to go," cried Schwemmer, trying to rise; but his feeble limbs refused to do him this service, and he sank back in his chair. "He shall—stay—till Matthias—comes. Strauber—go—to the door—and—don't—let—him go."

This command the latter obeyed with some hesitation. He was as pale as death; and though in reality a head taller than Schellinger, he looked as

if he would far rather open the door for him and let him go, than detain him.

Scarcely, however, had Strauber placed his back against the door than he sprang away from it with a cry of terror, for it was suddenly opened, and the expected Matthias came in.

“There—he is,” cried Schwemmer. “Have you—shut—the door—Matthias?” He would, probably, have said much more, but such a violent fit of coughing seized him, that some minutes elapsed before he was able to articulate.

When Herr Strauber saw that the person who had so alarmed him was a new and powerful assistant, he drew down his black coat, put on his hat, and placed himself again at the door, as if all ready for battle.

Matthias had advanced into the middle of the room, and looked at each person in turn very composedly. “What’s going on here?” asked he, after a pause. “One would think the devil himself was let loose!”

The master of the house, who could not yet utter a word, pointed repeatedly to the tailor.

“What has he done?” asked Matthias. And as Schwemmer did not answer, he turned to Strauber, and said: “You can tell me; you never find it difficult to use your tongue.”

“The tailor said all sorts of strange things,”

answered Strauber, sulkily, from the door. "He has become a dangerous fellow."

"A spy!" called out Schwemmer, by a violent effort. "You must lay hold of him, Matthias."

"What! The deuce!" answered he, gravely. "I don't often mind your stupid talk, but this time you may for once be right. There's something wrong outside."

"Where?" asked Strauber, in an alarmed tone.

"When I was entering the garden," said Matthias, "I looked, as I usually do, carefully on all sides, and I saw several men standing to the left of the hedge. Of course I did not act as if I thought their presence concerned me, but only glanced carelessly at them in passing; but I can tell you the matter is very suspicious, for I am certain I saw the glitter of uniform buttons, and I heard the clatter of a sword."

"Of a sword!" said Strauber, in an agony of terror.

"Ask him," said Schwemmer; "he knows all about it."

"I know nothing," said Schellinger, thrusting his right hand into the breast of his coat, where he had hid the stage-pistol. "Let me go home quietly. I don't want to have anything to do with you."

"But we intend to have something to do with you," said Matthias, sternly, approaching him.

“Schellinger, don't enrage me. You know I am not to be trifled with.”

“Let me alone,” said the tailor, “or I will call for help.”

“Ah!” cried Matthias, stepping back, “he will call for help; so he knows it is close at hand. I'll stop that joke.” So saying, he seized a heavy chair and hurled it violently at Schellinger's head.

The latter at the same moment pulled out his pistol, and uttered a loud cry. The shot went off, and Strauber, who thought it must have hit him, threw open the door and rushed into the passage. Schellinger followed as quickly, for he had avoided Matthias's blow, and the chair sent with such deadly force against him had luckily hit the stove instead, and so shattered the old iron that all its joints were splintered, and the burning, charred wood was scattered over the room, and caused a smoke which nearly choked Master Schwemmer.

It was a scene of frightful confusion. The lamp fell from the table, and Matthias, who regretted his rash action, stood listening amid the darkness and the smoke, and heard voices calling out, “We are coming! Schellinger, we are coming!” He hurried to the window, looked out into the court, and sprang back, calling to Schwemmer, “I cannot help you, and may bring you into trouble, so I will get away as fast as possible.” On which he hur-

ried through the kitchen and disappeared behind the house.

Schellinger, who had hitherto been standing in the passage, on hearing his friends' voices shoved back the bolt of the house-door.

It was Richard who entered, with a heavy axe in his hand, followed by some carpenters, one of whom carried a dark lantern. A female figure glided at the same instant into the house; but as she was hastily rushing on, Richard laid hold of her arm to keep her back, saying, "Quietly, Catherine—gently—gently. Let us go first. Schellinger knows the way."

The latter took the lantern from one of his companions, and hurried to the end of the passage. "The door is open," cried he. "Some one must have gone in before us! Now, my men, pass in, but quietly."

"How many men are there in the house?" asked Richard, resolutely.

"Only one," answered the tailor. "At least the two others who are there are not worth mentioning; and the one I named first, who, by-the-by, did his best to murder me, has probably his own reasons for leaving the house, otherwise he would not have let us get in so easily."

"There is my child!" cried Catherine, in a loud voice. In spite of Schellinger's warning she had

flown past the men into the room. "She lives! she lives! God be praised, she lives!" So saying, she sank down on the floor beside the little girl, pressed her in her arms, laughing and sobbing by turns, while she kissed her incessantly, tears flowing over her cheeks.

All this excitement and agitation, and then the sudden joy, was too much for her weak frame; thus on her knees, and speaking, she suddenly sank back, and would have fallen on the floor if one of the men had not supported her.

Richard looked at her compassionately, and said: "Poor creature! What shall we do? If we had only a little water."

"Here is some," said a clear young voice behind Richard.

And as he turned he saw a little boy, who had at first crawled under the bed, but who now stood there without any signs of fear. His dress was torn and shabby, and a bloody handkerchief was tied round his head; but his features looked bold and even cheerful, and his dark eyes shone with evident pleasure.

"Here is water," repeated he, showing a large pitcher which was standing in one corner.

The tailor dipped a handkerchief in it, and bathed the forehead and cheeks of the fainting girl.

“And who are you, pray?” said Richard to the boy, who, instead of answering, laughed and pointed under the bed.

“What is it? What is there?” asked the carpenter in a low voice, and raising his axe.

“One of them,” said the child.

Richard quickly stooped down and looked under the bed, and there he discovered a man, who had evidently crept there to hide himself.

“Hallo! my good friend!” cried he, “come forth! No harm shall happen to you. If you don’t come I will help you.”

The man under the bed seemed to hesitate, but at last he sighed deeply, and emerged backwards from under his hiding-place. First a pair of long legs came to light, then a black coat, all crumpled up; then the figure raised itself, and Herr Strauber, with his hat in his hand, his face distorted, and as pale as ashes, presented himself to the assembled group.

“I don’t think this fellow seems to have a very good conscience,” said Richard to the others. “Who is it, Schellinger? You know all these people pretty well.”

The tailor, who had succeeded in restoring Catherine, looked up and answered, “That is Herr Strauber, whose name you have heard me mention.”

“Yes! it is that unfortunate person,” said the villain, with a humble bow. “I trust the gentle-

men will permit me to retire?" added he, after a pause, looking round pitifully.

"No! no!" said Schellinger, eagerly. "Make him stay till we are gone. He would do us all the mischief he could. Hold him fast till we are fairly off."

Herr Strauber thought of the vicinity of the police, and hoped to slip away unperceived in the company of Richard and the tailor; so he answered readily, "Gentlemen, your proposal is extremely agreeable, and I shall feel highly honoured in accompanying you." He then crossed his hands behind his back, and hung his head affectedly to one side, as if sympathising with the mother of the poor child, who now rose with Richard's assistance, still holding the little girl closely in her arms.

Master Schwemmer had with difficulty recovered the choking fit brought on by the burning wood. He had at last slowly risen, and dragged himself into the kitchen, while his wife poured cold water on the smoking fragments. After the fire was extinguished, she threw open the window to let in fresh air; then she returned to her husband, shaking from anger and fear, and found him standing listening at the door which led to the place where the children were. He made a sign to his wife to come close to him, and whispered, "That was an affair all arranged; but they don't want us, only the children."

"Which of them?" asked the woman, who had now become quite sober.

"Perhaps the boy. I always said he would get us into trouble."

"Listen!" cried she; "that is no man's voice. Besides, I saw a woman come with them. Mind what you are about. No one wants the boy. It must be the crazy, consumptive sempstress, whose child Bilz brought here."

"And to whom we gave the other child's burial certificate," said Schwemmer, looking very uneasy.

The woman nodded. "Do you hear?" said she, after a pause; "that is Strauber speaking."

"The cowardly villain!"

"Well," said she, spitefully, "I expected no good from him; but Matthias! I never thought that he would take fright and desert his friends."

"He is not afraid. Rely on it, he has his own reasons. Didn't he say the house was surrounded by police? But come into the next room, and, as it is dark there, we can look out of the window without being seen ourselves. Observe the faces well; it may be of use afterwards. Oh! that dreadful cough!"

They then went through the kitchen into the next room, Schwemmer making a sign to his wife to draw down the window, as the cold night air made it difficult for him to breathe.

In the mean time the others had left the room where the children were kept, Catherine clasping her child to her heart, the boy following the carpenters without being perceived by them, and the two remaining children on the trestles crying piteously at having been woke from their sleep.

Richard went first, and had nearly reached the door of the house, when he stopped short, as he saw that it was wide open, and several men standing close to it.

One of these advanced from among the number, went into the passage, and called "Halt!" to the rest. This voice did not sound very loud, but its vibrating tone made a peculiar impression on Richard. He felt as if a superior officer had given him the word of command.

"Close the door!" continued the voice. "I should think enough of the confounded noise has been heard out of doors already."

Schellinger, who came last, carrying the lantern, now held it up to examine the man who spoke in so imperious a tone.

He was tall, and wrapped in a large cloak, of which one end was drawn so high over his shoulders that little could be seen of his swarthy face, except a black beard and two shining eyes.

"Precious work you make here," said the un-

known, in a clear voice, "breaking into other people's houses and stealing the children."

Richard, who was never wanting in courage, often declared afterwards that at this moment he could not repress a mysterious feeling of awe. The composure and coolness with which this one solitary man—for he had closed the door against his companions—stood in the narrow passage facing him, was so imposing that it is not surprising that the carpenter retreated step by step as the other advanced.

He stopped at the door of the room, opened it, and said, "One of you go in there, and also the woman with the child; the rest are to stay in the passage."

Which command Richard obeyed, by drawing Catherine into the room with him.

Schwemmer retreated, when he heard the door open, to the kitchen, to wait there the result of this new event.

"Light, there!" said the same imperious voice.

"Shall I take one?" whispered the woman to her husband. And as he answered, "We can't resist force," she went to the stove, lighted a lamp, and took it with tottering steps into the next room.

There stood the man in the cloak, who turned his head slowly round, so that the full light fell on his face.

If the whole police and all the judges, nay, the very executioner himself, had at that moment appeared, the effect on Herr Schwemmer could not have been more appalling than the sight of the stranger who was standing with so much composure in the middle of the room. He felt that his knees gave way, and therefore he clung to the door-post. "Forgive me," said he, drawing a deep breath, "for not coming forward to welcome you, but I am a poor, sick man, whose limbs can no longer support him."

"Who, however, in spite of his weakness, constantly lends his assistance to transactions which must at last excite attention, and bring down punishment. Is it not so?"

"How so, gracious sir?" asked the other, in terror, looking up timidly at the stranger, but casting down his eyes on seeing his indignant look.

"Who gave this child into your care?" said the latter, after a pause, pointing to the little girl.

"The mother gave it to me."

"Beware! I will have the truth, which I know already, but I choose to hear it from you. Who brought this child to you?"

"Well, then—Frau Bilz."

The man in the cloak nodded, and looked at Catherine, who said joyfully, "Yes, yes, Frau Bilz, that was the name of the woman to whom I en-

trusted my child, and who told me, in presence of Madame Becker, that she was dead, and gave me the certificate of her burial."

The stranger shrugged his shoulders contemptuously, and cast a glance at the master of the house which made him quail, and said, "One more occurrence of that kind, Master Schwemmer, and all forbearance is at an end. As for you," continued he, turning to Richard, "go home quietly, and take the girl and her child with you."

"Thank him, Catherine," whispered Richard.

But the unknown waved his hand when she tried to stammer out some words.

They then left the room and the house, followed by Richard's comrades and Schellinger, who was still holding the lantern.

The stranger in Schwemmer's room had waited quietly till they had all left the house; he then dropped the end of his cloak, which displayed his head and his arms, one of which he placed on his side, and leaned the other hand on the table.

"I will leave you a good piece of advice as a farewell," said he, in an impressive, distinct tone: "for your own sake, I recommend your avoiding such affairs as the one we have just discussed. What your reputation is in the town and with the police you know best, but I can tell you the latter have been told of your iniquities, and would have

paid you a very unpleasant visit this evening if I had not prevented them; so take warning for the future. The next time I come it shall not be merely to warn."

He turned towards the door, intending to leave the room, but he suddenly stopped, and asked, "Who is that?"

Schwemmer, who had listened to the stranger's words with a subdued, penitent air, looked up, and saw the boy, who had slipped in behind Richard unperceived, and had remained standing quietly at the door. He held his little body straight and upright, and looked without fear and with bright eyes at the stranger.

"A striking countenance," said the latter, covering his eyes for a moment with his hand. "This look, and the shape of the head! Singular, indeed." He turned to Schwemmer quickly, and asked, "To whom does this child belong?"

"I don't know at all, sir."

"No lies! Master Schwemmer."

"On my soul I don't know. May I die this moment if I am not telling you the truth! The boy was brought to me lately by a woman whom I can name, but she got him from a second person, through whose hands the boy had passed."

"It is just possible that you are not lying this time," answered the other, with a strange smile;

“but I’ll tell you what, my good Master Schwemmer, I choose to know to-morrow evening by six o’clock the name of the original person to whom this boy was entrusted. Do you understand?”

“Yes, sir. I suspect——”

“I don’t choose to listen to your suspicions. Not another word. Remember, to-morrow, at six. Who are you?” said he, turning to the child.

“I can’t tell,” answered the boy, in a fresh, clear voice, “but I know my name is Karl, that I live with Frau Fischer, and want to get away from this.”

“So you want to get away? You don’t like being here?”

The child looked round cautiously, and when he saw that Madame Schwemmer was not in the room, he said, “I want to go, they are so cruel—I mean the woman with the red nose. We get scarcely anything to eat, they beat us constantly, and it is always bitterly cold where we are.”

“A good account the boy gives of your treatment,” said the stranger, angrily; “but,” continued he, in a low tone, as if thinking aloud, “the likeness is quite astonishing, particularly in the eyes, and when he speaks the very same movement of the head. But is it possible? By Heavens, it is! I may have hit on the right path. You spoke of Frau Fischer,” said he, turning to the boy; “do you think you could find out the house where she lives?”

“Yes, if you would take me to the square where the palace is; I have often played there, and looked at the soldiers.” The boy’s eyes sparkled with delight as he said this.

“Very well,” answered the other; “we will make the trial to-morrow, and you look as if you would fulfil your promise. Will you go with me?”

“Oh, so gladly!” cried the boy, his face colouring up with joy.

The stranger looked at him with a well-pleased air; then muttering to himself, “That child recalls vividly the cruel scenes of my own childhood. How strange!” He turned to Schwemmer, and said, “I know Matthias is gone; is there any one here to whom you can entrust the child to bring him to the Fuchsbau to-night?”

“Strauber is still here, I believe,” answered Schwemmer. Then he called to his wife: “Find Strauber; he is in the house somewhere.”

The woman was heard to leave the kitchen, and a few moments after whispering to some one in the passage.

The stranger leaned quietly on the table, and Schwemmer fixed his eyes with a humble aspect on the door, which was now slowly opened.

Strauber entered, and remained standing at the door, with his foxy hat in his hands, and his head hanging down.

“ Ah! Herr Strauber, you are not exactly the person I would have chosen to accompany this young gentleman; but I must take what I can get. Listen to me.”

Strauber, who shrank at the very sound of the voice addressing him, said, meekly, without venturing to look up, “ I hear, sir.”

“ You are to go the nearest way with this child to the Fuchsbau; you are to speak to no one, but to go straight forward, without looking right or left. If you don't, it shall be worse for you. Matthias will be in the Fuchsbau; deliver the boy into his charge. He must take care of him to-night, and to-morrow he shall receive my orders.”

“ Am I to go with him?” said the child.

“ Only for a little,” said the stranger; “ so good-by. To-morrow you shall return to Frau Fischer, or go to a gentleman who will be very kind to you.” So saying, he shook hands with the boy, who followed Strauber into the passage.

As soon as the sound of their footsteps was heard in the court below, the stranger replaced his cloak over his shoulders, and without noticing Schwemmer further, quitted the house.

On the same evening Count Fohrbach had a rendezvous with Arthur in the coffee-house in the Kastell-Platz. Our gracious reader will easily guess the subject of their conversation. It was so important to the count that he quite forgot to ques-

tion Arthur as to the result of his interview with the young lady on New Year's evening, when he had replaced him.

Both now left the coffee-house, and walked along conversing together. "So you did not see his face on that occasion?" asked the count.

"No, it was impossible," answered Arthur, "for he had covered the lower part of it entirely with his cloak."

"But you seem to have recognised his voice?"

"I believe I am not mistaken. It certainly was that of the baron; but he pronounced the words very differently from his usual manner. He spoke in a powerful, energetic, commanding tone."

"There is no doubt," said the count, after a pause, "it must be the same person. But did you ever hear of such a history? What will be the result? Think of the commotion this will cause if this man, who has formed intimacies with all the best society, is laid hold of by the law!—it would leave in our circle a sense of injury quite irreparable. But, above all, Arthur, remember your promise to me of the most entire silence and secrecy: not a breath on the subject, if we wish to attain our object."

"Certainly not, count; you may trust me."

"I know it, dear Arthur, and I have proved my

reliance by telling you, without reserve, everything. You are going home?"

"Yes, I must. And you?"

"I have a visit to make. But come soon to see me."

"To-morrow. You know his excellency your father has done me the honour to invite me for to-morrow evening," said Arthur.

"Then we shall meet there. Good night."

The two friends separated. Arthur went to the left, and the count towards the police-office, where his carriage was waiting for him.

It was by this time quite dark, but gas was burning; and here, where were so many shops, the streets were almost as light as day.

Count Fohrbach went on his way thoughtfully, and only looked up occasionally at some brightly-lighted shop in passing, or to make way for some passenger. At last he came to the vicinity of the police-office, when he saw emerging from a small side-street two men, at sight of whom he moderated his pace—indeed, remained the next minute as if chained to the spot. One of these men was Baron Brand. It certainly was he: it was his air, his mode of walking, his whole figure, and also his voice, for he said some words at that moment to his companion, who was a police-officer in full uniform.

The count felt so convinced that he had recognised the baron, that at any other time he would have called to him; and now—all delusion was impossible—he felt sure it was the very same man he had seen that night come out of the Fuchsbau.

The two went on slowly together to the door of the police-office. There they stopped. The man in the cloak gave the other his hand, who made him a respectful bow, and remained standing on the steps looking after the former, who turned down an alley and soon disappeared.

“This would be a good opportunity to follow him,” thought the count. “It is yet early. I will call out his name, and then I shall see whether he will stop and speak to me.” But the next moment another and a better idea occurred to him. In two steps he reached the stairs of the police-office, which the commissary was slowly ascending.

Count Fohrbach wished him good evening in a loud tone.

The official turned round quickly, and when, by the bright gaslight, he recognised the aide-de-camp of his majesty, he made a profound bow on the highest step and quickly descended, observing that the count expected him.

“You have, sir, some order to give me?” said he, politely.

“Not so, sir,” answered the count; “but if you

will answer me a question I shall feel much obliged to you."

"With the greatest possible pleasure."

"Who was that gentleman who left you a moment since?"

The police commissary rubbed his hands, smiled slyly, and said, "That is a kind of official secret, but which I do not hesitate to disclose to you, sir, in your position. That gentleman in the cloak—I assure you, sir, I don't even know his name—but, between ourselves (on which he held his right hand to one side of his mouth, and whispered in the count's ear), I can tell you that he is one of the private secretaries of his excellency our chief, and belongs to the secret police."

"To the secret police!" said the count, in a tone of the utmost surprise.

"It is so, sir; but you won't mention it, I hope."

CHAPTER XXV.

A SOIRÉE AT THE HOUSE OF THE MINISTER OF WAR.

WHEN there was a great soirée at the house of his excellency the minister of war, which occurred frequently in the course of the winter, the lower apartments, usually closed, were thrown open. They consisted of a large ball-room, with a suite of smaller rooms, where the dancers could rest, mothers and relations converse agreeably, and yet have their daughters in sight in the ball-room. Further from the noise of the music, there were apartments for cards and conversation, and a room where heavy oak tables were loaded with albums, and all kinds of illustrated works.

As we already know, the little winter garden connected the principal building with the pavilion at the back, where young Count Fohrbach resided. On evenings such as this, however, not only was the

winter garden open, and lighted up for the passage of guests, but the young count's apartments, with the exception of his bedroom, were all included, and supper was generally served in his dining-room. Every corner was filled with plants, and the atmosphere was fragrant from the flowers and shrubs in the winter garden.

The rooms were most brilliantly lighted. The minister of war received his guests in the ball-room, and after the general reception was over, the company dispersed in various groups. The ball was now fully *en train*. All were dancing, laughing, conversing, playing whist. Gowns and ribbons rustled, diamonds shone, pearls and stars and orders glittered; fresh cheeks glowed, and bright eyes sparkled. Our kind reader will find many of his old acquaintances in the crowd. In the whist-room are the same respected excellencies whom we met at the royal table, but less pompous, having no uniform. Herr von Dankwart, too, is present, fidgeting about, looking at every one's cards, speaking of every one's play, and offering advice usually received with an astonished stare. In the winter garden we find some court ladies walking about, stopping to admire first a bed of flowers, then a rare shrub, exclaiming, "Charming!" "Delicious!" but carefully guarding their white silk dresses from all contact with the wet leaves, fanning themselves while they chatter

to each other and discuss the charms and toilettes of rival beauties. The young count is in his own salon, receiving gracefully the extravagant commendations of some old ladies of rank, who assure him that the taste with which he has decorated his rooms is beyond all praise.

We have not yet met our old friend Baron Brand, though he was not only invited but actually present. He is not easy to discover, as he is constantly flitting about, and is evidently not in a mood for conversation.

At last he drew near the card-room, and seated himself in a low arm-chair, close to the recess of a window, the curtain of which almost entirely concealed him.

There were three tables in this room, and at that nearest the baron sat his excellency, the director of the theatre, the master of the horse, the grand chamberlain, and a little old withered man, whose acquaintance we have not yet made. He had a sharp, cunning, disagreeable face, deep-set, dim eyes, and a brown wig, the colour of which formed a strange contrast to his wrinkled, yellow skin. The old gentleman was very much bent, and stooped down to see each card as it was played; sometimes he used an eye-glass which lay beside him to count the tricks, or to look at any one who stood near. His hands were thin, and shook so much that it

was with difficulty he could collect the cards or deal.

This ancient ruin, in his youth a successful candidate for the favour of ladies, was General Baron von Weiss, whose bad temper and jealousy have been already alluded to.

Near him sat the Baroness Weiss, and it was impossible to imagine a greater contrast than this couple. She was a beautiful young woman, about twenty, her figure finely formed, a remarkably fair skin, very pale, and with quantities of golden hair. She was dressed in blue silk; her ornaments consisted of pearl bracelets and earrings. She was one of the loveliest persons in the room, though she looked rather delicate, and the expression of her face denoted sadness and suffering. She was sitting beside her husband, and leaning her white round arm on a corner of the table, her eyes fixed on her fan. Occasionally, however, when his excellency uttered an exclamation of anger or satisfaction, she raised her heavy eyelids, and looked at the cards.

Herr von Brand was placed in his corner, behind Baron von Weiss.

The baroness, perhaps by chance, at one moment looked round the room and caught the eye of the baron. There must have been something singular in his glance, for her features were for an instant

convulsed; then she looked in terror at her husband, but he had observed nothing, and was intent on his cards.

The baroness by degrees turned from the table, so that she could look into the recess of the window. We must confess that she now looked intently at the baron, that he evidently returned her glance, and that a short time after he made a sign incomprehensible to us, but which the lady seemed perfectly to understand, for she slowly cast down her eyes, which evidently meant "Yes," for the baron rose and stole out of the room unobserved.

The baroness remained for a time; then she laid her soft white hand on the trembling arm of her husband, and said, in a gentle voice, "I am going to take a turn in the apartments. His Excellency Count Fohrbach wished to show me the winter garden, and I promised to go into the next room after this rubber was over."

"Well, you may go," said his Excellency von Weiss, crossly; "you distract my attention from the game. What a mistake I have just made—all owing to your talking."

The fair baroness then glided out of the room, making a graceful gesture as she passed.

She saw the minister of war in the ball-room, who immediately approached and offered to escort

her through the rooms; but she answered, smiling, "I see that your excellency is at this moment besieged by your friends, and her royal highness the duchess is just arriving, so you cannot go. I will go alone to the garden, and you can follow later, when I shall be charmed to have your society."

"You are right, madame. Here is her royal highness. I must attend to my duty as host, but I will soon follow you."

She bowed and passed through the ball-room and the other rooms to the winter garden, where, for the moment, there were very few persons.

At a little distance, and apparently intent on examining a superb camelia, stood Baron von Brand, close to the entrance of the young count's rooms.

The baroness approached him, and when she was near enough to hear his words, he said, "There is no one in these rooms; but as it might seem strange if we were found alone together, I will remain standing here, as I can see the garden and all along to the ball-room. Come nearer, and seat yourself on that low garden-chair, and if any one comes I can disappear in a moment through this door."

The baroness followed his directions, and when she was seated he bent down towards her, and said, "I have much to say to you."

"And I also," answered she. "I have passed a

dreadful day. Oh! how right you were when you once offered to take charge of my boy."

"It would indeed have been far better."

"But I was afraid. We must have had a confidant; and the worst of all would be any suspicion of an understanding between us."

"Of course it would be incomprehensible to the world, and give rise to strange reports," answered he, with a melancholy look. "At that time you knew so little of me or my position in society—whether I was prosperous or in misery. It is not our fault, my poor Lucie; destiny willed it, by separating us so early in life. But let us be silent as to the past. To the point!"

"Yes!" said the baroness, in an agitated voice, and looking anxiously round the garden.

"No one is coming," said he, stooping behind the camelia, so that he could hear her lowest whisper.

"You already know," said she, "that a year ago I caused the child to be brought here."

"Alas! you did."

"I could no longer bear his being so far from me. I felt that I must sometimes clasp him to my heart. You know my joyless life, and cannot blame me for wishing to place one rose among the many thorns of my miserable existence. Ah! what happy hours those were when I saw my child!"

“ My poor sister ! this happiness was but of short duration. But proceed, proceed.”

“ I had arranged everything so well; the child was placed with a respectable, trustworthy woman, who lived in the same house with one of my friends, so I could visit her constantly without suspicion, and I did so for a whole happy year. One day, however, the nurse informed me that of late a man had frequently met her when she was walking with the boy, entered into conversation with her on indifferent subjects, but afterwards questioned her as to the child and his parents, and was very rude and inquisitive.”

“ And is the nurse an old woman?”

“ Certainly,” answered the baroness, “ so the interest the man seemed to take in her was evidently on account of the boy. He tried several times, on various pretences, to accompany her home, which she declined, but he managed to discover her house, and told her so, and that he knew there was a mystery connected with the boy, which he was determined to find out. He offered her a large sum of money if she would tell him the truth.”

“ An agent of your husband’s, I fear.”

“ Thus stood the affair when I remarked that, to my great terror, the general’s conduct to me at home became more hard and tyrannical than ever. Sometimes he questioned me as to my former life,

and became so irritable that I had not a moment's peace, so I thought it was absolutely necessary to remove the child."

"There I agree with you, but you ought then to have applied to me."

"No," said she, eagerly, "I could not, for I knew well that I was at that moment surrounded by spies, and that all the letters I wrote were taken to my husband. I could only trust to the old nurse, who is devoted to me."

"To Frau Fischer," said the baron, as if buried in thought.

"How? you know her?" asked the baroness, in amazement.

"I suppose you must have named her to me once—but go on."

"The woman told me of a friend through whose means my poor child could be entrusted to some worthy people."

"Did she take him herself?" asked the baron.

"No, that would have been too dangerous, but her friend gave him to the person who took him to these people. Who could have thought that after all these precautions he should have traced him?" The baroness said these words in a tone of the deepest anguish, and covered her face with her hands, but in a few minutes, by a violent effort,

she repressed her feelings, and continued, "I had constant satisfactory reports of the child."

"Always through a third person?"

"Yes," answered she, "always. The last I got was the day before yesterday, but this morning the old nurse brought me the dreadful intelligence that my child had been taken away by force from the worthy people who had charge of him. Oh, Henry!" said she, after a pause, with clasped hands, while tears shone in her eyes, "is it possible?—can such things be? Ah, Heavens! I have spent all this most wretched day thinking of this dreadful event, and I cannot imagine what to do. Is it credible that the child should be stolen?"

"Oh yes, very credible."

"Now I have done," continued she, in a low, sad voice. "All that is left to me is to weep and lament, and that only when I am alone. He watches every gesture of mine. If you could but know the pangs of misery I suffer! And I am obliged to look gay and unconcerned when my heart is breaking!"

The baron, as she uttered these words in a passionate tone, gently seized her hand, and pressed it. "Be composed," said he. "Courage! courage, sister! Think where we are. Were any of the hundreds who surround us to see the traces of tears on your cheeks, how would they interpret them? Recover your self-command, and smile."

“I cannot,” said she, despairingly.

“In such a life as yours,” said he, in a bitter tone, “you should be well accustomed to such efforts; but,” continued he, in a softer voice, “I, your brother, wish to inflict no such martyrdom on you. I bid you smile because I can tell you a more cheering *dénouement* to your story.”

“You!” cried she, starting up from her chair. “Oh, Henry! do not trifle with my feelings.”

“Your child is found again,” said he, in a whisper. “I see the minister of war coming; all I have time to say is, that your child is safe, and in my hands, not in your husband’s.”

“Ah!” said she, pressing her hand to her heart, “I thank Providence for this undeserved mercy!”

The baron had disappeared, and his excellency the minister of war offered his arm to the fair lady whom he found in such entire solitude, and showed her the winter-garden, with all its rare plants and flowers. She was so lively, and so much pleased with all his explanations, that when the old count conducted her back to the whist-room, he said to Baron von Weiss, “I have had so much pleasure in showing the treasures of my garden to your lady. She seems to have a great love of flowers, and I never had the honour of escorting a more intelligent companion.”

The garden was destined to be the scene of various

interviews on this evening, for scarcely had the old count quitted it with the young baroness leaning on his arm, than two ladies entered it—Eugenie von S—— and one of her friends, Mademoiselle von A——, whose unpretending figure she eclipsed as the proud lily does the modest violet. These ladies were laughing and talking, now of a lovely flower, now of a murmuring fountain.

They were closely followed by young Count Fohrbach, though unperceived by them.

“Let us make a little voyage of discovery, Eugenie,” said Mademoiselle von A——, “and see how far this fairyland extends. I hear the salon adjoining the garden is exquisite. After supper we shall have no time for exploring.”

Count Fohrbach heard these words, and coming forward, said, with much courtesy, “I should esteem myself most fortunate if permitted, ladies, to be your guide in this unpretending dwelling, which you are so kind as to denominate fairyland.”

“I wish no better,” said Mademoiselle von A——, laughing.

Eugenie also, who could not help blushing at sight of the count, accepted his offer with gratitude.

The three went through the garden, and when they arrived at the salon, the count said, “Here are the boundaries of my realm, and I cordially welcome you both, fair ladies, into my dominions.”

Mademoiselle von A——, who was a lively little person, ran round the salon, examining every ornament and decoration like a child. “Nothing is forgotten here,” said she, gaily; “this is an actual paradise of flowers. I see a statue in the garden I must look at. Don’t disturb me in my meditations.” So saying, she ran back into the garden.

The count was alone with Eugenie. She made a movement as if to follow her friend, but an imploring look from the count held her back.

“Mademoiselle Eugenie,” said he, “I have not yet had an opportunity of offering you an apology for my absence the other evening at Major von S——’s, but you know how I was detained.”

“I do know,” said she, with a smile; “his highness the duke, who came in your place, told it, laughing, to the major, who said he had no doubt that you would be grateful for the honour.”

“But that was not your opinion, Mademoiselle Eugenie? I am sure you did not think so?”

“No, I did not,” said she, candidly; “you had told me in the palace how rejoiced you were at the idea of passing the evening with me—with us, I mean.”

“Oh! say with yourself, Eugenie,” said the count; “what pleasure have I in society where you are not—nay, in the whole world—if I do not see you? But the duke replacing me was most painful to my feelings.”

“And why so, Count Fohrbach?”

“Because,” said he, hesitating—“because I know that the duke persecutes you with his attentions.”

Eugenie cast down her eyes and contemplated her bouquet, and then said, in a low voice, “Yes, it is so, unfortunately, and he will not be repulsed. I do all in my power,” continued she, raising her bright eyes with a truthful expression, “to discourage his attentions, which are odious to me, but his mother the duchess only smiles, and would be very indignant if I deprived her beloved son of so innocent a pastime.”

“Are you serious in what you say?” asked the young man, indignantly.

“I feel that it is fatal earnest,” answered Eugenie, sadly. “But let us break off this conversation, which is so painful to me, and probably to you also.”

“No, Eugenie,” said the count, in a resolved tone, “let us rather continue it. Indeed, a very few words may conclude it,” added he, in a softer voice, seizing Eugenie’s hand and pressing it to his lips, “and these few words would make me the happiest of men. Will you say them, Eugenie?”

“I don’t know what they are,” said she, colouring.

“But you have some idea,” continued he, more importunately; “you must have read them in my

eyes—you must feel them in the pressure of my hand; which trembles when touching yours. Eugenie,” said he, with sparkling eyes, “you shall not pronounce the words, only answer my question with Yes or No, but remember, that your reply decides the whole happiness of my future life. May I ask it?”

“You may,” said she, in a whisper, involuntarily looking round the room.

“May I love you, Eugenie?”

At this moment Mademoiselle von A—— entered the room, and said, laughing, “I have meditated, and poetised, and reflected all alone till I am tired to death, so let us return to the ball-room, dear Eugenie, without delay.”

The little lady could not have heard the words the count had just uttered, but the king and queen with their suite at that moment entered the garden, so the two young ladies were obliged to hurry away, but not till Eugenie had contrived to say, in a whisper to her lover, “Yes, Count Fohrbach—I say Yes with my whole heart.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

A SLAVE.

AFTER leaving the house of the minister of war, Baron Brand went alone through the streets. He appeared sad and thoughtful, and at last stopped at a small house and looked up at the windows, where no light was to be seen. He took a key out of his pocket, opened the door, and ascended the stairs softly.

The house had only two stories. He stood still at the first, and opening a glass door, entered a room, where, without much groping, he soon found a box of lucifers and struck a light, when a loud voice in the next room was heard calling out, "What's the matter? Is that you, Frau Fischer?"

The baron, without answering, took up the candle and looked into the adjoining room.

"Is it possible, sir, that you are here? Give me a few minutes to make myself presentable."

"Certainly! my good Beil," answered the baron, returning to the next room, and resting on the sofa. Herr Beil soon joined him.

"I feel very much out of spirits this evening," said the baron. "You must forgive me for breaking in on your rest, but I thought a little conversation with you would cheer me; and if you can give me a good account of your young charge, I shall leave you in a happier mood."

"The child is as well as possible," answered Beil. "He is a singular boy, full of life and spirit, though rather self-willed; but I don't dislike that."

"Were you out with him yesterday?"

"Yes, every day, according to your orders."

"But taking all the precautions I recommended?"

"We drive a little way out of town, and every afternoon to a different spot, and there we walk about till it is dark."

"And no one has yet tried to enter into conversation with you?"

"Once only, two days ago. A very shabbily-dressed man, in a black coat, met us, as it seemed, by chance."

"Was he tall and thin?"

"Yes; and he greeted us in passing. The boy

said to me, 'That was the man who brought me from that dreadful house to Frau Fischer and you.' "

"And what became of the man?"

"He lounged along behind us for a time, but I took a carriage at the first stand and drove to the opposite end of the town, whence I walked home with the boy."

"Well done, Beil," said the baron. "I know human nature, and I felt convinced that in you I found the right man, and I can never be sufficiently thankful to Arthur for having recommended you to me as secretary. He told me you had taken refuge with him after leaving your tyrannical master, Blaffer, and that he would guarantee your integrity."

"It was, indeed, a happy hour for me when, as a last hope, I appealed to Herr Arthur's generosity, which he proved by placing me with you."

"I have long wished for some one who deserved my entire and unreserved confidence," said the baron.

"How can an insignificant person like myself," answered Beil, "serve a person like you, so powerfully connected? Your kindness is unceasing, and you enhance your benefits by reposing confidence in me."

The baron seemed sunk in thought for some time,

and then suddenly looking up, he said, "Do you remember the night you told me of when you saw a spectre near the canal?"

"I never shall forget it," said Beil, looking very grave.

"You were then in a melancholy, oppressed mood, and related your life to the phantom?"

"Yes; and I must say that the strange being was very sympathising, and spoke very reasonably."

"And as you related your history, did not you feel it to be a relief, and that you were in some degree consoled? Well, I am in a similar mood to-night. Will you act the part of the phantom, and listen to me patiently for half an hour? I feel it would be a relief to me, as it was then to you."

"I shall feel highly honoured, and will listen with the deepest interest," said Beil, cordially.

"But you know that spectres observe a strict silence as to what is confided to them—that they are as silent as the grave."

"From which they come," said Beil, shuddering. "I will listen eagerly; not one word of what I hear shall ever pass my lips; silent as the dead."

The baron leaned back in his chair, sighed heavily, and, pressing his hands to his eyes, seemed to be collecting his thoughts, and at length said, "You have never quitted Germany—you have never been in southern lands, or crossed the snow-covered Alps

to reach beautiful Italy! Ah! that is a fair, enchanting land—bright skies, splendid landscapes, treasures of art, and lovely women. I was born in Palermo, the most enchanting of all the fair cities of Italy, with its splendid bay, its Mount Pellegrino, its gigantic lighthouse, its golden domes, its countless orange and lemon gardens, its serene climate, its deep blue skies, and golden stars! Never more shall I see its charms. My mother was the daughter of one of the most powerful families in Palermo; my father an Englishman, who, on a voyage of pleasure, one day anchored his yacht in the bay. He landed, and, having brought good letters of introduction, he was received in the first houses; saw my mother, to whom he soon lost his heart, and never rested till her father, the Marchese di B——, gave his consent to her marriage with the stranger. My father's birth was in no respect inferior to that of my mother. He was the oldest son of Lord K——, a rich Scotch nobleman, whose consent to his marriage my father represented as certain to be easily obtained. The old marchese was present at the marriage, and then established the young couple in his own palace.

“No answer came from Lord K—— to the repeated letters my father addressed to him, and at last a man of business wrote to say that Lord K——, in consequence of his son's marriage, disowned and dis-

inherited him, and considered him as in all respects dead.

“It was a most severe blow to my parents, and my mother’s relations, whose pride was also severely wounded, gave up all intercourse with her. The Marchese B—— died soon after, and as only a small share of his property was inherited by my mother, and the sum of money my father had brought with him was nearly exhausted, they were obliged to retrench. This caused no regret, however, to my parents, who loved each other tenderly, and their children—my sister and myself—prospered in health and strength; no family could be happier.

“I do not know what steps my father had at this time taken with his family in Scotland, but one day a letter arrived from Lord K——, saying he would be reconciled to his son, and that the past should be forgotten; but he made the stipulation that my parents should leave Sicily, and return to my father’s native home.

“However dearly my mother loved her beautiful island, she had latterly suffered so many mortifications there, that she left her fatherland and her family without much regret.

“We sailed. I was then twelve years old, and my sister four. Our only grief was being obliged to part from the old and faithful servants of our house—but such was the will of Lord K——. Leaving

Sicily was no source of sorrow to us children. We admired the beautiful ship, we rejoiced in the prospect of the voyage, and when we had seen Naples, and Rome, and the lofty snow-covered mountains of Switzerland, we thought no more of our Monte Pellegrino, nor of the fair glassy Bay of Palermo, and I fear as little of the tearful eyes of our attached servants.

“The remembrance of Sicily did not again arise vividly in our thoughts till we approached the coasts of Scotland. It was a raw, frosty autumnal evening, the sea rough, the grey waves dashing wildly, and, when they came in contact, leaving white wreaths of foam on the troubled waters. The land was now visible, and the rugged, barren rocks stood forth in dim and spectral array out of the mist. Masses of torn flying clouds had sunk so heavily towards the earth, that the rising fog mingled with them. Flights of white sea-gulls, with sharp, discordant cries, fluttered round our vessel, or, driven by the gusts of wind, flew towards the shore, or balanced themselves, screaming, on the swelling waves. My father was busy in the cabin, but my mother, my sister, and I were on deck. Never in my life can I forget that moment. We thought so mournfully of the contrast to our own sunny bay, where the setting sun each night glows with such splendour. We thought our new country cold and

dreary, as we gazed at it, shivering, from the heavy fog. I had never before seen my mother so sad; she held us both in her arms, and pressed our heads fondly to her; and when she bent down to kiss us I felt her tears trickling over my cold cheeks.

“Soon the sails were furled, the sailors hurried on deck, the ship was brought to, and we floated slowly into the small bay, surrounded by perpendicular cliffs. It was now so dark that we could scarcely distinguish these rugged outlines against the sky. On the shore we could see some lights glancing in the darkness. The waves roared, and the wind whistled: it was indeed a stormy night. Boats soon approached, we got into them, and in a few minutes we reached the shore. Carriages were waiting, with outriders carrying torches. One old man—I see his repulsive face before me at this moment—who held one of these blazing pine branches, was standing at the head of his horse, and greeted my father respectfully.

“We set off at a gallop up a long, tiresome hill, and then across a desolate moor.

“‘You don’t find Scotland so beautiful as Italy?’ said my father to my mother, who was gazing out into the dark night, and had laid her hand on his.

“‘My heart feels frozen,’ answered she; ‘it is such a dreadful evening, even the children seem uneasy.’

“‘Have patience,’ replied my father; ‘to-morrow the place will look very different in sunshine. Scotland is famed for its splendid scenery.’

“We drove on at a great pace for two hours; at last the carriage stopped. An iron gate creaked on its hinges, we passed through, and the wheels rolled softly on turf. We were in an extensive park, apparently laid out with much taste; shrubs bordered the carriage road, and lofty trees, whose branches were dashed about by the gusts of wind, drooped over our carriage. Sometimes we saw smooth green turf and small shining spots, which we supposed to be little rills and lakes.

“At last the carriage stopped again, and we found ourselves in front of a large castle. The old man whom I had remarked at the beach approached my father and gave him a letter. He tore it open, and after glancing at the contents, he said to my mother, ‘Ah! how disagreeable. My father, who intended to be here to receive us, has been seized with sudden illness, and obliged to pass the night at the small town of C——, some miles off. He wishes me, however, to go to him immediately, and you will at once see that it is my duty to hasten to him without delay.’

“My mother agreed to this, but timidly entreated to be allowed to accompany him. She added in a whisper, that she would feel uneasy all alone in this strange place.

“‘Do not ask it,’ said my father; ‘it is dark, and the road to C—— very bad; besides, love, do not say a strange place; it will one day be your own, and we shall reside here in future. To-morrow, early, I will return to you.’

“After these words we entered the gloomy building, and were received by numerous servants, some bearing massive silver candlelabras, others carrying my sister and myself up the broad staircase; two waiting-maids respectfully kissed the edge of my mother’s mantle, who, leaning on my father, preceded us.

“The apartments were handsomely fitted up, but spacious and gloomy. The walls and ceilings were of dark oak, richly carved. We had supper, and then my father showed us our rooms, pressed my mother fondly to his heart as a farewell, and after kissing my sister and me affectionately, he left us.

“My mother sank into an arm-chair, and took my sister in her arms. I crept to the window, and slipping behind its heavy velvet curtain, I looked out into the dark. There was a scene of bustle in the court; I saw the smoke of torches, and sometimes, when a rush of wind came, the dark red flame flickered up and lighted the gloomy castle with its many windows. My father mounted a horse, and I saw him ride off, the old man beside him, and horsemen with torches riding before and

behind. As they galloped away through the green bushes over the yielding turf and quickly disappeared, so that only the wild branches were seen waving in the storm, with the blood-red light of the torches streaming on them, and then another glimpse of the horsemen was seen through the trees, an indescribable sensation of anguish seized my heart. They looked so mysterious, the gloomy figures on the galloping horses gave me the impression that they were carrying off my father by force, or that he was unconsciously rushing on to his own destruction. I felt as if I must warn him. I knocked on the panes, I strove to open the heavy window, while I cried out, 'Father! father! do not ride away, do not forsake us. You will return to us no more.'

"It was a melancholy night for us all. My mother remained in her arm-chair, her eyes fixed on vacancy and buried in thought, but starting up at the least noise in the castle, pressing us anxiously in her arms, as if wishing to shelter us from some unseen danger. At last we went to rest. We slept in two rooms adjoining each other, my sister and I in one, and my mother next to us. The door between the two rooms of course remained open.

"I don't know what hour it was when I suddenly awoke. I thought I heard voices in the next room, and when I sat up in bed to listen, I found that I was not mistaken.

“Morning was dawning, but as it was late in autumn, only a faint light was seen through the drawn window-curtains. I looked at my sister, who was also sitting up in bed. ‘Who can that be?’ said I.

“‘I don’t know,’ replied she, ‘but mamma is begging and crying.’

“‘I will go to her and help her!’ cried I. I was a bold child, and feared nothing.

“‘They have locked the door,’ said my sister; and so indeed they had. I jumped out of bed and tried to open it, but scarcely had I gone a few steps, when a strong hand seized my arm. I started, and on looking up I saw the old man with the stern, gloomy face, who had received us on the beach, and had ridden away with my father.

“‘What do you want?’ said he, in a harsh voice.

“‘I want to go to my mother,’ said I; ‘don’t you hear her crying?—who has dared to vex her?’

“‘Dared!’ said he, maliciously. ‘Go to bed, boy, and don’t meddle with what does not concern you.’ He then let go my arm, and gave me such a blow that it sent me reeling into the middle of the room, and would have knocked me over if I had not seized the bed to support me. I had been struck for the first time in my life, and by the hand of a menial! I clenched my fist. What should I do? He was a strong, well-armed man, I a young, defenceless

boy. I trembled from rage and cold, and sat down on the bed, straining my ears and eyes to hear and see. Yes, it was the voice of my mother; she implored, she wept, she called our names. 'Give me at least my children,' cried she; 'I want nothing else. Ah! my children, my darling children!'

"I wept with her, and called out as loud as I could, 'Mother! mother! we are here; don't leave us alone.'

"The old man who had struck me, and who was now standing at the window, shook his fist at me, and said, threateningly, 'Cry out, you little viper. You shall have ample punishment.'

"All was now still in the adjoining room. The old man opened the window, wheels were heard rolling in the court, and I thought I could distinguish my mother's moans. With eager eyes I looked round in search of a weapon. I wished to defend my mother, my sister, and myself. Near my bed there was a collection of knives and daggers of all kinds. The man had struck me and called me a viper; I wished to be one, and to sting him. I crept back to my bed. I seized one of the daggers—it was broad above and sharp at the point. I easily drew it out of its sheath. I held it fast in my hand behind my back. Ah! then I heard my poor mother's cries ascending from the court, 'My darlings! my children!'

“The old man bent forward out of the window, and called out: ‘Away with you! throw her into the carriage, and set off instantly.’ I then heard from below one solitary scream; but the anguish of that cry I can never forget. The doors of the carriage were violently shut, whips cracked, and wheels were heard departing.

“I seized the dagger firmly in my right hand. The man closed the window, and stepped back into the room. ‘Now for you, boy,’ said he, coming straight up to my bed. At that moment I was no longer a child. I felt nothing human within me. I was a savage beast—a wild cat or a snake. ‘Come on!’ cried I. ‘I am no defenceless woman; come on! I can defend myself.’ So I sprang up and stood on the bed. I kept my right hand which clutched the dagger behind my back. He never suspected it, but said, laughing contemptuously, ‘The whip shall tame you, boy!’ These were his last words in this world. He was close to me. I suddenly stretched out my right hand, and knowing that I had not sufficient strength for a blow, I held my arm stiff, and threw myself from the bed on him. The weight of my body and the force with which I had precipitated myself on him drove the dagger right into his breast up to the hilt!”

“Oh! Heavens!” cried Beil, in horror, “that was a murder!”

The baron had related the latter part of his history with increasing emotion. His arm trembled and his eyes flashed, but he covered his eyes with his hand, and after a pause said, sadly, "It was no murder—it was self-defence, and I thus revenged my mother. Ah! my good Beil, I feel assured that a higher power than mine directed the hand of the boy. That old man was the confidant and the evil counsellor of Lord K——, and he had been the cause of all my mother had suffered."

Here the narrator paused, a gloomy expression crossed his features, and he leant back thoughtfully, as if recalling that dreadful hour.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A WILD LIFE.

“ALAS!” continued the baron, after a pause, “it is a strange feeling to have shed man’s blood. You never knew it?”

“I!” answered Beil, shuddering. “God forbid!”

“And yet you wished to take your own life! You see how wisely that phantom reasoned with you!”

“The blood of a fellow-creature!—I cannot think of it without horror.”

“Yes, yes,” said the baron, thoughtfully, “who would not feel horror? In such a case as that which I have just related, all may be forgotten in after years—the aspect of the man who fell by our hand, the sight of his blood shed by us. Only one thing remains impressed for ever—the dreadful sensation of the weapon being thrust in! Ah!” said he, with a shudder, “who could forget that?”

“But it must console you,” said Herr Beil, kindly, “to remember that at that age you were not responsible. A mere child.”

“Oh! don’t say so. In that moment I lived through long years, and felt so cool and resolute that no one should then have robbed me of my mother. The man fell down. I let the dagger drop. The doors were hastily thrown open; the servants rushed in. I hoped my father would also appear, but instead of him I saw an old gentleman walking feebly with the aid of a stick—my grandfather. I recognised him by his likeness to my father. I have never forgotten his appearance.

“‘That boy,’ said he, furiously, ‘has done this deed! Take him away! See if you can get help.’ The latter was impossible, for in vain they tried every means to restore the man. He was dead. They then pushed me out of the room, and my poor little sister, who had been sadly terrified, for, young as she was, she knew I had done evil.

“We were thrust into a carriage, and drove incessantly all next day. I tried to keep awake, to mark in my memory the castles and rivers we passed; but exhausted nature at last prevailed, and I sank into a deep and dreamless sleep. The stopping of the carriage woke me; but my sister was gone. Oh! this loss was cruel, for while together we could have comforted each other.

“I was brought into a house and given in charge to a repulsive-looking man, outwardly very pious, who was constantly reading his Prayer-book, but had no scruple in overreaching his neighbours. A moderate sum was paid down for my yearly board. He was to see what he could make of me, and I was to follow any profession to which I felt inclined.

“So he told me. But I, who was older than my years, soon perceived that the man had orders to let me do as I chose, and not to check me in excesses or vices. Thus I was allowed to do just what I pleased; so I idled about all day, drank, played, and rode the neighbours' horses, and, as I was a bold, handsome lad, I was a favourite with them all. I became strong and active. No horse was too wild for me to break him in; no window, no tree, too high to climb. I steeled my frame so entirely that I could bear any hardships, and it was quite the same to me whether I was in bed, or passing the night in the open air, in rain and storm. One thing I learned from my tutor—dissimulation; for when I confessed my faults he was furious, but when I began to deny them, and to sneak about the house, casting down my eyes and sighing, we soon got on famously together.

“You may think I never forgot the past, or my father and mother, and my sister. Perhaps you will wonder that I did not attempt to run away, as I was allowed full liberty to wander about in the

village and the neighbourhood alone. But I was wise enough to see that as a child, and without means, I could not venture on flight. I constantly hoped, too, to receive some token of remembrance from my parents. But in vain. The dreadful deed I had committed threw its dark shadow over my early youth ; but instead of feeling remorse, the bitter sense of our wrongs only made me nurse a feeling of revenge, and glory in my deed. I cannot express to you how I had loved my little sister. From my earliest childhood she had been my only playmate, and her gentle nature soothed my wild humours, and my hasty, passionate moods. She, too, loved me devotedly.

“In the vicinity of our village there was an encampment of gipsies, with whom I had frequent intercourse. I was a favourite with them all, and sometimes went with them in their expeditions, and one day their captain proposed to me to accompany them on a longer journey. They were to bring some ponies from the Scottish mountains to England. He promised me a good share of their gains. I naturally consented at once, and left without grief or regret the house that had hitherto sheltered me. My hair, which was fair, like my father’s, was dyed black, my face was coloured olive, and we travelled on for many days through the land. How anxiously I looked round to see if I could recognise any of

the castles or landmarks I had formerly observed. All in vain. Sometimes I thought I recognised the park gate through which we entered the night we arrived, or turf and trees, rills and brooks, like those I had then seen; but on closer examination I always found a great difference. At last, however, by a singular chance, I found what I sought. I had been wandering round a park with high walls; the porter refused to admit the gipsy, but I came to a place where I heard the gay voices of children. Feather-balls were flying in the air, and one was tossed over where I was. 'What a pity,' said a young voice; 'it is lost!' but I hastened to the porter with the ball, and gave it to him. He wished to give me something for my trouble, but I begged him instead to allow me to see the gardens. His boy went with me.

"Yes, these were the lofty stone gates shaded by trees, the winding road, the luxuriant thickets which I had seen by torchlight the night my father rode away. How my heart beat at this discovery! I would gladly have gone straight to the castle, but I was obliged to follow my little guide, who wished first to return the ball. We came to a smooth space of green turf interspersed with beds of flowers; there two children were playing, a boy and a girl, about five or six years old. A lady in deep mourning was watching the children's game. She thanked

me, and while she was speaking to me I looked at the pretty little children. I felt so strange and so sad that I could gladly have wept, and taken the children in my arms; images of the past floated before me—of my parents, of my darling sister. Oh! this must be my father's park. I, too, might have played here happily in careless, childish mirth, with a happy future in prospect. The little girl, too, reminded me strongly of my own sister.

“The lady now called the children, and we were obliged to go, but I often looked back. But now to the castle. It was the same. I saw the spacious staircase and the numerous windows; I recognised it all by the beating of my heart. What would I have given to be able to enter it! But this was not permitted. I asked the boy if the rooms were handsome? He said, ‘Yes.’ ‘Panelled with dark oak?’ I continued, ‘and one in which there are many foreign daggers and weapons?’ ‘Yes, yes,’ he answered; ‘my father has often shown them to me when the family were absent.’ ‘And the family,’ I asked, in a hesitating tone, ‘are they here just now?’ ‘We saw the lady a moment since,’ answered the boy, ‘and her children. She is in deep mourning for her husband, Lord K——, who was killed by a fall from his horse out hunting last year.’ That was my father!

“Without saying another word I went back

through the park, greeted the porter in passing, and found myself on the highway again. What a dreadful mystery surrounded my life! I had seen the wife of my father—who yet was not my mother; his children—and yet they were strangers to me.

“We remained for the night at a village near, and there I learned the history of the family at the castle, and likewise my own. They related that about eight years ago the young lord returned from Italy, owing to a kind invitation from his father, accompanied by his young, lovely wife, and two children. Scarcely had he arrived, when, through his father’s influence, his marriage was declared to be null and void, the children pronounced illegitimate, and the mother sent back to Italy. Contrary to all expectation, the son seemed quickly reconciled to his father’s wishes, for not long after he married a rich heiress.

“Thus was I cast forth without a name, without a family. They said my mother had returned to Italy—but where was my sister? I thought the best plan I could pursue to discover some trace of my lost ones was to turn my steps towards Sicily; but perhaps you will smile when I tell you that I could not easily resolve to part with my only friends the gipsies. I confess that I had a liking for their wild life, and I had no means of my own to subsist on if I quitted them. What I suffered in reflecting

on what I was and on what I might have been, I need not tell you; all the natural levity of youth could not banish these bitter thoughts."

Here the narrator paused, and stretched out his hand to Beil; his expression was gentle and melancholy. "Could you but know," continued he, "the relief it is to me to have found some one at last to whom I can speak without reserve! But, my friend, if I entrust my past life to you, you must bury it in your heart, as the grave does its dead, or the sea the drowned. Promise me this solemnly, and I will continue; but before you do so, believe my assurance that you have not yet heard the worst parts of my life. If you feel that you have the power and the strength to preserve silence faithfully on the secrets I entrust to you, give me your hand. I require no words."

Herr Beil grasped his hand with much emotion, pressed it fervently, and the baron continued thus:

"From that time forth I was the wildest of all the gipsy band. I must tell you that, hitherto, I had not been initiated into many of their mysteries; I had earned my livelihood by honest means; but now, in my desperation, I hinted to the captain that I was not disinclined to join in more dangerous exploits. His joy on hearing this flattered my vanity, but he had cause for it, as though then slender and slight, I had the strength of two men, and so far as

dexterity and craft could go, I felt that a dozen were no match for me. I told him I would have nothing to do with petty depredations; I longed to be engaged in some affair of danger, where spirit and courage were required.

“ We travelled on, and a few days afterwards the captain took me aside, and said: ‘ If you choose to risk a bold stroke, in four-and-twenty hours we may both become rich.’ I of course joyfully assented. ‘ To-night,’ continued he, ‘ one of the richest proprietors in this country is journeying to the capital; he will be attended by some servants, but is to have a large sum in gold with him. Shall we take any of our companions, or shall we two risk the affair ourselves?’ ‘ We two alone,’ answered I; and so it was settled. Night came, we took the best horses, and, well armed, rode forth. Our way led across a wide moor; the weather was stormy, the wind swept across the barren heath, we could scarcely sit our horses. We drew up in a small hollow concealed by a thicket. It was about midnight when we heard the distant rolling of wheels. It came nearer; we saw there were four horses ridden by postilions, and two servants on the seat outside. I sprang to the leaders and dashed the man from the saddle, while the captain stood at the door of the carriage, shouting out ‘ Halt!’ Although it instantly stopped, shots were fired at the same moment, which, how-

ever, we did not reply to. While the captain kept guard over the carriage, I slipped from my horse, dragged off the other postilion without injuring him, and, holding a pistol to his head, forced him and his companion to unharness their alarmed horses, which galloped off instantly over the moor. Then we allowed their riders to follow them.

“In the mean time the captain had obliged the two servants to remain quiet, and I went up to the door of the carriage; but I took the precaution, the next moment after showing myself, to spring to one side, which was wise, as the determined master of the carriage fired at me twice. The balls whistled past my head. I then desired him, very seriously, to refrain from such attempts, and drew him out of the carriage. He was an old man; and as he was lame, and his crutch remained in the carriage, I seated him on a stone carefully, having no wish to injure him. I was quite cool—indeed, the enterprise appeared to me free from all risk. Think, however, what my sensations were when, on taking down one of the carriage lamps, its light fell on his face, and in spite of the many years that had elapsed, and only having seen him once, I recognised the stern, withered features of my grandfather, whose command had cruelly driven us forth from our home!

“I left my companion to search in the carriage,

and to take possession of the coffer, with the gold and papers. I stood beside the old man and thought of that night when we had met for the first time. We could not part thus. I was resolved that he should know me, and learn that destiny sometimes exercises strict justice. I slowly drew out a dagger. When he saw it he started, but I only held it before his eyes, and told him to search back eight years in his memory. 'Remember,' said I, in a determined voice, 'that fatal night when your harsh will parted for ever a whole family, forcing my father to commit a crime, casting forth my mother into shame and misery, robbing your own grandchildren of their honourable name and of their inheritance, and crushing every hope for the future, throwing them into the paths of vice. Yes, of vice, I repeat,' said I, 'for I, who ought to be seated beside you in that carriage, your grandson and your rightful heir, to defend you against such attempts as this, I now stand before you as a common highwayman, and might perhaps become your murderer, if fate had given me a heart like yours.' "

"Horrible! horrible!" ejaculated Beil.

"Horrible indeed!" continued the other. "My companion had in the mean time placed the casket and the trunks on the ground, and had quickly emptied their most valuable contents into a sack he

had brought with him for the purpose. 'We shall never meet again,' said I to the old man; 'if, therefore, you proceed against me for this night's deed at law, when I have only taken part of my rightful inheritance—in that case alone, or if you revengefully endeavour to plunge me into still deeper misery, will I again appear before you to avenge my mother's wrongs and my own.' He made no answer, but hung down his head. Did he at that moment think with remorse of the injury he had inflicted on me, or was he only enraged at the sense of his utter inability to destroy me on the spot?

"The horses were laden with the booty. I replaced my dagger slowly in its sheath, and though my companion wished to gallop off as fast as possible, I insisted, to his surprise, that we should ride away at a foot's pace, and so we went quietly along, to the amazement of the servants, who certainly had never before seen such a termination to such a scene. We rode on through the night to the ruins of an old abbey, well known to the gipsies. There we dismounted and examined our plunder. It was immense, and, equally divided, it formed a complete independence for both of us. We shared it amicably; only I claimed all the papers. The captain, who had been considerably alarmed at the possible consequences of this night's work, was overjoyed when

I disclosed to him my relationship to the old man, and assured him he might enjoy, undisturbed, what we had this night gained. He was sophist enough to declare that he did not consider that we had committed a robbery, but only shared my rightful inheritance due to me by my grandfather.

“ We then parted for ever. He went back to his own people. I resolved to leave England, and after having realised my property, I sailed for the Continent, intending to go straight to Sicily. When I reached Paris, I took the wise precaution to cause inquiries to be made in Palermo about my family, and soon after received sad intelligence. Nothing had been heard of my unhappy mother and sister. The misfortunes which had befallen us were not known there to their full extent. It was reported that my father had divorced my mother, on which she had left England with all she possessed, and gone to live in Germany. My steward in Palermo wrote that my mother's relations were only too glad to hear nothing of us, and unless important affairs required my presence in Sicily, he strongly advised me not to return there.

“ Thus my own home was closed against me. I had no one in whom I could confide, or relate my story, or from whom I could expect consolation or assistance. How miserable and solitary I felt! I was on the point of taking the same step you once

meditated. A spirit held me back also ; but it was my own which whispered to me, ‘ Will you, in this cowardly way, leave the world and your enemies, and have no compensation for all you have suffered? Conquer fate instead of yielding to it; live as a free and independent man, and crush those who have striven to crush you.’ This voice sounded loudly in my heart, and I followed its enticing tones. I was rich, and could enjoy life in the great capital. I quickly learned the tone of good society, and formed many intimacies, but I plunged deep into the lowest abysses of mankind, and gained not only tools, but friends there also. You look astonished; but I tell you the simple truth. Often at night, when after being at a brilliant *soirée* I left my carriage, took off my rich apparel, put on a blouse and false black hair, any of the distinguished ladies with whom I had been dancing would have bestowed alms on me without recognising me. And don’t suppose that it was against my inclinations to frequent such a low grade of society. There men are seen in their natural goodness of heart, as well as in their natural wickedness, without a mask, without disguise ; but you must not mix with them as a strange element—you must become one of them. Then a word, a pressure of the hand suffice, and if you make sacrifices for them, they devote themselves to you body and soul. It was a life of enchantment to me to hover like an

invisible spirit in all ranks of society, high and low. Nothing escaped my vigilance; no secret police could ever discover or accomplish what I did. I saw the threads of a thousand intrigues entangled before my eyes; I united them when it pleased me to do so, and tore them asunder when I chose. The most secret mysteries were all open to me. I facilitated their course, or checked them, as I thought fit. I was lord and master over thousands of slaves."

"And were you that once, or are you so still?" asked the other, in a suppressed voice.

"I am so still," answered the narrator, looking up proudly. "Yes, I do not deny it, for I have made to you an ample confession of my whole life."

"I see. Forgive me, honoured sir, but my surprise and my awe are great, while you appear before me a mysterious being, sweeping past in darkness and thus suddenly coming to light—almost a spectre. Yes, a spectre," continued he, with increasing vehemence, fixing his eyes on the brilliant ones of his companion—"a spectre beyond all doubt, and the same who appeared to me by the canal. But I am childish," said he, after a pause, forcing a smile; "you are before me in your bodily presence, and that phantom was no phantom—but you!"

"Yes, it was I, my friend," answered the baron—"it was I who saved not only your life, but your body and soul, and when I say that I rescued you

for my own purposes, it was merely to gain a friend, who, not engaged in any of my wild actions, would give me disinterested advice, and to whom I could open my inmost heart. Rest assured that I will never attempt to drag you into that gloomy sphere. This house and these rooms shall remain as pure as the soul of the child who now sleeps so sweetly near us."

"And this child—is he yours?"

"Oh no," said the baron, with a melancholy smile, "I am not so happy. Listen to me for a few minutes more. My tale will soon be done. At first I thought that I could as lightly withdraw from the strange life I had begun as I could change a dress or draw off a glove. I wished to do so, and I left Paris to go to Germany, but at the commencement of my stay I kept apart from all that I had formerly enjoyed. It did not last long. I could not resist the temptation of invisibly rewarding, and punishing, and interfering in the fate of those who interested me. The first I could frequently do with ease. You will believe me when I say that I never derived the smallest profit from any of my connexions or transactions—never! never! Though immense sums were offered to the unknown being, riches rolled at my feet, I never had been a spendthrift; what I possessed being wisely managed, increased instead of diminishing, though I was no

niggard in relieving misery wherever I discovered it. I was residing at W——, and among other tales of scandal which the rich young men whose society I frequented related to me, one in particular interested me. It was a regular slave-traffic. It was said a mother wished to sell her only daughter for a large sum of money; that the daughter loved another, and was in despair. That was the very case to excite my eager interest. My first idea was to carry off the poor creature, to provide for her, and, if possible, to unite her to her lover. I resolved, therefore, to be introduced to her, and this I accomplished.”

The narrator, at these words, drew a deep breath, and as he pushed back his hair his hand trembled. “I went thither—I never was at a loss for a pretext on similar occasions—I found the girl alone. I shuddered, and felt my heart quail within me, for in the features of the girl I again found those of the child. My sister stood before me!—my own sister! my Lucie! who her own mother wished to sell to shame. But no, it was not so bad; for I found that my mother had been long dead. She had sought out her child, and found it in Scotland; they had led a miserable life; my mother had worked day and night to support her child; but all the sad losses she had met with, the remembrance of my father, who had so cruelly forsaken her, and my death, which

she believed to be certain, had destroyed her health. After her death my poor sister was without a friend in the world, when chance made her acquainted with the woman who now called herself her mother, who educated her carefully, with a view to being one day repaid by my sister herself, with all her charms and accomplishments.

“That I had a stormy interview with this woman you can easily conceive. I gave her the sum she demanded for my sister, and took the poor creature home with me. Yes, poor creature indeed! but though most miserable, still pure and virtuous. She had been privately united to her young lover, but he died suddenly from fever a few days afterwards. I did my best to establish her claims, but, alas! the marriage proved to be irregular. Thus in the eyes of the world my poor sister was dishonoured unless I could succeed in concealing an event which obliged me to live for long in the deepest solitude and concealment with her. The unhappy girl became the mother of a child—a boy—why should I conceal the fact from you?—the same boy who is now under your charge, and whom I am sure you will not love less on account of the stain on his birth.”

The assurance of Herr Beil that he would perhaps love the child more, because he stood alone in the world, without any legal claim on a father's care

seemed scarcely to be heard by the baron. He held his hands over his face, and sat for a long time absorbed in thought. When he at last looked up again he sighed deeply, and said, "Believe me, I would rather have found my sister's grave than herself as I found her. I told you how I loved her as a child, and, though separated from her, her image had been too deeply impressed on my heart ever to be forgotten. I saw her in my dreams, lovely, and virtuous, and admired. One thing I must confess: though I have had many adventures, I never loved, for as often as my heart turned to any one, the image of my sister arose before me, and eclipsed every other. Only once," continued he, with a smile, "chance brought me acquainted with a poor creature with fair hair and a look of my sister, which attracted me towards her. I felt deep emotion in looking at her, and if I had met her sooner—— But these are all fancies. I must proceed with my story.

"I travelled with Lucie into Sicily, and there I instituted a lawsuit against my grandfather. I knew I could gain nothing, but I pursued the suit solely with the hope of obtaining a name for my sister; and in this I succeeded. She was declared entitled to bear the family name of her father. The grandson of Lord K—— was dead and forgotten. I felt I could be more useful to my sister

by standing as an invisible protector at her side. If we had borne the same name, she might possibly have been involved in transactions which I felt it to be my most sacred duty to keep out of her sight. That I shared my property equally with her, you will at once believe. And now I am done, but prepared to answer any questions you may wish to ask me. Do so without reserve."

"If I do so," said Beil, hesitating, "it is not curiosity which impels me to question you; but I wish to hear if the mother knows where her boy is, and if she is allowed to see him?"

"I cannot answer you as to the last. My sister married, and made what the world calls a brilliant alliance; but she lives childless with her old husband, and her whole heart is with her boy."

"And what am I to do if she makes an attempt to see the child? You told me others were also seeking him."

"You are quite right to be cautious. If a lady, therefore, asks to see the boy, you must inquire if she has resided long in this city; if the answer is that she has just returned from England, then you may safely give the child into her arms. But it is now time that I should retire," said the baron, rising; "I can say with Mephistopheles, my horses shiver, the morning dawns. You have dreamed a wild, fantastic dream with me. Adieu, my friend. Remember, I am always at your service. Demand

what you will, I will get it for you. Farewell. I will soon visit you again ; if you have anything urgent to tell me, you know where to find me." He then shook hands cordially with Herr Beil, and left the house.

The other went to the window, and looked after the baron, who went along erect and quickly till he disappeared round the nearest corner.

Morning was dawning—a dismal, cold winter morning ; the wind chased grey clouds along the sky, which, flying over the city, scattered down occasional flakes of snow. The weathercocks flew round, creaking ; a frosty mist lay heavy on the distant houses ; and, on a fountain opposite the house, some icicles were hanging. Out of doors the weather was miserable ; but within, the stove made the room warm and comfortable. Herr Beil extinguished the candle, for its flame was overpowered by the dawning light of day. He then passed his hand across his eyes, and felt as if he had really dreamt a wild dream, or as if he had read a fantastic romance during the night—a tale of robbers, such as are often to be met with. He sank into a reverie, and rejoiced when he was startled out of it by a child's clear voice calling :

“ Herr Beil, I am awake, and wish to rise.”

END OF VOL. II.

C. WHITING, BEAUFORT HOUSE, STRAND.



