The Magic Ring

A Knightly Romance

Volume 1

Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué

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by

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To the Gentle Reader

The writer of the following story applies himself in glad trembling to his task. There are people that laugh at a man who, in any of his doings, can fervently call God to his aid: nevertheless, the Author is not loth to confess that he has done so just this moment from the bottom of his heart. Ere this, it hath been of service to him in similar undertakings, and he confidently hopes it may avail him now. For, like unto a teeming sea, with groups of wonder on its shores, with the hues of the rainbow upon its waters, with an ever-changeful current, and the richly-peopled clouds of heaven sweeping above it, doth this tale float in vision before me. Well wot I the far track I have to steer; but of the single adventures to be encountered, I dream rather than I know. Haste thee, then, on board to me, gentle reader: and launch forth, of good cheer, with me on the waves. Or, maybe thou ill brookest the name of the good God whom I have called upon, or thou mightest well be content, I ween, with that which I shall give thee, with all that hath suggested or still may sug-

gest itself. Know only, that what pleases thee best is not my own; but that it is a certain sweet gift from above, which only becomes mine when I myself am better than lies usually within the compass of my degenerate nature. Albeit, in the following leaves, I give thee the very best that I can achieve; and in so saying, I tender thee the pure truth, for which my word of honour stands pledged. To mead, then, and to grove, to fight and to festival, to day of woe or of wedding, as they hereafter shall unfold themselves, I welcome thee from the bottom of my soul!

Chapter 1

In the favoured land of the Suabians, hard by the banks of the Danube, lies a beautiful mead; and there, one month of May, just as the last rays of the sun were taking leave of the flowers, strolled a young scion of knighthood, named Otto von Trautwangen. From the castle of his father, Sir Hugh von Trautwangen, that stood not far off, on a lofty hill, he used often to repair to this pleasant scene; now amusing himself with the baited hook in the stream, and now shooting his cross-bow-bolts at mock dragons, witches, and cobolds, which he fashioned for himself in many an uncouth form, painting them in gaudy colours, and then setting them up on the greenplain, where he was sure of not injuring any one unawares. But today, bow and bolt lay by him on the grass, while he let his hook wanton gently over the smooth mirror of the waters, less, it would seem, for the sake of fishing, than in the listless play of thought. There was not perhaps even a worm upon it. Then Bertha von Lichtenried came that way; she was his father's niece, and had been brought up with him from his

earliest childhood in the castle. She sat down beside him on the sward, and asked him, half teasingly, yet in a tone of kind interest, what he might then be sweetly be dreaming of. He scarcely knew himself, and still less could he say, since her pretty little face had been smiling on him from the water. It looked all too beautiful from out the flood; and haply she thought the same of him, for she still kept smiling on his counterpart; and thus did the two beauteous children hold parley, as it were, in the mirror with each other. When Otto had bethought himself for a time, he remembered that a pilgrim in a red-cross mantle, passing on the other side of the river, had first made him so thoughtful. He told the maiden of this, and how very solemn it had seemed to him, that the palmer should ever keep his eye steadfastly before him, looking neither to the right nor to the left, as if hurried on by some irrepressible longing; so that one could not even guess whether it was age or meekness, or fervent eagerness to reach his goal, that thus bowed down his head. Then he began saying, how fine and glorious a thing it was to travel far over land and stream and sea; how endlessly dear above everything this must be to one; and how, in such wanderings, travel itself was not so much a burden as that dreary resting all alone.

"But you are not thinking of wandering thus?" said the maiden, with a trusting smile.

"Heaven forbid!" answered the youth. "These low lands here are all my goal, or rather my magic ring; but only take care that *you* never leave them, my wondrously fair little cousin."

Bertha blushed so brightly, that it looked as if a tiny star had kindled in the water, while she said to her young kinsman: "Since you are so *very* sure, then, we may venture a joke about parting. Let us sing that little farewell ditty that old Master Walther rhymed. We feel more at ease, you know, and all the happier after it, for not really needing to leave each other."

And Otto began to sing as follows:

"Sweet home of our childhood,
Dear place to us,
I greet thee, but greet thee
Bitterly thus.
Bitterly thus, for oh! adieu!
How mournfully it knelleth!
And that thou art no more in view
My tearful eyelid telleth."

Bertha answered:

"Thou naughty distance,
So smooth and so fair.
How gladly I'd track thee!

How little I dare!
For ah! the word's adieu! adieu!
Maiden must wait so lonely,
And with her weeping eye bestrew
The garden flow'rets only."

They ceased their song; for so large a train of pilgrims passed by on the other side of the stream, and in such motley guise too, that the young people turned their whole attention that way. In the centre of the throng were beautiful women, conspicuous on costly-arrayed mules; while a guard of warriors, with huge halberts, walked close at their side. Then, again, some there were who, in spite of the gray garb and the cockle-hat, might at once be said to come from court, their noble grace and seemly air matching so oddly with that of the burly peasantry that pressed around or jostled through them. Yet honest burghers too might be seen in their numbers, of staid and goodly bearing, and limners and minstrels, as shown by the furniture of their craft, with which, far beyond the seas, on the very spot of His Passion, they hoped to serve God and their Saviour. At last, too, came knights on beauteous chargers, in full suits of burnished mail, the red cross on whose shoulders was their only token of pilgrimage. And just as the train arrived opposite the youth and the maiden, the ladies began singing the following strain:

"The East! the East! oh! eastward hie,
Leave care beneath the sable western sky;
The East is all of spangles set:
There, sweetly telleth many a flower
Of hallowed crypt and relique bower;
There, singeth Cedron's rivulet,
And in its father's arms the flock doth lie;
There, holy zeal and prowess meet.
And die we? oh! such death is sweet.
Then eastward, sisters, brothers, eastward hie!'

They sang so sweetly and joyously, that the sun seemed as if he would rise again through his bright night-veil of crimson, and, wooed by the sound of their enthusiast lay, turn evening into morning for their sakes. And now, when the fairy tones had died slowly and solemnly on the ear, the knights threw in their merry war-strain. The halberdier-escort of the ladies took part, and a mounted trumpeter in the rear of the knights mingled many a fitful blast with the song. The warrior words ran nearly thus:

"Saracen, thy toil waste not
O'er thy weapon store;
Speed thee, Saracen, or taste not
Home's endearments more.
Hence thy banner soon must fly:
Though afar 'neath Asia's sky
New award of land be given thee,

From the promised one we've driven thee.

Knightly Richard, lion-hearted,
  Many an oath hath ta'en,
Winging there, where Christ departed:—
  Fruitful hurricane!
On that holy spot
Will the war be hot,
He who falls, hath Gloria,
He who lives, Victoria."

The train had passed, the youth and maiden still kept silence, till Otto, at length, with glowing cheek, began to speak. "It is true," said he, "King Richard of England, whom they call Lion-heart, from his bravery and generosity, hath vowed a crusade. My father and Master Walther were talking only the evening before last about it. Heavens! what a glorious war that will be!"

"If you *will* always begin," said Bertha, with a sigh, "to talk so rapturously of war and marching as soon as the least thing goes by, I scarcely have heart to go on with the ditty about parting. "

"Ah, you little silly child!" said the stripling, smiling; "there has not been a word said yet about anything of the sort. Give heed prettily to your voice now; you know we sing the next rhymes together."

But it seemed fated today that they should never

bring their song to an end; for just as they were going to begin the next stanza, a noise, as of many horses, sounded behind them on the mead, and they turned their eyes quickly that way.

Chapter 2

A troop of richly-clad squires leaped anon from their steeds, and began pitching gay and costly tents on the turf; whilst a lady of wondrous beauty came riding towards them, with a retinue of noble damsels, and was reverentially handed from her white palfrey by an armed cavalier. A pretty sight it was to see the dame and the knight strolling side by side over the greensward: the lady's vesture of azure velvet, with sweeping verge of gold embroidery; the mail of the knight, of bright deep black, inlaid with many a cunning emblem of shining silver. His whole array was almost odd to look upon, for the plates of his armour were quaintly set in curious quirk and curve; but his port was grand and noble withal; while his unhelmed head told of the merry grace of youth. The loiterers passed not far from the spot where Otto and Bertha were standing, who modestly greeted the distinguished strangers. The lady as kindly returned their salute, and tarried with a look of pleasure by the tender pair, towering up tall and slim in their Teuton stature, yet with faces of childlike beauty.

She at length, beckoned them to her, and a pleasant conversation ensued, in which Otto and Bertha's life of unbroken union and homely joy lay soon unfolded before her. Their story was short, and its in every way simple and ordinary features were expressed in few and equally simple words. Then the lady-stranger looked on her companion with a pensive smile: "Count Archimbald," said she, "if we had to tell our story, should we have done so soon?—And yet," continued she, turning to Otto and Bertha, "I feel as if I owed you, dear children, the wondrous story of my wanderings. You will be pleased with it, and I can almost fancy that your graceful modesty only keeps you from questioning me. It is but fair that I should be frank to those who have been so trusting and open-hearted to me." Thereupon, as her tent had been raised in the meanwhile, she led both the young folks within it, their hearts burning with childlike curiosity to hear the singular tale; and whilst Sir Archimbald went out to order the little camp, she sank upon a tasteful couch, beckoned Otto and Bertha to her side, and began as follows:

"My name is Gabriele, and I am sprung from the ancient and noble race of the Portamours. Being left an orphan at an early age, I often heard from my guardians that I might be one of the richest and grandest ladies in France, if I had but a certain ring,

which a Norman dame of the family of Montfaucon had managed to appropriate to herself by unlawful wiles, and which her daughter, of the same age with myself, now possessed as an heirloom. This ring was always held up to me as Paradise is to other children, or at least made of the same importance, and the same sweet object of hope. So then it turned out that all my dreams, waking and sleeping, centred on this wonderful gem, without my knowing any more about it than that it gave a right to certain large domains, and—what seemed of infinitely greater weight—made its owner familiar with many magic secrets, and means of swaying the realm of spirits. Think, then, what I felt when, one evening, at the court of the king, where I was present for the very first time, I was presented to a noble maiden, Blancheflour de Montfaucon by name, on whose fairy hand, mirror as she was of every charm and grace, I at once, by the description that had been given me, descried the magic ring. To become mistress of it for the first time was very easy to me; for we were shown into the same chamber for the night, and Blancheflour drew her ring so carelessly from her hand, that in her very first slumber I achieved the capture of my property; and so adroitly too, that the next morning she scarcely noticed her loss, but after a little fruitless searching, as if nothing had happened, skipped away

to the tourney that was just then beginning. But now a handsome knight dashed up to her, whom I found, upon inquiry, to be Sir Folko de Montfaucon, her brother, and whose bright falcon-eye had descried from afar both the absence of the ring from her hand and its appearance on mine. After exchanging a few words with his sister, he rode gallantly but very gravely up to me, lowered his lance, and, 'Lady,' said he 'wilt thou choose thee a champion, that I may win from him that ring of my Blancheflour's that glistens on thy fair little hand?' I did as he craved, and chose for me one of the most famous lancemen of France, who, alas, was thrown so speedily and helplessly on the sand, that my only choice was to fulfil the settled laws of the combat, and, amid a flood of the bitterest tears, to restore the conqueror, for his sister Blancheflour, the birthright jewel which I had so lately recovered.

"In pensive mood I sought my room, heedless of the games to which the other noble damsels had, for that evening, bidden me; and I gave my handmaid a pettish rebuff, on her bringing me a beautiful fishing-rod, inlaid with mother-of-pearl, with a long line of gold, and a silver hook. I had meant to make use of this at an approaching water-party of the court; but what was all that to me, now that I had lost my ring? So the sullen waiting-maid set the fishing-rod

against the window-sill, and left me alone with my tears. Towards evening, I had cried myself tired; and the laughing of my companions, who were playing at ball on the lawn of the garden, enticed me to look at least through the window-panes. At that instant I noticed Blancheflour draw my ring from her finger, that she might play more at ease, lay it upon a mossy bank beneath my window, and thoughtlessly run back again to the game. With anxious haste and beating heart I threw open the lattice, and in doing so, the fishing-rod, as if tendering its aid, fell on my arm; in a trice I held it out, and found that the golden thread reached down with ease to the ring. On the very first trial it was swinging on the little silver hook; and drawing it quickly up, I covered it with a thousand kisses.

"But what did the brief triumph avail me? No sooner had the childlike Blancheflour poured forth her new plaint to her brother, and no sooner had he espied the ring on my finger,—for I was too proud not to show my newly-regained property in public,—than he again begged me to choose a champion from whom he might wrest it. And oh! how could such a one abide Folko's valiant arm? He soon lay stretched on the sand, while Blancheflour gave her brother my ring to take care of, and little store of hope remained of my ever winning it again. Still I never ceased to

keep the dear token in view; and one day, while we were resting from the chase, at the foot of a nearly branchless tree, and something was said about its being almost impossible to climb, I teasingly called on Folko to try his fortune. Just as I had hoped, his love of enterprise and knightly feats blinded him to all beside. The ring, which by no other chance he ever took from his finger, was now laid upon the turf, as being a hindrance to him in getting up, and the venturous task was begun. When, as I afterwards learned, after many fruitless endeavours, he at last reached the top, I was off and away with my gem, and travelling towards England; where, in the court of Richard the Lion-hearted, I might seek a champion to battle for my right with the victorious Folko. The great Richard gave me welcome, as beseemed that mirror of knighthood; and on my craving his choice of a champion for me from his garden of heroes, leading his favourite knight before me, he bid him kneel, and sue for the grace of consecrating to me the last drop of his blood. How proud was I now! with what an eye of unconcern did I behold Folko's appearance at court to renew the combat for the ring! Ah! my hopes were all in vain! I ought to have known that the knights of the Frank country were mostly superior to the English in the skill of the tourney. My brave champion, it is true, was aware of this, and had

settled that the joust alone should not carry the day, but that the unhorsed combatant should be free to grasp his trusty falchion; this, however, only made Folko's victory more toilsome and more glorious, but not the less sure. With three deep sword-wounds, my knight was borne swooning from the lists; while Folko kneeled to me, and with comely modesty craved back the prize. The noble Richard would have persuaded him to solace himself with his newly-won right, and leave the guerdon itself to the fair lady, who parted with it in such bitter tears.

"'Great king, and noble chief of all Christian knighthood,' said Folko, 'fain, for my part, would I leave to this enchanting lady the free ownership of the ring, and hold my life, moreover, forfeited to her, in that I am guilty of the tears that trickle from those beauteous eyes; but as it is, the jewel falls to Blancheflour de Montfaucon, my sister, and in naught dare a true knight be remiss to his lady, as your knightly majesty best may tell.'

"To this the king of the Lion-heart could make no demur; and once more despoiled of my ring, I withdrew, in deep sorrow, from court. Still I lingered in the neighbourhood, hoping that as knightly trial of arms had always favoured Sir Folko, so fortune and cunning might remain favourable to me. Things were thus, when I heard that Sir Folko was bent upon

a journey into the land of Wales, to see with his own eyes the old places and ruins where King Arthur of the Round Table had fought and dwelt with his knights. Resolved to venture my utmost, I hastened before him into the mazy mountain ranges, and disguised in a rusty armour of ancient fabric and well-closed helmet, I waited for him in a lonely valley, through which he would be obliged to ride. He came, and in a nicely feigned voice, which my vizor happily served to render still more hollow, I challenged him to deadly fight. He demanded my reason, and my name. These I refused to give, and made as if I fancied that he wished to escape me. Down then he sprang from his horse (since I was on foot), his heavy arms glittering and crashing so, that I was nearly swooning away with fright. But I kept my stand, vowing that I never would fight with him till he should take off his wizard-ring; it was well enough known that that was what made him invincible, and that he otherwise was weak and timid as a child. With an angry cry he tore the iron gauntlet from his hand, and threw the ring on the grass.

"In a twinkling I had seized it. Loosing my casque and throwing it from me, 'It is to be hoped now that Sir Folko,' said I, 'recognises Gabriele de Portamour, and is too nobly favoured to spoil a defenceless lady of her ring, or even to thwart her journey.'

"He bowed in silence: 'But I hope to have the honour,' said he at length, 'of meeting you on peopled spots, where you never can lack a champion.'

"I then vanished from before him, and, on horses purposely held in readiness, with an arrow's swiftness I gained the sea. Favourable winds wafted me across to the Saxon land, which I had fixed upon from hearing that it was the true resort of honour for gallant souls and trusty knighthood. And, sooth to say, the noble Count Archimbald von Walbek has pledged himself to me for death or for life; and I am free from care with so renowned a warrior at my side, who never yet was vanquished by mortal foe. While relying on him, I wear the blue and gold blazon of the house of Montfaucon, to foreshow the right which the ring gives me to their domains; though gladly will I leave them these, if I may but keep my dear and wondrous ring. Perhaps, too, the puissant Folko has long ago given it up and forgotten it; for, since leaving England, I hear not a word of him anywhere; so that I well may rejoice in my happy wile, and look forward to that peaceful repose which may acquaint me with the secret virtues of my gem, of which I as yet know scarcely any more than a few unfathomed riddles."

Otto and Bertha thanked the fair Gabriele for her tale, in words of the fairest courtesy.

"What a beautiful ring it must be!" whispered Bertha.

"I will gladly show it to you, sweet child," said the smiling Gabriele, and drew it on its golden chain from her snow-white bosom. Two serpents of virgin gold, in mingled coil, bore jewelled crowns on heads of blood-red hue; these were set round with signs, like some which Otto well remembered to have seen on strange weapons in his father's armory; they called them Runic rhymes, and had told him that they came a great way out of the north. Surmounting the serpent-coronets was a bright green gem, that almost looked like the tide of the Danube. But Gabriele said that its hues were the very colour of the sea.

Whilst youth and maiden were thus gazing at the gem, Bertha admiring the uncouth symbols, and Otto, with flushed cheek, stealthily breathing on it a kiss, the curtains of the tent, now brilliant with many a taper, were thrown aside, and Sir Archimbald stepped in. Another knight followed him.

Chapter 3

"Heavens!" cried Otto and Bertha with one voice, as the stranger drew near, "it is the mighty knight Folko de Montfaucon himself!" As it often happens, they both of them, during Gabriele's story, had formed an inward picture of the victorious hero; and the newcomer answered to it in a most wonderful way. That they were not wrong was plain enough from Gabriele's turning so pale, and from the gallant address of the cavalier, who bowed reverentially to her, and asked her if she recognised the knight by whose favour he had been introduced as the one from whom he might challenge, by brunt of arms, the jewelled ring. Gabriele nodded assent, and Sir Archimbald spoke thus: "Warrior unknown, it befitteth me, then, to unfold to thee that I am the Count von Walbek. Thou wilt have heard of me, and it resteth with thee whether thou wilt tilt with me for the prize, or wave thy claim to it in peace."

A bright flush mantled on the knightly Montfaucon's cheek, and his dark eyes sparkled like the far flash of the lightning-cloud; yet he bent in courtesy,

and, in a gentle voice, "I know not, Sir Count," quoth he, "if it seem worth while to thee to vanquish Baron Folko de Montfaucon; but this I know, that the pride of fighting with the renowned Archimbald von Walbek would alone awake in me the desire for combat, had I no other cause to battle."

"Shall we to the lists this evening?" asked Archimbald.

"This noble lady must give the word," replied Folko, "it may perhaps be unwelcome to her, after the fatigue of travel, to witness our tourney."

"Rather today than tomorrow," said Gabriele, in eager alarm. Upon this, Archimbald went out to arrange the scene of fight; the knights first agreeing that he who left the ring marked out, under whatsoever plea, should be held defeated, and have no further part in the fray. Moreover, the encounter with the keen falchion might follow the running with the lance, as had been the law of fight in the knightly school of the King of the Lion-heart. Whilst, then, Sir Archimbald was without, making preparations for this solemn trial of skill, Folko had taken up Gabriele's lute, and sinking down at her feet in elegant ease, was gracefully toying with the strings. Splendidly he looked in his mail of deep-blue steel, and its rich setting and chasing of costly gold, with his dark-brown hair, and finely-turned mustachio, beneath which

the rosy lip smiled so winningly forth, displaying two rows of teeth of pearly whiteness. Gabriele, but ill at ease, fixed her gaze in mute impatience before her. He who had seen them both sitting there, in like array of azure and gemmed with gold, would scarcely have guessed that theirs was the converse of foes, but rather that the lady had presented the knight with the beautiful blue scarf, inwoven with gold, that swept from his sinewy shoulders adown his slender girth, and that he now sought to tender his thanks in the softly-wooing sounds of the guitar. Things, however, did not long remain so peaceful; Archimbald quickly appeared at the portal of the tent in fearful array; for he had already donned and locked his helm, the quaint vizor of which formed the head of an eagle, with a huge silver beak, and matched so oddly with the rest of his grotesque armour, that he might easily have been deemed the denizen of some fabled land of wonder.

"All is ready," said he; and Folko bounded, light as a feather, on his feet, laid the lute with the most courteous care on the cushioned floor, and, with fair greeting, left the tent. Then Count Archimbald tendered the lady his arm, and led her into the open air. Otto and Bertha followed, with glowing and astonished looks, as though they had been transported

in a dream to the fairy world of their often read and often sung legends.

Without the tent, a bright glitter shone dazzlingly from amid the olden darkness of night. A wide circle, roomy enough for two steeds to charge and manoeuvre in, was encompassed with a festive garland of blazing torches, which spired up in red cloudlets of flame to the pitchy firmament, shrouding the space beyond the ring in the deepest and most shapeless black, but lighting up every floweret in the dread arena with almost more than noontide brilliancy. Archimbald led Gabriele to a seat, prettily fashioned of turf, and spread with the most costly coverlets; it was so placed that she sat exactly opposite the centre of the challenge-ground, where the knights would encounter the shock. Round her stood the rich retinue of herself and Archimbald,—Otto and Bertha were at her side,—whilst on the opposite barrier, through the red blaze of the torches, a medley of foreign and richly-arrayed forms might be seen, who, no doubt, belonged to the serving-train of the Baron de Montfaucon. Now, whilst Archimbald, craving leave of the lady, turned to the right, towards his warhorse, Folko was descried on the left, issuing forth on his swan-necked nimble steed of silver-gray, with helmet donned, and already closed, of the most tasteful fashion, and all of gold. As his antagonist

was not yet addrest to the fight, he trotted in playful manoeuvre over the lawn, swaying his willing steed, it seemed, more with words than with the rein. As soon as it came near the spot where Gabriele sat, as if at the beck of its master, it bent its forelegs, then started again with a mighty caracole in air; and with such light bounds that it almost seemed to fly,—the gold bells jingling pleasantly on saddle and head-gear,—it sped back to its place. There it stood submissively still, a caparisoned statue; then beneath the rich coverlets, bending its pliant neck towards its lord, it seemed to fawn upon him, and to ask him if it had done everything aright; while he drew off his gauntlet of steel, and kindly patted the neck of his charger,

A strange contrast to this was Archimbald's coal-black steed, spotted white with foam, rearing and plunging, and threatening to rive the chain-rein by which two horsemen strove with might and main to hold him; and then to see Archimbald, with one bold bound, spring deftly on the restive creature's back, urging him with the keenly punishing spur to still wilder gambols; swaying him many times hither and thither, and plying rein and limb with amazing power and dexterity, till at last the charger owned his lord, and stood rooted to the spot at his pleasure. But the eyes of the black steed flashed so fierily, that

they might well be likened to torch-brands; while he dashed his right forehoof with violence to the ground, as though hollowing a grave for the foe of his stalwart rider.

Now both knights, in token that they were waiting the fray, bent low to Gabriele, till their tall waving helm-plumes almost touched the ground; and then, with lances couched they again sat erect and still.

Gabriele's white kerchief flew upward in the darkness of night, shrill trumpet-blasts sounded, and the combatants rushed with such lightning-speed at each other, that their encounter was scarcely seen before the ear caught the crash of the splintered lances, and the loud rattling of the mail pieces after the gigantic shock. But the combatants had sped past, without swerving in the saddle; and bringing round their steeds at the reverse corners of the course, they now stood still, each astonished, as it seemed, to see his antagonist in his seat.

"Fresh tilting-spears!" cried Archimbald; and squires ran up, leaving their masters the choice among a variety of powerful weapons. When they had chosen and poised their new arms: "Two lances more, knight of Montfaucon," cried Archimbald; "is it not so? And if that do not finish it, we will fight it out with the naked sword-blade."

"I am a guest here," said Folko, politely bend-

ing, "and honour every cup in which my noble host pledges me."

Again the trumpets sounded, and again the two knights flew to the shock; this time, however, with such impetuous violence, that both the chargers sank back on the crupper, till, hotly spurred by their riders, they again sprang up, and sped past each other to their posts. Folko's lance was shivered in a thousand pieces on his antagonist's breastplate; Archimbald's spear was simply snapped. At this, both Walbek's serving-train and Montfaucon's shouted for joy; for each saw in it a happy omen: the latter vowing that their master must have given the firmer thrust, and that the count's lance had only glinted off. The knights were armed anew; the third trumpet-call was wound, and as they closed with burning fury, Folko's silver-gray was seen to rear on high, and totter from the violence of the shock; while its rider, skilfully bending to the saddle-bow, plied his golden spurs, and urged his charger to bound lightly forward; Archimbald's black steed, on the other hand, plunged and fell: then, no longer curbed by the hand that now hovered lifelessly over it, it gathered itself up in its rage, and,—itself and its quaintly harnessed rider looking like two evil spirits,—scoured in mad fury over the lists, dashed out of the circle amid the blazing torches, and vanished. The rattle of the falling mail, in the gloom

of night beyond, told that Archimbald was on the ground. For some time Folko remained quietly in his bounds; he then alighted, stroked the mane of his silver-gray, cast the broken lance-helve from him, and, with drawn sword flashing amid the gleam of the torches, stopped into the middle of the circle. No one advanced to meet him; and outside in the darkness was heard the hollow murmur of the horsemen and squires, hasting to and fro, about their prostrate master. Then cried Folko at length: "Sir Count von Walbek, your black charger bore you from the lists against your will. That shall not be reckoned; be it free to you, with the bright falchion, to repair your disaster: I stand and await you."

For a long time all was silence. At last, "My lord has fainted," cried a squire; "He can fight no more," cried another voice; "We must away with him to the next convent, to the monks," said a third; and in a moment after, the train was heard tramping slowly and mournfully over the mead.

Then Sir Folko returned his shining sword to its scabbard, and moving, with raised vizor, to the spot where Gabriele was seated, he begged her, on his knees, for the guerdon of fight. The beautiful damsel, amid a warm flood of tears, pulled a little thread of gold, and drew forth the ring from her tender bosom: how differently had she done so a short time before,

when she showed it in triumph to the youthful strangers! Still was it unloosed from the thread, when Otto, stepping up before the knight of Montfaucon: "Let a suit of armour, noble sir, be given me, with horse, falchion, and lance; and I will fight with you for the jewel, in the name of this noble lady, if she deem me not unworthy of the honour." A ray of glad hope mantled faintly on Gabriele's countenance. At once she thought of the numberless old legends, in which youthful heroes, ere boyhood was scarcely over, had worsted renowned champions and mighty giants in defence of hapless damsels. Folko was again on his feet, and keenly eyeing his unlooked-for adversary. Of a sudden, however, he turned away with a smile; and looking back upon Otto: "Young squire, young squire," said he, "where hast thou thy golden spurs? Dost thou think it already time for thee to battle with knights? Three sword-strokes, and a night-watch over thy arms: and then hie thee to me again, and right gladly will I meet thee." Thereupon he again kneeled before Gabriele, and craved the ring: and scarcely had it in his hand than, courteously bending, he was again upon his silver-gray charger, and dashing away with his service-band.

In a bitter flood of tears Gabriele turned to her train: for immediately, on the unfortunate issue of the tourney, having begun, at her wish, to strike the

tents, and load the sumpter-horses with the baggage, they had now brought that business to an end. Not an hour longer, said the weeping maiden, would she tarry on so ill-starred a spot; and without giving the least heed to what Otto said, or to his offers of aid, she turned sharply away from him, as from a silly, forward child, and rode off into the gloom. Otto called after her: "God help me, noble lady; but I will never rest till I am a knight, and can lay your ring at your beautiful feet." But this protestation, too, she seemed not to notice. And soon in the far distance he could hear the light tramp of her palfrey over the moor.

Alone and deserted stood Otto and Bertha on the eventful spot. All seemed like a dream. The half-burned torches, the scorched and trodden grass, alone vouched for the truth of those strange apparitions. Neither found aught to say to the other; but they silently turned their steps homeward through the deep gloom of night; sadly changed to what they were when, a few hours before, they tripped down to the green. Once or twice only said Otto on the way, "Are you crying, dear Bertha?" But she always answered, "No," and wound her kerchief closer round her head; so that Otto thought he had been deceived, and had taken his own involuntary sighs for Bertha's weeping.

Chapter 4

In the vaulted hall of his ancient castle sat Sir Hugh von Trautwangen. There were hung the warlike accoutrements of himself and forefathers, and there too he had been used to pass the greater part of his day, since age had debarred him from the hunt, the tilting-ring, the tourney, or the fray. But now the two tapers that lit up the large round table from their sconces of massive silver were almost burned to the socket; and son and niece, quite contrary to custom, still let him wait for them in vain. As often as a footstep sounded on the winding staircase, the old man thought the two young people were coming, and, in kindly longing, glanced towards the door; but when a page entered, to see perhaps that his master still had light, and wine enough by him in the large flagon, which had been cast from silver medals, Sir Hugh would look as if he had not at all been expecting anything, and this or that expression of uneasiness on the part of the servant would meet with no answer; or at most it would be, "Young blood—merry hearts! What is there to mind about? All will come right."

But the clock in the castle-tower struck nine!—ten! and neither son nor niece stepped forth from the deep darkness without into the hall of their home. From his bald head the old man took the little green-velvet cap, held it in his folded hands, and fervently he prayed that God might not reckon to the innocent children the many sins of his youth, but lead them back of His eternal goodness, guiltless and safe, into the castle.

Still he prayed, when the large oaken door opposite him flew open, and the two whom he longed for stood before him in the hall, their faces glowing with all the freshness of youth. For that once he had heard no one on the stairs, and the fulfilment of his prayer broke quite unexpectedly upon him; as the right sort of fulfilments usually do, coming sweetly and suddenly upon us whilst we ask for them. The young pair felt quite touched and sorrow-stricken when they saw the hoary old man sitting bareheaded in the opposite arm-chair, with folded hands; pale with many years and with the anxiety that but just then was over, and still paler from the low-burnt tapers between him and them. They felt keenly for whom he had been praying, and they at once raised their hands in the same thankful gesture on high, imploring pardon. But Sir Hugh had recovered his accustomed mien; he replaced his cap, and motioning

them to him, he asked them, in a grave but kindly air, what they could have been doing that kept them out so long.

"Father," said young Otto von Trautwangen, "if we had but stayed just a very little longer, we should all of us, as seems to me, feel better and more light-hearted than we do, and the beautiful lady with the ring too; for then the fray would be settled already, and triumphantly for us, it is to be hoped; but, as it is, Heaven knows how long I shall have to trudge through the world after my vow—and that all comes of your not earlier having dubbed me knight."

Sir Hugh gazed with amazement on the face of the bold boy, not only on account of the strange words that he had uttered, but still more so because his look was so altered, as if in a few hours he had become quite another creature. But Bertha, without any disguise, began bitterly crying, perhaps still more bitterly than Gabriele had before done for her ring.

At this Otto looked round quite astonished, and observing that his favourite's eyes were red and dim with many an earlier tear, "Ah, dear Bertha," said he, "then you were crying though on our way back! Why, then, did you always say 'No' when I asked you? And why do you cry at all?" Bertha answered him only with a mingled smile of kindness and of pain; then begging leave of the old man to go to rest

for the night, and hiding her face with her hands, she passed out of the hall.

Otto would have stayed her, but a stern look from Sir Hugh held him spell-bound to the table; and when Bertha was gone, "Young lad," said he, "you have either been dreaming and raving, and in that case tomorrow will make all right of itself, or you are really in earnest with your vow and your knightly journey, and then a tear or two in your little cousin's eyes are of less account. Seat yourself opposite to me, and tell me plainly and advisedly what has happened to you, and then we will soon set matters straight together."

When now the boy began to tell his tale, and got further and further in it, the old man too began to grow very grave, and so markedly so towards the end of the story, that he could not take his eyes off a huge sword that hung not far from them on the wall, and peeped half-shown from its sheath.

When the adventure of the mead was ended, "Sooth," said Sir Hugh to the old sword, "thou hast anon had something to object against being hidden, and hast never quite been willing to sheathe thyself, oft as I have tried to lay thee in peace and repose. Now I see thou wast not altogether so wrong. Out with thee, then, old comrade; and, Otto, reach me him down without more ado."

With a shudder of awe, the stripling turned to the object of his father's address. He felt as if it might almost be some suddenly risen spectre, or other thing of fear. But it was only the well-known weapon that flashed on his eye, though glittering with unwonted brightness in the flicker of the struggling taper. So he joyfully grasped the golden hilt, and, unheeding the rattling fall of the massively-mounted scabbard, he bore the naked falchion to his father. "Ha! the joyful sight," cried he; "not more cheerily sparkled the, knight of Montfaucon's blade in the circle of torches!"

"Of the knight of Montfaucon's blade much might be said," rejoined the old man, as he poised the huge weapon in his hands, "and still more might be said of hasty vows and suchlike; but of this by and by, or not at all perhaps; for vows must be kept, and you have given yours to Gabriele. But if you ever chance upon a jeweller, who once had a costly stone that he would in no wise part with, but in whose diamond-flash he sought to refresh and strengthen his aged eyes till death, till some wandering princess bore off his gem in spite of vow and prayer; or a gardener, who, in stilly joy, cherished some little flower in the snuggest corner of his nursery, till a wanton dove came darting downward, and, tearing it up, root and stem, winged away with it over the

sea;—oh! if you ever see this, or the like of it, then guess what old Sir Hugh must feel now." Two big drops, bright as crystal, started in his age-sunk eyes, as he strode firmly into the middle of the hall; and when Otto, humbled and touched to the heart, would have embraced him: "Young warrior," said he, "this is too serious and solemn an hour to allow of aught that might be branded as soft-hearted foolery. Kneel, young Sir Otto von Trautwangen. Our business now is to dub thee knight."

Otto, with folded hands, devoutly bent the knee. He almost looked like one of those monumental statues that we often find at young men's tombs—pious, simple, and expectant of a happy resurrection. Sir Hugh took the huge sword, and thrice touching the shoulders of his son with the flat of the blade: "Bear that from me now," said he, "but never again from another." Then placing himself in front of the youthful knight, he said, "Sir Otto of Trautwangen, in virtue of my power as knight and banneret, I have devolved to thee the sacred dignity of knighthood. Acquit thee worthily of thy charge, to the succour of the fair, of widows, and of orphans, but, above all, to the glory of our most holy Redeemer Jesus Christ. Rise, then, and come to my arms, and let us be boon comrades together."

So hearty and fond an embrace had father and

son never known till that solemn moment, when, over and above every other tie that bound them, they had become brethren too, and companions in arms. Thereupon Sir Hugh, with the old sword in his hand, strode towards a large shield of golden brightness that hung immediately over his chair. Thrice he struck violently upon it, at measured intervals, till the high halls rung again, and the saloon became full of armed menials.

"This is Sir Otto of Trautwangen," said he to them, holding his son by the hand; "and now must this dear young warrior hold his night-watch over his arms. Carry, then, the silver-bright mail down into the chapel, for his shall it be now; and he who means well to the house of Trautwangen and its youngest blossom, let him abide wakeful tonight, and pray God that these solemn hours may bear lively fruit for time and for eternity. Amen."

And they bent their way down the winding staircase to the chapel, which jutted far out eastward from the foremost walls, and formed, as it were, a bulwark of the castle. Then the squires-at-arms laid the shining furniture of war down before the altar. Sir Hugh blessed his knightly son, placed the old sword in his hand, and left the hallowed spot with his serving-men; whilst the youth, with noble grace

and drawn sword, planted himself like the watch of paradise before the silver-bright war-suit.

Chapter 5

Far aloft in the heights of the chapel burned a single I amp; and so wondrously did it light up the vaulted roof with its rich span of arches, entwining each other, and towering up like organ notes from the taper shaft, that the eye wandered, as it were, through forest-boughs to the open sky; whilst the under part of the building lay sunk in dubious darkness, as earth and her fantasies mostly do to the simple ken of mortals. Pious thoughts at first kept hold of the young knight, to the exclusion of all others. He bent the knee, folded his hands on his sword-blade, and raising the golden hilt as a crucifix aloft, he fixed his gaze devoutly on the brightness of the root above him. He thought on his sainted mother, of whom his only remembrance was, that she had died on a journey in the open forest, and, smiling sweetly on him, her weeping boy, had pointed up anon to the clear blue sky of spring; for then she could speak no more. Other memories crowded closely on that of his mother's death, till the fancy of the stripling, step by step, was led onward to the present hour.

Then it occurred to him, that till that day the chapel had been an unknown and forbidden spot to him, and with mingled curiosity and awe he sprang to his feet. Picture on picture became visible on the neighbouring walls, some stepping out in such bold relief, that the twilight, with its varying light and shade, moulded them almost to living forms; others again, lightly painted on the flat surface, seemed but shadows among other shadows thrown upon them by the flickering I amp. He felt as though all this pictured array must form part of his father's life, of which he had learnt little else than he now knew of the walls of the chapel: certain configurations were clear to him, others were scarcely guessed at, and the chain of the whole was ill understood, and veiled in misty obscurity. Thus much he could plainly see, that, on one hand, tombs were there, with their solemn adornments; on the other, weapons won in fight, and suits of mail of wondrous fashion; for far and wide Sir Hugh had roamed, both into the holy Orient and Europe's blooming West; and again to the northern land, where there is more winter than summer, and where the sun remains unseen for many weeks together. From all these distant regions some effigy or memorial seemed to have found its way hither, betokening in narrow bounds, as it were, the richly-chequered life of the veteran knight, now on

the verge of a still narrower limit. Large banners and Mahometan horse-tails waved in the night-breeze, and crooked sabres with richly jewelled hilts hung sparkling by rusty swords and battle-axes of olden date; corslets burnished as for the fight were there, and the sternly chiselled visages of aged men, or the gentle faces of women with pale, moon-like hue, shone beside them from the walls. Ah! one among these there was that riveted his eye with the sweetest witchery he had ever known. Some gloomy armour almost intercepted the view of it; and yet, he thought, it could be no other than his departed mother. It was just as if she raised her hand on high, and beckoned him to her. And he would have stepped to her at once, but he knew not whether it befitted his rank of knight to stray so far from the arms he had to watch; for the painting was quite at the other end of the chapel. Then arose a strange struggle within him that banished peace; his mother seemed still to beckon to him, and at last he thought he could even hear the sweet voice that from his early childhood had so often sounded in his dreams. "Ah, my darling boy," it seemed to say; "ah, one, one moment only! Think how long I have been dead, and away from thee. Ah, one moment only! God will guard thine arms." Well might the young knight assure himself that his outward ear heard none of all this; yet it

struck too touchingly on his heart: so bending before the white marble effigy of the crucified Saviour that surmounted the altar, "God-Man," spake he in prayer, "Thou too so lovedst Thy mother. Be guardian, then, over my arms, whilst I go to see if yonder figure be the image of mine." And therewith he walked courageously to the wished-for spot.

And it was his own dear mother: she was portrayed as in the thick shade of a forest, her arms stretched towards the clouds, and as he had only seen one of them before, it had appeared that she was beckoning him to her. Now he plainly saw that they were directed to none but God; for her light-brown eyes were uplifted to a golden triangle, that became visible in the deep-blue vault above her. What the picture wanted in the freshness and reality of life, the moist eye of the young knight easily transfused into it. He quite felt as though he again saw the clear spring-sky before him, to which his mother had pointed in that well-remembered hour, and the shady bright-green forest, that so winningly encircled them. And the colour, too, on his mother's cheek, so nearly blanched and faded, was unspeakably touching. He kissed it reverently, and said, "Thanks to thee, dear, good limner, that thou paintedst her when lifeless and cold; for my father and the rest would not let me see the beauteous corpse. But now it has just

happened as I wished." Here he paused musingly, and pondered whether this could be her grave. Too gladly would he have thought so, and here poured forth his silent prayer by the dear remains; but he could not at all call to mind that a coffin had come with them into the castle, or any solemn obsequies been held there.

At this moment a current of air swept through the vaulted hall. The door rattled at the lock, an old banner above the young knight's head began to rustle, till he started up surprised from the depths of his musings, and looked hastily round to his arms. Then it seemed that a gigantic figure stretched forth its long black arm between them and him, and made a snatch at his confided treasure. Like ready wrestler, he sprang upon the dark apparition, and as he seized it, its helmet and other equipments fell rattling to the ground, and from behind the cloud of dust, which the rusty furniture threw up, a fleshless death's head grinned jeeringly at him from the trunk of his foe. In mad dismay he made a blow at it with his sword, and death's head, armour, and all, fell clattering at his feet. Then only he saw that no goblin mocked him, or other godless tenant of the grave; but that he had taken one of the figures along the walls to be hostilely moving, and had hewn it to the earth. It was a strange task to set up the old trappings in their

places again; but, above all, to repoise the death's head on the shoulders of the mailed block, and to lodge the rusty casque on the top of it. Thus engaged, it looked to him as though he had hewn a deep cleft in the skull, which now, therefore, grinned on him in pain. This fancy quite got the better of his senses; and when all was in order again, he tore off the helmet once more, to convince himself of the truth. He beheld many wounds of various depth on the whitened bone, and was well aware that he had made but one blow: yet one of these, he was sure, was his doing; and he made haste to cover up the ghastly head again. Then stepping to his arms, he bowed before the crucifix, and implored forgiveness: "Lord, I have sinned," said he, "in that I have swerved from my post. Thou art almighty, and the best guardian of all things; but to me, and not to Thee, was the watch committed." Then it appeared to him as though his crucified Lord looked kindly on him; and he again felt undaunted. Often as thoughts of horror would rise, at his having held his first knightly encounter with a helpless corpse, yet he fancied anon that his mother whispered rhymes of solace in his ear, out of a song of old Master Walther's, which he had so often heard.

"Night flies away before the sun,
And fear doth into transport run,

and grim death into life."

So boldly and blithely he paced up and down before his arms; and when he again fancied that the beauteous face was signing to him, he would only give it a friendly nod, and gallantly saluting it with his naked falchion, would say, "I cannot leave now, dear mother, for I am on the watch of honour."

At last the morning, with its dear fresh blush and fragrant breath, came peeping through the lofty windows; the key turned in the lock, and Sir Hugh entered the chapel.

Chapter 6

Sire and son, with a sober gravity, and love that told of sorrow, exchanged their greeting: then Sir Hugh strode toward the altar, took the arms from the steps, and began to brace them on his boy. The latter could scarcely bear to receive the service of such venerable hands; but knowing the laws of knighthood, he stood still whilst the old man arrayed him in cuirass, gorget, and thigh-piece, placed the helmet on his head, and at last, kneeling down, buckled on his golden spurs. But father and son were equally astonished withal, that the huge sword, the sheath of which the old knight had brought with him, should now slide obediently into its hiding-place; for till then it would scarcely enter more than halfway.

"It seems almost," said Sir Hugh, "as if this strange old fellow had got a notch more or less over-night." Otto shuddered almost, when he thought of the blow that he had inflicted on the death's head; and as they passed, on their way out, the suit of mail that shrouded it, a shy, involuntary glance escaped his eye.

"What," said Sir Hugh, drawing up, "did *he* dis-

turb you? I should scarce wonder at that; for it was quite his way in his lifetime." Otto made no reply. But by the clear daylight he was still more astounded at the unwonted mould of the armour; and, above all, at two monstrous vulture-wings, of raised gold-work, that jutted out from the helmet, and which he had taken in the night-time for two mighty horns.

In this form they were almost more hideous to look at; and the young knight could not help thinking of several strange and fearful legends which his father had formerly told him, about a dreadful man with vulture-wings like these on his helm.

But how quickly was skull, and vulture-pinion, and all else in the world forgotten! For close by, the dear heavenly countenance of his mother, so yearning and so pale, looked forth from the pictured wall. "Ah, good father," said Otto, "can this be the grave-spot of the beauteous departed one who bore me?" In solemn silence Sir Hugh only shook his hoary head. "Do, then, I pray you," continued Otto, "lead me to the spot where the dear remains repose, that there I may pray once more before I set forth into the world. These live-long years, in my childish ignorance, I have failed to do so."

"This is no time for thinking on graves!" cried Sir Hugh, and drew the young knight briskly and almost angrily from the chapel. They stepped forward

to the castle-rampart in the fresh and crimson glow of morning. Before them lay the Danube, mead, wood, and distant mountain range, all dotted and garlanded with wavy light and glistening dew. "Not so soft-hearted, I pray thee, young knight of Trautwangen," said Sir Hugh, stoutly shaking the hand of his son; "there is time enough for weeping and sighing when thou art as old as thy father, and even then one must not let it be seen. Wait here and bathe eye and heart in the cool freshness of the morning and when everything is ready for thy journey, I will call thee away." So saying, the old warrior strode down from the rampart to the castle. The young knight remained above, thrilling with joy at the words and bearing of his father, and lighting up still gayer hopes after the rich span of country that lay in the distance before him, ringing with the warble of the lark and the song of the shepherd.

As he paced in this wise up and down, pleased with the jingle of his silver trappings, that chimed in so merrily with the gay scene around, his hardy foot struck against something in the high grass that gave forth a tone, mournful and plaintive, as if from undeserved wrong. Stooping down, he beheld Bertha's lute; and in truly deep thought must she have quitted the spot, to have left her favourite playmate in the damp moss and chilly dew. He bent over the

poor lorn warbler, clasped it in his arms, and sitting down on the grass, he drew off his brazen gauntlet, to fondle the more tenderly and solace the forsaken one. It sounded so sweetly, and even joyfully, as he ran over the chords; and, in a clear, high note, he sang the following song:

"To the May-breeze, everywhere
Fair
Spring awakes in beauteous seeming,
And beside
Mirror floods of arrowy tide
All is loving, hoping, dreaming;
Speed then out.
Cull the leaves
That sweet spring weaves
About
Court and pleasance-ground and garden
gleaming.

Though in boyhood's easy glee
We
Feel our childish hearts grow fonder.
Well we may,
While we knit the band in play,
Or through scenes of home so meekly wander.
But when light
Of sunnier sheen
Tells of keen

Delight,
Little ties like those are burst asunder.

Then they stir their burning flood—
Blood,
Heart, and soul, and sense, contendent,
Soon as pride
Calls to high-born lady's side.
And coy love turns heroine resplendent.
Maiden shy,
By garden stream
Of others dream;
But I
Must win my way where favour smiles
attendant."

"Is this, then, in real earnest, your parting with me?" said Bertha, who, in the meanwhile, had stolen unseen to Otto's side, and was now gazing on him, if not with such bright eyes, yet with brighter tears than before.

For a moment Otto remained in silent thought, then—"Dear Bertha," said he, at last, "the song has betrayed almost more of me than I myself was aware of. At first I only wished to frame a carol to spring, and then the stream of my whole inner fountain came gushing out in truthful flow. But listen to me, dear cousin; we cannot, after all, deny that it is just

as my song would have it. The strange lady, with her grandeur and her distress, has quite fired my heart; and this is the very thing that noble minstrels call knighthood's love. Our little playful doings were only child's sport. Come, now, smile and be merry; some wondrous stranger-knight will be sure to come, and make you quite forget your simple, childish Otto."

"He will not come," said Bertha slowly. "And as for the fine lady's distress, I too—" She blushed and paused.

"But ah!" cried Otto, in a fit of enthusiasm, "if you were ever to be in distress, my life, my all I have, were yours."

"But I will not at all be saved by thee. Sir Otto von Trautwangen," rejoined Bertha, with haughty coldness. "Believe me, had the pagans bound me to the stake, as we often read in fine old legends about noble ladies, and the torches were flaming and hissing round the arid brushwood, and thou wert to come galloping up, in all the armed splendour that now clothes you so gloriously, and offeredst to fight for me, I would say, 'Avaunt! my champion thou shalt never be! More fire! more fire!' would be my cry. Ah! and then, I ween, my own poor tears should stifle it. And yet too warm are they for that."

And herewith she sank, bitterly weeping, on the grass. In the conflict of feeling, Otto pulled at the

strings of the lute. One of them sprang in twain with a loud and plaintive cry. Bertha rose at the sound. "See," said she, "how you deal with everything that belongs to me. Why, then, did you draw off your iron glove just now? With that you might still quicker have snapt the poor thing asunder. My lute! Sir Otto von Trautwangen, that at least is mine." And she tore the instrument from him, and walked away. He called after her in vain; she cradled the fondling in her arm like a wounded child, lured forth its softest and most soothing tones, and, without looking back, vanished with it behind the chapel.

At this moment Sir Hugh called to his son from the court-yard of the castle. "All is ready, all is ready!" he repeatedly cried: "to horse, young sir." And the youth hastened below, where he found a number of serving-men in readiness, and one of the squires held a light-bay steed with gilded bridle, which till then he had never dared to approach.

He stepped forth; and Sir Hugh said, with a painful smile, "Partings like these give pain, young soldier. Well, to horse at once, and try how so noble a creature can suit himself to your sway."

And the young knight guided the charger this way and that with powerful supremacy, till the squires were astounded, and felt that the noble steed must recognise his real master, and that the power of the

latter over him must be of peculiar and unheard-of import. Dismount again, my dear son," cried his old father, with outstretched arms, "that I may once more press thee in fond fervour to my heart." And with clattering weapons the son swung himself from his horse, and flew to his father's embrace. The charger snorted wildly on the squires that caught at his rein, plunged out at them till he had cleared his way, and then trotting up to his young lord, he stood still at his side, and laid his head fawningly on his shoulder, whilst he caressed his aged father.

"Now, my son, God speed thee!" said Sir Hugh, softly withdrawing from that embrace of love; "thy train attends." "My father, thou wilt not deny me one boon," said Otto; "it may be the last I crave, for I am setting out on a far journey, and haply have many a tough encounter before me."

"My son," rejoined Sir Hugh, "every word of evil import we must shun. Misfortune is quick to entangle us, and finds an easy ascent by means of those things which to our wishes are insurmountable precipices. So say nothing about last requests, but tell me rather thy boon itself; and little, I ween, shall I deny it."

"Dearest father," said Otto, "as far as I have read or heard of true-born heroes, they always ride alone on their first adventures. So did the great Seyfried, and thus have the best knights ever done. But you

talk to me about a train, and here I see a whole band of serving-men standing around us. Do not send me out like a spoiled child, but as a stalwart fellow, whose merry heart and ready hand carry his own weal, and that of many others, along with it."

Whereupon Sir Hugh bid the horseman and squires, one and all, lay aside their riding-gear, and tarry at home. "For," said he, "my son has begged of me in such guise, that it were a great sin to answer him with a rebuff. And on thy part, young knight, speed thee quickly forth, or at last thy aged father's heart will soften. Thus much only I say to thee: deal as sparingly with the noble Baron de Montfaucon as thy vow permits; for he is not so very wrong about the ring, after all."

Then the young warrior flew to horse, and sped out of the castle; while old Sir Hugh, in bitter tears, went back to his hall, with the stamp of such venerable sorrow, that not one of his people had courage to look him directly in the face.

Whilst now Sir Otto trotted lightly over the mead, Bertha and the old minstrel, Walther, were sitting on the rampart, watching him in sorrow; for the old man had just come on a visit to the castle, and the maiden had confided to him her whole tale of woe. She was just beginning to weep anew, but, "Song stayeth sorrow," said Walther; "let us warble

the young knight a lay for his pilgrimage." And he began as follows:

"The old man's strength is sapped and shaken.
His wanderings past away;
But thou thy youthful course hast taken
To many a distant fray.
For there's the fray of young lips meeting.
The fray of spear with spear;
How soft and sweet that hurried greeting,
How bitter that, and drear!"

Then Bertha sang:

"But thou shalt share the sweet ones only—
The bitterer all unknown
Though sorrow wring this bosom lonely,
And death soon claim its own.
Though in some bower of love thou lay thee.
The grave my couch shall be;
Then cull anon, I will not stay thee,
The lily cull for me."

Walther was intent on continuing the song; but Bertha signed to him to stop, for she could not bear it any longer, and buried her face in her veil. By this time the soft sound, wafted on the morning breezes, had wound its way to Otto. He quickened his pace and lowered his vizor, that he might hear no more.

As it was the first time that he had worn a closed helmet, the world looked quite strange through its open intervals, as though seen through some beautifying optic-glass; and in the fresh light of morning, all seemed to swim in a burning red more than any other hue; so that the young warrior could not refrain from sending a loud cry of jubilee into the wondrous scene before him; and forgetting every thought of pain, he flew, like the young bird of May, over mead, and heath, and field.

Chapter 7

Where the stream of the Maine winds its silver streak of glassy blue towards the old imperial town of Frankfort, and villas, and fruit-fields, and shining villages beckon across to each other from its smooth and genial shores, a delightful life awaits one. He, especially, who in the beginning of spring may draw a breath there, and who, in all the full, vague hope of a youthful warrior, is riding out in quest of his first adventure, tastes such a cup of joy and gladness as in afterlife will not often be raised to his lips. Something of this sort has he experienced who now is writing, and much he wishes his readers had known it too; both for their own sakes, and because they would then be the better able to realise that merry sense of delight which wove, as it were, a net of gold round the young knight Otto, in that beautiful country, and round every object that met his view. He could not tell which was the more delightful to him,—the spring or his journey; the blossoming fruit-trees and softly-undulating hill and vale, or the happy beings who peopled them.

In such a train of thought he reached a hostelry, not far from the banks of the stream, the caves of which, entwined with vine and jasmine leaves, gave the young traveller a friendly invitation to his noontide rest. His noble charger was soon led into the stable, and fodder shaken into the rack. All this the knight had to do himself; for, true to his wonted pride, the noble steed would let none else come so near him; and now Sir Otto sat beneath the shady eaves,—with flagon and cup before him, and the noble Rhine wine,—glittering with a deeper gold, from the depth of the dark cool green that embowered him.

At this moment a man emerged from the doorway, not much older than Otto in appearance, but with grave and sunburnt visage; armed as a knight, but with equipments so soiled with rust and dirt, that he seemed to have come from some far journey. His armour, too, was wholly without adornment: the buckles and straps that held it together were unconcealed, and fitted to it just as it could best be managed, without any care for arrangement; so that he must have contrasted oddly enough with the young silver-clad drinker at the table. The stranger paid his salute with a certain blunt and hearty courtesy that was almost tinctured with moroseness; he

then seated himself opposite to the young knight, and ordered wine for himself.

At first Otto was not quite pleased with his drinking comrade; he thought the pleasant images that, borne upon the sap-green foliage and the sunny sky, had cradled themselves on his senses would fly at the sight of this man, without leaving anything better in their stead. But it soon appeared that the stranger belonged to a class of people whom we may meet with even nowadays in our good Germany; sharp-cornered, unpromising pebbles on the outside, though on the lightest touch beautiful and brilliant sparks fly out of them; and he who can test their interior with true alchymistic spirit, is likely to find a vein of costly gold beyond compare. The stranger had travelled far and wide in the world, and yet had always remained a good stanch German, or rather he had thereby become one; for the contrast it was that clearly proved to him how dearly his old fatherland should be prized. The two young knights became quite pleased with each other, and felt still more at ease on a third person joining them. He was a young merchant from Frankfort, Tebaldo by name, and had been sent to Germany for a few years, he said, by his Italian relations, to familiarise himself with the trade and traffic, the noble genius of the imperial towns, and their great commercial affairs. In the course of

their varied conversation, the strange knight told the following story, which Otto and Tebaldo listened to with the greatest attention.

"In the distant northern land of our German brothers, the Swedes, there are people still held in the meshes of heathenism and horrid witchcraft, and more than all towards the frontier of Finland, because their wicked neighbours there have nothing better to do than to call up ghosts and genii, or, by dint of ugly charms, to work their enemies all manner of mischief in body, lands, or household. Just on the Finland boundary-line lies a circular mountain, overgrown on the Swedish side with dark brushwood, on the other with pine-trees, so wondrously close together, that the smallest bird could not find its way through the tangled trellis-work of the branches. Below it, at the foot of the brushwood, stands a chapel, with an image of St. George, who has been planted in the desert there as border-guardian against the dragons and other monsters of paganism. On the other side, and skirting the firm-set pine-grove, are said to stand the cottages of certain hideous sorcerers; while a deep, deep chasm reaches down into the mountain, and even forms the junction-line with the yawning gulf of hell. The few Swedish Christians who live so far up in those parts thought, besides the good saint, to provide another doughty guard against their evil

neighbours; and they therefore chose for this special service a renowned old warrior, who had turned monk in his old age, and made him tenant of the chapel-hermitage. On his removal thither, the son of his earlier wedlock would never leave him, but became his servant, in prayer or penance standing dutifully at his side, with as little thought of quitting his father as he ever had in former times in the tumult of battle. A very edifying life it was these pious sons of knighthood led.

"Once upon a time, the young liegeman of God went out in quest of wood. He carried a sharp axe on his shoulder, and was girt, moreover, with a ponderous sword; for as there are so many savage beasts and wicked men thereabouts, the pious hermits had a dispensation to wear the arms of knighthood. Now as the good young man was rambling about in the thickest part of the copse, and could already see the pointed pines towering over the brushwood,—so near had he approached the Finland boundary-line,—a huge white she-wolf came springing on him from the thickest of the bushes, so that he only had time to slip on one side, and, being unable to seize his sword, to dash his hatchet at the foe. The throw was so well aimed, that, with shattered forefoot and a painful howl, the wolf fled back into the forest. 'But,' thought the young hermit-warrior, 'it is not enough

that I am saved: I must take care that no other man henceforth be either harmed or even frightened by the monster.' And in a moment he sprang nimbly after her through the thicket, and levelled such a heavy blow on her head, that she fell moaning to the earth. Then, all at once, a strange feeling of pity for the animal came over him. Instead of killing it outright, he raised it up, bound up its wounds with moss and limber withes, and at last bore it to his hut, in fervent hope that it might, after all, be granted him to heal his fallen foe, and tame it at last by fostering gentleness. He did not find his father at home, and in the height of his anxiety he laid his wondrous capture on his own bed of moss, over which he had drawn the figure of St. George; and then turning to the hearth of the little cottage, he sought to prepare a healing salve for the poor animal's wounds. But, in the midst of his task, the moaning, plaintive accents of a human voice seemed to issue from the mossy pallet. And what must he have felt when, on turning round, he beheld a wondrously beautiful damsel in the place of the wolf; the blood gushing through her gold-bright hair from the wound which he had dealt her, and the right arm, which his hatchet had shattered, hanging motionless, in all its delicacy and whiteness!

"'I pray thee,' said she as he turned towards her,

'do not kill me quite. The little drop of life which is left me gives me pain, indeed, and perhaps it will not last long; but yet I am sure it is ten thousand times better than this fearful dying.'

"Then the young man kneeled down, weeping, beside her; and she told him how she was the daughter of one of the wizard-men who lived on the other verge of the mountain, and how he had sent her out in that charmed form to gather herbs, and she had only rushed out so in fright and fear. 'But you broke my arm in twain at once,' continued she, in piteous strain, 'and I really did not mean so ill by you.' How she had been so suddenly transformed, she could not at all understand; but the young man saw very clearly that the neighbourhood of St. George's picture must have released this poor victim of witchery from the spell that bound her.

"Whilst now the hermit's son was thus kneeling at her side in tears, and trying to soothe her, the pious old man came home, and soon saw how matters stood; that the heathen girl, for-sooth, had been disenchanted and freed from her wolf-like garb, and the youth become doubly bewitched by the sweet sway of love and virgin beauty. From that moment all his care was to heal her spiritually, just as the son was intent on the bodily cure; and as their united endeavours met with the best success, it was commonly agreed

upon, as the stripling had made no vow, that the lovers should marry and return into the world.

"The beautiful girl was now quite well again, the day of her solemn baptism and consequent marriage was fixed, when, one fine summer evening, the two betrothed ones went for a walk together in the wood. The sun was still high in heaven, shining so warmly on the green earth through the spreading beeches, that they never grew tired of rambling, but dived deeper and deeper into the forest. The bride told tales of her former life withal, and sang the sweet-sounding songs which she had learned as a child. Idolatrous and impious as many of them seemed to the bridegroom, yet he could not check his dearest maid in her singing; first because he loved her above everything, and then again she warbled with so sweet and clear a note, that the whole forest seemed gladdened by it. But at last he caught sight of the pointed pine-tops once more, and would have turned round, to avoid approaching the accursed Finland boundary. But the bride said, 'Why should we not go farther? I should so like to see the place where you wounded me on the head and arm, and took me captive, that you might afterwards heal me so delightfully in body and soul. It must be close by here.'

"They searched about this way and that, and it grew quite dark in the wood the while; the sun went

down, the moon rose, and of a sudden the betrothed pair stood on the Finland frontier, or perhaps a little beyond it; for the bridegroom started with fright as a pine-branch swept his cap from his head.

"Then a strange scene of life encircled them; a large number of owls, cobolds, wizards, cave-sprites, and hags of the mist,—for the stripling learned these and stranger names he knew not how,—were dancing in hideous whirl; and the bride, after watching them for a time, burst into a wild excess of laughter, and at last joined madly in the dance with them. In vain might the bridegroom cry and entreat—she heeded him not; and she at last changed to so unheard-of a form, that he could no longer distinguish her in the frantic band before him. Yes; once, as he sought to drag her away with him, he found, instead of her, a woman of the mist in his grasp, who at once enwound him in her wide gray veil of woe, and would not let him free again; whilst cave-sprites were tugging at his legs, seeking to drag him down to the coal-black pits beneath. Happily at this crisis he signed the sign of the cross and spoke the Saviour's name; when these hideous mockeries set up a piteous howl, dashed wildly asunder, while the youth fled away to the Swedish frontier, and took refuge beneath the shady brushwood. But his bride had disappeared with them, and no endeavour of his could bring her back again.

Often as he came to the boundary-line, and begged and shouted and wept, yet she would never return. Now and then he might see her, perhaps, glancing through the pine-shades, as if bent on the chase, but always in the company of hideous creatures, and quite savage and disfigured. For the most part she did not notice him; but when she did catch sight of him, she laughed at him with the most unchastened and revolting merriment, till he signed before her, in terror, the sign of the cross, and then she would fly howling away. In this manner he grew more and more silent day by day; went out no more in quest of his bride; and at last his only answer when spoken to was, 'Ah, she is gone over the mountain!' Naught did he know of any earthly object but the lost one. At last he pined to death. His father made him a grave, as he had once requested, on the spot where his beloved had been found, and lost again; and much fighting did the work entail upon him,—now with the crucifix against evil spirits, and now with his veteran sword against wild-beasts, which the sorcerers and wizards must needs have set about his ears. However, he accomplished it at last; and now it seemed as though the faithless bride bewailed her lover's death; for ever and anon a sad moaning was heard at the grave. It is very like the cry of a wolf, indeed, but human sounds may be clearly distin-

guished in it; and I have many a time heard it there myself in the long nights of winter."

They sat for some time after this in earnest thought; till at last Tebaldo began to speak as follows: "The pains of truant love, the sighs we send to looks that once allured and now repel us, the wounds received from a hand more dear than every other,—these are the fellest witch-tokens of the fearful beldame who holds us one and all in her adamantine toils, and whom we are wont to call Nature. They say, too, that she generally bestows on mortals this better aftertaste of her richest sweets, as contrariwise kind mothers give their children some delicious dainty after the bitter draught that heals them. I know a story of similar purport, and am ready to tell it, if it will give my noble comrades any pleasure."

The two knights begged to hear his tale, and he began:

"It must be five-and-twenty years ago or more, that, in my famous birthplace Milan, there lived as beautiful and lovely a girl as noble artist ever dreamed of, or skilfull limner's pencil ever wrought. And with all this she was modest, discreet, and gentle-minded, and, despite her strict seclusion,—for the diamond sparkles from the closest bower,—she was honoured by the whole town with the name of the beautiful

Lisberta. This Maylike flower of lovely Mayland (you Germans give our Milano a far prettier name than we do) was one day entreated to array herself in bright apparel, and to walk in the procession on the festival of one of the saints, that her lustrous beauty might enhance the brilliancy of the pageant. Remembering that God had granted her this luxuriant grace, she deemed it a pious duty to let it beam forth in honour of the Giver. She decked herself, therefore, in the loveliest guise, with flowers, jewels, rings and chains, and bright vesture; in short, with all that deserves the name of adornment; and as, long before the pageant began, her graceful task was at an end, she was lured by the sunny rays of spring on her lattice to stroll a while in the splendid garden laid out by her father, the richest merchant in the town. Wandering along the embowering avenues, among odorous plants and trees of golden fruitage, she at last reached the clear mirror of a shady fountain, that peeped up from the pretty garden's embrace like an enamoured eye, the sworn vassal of beauty. Ensnared and enchanted by the magic of its spell, she too, on her part, gazed a down into its depths, and beheld there so lustrously beautiful an image, that it almost fared with her as with the fabled Narcissus, who forgot the whole world for his fair semblance in the stream. Anxiously did she turn her gaze on the things around her, to save

herself from that perilous spell-work of the waters, and at last was surprised by a wondrous shining, resembling flashes of gold and silver, in the grass. Flying from the glassy flood, she hastened up to the singular floweret, and found it to be a splendid sword, with golden hilt, silver-mounted scabbard, and faultless beauty of form. She took it up like a toy, shy as she otherwise was of such formidable implements; she even drew it halfway from the sheath, and wondered to see her face look still more beautiful on the polished steel than when reflected from the flood; though she felt far less afraid of this mirror of her loveliness. Ah! poor Lisberta, the real danger was at hand, that, like a merciless sickle, was to cut off the sweet flower of thy life! What though the bright blade spare thee,—yet not so he who wore it!

"For now, from forth the blooming thicket, stepped a lofty knightly form, no longer young, and yet not old, and with such heroic grace of air, that the fair Lisberta almost bent the knee to him in involuntary homage. 'Wound not thyself, lady,' said the knight, 'with that sharp toy. Rather would I see my heart's best blood gush forth in triple stream, than that a drop of the soft purple that courses through thy veins should come trickling from thy pearly fingers.' Thereupon, with well-bred air, he took the weapon from her hand, hung it in the sword-belt at

his side; and before he could say another word, servants came calling for Lisberta, as the festal pageant had already begun. The timid girl made a sign to the noble knight, and, reverentially bowing, he vanished behind the green barrier of the garden. How utterly the glittering train, the song of the choir, and the huzzas of the multitude, were lost on poor Lisberta, I can scarce describe to you, noble knights. My heart bleeds to think how the beautiful victim waned, and too gladly have I dwelt on the happier tissue of her life, in the consciousness of the sad future that was coming. Allow me, then, from this crisis in her history, to pass more hastily to its end.

"On the evening of that scarcely appreciated festival, while the fair girl was sitting at her flower-wreathed lattice, rapt in delicious reverie, the parting sun shining brightly on her face, she could not help noticing that one of the high, wavy plants, which wound their tendrils round the higher trees of her garden, had freed itself from its fastenings, and instead of clambering up its guardian stem, was trailing down from the window-sill to the terrace below. Rising to bind up the branch again, she beheld a figure flit by beneath her, in whom she too surely recognised the cavalier of the glittering sword. Hastily she stepped back, quickly drew in the tendril, and behold, on its just now drooping point, a little note, fastened to it

by the dread yet handsome wanderer, was drawn with it into the room. On opening and reading the letter, she quickly learned from the knightly stranger's love-suit that he was a warrior from distant lands, who in Milan was called Signor Uguccione. He was greatly honoured for his chivalrous and social virtue, and months before she too had heard of him, in many a tale of peerless wonder. Her wounded heart, then, was all the sooner won. Anon was the blooming creeper released from its fastenings, sinking with its pretty errand, like a gentle carrier-dove, to the terrace below, and soon drawn up again on the same service, with Uguccione's answer to his lovely mistress. In this pretty way were greeting and response wafted up and down many times together; and at last even Lisberta herself flitted down the secret stairs that led from her chamber into the garden, where, beneath the shadow of night, she might converse undisturbedly with her beloved Uguccione.

"But in course of time, though Lisberta's letters glided down on the limber plant, yet no one went by to release them from its tresses. On drawing it up again, she found only the seal of her own disconsolate woe—her own unopened letter upon it. At last she began to inquire about Uguccione; and learned that many days before, he had disappeared from Milan in an incomprehensible manner. Still the poor thing

never ceased to loosen the plant day by day from its fastening, and let it down to the terrace; and then when she drew it up without the wished-for letter, she would weep bitterly; and she did this so long, that at length, in excess of sorrow, she died of a broken heart. A friend had the blooming creeper planted on her grave, and I have often seen its leaves and flowers shedding umbrage and fragrance on that lonely spot."

Chapter 8

Deeper and deeper the shade of woe had gathered on Tebaldo's cheerful countenance during the recital of his story, so that he seemed quite changed at the close of it. The merry toper of the moment before now looked the funeral guest, whose heart was lying in the dark grave with the buried one. After a few moments' pause he recovered himself, and said, "You must not be displeased with me, noble knights, if I have spread a dark pall, as it were, over your cheerful banquet and golden wine-cups. I am at other times a light-sped youth, and take glad part in boon-carousal and merry meeting; yet the story I have just told often thrusts itself betwixt me and my pleasures, and till, at such times, I have disburdened my heart of it, it never lets me rest in peace. This all comes of kinsmen and kinswomen taking me so often to Lisberta's grave, and telling me there of her loveliness and truth, and of Uguccione's treachery: the tale has pretty well grown up with me, and taken root in me. Signor Uguccione may look to his life if he ever should fall in my way. I can scarcely think of

any greater pleasure than to plunge his gold-bright sword into his heart, shouting in his ear the while, Lisberta! Lisberta!"

His glowing eyeballs here flashed like the murderous fire of war, that flames out over an exasperated land in the dark hours of night. But Otto gave little heed either to this or to his last words of menace. His whole soul was rapt in the story, and in the doleful thought of forsaken love. At last confiding melancholy took the seal from his lips, and he began to tell his comrades (though without mentioning family names) what had befallen him,—how happily he had lived on the banks of the Danube, from his childhood upwards, with his innocent affection for his little kinswoman Bertha; how, at last, lured away by powerful yearning, he had broken that early lovely tie in sunder; and how the pain of lost affection, which the two stories had told of, had made the sorrows of his beauteous little cousin weigh heavily on his heart; and he at length finished his half-childish, half-manly talk, by asking whether his two comrades thought that Bertha too might die, like the hermit-knight and the beautiful girl of Milan.

On this the strange knight looked him keenly in the face, and with an icy coldness, which seemed to mantle over his whole countenance and frame with hostile and petrifying power, "As ye have so much

to say," said he, "about the Danube and Bertha, may your name be Otto von Trautwangen, and your fair little kinswoman's, Bertha von Lichtenried? Scarcely had Otto answered both questions with a "yes," when the stranger rose, and donning the heavy helm which he had brought out under his arm and laid down at his side, "It is well that we are met here," rejoined he; "for I am Sir Heerdegen von Lichtenried, Bertha's brother. After a long course of roaming, I am bent on a visit to my little sister, now budding into womanhood, and have just come in the nick of time to take vengeance for her on a conceited and light-headed chatterer like you."

His concluding words stifled in Otto's heart every thought of reconciliation, however much he might have been inclined to it at first, and with ringing mail he started up to grasp his casque and sword. But on the Italian's endeavouring to throw in a soothing word or two, whilst Otto was buckling on his weapon, "Trouble not yourself, I pray you," cried Heerdegen; "if the young silver-bright coxcomb has spoken the truth, the thing calls for vengeance; if he has childishly lied, chastisement is quite in place."

By this time Otto was standing at the entrance of the bower, and beckoning his foe towards a thick line of bushes, that wound for some distance along the banks of the river. Heerdegen closed his helmet

with a clash, and strode forth at his adversary's side; whilst Tebaldo, with a great show of merriment, kept pace with these men of steel, or strolled on a little in advance of them.

"Pardon me, noble sirs," said he, on their way thither, "if you see me so merry over this solemn affair of yours. Never, my whole life long, have I wished for aught more racy and refreshing than to witness a fight for life or for death betwixt two heavy-armed knights like yourselves. Yes; I should have been glad enough to enter upon this grave diversion at my own peril; as it is, I have at most managed a single bout with cowardly, light armed banditti. And if people really will fight with each other by way of sport, it is the most foolishly courteous farce that can be imagined. Praise and blessing, then, on my good fortune, for helping me to so dread and glorious an eye-feast today; for I know of a surety, ye will bear yourselves like heroes!"

Where the bushes entwined their dark branches in the closest embrace, a clear lawn opened its verdant barrier to the angry knights. Without more ado, they at once came to a stand, and straightway unsheathing their swords, they fell on each other with impetuous fury; while, at a short distance from them, Tebaldo leaned against the trunk of a lofty lime-tree. The sword-blades went whirring and hissing through

the air; not a blow fell flat; but each skilfully caught on the ringing shield, or, recoiling from the plumed crests of their helmets, besprinkled the green turf with the down of feathers, rather than with blood. Sir Heerdegen shouted the while from his rusty vizor, in the choking voice of anger, "Bertha, Bertha!" and Otto seemed to stagger at the fearful cry, little as the foeman's steel could make him cower. Now Lichtenried's blows fell more hotly and crashingly; young Sir Otto began simply to guard, without further thought, it seemed, about offensive onset, and half his shield flew in shivers from his hand. Then he suddenly rushed on, like a wounded lion; lightning flame seemed to have shot through his soul, revealing the very hue and fashion of its brightness; for the young warrior, wildly hurling the shivered buckler behind him, and grasping his glaive with both hands at once, shouted, "Gabriele! Gabriele!" as though his silver helm had found a silver tongue. Shrill rang his resistless blows on his foeman's casque, and mail, and shield. Anon gushed a red rivulet from Heerdegen's vizor; and when, retreating from the crimson shower, the young Trautwangen stayed his sword, Lichtenried sank down effortless and powerless, and, with clattering arms, fell tottering on the grass.

Tebaldo and Otto kneeled down beside the lifeless one. The helmet, almost shivered by that blow of fury,

was soon unloosed, and the seething blood lay like a purple coverlet on Heerdegen's visage. As soon as Otto, who, by the custom of knighthood, was skilled in the art of healing, had stanched the stream as might least give pain, and washed the clotted gore away, they found the wound to begin at the left temple, passing between the eyebrows far down the right cheek. The bandage soon lay firm and aptly fixed; but the knight too lay in his deep still swoon, as motionless as a corpse. Thus pale and blanched, and suffused with a soft expression of languor, the resemblance to Bertha spoke touchingly in his features. Otto bent over the fallen one, and shed a bitter flood of tears. An old legend now broke on his recollection, which Bertha and he had heard a long time before from the lips of old Sir Hugh. It was about a knight who had unwittingly slain his mistress disguised in hostile mail; and now it seemed to him as though he had given the final death-blow to his poor Bertha. "Yes, the final death-blow!" said he aloud, "that is the real truth of it. For the first death-thrust was my heartless farewell, and with her brother's loss I shall have killed her quite."

The young merchant now reminded him that it was time to get the wounded man back to the hostelry; "for evening gathers," said he, "and rest in bed and under cover is necessary above everything."

They therefore raised their pale and rigid burden on their shoulders, no longer the merry carouser of the morning, placing him so that Tebaldo should support his head; "for," said Otto mournfully, "should he wake upon the way, he would much rather see your face so near his than mine. And besides, I might fancy it was Bertha's corpse, and let him fall in the mad terror of the thought."

In the hostelry Lichtenried again came to himself. Two serving men, who were in attendance on him, applied themselves to nurse him; but when the sick man remarked that Otto was bent on tarrying longer, and even awaiting his recovery, "Sir Otto von Trautwangen," said he, "if ye are minded to do me a favour, ride hence this evening—nay, this very-hour; for the sight of you has grown so hateful to me, that I should die, beyond a doubt, were ye much longer to force the nauseous drug upon me." Otto, therefore, sorrowfully mounted his horse, and with the stars faintly glimmering above him, and the sweet scents of evening around him, he rode along the high-way with Tebaldo.

Chapter 9

Two ill-matched horsemen they were, who now trotted on together beneath the night-sky of spring. Otto's soul seemed to have drunk in the whole darkness of the hour, but Tebaldo, on the contrary, the fragrance, the serene quiet around him, and the twinkling lustre of the stars. He tried to pour a portion of this happy humour into his companion's bosom; and his efforts failing, he sang all kinds of love-songs, in the sweet language of his country, as they passed on beneath the cool blue shade of night. Nor did Otto feel himself at all annoyed by this. From his understanding little or nothing of the words, he could the better fancy that one of the nightingales from neighbouring copse or lawn kept flattering on at his side, with one unbroken chant; and it soothed him to be able to mould the pretty tones into that sense which chimed in most welcomely with the feelings of his heart.

In this way they at last surmounted a grassy eminence, and the great free imperial town of Frankfort, with its countless lights, shone upon them from

either bank of the Maine. Otto reined in his steed in amazement. Such an array of beaming windows the knightly scion of the lonely castle had never yet beheld; and the farther the houses stretched out into the darkness, the more convinced he felt that one of the most skilful and festive illuminations was before him that had ever been seen on earth. Tebaldo regaled himself for a time on his noble comrade's astonishment. "Yes, sir knight," said he at last, "this is the far-famed city of Frankfort; and if you are minded to ride in with me, and to honour my house so far as to become my guest, you may happen to see things still more wondrous and delightful."

Whereupon they rode on past pretty gardens and pleasure houses, situated outside the gates. Most of the buildings were amply lighted; and the sound of the lute and the song, and the clang of the ringing pledge-cup, came pealing on the ear; while, sparkling through the pretty tissue of leafy green, from many a high arcade and bower came the golden gleam of the tapers, and still more cheerily sounded the huzza of the merry revellers within. Otto thought he had been long ago in the town, when, at Tebaldo's challenge, the ponderous gates swung slowly apart, and they rode through the arched and echoing barbican, as into a castled fortress, which the young knight at first really took it to be. But when he gazed, from

the other side, down the long illuminated street, he understood that the city itself formed one gigantic burgh, whose burghers, perhaps, were not altogether so wrong about the pride which he had now and then heard old Sir Hugh charge them with.

At this moment his charger started at a dazzling stream of light, which the bright windows of a stately mansion shed from two large bays on the street below.

"Here we are, my noble guest!" said Tebaldo; and from the illuminated hall, a host of gaily-apparelled servants hastened up to take their master's steed, and, at his bidding, to attend to that of the knight. With a noble air Otto vaulted lightly from the saddle, and when the menials caught at his charger's rein, "Gently, sirs," said he, "that is no such easy task; I must lead him to the stable myself, unsaddle, unbridle, tie him up, and even give him his fodder; for he won't suffer this at other hands." The charger's flaming eye and pawing foreleg showed it to be as his master had said, and the servant therefore lit the way to a splendid stable, where a store of noble horses were standing at handsomely finished racks. But these all shrank back in affright when the light-brown steed, led by his mailed lord, paced neighing and stamping through the vaulted stalls, and the knight's earnest bidding alone hindered him from here or there testing his strength against his fear-struck and panting compan-

ions. The grooms looked about for halter-chains, to fetter the spirited guest with. "It is all of no use, good sirs," said Otto; "he snaps such things in a moment; but when I tell him, he remains quiet.—Still, my good fellow!" cried he; and the charger stood quiet as a I amb, and peacefully snuffled at the corn that his master threw into the manger. Whereupon Otto went up into the saloon with Tebaldo, who had been waiting for his knightly visitor at the entrance of the stables.

Gay and many-coloured, and teeming with varied splendour, was the scene that opened to them between those lustrous walls; for a vast concourse of people moved, wave upon wave, beneath the high span of the roof; and in the background there seemed, as it were, a raised platform, where figures still gayer, more strange, and more brilliant, were plying their sport. One might at once perceive that Tebaldo was the king of the festival, for the less-honoured among the company made way for him with deferential obeisance; whilst the grandees of the feast, ladies as well as men,—and among the latter, many with the golden chains of councilmen,—thronged to salute him, and accepted their host's apologies for his late appearance as tokens of favour. The performance on the stage in the background of the hall was hushed, and seemed patiently to await a sign from the lord of

the festival as to whether it should continue or cease, till Tebaldo, having seated himself, with his guest, quite in front, on an ottoman of purple, decided, by a friendly nod, for the continuance of the play.

Now might be seen in the centre of the scene a richly-dressed, gorgeous looking man, sitting in a raised arm-chair, with a number of little bags of gold in his hand, and wearing in golden letters on his breast the name of Plutus, as the god of wealth was called by the olden pagans of Rome. All manner of different figures drew near to this man from every side,—priests, courtiers, men of learning, singers, pilgrims, judges, and so on,—and with the lowliest gestures sought his protection. Then Plutus threw to them, from his gold bags, little or much, at pleasure, and they took leave of him as they had come, each with some short and significant rhyme. At last, too, there came a corseted warrior, who bent most obsequiously before Sir Plutus, and said:

> "Silver for bruises, for blood give gold!
> Give, master, thy gift, and my blows shall be bold!"

Sir Plutus was just about to tender a well-timed answer, when Sir Otto von Trautwangen sprang angrily to his feet, struck the hilt of his sword, and cried out, "That fellow there disgraces his mail, and

I will prove this to him on his head-piece, if he has heart enough to stand to me!"

Half smiling, yet half alarmed, the company cast their eyes on the indignant youth; whilst Tebaldo, in great choler, drove the mountebanks apart, upbraided them with the baseness of their infamous sentiments, and forbade the terrified players, once for all, to enter his house again. Then reddening with shame, he returned to Otto, and begged him, in the choicest and politest guise, not to ascribe the bI ame to him, if that rabble crew had been pert enough to honour the sons of trade by so offensive a comparison with knighthood. At this soft speech, Otto recovered his gentleness and good humour, and craved pardon for having spoken so rashly and unbecomingly on his part; whereupon they one and all repaired with great glee to a banquet which had been prepared with princely magnificence in another saloon.

But, brightly as the lustres sparkled, fragrant as was the odour of the viands, and refreshing the glow of the circling cup—yet Otto could not banish the remembrance of those two hateful rhymes. Not that he in any way felt indignant with his generous host, or his guests; but he could not help feeling that he was being so magnificently entertained for the blood that he had smitten from the brow of the noble Heerdegen von Lichtenried, and was here receiving

"gold for blood;" for whether it were wine-gold or metal-gold, that was all one at bottom. Besides, there was an eternal buzz throughout the assembly about money and lands, and profit and loss, nay, even when Tebaldo (in noble indignation, as it appeared) tried to turn the conversation to the crusade which King Richard of the Lion-heart was soon about to begin, a new computation was straightway set on foot, as to whether the Genoese or the Venetians would gain most by it. Then Otto felt as though the red wine were gushing into the cups from the veins of Christian knights, and as though they were drinking it with zest, as a well-flavoured medicine. Yes, even for him, he thought, Heerdegen was brimming the golden goblet, and his hollow voice murmuring from his shivered vizor in his ear, "Hast thou opened thee a wine-cellar, then, in the depth of my wound? hast thou prepared thee here thy downy couch, after laying me down on my bed of pain? maybe it will prove my death-bed yet."

Here Otto could bear it no longer; all seemed to eddy around him as if in frenzy. So he started up, and begged Tebaldo, in a whisper, to allow him to depart;—that night he must sleep in his hostelry, he said; the reason of this he would tell him on the morrow.

"You need not tell me," answered Tebaldo, in

deep dejection, "for I know already. But, for heaven's sake, come again tomorrow, or else I shall think you despise me too."

Therewith they kissed each other; and escorted by one of Tebaldo's household, Otto aroused his spirited steed from sleep, and led him through the dark streets to a neighbouring inn.

Chapter 10

Now morning began to break brightly in at the windows, and the noise of carriages, coachmen, and criers broke rudely on the tissue of Otto's dreams. Waking up at the sound, he hastily drew on his apparel and flew to the window; for he thought something extraordinary must be going on without. But he soon became aware that the gay tumult, which appeared so singular to him, was nothing but the everyday run of things there, at which no one was astonished; but, on the contrary, everyone would assuredly start with alarm if things were suddenly to be quiet, as a miller would at the unlooked-for stopping of his mill. And he easily understood that so many large houses, most of which might compete in size with the lordly mansion of his father, must contain a vast multitude of inmates, with wrangling or peace in their hearts, and the accents of anger or of love on their lips. Had not much of this sort of thing been rife in the lonely stronghold of Trautwangen since its erection, and of a surety was at work there at that very moment? In that city there might be many a Bertha weeping, and

many a Walther singing, and many an old Sir Hugh asking for his distant son.

In the midst of thoughts like these, the young knight was interrupted by one of Tebaldo's servants, who, by the merchant's orders, brought his well-cleaned and burnished accoutrements into his chamber, and offered to gird them on. He understood such matters, he said. Whilst Otto looked round with complacency on his shining equipments, "I crave your pardon, noble sir," said the servant, "for having left a small spot on the cuirass, just above the pit of the heart. It may be from blood that has but lately spirted upon it, at least it looks so to me; but as it was neglected at first, it turned to rust, which most likely will not stir so long as the splendid armour itself exists. But sooth, noble knight, it is not my fault."

"No, my good friend, it is not thy fault," repeated Otto slowly and sorrowfully, as he riveted his gaze on the cuirass; for too well he recognised Heerdegen von Lichtenried's blood, which must have spirted on him when he bent over him to bandage up the wound. Now the whole suit of mail displeased him; he had no inclination at all to put it on again; so he dismissed the servant with a word of courtesy to Tebaldo; he already had some one, he added, to array him, and would soon follow in person.

But girding on his arms was out of the question.

When left alone, he paced his room in heated mood, passing his armour like a timid steed; and if he ever *did* approach it, it was only to conjure up every possible device for rubbing out blood-spots that he had learnt of his father's old squires and serving-men, and thereby to convince himself more and more how utterly vain was his every endeavour. "It will not stir," said he with a sigh; and then strode along more ruffled and disheartened than before.

At length a loud talking in the next apartment caught his ear, a fuming and execrating, to which he was quickly alive; for a service of armour was the matter in hand, which ill-suited the owner, and would not at all let him brace it on. Wishing to escape from his troubled thoughts, and the painful throbbings of his heart, he pulled the door violently open. A half-accoutred knight stepped forward with equal impetuosity, and asked what he wanted. But they both stood stock-still with astonishment; for Otto at once saw that he had the late adversary of Folko de Montfaucon, Count Archimbald von Walbek, before him, who, in his turn, seemed to recognise in the stripling the witness of his disastrous conflict. Matters were soon explained.

"I am not vain enough," said Archimbald, "to wish you to bear me company in my fall before the arms of the Frankish baron. Much rather should I

rejoice from the bottom of my heart, if you were again to win the fair Gabriele her ring; and albeit, to speak the truth, there is little likelihood of this, yet no one knows what awaits him, either in evil or in good. Good speed, then, to your enterprise. All may turn out as you wish. But now, by the by, just hear how cross things go with me. Exasperated by that ill-starred evening, I had sworn never to wear my black-and-silver eagle-mail again, and vowed, once for all, to go without any sort of armour till I should sheathe myself in a suit which, without cuirass or thigh-piece, I had won from some other knight. In this I have at length succeeded. But, see now, what cursed spider-shanks of limbs my antagonist had. I can neither thrust myself into arm or thigh-piece; in very vexation, I have just thrown the puny chain gauntlets through the window-panes, and nowhere will back or breastplate meet."

And at that very moment, while the knight stood there with his armour half braced on, some of the buckles snapped with his vehement gesticulations; and on two squires stepping up to repair the damage, Archimbald ordered them indignantly back.

"There is nothing to be made of it," said he; "give yourselves no further trouble; and as for taking the wretched stuff off me, I alone am man enough for that."

So saying, he tore buckle and strap clean away, and hurled the plates so violently to the ground, that nail and rivet flew rattling out. Pensively then he turned his gaze on the black-and-silver mail in the corner, which Otto easily recognised by the eagle-helm: "When I wore ye," said he, "I was still a man; but now, I ween, I shall never find furniture that fits my limbs aright. "

On hearing this, Otto was reminded of the shyness with which he had but lately eyed his silver suit; "Sir Count," quoth he to Archimbald, "it strikes me that we are well met, and may easily help each other out of our distress. If you have sworn never to wear your armour again, I too have a suit in my room there which I do not like to put on anymore, for reasons that I am equally loth to tell you; but, on my honour, they are not such as would do the mail discredit."

"You do not look as if it would, young warrior," replied Archimbald, with a friendly smile.

"Well, so be it," cried Otto; "then let us change."

"Done," said Archimbald; "I think the metal will suit us, for we are both of us of the high old Teuton stature."

The silver mail was quickly brought in. One of Archimbald's squires waited on each of the knights, and they soon stood fronting each other in transformed array; Archimbald's mien of defiance lowering

from beneath the softened sheen of the silver helm, and Otto's blooming, almost maiden-like features from under the menacing eagle vizor. Then they stalked up and down with ringing step to the reverse ends of the chamber, to try how the new storm-attire suited them. And when they both were pleased with the exchange, each shook the other's gauntleted hand, and closed the bargain; Archimbald rejoicing with all his heart to think that the eagle-mail might, after all, give the dainty Folko de Montfaucon a warming: "For," said he, "a warming you will be sure to give him, Sir Otto; your stalwart hand, and your noble, martial mien, stand pledged for that."

Thus they parted the best of friends; Archimbald to make ready his horses for departure, Otto to gladden the young merchant with his promised visit.

In his spacious and richly-stocked wareroom stood the wealthy Tebaldo, surrounded by a host of clerks and servants, and a multitude of carriers, and purchasers besides. Curious it was to see how he ruled like a mighty prince the whole business of the place; settling this matter, or by a single wink distributing that, and yet never disdaining to lend a hand where it was needed; nay, even sometimes grasping the ell himself to measure off pieces of costly cloth. He was in the very act of doing this when his eye fell on Otto, though without happening to recognise him;

for although the young knight had been looking on a long time at the entrance, yet the silver-black eagle-mail entirely transformed him, and his vizor, moreover, was closed. Despite of this, Tebaldo flew to him with devotion, as the iron is wont to do to the magnet; for all knightly accoutrements were a magnet to the iron of the young merchant's heart.

"Can I serve you with anything, high and war-like sir?" said he; "you shall be waited upon before everyone else. "

Whereupon Sir Otto threw up his vizor; and, "Good heavens!" cried Tebaldo, starting half terrified back, "how much more glorious you look than even yesterday! and must I then stand by you with the ell in my hand?"

So saying, he dashed the slender trade-wand against a pillar, and shivered it in pieces. As it was composed of gold and ivory, all the servants thought that he could only have done it against his will. Most of them ran up, picked up the shattered bits, gathered the loose pieces of inlaid work together, and assiduously sought to comfort their master, by assuring him that the costly implement might be again set right. He, however, heard nothing that they said, but hastily drew the knight with him up the stairs of his mansion.

On himself and guest reaching an elegant and

retired apartment, Tebaldo grasped both his hands in his own, and bending over them with a glowing countenance, "For heaven's sake, noble knight of Trautwangen," said he softly, "refuse not to take me as your squire, steedholder, or what you will; only let me go forth with you into the world, armed at all points, and ready for the fight! "

Otto looked at him in utter amazement, and reminded him, in a friendly tone, of his warerooms and his brilliant mansion; and hinting that the stars had pointed out to him quite another path to that which he was intent upon striking into.

"Say not so," rejoined the young merchant with vehemence; "I am a Milanese by birth, and many a Teuton shield, nay, imperial mail itself, has shown that our burgher swords are skilled in cleaving. There is something of the old Roman in us, good sir knight. Yes, you should scarcely judge of your mates at yesternight's banquet by their callous speeches and random chatter. I was vexed at them myself, as you saw; but more so because you misunderstood them, than because it was possible for me to mistake them."

"Not so," replied Otto; "but as there was so much said about prices and goods, it struck my heated fancy that festival and night-couch too were only wares, and the price thereof Heerdegen's blood; so I was forced to go. I tell you all this thus bluntly at once, because

I am now grown cleverer, dear Tebaldo, and know very well that you will pardon me the mad delusion. I have no fault to find with any of them now."

"And you would be wrong to do so," replied the merchant. "See, in how varied vesture God clothes the trees, and grass, and flowers; and yet they all are at peace with each other, and deck the wood in concord. And, in truth, those people adorn most worthily the great forest of Christendom. Not only do they spread a refreshing shade over hill and vale, but stand manfully and firmly before the lightning, when time requires it. The only difference between them and you is, that *their* words put on the jerkin of the trader or seaman, and yours the burnished mail-suit. But the true craftsman disengages, with easy zest, the excellent and characteristic thoughts of each. Then spurn not trading folk, I pray you, and still less *me*, who am bent on a full transfer of myself from them to you."

"Dear Tebaldo," said Otto, "enough of that. You are older, and cleverer, I ween, than I. How, then, should I become your knightly leader, and make up to you, in the world, for all the wealth that you leave behind you here?"

"Well, if I am the cleverer," said Tebaldo smiling, "deliberation will rest with me."

"Besides," resumed Otto, "I am very fond of you;

and it would cut me to the heart if you were to suffer harm. But armed you certainly will be, for you can have had little store of sharp-edged weapons in your hand, to say nothing of your not knowing how to wield them."

Tebaldo glanced at him with a smile of good-natured irony; then turning round, he opened a door, and displayed a chamber full of the choicest corslets, morions, cross-bows, targets, and battle-axes. "These are the accoutrements of serving-men, and not of knights," said Tebaldo; "but I know the use of them."

Herewith he took a beautiful crossbow from the wall, strung it with power, fitted in the shaft, and pointed through the open casement into his garden. "Now for the knot in the old oak-tree there," said he; and after scarce a moment's aim, twang went the string, and away flew the shaft into the distant target, quivering with the shock, and the gay feathers alone peeping forth from the stem. A moment after, Tebaldo stood with battle-axe in hand, which he brought so doughtily down upon a well-braced corslet, that its jarring, sundered rings fell rattling on the floor.

"Will you take me with you?" said he, in cheerful confidence.

"Ah, with all my heart," replied the young knight; "I see you are ready of arm, and cheery of tongue;

so where could I find a better comrade, were I to search the whole world over? But, Tebaldo, my dearest Tebaldo, how about the golden spurs, and your lack of knightly blood: for if you never want to rise to knighthood, what need have you to be my squire?

"Let me only just pass for your serving-man," said Tebaldo, with a gloomier air: "it is not quite as you take it to be. Young cavaliers ride forth for golden spurs, but burgher-lads for burgher-wreaths and victory. When I shall have gleaned at your side the experience of war, and Milan's banner follows me for pleasure or for gain, before all the princes and dukes of Italy, the golden spurs will easily be forgotten."

"I sought not to affront you," said Otto in confusion; and at once the dark fire in Tebaldo's eyes passed away, and a very May-sky of frolic and kindliness came smiling forth from them. He now led his knightly friend down to a sumptuous morning repast; and from first to last the day was spent in carousal and festivity. However, the merchant was now and then called away to important business, which he appeared to transact with the greatest diligence, till Otto almost began to think his riding forth as serving-man could only be a wanton and frolicsome piece of rigmarole. But in the evening, when Tebaldo led him to his magnificent sleeping-room (for he had been obliged to promise him in the morning to pass

the night under his roof), he whispered in his ear, "Tomorrow before sunrise, Sir Otto! A trustee for my property I have already appointed."

And at early dawn, as Otto stood by his charger, saddling and bitting him, a dainty serving-man was quickly at hand, whom, only when he threw himself on his cream-coloured jennet, he recognised to be Tebaldo. With a cordial laugh, they pressed hand in hand, and trotted cheerily out at the gates; whilst, fresh and merry as the young hearts of the travellers, the sun began to beam forth on the green bosom of earth.

Chapter 11

Otto and his companion were now riding farther and farther into scenes all new to them, flying over the borders of their German fatherland, conversing in the Frankish tongue with the people, and encountering, in gay alternation, many a merry or solemn adventure. But, meanwhile, things looked quite otherwise in the old castle of Trautwangen, on the banks of the Danube. Besides Sir Hugh and Bertha, a third inmate had now installed himself there: but he only gave a deeper cast of sadness to the scene; for he was Sir Heerdegen von Lichtenried, who, despite his wound, had hastened on to reach his sister, and from excess of exertion had fallen into a deeper and more feverish state of exhaustion. Not far from the old corsleted hall, where Sir Hugh was wont to pass his day, lay the suffering Sir Heerdegen, that Bertha might be enabled to attend to his wants without quite neglecting her aged uncle. Sir Hugh and Bertha stood equally in need of each other'.s consolation, for Heerdegen, in the sad frenzy of fever, had revealed everything; both at whose hand

he had received the wound, and why it was given. This often made the bright tears trickle down Bertha's blushing cheek, till it almost looked like the crimson morning in the shower of May. Sir Hugh, on the contrary, gazed gloomily on vacancy; and from his son's first fray being of so hapless a cast, he augured all kinds of sad results: yet he mostly changed to a serene smile, that spoke of trust in God, and showed that the gloom which darkled over his features was never meant to pass the barrier of his lips. And when the smile broke out, he was wont to repeat aloud a solacing rhyme of Master Walther's:

> "Night flies away before the sun,
> and fear doth into transport run,
> and grim death into life."

It was the same that Otto had aforetime mingled with his prayer in the chapel. Sir Hugh dared not go near the sufferer; for in the false light of the glowing fever he appeared, in the eyes of the latter, to grow young again, and to take the form of his son; so that Heerdegen would accost him roughly, revile him, and bid him be off, or threaten to throw the whole burning temple-wound at his head, with all its fire and flame. At such times he would furiously clutch at the bandage, and old Sir Hugh would draw a deep sigh, shake his head, and return to the lonely

hall, through whose huge oaken door the two sweet children, Bertha and Otto, could now never enter together.

But when the beauteous girl sat all alone by her wounded brother's couch, and a single lamp shed its soft light from a far corner of the chamber, he was still and peaceable; and at time he would even tell her some little story or other; and among these was the following one:

"Far up on the shores of the Baltic lies a land which they call East Friesland. In this country there reigns an unquenchable feud between chieftains and their vassals; for the former want to manage everything by right of will, while the latter think themselves equally empowered to order matters in the way that seems best to them. So the land is kept in continual din and turmoil by these hateful disagreements, as my head is just now, my pretty sister. But then a glimmering cresset, too, sheds its calm and moon-like halo among them, as when you are sitting at the head of my couch, and I am rocking as in a cradle; shadow here, and light there; or here light, and there shade again. This comes from a high still tower, called the Felsenburg, lying open to the moon, and embathed in her hallowing beams. There there lives one of the daughters of the olden Drudas, who, moreover, is our kinswoman—our wondrous and,

time out of mind, mighty kinswoman, sister dear. She is called the Lady Minnetrost, and every day she boils up a great many herbs in one single caldron, which is made of nothing else but the purest gold.

"One evening I had lost my road, and I stopped unawares in front of the steep castle-hill, which looks far away over the whole level of the land. And tired as I was, and much as I needed refreshment, it seemed to me as though something had planted itself in my way as I tried to ride up the stilly unknown height. Just because it was so still, and so wholly unknown to me, I durst not move on for very fear of myself. Whilst I was thus halting, and taking counsel what to do, something came trotting fleetly and airily over the dew-bespangled meadow. A knight it was, with a fair slender maiden in his arms, who clung to him alike bashfully and fondly, and half sang to him, half said to him:

> 'Spur, dearest, spur thy palfrey light!
> We near the stilly Druda's height.'

While he rejoined:

> 'For stilly Druda what care we?
> Am I not wedded mate to thee?'

But they soon had to cease their love-rhymes, for a host of feudal vassals sprang forward from a number

of little bushes, where they had been in ambush; and whilst a tall slim stripling seized the knight's bridle, crying, 'Holloa, you, where are you off to with my sister?' the others formed round him in a circle with uplifted halberds.

But in a moment the knight had his flashing falchion out of its sheath. 'Thou wilt not get her back so easily,' said he. 'She chooses me, and I choose her. What hast thou to say to it, if thy chieftain claims thy sister? Seest thou not that I am the knight of Edekon?'

'In a few moments you will be the ghost of him,' cried the vassal, 'if you give not my sister back.'

Whereupon the knight struck at him, and a wild combat ensued. As I could see very plainly that the maiden would fain stay by the cavalier, I dashed up to his aid, and made my blows tell on the peasantry. Manfully as they stood to it, we should nevertheless soon have done for them, but all at once (and God only knows how it happened), in the midst of our rancorous cleaving and thrusting, we heard the light clash of a casement, that was thrown open on the steep castle-height, and we were obliged to pause and look up to see what it was. And, lo and behold, the full moon shone brightly on the window, and the Druda stood before it, in her long white robe; menacingly she held up the forefinger of her right hand, and pointed to the clear and starry sky. A thrill

ran through us to our very marrow. We stood still a long time, and so did she.

At length, 'You are very wrong indeed, all of you,' said she. 'One of you is a stranger, and his name is Heerdegen von Lichtenried. He is my nephew, and he must take the maiden gently on his horse, and bring her up to me into my castle. The rest of you go home in peace, and in three days' time brother and bridegroom may come and ask further about matters.'

All was done as she had bidden: bitterly as the maiden wept, savagely as knight and bridegroom gnashed their teeth, and fearful as companionship with the castellan appeared, yet it seemed as if it could not be otherwise. In the deepest silence the combatants parted, and in silence as deep I took the truant girl into the castle.

"How things looked here, my dear little sister, I can ill find words to tell you, and it would be of little use if I could; for no description will open our minds to a sense of things so very wonderful. But look now at the peaceful glimmer of our cresset, look in the mirror at those pensive dew-laden eyes, and your lovely little face and air, and only think that a soft beam, the very softest you can find there, was shed over lady Minnetrost and her castle. I was not allowed to enter, but she bid me tarry beneath a jutty at the gate.

'You will find it pleasant,' said she, 'to stay the time half in the open air, for very bad weather we never have here. What now and then falls in the way of rain is only a gentle, pleasant sprinkling, that refreshes the earth without bruising the blade.—

'And so shall thy weeping be, with a glad sunrise at its close,' said she, turning to the girl; and at that very moment she almost ceased crying, as she looked on the kindly Druda's countenance, all golden in the moonlight.

Then they both went into the castle, and the delicious music of flutes and dulcimers began to steal forth from the inner chambers. I could distinctly hear how sweetly the maiden was being lulled to sleep. Afterwards the Druda came out again, bringing me a large golden goblet of wine, and savoury food on silver patens. She sat down, too, beside me, and told me of her kinship with our sainted mother, and how certain secret, pious lore had, since the memory of man, been the gift of her race; and how she now lived there, and deemed herself chosen to be the soothing genius of the savage land. Her stories were long and of wondrous sort, and lasted the whole night through, as she sat in the moonlight. Often I felt a shudder of awe creep over me; and then again I had the sweetest sensations, just as though our dear

mother were folding me in her arms, and telling me some pretty fairy-tale.

Ere morning broke, the Druda left me. 'You will gladly wait the event of all this here, I ween,' said she; and you may do so without danger.'—So I fell cheerfully asleep, as when under the safe shelter of home.

"The next day or two I sometimes saw the Lady and the abducted one sauntering on the castle-wall, among tall white flowers that breathed the sweetest perfume, and, like spell-bound flames, stood peeping over the battlements. Often would the maiden begin bitterly to cry, and to call for her lover. And then the Druda would neither have recourse to words of solace nor to promises, but she would only look kindly at the mourner with her crystal, moon-like eyes, or break off a flower and coolly fan her with it, or sing her, perhaps, some plain old song. So the weeper would grow calm, and even smile, at times, with wonderful cheerfulness. And the Druda did just the same when the brother and the lover came, every three days, to ask after the truant one, if they began to be impatient, or give signs of menace and violence. She only had to smile, and the angry words floated from their lips like a sigh, or changed to kind entreaties, full of hope and solace. After thrice three days, they all had grown quite good and gentle. So

the Druda gave them back the smiling girl. The bride walked to the altar between brother and lover, and chieftain and vassal remained good friends and kinsmen their whole life long.

"Many a like tale do folks tell of our kinswoman's doings, and rightly they call her Minnetrost, partly because she often solaces and heals a love-sick heart, and partly because her comfort is always loving and kind, and never haughty nor violent."

Chapter 12

As Sir Heerdegen's stories took a gentler and holier tone (and since the above mentioned one, they were almost all about the good Druda), his mind, and body too, and indeed his whole man, grew more peaceful and subdued. Then he began to ask after Sir Hugh, and to behave becomingly and reverently when the old man entered, and to crave pardon, in case the height of the fever had made him say or do anything unseemly. Now Sir Hugh would often sit at his bedside; but this was soon unnecessary, for when once Heerdegen had begun to get the better of his illness, he soon succeeded in shaking it off entirely, sped cheerily to the chase over wood and plain, and at noon and eventide sat by the brimming goblet with Sir Hugh.

Bertha, on the other hand, as her brother grew hale and blooming again, was paler and sadder every day. It was easy to see that nothing had borne her up but anxiety for his recovery and the solace of old Sir Hugh. Now that the two warriors quaffed and chatted, and old Master Walther, with his merry hero-

lays, was often summoned to the castle, the pretty floweret kept quite alone, as such forsaken flowers are wont to do: in woeful songs and sighs and dreams she breathed forth the pure fragrance of her life into the stillness of Nature, and soon, perhaps, would have faded and pined away, like the pilgrim on the Finland border, or Lisberta in Milan. But her brother knew those stories too, and he took his stand by his little sister, like the straight staff of the garden-bed by the tender blossom. Most trustingly of all would she cling to him when he told her about Lady Minnetrost; and it was a keen source of joy to her that the pious Druda had not merely been a shadowy creation of fever in her sick brother's dreams, but that such a wonderful mistress of peace and comfort really did live in the north of East Friesland, and, more than this, was her own kinswoman.

Yet, in spite of this, Bertha's paleness and silent habit increased; and when Heerdegen questioned her about it, she would answer, "The real Lady Minnetrost here below, brother, I shall never see, I ween, face to face. But on the other side of that pit, which is so deep that men often call it the grave, there is nothing else but solace for love; and he who carries us over does it always when we are asleep; so think now what a light hand he must have. "

Such speeches as these Heerdegen would report to

old Sir Hugh, adding, that if Bertha were not speedily and bodily taken to her kinswoman Lady Minnetrost, she would in a few months be seeking her like, as she said, beyond that deep grave. Whereupon Sir Hugh mustered all his nerve, sent for his niece, and solemnly bade her set out, ere long, to East Friesland, with her brother, to visit her kinswoman, whom the people there called Lady Minnetrost. Doubtingly did Bertha look in the old man's face, who had now long since been deserted by his son. Whereat Sir Hugh bursting into a laugh, "Does such a little silly May-bird think," said he, "that a hale old tower, like me, must fall to pieces if it does not come flying round about it as usual?" and with a loud laugh he entered his chamber, and locked the door after him; then two big tears rolled down his beard.

However, on making his appearance again, he made hasty arrangements for their departure; and the blush of the second morning beheld, in the outer court, the sumpter-horses, two horsemen as escort, and Heerdegen's caparisoned charger. Sir Hugh came down the high stairway with the travellers, humming a jocund lay of olden days. He kissed them both, and bid them make good speed to get out of the courtyard. Then at old Walther's side, whom he had invited to while away that and the next day over the goblet, he walked to the rampart and looked

on, as Heerdegen and his sister trotted farther and farther over the glistening mead. And old Walther remembered the while how he had sat on that spot with Bertha when the young Sir Otto spurred his light-brown steed across that self-same meadow, and without meaning anything by it, he again began to sing, as aforetime,

> "The old man's strength is sapped and shaken,
> His wanderings past away—"

Then old Sir Hugh seized the shoulder of the minstrel in fury. With the anger of a lion in his eye, and its strength in his arm, he roared aloud, "I will dash thee down the rampart, if thou thinkest to jeer at me! The old hoar man feels strength enough for that."

Walther was already tottering on the slippery verge, yet he boldly confronted the strong man in his rage. "If ye can forget yourself towards a singer, and a guest to boot, so do then! You are accountable, not I, and the reckoning is at hand."

Old Sir Hugh quivered as he loosened his hold: "For God's sake, forgive me," said he; "fell spirits, you know, have held sway over me in my lifetime, and when I felt so quiet, and perceived that this first taste of loneliness was the beginning of my penance, your song struck on mine ear as that of an utter stranger to me, who was bent on jeering at me in

my powerless old age. He it was that I sought to hurl down the rampart."

"And a pretty penance *that* would have been," rejoined Walther. Sir Hugh stood a while suffused with shame, an unwonted state for him to be seen in; then, "I know not," he began, "whether you have heart or inclination now to go in with me and taste the wine-cup?"

"Why not?" replied Walther; "minstrels know pretty well how to manage with noble, impetuous creatures."

So saying, he followed his stern host into the castle.

Chapter 13

During many a day Heerdegen and Bertha travelled on, and the higher they ascended towards the northern shores, the maiden grew inwardly more cheerful and the young warrior more discontented. She once asked him the reason of this. "It is no better," said he, "or at least very little, than if I were leading you to the cloisters. For when the stilly dame once has you with her, she will certainly not let you go again so soon; and from what I know of you, and your little pensive flower-like heart, you will scarcely sigh to leave the moonlit walls again."

"Well, dear brother," rejoined Bertha, "then all will be just as I like, and I am sure you are fond of seeing that."

"The world is to be pitied, though," murmured Heerdegen; "I should have liked to have led you to the altar."

"Why," said Bertha, "in our good kinswoman's house we shall certainly find all that is needful for the service of God,—chapel, oratory, crucifix, and altar."

"But I meant something quite different by the

altar," rejoined Heerdegen, and looked poutingly down at his horse's hoofs; whilst Bertha, with half closed eyes and reddening cheek, glanced downwards on the other side, among the flowers and grass.

And when after suchlike parley she sought to cheer her brother, pointing out to him how subdued and peaceful the landscape was growing, with its softly-swelling, grass-covered hills, and its tire ATTIRE of verdant hedge-rows, "That is all very pretty in the height of summer," he would say; "but only let winter draw on with the hollow whistle of the storm among the hills, and the snow-drift, burying road and hedge-row beneath its cold unstable coverlet, and then see how the solitary, dingy dwellings lie scattered over the pathless waste, far less like houses than heathen tombs, with the dim smoke of the funeral pile reeking through the russet air,—then you will soon cease to praise the soft beauty of the landscape."

"But up there with the Druda," Bertha would say, "there is no snow or noisy blast, you know."

"Yes, yes, so they say," was Heerdegen's testy reply; "but I have never been there in winter days, for my part."

And then he would go silently on his way; and the more sullen he looked, the more ardently did Bertha's little heart long for her gentle, mysterious kinswoman, and her rich store of charity and love.

One day her brother's countenance grew far more thoughtful than ever; and Bertha fancied from this that they must be very near the end of their journey. Her young heart was beating with dreamy expectation; whilst Heerdegen, as evening fell, looked round, almost anxiously, for a hostelry, without, however, discovering anything but the lonely moss-covered peasant cots COTTAGES. He sent both his serving-men out this way and that to explore; and when a long time had elapsed without their returning, he bid the leader of the sumpter-horses wait for him at the spot where they had halted, and rode out with Bertha in another direction, in quest of shelter. But in the mazy round of hedge-rows and tiny dells they soon quite lost their way; and the stars were mantling the sky with their spangles of gold without the travellers falling in with any shelter for the night, or even knowing how to find their way back to the appointed rendezvous. But all at once they stopped before a steep acclivity. "Good heavens!" cried Heerdegen, "do I deceive myself, or are we really earlier at our goal than I had wished for? Fain would I, dear Bertha, not have given you up till tomorrow. But do look up at the dark mountain there, and tell me if you can, whether there really is a castle at the top of it."

And at that very moment the full moon rose, all golden, over the hills, and the windows of the castle

shone festively in her radiance, bright crosses shot glistening up to heaven from its towers, and sweet sounds came stealing over copse and lawn, whilst the yearning Bertha stretched forth her arms to the gentle beauty of the scene, and her brother sullenly struck his gauntleted hand on his corslet.

Then from behind a knot of birch-trees stepped forth a womanlike form, all white and slender as the birch-stems themselves, and with just their lucid veil of green in pendent flow over her shoulders. Bertha thought at once it must be the Lady Minnetrost; and when the veil flew back, and from a countenance so kind and thoughtful two gentle light-brown eyes beamed forth with the soft innocence of the roe, she felt quite sure of it then; and, weeping for joy, she sank down on the grass from her palfrey before that stately form. Even Heerdegen forgot all his sulleuness. He alighted gallantly from his steed, and bending reverentially to the lady, he was on the point of preferring Bertha's request. But "I know all about it," said she; "joyfully we go forth to meet the guests whom we love to see. As far as the castle, good Heerdegen, you may go with us."

So saying, she extended each of them her hand, advising them to let their horses graze just where they were; for they were in very safe keeping. Thus all three went hand in hand up the castle-hill; and

Lady Minnetrost sang, on their way thither, with the most sweetly-thrilling voice:

"What hath the Druda by her?
Oh! all that heart can crave or covet;
Sweet rest, and sport, and festal show;
The fairest buds of all that blow,
The flower of peace, the balm of woe,—
How man doth love it!

Then come, the Druda follow,
If these sweet things thou covet;
And thus on all thou hast below
The little flower of peace shall grow;—
The angels bright in heaven know
How heaven doth love it!"

They reached the castle; and Heerdegen, without a shadow of sullenness or reluctance, took a kind leave of his sister. It was just as if his whole being had never once had a taint of rudeness or violence. They cheerfully arranged the days on which he was to come to the castle-gate to see Bertha. So waving his farewell, he hied him down the height, and the maiden went with her smiling kinswoman to her home.

As the portal closed behind them, a clear lake unfolded itself to their view; and on their entering a shallop, which wafted them of its own self to the solemn pile on the other side, the full moon stood

high in heaven, streaming up from the waters almost brighter than before, with her golden flock of sparkling star-drops around her. And on the surrounding battlements the tall white flowers waved and whispered in the night-wind, which Bertha had formerly heard her brother tell of on his bed of sickness. Now, for the first time, she really saw what his words had meant, as she floated on the still blue mirror of the lake, with the perfume of the pale flowers circling, like some sweetly-wreathed dance, round her temples.

The clang of the cymbal and the whisper of the harp sent their greeting from the storied pile; and when they left the bark, and wandered through the vaulted halls, the sweet sounds fell clearer and clearer on the ear. A soft, chastened light suffused everything in the castle; for from the full moon alone it came streaming down, and, caught up in many a varied prism and cunningly-contrived mirror, spread a snow-white vesture of glory on every object around. Passing on into a costly saloon, where arch wreathed its light span over arch, Bertha could now see whence the fairy music came, for here it swept along in unfettered undulation. Rings of pure gold were pendent on the high vault above her, running through or over each other, touching and commingling in beautiful melody; now striking on the silver cymbals that hung from them, now chafing the harp-strings that enwove

their golden net between the pillars. Here too Bertha understood how the fugitive bride must have felt when lulled into soft slumber by this minstrelsy of heaven; and recumbent on the velvet-strewn floor, she too was wafted away into the glad land of enchantment. Then raising her eyelids in her half-wakeful sleep, she beheld the golden circlets weaving their fleet dance on high, and the eyes of the Druda, with their moon-like radiance, watching beauteously over her.

Chapter 14

Bertha led a life in the castle that varied betwixt childish frolic and wisdom's higher lore. She stood as it were on a threshold, and yet could rest upon it in sweet composure, fanned by the light breezes of a twofold world. The mystic arts of her kinswoman were ever at hand for her to toy with, and yet they pointed anon to unheard-of mysteries in the distance. When her brother came to the castle-gate, she was fond of telling him from the flowery battlements how pleasantly it fared with her, and what wondrous things she saw. He, on his part, was delighted to see her fairy face peep forth every time more rosy from the snow-white flowers; and so they always parted in content and gladness.

More than every other pastime Bertha loved a wonderful mirror that was fitted into the wall of a retired apartment, and encircled with a number of secret symbols. On the Druda showing her this for the first time and drawing aside the curtain, "There, look a little at the pictures, child," said she; "I have something very particular to do."

And when Bertha stood alone before the glass, she at first could not at all make out how she was to do about the pictures; but she soon found out; for the mirror began to grow alive of itself, with a manifold variety of countries, animals, men, and buildings. Now she saw a vast sea before her, and ships coursing over it, to and fro, engaged in traffic or in war, beneath soft sunny skies, or scowling storms. Then, again, spacious churches opened on her view, with men that bent the knee in prayer; or large market-places, and lists and tilting knights. Bat Bertha was less pleased at seeing these, for they reminded her of the combat between the Baron de Montfaucon and Count von Walbek, and how much that had cost her. Again the mirror changed its configurations to the interior of a gorgeous palatinate, where a great king sat on his throne, with beautiful dames and knights around him. Moorish towns too were shown there, with their strangely attired inhabitants in the streets, in rich and flowing raiment. But what Bertha feasted her gaze upon with the keenest delight was a lonely and seemingly far northern country, full of wondrous groups of rooks, on one of the highest of which was an old moss-grown watch-tower. Through the windows of the watch-tower glimmered a tiny light, quite faintly and coyly trembling, and yet the maiden thought a wondrous store of quiet happiness must

be found there. And she made no secret of this to her kinswoman, who would often say to her, "What pleases you so well, child, lies far, very far away from here, high up in chilly Swedeland. I am soon going on a journey, too, to that lonely watch-tower; but, alas, I cannot take you with me."

This way of talking made Bertha all the fonder of the craggy country in the north; and never did she smile a sweeter smile of content than when the old tower showed itself on the lonely crag as she looked at the pictures in the mirror.

Late one evening the kind Druda had gone up with her fondling to one of the high towers of the castle, where there was nothing above them but the starry sky, and where the balmy airs of a summer's night came freely curling around tree and building, and swathing them about like the ocean calm. Then the Druda fixed her glance changelessly on the gold-bespangled firmament, and it seemed as though she not only saw, but heard also, things of glory coming down from above. Bertha, at last, with a light whisper, broke the long interval of silence.

"Ah, sweet lady," said she, "you almost listen as though you could hear the circling hooplets of gold in your halls, and yet everything is still."

"Do I not, then, catch the sound of the circling hooplets?" rejoined the Druda, with a pitying smile;

"to thee only, my poor untaught girl, all is still. For as the golden circlets are wont to revolve in the hall below, so here too, in the brilliant hall of heaven above us, the blessed circlets, called the stars, are endlessly whirling and ringing with a sound so passing lovely, that every other note must hush its noisy jar, be it the sweetest that earth can boast of. He whose ear is wedded to the starry choir, he only hears it. Others must content themselves with dumb amazement; or if their nerves are sorely strung, a blessed dream takes pity on them, and wafts them the sweet chimes whilst they sleep."

The maiden here cast a speaking look at her kinswoman; for she had a long time felt more yearning than fear about her mystic and magical arts, and she was on the point of entreating the Druda to initiate her in all the wonderful spell-work that surrounded her. But the Lady Minnetrost cast on Bertha a far stranger glance, that quite frightened her, and at once brought on a return of every fearful and untoward sensation that those magical appearances had formerly awoke in her. And gazing on her in the meanwhile with a still sterner and more piercing look, "Child, child," said she at length, "why wilt thou ask this of me? Thinkest thou, then, because it is allowed thee to play with those wonderful secrets, that they are nothing else but pretty toys? He to whom God has

revealed them must bear the dire burden because he is appointed to it. But let not another stretch forth his hand thither. Pain, great pain, this burden often gives. Ah, child, dost thou fancy I have always lived here? so lonely always, and so little understood? Never called by a name like other mortals? Ah, no, no! A happy life I once led; and my secret lore dissolved the charm, though, sooth, without my being in fault. Now people call me Minnetrost, and store of comfort I have for the love of many; but for that which sweetened my own life, now I have none."

So saying, she began meltingly to weep, and laid her head, as if weighed down with tears, on the maiden's bosom. Sorrowfully, yet sweetly, it pierced Bertha to the heart; for she had always seen her wondrous kinswoman serene and cheerful, like the beaming moon; and now she, for the first time, became sure that she too was a mortal being, susceptible of joy and sorrow; and she could not help pressing her with the fondest affection to her bosom, and weeping with her, and saying to her, "Ah, my good, good aunt, how dearly, how very dearly I love you!"

Bat the Druda drew herself up in grave yet kindly guise. "If you love me then so much," said she, "you must take care and manage cleverly how we may still live together. List to me; I am going away for a very long time, to that far northern watch-tower in the

Swedish country, which you are so fond of seeing among the pictures. To be sure, I travel quicker than other mortal children are wont to do; but still the journey is a very great one, the errand very weighty, and our parting must be for long. So keep quite still and snug at home the while; and do not look out of the windows, and still less from the battlements, if you will be advised by me. Your brother will never come to the gates while I am gone; I have sent him word by a messenger. Yet you shall have a pleasant time of it: the picture glass will show you pretty things, the golden circles will ring sweetly round you; and the flowers, the lake, and everything, will yield you service, as though I myself were here. But, dear child, draw not aside the curtain over the mirror with your hand; put not, with your hand, the golden hooplets in motion, and touch not my flowers. If you ever stand in need of anything, sing a song to your lute, or just play upon it only, and it will come. Patience, my dear child, and gentleness and obedience. Then we shall remain together, and all will soon be unspeakably delightful!"

So saying, she kissed the astonished maiden, and repaired in silence to her chamber. The next morning Bertha sought all over the castle for her kinswoman, but in vain.

Chapter 15

Peace and stillness shed their soothing influence over Bertha's lonely days. The wonderful chimes and images sported with her most delightfully; and though she took upon herself the whole management of garden, household, and kitchen, yet invisible favour made all this so easy to her, that it seemed less like toil than a part of her own pretty pastimes. Now, one afternoon she sat rocking herself in the shallop on the deep-blue lake, and the summer breeze played refreshingly round the cheek and brow of the beautiful sailor. Little cloudlets, with the sun flashing through them, seemed to speed their airy dance in heaven; flocks of birds came fluttering about the battlements of the castle, or peeping in among the pale flowers, and then went winging away, with clear pipe and carol, through the bright blue of day, as though inebriate with joyance and liberty. It seemed as if all this sought to tell her something about things without, and to encourage her to take just one single peep at the merry world outside.

"And what harm can it be, after all?" said she to

herself. "I question whether I quite understood my aunt, and her warnings. To look forth on the earth for which God created me, no one can possibly wish to forbid."

And almost as promptly as the thought was conceived, Bertha had turned the gold-bright shallop to the shore; and as it was to be far worse for her to look from the battlements than from the windows, she behaved, as she thought, very obediently, passing by the tempting white beacons of the flowers, and entered a chamber, from which she remembered often to have seen her kinswoman look out, while she spoke with her brother from the battlements. The little room, for that matter, contained nothing that was to be secret; and Bertha in a moment had the gaily-painted lattice open, and stood gazing on the far green land.

Here a delightful view unfolded itself, over fruitful vale and mead, as far as the neighbouring sea, on whose breathless mirror the sunbeams sped their radiant play, enwreathing a bushy islet near the shore with a halo of golden blue. Bertha felt herself filled with a deep yearning for the islet; she fancied (and without knowing why) that Otto must be living there; that he had built himself a blooming hermitage beneath its shades, in utter forgetfulness of the magnificent Gabriele, and was peacefully waiting there

and hoping for his lost first love. This grew more and more in her mind into a matter of truth and necessity: she fancied she could already tell how the open glades among the copse wood were blooming brightly and fragrantly under Otto's care, and how tastefully contrived paths were winding their white way through the plantation.

Soon after this a boat flitted towards her, rocking in the sunshine between the island and the shore, and the figure of her brother in it became every moment more distinguishable by his stature and gesture, and the cut and colour of his dress. "Good heavens!" thought she, "can he have found Otto on the island, and made it all up with him, and now is coming to row me across to him? Thus thinking, it seemed quite plain to her that Heerdegen was beckoning her with his white handkerchief; but when she seized her own to return the signal, she started at the temptation, and quickly shut the lattice to. In deep dejection, she thought of her kind Druda, and how loving and sorrowful she had been on the eve of her departure; and bitterly she wept, to think that she could for a moment have been untrue to her counsel and entreaties. Yet—so weak are we poor mortals under temptation!—her yearning for the island and the little boat in no way declined, and to place a sure guard against her own self, she would often say aloud,

"Stupid nonsense! Thank Heaven! I have not even got the keys of the castle-gate." Then all at once the thought flashed upon her, that she knew very well where they lay; and her alarm rose to such a pitch, that she was soon quite at a loss how to advise or to help herself.

Anxiously seeking to dissipate her thoughts, and hastily flying from the way they led her, she ran to the chamber where the mirror with the pictures was set up. On her way thither, she brushed past a chair on which her lute was lying, and the kindly strings sounded at the touch, as if to call her to them: "Oh, *do* take us with you!" they seemed to say; "you were to let our voice sound, you know, when you wanted any of those pretty, wondrous things." But Bertha's heated fancy was now quite deaf to light parley of this sort; she rushed breathlessly into the chamber, and awfully as the blood-red curtain threw its heavy folds over the mirror, she seized it in mad forgetfulness, and tore it violently aside from the magic plane.

And there was a waving and darkling on the mysterious surface, like the boiling of a mighty sea; a creation, stirring in its earliest travail, and suddenly reft of every tempering veil; when it shrinks with horror from the light into which it has been rudely hurried, and sweltering from the writhing mass come the misgotten monsters of the deep. Bertha would

fain have screened it with the curtain again; but as surely as she raised her trembling hand, the rolling and whirling began its doubly frantic play, and, awe-stricken and hesitating, she stood riveted to the spot. At length a human form stepped forward on the mirror, pale and distorted with the wildest rage; and, try as Bertha would to deceive herself, she was forced to recognise in it her brother Heerdegen. On his head rested something with two huge gold-coloured vulture wings: did he wear a helmet of so strange a device? or was it a real vulture, that perhaps had pecked him so pale with her sharp-pointed beak? Whilst she pondered over this, a womanly figure appeared on the shadowy glass: it was dappled with blood; and looking more closely, she shrieked in ghastly horror, "Great God! it is I myself!" Scared from the picture, and goaded on by the echo of her own mad cry, with bristling hair she rushed from the chamber into the saloon where the hooplets were hanging. Rigid and motionless, there they hung, as if held by invisible hands, without the least breath of sound; and Bertha would now for worlds have craved their loudest peal; for in the adjoining room there was a strange commotion, as though the pictures had freed themselves from the glass; and the hooplets might have overpowered that horrible din, and soothed the fearful anguish of her bosom. Just

then, she happened to remember that she was to summon what enchantments she required by the sound of the lute or the song. But song seemed frozen up in her, from very fright and fear; and her lute lay far on the other side of that ill-starred mirror-room. In the height of terror, she raised her thoughtless hand to one of the nearest hooplets, and they began turning and sounding, though with the din of the storm-wind and the thunder, and hoarsely bellowing and roaring like savage beasts. The hissing and clashing of swords were heard, and a woeful wail, like that of sinners in dying torment. Presently the hooplets flew round quicker and quicker, the howling noises became more hideous than before, a fiendish laughter broke upon the din, Bertha's head began to throb and go round, and then came a knock at the door of the mirror-room.

Bertha thought she could not keep from calling out, "Who's there?" and then her own voice would answer, "I myself!" and then she would see her own self enter through that fearful door, all writhing and bloody, and run grinning towards her with open arms. Nearly raving mad, she rushed from the mansion, sped swift as an arrow along the banks of the lake, across the courtyard of the castle, to the gates. The waters of the pool went boiling and hissing up to heaven, and everything looked wasted and disor-

dered; amongst other things, most of the flowers had turned blood-red, waving like mighty flames from the battlements, and bursting in fury on the fugitive. But what was her dismay, when she approached the outlet of the castle, and remembered that she had forgotten the keys! Was she to make her way back for them through all these motley things of horror? She felt that that would never do, for the effort would have crazed her. So she kept running on towards the gateway, calling in anguish for her brother, though she knew very well he could not come to help her over those high walls. But, lo and behold, the gates stood open, wide open, though they quaked most fearfully, and threatened every moment to fall together with a crash, and to crush beneath their ponderous bulk all that had ventured between them. Nevertheless the maiden took heart, and ran through them at the top of her speed. Scarcely was she past them, when the brazen valves fell to pieces with a deafening crash, so that, terrified by so narrow an escape from imminent death, she fled still more swiftly down the hill, and fell lifeless with exhaustion at its foot. Yet she still could hear all around her the wild clashing of weapons, and could remark, when she at times came to herself again, that her brother was carrying her in his arms, and saying to himself, as it were, "We must be quick and get to the shallop, and then

off to the island. The people here are quite crazed with the spirit-doings at the castle." Then, mindful of her former presentiments, Bertha would whisper softly, "Oh! to the island; oh, yes, to the dear island!" and then as quickly would close her weary eye-lids.

Chapter 16

On awaking, she found herself lying on the turf, with her brother kneeling at her side, and anxiously busied in reviving her. Still, a wild, confused hubbub sounded on her ear. She drew herself up, and saw that there was a dusty din and a flashing of arms on the neighbouring shore, from which she was severed by an inlet of the sea. The shallop was swinging at its moorings, at her feet.

"God be praised that we are on the island!" said she to her brother.

"Yes, indeed, that is lucky," replied Heerdegen; "for the whole land is up in arms about the thundering and storming at the moon-castle, partly to save the Druda, whom they suppose to be in jeopardy, partly to vent their own fury more freely on one another, since such uproar is wafted from the very dwelling of peace. Well, that is no place for tender damsels to live in now, and we must try what we can do to get away again."

"Why, then, away?" said Bertha; "why, then, leave this little island? Here peace and love and kindness

are ever in bloom, with all that one can wish for on earth. Only just follow me; I know what to do." So saying, she strode on into the deep-green shade of the bushes, fully convinced, in the light-sped delusiveness of her former wishes, which she used to confound with the prophet imagery of the mirror, that she would find her Otto and his hermitage. Perhaps Heerdegen fancied she had really brought some mystic benevolent lore with her from the castle, as he followed her in wonderment into the mazes of the unhabitable forest.

But there they saw nothing like level walks, nothing like tenderly-nursed and tastefully-arranged flowers,—nothing, in fact, that told of the heart or hand of lonesome, yearning love. Bertha pressed forward in hotter zeal; she was almost on the point of shouting for Otto, but shame and the fear of her brother stayed her tongue. In the meanwhile, the branches of the trees became more darkly intertwined, their roots ran more lawlessly over the damper ground, snakes and other vermin, startled by the footsteps of man, went shyly rustling through the tall rank grass. Then the sea glimmered through again from the other side, and hastening along its strand, Bertha found only a still wilder region, where the parting rays of the sun played mournfully on many an old Runic stone and grave-mound, and mournfully the

sea-breeze whispered in the moss that sprung from those gray memorials. Bertha sunk weeping on one of the weather-beaten stones, and in painful desolation she cried, "Then, was it naught else but a grave?" And the more her brother pressed her with questions, the more vehemently she wept, oppressed with bitter grief both for the shame of her premature hope and her disappointment.

In his concern and uncertainty about his sister's tears, Heerdegen began to upbraid the Druda, who surely, thought he, with her mad witcheries had so strangely crazed the poor maiden's brain. At this remembrance, a more painful fount was opened to Bertha's tears. In all her solemn gentleness, and the weeping woe of that last evening, with all her tender importunate warnings, rose the Lady before the mind's eye of the maiden; till, in remorse for her broken promise, and regret for the lost happiness which the Druda had signified to be instant on her return, poor Bertha quite melted into melancholy, and made her brother every moment more impatient.

Now all at once, close by them, they heard the clear and lovely voice of a woman, singing such words as the following:

> "Berries blood-red, leaflets green,
> brew the darkling hero-draught."

And looking up, they beheld a tall slim figure sauntering along the shore, sometimes stooping to the grass, or stripping the branches of their leaves, and gathering all into a shining beakor that she carried under her arm, and which resembled a large golden horn. Rich flaxen tresses floated over the neck and shoulders of the loiterer and veiled her visage, as she plied her search on the ground. A richly-embroidered vesture, such as only noble ladies wear, though carelessly girded and gathered up as for a journey, curled waveringly round her tender limbs; from her waist hung a beautiful flashing sword; and bow and quiver were swinging at her back. She still kept on searching and singing the while, till the brother and sister forgot their own sorrow and vexation to watch the beautiful apparition, and to listen to the quaint words of her lay. It flowed in quite an uncommon strain, and told of a witch-draught that made heroes fierce for the fight, and unconquerable by any but charmed weapons; but at its every close the sounds grew soft and slow, and passed into a tenderer key. One was:

> "But with caution drink, my quaffer;
> Charmed mead is fierce. Oh, heed thee!"

Just as she was again bending towards the grass, "Heavens! how fair must her face be!" cried Heer-

degen involuntarily. Then, quick as an arrow, she sprung to her full height, like some young fir-tree that has been bent over by force, when, suddenly riving its bonds, it shoots up anew to the blue of heaven; and, sunlike, the wondrous beauty of her features beamed through the surrounding gloom: yet anger soon flashed from those large blue eyes. Menacingly she shot her glance at the youth and maiden: "Ye have disturbed me!" she cried; "for what now this favouring evening? for what the rich bloom of these beautiful witch-herbs?" And angrily she shook the golden horn, till its fragrant store flew in a shower over the grass. Heerdegen would fain have approached her to make excuse for himself. But straightway the bright blade glittered in her beautiful hand. She waved him back with it, and stalked in grandeur to a skiff, which had probably just brought her over; then, with practised oar and rapid stroke, she urged it over the wide plane of the waters, and soon after vanished behind a wooded upland.

The youth and maiden gazed after her in astonishment; and in a very little while, just as they were beginning to talk about the strange apparition, Bertha started up with surprise: "Ho, brother," cried she, "what strange masts are those in the wood there?"

Looking the way she pointed, Heerdegen, instead of masts, beheld enormous halberts, towering over

the less stately grass. A moment after, many of the men who bore them stepped forth from the dark umbrage of the forest; gigantic forms they were, with loud-rattling, massive breast-plates, and huge brazen bucklers on their left shoulders. Heerdegen sprang to his feet, and, with hand on his sword-hilt, he turned a searching glance the other way, whence the like frightful host of armed men were approaching. A handsome young warrior, in gold-coloured mail, with two large gold-embossed vulture wings shooting from his lofty helmet, stepped forward from the mingled troop to the spot where they stood, and pointing to the young pair, with the mighty javelin in his sword hand, "Away with them to our ships!" said he.

"What will ye with free-born people?" cried Heerdegen and the sword he grasped flashed upon the stranger. "Step behind me, Bertha! And he of *you*, who first dares to near us forfeits his life."

Then a host of brawny hands levelled their darts at the stripling; but, "Hold!" cried their leader; "I will have them alive."

The javelins fell, but the bucklers locked themselves together, like a cleverly-contrived moving parapet, and closer and closer wound the brazen toils round Heerdegen and Bertha.

"Fie on this abuse of strength!" cried the menaced youth. "If thou of the gold mail hadst a bold heart,

and wert a knight like me, the fray would soon put on another face."

"Halt!" cried the young chief; and the advancing giants of brass stood as if reft of motion. Then, stepping into the ring himself, he took his stand in front of Heerdegen, and leaning on the hilt of his ponderous sword, "What then," quoth he, "didst thou mean to say thou wert a knight? Thou hast not a single plate of mail on."

"Was I roving in quest of combat?" retorted Heerdegen. "I rowed over with my sister, at eventide, from the shore. Who would have thought of a surprisal?"

"But ye ought to have thought of it," replied the stranger. "If ye have shunned payment of my rent, I take from your strand just what pleases me, in passing; and ye both happen to please me, though thou, in thy jerkin and baret-cap, hast no such costly equipment as you chieftains usually have."

"I belong not to the chieftains of the land," said Heerdegen; "I am a stranger knight, and care naught for gay attire and trappings."

"So I see," answered the other, with a jeering laugh; "and who is to say how it stands with this knighthood of thine? Seize him, my men!"

The brazen wall, with slow advance, again narrowed its barrier.

"Halt!" shouted Heerdegen, with so thrilling a

voice, that the adamantine figures again stood still, as at their lord's behest. "I know you to be Normans," continued he, "by your tongue, stature, and attire. Normans are brave warriors prompt to single fight, and each high and venturesome emprise. I challenge thee, thou leader of this troop here, to try with me thy prowess in arms. The conqueror may decide on the fate of my sister and me."

"Ah! that's another thing," said the stranger. "Here we shall have a proper holm-bout, as we are used to call the solemn courses that we fight single-handed on our islands. Peace there, ye warriors; stake out the rounds for the combat; for now I see clear enough we have a true-born knight before us. But thou, stranger warrior, canst thou wield the weapons of our people? That is the chief point, for I have no others with me."

"Dost thou take me for a boy?" quoth Heerdegen. "An errant knight who hath roved over the north so long as I, will surely have learned its way of war above everything, and know how to wave your ponderous shields, and hurl your mighty spears."

So the stranger chief at once gave orders that beautiful mail-suits, and helmets, and shields should be brought, and the very best javelins too, leaving his antagonist the choice among them. "Swords," said he, "I have not sent for thee, because, sooth, thy own

hangs at thy side; and such a one, to us warriors, is ever our best and trustiest friend."

Whilst thus Heerdegen was arming himself with the help of the Norman hero, "Art thou now satisfied that I am an honourable knight?" said the latter. "I was not quite so sure, at first, whether *I* had *my* equal before me in birth and prowess. Or else, if thou hast travelled much in northern lands, it cannot be strange to thee, that we sea-champions are not only skilled to conquer the foeman, but to spare him and honour him too."

"That I know," replied Heerdegen; "and fully trusting to it, I challenged thee to the fight. But now, tell me, above everything, comrade, whether the beautiful damsel with the golden horn and knightly sword hath sent thee to avenge her, because I disturbed her while gathering her herbs, and berries, and leaves?"

"I know not what thou meanest by the beautiful damsel," answered the sea-knight. "Save the fair trembling image there, that thou callest thy sister, I know of no beautiful damsel far or near. So thou hadst better tell me at once what thou meanest."

And scarcely had Heerdegen told of the wonderful apparition, when the Norman turned to some of his fighting-mates near him: "Think only," he cried, "Gerda has been here, and within the very

last half-hour, seeking for witch-herbs! What can that betoken?"

Ill-pleased and silent, the warriors shook their heads, and were hindered in giving their opinion by a young champion who came dashing up to them.

"What boots it now," said he, "to query or to scruple? Let him who will fight by the last lingering sunbeams make haste about it, and trifle no more. If he be left alive, he will have time enough afterwards for weighing matters; and if he fall, curiosity will be no longer in place."

And now Heerdegen being fully equipped, and having chosen his javelin and shield, the two combatants marched into the ring, which the deftest among the warriors had carefully measured and marked out with hazel-twigs. A hoary hero led each of them to his place, and, with a pressure of the hand, saying, "Bear thee bravely!" left them confronting each other alone. With spears uplifted, and shields held as a bulwark to their breasts, they wound their circle round each other at one unvaried distance and a slow and measured pace, each sweeping the barriers of the ring, and watching an opening for the throw. Bertha noticed with trembling alarm that her brother was unused to those strange implements of war, that he moved more awkwardly than his opponent beneath the giant weight of the shield, and managed only

with labouring uncertainty to poise the ponderous javelin; whilst the sea-knight swung his lance lightly in his casting hand, like some dainty little wand. But well-tempered hardihood, and the joy of fight, flashed with equal lustre from the eyes of both. Could their flaming looks have been arrows, they must both have sunk pierced upon the turf. Anon one of them would brandish his spear, seemingly for the fatal throw, but it would only be a feint to lure his antagonist to some ill-advised cast, or some incautious adjustment of his shield; and then waiting what should follow, firmly as rocks, they would renew the solemn death-dance round each other. Now Heerdegen's spear whistled suddenly through the air, and at the same moment the Northman turned his gigantic shield, that flashed like a whirling moon, caught the missile on the firm boss of the guardian orb, and thus dashed it back, in an accelerated curve, on the caster. And at the same moment his lance went hissing forth, passing with such a shivering shock through the rim of Heerdegen's shield, that just as the astounded combatant was about to take to his sword, it bore him to the earth with it, and staved the targe in the turfy ground. Ere the fallen warrior could release himself, the sea-knight sprang, like some winged dragon, upon his neck, with an able grasp pinned both arms to his back, and instantly seizing the knob of his sword

with the hand that was still free, he tore it from the scabbard, and hurled it away over the barriers. Yet in the midst of the struggle, he chanted in a loud and gladsome tone:

> "Heigh! the mighty holm-bout
> Hotly fought the Northman;
> Well nigh reft of motion
> The stranger warrior kneeleth!"

But Bertha, with increasing alarm, beheld her brother prostrate, and the golden vulture-wings on the conqueror's helm waving over the pale and raging visage of Heerdegen. Then remembering the vision in the mirror, now so hideously fulfilled; "O vulture, mighty vulture," she cried, "spare the noble quarry!"

The sea-knight looked up with a friendly smile: "Fear not that I shall harm him," said he. Then bending anew over Heerdegen, "Thou art weaponless," he continued; "yield only, and thou wilt find that thou hast dealings with an honourable foe. "

Heerdegen hung his head in mingled shame and rancour. The Northman therefore loosed his hold, and approaching Bertha with a smile, "Let neither of you repent," said he, "being bound to bear me company a while on my journeyings through the briny flood. I have won you with good grace, and it is no more for you or him than if you had found

another brother. To be sure he is the eldest, or at least passes for such, and so you must be good and do his bidding."

With this he turned to his retinue: "Boat, ho! and sails spread," cried he; "we must make many a mile tonight by starlight."

And scarcely was the sun set in the waves ere the brother and sister were off with the sea-knight's fleet; three fast-sailing, oddly-built crafts, in the same one of which they and the sea-knight were together. But Bertha stood on deck, and wept bitterly, as the evening mist curled along the lessening shore, and seemed stretching forth its white arms, as it were to clasp her, like an envoy from the lorn and kindly Druda. "Gladly would I come, right gladly would I come," said she softly, with the tears trickling down her cheek; "I never can get back again."

A white dove flew cooing over her, and the shore was lost behind the dark night-veil of the ocean.

Chapter 17

Some time after the last-named events had taken place on the North-sea strand, Otto and Tebaldo were sitting on a softly undulating lawn, in the midst of the beautiful land of France. A dark forest spread its deep shade above them; the sun stood high in the cloudless heaven; and without taking from the coolness of the air, little sportive flashes would stream through the spring-green foliage. The horses of the errant pair were grazing peacefully together; for the knight's light-brown charger had made up an acquaintance with the cream-coloured jennet, as well as its master, and now offered neither of them any further harm. Thus whilst Otto, in graver thought was leaning back, and gazing through the leafy green on the blue sky above, Tebaldo took up a pretty mandolin, which he always had by him, tuned it, and as he ran over the chords, sang in a sweetly-flowing voice the following words:

> "The far shores fly, and Travel plumes her wing,
> In giddy glee we whistle through the air,

> Still finding pleasance new, still unconfined!
> Farewell, ye seas and mountains vanishing;
> Hail, distant climes, that waft your odours rare.
> And round today tomorrow's halo wind!
> O Change, gay child, of fairest, tend'rest birth,
> Speed ever thus the merry dance of earth!"

"No! I cannot sing your song after you," cried Otto, as he started from his reverie.

"Who asks that of you?" replied Tebaldo, with a smile; "sing another. Very few people sing the same songs, or even like to hear them; and that is just why there are, and must be, so many bards and minstrels."

"I care not to sing," said Otto. "Longing, in my breast, hath overflown that comely height at which it is wont to gush forth, a sounding sea of song. Speak, Tebaldo, is it not passing wonder, that we must thus push on in vain after two such brilliant personages as Folko and Gabriele, two names with which all Frankland is echoing, so long and so zealous as we are in our search?"

"It is just the very number of the mirrors that reflect their fair semblances," answered Tebaldo, laughing, "and the countless echoes ringing with their names, that lead us astray, and bring our endeavours to naught. Are they not, in fact, become like to returning spirits of old legendary days, of whose

wondrous doings everyone recounts all that appears most wondrous to him, and thinks himself justified to add to the score every lie that he can possibly conjure up? They are in some sort deified while still on earth, and for that very reason are less easy to find."

"You seek to make me laugh," said Otto; "but give me the mandolin: I would rather sing a song than that."

"Do you see how it is now?" said Tebaldo, handing him the instrument. Ah, well; sing, good knight, sing. Song is, sooth, the purest angel that wings its way into this world of ours."

Otto ran over the chords, and sang as follows:

> "Little birds in lucid air,
> Winging hither,
> Tell me whither
> Leads my way to lady fair!
> Ah! while flitting thus about
> In and out,
> Ye have failed, I ween, to find it;
> E'en in you,
> Little feather-glistening crew,
> Pleasure leaves a pang behind it."

"It is strange," said the Italian, as Otto paused, "that when you speak German, and somewhat earnestly withal, the trees, grass, and waters seem no little

astonished, nay, even frightened; but the moment you sing, all is right again, and they look on us quite kindly the while. And just look what wondrous and beautiful guerdon they are now bent on sending you."

Raising his eyes, Otto beheld a young man on a spare white steed, riding towards them through the shades of the grove. He wore the green plaited garment of a minstrel, and over it a costly chain of gold, from which the polished zittar depended on his breast. He played upon it as he rode, for his beautiful well-trained palfrey sought skilfully to clear the low-drooping branches, that his master might not be disturbed in his graceful handiwork.

"Was it you?" asked the stranger, on reaching the travellers, "who were singing so enchantingly just now?"

And on Otto's courteous answer to that effect, he alighted.

"Allow me, then," said he, "to take a seat beside you; fellow will fain mate with fellow."

So saying, he took off his horse's head-gear, and left him free to stray through the fresh forest-glade. Straightway Otto's charger was at hand, challenging his strange pasture fellow to the fight, and with such display of vehemence that the gentle animal was affrighted, and trotted back to his master for shelter. But Otto called out in a stern voice to the mettlesome

light-brown, and it at once returned peaceably to the jennet; whereat the little steed of the minstrel again took courage, and sported in many a pretty gambol over the sward.

"We are perhaps bound the same way," said the friendly stranger; "nay, I fain would hope so. For now, wheresoever I behold a mailed knight, I can never bring myself, by any chance, to think otherwise than that he is travelling eastward to the Holy Land."

"Unhappily that is not the case with me," quoth Otto, with a passing blush; "but neither is it my fault. My promised word drives me anon to the West, sorely as my heart throbs for the refreshing sun of the Orient."

"Pity on it," said the minstrel; "it would have been nice travelling, I wot, in your company. But as matters are, you are every way in the right. A promised word is a holy pledge, and an ill tender of homage to God it would be, to serve the Holy One by leaving what is holiest undone. But will you not sing me a passing song now?"

"I know not how it is," said Otto, "but with the thought of the East you have quite saddened my heart. I could sing nothing fitting just now, or at least nothing of gladsome sort. I would much rather hear a song from you."

"Well!" quoth the stranger, "though, alack, I can

sing of naught but the East. List ye, then, if ye will hear me."

Whereupon he struck the chords, and with a voice of wondrous sweetness sang the following words:

"What quivers through the greenwood ever?
What rustles through the blue of air?
Ye trees, what tell ye one another?
What news, sweet perfume, dost thou bear?

There comes from far a sound of wailing,
As when deep sighs the bosom thrill;
Yet like a bride on bed of ailing,
With all its pain, we love it still.

Ah, God! who could mistake the token
Whose heart still warms at Christian strife,
How there each hallowed tie is broken.
Where buried lay the Lord of life?

Of old, they slew the loved of Heaven,
And now they revel round His grave;
To those our shrilly wail be given.
To these our chastening lance and glaive.

Though there the cry of pain be sounding,
Oh, list ye here the clarion dread;
And see, upon his charger bounding,
The mailed knight with cross of red.

See billow still on billow throwing
  Its steely sheen athwart the sod!
See, what a wood the spears are growing,
  And every branch is waved to God!

Though long we tarried, still before us
  We kept the path, and loved it well;
But none unfurled his banner o'er us,
  And lone and blind, our spirit fell.

Now every breast hath ceased its sighing,
  And every tongue is loosed to sing;
We see the fearless banner flying—
  'Tis Richard Lion-heart the king."

Otto's cheeks glowed. He would have given worlds to have joined himself to the wonderful singer, and to have followed the royal banner of the Cross into the East; nay, he was just opening his lips to ask the stranger if he had not chanced to hear that the Baron Folko de Montfaucon was bound along with them to the Holy Sepulchre, for then every private feud would have been set at rest till after the pilgrimage, and their common journeying and fighting would have been the most glorious and happiest thing on earth. But before he could ask a question, a troop of warriors came at a trot through the forest, spoke reverentially to the minstrel, and re-bridled the little white steed at his bidding; whereupon, waving a

friendly farewell to Otto and Tebaldo, he rode off with them through the merry greenwood.

"Who was that?" said Otto to a trooper, who had lingered behind the rest.

"Heigh!" quoth the man, "it is the famous Master Blondel, the finest minstrel in all the English country, and King Richard of the Lion-heart's bosom friend, wherefore he too is on his way to the Holy Land with this great host of ours. The king has allotted us to him as an escort, so often as he chooses to strike off hither and thither on the road in friendly quest of something new, as is the merry wont of noble minstrels. Fare ye well, good sirs!"

So saying, he dashed after the gladsome rout, that might still be heard in the distance, as with jest and song they sped on through the forest.

"Doth it not seem to you," said Otto, after a long silence, to Tebaldo, "as though the best pleasures and powers of life only looked us jeeringly in the face, without ever deigning to show us the way to real enjoyment? Or, as you look so ill-pleased at what I say, let me change my mode of talking rather, and, in lieu of us, say me. It is really, though, like the spiteful play of sorcery, that this very day I should behold, and quite near me too, that which seemeth to me the most beautiful and most glorious thing on the face of the earth, and that yet for all that, a

strange pulling at the chain of my sacred word so unceasingly drags me downwards."

"In real truth, I should have more to complain of than you," rejoiced Tebaldo, in a somewhat peevish tone. "For just look now, noble sir, if you have made foolish promises, I made them not with you, so far as I know, and yet I should very gladly have set forth to Jerusalem."

"Go on, then, and leave me," said Otto, softening; "too much have I forsaken, and must therefore be well used to the like."

Then Tebaldo looked kindly on him, and speaking in a tone of tenderness, "No," said he; "may God forbid that I should do so! But away with wailing now, and look up once more to the blue of heaven. See how cloud, and branch, and flitting bird are mingling their pastime. Methinks, a balm for every earthly woe must shower down from among that gladsome throng."

Otto gazed on high. "You are right," said he; "nothing does away so well with all my silly fretting as a glance at the restless sun-blue vault above us."

When the youths had been thus lying, for some length of time, stretched upon the turf, with their glances riveted on the clear blue robe of heaven, behold, a falcon-gentil, of wondrous beauty, rose cheerily over their heads, and, like a fast sailer in a

sea of clouds, shot up to such a height that the sun soon stood beneath him, enkindling in the brightest crimson glow the underpart of his wings and body. Joyfully did Otto start up, and call the lordly creature many times with the sportsman's lure. But the falcon swept not down to his hand. It was easy to see that he heard the call, and owned the voice of a noble huntsman; for he wound his airy path delightedly round the stripling; but on another call farther off in the forest, he struck his wings cheerily together, and with the swiftness of an arrow darted off that way. He had heard the lure of his rightful master.

"I am glad he is gone," said Tebaldo. "Nothing is more hateful to me, heart and soul, than a plundering fellow like that, with his crooked hook-like beak, his hideously sparkling eyes, and the knavish finger-claws on his legs. How can you possibly take any pleasure in him?"

"In the way you talk," replied Otto, "one might take a disgust to every animal. But I love all little creatures dearly, and a falcon like that more than all. So clever and so trusty!"

"So is the devil clever," said Tebaldo; "and if you call that trustiness, hooking itself on everywhere with its pointed talons, why, he can do that too."

"You, I ween, never rode out on falcon-sport?" said Otto.

"It is one of the sorry fancies of knighthood," rejuiucci Tebaldo, "to call such things delightful."

"Nay, say not so," cried Otto. "It is like living in heaven and earth at once—over us the winged hunter, under us a courser swift as the wind; away we go whirling through the meadows green, the cloud tent of heaven running dizzily round as we fly, with the glad rustling of the breeze in our hair, and the cheery halloo of our comrades around us,—then at last the wizard-bird holds his foe in ban, waving, and hovering, and flashing over him, and now—and now—"

Twang went Tebaldo's bow. Roused from his discourse, Otto looked round; and with a reeling flight, a shaft in his wing, and almost lifeless from the copious flow of blood, the falcon-gentil was seen making off to the other side of the wood.

"Who bid thee harm what pleases me?" cried the young knight, with a look of flame.

"Was it your falcon, then?" asked Tebaldo. "If you love every little animal so dearly as you just now said, you ought to rejoice that my shaft hath saved a poor timid fowl, that had just hid itself in yonder bushes, from the arrogant robber."

"No one hath made thee judge over the eagle's realm," said Otto sullenly.

"But just as much so," rejoined Tebaldo, "as you or any other have been made keeper and ranger there."

But the young men were interrupted, at the outset of their quarrel, by a third person's arrival.

Chapter 18

On a spare steed of silver gray, and arrayed in costly hunting-gear, with a bright silver bugle at his girth, a noble forester stood unexpectedly before them. Like them, he was young, and his mien and bearing handsome. The very moment that Otto espied the bleeding falcon nestling in the stranger's breast, the latter perceived the fatal weapon in Tebaldo's hand; and striving hard, as one could easily see, to stifle the fire of his wrath, he turned away from the squire to the knight.

"Gentle sir," said he, in the most courteous tone, "if it be thy pleasure to let thy people speed the chase in my forest, thou drawest not more largely on my hospitality than it would fain lay itself out in favour of every noble traveller; but I must beseech you, for the future, to spare so noble a creature as this."

So saying, he tenderly stroked the wounded bird, throwing in many a winning word of solace, and thereby failing to hear Otto's excuses, which, forsooth, flurried as the young knight was by the beautiful falcon's wound and Tebaldo's unaccountable bearing,

were not of the very richest order. But the quarrel with his comrade, and their unfinished wrangle, had only made the squire more dogged. Stepping boldly up to the stranger huntsman, "No one shot the bird," said he, "but I; and no one else has to answer for the deed."

"Back, Tebaldo," cried Otto. "You seem not to know what you have done,—trespassing on the forest-law of a noble gentleman, and, more than that, wounding so beautiful a creature. "

"Oh, I know, I know very well," replied the hot Italian; "knights and princes have parted off the earth for themselves into little pieces, which are to belong solely to them, and on which every other mortal is to bid adieu to the rights which God has given him to the beasts of the field, and to many another sacred heirloom;—*is* to bid adieu, proud sirs, do ye mark me, but not always *does* bid adieu. For where my equals come together, there is no such great ado about your sorry law-faddle; and what Milan as a whole does, any and every single Milanese may do too; maintaining his inborn rightful liberty, despite emperor and king, or duke and earl. So now I shall just go and shoot me another fowl or so." And therewith he righted his cross-bow anew.

"Thou hast an odd sort of squire there, gentle sir," said the noble from the Frank country. But

Otto, whose knightly feelings had been harrowed to the core, had, with sudden violence, already wrested the cross-bow from Tebaldo's hand, snapping it and stamping it to pieces, and scattering the fragments this way and that over the meadow.

"Well I wot, in plain language, that means a downright adieu," said the enraged Tebaldo; and on the knight turning sullenly away from him, he went to saddle and bridle his jennet. The charger, too, trotted up to him with a gladsome neigh, but Tebaldo drove him off. "Yes," said he, "thou, perhaps, wouldst fain have me still; but thy master willeth it no longer, and so thou mayest go thy own gait now."

The deeply-insulted Otto whistled to his charger, braced on his riding-gear, mounted him, and with great good-will accepted the noble sportsman's bidding to his castle; there to forget, in the midst of a large and knightly company, all the vexations and disgust caused by this strange disaster. Tebaldo, too, was already on his horse, riding slowly and sadly along; whilst Otto and the stranger set off in the opposite direction. Then the light-brown steed and the jennet began neighing, and striving to join each other; but their riders urged them on the way they had struck into, although they themselves could ill refrain from looking back in the deepest sorrow.

Otto had already ridden on for some distance

at the stranger's side, when they all at once heard a trotting behind them; and looking round, they saw that it was Tebaldo, who, however, stayed his horse as soon as Otto's eye met his, and with a most unwonted meekness—"Master," said he softly, in the German tongue, "I believe I was wrong, and I will fain go with thee again." Whereupon Otto stretched out his arms to him, and Tebaldo flew with joyful shout to his embrace; and whilst the two comrades kissed and clasped each other, the light-brown and the cream-coloured steeds neighed cheerily at the meeting.

Whilst now they all three rode on together, the noble huntsman evinced his joy at the reconciliation in the warmest and kindliest terms: it was well worth while for brave knight to bear anon with brave serving-man; for such a league would last out a dozen other leagues, for all they might be between king and king. And then he began to tell the prettiest things about his falcon, and about falcons altogether; and how they lived to be more than a hundred years old; and how, by the golden collars of the noble creatures, while still alive, people had found that they had belonged to mighty heroes long since dead; and how, after their master's fall, they had often winged about over distant lands and seas, and lived quite wild, till they found a new master worthy of the old

one. Thereat Tebaldo grew quite a friend to these knightly birds, and discovered, without the least disguise, his remorse at having wounded the noble forager of such a lord.

But after a few moments of quiet, Otto had quickly remarked that the huntsman of the Frank country was the Baron Folko de Montfaucon; whilst, in the stately and richly-accoutred knight, the latter could not for a moment dream of beholding the pert stripling of the Danube's bank. Of a truth, the black silver mail glanced on him its solemn warning; but the youthful face, with its morning blush and flaxen tresses, suited those trappings too ill to allow any distinct remembrance to arise. All floated before the baron's senses like some dream-sent figure, which, when fully awake, we can no longer arrest—dark, vague, and soon utterly forgotten.

Chapter 19

In Sir Folko's castle, at the merry evening banquet-table, sat the noble knights of many a varied kinship, and other men too of buoyant life and spirit, among whom Tebaldo found fitting place. His sprightly Italian vein of merriment soon boiled up, to the amusement of the company, and was remarked with especial complacency by one of his countrymen, named Count Alessandro Vinciguerra; whilst Otto sat still and silent, unnoticed by any after their first astonishment at his handsome figure and bright knightly array was over. As the cups circled more quickly, filled with more fiery wine, they thought of enhancing their social pleasures by the recital of all kinds of pointed tales. Among knights of such renowned blazon and such distant travel, and so many noble masters in many a varied art, there could not possibly be any lack of adventurous matter; and they all begged the lord of the mansion, in common, that he should make a beginning.

"It will not avail us as an excuse for the host," said Folko, "that his garden boasts only sorry or ordinary

flowers: it is enough if his noble guests crave them; accept, therefore, what I am able to bestow.

"It will be no unknown tidings to many of you, that my house had its rise in the mountain ranges of Norway, and that we there may still number many a noble kinsman. Setting sail from those parts, my conquering forefathers landed on the Frankish coast, pushed forward victoriously into the domain which to this day is called Normandy, and, among many other curious legends, brought the following one with them:

"An old and far-famed warrior had a beauteous daughter, whose name was Fair Sigrid; they talked about her in every northern country, and many a suitor sought her hand. The splendour of her beauty was enhanced still more by her rare skill in every graceful and womanly art, and in divers lore too, the gladdening and the gay, as well as the secret and magical, which the ladies of those parts are specially fond of. Thus she knew, above all, how to prepare a certain draught, which, if prudently taken, would fire the combatant with unheard-of strength and glee, yea, even render him proof to every other but a charmed weapon. To this very hour there are said to be many dames in the northern lands who are skilled in mixing this wondrous beverage; nay, the secret of it is reported to be hereditary in one of the

branches of our race. Now one day the old warrior said to his daughter, 'Fair Sigrid, be quick and go out into the wood, and gather red berries and green leaflets. Tomorrow I need thy draught; for I march forth to a hot encounter.'

"'With whom, then, father?' asked Fair Sigrid; and the old warrior replied, 'With Hakon Swendsohn, the young lordling who bids fair to outvie me one day in all the north country, if I bring not down the bold eaglet ere he is fully plumed. Moreover, thou knowest he is sprung of a race hostile to ours.' And Fair Sigrid went forth into the dark evening wood, all alone, as the charmed custom of the mysterious potion required.

"Up the rocks and down the rocks, over the banks of the wood-streams which the light bridge of the pine-trunk scarcely united, through many a dark valley, and along many a fearful precipice, Fair Sigrid pressed forward till she had found all the simples for the wonderful potion. And now she looked around her in the gathering darkness of night; and there she stood in an utterly strange part of the forest, all alone, and at a loss to find her way. Many a look had she given to the flowers and night-herbs, but not one to the stars; and brightly as they sparkled in the sky, Fair Sigrid could not at all set herself right by these puzzling, mute way-marks. As she was thus

peering doubtfully into the gloom, she heard the branches rustling and snapping in the forest-trees near her; and just as she espied a black bear, rampant in grisly mimicry of man, coming rushing on her with a roar, a javelin passed whizzing over her, and the next moment the huge beast was rolling in his blood down the neighbouring precipice. With a winning smile a young warrior issued from the brushwood, and made offer to the beauteous maiden whom his spear-cast had saved to guide her homeward in safety. But Fair Sigrid wept bitterly; for all her witch-herbs and flowers had fallen out of her veil in the fright. To gather new ones, she would be forced, by wizard-law, to begin all over again; and the moon was now high in heaven, and the maiden felt the wood thereabouts quite strange and uncanny.

"'Go on seeking and gathering as thou wilt,' said the young warrior; 'I too know well enough that it must be done quite alone and undisturbed; so I will course round thee at a distance, sweet maiden, to guard thee, that no one may hinder thee; and ere morning breaks, I will escort thee home again to the rocky castle of thy father.'

"So the young chieftain vanished amid the brushwood; while, merrily and trustingly, Fair Sigrid plied her search; and if she grew timid at times in the strange lone wood, she soon felt cheered and relieved

again when the gold-mail which the young warrior wore sent its guardian rattle through the whispering leaves.

"At length she had done gathering her herbs, and was minded to brew them up at once in a golden flask that she had by her, and thus to take the wondrous draught easier and safer to her home. Her first and slightest signal brought her guardian to her side; and scarcely had he heard her wishes, before he piled up a heap of light twigs and boughs; and in a trice, at the maiden's bidding, the flame flashed up cheerily, through the dark green forest, to the lone vault of night. But this brewing of the weird potion lasted long; and when at last it was ended, Fair Sigrid began again to weep bitterly, for she felt that she was no longer able to begin her long way homeward without taking some repose.

"'Sleep in safety, beauteous maiden,' said the gallant warrior: 'I will take good care to watch over thee, and to wake thee at the fitting time.' So, with his mantle and a plentiful store of moss, he made a soft, warm couch; and as she stood bashfully by the side of it, he vanished at once into the dark shades of the grove.

"She awoke just as morning was breaking, at the sound of some war-horns in the distance, and the young warrior again stood at her side. 'Thou must

haste and hie thee, home,' said he, 'for those are Hakon Swendsohn's horns that are blowing, and they summon thy father to the fight. Take up thy draught quickly, and come.'

"And he led the maiden on through the strange by-ways of the forest, till they were close to her father's castle. On taking leave of him there, she besought him to tell her his name. 'I am Hakon Swendsohn,' said he; 'and I know full well that thou art Fair Sigrid, the old warrior's daughter; and that, to my ruin, thou hast sought and brewed the potion in the mountains. But too long have I been fired with the love of thee, Fair Sigrid; and the feud between our races is the death-blow to my hopes. Now right gladly will I die by the famous sword of thy father, and may he thrive on the potion!'

"Albeit Hakon, with these words, was darting off to his followers in the thicket, yet Fair Sigrid would not let him go till he had followed her into her father's castle. There she told all that had happened to her. The two foes embraced each other, and Hakon Swendsohn and Fair Sigrid became a happy pair."

The company were well pleased with the story. "Yes," said a noble master of the painter's art, "the sportive dalliance of light is ever and everywhere a welcome greeting; but where the rainbow throws its span athwart the threatening thunderclouds, we thrill

with the keenest joy. Thus welcome, too, are these looks of love and gentleness, darting forth from the roughest regions of the north. Glad astonishment and sweet surprise, mingled with delight in the bright picture, enter at once into delicious fellowship."

"You are right, noble master," said the Count Alessandro Vinciguerra, "if the sight of the rose seems more wonderful to you in northern lands than in our blossom-teeming Italian gardens. But we cannot be astonished at the fair flowers of knighthood and comely bearing that bloom among those noble Normans—we, I mean, who have seen Normandy, and know her high-born sons and beauteous daughters."

In the meanwhile, several of the company had turned to a Spaniard, Don Hernandez by name, of fine stature and sunburnt visage, and begged him to tell a tale of his fatherland.

"Many a wonderful thing must take place," said they all, "in a land so rife in beauty and knightly prowess, where Christian swords have ever had to stand their ground against the armed hosts of the cunning and gorgeous Saracen."

Hernandez craved a lute. He would rather sing his tale, he said, than tell it. His wish was granted; and waking the strings with the most lovely sway, he sang the following words:

"'Don Gayferos, Don Gayferos,

Knight so wondrous, knight of glory,
From the castle thou hast charmed me,
Lovely one, with thy beseeching.

Don Gayferos, leaguers with thee
Were the wood and evening's cressets:
Lo, I wait thee; tell me only
Whither wilt thou wander, dearest?'

'Donna Clara, Donna Clara,
Thou art mistress, I the vassal;
Thou my guide, and I the planet;
Spell of sweetness, speak thy bidding!'

'Sooth, then, let us down the mountain
To the crucifix beneath it;
Wending then along the meadows
By the sainted chapel homeward.'

'Ah! why need we by the chapel?
By the crucifix why need we?'
'Speak; for why wilt thou gainsay me,
Who methought wert my true vassal?'

'Nay, I wend me, nay, I wander,
Lady, as thy will commandeth:'
So they rambled on together,
Communing of love so sweetly.

'Don Gayferos, Don Gayferos,

By the crucifix behold us;
Why hast thou not bowed thee lowly
To the Lord, like other Christian?'

'Donna Clara, Donna Clara,
Could I gaze on aught around me
But those little tender fingers,
Whilst they sported with the flowerets?

'Don Gayferos, Don Gayferos,
Couldst thou find no fitting answer
To the holy friar's greeting,
As he murmured, Christ be with thee?'

'Donna Clara, Donna Clara,
Could I hear the lightest breathing,
Or a single earthly whisper,
But thy soft sweet tale, "I love thee?"

'Don Gayferos, Don Gayferos,
See, before the chapel glistening,
Stands the little hallowed fountain;
Come and do like me, beloved!'

'Donna Clara, Donna Clara,
Very soon shall I be sightless;
For a single moment's gazing
On thy bright eyes hath undone me.

'Don Gayferos, Don Gayferos,

Do like me if thou wilt serve me;
In the wave thy right hand steeping.
Sign upon thy brow a crosslet.'

Don Gayferos mutely started;
Don Gayferos fled away thence;
Donna Clara turned her timid
Trembling footsteps to the castle."

Now striking a few pensive chords, Hernandez passed into another and a gloomier key, and continued his song as follows:

"Then at night the lute rang sweetly.
As it oftentimes had sounded;
Then at night the handsome stranger
Sang as he so oft had sung there.

And again the casement trembled—
Donna Clara gazed beneath it;
But her timid glances hurried
Coyly through the dewy darkness.

And in lieu of love's sweet whisper,
Soothing tale, and tender tiding.
She began conjuring harshly—
'Say, who art thou, darksome wooer?

Say, by thy love and by my love—
Say, if thy soul's peace thou prizest.

Art thou Christian? art thou Spaniard?
Art thou of the Church's liegemen?'

'Lady, sternly thou conjurest;
Lady, thou shalt hear the tidings.
Ah! no Spaniard am I, lady,
Nor the holy Church's liegeman;

But a Moorish king, whose bosom
Love of thee to flame hath kindled;
Great in power, rich in treasure,
Matched by none in knightly prowess.

Crimson blooms Granada's garden.
Golden gleam Alhambra's towers;
Warriors wait their queen to welcome—
Fly with me, then, through the darkness.'

'Forth! thou soul-destroying false one!
Forth! thou fiend!' she would have shouted;
But before the word was fashioned,
On her lips' sweet bourne it melted.

Helplessness its darksome coil
Wreathed around her form of beauty;
Straightway to his steed he bore her,
And fled onward through the night-gloom."

Again Hernandez changed the key; and in a stately, hymn-like march he closed his song.

"Up the early sky of morning,
Pure and smiling, soars the sun;
But there's blood upon the meadow,
And a steed with rider gone,
Round and round affrighted runneth;
And a vassal-band is there.
Moorish king! thou hast been smitten
By the valiant brother-pair,
Who beheld the hardy venture
Thou didst in the greenwood dare.
By the corse the lady kneeleth,
With her gold dishevell'd hair;
Little now to hide her fondness
For the fallen doth she care.
Brothers plead, and priests reprove her—
Vain alike reproof and prayer:
Suns may set, and night-stars follow,
Eaglets soar and sink in air,
Everything on earth is changeful—
She alone unchanging there.
So at last the faithful brothers
Build her shrine and chapel fair;
And her life is spent in praying,
Day by day, and year by year,
Like a slow-exhaling offering
For the soul of him so dear."

The sounds of the guitar died away in slow vibra-

tions, and the gaze of the listeners was overcast with gloom.

Hernandez was the first to break silence. With a tone of the most courteous sweetness, "I should both reproach and condemn myself, ye noble knights and masters," said he, "for darkening your merry banquet with so stern and sorrowful a tale, had ye not yourselves craved a story of my fatherland. But everything there just now takes a very gloomy cast; for where Christians and Pagans fight for their lives with each other, sorrow, and even death, too often sits at the helm."

"It needeth not excuse," rejoined the Baron de Montfaucon. "Think ye, then, we do not gladly weave dark flowers, too, in our garlands? Thank God, we Franks are not degraded to such mountebank fellows, that we either mistake or avoid the noble gravity of Castile; and who, of all my gentle-born guests from divers European lands, hath not gladly drawn from the deep spring of life and poesy in the bright soil beyond the Pyrenees?"

"You speak graciously of us," said Hernandez, "and we hope that we are worthy of such favour. But, however that may be, the beautiful garland will pale before too many dark flowers. A flame-bright firefly might fitly be blended with it; and sorely am

I mistaken if such gay little blossom is not just now upon the lips of the noble Count Vinciguerra."

"Spaniards and Italians form ready fellowship," said Count Alessandro; "and if such be your pleasure, I would fain tell my story too.

"In magnificent Naples, which, both for its situation and beauty, may be called a very city of the sun, lived sometime ago a warrior of the name of Dimetri, high-born, wealthy, and of far-famed prowess, though well advanced in years. As he wished now to crown his toilsome life with a cheery and refreshing old age, he gathered around him all the fairest things those rich domains afforded, in tapestry, fruit, wines, blazonry, sculpture, and whatsoever could minister to delight; but the most beautiful gem of all was a young wife, Madonna Porzia, whom he had taken to his home from one of the noblest families of the land. Therewith, however, no little discomfort installed itself in his mansion; for however modest, gentle, and compliant Donna Porzia might be, still the consciousness of his own gray hair, and the decay of his personal charms, raised such jealous thoughts in the good old man's breast, as left him but small store of peace.

"If he, however, on his part, was a prey to uneasiness, still more so was Signor Donatello, a young nobleman, whose winning manners, knightly beauty,

and graceful bearing, made him a favourite with everyone; for since he had by chance seen Madonna Porzia at mass (and to any other place the anxious Dimetri never let her repair), he could think of nothing else but the enchantment of her beauty. Accordingly he resolved in one way or other to gain her love, or to lose his life in the endeavour. Yet he did not set about this like most foolish youths, who, by messages from the chattering lips of female envoys—by riding and galloping past in full array of splendour, and waving their greeting the while—only awaken the fears of jealous husbands; or, by thrusting presents upon their mistresses, and like acts of indiscretion, strike such terror into their tender hearts that they must blame themselves if there be no more room for love there. But so artful and circumspect was his demeanour, that albeit the fair Porzia took knowledge of his flame,—as one bright look is ever quick to strike fire from another,—yet she at the same time felt assured that Donatello held the safety and happiness of his mistress far dearer than the attainment of his wishes.

"So it happened, then, at last, that she herself devised safe means of sending him her thanks for his attentions, and the tenderness of his court to her; and after many sendings to and fro, Donatello was at last empowered to promise himself all he most ardently

longed for, if he could but gain an entrance into his lovely mistress's house.

"The favours which by this time Donatello had showered on Dimetri had not fallen to the old warrior's lot in all the length and breadth of his eventful life; yet so cleverly were they tendered, that no obtrusiveness of design was for a moment discoverable. That, however, which might greatly advantage the youth with the beautiful Porzia, was his greatest drawback with old Dimetri: the handsomeness of form and feature, to wit, in which he shone above all others of his age. Had it not been for this, Dimetri would long before have bidden to his dwelling a comrade so congenial and winning; but now the venture appeared to him too fearful; and friendly as he invariably continued to Donatello, Donatello as invariably continued a fixture outside his door.

"The enamoured youth had soon spent a considerable part of his fortune in tokens of good-will to his veteran rival, and was still not a whit nearer his goal. At length a thought, which had hitherto been but a dream, ripened into a well-ordered plan; the wish, namely, that Dimetri's life might be perilled, and that he, by saving him, might gain his confidence and friendship for ever. To this end he hired certain assassins, who were to fall upon the old man unawares in some retired part of the city. But as

soon as he was seemingly in the height of danger, Donatello was to hasten up, and the venal bullies, after a feigned resistance, were to take to flight. The trick was played off most cleverly; Dimetri believed himself saved by Donatello, thanked him with the greatest warmth and earnestness; but his threshold remained barred as before, and he himself seemed still more morose and uneasy.

The facts of the case were these: The belief that Madonna Porzia could never love an old man like him—one, too, so utterly unskilled in the art of pleasing—he sought to stifle in his own breast, by calling to mind all his renowned and truly wonderful achievements, and at the same time conjuring up all that great poets had said about the love of fair dames for mighty warriors. Whereupon he failed not to tell the young dame in glowing terms of his combats and adventures, and to put books into her hands where in many of them were chronicled. But it always seemed to him as though she heard and read that sort of thing with no other emotion than she did the histories of warriors that had long since mouldered into dust; and, beyond a doubt, he would fain have freshened up his fading laurels by some new campaign or other, despite his tottering health, had jealousy allowed of his straying so long from Donna Porzia's side. And when he now and then had young chargers led into

the courtyard of his mansion, or cross-bows brought him, that he might show his lovely young consort the dexterities of his once-admired youth, he felt too keenly how little he then shone in those featly exercises; while a certain anxious trait of concern in Madonna Porzia's features told more of the fear of a daughter for her feeble father, than the anxiety of a wife for her hair-brained spouse. How much more keenly must the heart of the old soldier have been wounded by his inglorious fray with the bravoes, and his rescue by the hand and arm of so comely a stripling. He disengaged himself more and more from Donatello, whose every thought of entering the house had now to be relinquished. After hopes so often blasted, the young lover's patience could stand it no longer. To be sure, a faint glimmer of hope that his wish would one day be granted kept him still gentle and friendly towards Dimetri; but to the rest of the citizens he was a very torment, since he thought, if his best wishes were in vain, others should never see the fulfilment of theirs. So that he, who before was the favourite of Naples, and praised by her every tongue, came at last to be by all Naples execrated and hated; till some young men, whose path he had too often jeeringly and spitefully crossed, resolved to lie in wait for him without more ado, and if not to murder him, at least to wound him in such a

manner as to make him thoroughly shy of his own bickering and banter.

One evening he fell into the snare; for as he could not help sauntering, by night at least, in the neighbourhood of that well-loved roof, it was easy to fall in with him there; and bravely as he defended himself, yet the surprise and number of his foes left him open to two severe wounds. But, hark! the old swordsman heard from his palazzo the shouts and the clashing of the combatants; and eager to play the Orlando, both before himself and the beauteous Madonna Porzia, he girds himself to the fight, and runs out at once with his huge two-handed battle-blade. Whether he, equipped as he was for the fray, was really a dread warrior still, or alarm was most potent with Donatello's foes,—enough, they fled before the giant spectre, and Donatello was saved. Now, every shadow of scruple vanished from the eyes of the triumphant conqueror. He brought in his rescued friend to Madonna Porzia as a trophy: nothing would do but she must undertake the nursing of the wounded one herself; and as Donatello knew his own game too well to talk of aught to Donna Porzia, so long as Dimetri was present, but the heroism of her spouse, dwelling on his feints and wards, his menacing postures and unheard of daring, he continued, even after his recovery, his daily and privileged guest. Dimetri often found him

alone with his wife; but every germ of distrust was crushed in a moment, as he always heard Donatello recounting the story of his valour, and Donna Porzia applauding it.

"My tale may teach us, I think, that one man's cunning is of little avail against the wits of another; but when the fool in our adversary's breast declares for us, the game is at once our own."

Chapter 20

Many tongues grew loud about the adventure of the old warrior and young Signor Donatello. Now the lover was praised for his refined secrecy and reserve; now Madonna Porzia for understanding and honouring so delicate a suit; and now again every personage in the story, even old Dimetri included, were termed happy, since each had met with the fulfilment of a long-cherished hope: in short, there was no end to their laughter and the motley tissue of their remarks meanwhile, with the watchfulness of a worthy host, the bright eyes of Sir Folko de Montfaucon circled round the table; and as it seemed to him that Otto was sitting there in sad and sullen thought, he strove to raise his cheer, and make him better acquainted with his company.

"My noble German guest," said he, "you hear how this and that is praised in Count Alessandro's story: what seemeth the most praiseworthy point in it to you? and do you find it in the knight or in the lady?"

With eyes darkly glowing, a deep voice, and an austere look, that matched but oddly with the witty

mirthfulness of the company, "I know not," replied Otto, "whether in such a knight and such a lady there can be the least mite of anything to praise. If you ask me in which of the two all that is most abominable, most infamous, and most devilish is to be found, I might find a readier answer, and even then it would be hard for me to choose. Out upon it! Far above all she deserved, the renowned warrior chose the smooth, sleek puppet, placed his honour in her hands, trusting to her to light up the peaceful evening of his valiant life with the goodly ray of love and tenderness and truth; and now, vile truant from the high path of her destiny, her eyes rove in search of wanton lemans! Out upon it! The pretty sauntering coxcomb succeeds in making the old hero fond of his company,—an honour, by the by, at which every right fellow's heart would leap with unmingled joy,—but only in order to set his toils the more artfully! He mates and mixes with bravoes! Why not with poisoners outright? And at last the old battle-prince eaves him in earnest, unlike his own wicked toying; wields for him in truth and bravery, and perhaps for the very last time of all, the fame-crowned sword; and then, instead of the sniveller sinking to earth under the burden of his shame—But spare me, good sirs, the pain of dwelling on it more largely: I have already gazed on it longer than is good for healthy eyes."

All at the table were silent; many a cheek was glowing with a, deep flush of shame, which Count Alessandro Vinciguerra felt kindling on his own. Yet, thinking to struggle out of it, "You take things too severely," said he, "noble Allemanian knight. From your point of view, you may be right; but, prithee, from your side of the Alps level not your shaft of reproof at my fiery countrymen. We are other than you are, and so things must go otherwise with us than with you."

"Are there points of view, or whatever you call them, in such matters?" said Otto. "I know sure enough that, on the other side of the Alps, folk are as little fond of going to hell as on ours: and hellward leads the road that your story would teach us; you may take my word for it."

With all this there was a sober earnestness, a freedom from everything spiteful, and at the same time a quiet, childlike grace on Otto's features, such as we see on the angels' heads of old German or Italian masters. A light shudder, a presage of measureless eternity, thrilled through the assembled wassailers. The proud Vinciguerra riveted his eyes on the ground. Hernandez, on the other hand, had quietly risen and stationed himself behind Otto's chair. At a friendly tap on the shoulder, the young knight turned round,

and a joyful, loving ray of light came streaming from the Castilian's eyes.

After a long interval of silence, the Baron de Montfaucon rose from his seat and addressed the young German: "Sir knight," said he, "you have put us one and all to shame; but you have led us one and all too into the right path; for you sound forth, like a clear church-bell, the behest of Christendom and of knighthood. My inmost, warmest thanks to thee. I acknowledge thee the noblest jewel in my castle." Thereupon he bowed solemnly before him, and all the knights and masters rose and did the same.

Otto's cheeks were brightly flushed with modest embarrassment. "Kind sirs," quoth he, "I ween ye bow to the good God, and not to me, and so it is all very right. Were it meant otherwise, I, poor stripling knight, dare not approve it."

"We crave your name, noble sir," said the baron, "and the story of your life. "

"Whether any at all, or what kind of story my life will produce," replied Otto, "rests with your sword-grasp, my noble host. Remember you still the youth on Danube's bank, at the time when you worsted the stalwart Count Archimbald von Walbek? I *have* now the golden spurs, and the three flat sword-strokes too."

"Good, sir knight; and ye come for Gabriele's

ring?" said Montfaucon. In courteous approval, Otto bowed his head. "At your service," said Folko, in friendly guise; then turning to the banqueters, "Sirs," he continued, "the young German knight has told you no tale; but he will let you see the germ of one if ye will honour us so far tomorrow as to bear us company to one of my Norman castles, whither I will bid the wondrously beautiful Gabriele de Portamour, and there to be witnesses of our encounter."

He then told them how he had formerly met with Otto at the castle of Trautwangen, and what they now had before them; that, moreover, the lordly mansion where they were to fight before Gabriele was the principal seat of those baronies to which the contested ring gave a paramount right, so that the beautiful lady would not be slow to repair thither. All the guests present had already accepted the invitation, when Otto, with a graceful meekness, went round the circle, thanking so august an assembly for their readiness to behold how his almost deedless youth was honoured by a combat with the great Folko de Montfaucon. Every heart beat warmly for the friendly stripling; and Alessandro Vinciguerra kissed him fondly.

"Truly," cried he, "if fate wished for a stern preacher to chide and put a damper on my arro-

gance, it could send me nothing more lovable and true-hearted in the whole wide world than this!"

Chapter 21

With the earliest beams of the following morning, the whole of the noble company set forth for Normandy. A fair sight it was to see how they rode along together, now over blooming plains, now through shady avenues or thickets, now across bright green meadows; warriors, and cunning masters, and liveried servants in glittering medley; and here and there sumpter-horses richly laden with baggage, over which lay sparkling coverlets with fringe of gold or silver. Among the proudest of the train was Count Alessandro Vinciguerra, whose gaily-emblazoned arms shone gorgeously on high from the silk-embroidered groundwork of his escutcheon. Costly braids of bead-work were enwound with the dappled chasings, forming in many a varied festoon some pretty motto or warlike device. The plates and splints which peeped forth from his rich raiment or saddle-cloths were of the purest steel, inlaid with gold; while feathers of countless hues fluttered in the wind from his baret-cap, or proudly waved adown his slender girth. Strange was the contrast formed by the Spaniard

Hernandez. He had made things quite comfortable to himself, in true travelling trim; he wound his way on a wondrously fair and prettily caparisoned mule, with no other weapons than a falchion of elegant form, and a little glittering targe, both of which hung on the velvet trimming of his saddle. But not far from him, a squire led his snorting Andalusian charger by a golden chain-rein, and another his beauteously flashing arms on a sumpter-horse, in as fair array as one could well conceive,—the closed vizor fastened high upon the top of them, with its far-waving heron-plumes.

The brave baron and Otto mostly rode at each other's side, engaged in various converse, and growing mutually fonder every moment. And Folko's silver-gray, and Trautwangen's light-brown too, were of friendly accord, little as the latter was wont to order himself peaceably towards stranger steeds. Of the parley of the noble foes, be it granted me to note the following.

"I scarcely thought to find you again in Frankland," said Otto. "At the Holy Grave, thought I, we shall meet, or at least on our way thither. But doth not every great heart in Europe throb towards that blessed loadstone which, in the night-shroud of the grave, engirt by the godlessness of Paganism, spreads through all the world its still yet mighty sway,

and summons us to burst the chains of its bondage? And your heart, my noble foeman, must assuredly beat time with the best of Christendom. Why, then, weareth not your shoulder the cross of red?"

"Because not only doth the Saviour need warriors at His grave," replied Montfaucon, "but my king too must have barons in his blooming realms. For the very reason that my noble liege himself is marching forth into the East, he maketh it his high wish and behest that my mates and I shall remain behind to keep guard for him over the earthly garden of France, whilst he conquereth Palestine, the garden of God. The Moors in Spain are not so very far off, nor is there an arm of the sea between us and them; and if the brave knights of Castile seek to make head against them, we must either help in strengthening our noble bulwark, or appear in our own eyes but craven idlers. I think of bending my march thither in the company of the valiant Hernandez, and, maybe, in yours too, if it so chance that I fall in the fray, and yet survive it; for, as conqueror, you too will become a vassal of France."

Otto looked on him questioningly, and the baron continued: "I thought you already knew," said he, "that the fair Gabriele de Portamour has promised her own passing lovely self to him who wins for her

the wondrous ring. Oh, how your eyes sparkle again, you hope-exulting champion!"

And, sooth, Otto's soul flashed forth with a joy till then strange to him; and yet he could not but doubt more than ever of his victory, and even whether he should live till the day of strife, in such sudden and overwhelming glory did that fair fortune beam upon him. Folko smiled with keen delight at the stripling's enthusiasm, and yet his look was soon changed to one of pensive sorrow; haply he was reflecting that this very warrior-glow was urging the young knight on his fearful, and, to many a foe, deadly lance-point. So they both sought, by divers parley, to forget that they shortly would close for life or for death; and on Otto asking the baron what he really knew about the wondrous jewel, the latter gave him answer as follows:

"The ring is an heirloom of my stepfather's, a very doughty man of war, Messire Huguenin by name, who was of high account at the court of our king. Although he had come a stranger into the land from the East, or, as others said, the North, his valorous achievements had gained him the grant of many mighty feoffs in the realm; and this, too, with such unfettered ownership, that he might bequeath them to whom he would, whether lady or knight. Glittering at all the galas of the court, he was smitten by a beautiful damsel, of one of the noblest houses,

betrothed himself to her, and promised her the wonderful ring of enchantment, which he was said to have brought with him from the wonder-lands of the North. The jewel was, moveover, to serve as a pledge to the fair possessor for the feudal feoffs obtained by him in Frankland. And the damsel is even said to have been seen pranking with the golden circlet on feast-days, yet it always returned again into Messire Huguenin hands.

"About this time he travelled into Normandy to see his fine castles for the first time. They lay close to the ancestral seat of our family, where my mother lived a lonely life, busy only in bringing me up to be a brave knight, not unworthy of the name of Montfaucon; yet harassed in her forlorn state all the more, because her seemingly never-failing and luxuriant beauty still outshone the fairest and youngest lady-flowers of the land, and brought upon her a number of suitors, who were one and all a plague to her. I still remember quite well how the glorious Messire Huguenin came riding up the first time to our castle; how my whole heart enkindled at his princely array; with what knightly courtesy, yet well-bred ease, he spoke with my mother; for I was then more than ten years of age, and well able to see the difference between him and our other neighbours. If since then I have now and then been happy enough

not to be displeasing to noble ladies, I have always been obliged to say to myself that Messire Huguenin was my best teacher, without ever being quite able to come up to this pattern of noble bearing. By my beautiful mother, too, he was more than commonly prized; and, on the other hand, her heavenly charms made every union but one with her unbearable to him. His first care, therefore, was to release himself from his earlier betrothal; and a dread of the favour in which Huguenin stood with the king, and of his own valiant arm, kept the lady's kinsmen so thoroughly within bounds, that all passed off in the utmost peace: the knight retained the ring; and it was not till long afterwards, when she was already Huguenin's spouse, that my mother heard a single word of the matter.

"Willingly had the fair Wittid entrusted her life and her happiness to the renowned Messire Huguenin, and, what she had much more at heart, the knightly rearing of her son. How the first two costly jewels were cherished by him, I know not; for the rosy spring-bloom of his love was as brief as it was beautiful. Scarcely more than two years, during which my stepsister Blancheflour was born, an embodiment of her mother's every charm, did the stately Sir Huguenin dwell in our castle: after that he set forth on the seas, and never came back again. For the sake of his honour and his soul, let us think

that he met with a speedy and a glorious death. My mother never heard of him more; and the greater the happiness he had yielded her in the short term of their union, the more surely did he wind his own dark shroud round her beautiful life. For a few years sorrow preyed upon her health, and then, sorrowfully smiling, she sank into her peaceful grave.

"The other pledge—namely, myself and my knightly culture—he had honourably kept. Grave and tender, stately yet kindly, like some beckoning pillar of flame, he ever strode on before me. During the day he talked but little to me, but showed me rather what was noble and animating in feats of arms, and horsemanship, and the chase. At eventide the legends and stories of far-gone times fell on me from his proud lips in plentiful flow: little or none were the warnings he blended with them; but he told his tale in such wise that the soul and life-giving power of each achievement stood ever in fair embodiment before me, holding out its hand, as it were, to mine, and bidding me join fellowship with the shining league. And this I did with heart the more devoted to the cause, because I knew that it was a mighty hero who was recounting all this to me, and one who had compassed no less exploits than those of which he spoke to me. And in those two years I too—without boasting, be it said—had followed closely in his foot-

steps; wherefore, on the eve of his departure, he took me with him to his chamber, and locking it after us, 'Folko,' said he, 'I am going to other lands; for how long, God knows: perhaps for ever. Thine eyes already sue me to take thee with me to battle and to victory; but that must not be, as I have fashioned thee to a higher destiny. Thou must tarry here as warder to thy mother and the little Blancheflour; for though thou numberest but thirteen years, yet, in spirit and skill to wield thine arms, thou art half a dozen years older. And withal thou art fond of me, and of poor little Blancheflour too. Her, then, be it thine to ward, and the wondrous jewelled ring which I bequeath her, and which, I foresee, will be assailed on many sides. But let it not be taken from her, young lion of Montfaucon: and see, when both of you are older, that she one day bears the name of thy lineage; for mine, though great and mighty, is not so well known here in the realm, and sounds strange and awkward to Frankish ears. Wilt thou now promise me all this?'

"Proudly and joyfully I vowed to do his bidding, and Heaven knows I have kept my word honourably to this very day. Messire Huguenin's earlier betrothed was afterwards wedded to the knight of Portamour, and became the mother of Gabriele. Thereupon the fair Gabriele, who was early left an orphan, heard much from her guardians of her right to the ring,

for which her poor mother is said to have raised her cry in the hour of death, as a dear and promised dowry. Hence, then, all this fighting took its rise. If your good fortune and the will of God will have it so, today or tomorrow may put an end to it. For see, the towers of the castle to which my fair foe is bidden are already peeping over the tree-tops."

Chapter 22

At the foot of the castle-hill, in a fresh green beech-wood, the train had halted beneath the broad and shady branches, to enjoy the balmy spring-breeze of evening as it curled through the wood; whilst a squire was despatched in haste to the mansion to announce the arrival of the knight and his noble guests. But scarcely had they alighted from their steeds and filled the wine-cups, when the messenger came hastening back with the news that Lady Gabriele de Portamour was already at the castle; and that, at her suit, Lady Blancheflour, as hostess, had ordered their evening meal and supper to be served in the forest beneath; and that the escort of the noble damsels was already in motion down the hill. And now the flash of polished arras, silver table-services, and rich attire, might be seen through the webwork of the branches. The Baron of Montfaucon turned to Don Hernandez and the Count Vinciguerra, and begged them in the meantime to give the ladies greeting at the head of the brotherhood of knights and minstrels; "For," said he, "it is fitting that we two foemen appear in

comelier guise before the beautiful Gabriele than our journey and surprisal will just at this moment allow of." So saying, he strode with Otto down a little copse-covered dell. Tebaldo and a squire of the baron's attended them.

The young warriors armed and arrayed themselves with eager haste. Carefully were plate and vambrace rubbed up and furbished, the straps buckled closer, and their ends concealed, their ruffled helm-plumes smoothed again, and their sashes beaten, and more daintily wound round them. When they both placed their helmets on their heads, Folko looked on the young knight with amazement: "Now first, at the sight of the eagle-vizor, I get to the rights of what seemed so strange, and yet familiar to me, in your black and silver mail. Is not that the armour of Count Archimbald von Walbek?"

And on Otto's replying that it was, "I shall soon beg of you," continued he, "to tell me more at large, how you, so young a flower of knighthood, come by this austere war-suit; and I will recount to you, on the other hand, what strange things I have dreamt about fighting with a silver-black eagle, that kept flying across the Rhine from German soil, and pecking with its sharp beak at a garland on my brow. Now, when I awoke with my own strugglings, I said to myself, Thou must surely think of hot encounters

with Count Archimbald von Walbek; but his word binds him fast, and debars him from the tilting-ring. Here, however, the eagle is, and ready for war. Follow me, my young eaglet; the dames await us." And the two knightly comrades strode hand in hand up the slope of the dell.

Through the circle formed by fair ladies and noble knights on the lawn above, Gabriele's beauty shone with such wondrous lustre, that Otto, at the thought of the fray and the happy prize, cast his eyes meekly to the earth. Folko stepped up to the lovely lady of Portamour: "Never should I forgive myself," said he, "for coming, like tardy host, later than so beauteous a guest, if it were not still unsettled who is really to remain host and who guest here. If such be your pleasure, this brave young German holdeth himself ready to adjust the point of strife."

Gabriele cast a hurried glance at Otto. Now she seemed to doubt his youthful inexperience and the issue of the struggle; and now, in his youth and artlessness, he took the semblance of a ministering angel. "Wert thou not the stripling on the bank of the Danube?" said she, trying to recollect herself.

"The same," answered Otto softly; "and I am come to redeem my vow." Gabriele looked at him complacently; yet still, it seemed, in doubt. But the knight of Montfaucon stepping up to her, "Lady,"

said he, "prithee choose this noble cavalier to be thy champion. I stand not in the repute of craving powerless foemen: and this one I would gladly see confronting me in the lists." And straightway the lady Gabriele drew the pretty glove from her swan-white hand, and tying it fast to the knight of Trautwangen's sash, "My right and my hope," quoth she, "are wedded to thy brave sword." And then with faltering voice she added, "and Gabriele shall be the conqueror's guerdon." He was about to return an answer, when a cooing, as of the soft turtle-dove, sounded close at his ear; and looking up, he beheld a form of passing loveliness leaning on Sir Folko's shoulder—one which, by the description given him, ho knew at once to be the lady Blancheflour; and now he heartily believed all that the baron had told him of the never-fading beauty of his mother. Was not that lovely flower still triumphing over the grave, and spending its sweet bloom on the world? But Blancheflour bent meekly to Gabriele: "Oh, one boon only, noble maiden!" whispered she. "One, one brother only have I, and must he fight all his lifelong for that little ring? Must I never gladden myself in the young warrior with safety? Oh, let the pending combat decide for ever! If my dear brother falls, lady, then the ring is thine, and again, if thy champion be defeated, then once for all let thy claim be waived.

Oh, prithee hear me. Too noble-minded I know thou art to play so ill-matched a game for ever."

It was easy to see that Gabriele underwent a fierce struggle with herself. But at length she kindly raised her eyes. "Be it so," said she. "Sir knight," she continued, turning to the Trautwangen with a high-born though anxious air, "now rest my woe or weal with thy bold hand and heart."

"Oh! can I not fight this very hour, then?" cried Otto, in ecstasy.

"Not so," said Gabriele, in a solemn tone; "very well do I know the mail that thou wearest. Haply it may be destined to repair my earlier ill-fortune; or, maybe, to complete it. Yet if I then was rashly eager for the ill-starred tourney, today I will curb my zeal. Tomorrow, therefore, at the hour of noon, hold ye ready for the fight in the castle-court. Till then away with all such solemn matters. But rather, if I may speak the boon I crave, let sport and festival be gaily sped, and care unthought of."

Folko bowed, and with skilful grace he had soon arranged the company beneath the greenwood bower. Wines and viands were handed round in delicious variety; and sweet lays were warbled the while by this banqueter or that. Then many a lip besought the lady Blancheflour to sing the lay of Abelard and Heloisa with one of the noble minstrels. She chose,

therefore, one of the minstrels from her brother's retinue, named Master Aleard; and their alternate strain began as follows:

BLANCHEFLOUR.

O'er the vale and woodland lonely
Evening's flowery buds are laid;
But her Heloisa only
Is the flower to droop and fade.
Cloister-garden,
Cruel warden
Will not let the bright one through;
She may not fly;
But only sigh
Unto life a last adieu.

ALEARD.

Heavens! the crimson gloaming sparkles;
'Tis the night-bird's witching prime;
Soft and cool the evening darkles;
Ah! this wont to be the time.
Hush, sweet wooer!
Sterner, truer,
Sounds the solemn cloister-bell;—
Song is over,
Flown the rover;
Over, all but dirge and knell.

BLANCHEFLOUR.

Heloisa, bent on flying,
Long'st thou for the blooming train?

ALEARD.

Over field and meadow hieing,
Com'st thou, Abelard, again?

BOTH.

Earth hath tried us;
We would hide us
Where its woes are all unknown:
In the ruing
Love's undoing,
'Tis not sad to be alone.

BLANCHEFLOUR.

Over distant seas it pealeth:
Comes it, Abelard, from thee?

ALEARD.

O'er the far woods echo stealeth:
Can it Heloisa be?

BOTH.

Warblers roaming
Through the gloaming.
Sing their last ere spring is flown:
Close, ye bowers;

Hearts like ours
Do not grieve to be alone.

The tears stood in many beautiful eyes; nay, in the eyelids of many a valiant warrior; so touchingly had Blancheflour and Aleard sung. Otto felt the strain echo from the very depths of his heart: it seemed to him as though the whole lay were made for him, little as it tallied with his present situation; and he could not keep from secretly murmuring to himself the few closing lines. In the meanwhile Sir Folko de Montfaucon looked gloomily before him; very differently to the light-hearted knight's usual wont. At length he cast a keen look towards the lady Blancheflour, who at that moment was speaking with great concern to Master Aleard; and she hastened to her brother, sat down beside him, and stirred not the whole evening from the spot. He, on his part, caressed her in the fondest and gayest guise; devising a thousand pretty things to divert her with. Yet ever and anon there was, as it were, a little pearly tear in Blancheflour's gentle eye; and then Master Aleard withdrew to the deepest shade of the bower.

Evening now drew its cool veil over the landscape; damp vapours stole from the fallen beech-leaves: so rising to the strain of a merry march, they passed onward to the castle. And strangely through the

gathering darkness glimmered the tapers and torches that lit the train up the winding mountain-path.

Chapter 23

Early at dawn of morning on the following day there was a busy scene in the courtyard of the castle, on its fresh green-sward, and beneath the shade of its lofty lime-trees. Stakes were set up, and spars let into them, as a grating to defend the tilting-ring from the pressing crowd, while rich tapestry was hung over the barriers. Into the lists themselves wagons poured their loads of fine white sand, and a number of serving-men spread it smoothly and carefully over them, that the war-horses might have a firm footing, and curvet and caracole at will, without slipping on the smooth turf; and that, if the knights should chance to grasp the keen falchion for the fight on foot, their armed heels might find a trusty stay. With all this, Don Hernandez and Count Vinciguerra strolled up and down, to whom, as umpires of the fight, the chief survey and arrangement had been deputed on the evening before. They measured the rounds, fixed and marked out the standing-posts of the combatants, giving each equal advantage of sun and wind, and all this with the maturest deliberation. For the ladies

a high and beautiful platform was placed amid the leafy network of the old linden-trees, so that from the thick leaves that shaded and warded them they had a free, open view of the tilting-course, peeping forth like fruits touched with life from heaven, or rather like angels from the bowers of paradise. A throng of spectators had already gathered, waiting impatiently for the coming of the knights and ladies who were to grace this fair death-festival.

In the meanwhile, in separate chambers, the baron and the knight of Trautwangen were girding on their arms. About the latter his comrade Tebaldo was busied with the utmost care, and with a soft-heartedness at the same time which was but seldom seen in him. From the eagle-helmet down to the golden spurs, he looked at everything ten times over; tightening a buckle here, giving more play there; and yet it was never quite the thing, to his mind, for his knightly master and friend.

"Heigh, Diephold," said the latter, looking at him kindly, and using the German name by which he was fondest of calling him in their tenderest moments,—"Heigh, Diephold, thou makest such a sorrowful face about it, as though thou wert arming me for the last time of all!"

"That may well be, saving your noble prophetic

lip!" said Tebaldo with a sigh; and he bent over the still-ungauntleted hand of his master.

Now the doors flew open; and with gleaming mail, flashing blue and golden, like the starry night-sky, surmounted as with a glory by an unclosed helm of the sunny metal itself, the Baron Folko de Montfaucon stepped in, followed by a squire with a huge sparkling sword. "Dear comrade of war," said he to the knight, "we have lived in good accord till today, and have often looked each other trustingly in the face. But now it will full soon come to pass, or at least bids fair so to do, that after the closing of our vizors, the one shall never again see the eye of the other; at least not living, and withh ray unbroken. So hitherward am I come, heartily to mingle my kisses with thine; and we will pray together before the altar in the chapel." And wide he stretched his arms apart, while Otto rushed fondly to his embrace; and the two mail-clad men of war enclasped each other, as though the hard shell that encased them would melt at the brotherly warmth of their love. But a trumpet sounded without, and they tore themselves hastily apart.

"The first signal call!" said Folko; "now gird me on my sword, my noble foe, and I will do the like service for thee." What the baron craved was done; and, whilst they were girding each other with the

superbly-flashing weapons, they told each other—the one, how his stepfather, the other how his father, had for the first time placed the gold-chased falchion in his hand. Then they strode arm in arm down to the chapel, and kneeled in still prayer at either side of the altar; there, burning for the fight, yet with hearts overflowing with love, they awaited the second call of the clarion. On rising, they again looked kindly at each other; and then closing their vizors, they stepped forth together to the sun-bright court of the castle.

The fair dames were already on the balcony; and Folko said to his companion, "In the northern lands where my lineage sprung, they have a legend about the golden apples of immortality. Seest thou them up above there, comrade?" He only wished to say something pretty and sprightly; but hollow as the voice came from forth the close-locked helmet, softened by no smile of the lip or gay twinkle of the eye, with the cold metal vizor stark and motionless over the face, it sounded not like sportiveness, but like the stern watchword of death. The knights then shook hands, and each sought his charger. Whilst now the baron was approaching his silver-gray on the left, his noble falcon, almost healed of the wound given him by Tebaldo, flew down from a window of the castle to Folko's golden helm, and would not stir till his master took him down again. He stroked him

kindly, and then turned him over to the hand of one of his serving-men, who drew the velvet hood over the faithful bird's eyes, and straightway went off with him. At this hap, a strange murmur arose round the lists: some holding it to be a greeting, foreshowing victory to the baron; others regarding it as the good creature's farewell, and the omen of its master's bitter death. But now the herald wound the third trumpet-blast; every voice was hushed; and the warriors, addressed to the fight, rode from opposite sides into the lists.

And at the foot of the balcony where the ladies sat rose Don Hernandez, in a magnificent suit of mail, calling aloud from beneath his open helmet, "Hereby be it made known to high-born dame and knight, and all true-hearted folk here present, that my fellow-umpire, Count Alessandro Vinciguerra, holds in his hands the casket which contains the contested ring. The fight with lances and the keen sword-blade, on horse and on foot, is open to both the noble combatants; and whichever can approach Count Vinciguerra with comely greeting, take the casket from his hand, bear it to his lady-fair on the balcony, and place the ring on her delicate finger, without his foe being able to hinder him, shall be held victor, and the strife be ended and quashed for ever. Are ye content to have it so, ye noble knights?"

Both foemen bowed their plumed heads of sturdy metal in sign of approval; and Hernandez, in stern dignity, took his seat beside Alessandro. Now a deep silence held the assembly in thrall, but only for a moment, for the trumpet-blasts rose on all sides with dreadly echoing joy; the spectators started, and crowded closer on each other in fear, and the two combatants spurred on their snorting and far-neighing steeds. In the middle of the fighting-course they met, and with such a terrific crash, that it sounded loud above the prolonged flourish of the trumpets;, and the silver-gray and light-brown stood facing each other on their haunches, plunging with their forehoofs to keep their balance, after the stupendous shock that had shivered the lances of both the knights into a thousand pieces, and hurled them far away over the barriers. Firm sat the knights, both bending to the saddle-bow, both pricking for a forward spring; but after tottering and reeling awhile, and in vain seeking to recover their balance, both horses brought their masters with a backward crash on the sand.

A shriek of horror burst from the balcony and from the spectators that encircled the lists. But scarcely had it died away, the fallen chargers still struggling on the ground, when the nimble combatants had already freed themselves from ponderous steeds, and saddle, and bridle, and were hasting,

with their swords drawn, to the spot where Count Alessandro Vinciguerra was posted with the eventful jewel. But soon seeing that neither would give the other law for the accomplishment of the stated conditions, they came to a stand-still opposite each other, firmly clutched their falchions, and then, each keeping his foeman in his eye, they strode leisurely back to the place where they had fallen, and where their shields were still lying. As if at a signal-call, they both had seized the bright orbs at the same moment. Each found his steed at his side; for the noble animals had helped themselves up again, and trotted faithfully and gladly hither and thither after their masters. And touching it was to see how the baron's silver-gray, with shoulder wounded by the shock, came limping on three legs behind its knight, and how it now stood still and stretched out the leg that had been lamed, neighing cheerily the while, and snorting from its dilated nostrils, true to its warlike sense of joy, though so sorely bereft of warlike power. Otto, seeking no advantage, and pitying his faithful charger, said, "Let us have the war-horses led from the ring, my noble baron." Folko gave him a courteous and thankful salute. "As you will," said he, "you prove yourself what I ever thought you to be." So the chargers were led from the course.

But scarcely had the foemen raised their shields

and stridden to the fray with their flashing sword-blades,—scarcely had their first strokes fallen, rattling on the sounding plates of their helms and corslets,—when lo! fiercely dashing aside the squires who held him, Otto's light-brown flew over the lofty barriers, and, with many a wild caracole and gladsome battle-neigh, rushed to the aid of his master, and fell foul on his antagonist. But "Halt!" cried Otto, and catching at his charger's rein, he led him back to the outlet of the lists. There he delivered him to his squires, and with sternly menacing gesture, "Still, fellow!" said he; and anon he stood so motionless that they no longer needed the golden bridle to hold him.

A friendly salute from the baron's sword was waved to Otto as he returned; then the weapon was uplifted to deal a doughty blow, and the fearful fray began anew. Now the strokes of their falchions fell thick as hail; now their shields only clashed together as they pressed to and fro, letting their bright blades rest till either espied an opening that would tell, and then came the shrill whirr of the weapons as they flew asunder. But at length Folko's blade flew, swiftly as the scathing lightning, down Otto's left side, and the orb of the young knight's shield fell half-riven from his arm.

"Halt!" cried the baron, and Otto stayed his falchion.

"Are you wounded, my noble foe?" quoth he; "I myself am sound."

"Your shield is not," rejoined Montfaucon; "and on mine the golden chevrons and ball glitter still untouched; wherefore I will rid me of it, for true battle calls for equal weapons."

So saying, he beckoned to his squire-at-arms, and handed him his gold-blue targe. But Otto would not allow of this: then, "Young sir knight," said the baron gravely, "wilt thou this once take friendly counsel from me? I have been for twelve years or so longer in arms than thou, and know pretty well what beseemeth knighthood. If I erst thanked thee and honoured thy proffered grace when thou badest the chargers be led from the lists, thou, on thy part, I think, wilt not demean thyself too far by receiving a like favour at the hands of Folko de Montfaucon."

"Thou art right, my noble guide in all that is knightly," quoth Otto, with a lowly obeisance; and the squire-at-arms bore the glittering shield away.

Now the combat was renewed with joyful ardour; but it was not long before a blow of Otto's, passing over Montfaucon's left vambrace, lighted between his gorget and cuirass, and with such mighty sway, that the fresh blood spirted out like a rosy fountain as he drew back his sword-blade. Folko himself soon began to totter, propping himself with difficulty on

his sword; and before Otto could receive him in his arms, he sank to the earth. And Otto, too, at the same moment, was seen kneeling on the sand, fainting, as the spectators supposed, with an equally violent blow; but they soon saw that he was only endeavouring to loose the helmet, gorget, and cuirass of his fallen foeman. Blancheflour had hastened up to do him the same service, and was kneeling on the other side of the baron. She wept an anguished flood of tears; but Otto, looking kindly on her, "God be praised!" said he; "he lives, and the breast-wound reaches not to the heart." As Folko, too, just at that moment, opened his eyes, Blancheflour reached forth her hand to the conqueror, over her bleeding brother, with a smile that showed how thankful she was for those words of solace; while Otto imprinted upon it a reverential kiss, and then rising up, went to fetch the casket from the Count Vinciguerra, and carry it to the embowered platform. And as he now entered that leafy tent of green, and Blancheflour, with her sweet and heavenly smile, came forth to meet him, the trumpets without raising the glad flourish of victory, and knights, minstrels, and serving men resounding his name, he sank upon his knee, as in the dizziness of some blessed dream; and whilst he drew the wondrous ring on Gabriele's swan-white

hand, a soft kiss fell glowing on the brow of the too-happy conqueror.

Chapter 24

Now Otto doffed his arms in his chamber, and arrayed himself for the bright betrothal banquet, after which Gabriele was solemnly to declare herself his bride. Squires and serving-men crowded on one another's heels; some sent by his virgin prize to wait upon him; others with necklaces, rings, baret-plumes, and other trappings, received at her beautiful hands. In the sweet delirium of his joy, and the reflection of it in all the brilliant colours around him, Tebaldo's absence first appeared strange to him, on his entering an apartment alone, whither Gabriele had bidden him, that he might lead her thence on his arm to the gorgeous banquet-hall. With his heart ready to burst with the good fortune that was being showered down so richly upon him, he would fain have disburdened it in confiding converse, and felt surprised and puzzled that Tebaldo still kept in the background. But just then he entered the hall at a side door, in such unwonted gaiety and grotesqueness of bedizenment, that at the first moment the knight did not know him. Seeing this, "Yes, yes," said

Tebaldo, "you are not altogether wrong, for I look very much changed: but then, everything changes in the world. Just look here yourself now, and see whether the knight in the silver-black eagle mail has so much as a thought of him left." So saying, he turned the knight lightly round to a large pier-glass opposite; and before the brilliant image it presented, the noble stripling stood spell-bound with a blush of astonishment. Like a flower from its rich wreath of leaves, the blooming visage sparkled over the close and crisped lace ruff; curling and clustering under the green-velvet baret-cap were the fragrant tresses of his golden hair, well-nigh more golden than the splendid egret that confined the nodding plumes of his head-gear. The white-velvet jerkin, barred with green and gold, and girded round above the hips with the golden sword-belt, fitted nicely on the well-knit yet slender form; whilst over it, in carefully-arranged folds, fell the short green mantle, faced with ermine, and edged with pearls.

"Well!" said Tebaldo, at length, with an almost sarcastic smile, "that is not, I ween, the travelling-suit for Jerusalem?'

"As little so as thine can be named one," replied Otto, turning sullenly away.

"But pardon me, noble sir," said Tebaldo; "mine is a travelling suit, though; and if ye lay not too

much stress on a little circuit that I have to make, it is one for Jerusalem too. I wear the colours of Count Vinciguerra,—in bright Italian fashion, you know; they are a little gaudy; and this very moment I am off with him to my blooming home; and then, taking ship to Naples, we shall pass on to share the holy war among the leaguers of the Lion-heart."

"What harm, then, have I done thee?" cried Otto sorrowfully. "Why wilt thou wound me when my happiness is at its height?"

"You have done me no harm," replied Tebaldo in a kindly tone; "but you know I seek the clash of arms, and not the peace of home: so that you were quite right this morning; for I really was girding you to the fight for the last time. The zest of war, and much beside it, hurries me away. I would fain kneel once more at the flowery mound where Lisberta slumbers. God knows why they let me play there so often in my childhood: but now it seems to me as though my life's best treasure were buried beneath it; and ever and anon I must away to the spot. But as for the wounding you, good knight, while your happiness is in full blow, prithee thank me kindly if I really do so. Know you not, then, that the trees are wounded when they grow too full of sap? And remember you not the story about Polycrates, who cast his ring into the sea to still the envy of fortune?—let me only be

the ring, and God grant that no sea-monster may bring me back again into your hands."

"But why, then, in such haste?" asked Otto.

"That is Count Vinciguerra's fault," said Tebaldo; "for, indeed, I have pledged my word to him to travel with him as he shall choose."

"And he—?" said Otto.

"Well, then," replied Tebaldo, laughing, "to tell the truth, he is a little sore with you and your youthful tongue for the rating you gave him about the story of young Signor Donatello. For in confidence he avowed to me that the signor was himself. And so he cannot readily bear to see you in full array of splendour as the chief personage of the feast. He was well-nigh swooning with vexation when he had to give you the casket with the ring. Let us part from each other with a laugh about it, good knight, and not a word about anything sorrowful."

"You have forgotten, perhaps," said Otto, "how hard that parting was to you, then, when we had quarrelled about the falcon?"

"Yes, and just because we had quarrelled," rejoined Tebaldo; "but now we are parting in peace and goodwill, and I leave you in all weal and happiness at the side of a most beautiful bride. Good speed to you withal!"

And so saying, he went with a friendly nod out of

the chamber; and when Otto at last stepped slowly to the window, the two Italians, like glittering parrots, were jogging cheerily, in their rainbow-hued attire, down the castle-hill.

The young German was still watching them in amazement and sorrow, when a little hand was laid upon his shoulder, and, turning round, he gazed on the full brilliancy of Gabriele's beauty in the costliest array. If the aid-imploring maiden had been beyond measure charming at the tourney, far more brightly beamed the conqueror-bride than that beauteous image. The jewelled wreath that sparkled on her silken looks, the black gold-bespangled velvet that enwound her peerless form,—these were but a dull foil, as it were, to set off the wondrous beauty of her every feature and her every turn. And, bending to the young knight with noble courtesy, in all the lustre of her pride, "Why so grave and gloomy, noble sir?" said she. "Cannot Gabriele's hand compensate for the flight of two humorsome comrades? Come, our guests await us; so lead me to the hall." Of all those charming words, the "our," on the mention of the guests, shot the gladdest flame through the soul of the happy bridegroom. He kissed the lady's little tender hand; he kissed—as a soft glance said he might—her blooming lips, and led her to the host of noble guests that thronged the glittering hall.

All bent to them as they made way for them, and gave them gladsome welcome; softly-breathing music played an enlivening march; flowers were showered from the hands of noble damsels on the beauteous and blushing pair, as with comely grace they tendered their thanks; and, on reaching the upper end of the table, Gabriele showed her bridegroom the noble Folko de Montfaucon reposing upon a silken couch, and supported and waited upon by his sister Blancheflour. "I knew very well," said Gabriele to Otto, "that nothing would give you greater pleasure than the sight of your noble foe so far restored, and taking cheerful part in our festivity."

"And," said Otto, bending thankfully over her hand, "I might know that nothing outmatched thy power, beauteous fay."

"Not a word about my fairy-power!" said Gabriele, smiling; "its healing virtues lie mainly in the ring which you have achieved for me in fight."

In the meanwhile, with Blancheflour's help, Folko had raised himself on his couch. He was still pale; yet with the kindliest smile he held forth his unmaimed sword-hand to the victorious Trautwangen, who pressed it with emotion, and could scarce withhold himself from kissing it, like that of some fostering elder brother. They now sat down to the banquet; and everyone was enraptured with Folko's grandeur and

grace: there lay the hero-form beneath the gorgeous blue-velvet coverlets, set off with a rich gold fringe; while his still-wounded falcon was perched upon his pillow, and ever and anon stooping to fondle him, it would sip a tiny drop from its master's golden cup. "They treat me here like a sick child," said Folko to the company, smiling an entreaty that it might be excused. "They leave me my playthings at table." And some minstrels there were who, in secret whispers, were fain to compare him with the beautiful Adonis, the wounded favourite of the heathen goddess Cypris; and everyone said that they were right.

Whilst they one and all now sat together at the table, that bloomed with its savoury viands, and sparkled with its fragrant wines, the shrill blast of a monstrous horn was heard at the castle gate; and shortly after a gigantic man, in loud-rattling full suit of mail, and a halbert of wondrous length in his hand, entered the hall. He gazed around him inquiringly for some moments on the amazed throng of banqueters, and then, with a courteous obeisance, he went up to Sir Folko de Montfaucon.

"Noble sir," quoth he, "I am sent hither by the sea-king Arinbiorn, your kinsman and friend. He maketh halt before your stronghold, and hath strayed thus far landward simply and solely to give you greeting. He asketh, therefore, whether you have the will and lei-

sure to give him entertainment, together with certain noble maidens and knights in his suite; though, as it chanceth, one of the damsels is somewhat strangely favoured."

"Did I still hold sway here," answered Folko, with his sparkling eyes wandering to the ground, "the wound which keeps me to my couch should not prevent me from tottering at least, if not walking, to welcome your noble master. But thus—"

"O Valiant baron," said Gabriele, staying him with a kindly yet half-angry rebuke, "if thou demean not thyself here quite as the rightful host, thou wilt drive me and my champion away."

"Then things are otherwise," said Folko, turning to the stranger; "your lord and his train shall be most dearly welcome, and I will up to meet him."

He stirred upon his couch, but the giant-herald saw Blancheflour's imploring look of pain. "No, sir knight," said he; "that I must forbid in the sea-king Arinbiorn's name. Even though the like effort may not be death to a vigorous man, yet the beautiful damsel there trembleth for the issue; and true-hearted warrior must spare sweet woman pain wherever he can. Therefore I beg of you, dear as you hold my master's wishes, break not now the repose of your couch. The sea-king will in a moment be with you."

So saying, he shook his right hand with hearty cheer, and again bowing a farewell, he strode from the hall.

"The sea-king Arinbiorn," said Folko, as the guests turned their glances questioningly upon, him, "is a brave Norman, my kinsman from times long gone by, when our race was divided, and the branch to which I belong rambled from those icy mountains to the softer plains of Frankland. Since then we have always kept faithful kinship with each other in many a doughty deed and league of arms; and these—since Arinbiorn is sea-king—have ever tended to my weal. This name is given to those warriors in the high-coast country, who own little or nothing on the mainland, but who sail round the earth in their barks, in the company of brave and most devoted followers; passing from the other side of the North Cape, nay, even from distant Iceland, down to bright Constantinople, and far along the coasts of blooming Asia, or the molten gold of burning Africa, where almost all other seamen are at fault, and where they, by dint of their resounding arms, may lord it at will with kingly power."

Folko would gladly have recounted further, and gladly would the banqueters have listened to him, but the mighty steps of the wondrous guests already sounded on the stairway, and every eye was turned towards the door.

Chapter 25

The doors of the hall flew open, and a man sheathed in mail of gold stepped in—a very prince to the gigantic herald, by reason of his mighty stature, no less than his rank, with two gold-embossed vulture-wings shooting from his flashing helm. Otto started and shrunk back involuntarily at sight of the metal wings; he could not help thinking of his fight with the skeleton in the chapel. Many a wondrous form came in the sea-king's train; but wholly riveted as they were on him, the eyes of the company saw little or nothing of the rest. With a reverential salute to the ladies as he passed, Arinbiorn strode straight to the Baron de Montfaucon, and, with a friendly grasp of the hand, "Heigh, Folko, what meaneth all this?" said he. "What! must I find thee, then, so smartly wounded at last, thou fondling of fortune? A famous champion it must have been that smote thee so doughtily; but he is dead and gone, I ween. For, as to what my henchman would fain have told me, that thou hadst had inglorious fight and lost the

oft-contested ring,—in the whole world, there can be no likelihood, surely, of that."

"Alas! but so it is," said Folko, somewhat confused, and with glowing cheek. "I have, sooth, found my master; and the wondrously beautiful damsel there is now mistress of the ring and of the castle, and thy gracious hostess as well as mine, Arinbiorn."

The sea-king made gentle obeisance to Gabriele. Then he begged that they should show him the astounding foeman who had not only borne the mighty Folko's falchion, but mastered it too: his eye had singled out Don Hernandez. But when the youthful, ruddy Otto was presented, he gazed on him with the greatest tokens of amazement, till the stripling began to feel himself affronted, and was about to speak. But the brave Arinbiorn, bending graciously before him: "If, as I doubt not," said he, "there hath been naught but fair play here, by heaven and earth, young sir knight, to what fair fame wilt thou not mount at last, so great as early youth already findeth thee!"

And again he bent with deep obeisance; and Gabriele, in proud transport at her young champion's prowess, laid her swan-white hand in Otto's palm, and sinking her blushing brow and floating tresses, "I am the noble knight of Trautwangen's betrothed bride!" she said. Then the minstrels and musicians

woke their strain of triumph anew; the guests poured in their glad shout as they wished them joy; the beakers rang; and Otto, pressing his lip to Gabriele's, saw heaven in her softly-flashing eye.

"Mayst thou be happy, dear Otto!" said a voice like a soft flute-note behind him; and looking round, he recognised the sweet face of his little kinswoman Bertha,—so friendly it was, so serene and cheerful, though perhaps of a moonlike paly hue—just, indeed, what the Lady Minnetrost's halls had made it. A little behind was Heerdegen's scarred visage, scowling like a thundercloud.

"Then, haply, all has been but a dream!" said Otto; and he passed his hand to and fro across his brow, as though seeking to scare slumber from his eyelids. Heerdegen pushed forward, and seemed eager to speak. But now Bertha stepped up between Otto and Gabriele, enwreathed their hands in one, and poured forth on them such a flood of tender and gladsome wishes of happiness, that one might have fancied some sweet-tongued angel had winged its bright way thither from heaven to bless that beautiful bond. Even from Heerdegen's brow the cloud passed away at the sound of Bertha's honeyed words; and Arinbiorn said, "The young knight and maiden here were once my prisoners. I won them in the goodly holm-bout on the coast of East Friesland; and gladly

would I have taken them with me to my hearth and home, as tokens of victory, and as my own dear brother and sister; for, Heerdegen and Bertha, have we not lived together as such hitherto? But now be ye for ever released from my wardship, as well in honour of this high festival as because ye must be dear to the young conqueror there!" And a new shout of joy arose in the resounding hall. Gabriele kissed Bertha, now recognising her again as the child of the Danube's bank, and kindly stroked her softly-tinted cheek; whilst Otto and Heerdegen pressed each other's hands in glad pledge of reconciliation.

They were now seated again at the banquet-table in friendly converse,—Bertha by Gabriele, Heerdegen by Folko, Arinbiorn beside Otto; when the latter remarked the tall form of a woman standing behind the sea-king's chair, with many tresses of gold, and a long sword at her girth of wondrous beauty, yet stern and motionless; and when Otto rose, and politely craving pardon, offered her his seat, she turned indignantly away, and strode out of the hall. "Oh, is that all?" said Arinbiorn, on hearing why Otto and the other guests had been astonished. "Ye ladies fair and noble knights, my parents once wished to betroth me to this warlike damsel. Her name is Gerda; and she is famed far and wide, in all northern lands, for her wizard-skill, and is, moreover, near of kin to our

line. But I was held in thrall by a dreamlike form that I saw in some weird mirror—ah! so wondrous lovely, so soft and fair it was, and one that I even now behold again."

The sea-king faltered and paused in strange confusion. Pretty it was to see how a girl-like blush passed over the visage of the stalwart warrior! But he soon manned himself anew, and continued as follows:

"Thus, ye fair dames and warriors, our marriage came to naught. Gerda said, 'For that I cannot be thy wedded wife, I will be thy conquest-bringing Wallkura;' and ever since then, even though unbidden, she follows in my traces, often bringing me unexpected good fortune, and sometimes brewing for me the wonderful war-draught of our north country, which makes one a long time unconquerable, save by charmed arms; and as, in many a venture, I hold it unknightly to make use of it, she ever and anon palms it on me by covert art."

"The Baron de Montfaucon lately told us a tale about a like potion," said Don Hernandez.

"And the draught is all very well," continued Arinbiorn. "But since, when drunk incautiously, and with unchastened eagerness, it is said to work black and fearful woe, my warriors shun it, and Gerda too. And yet, of a surety, she means kindly by us; though I grant she is a little strange and odd withal.

Sir Heerdegen, there, made her acquaintance singular wise; it was on the coast of East Friesland, and not long before he fought the holm-bout with me."

And whilst now Heerdegen, at the desire of the banqueters, was giving the history of that evening, Gerda herself had again entered the hall unnoticed by the most of them; had again taken her stand behind Arinbiorn's chair, and, without the sea-king's giving any heed to what she did, had placed beside him a large gold beaker, brimming full of the pure beverage itself. Otto, who had seen her come, turned round to her and rose, but with a look of displeasure she signed to him to keep his place; and then, stepping shyly back, she went tottering up and down the hall like a dreamer. In this way he soon lost sight of her, and the more readily as, in the course of his tale, Heerdegen had let fall something about the Lady Minnetrost, after whom several of the guests at once made eager inquiry. Otto could not join with them; but his whole soul was by that bright and happy moonlight-form. Bertha's eyes were full of tears.

"Ah!" sighed the winning Gabriele, with teasing fretfulness, in her bridegroom's ear—"ah, how absent all at once, and on the betrothal day, too!" And when Otto would have excused himself, "No, no," continued she, with a smile; "there must be some very great thing on thy mind. What! thou, German-born, and

the cups so still before thee! Hast thou drunk a single one to the health of thy bride?"

"My life, my all, my crown of conquest!" cried Otto; and in the sweet whirl of transport he emptied the drinking-cup next to him, never noticing that it was Arinbiorn's golden beaker, till Gerda touched him on the shoulder, and muttered menacingly in his ear, "There, there, a fine thing hast thou done! Take it, then, even as it is, since thou wouldest not have it better." In the meanwhile, the draught flowed down his throat like a scorching stream of fire; and he instantly saw Gerda standing opposite to him in a corner of the hall, busily muttering, and framing her wizard-passes over Arinbiorn's battle-axe, without once turning away her glance from him. At length she rested the battle-axe against the sea-king's chair, and, shaking her head, stalked out of the hall.

In the meanwhile, voices grew still gayer, and song circled still more gladly round the board: a hearty sense of good-will and good cheer seemed mingling as it were its double current, and the storied lays, thrown in anon by cunning masters, formed the crowning blossoms of the general mirth.

But in poor Otto's mind, the joyful tones around him fanned to wilder and wilder flame the dark, unblest struggle within him. Word and song broke piercingly on his ear, seemed levelled at him, or

wafted over him; moulding all that environed him to strange deformity, shrinking the laughing vault of the banquet-hall to the narrow span of the funeral chapel, and contorting the features of Arinbiorn, Heerdegen, Folko, and Bertha, and even of Gabriele herself. He felt as though he were swimming on the endless roar of a deafening sea, where fishes, with the faces of men, were jeeringly snapping at him; one of which was passing horrible to view: it had a pair of huge vulture-wings upon its head, and carried a skull hacked with sword-strokes in its maw. "It comes from the castle-chapel," thought Otto to himself; and then he braced his nerves anew, remembering that it was none else than Arinbiorn, the brave and friendly sea-king, who was sitting by him at the splendid banquet. But soon he thought a sea-king might, after all, be a fearful fish of prey; and then he remembered what Heerdegen had aforetime told him about ladies of the mist and cave-sprites on the Finland boundary-line, and much other silly nonsense. He could scarcely bear up against a sense of dizziness, as well as of prodigious power, that glowed in his sinews, and went coursing through his veins.

Suddenly he started up, his eyes sparkled hideously, and his voice sounded through the hall like a dread peal of thunder: to the right an left of him, like affrighted hinds, they all sprang involuntarily to

their feet, while with astounding nimbleness of limb he bounded to a corner, and seizing his falchion, he whirled and brandished the flashing weapon over his head. "Holloa! holloa!" cried he; "where is he, the wicked fiend? Holloa! huzza! I challenge him to the fight! I'll meet him like a giant!"

"Well-a-day, ah! well-a-day, he is possessed; he is the arch-fiend's own!" Such light whisper was it that passed shyly from lip to lip along the walls, to which knight and lady had thronged, in dread of the menacing and terrific raver.

"I will venture it with him again for life or for death!" quoth the bold Baron de Montfaucon, seeking to soothe his fair partners. But as he tried to rise from his couch, the wound opened anew with the sudden strain; he swooned and fell, and attended by the trembling Blancheflour, was borne out of the hall. Straightway Hernandez and three noble Frankish knights ran up to hold the raving stripling; but the moment after, smartly wounded by his fist, they were reeling towards the walls. He laughed, and took his stand in such wise that no one could now gain the outlet of the hall without encountering his menace.

"Spears, ho! throw spears at him!" was the cry of fear and anger on all sides; and Bertha's soft entreaty, "Oh, spare him! throw not at him!" was overborne by the clamour. Knife and javelin flew; they struck

the uncorsleted one, and recoiled without effect. The raver laughed. "Come, more of your spurting, ye fishes!" cried he, with a yell. And again a whisper passed through the terrified throng: "The devil is with him, and gives him charmed life; the devil is his master."

"Nay, say not so!" said Bertha, a very heaven of love and trusting tenderness beaming from her soft blue eyes: "Otto, dear Otto, in the name of Heaven, give me thy hand, and follow me in peace to thy chamber." She drew near to him so bravely and lovingly, that they all looked forward to her victory, as to that of the Virgin, who, in holy blazon, is seen standing on the moon, over the dragon; but the storm in Otto's distracted brain rose still more wildly.

"What would the witch, the pale witch?" he screamed; and Bertha staggered back with a sword-wound on her kindly-extended hand. Heerdegen caught his sister in his arms; his glances fell burning on the phrensied FRENZIED foe, as he sped his mad gambols about the hall; but he could not leave his snow-white burden, and rush to the attack.

The sea-king Arinbiorn now stepped forward with his battle-axe. "This devil's leaguer, though, shall rue the blood of the beauteous maiden," cried he, "or I will shed every drop of mine upon the

red pavement with hers!" And with uplifted arm he strode to the fray.

"Hoo, vulture-pinion! hoo, death's head!" shrieked the madman. "Gravest thou another blow from me! Wait, then, Satan, wait!"

"Satan thyself," shouted Arinbiorn, in his very teeth; and over the whirling sword-blade and all its brandishing, down upon the baret-cap fell the mighty battle-axe. Mute and motionless, Otto fell to the earth.

Chapter 26

It might be about noon on the following day when Otto, shaking off his long stupor, again came to himself; but he could neither open his eyes, nor move a single limb. At first he felt as though he were already lying there a corpse, save that the soul could not yet struggle out of the stiff-set body; and as he by degrees called to mind many of yesterday's events, he fancied that the sea-king Arinbiorn had slain him with the ponderous blow of his halbert. Yet he soon became aware that he must still be living, and that he was reposing on yielding cushions, beneath carefully-arranged coverlets; that the wound, moreover, on his head pained him but little, and was possibly but a slight one; the more so, since a gentle hand ever and anon enwound it with cooling cloths; taking off the old bandages so softly, that he did not feel the most trifling smart. But the same inability to stir still lay rigidly and unalterably upon him.

Now he heard a voice, which he recognised to be Gabriele's, saying, "Then he is really out of danger now?" And he was gladdening himself with the

promise of his tender bride's nursing, when a male voice—that of one of the cunning masters at yesterday's banquet—replied: "I pledge thee my body and soul on it, my noble mistress; ye and all of us may speed our journey now, without the smallest concern; for ye have all done your duty by the hapless youth. What still keeps him powerless is not that slight wound of his; for the blow was broken by the edge of his falchion and his baret-cap; but wholly and solely the weariness that hath crept over the limbs of this poor possessed and fiend-ridden wight since his demon-dance of blood."

With every word in this address a fresh dagger struck deep into Otto's heart. The ghastly horrors of yesterday all rose before his mind's eye, and found freer play, as he lay there half stupefied and motionless. A low sobbing, which he heard at the head of his couch, mingled with the words of pity, "Ah, poor Otto! good, lost Otto!" fell like balmy dew on his wounded heart; but it sounded as from the lips of his sainted mother, a far echo of his peaceful childhood; and, alas! in this living world, no one knew or loved him. Then he again heard Gabriele's voice. "Moreover," said she, "I have already restored the Baron de Montfaucon his sister's ring, pending another combat; for, by the bewitched and charmed champion here, I choose not, and dare not, to win

anything. I can only thank God that the mask fell from that devil's face of his before I was wedded to the wicked sorcerer by the Church's holy bonds."

"Ay," said the voices of several men, "we soon saw there must be witchcraft at the bottom of it; or how else could a boy like him overpower the stalwart Baron de Montfaucon?"

"And yet it is such a pity for so fair a thing!" said Gabriele with a sigh. "When he raised that truthful blue eye of his, one felt as though one would gladly trust oneself and all the world to him."

"Take heed only lest he catch *thee* too in his wiles at last!" said the warning voices of some women; and at that moment the door flew open, and serving-men brought word that all was ready for the journey. With a deep-drawn sigh, Gabriele turned away and left the chamber: the others followed in her train. Otto heard his bright day of love and his goodly fame departing; and still he had no power to move hand, or eye, or tongue.

But he was not quite alone: this he could feel by the cooling cloths that were still being wound round his hair, and by the low sobbing at the head of his couch. And ever and anon it seemed as though a gentle hand were coursing timidly over his cold cheek.

Now all at once Heerdegen's voice sounded like a trumpet-blast in his ear: "Sister," cried he, "wherefore

shouldst thou tarry longer by this vassal of Satan? Is he to wake up and wound thee again? Come, haste thee! Our horses are waiting. The rest of them are already off, even Montfaucon and the lady Blancheflour; and the old gray castle is quite lone and deserted." And when Bertha sighed and murmured words of soft entreaty, "Drive me not mad," cried he warmly. "Many a noble knight would rejoice to confront death, if thy heart and hand were the guerdon. And is this fellow here to wound thee both hand and heart? I beg of thee, irritate me not; or I might do unknightly deed, and lay rash hands on the powerless one." And then Otto felt the cooling bandage wound around his temples, for the last time of all; and Bertha, led by her brother, flew sobbing from the room. Soon after this, he could hear their steeds, as they trotted down the paved horse-road from the castle.

Now he was quite alone. But fainting nature took pity on him, and once more shaded him with her darkling pinions.

It was late in the afternoon when he awoke a second time. That rigid powerlessness had passed away. He raised himself with a groan: the veil was taken from his eyes, and the beam of evening played aslant through the casement on the scattered pieces of his mail. Painfully he turned away from these witnesses of his yesterday's resplendent glory, and

tottered to the window. He looked straight down over the castle-walls into the vale below; and, on throwing open the lattice to breathe the peaceful evening air, he heard warriors riding through the forest, and singing the following words:

"What though we tarried, still before us
We kept the path, and loved it well;
But none unfurled his banner o'er us,.
And lone and blind, our spirit fell."

He recognised the lay to be the same which Blondel had sung for Tebaldo and him on that beautiful evening in the forest. "Ah!" cried he, "if those were but the people of King Richard of the Lion-heart, and I might journey with them to the Holy Land!" And again he caught the sound of their song:

"Now every breast hath ceased its sighing,
and every tongue is loosed to sing;
We see the fearless banner flying—
'Tis Richard Lion-heart the king."

And at that very moment the mail-clad singers issued from the wood; they rode steeds of stately beauty, and wore the like equipments with those who had formed the escort of the noble minstrel Blondel. Otto was just on the point of calling to them to wait, and he would ride with them, when

they halted of themselves, and fell into parley with a number of squires and serving-men, whom Otto had not till then perceived sitting by the stone wall of the castle. The pilgrim warriors told how that they belonged to the train of the King of the Lion-heart, and formed his rear; that he himself had gone on long before them. Then they asked why all was so silent and so still in that stately stronghold.

"Yester-morning you would scarce have asked us that, I trow," replied an old serving-man; "but just now there is not a soul up above there, but a bewitched knight, who has given himself to the devil's keeping. Would to God he were but gone!" And then in fearful words he told the whole story of the day before; and they who sat around him confirmed what he said, with many a shudder at the frightful parts, and many a voucher for the truth of them. But when he came to Bertha's wound, the English heroes crossed themselves. "God forbid," quoth they, "that we should catch a sight of the monster!"—and so saying, they trotted shuddering away.

"My doom is fixed," said Otto, in an undertone. "I must only be quick, and withdraw my degraded self from every human eye. There must surely be some mountain cave where I may bury my arms, and shroud myself in endless night."

He then began to gather up the scattered pieces

of his war-suit; and among them he found his good sword, cloven in two by the battle-axe of the sea-king Arinbiorn. "Little thought old Sir Hugh," quoth he, "that thou wouldst come to such an end!" Yet he carefully raised the shining fragments, and bound them up in a bundle, with the rest of his fighting-gear. Laden in this sort, as he made his way out through the antechamber, he came upon the very same mirror that had reflected his image on the morning before.

"This looks quite another thing," said he, with a shake of the head, as the pale and burdened form peered on him from the glass, mocking him with its blood-stained bandages, and the flaunting disarray of its festal attire. His light brown neighed cheerily as he approached the stable. He shook his head once more. "Peace!" said he, "it is no time now for gladsome greeting!" Then binding the fighting-gear fast on the noble charger's saddle, he led him by the rein out of the gate. The people of the castle shrunk back on all sides; and he was presently lost in the deep umbrage of the wood.

Ah! let man take heed to himself when the things he wishes for are rained down upon him, and his heart knoweth no bounds to its joy!