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IN THE FIRE OF THE FORGE

A ROMANCE OF OLD NUREMBERG

By Georg Ebers

Volume 8.

CHAPTER XV.

Day followed day, a week elapsed, and no message had reached Schweinau from Heinz Schorlin or Katterle.

The magistrate had learned that the Siebenburg brothers, with the robber knights who had joined them, were obstinately defending their castles and making it difficult for Heinz Schorlin to perform his task. The day before news had come that the Absbach's strong mountain fortress had fallen; that the allied knights, in a sortie which merged into a miniature battle, had been defeated, and the Siebenburgs could not hold out much longer; but in the stress of his duties the knight seemed to have forgotten to make the slightest effort in behalf of his faithful servant. At least the protonotary Gottlieb, a friend of Herr Berthold, through whose hands passed all letters addressed to the Emperor, positively assured them that, though plenty of military reports had arrived, in not a single one had the young commander mentioned his servant even by a word. He, the protonotary, had taken advantage of a favourable hour to urge his royal master, as a reward for Biberli's rare fidelity, to protect him from further persecution by the citizens of Nuremberg; but the Emperor Rudolph did not even allow him to finish, because, as a matter of principle, he refrained from interference in matters whose settlement rightfully pertained to the Honourable Council.

When soon after Herr Pfinzing availed himself of a report which he had to deliver to the Emperor to intercede himself for the valiant fellow, the Hapsburg, with the ruler's strong memory, recalled the protonotary's plea and referred Herr Berthold to the answer the former had received, remarking, less graciously than usual, that the imperial magistrate ought to know that he would be the last to assail the privileges which he had himself bestowed upon the city.

Finally even Burgrave Frederick, whose sympathy had been enlisted in Biberli's behalf by Herr Berthold, fared no better.

His interests were often opposed to those of the Council and, kindly as was his disposition, disputes concerning many questions of law were

constantly occurring between him and the Honourables. When he began to persuade the Emperor to prevent by a pardon the cruelty which the Council intended to practise upon a servant of Sir Heinz Schorlin, who was doing such good service in the field, the sovereign told even him, his friend and brother-in-law, who had toiled so energetically to secure him the crown, that he would not interfere, though it were in behalf of a beloved brother, with the decrees of the Council, and the noble petitioner was silenced by the reasons which he gave. The Burgrave deemed the Emperor's desire to maintain the Honourables' willingness to grant the large loan he intended to ask to fill his empty treasury still more weighty than those with which he had repulsed Herr Pfinzing.

On the other hand, the pardon granted to Ernst Orlieb and Wolff Eysvogel could only tend to increase the good will of the Council. The former was given at once, the latter only conditionally after the First Losunger of the city, with several other Honourables, had recommended it. The Emperor thought it advisable to defer this act of clemency. A violation of the peace of the country committed under his own eyes ought not to be pardoned during his stay in the place where the bloody deed was committed. It would have cast a doubt upon the serious intent of the important measure which threatened with the severest punishment any attempt upon the lives and property of others.

So long as the Emperor held his court at Nuremberg, Wolff, against whom no accuser had yet appeared, must remain concealed. When the sovereign had left the city he might again mingle with his fellow-citizens. An imperial letter alluding to the gratitude which Rudolph owed to the soldiers of Marchfield, to whose band the evildoer belonged, and the whole good city of Nuremberg for the hospitable reception tendered to him and his household, should shield from punishment the young patrician who had only drawn his sword in self-defence, and fulfil the petition of the Council for Wolff Eysvogel's restoration to the rights which he had forfeited.

The news of this promise gave Els the first happy hour after long days of discomfort and the most arduous mental conflict. True, the measures adopted by her friends seemed to have guarded her from the attacks of the old Countess Rotterbach; but Fran Rosalinde, since she had been allowed more freedom to move about than her mother, who had been confined to the upper story, felt like a boat drifting rudderless down the stream. She needed guidance and, as Els now ruled the house, asked direction from her for even the most simple matters. Clinging to her like a child deserted by its nurse, she told her the most hostile and spiteful remarks which the countess never failed to make whenever it suited her daughter to bear her company. During the last few days the old lady had again won Rosalinde over to her side, and in consequence an enmity towards Els had sprung up, which was often very spiteful in its manifestations, and was the more difficult to bear, the more rigidly her position as daughter of the house forbade energetic resistance.

But most painful of all to the volunteer nurse was the sick man's manner; for though Herr Casper rarely regained perfect consciousness, he showed his unfriendly disposition often enough by glances, gestures, and words

stammered with painful effort.

Yet the brave girl's patience seemed inexhaustible, and she resolutely performed even the most arduous tasks imposed by nursing the sufferer. Nay, the thought that Wolff owed his life to him aided her always to be kind to her father-in-law, no matter how much he wounded her, and to tend him no less carefully than she had formerly cared for her invalid mother.

So she had held out valiantly until, at the end of a long, torturing week, something occurred which destroyed her courage. On returning from an errand in the city, she was received at the door of the sick-room by her future mother-in-law with the statement that she would take charge of her husband herself, and no longer allow the intruder to keep her from the place which belonged to her alone. The old countess's power of persuasion had strengthened her courage, and the unwonted energy of the weak, more than yielding woman, exerted so startling and at the same time disheartening an effect upon the wearied, tortured young creature that she attempted no resistance. The entreaties of the leech and kind Herr Teufel, however, induced her to persist a short time longer.

But when, soon after, the same incident occurred a second time, it seemed impossible to remain in their house even another day.

Without opposing her lover's mother, she retired to her chamber and, weeping silently, spite of the earnest entreaties of the Sister of Charity, packed the few articles she had brought with her and prepared to leave the post maintained with so much difficulty. To be again with Eva under the protection of her uncle and aunt now seemed the highest goal of her longing. She did not wish to go home; for after his liberation from the tower her father had had a long conversation with Wolff and old Berthold Vorchtel, and then, at the desire of the Council, had ridden to Augsburg and Ulm to arrange the affairs of the Eysvogel firm. He had felt that he could be spared by his family, knowing that his younger daughter was safe at Schweinau, and having heard that Wolff's pardon would not be long delayed.

Eva, too, had experienced toilsome days and many an anxious night. True, Biberli and the carrier's widow, with her children, had been moved to the Beguines' house, where she could pursue her charitable work safe from the rude attacks of the criminal inmates of the hospital; but what heavy cares had burdened her concerning the two patients for whom she was battling with death! how eagerly she watched for tidings from the neighbourhood of the Siebenburgs! what hours of trouble were caused by the prior of the Dominicans and his envoys, who strove to convince her that her intention of renouncing her conventual life was treason to God, and that the boldness with which she had released herself from the former guides of her spiritual life and sought her own way would lead her to heresy and perdition! How painful, too, was the feeling that she was being examined to discover whether the Abbess Kunigunde had any share in her change of purpose!

The torture to which stronger men rarely succumbed seemed to threaten the life of the more delicate ex-schoolmaster. At first the leech Otto, who,

to please Els and Fran Christine, and touched by the brave spirit of this humble man, had daily visited Biberli, believed that he could not save him. On the straw pallet, and with the incompetent nursing at the hospital, he would have died very speedily, and what would have befallen his poor mangled toes and fingers in the hands of the barbers who managed affairs there?

At the Beguines the kindly, skilful old physician had bandaged his hands and feet as carefully as if he had been the most aristocratic gentleman, and no prince could have been more tenderly and patiently watched by trained nurses; for, wonderful to relate, Eva, who had so willingly left her sick mother to her sister's care, and had often been vexed with herself because she could not even remotely equal Els beside the couch of the beloved invalid, rendered the mangled squire every service with a touch so light and firm that the old physician often watched her with glad astonishment.

Caution, the quality she most lacked, seemed to have suddenly waked from a long slumber with doubly clear, far-seeing eyes. If it was necessary to turn the sick man, she paid special heed to every aching spot in his tortured body, and invented contrivances which she arranged with patient care to save him pain.

Her own bed had been placed in the widow's chamber next to Biberli's, and from the night that her Aunt Christine had permitted her to remain in the Beguine house, she, who formerly had loved sleep and slumbered soundly, had been beside the sick woman at the least sign. On the third day she rendered her, with her own hands, every service for which she had formerly needed a Beguine's aid. She had possessed the gift of uttering words of cheer and comfort even to her invalid mother better than any one else, and often gave new courage to the suffering man when almost driven to despair by the anguish of pain assailing him in ten places at once. How kindly she taught him what comfort the sufferer finds who not only moves his lips and turns his rosary in prayer, as he had hitherto done, but commends himself and his pain to Him who endured still worse agonies on the cross! What a smile of content rested on the lips of the man who, in the ravings of fever, had so often repeated the words "steadfast and true," when she told him that he had done honour most marvellously to his favourite virtue, represented by the T and St, and might expect his master's praise and gratitude!

All these things fell from her lips more warmly the more vividly she conjured up the image of the man for whose sake the gallant fellow had endured this martyrdom, the happier it made her to help Heinz, though without his knowledge, to pay the great debt of gratitude which he owed the faithful servitor. She was not aware of it, but the strongest of all educational powers--sorrow and love--were transforming the unsocial, capricious "little saint" into a noble, self-sacrificing woman. She was training herself to be what she desired to become to her lover, and the secret power whose influence upon her whole being she distinctly felt at each success, she herself called--remembering the last words of her dying mother--"the forge fire of life."

At first it had been extremely painful for Biberli to allow himself to be nursed with such devoted, loving care by the very person from whom he had earnestly endeavoured to estrange his master; but soon the warmest gratitude cast every other feeling into the shade, and when he woke from the light slumber into which he frequently fell and saw Eva beside his bed, his heart swelled and he often felt as if Heaven had sent her to him to restore the best gifts for which he was struggling--life and health. When he began to recover, the faithful fellow clung to her with the utmost devotion; but this by no means lessened his love for his master and his absent sweetheart. On the contrary, the farther his convalescence progressed the more constantly and anxiously he thought of Heinz and Katterle, the more pleasure it afforded him to talk about them and to discuss with Eva what could have befallen both.

It was impossible--Biberli believed this as firmly as his nurse--that Heinz could coldly forget his follower or Katterle neglect what she had undertaken. So both agreed in the conjecture that the messengers sent by the absent ones had been prevented from reaching their destination.

The supposition was correct. Two troopers despatched by Heinz had been captured by the Siebenburgs, and the maid's messenger had cheated her by pocketing the small fee which she paid him and performing another commission instead of going to Schweinau. Of the knight's letters which had fallen into the wrong hands, one had besought the Emperor Rudolph to pardon the loyal servant, the other had thanked Biberli, and informed him that his master remembered and was working for him.

Katterle had reached Heinz, had been required to tell him everything she knew about Eva and Biberli down to the minutest detail and had then been commissioned to repeat to the latter what had been also contained in the letter. On the way home, however, she only reached Schwabach, for the long walk in the most terrible anxiety, drenched by a pouring rain, whilst enquiring her way to Heinz, and especially the terrible excitements of the last few days, had been too much even for her vigorous constitution. Her pulse was throbbing violently and her brow was burning when she knocked at the door of Apel, the carrier, who had taken her into his waggon at Schweinau, and the good old man and his wife received and nursed her. The fever was soon broken, but weakness prevented her journeying to Schweinau on foot, and, as Apel intended to go to Nuremberg the first of the following week, she had been forced to content herself with sending the messenger who had betrayed her confidence.

How hard it was for Katterle to wait! And her impatience reached its height when, before she could leave, some of the imperial troopers stabled their horses at the carrier's and reported that Castle Siebenburg and the robber stronghold of the Absbachs were destroyed. Sir Heinz Schorlin had fought like St. George. Now he was detained only by the fortresses of the knights Hirschhorn and Oberstein, whose situation on inaccessible crags threatened long to defy the imperial power.

The thought that the strong Swiss girl might be ill never entered the mind of Biberli or Eva, but in quiet hours he asked himself which it would probably grieve him most to miss forever--his beautiful young nurse

or his countrywoman and sweetheart. His heart belonged solely to Katterle, but towards Eva he obeyed the old trait inherent in his nature, and clung with the same loyalty hitherto evinced for his master to her whom he now regarded as his future mistress.

This she must and should be, because already life seemed to him no longer desirable without her voice. Never had he heard one whose pure tones penetrated the heart more deeply. And had Heinz been permitted to hear her talk with the Dominicans, he would have given up his wish to renounce the world and, instead of entering a monastery, striven with every power of his being to win this wonderful maiden, for whom his heart glowed with such ardent love. When she persisted in her refusal to take the veil because she had learned that it is possible in the world to live at peace with one's self, feel in harmony with God, and follow in love and fidelity the footsteps of the Saviour, she had heard many a kindly word of admonition, many a sharp reproof, and many a fierce threat from the Dominicans, but she did not allow herself to be led astray, and understood how to defend herself so cleverly and forcibly that his heart dilated, and he asked himself how a girl of eighteen could maintain her ground so firmly, so shrewdly, and with such thorough knowledge of the Scriptures, against devout, highly educated men--nay, the most learned and austere.

The Abbess Kunigunde had also appeared sometimes at his bedside, and Eva's conversations with her revealed to him that she had obtained her armour against the Dominicans from the Sisters of St. Clare. True, at first the former had laboured with the utmost earnestness to win her back to the convent, but two days before she had met two Dominicans, and the evident efforts of one who seemed to hold a distinguished position among his brother monks to gain Eva for his own order and withdraw her from the Sisters of St. Clare, whom he believed to be walking in paths less pleasing to God, had so angered the abbess that she lost the power, and perhaps also the will, to maintain her usual composure. Therefore, yesterday she had opposed her niece's wish to remain in the world less strongly than before; nay, on parting with her she had clasped her in her arms and, as it were, restored her freedom by admitting that various paths led to the kingdom of heaven.

This was balm to the convalescent's wounds; for he cherished no wish more ardent than to accompany his master to the marriage altar, where Eva would give her hand to Heinz Schorlin as her faithful husband, and the abbess's last visit seemed to favour this desire. Besides, he who had gazed at life with open eyes had never yet beheld a brave young warrior, soon after reaping well-earned renown, yearn for the monk's cowl. Doubt, suffering, and a miraculous escape from terrible peril had inspired the joyous-hearted Heinz with the desire to renounce the world. Now, perhaps, Heaven itself was showing him that he had not received the boon of life to bury himself in a monastery, but to be blessed with the fairest and noblest of gifts, the love of a woman who, in his opinion, had not her equal beneath the wide vault of the azure sky.

Countess Cordula was not suited for his master. During the long hours that he lay quietly on his pallet a hundred reasons strengthened this

opinion. The man for whom he had steadfastly endured such severe agony, and was suffering still, was worthy of a more beautiful, devout, and calm companion-nay, the very loveliest and best--and that, in his eyes, was the girl for whom Heinz had felt so overmastering a passion just before his luckless winnings at the gaming table. This potent fire of love might doubtless be smothered with sand and ashes, but never extinguished.

Such were Biberli's thoughts as he recalled the events of the previous day. He had found Eva less equable in her tender management than usual. Some anxiety concerning something apart from her patients seemed to oppress her. True, she had not wished to reveal it, but his eyes were keen.

Soon after sunrise that morning she had carefully rebandaged his crushed thumb, which was not yet healed. Then she had gone away, as she assured him, for only a few hours. Now the sun was already high in the heavens, yet she did not return, though it was long past the time for the bandages to be renewed, and the drops to be given which sustained the life of the dying Minorite in the adjoining room. It made him uneasy, and when anxiety had once taken root in his heart it sent its shoots forward and backward, and he remembered many things in which Eva had been different the day before. Why had she whispered so long with Herr Pfinzing and then looked so sorrowfully at him, Biberli? Why had Frau Christine come not less than three times yesterday afternoon, and again in the evening? She had some secret to discuss with the surgeon Otto. Had any change taken place in his condition? and did the leech intend to amputate his thumb, or even his hand? But, no! only yesterday he had been assured that he could save all five fingers, and his sorely mangled left foot too. The widow was better, and all hope of saving the Minorite's life had been relinquished two days ago. Eva's anxiety must have some other cause, and he asked himself, in alarm, whether she could have received any bad news from his master or Katterle?

A terrible sense of uneasiness overpowered him, and the necessity of confiding it to some one took such possession of the loquacious man that he called little Walpurga from the next room. But instead of running to his bedside, she darted forward with the joyful cry, "She is coming!" towards the door and Eva.

Soon after the latter, leading the child by the hand, entered the room. Biberli felt as if the sun were rising again. How gay her greeting sounded! The expression of her blue eyes seemed to announce something pleasant. Whoever possessed this maiden would be sure to have no lack of light in his home, no matter how dark the night might be.

He must have been mistaken concerning the anxiety which had seemed to oppress her on his account. Instead of bad news, she was surely bringing good tidings. Nay, she had the best of all; for Katterle, Eva told him, would soon arrive. But his future wife had been ill too. Her cheeks had not yet regained their roundness or their bright colour.

Sharp-sighted Biberli noticed this, and exclaimed: "Then she is here already! For, my mistress, how else could you know how her cheeks look?"

Soon afterwards the maid was really standing beside her lover's couch.

Eva allowed them to enjoy the happiness of meeting undisturbed, and went to her other two patients. When she returned to the couple, Katterle had already related what she had experienced in Schwabach. It was little more than Eva had already heard from her uncle and others.

That Seitz Siebenburg, whom he bitterly hated, had fallen in a sword combat by his master's own hand, afforded Biberli the keenest delight. No portion of the narrative vexed him except the nonarrival of the messengers, and the probability that some time must yet elapse ere Heinz could sheathe his sword.

Eva's cheeks flushed with joy and pride as she heard how nobly her lover had justified the confidence of his imperial patron. But it seemed to be impossible to follow Biberli's flood of eloquence to the end. She was in haste, and he had been right concerning the cares which oppressed her.

She had stood beside his couch the day before with a heavy heart, and it required the exercise of all her strength to conceal the anxiety with which her mind was filled, for if she did not intercede for him that very day; if his pardon could not be announced early the following morning during the session of the court in the Town Hall, then the half-recovered man must be surrendered to the judges again, and Otto believed that the torture would be fatal to his enfeebled frame.

The tailor and his adherents, as Eva knew from Herr Pfinzing, were making every effort to obtain his condemnation and prove to the city that they had not censured the proceedings of the Ortlieb household as mere reckless slanderers. Eva and her sister would be again mentioned in the investigation, and were even threatened with an examination.

At first this had startled her, but she believed her uncle's assurance that this examination would fully prove her innocence before the eyes of the whole world. For her own sake Eva surely would not have suffered herself to be so tortured by anxiety night and day, or undertaken and resolved to dare so much. The thought that the faithful follower whom her patient nursing had saved from death and to whom she had become warmly attached must now lose his life, and Heinz Schorlin be robbed of the possibility of doing anything for him, had cast every other fear in the shade, and had kept her constantly in motion the evening before and this morning.

But all that she and her Aunt Christine had attempted in behalf of the imperilled man had been futile. To apply to the Emperor again every one, including the magistrate, had declared useless, since even the Burgrave had been refused.

The members of the Council and the judges in the court had already, at Aunt Christine's solicitation, deferred the proceedings four days, but the law now forbade longer delay. Though individuals would gladly have spared the accused the torture, its application could scarcely be

avoided, for how many accusers and witnesses appeared against him, and if there were weighty depositions and by no means truthful replies on the part of the prisoner, the torture could not be escaped. It legally belonged to the progress of the investigation, and how many who had by no means recovered from the last exposure to the rack were constantly obliged to enter the torture chamber? Besides, the judges would be charged with partiality by the tailor and his followers, and to show such visible tokens of favour threatened to prejudice the dignity of the court.

She had found good will everywhere, but all had withheld any positive promise. It was so easy to retreat behind the high-sounding words "justice and law," and then: who for the sake of a squire--who, moreover, was in the service of a foreign knight--would awaken the righteous indignation of the artisans, who made the tailor's cause their own.

Whatever the aunt and niece tried had failed either wholly or partially. Besides, Eva had been obliged to keep in the background in order not to expose herself to the suspicion of pleading her own cause. Many probably thought that Frau Christine herself was talking ostensibly in behalf of the servant and really for her brother's slandered daughter.

When Eva met Katterle in front of the hospital, she had passed without noticing her, so completely had sorrow, anxiety, and the effort to think of some expedient engrossed her attention.

It had been very difficult to meet Biberli with an untroubled manner, yet she had even succeeded in showing a bright face to the carrier's widow, as well as to Father Benedictus, whose hours seemed to be numbered, and who only yesterday had wounded her deeply.

When she returned from the Minorite's room to Biberli's the lovers were no longer alone. The fresh, pleasant face of a vigorous woman, who had already visited the sufferer several times, greeted her beside his couch.

When, in the exchange of salutations, her eyes met Eva's the latter suddenly found the plan of action she had vainly sought. Gertrude of Berne could help her take the chance which, in the last extremity, she meant to risk, for she was the wife of the Swiss warder in the Burgrave's castle. It certainly would not be difficult for her to procure her an interview with the Burgravine Elizabeth. If the noble lady could not aid herself, she could--her cheeks paled at the thought, yet she resolutely clung to it--present her to her brother, the Emperor.

When Eva, in a low tone, told Frau Gertrude what she hoped to accomplish at the castle, she learned that the Emperor had ridden with the Archduchess Agnes and a numerous train to the imperial forest, to show his Bohemian daughter-in-law the beekeeper's hives, and would scarcely return before sunset; but the Burgravine had remained at home on account of a slight illness.

Nevertheless Eva wished to go to the castle, and, whatever reception the noble lady bestowed upon her, she would return to Schweinau as soon as

possible. Father Benedictus was so ill that she could not remain away from him long.

If the Burgravine could do nothing for Biberli, she would undertake the risk which made her tremble, because it compelled her, the young girl, to appear alone at the court with all its watchful eyes and sharp tongues. She would go to the fortress to beseech the Emperor herself for pardon.

She could act with entire freedom to-day, for her uncle had ridden to the city and, Frau Gertrude said, was one of the party who accompanied the Emperor to the beekeeper's, whilst her aunt had just gone to Nuremberg to see Els, who had besought her, in a despairing letter, to let her come to Schweinau, for her power of endurance was exhausted.

How gladly Eva would have accompanied her aunt to her sister to exhort her to take courage! What a strange transformation of affairs! Ever since she could think Els had sustained her by her superior strength and perseverance. Now she was to be the stronger, and teach her to exercise patience.

She thought she had gained the right to do so. Whilst Eva was still explaining her plan to Frau Gertrude, she herself perceived that she had taken no account of time.

It was nearly noon, and if she ordered a sedan-chair to convey her to the city and back again to Schweinau, it would be too late to approach the Emperor as a petitioner. She could fulfil her design only by riding; but the warder's wife reminded her that it would be contrary to custom--nay, scarcely possible--to appear before the Emperor, or even his sister, in a riding habit.

But the young girl speedily found a way to fulfil her ardent wish to aid. On her swift palfrey, which her uncle had sent to Schweinau long before that she might refresh herself, after her arduous duties, by a ride, she would go to the city, stop at her own home, and have her new expensive mourning clothes taken to the castle. The only doubt was whether she could change her garments in the quarters of the Swiss, and whether Frau Gertrude would help her do so.

The latter gladly assented. There was no lack of room in her apartments, nor did Frau Gertrude, who had served the Burgravine as waiting maid many years before her marriage, lack either skill or good will.

So she went directly home on her mule; but Eva, after promising her patients to return soon, hastened to her uncle's residence.

There she mounted the palfrey and reached the city gate a long time before the Swiss. The clothes she needed were soon found in the Ortlieb mansion, and she was then carried in a sedan-chair to the castle with her wardrobe, whilst the groom led her palfrey after her. Countess Cordula was not at home; she, too, had ridden to the forest with the Emperor.

The Burgravine Elizabeth willingly consented to receive the charming

child whose fate had awakened her warm interest. She had just been hearing the best and most beautiful things about Eva, for the leech Otto had been called to visit her in her attack of illness, and the old man was overflowing with praises of both sisters. He indignantly mentioned the vile calumnies with which Heinz Schorlin's name was associated, and which base slander had fixed upon the innocent girls whose pure morality he would guarantee.

The great lady, who probably remembered having directed Heinz's attention to Eva at the dance, understood very clearly that they could not fail to attract each other. Of all the knights in her imperial brother's train, none seemed to the Burgavine more worthy of her favour than her gay young countryman, whose mother had been one of the friends of her youth. She would gladly have rendered him a service and, in this case, not only for his own sake but still more on account of the rare fidelity of his servant, who was also a native of her beloved Swiss mountains. Yet, notwithstanding all this, it seemed impossible to bring this matter again before the Emperor. She knew her husband, and after the rebuff he had received on account of the tortured man he would be angry if she should plead his cause with her royal brother.

But her kind heart, and the regard which both Eva and Heinz Schorlin had inspired, strengthened her desire to aid, as far as lay in her power, the brave maiden who urged her suit with such honest warmth, and the petitioner's avowal of her intention, as a last resort, of appealing to the Emperor in person showed her how to convert her kind wishes into deeds.

Let Eva's youth and beauty try to persuade the Emperor to an act of clemency which he had refused to wisdom and power.

After supper her brother received various guests, and she could present the daughter of a Nuremberg patrician whom he already knew, and whose rare charms had attracted his notice.

Though she had been compelled to forego the ride to the forest, she was well enough to appear at supper in the Emperor's residence, which was close to her own castle. When the meal was over she would take Eva herself to her royal brother.

She told her this, and the gratitude which she received was so warm and earnest that it touched her heart, and as she bade the beautiful, brave child farewell she clasped her in her arms and kissed her.

CHAPTER XVI.

Encouraged and hopeful, Eva again mounted her palfrey, and urged the swift animal outside the city to so rapid a pace that the old groom on his well-fed bay was left far behind. But the change of dress, the

waiting, and the numerous questions asked by the Burgravine had consumed so much time that the poplars were already casting long shadows when she dismounted before the hospital.

Sister Hildegard received her with an embarrassment by no means usual, but which Eva thought natural when the former told her that the dying Father Benedictus had asked for her impatiently. The widow was doing well, and Biberli would hardly need her; for the wife of a Swabian knight in whose service he had formerly been was sitting by his couch with her young daughter, and their visit seemed to please him.

Eva remarked in surprise that she thought the sick man had never served any one except the Schurlins, but she was in too much haste for further questions, and entered the room where Biberli lay.

Her face was flushed by the rapid ride; her thick, fair hair, which usually fell loosely on her shoulders, had been hastily braided before she mounted her horse, but the long, heavy braids had become unfastened on the way, and now hung in tresses round her face and pliant figure.

She waved her hand gaily from the threshold to the patient for whom she had done and dared so much; but ere approaching his couch she modestly saluted the stately matron who was with Biberli, and nodded a pleasant welcome to her daughter, whose pretty, frank face attracted her. After the Swabians had cordially returned her greeting, she briefly excused herself, as an urgent duty would not permit her to yield to her desire to remain with them.

Lastly, she addressed a few hasty questions to the squire about his health, kissed little Walpurga, who had nestled to her side, bade her tell her another that she would come to her later, and entered the next room.

"Well?" Biberli asked his visitors eagerly, after the door had closed behind her.

"Oh, how beautiful she is!" cried the younger lady quickly, but her mother's voice trembled with deep emotion as she answered: "How I objected to my son's marriage with the daughter of a city family! Nay, I intended to cast all the weight of my maternal influence between Heinz and the Nuremberg maiden. Yet you did not say too much, my friend, and what your praise began Eva's own appearance has finished. She will be welcome to me as a daughter. I have scarcely ever seen anything more lovely. That she is devout and charitable and, moreover, has a clear intellect and resolute energy, can be plainly perceived in spite of the few minutes which she could spare us. If Heaven would really suffer our Heinz to win the heart of this rare creature----"

"Every fibre of it is his already," interrupted Biberli. "The rub-- pardon me, noble lady!--is somewhere else. Whether he--whether Heinz can be induced to renounce the thought of the monastery, is the question."

He sighed faintly as he gazed into the still beautiful, strong, and yet

kindly face of the Lady Wendula Schorlin, Sir Heinz's mother, for she was the older visitor.

"We ought not to doubt that," replied the matron firmly. "As the last of his ancient race, it is his duty to provide for its continuance, not solely for his own salvation. He was always a dutiful son."

"Yet," replied Biberli thoughtfully, "'Away with those who gave us life!' was the exhortation of Father Benedictus in the next room. 'Away with the service of sovereign and woman!' he cried to our knight. 'Away with everything that stands in the way of your own salvation!' And," Biberli added, "St. Francis was not the first to devise that. Our Lord and Saviour commanded His disciples to leave father and mother and to follow Him."

"Who will prevent his walking in the paths of Jesus Christ?" replied the Lady Wendula? "Yet, though he follows His footsteps, he must and can do so as a scion of a noble race, as a knight and the brave soldier and true servant of his Emperor, which he is, as a good son and, God willing, as a husband and father. He is sure of my blessing if he wields his sword as a champion of his holy faith. When my two daughters took the veil I submissively yielded. They can pray for heavenly bliss for their brother and ourselves. My only son, the last Schorlin, I neither can nor will permit to renounce the world, in which he has tasks to perform which God Himself assigned him by his birth."

"And how could Heinz part from this angel," cried Maria--to whom, next to her mother, her brother was the dearest person on earth--"if he is really sure of her love!"

She herself had not yet opened her heart to love. To wander through forest and field with the aged head of her family, assist her mother in housekeeping, and nurse the sick poor in the village, had hitherto been the joy and duty of her life. Gaily, often with a song upon her lips, she had carelessly seen one day follow another until Schorlin Castle was besieged and destroyed, and her dear uncle, the Knight Ramsweg, was slain in the defence of the fortress confided to his care. Then she and her mother were taken to the convent at Constance. Both remained there in perfect freedom, as welcome guests of the nuns, until the mounted courier brought a letter from the Knight Maier of Silenen, her cousin, who wrote from Nuremberg that Heinz, like his sisters, intended to renounce the world.

Lady Schorlin set out at once, and with an anxious heart rode to Nuremberg with her daughter as fast as possible.

They had arrived a few hours before and gone to their cousin from Silenen. From him the Lady Wendula learned what her maternal love desired to know. Biberli's fate brought her, after a brief rest, to the hospital, and how it comforted the faithful fellow's heart to see the noble lady who had confided his master to his care, and in whose house the T and St had been embroidered on his long coat and cap!

Lady Wendula had remembered these letters, and when she spoke of them he replied that since he had partially verified what the T and St had announced to people concerning his character, and to which the letters had themselves incited him, he no longer needed them.

Then he lapsed into silence, and at last, as the result of his meditations, told his mistress that there was something unusual about his insignificant self, because he earnestly desired to practise the virtues whose possession he claimed before the eyes of the people. He had usually found the worst wine in the taverns with showy signs, and when the Lady Wendula's daughter had embroidered those letters on the cloth for him, what he furnished the guests was also of very doubtful quality. On his sick bed he had been obliged to place no curb upon his proneness to reflection, and in doing so had discovered that there was no virtue which can be owned like a house or a steed, but that each must be constantly gained anew, often amidst toil and suffering. One thing, however, was now firmly established in his belief: that his favourite virtues were really the fairest of all, because--one will answer for all--man never felt happier than when he had succeeded in keeping his fidelity inviolate and maintaining his steadfastness. He had learned, too, from Fraulein Eva that the Redeemer Himself promised the crown of eternal life to those who remain faithful unto death. In this confidence he awaited the jailers, who perhaps would come very soon to lead him into the most joyless of all apartments--the Nuremberg torture chamber.

Then he told the ladies what he knew of the love which united Heinz and Eva. The four Fs which he had advised his master to heed in his wooing--Family, Figure, Favor, and Fortune--he no longer deemed the right touch-tones. Whilst he was forced to lie idly here he had found that they should rather be exchanged for four Ss--Spirituality, Steadfastness, Stimulation, and Solace--for the eyes and the heart.

All these were united in Eva and, moreover, there could be no objection to the family to which she belonged.

Thereupon he had commenced so enthusiastic a eulogy of his beloved nurse and preserver that more than once Lady Wendula, smiling, stopped him, accusing him of permitting his grateful heart to lead him to such exaggeration that the maiden he wished to serve would scarcely thank him.

Yet Eva's personal appearance had disappointed neither the experienced mother nor the easily won daughter. Nay, when Maria Schorlin gazed at her through the half-open door of the Minorite's room, because she did not want to lose sight of the girl who had already attracted her on account of her hard battle in the cause of love, and who specially charmed her because it was her Heinz whom she loved, she thought no human being could resist the spell which emanated from Eva.

With her finger on her lip she beckoned to her mother, and she, too, could not avert her eyes from the wonderful creature whom she hoped soon to call daughter, as she saw Eva standing, with eyes uplifted to heaven, beside the old man's couch, and heard her, in compliance with his wish, as she had often done before, half recite, half sing in a low voice the

Song of the Sun, the finest work of St. Francis.

The words were in the Italian language, in which this song had flowed from the poet heart of the Saint of Assisi, so rich in love to God and all animate nature; for she had learned to speak Italian in the Convent of St. Clare, to which several Italians had been transferred from their own home and that of their order and its founder.

Lady Wendula and her daughter could also follow the song; for the mother had learned the beautiful language of the Saint of Assisi from the minnesingers in her youth, and in the early years of her marriage had accompanied the Emperor Frederick, with her husband, across the Alps. So she had taught Maria.

As Lady Schorlin approached the door Eva, with her large eyes uplifted, was just beginning the second verse:

"Praised by His creatures all
Praised be the Lord my God
By Messer Sun, my brother, above all,
Who by his rays lights us and lights the day.
Radiant is he, with his great splendour stored,
Thy glory, Lord, confessing.

"By sister Moon and stars my Lord is praised,
Where clear and fair they in the heavens are raised.

"By brother Wind, my Lord, thy praise is said,
By air and clouds, and the blue sky o'erhead,
By which thy creatures all are kept and fed.

"By one most humble, useful, precious, chaste,
By sister Water, O my Lord, thou art praised.

"And praised is my Lord
By brother Fire-he who lights up the night;
Jocund, robust is he, and strong and bright.

"Praised art Thou, my Lord, by mother Earth,
Thou who sustainest her and governest,
And to her flowers, fruit, herbs, dost colour give and birth.

"And praised is my Lord
By those who, for Thy love, can pardon give
And bear the weakness and the wrongs of men.

"Blessed are those who suffer thus in peace,
By Thee, the Highest, to be crowned in heaven.

"Praised by our sister Death, my Lord, art Thou,
From whom no living man escapes.
Who die in mortal sin have mortal woe,
But blessed are they who die doing Thy will;

The second death can strike at them no blow.

"Praises and thanks and blessing to my Master be!
Serve ye Him all, with great humility."

How God was loved by this saint, who beheld in everything the Most High had created kindred whom he loved and held intercourse with as with brother and sister! Whatever the divine Father's love had formed--the sun, the moon and stars, the wood, water and fire, the earth and her fair children, the various flowers and plants--he made proclaim, each for itself and all in common, like a mighty chorus, the praise of God. Even death joins in the hymn, and all these sons and daughters of the same exalted Father call to the minds of men the omnipotent, beneficent rule of the Lord. They help mortals to appreciate God's majesty, fill their hearts with gratitude, and summon them to praise His sublimity and greatness. In death, whom the poet also calls his sister, he sees no cruel murderer, because she, too, comes from the Most High. "And what sister," asks the saint, "could more surely rescue the brother from sorrow and suffering?" Whoever, as a child of God, feels like the loving Saint of Assisi, will gratefully suffer death to lead him to union with the Father.

Benedictus had followed the magnificent poem with rapture. At the lines,

"But blessed are they who die doing Thy will;
The second death can strike at them no blow,"

he nodded gently, as if sure that the close of his earthly pilgrimage meant nothing to him except the beginning of a new and happy life; but when Eva ended with the command to serve the Lord with great humility, he lowered his eyes to the floor hesitatingly, as if not sure of himself.

But he soon raised them again and fixed them on the young girl. They seemed to ask the question whether this noble hymn did not draw his nurse also to him who had sung it; whether, in spite of it, she still persisted, with sorrowful blindness, in her refusal to join the Sisters of St. Clare, whom the saintly singer also numbered amongst his followers. Yet he felt too feeble to appeal to her conscience now, as he had often done, and bear the replies with which this highly gifted, peculiar creature, in every conversation his increasing weakness permitted him to share with her, had pressed him hard and sometimes even silenced him.

True, they fought with unequal weapons. Pain and illness paralysed his keen intellect, and difficulty of breathing often checked the eloquent tongue, both of which had served him so readily in his intercourse with Heinz Schorlin. She contended with the most precious goal of youth before her eyes, fresh and healthy in mind and body, conscious, in the midst of the struggle, against doubt and suffering, for what she held dearest of her own vigorous energy, panoplied by the talisman of the last mandate from the lips of her dying mother.

Benedictus, during a long life devoted to the highest aims, had battled

enough. He already saw Sister Death upon the threshold, and he wished to depart in peace and reap the reward for so much conflict, pain, and sacrifice. The Lord Himself had broken his weapons. The Minorite Egidius, his friend and companion in years, must carry on with Eva, Father Ignatius, the most eloquent member of the order in Nuremberg, with Heinz Schorlin, the work which he, Benedictus, had begun. Though he himself must retire from the battlefield, he was sure that his post would not remain empty.

The chant had placed him in the right mood to take leave of the Brothers, whose arrival Sister Hildegard had just announced.

Since yesterday he had seen the Saviour constantly before his mental vision. Sometimes he imagined that he beheld Him beckoning to him; sometimes that He extended His arms to him; sometimes he even fancied that he heard His voice, or that of St. Francis, and both invited him to approach.

To-day the leech had admitted it, and he himself felt it by his fevered brow, the failing pulsations of the heart, and the chill in the cold feet, perhaps already dead--he might expect to leave the dust of the world and behold those for whom he longed face to face in a purer light.

He wished to await the end surrounded only by the Brothers, who were fighting the same battle, reminded by nothing of the world, as if in the outer court of heaven.

Eva, the beautiful yet perverse woman, was one of the last persons whom he would have desired to have near him when he took the step into the other world.

Speech was difficult. A brief admonition to renounce her earthly love in order to share the divine one whose rich joys he hoped to taste that very day was the farewell greeting he vouchsafed Eva. When she tried to kiss his hand he withdrew it as quickly as his weakness permitted.

Then she retired, and Father AEgidius led the Brothers of the order in Nuremberg into the room. Meanwhile it had grown dark, and the Beguine Paulina brought in a two-branched candelabrum with burning candles. Eva took it from her hand and placed it so that the light should not dazzle her patient; but he saw her and, by pointing with a frowning brow to the door, commanded her to leave the room.

She gladly obeyed. When she had passed the Brothers, however, she paused on the threshold before going into the entry and again gazed at the old man's noble, pallid features illumined by the candlelight.

She had never seen him look so. He was gazing, radiant with joy, at the monks, who were to give him the benediction at his departure. Then he raised his dark eyes as if transfigured; he was thanking Heaven for so much mercy, but the other Minorites fell on their knees beside the bed and prayed with him.

How lovingly the old man looked into each face! He had never favoured her with such a glance. Yet no other nursing had been so difficult and often so painful. At first he had shown a positive enmity to her, and even asked Sister Hildegard for another nurse; but no suitable substitute for Eva could be found. Then he had earnestly desired to be removed to the Franciscan monastery in Nuremberg; this, however, could not be done because it would have hastened his death. So he was forced to remain, and Eva felt that her presence was not the least thing which rendered the hospital distasteful.

Yet, as his aged eyes refused their service and he liked to have someone read aloud from the gospels which he carried with him, or from notes written by his own hand, which also comprised some of the poems of St. Francis, and no one else in the house was capable of performing this office, he at last explicitly desired to keep her for his nurse.

To anoint and bandage, according to the physician's prescription, his sore feet and the deep scars made on his back by severe scourging, which had reopened, became more difficult the more plainly he showed his aversion to her touch, because she--he had told her so himself--was a woman. She certainly had not found it easy to keep awake and wear a pleasant expression when, after a toilsome day, he woke her at midnight and forced her to read aloud until the grey dawn of morning. But hardest of all for Eva to bear were the bitter words with which he wounded her, and which sounded specially sharp and hostile when he reproached her for standing between Heinz Schorlin and the eternal salvation for which the knight so eagerly longed. He seemed to bear her a grudge like that which the artist feels towards the culprit who has destroyed one of his masterpieces.

Often, too, a chance word betrayed that he blamed Heaven for having denied him victory in the battle for the soul of Heinz Schorlin which he had begun to wage in its name. True, such murmuring was always followed by deep repentance. But in every mood he still strove to persuade Eva to renounce the world.

When she confessed what withheld her from doing so, he at first tried to convince her by opposing reasons, but usually strength to continue the interchange of thought soon failed him. Then he confined himself to condemning with harsh words her perverse spirit and worldly nature, and threatening her with the vengeance of Heaven.

Once, after repeating the Song of the Sun, as she had done just now, he asked whether she, too, felt that nothing save the peace of the cloister would afford the possibility of feeling the greatness and love of the Most High as warmly and fully as this majestic song commands us to do.

Then, summoning her courage, she assured him of the contrary. Though but a simple girl, she, who had often been the guest of the abbess, felt the grandeur and glory of God as much more deeply in the world and during the fulfilment of the hardest duties which life imposed than with the Sisters of St. Clare, as the forests and fields were wider than the little convent garden.

The old man, in a rage, upbraided her with being a blinded fool, and asked her whether she did not know that the world was finite and limited, whilst what the convent contained was eternal and boundless.

Another time he had wounded her so deeply by his severity that she had found it impossible to restrain her tears. But he had scarcely perceived this ere he repented his harshness. Nothing but love ought to move his heart on the eve of a union with Him whom he had just called Love itself, and with earnest and tender entreaties he besought Eva to forgive him for the censure which was also a work of love. Throughout the day he had treated her with affectionate, almost humble, kindness.

All these things returned to Eva's thoughts as she left her grey-haired patient.

He was standing on the threshold of the other world, and it was easy for her to think of him kindly, deeply as he had often wounded her. Nay, her heart swelled with grateful joy because she had been so patient and suffered nothing to divert her from the arduous duty which she had undertaken in nursing the old man, who regarded her with such disfavour.

A light had been brought into Biberli's room too. When Eva entered with glowing cheeks she found the Swabians still sitting beside his couch. The door leading into the chamber of the dying man had been closed long before, yet the notes of pious litanies came from the adjoining room. Lady Schorlin noticed her deep emotion with sympathy, and asked her to sit down by her side. Maria offered her own low stool, but Eva declined its use, because she would soon be obliged to ride back to the city. She pressed her hand upon her burning brow, sighing, "Now, now--after such an hour, at court!"

Lady Wendula urged her with such kindly maternal solicitude to take a little rest that the young girl yielded.

The matron's remark that she, too, was invited to the reception at the imperial residence that evening brought an earnest entreaty from Eva to accept the invitation for her sake, and the Swabian promised to gratify her if nothing occurred to prevent. At any rate, they would ride to the city together.

Biberli's astonished enquiry concerning the cause of Eva's visit to the fortress was answered evasively, and she was glad when the singing in the next room led the Swabian to ask whether it was true that the master of her suffering friend on the couch, who intended to devote himself to a monastic life, meant to enter the order of the Minorite whom she had just left and become a mendicant friar. When Eva assented, the lady remarked that members of this brotherhood had rarely come to her castle; but Biberli said that they were quiet, devout men who, content with the alms they begged, preached, and performed other religious duties. They were recruited more from the people than from the aristocratic classes. Many, however, joined them in order to live an idle life, supported by the gifts of others.

Eva eagerly opposed this view, maintaining that true piety could be most surely found in the order of St. Francis. Then, with warm enthusiasm, she praised its founder, asserting that, on the contrary, the Saint of Assisi had enjoined labour upon his followers. For instance, one of his favourite disciples was willing to shake the nuts from the rotten branches of a nut tree which no one dared to climb if he might have half the harvest. This was granted, but he made a sack of his wide brown cowl, filled it with the nuts, and distributed them amongst his poor.

This pleased the mother and daughter; yet when the former remarked that work of this kind seemed to her too easy for a young, noble, and powerful knight, Eva agreed, but added that the saint also required an activity in which the hands, it is true, remained idle, but which heavily taxed even the strongest soul. St. Francis himself had set the example of performing this toil cheerfully and gladly.

Whilst giving this information she had again risen. Sister Hildegard had announced that her palfrey and the horses of the guests had been led up.

Finally Eva promised to mount at the same time as the Swabians, bade farewell to Biberli, who looked after her with surprise, yet silently conjectured that this errand to the Emperor was in his behalf, and then went into the entry, where Sister Hildegard told her that Father Benedictus had just died.

The monks were still chanting beside his deathbed. Brother AEGidius, the friend and comrade of the dead man, however, had left them and approached Eva.

Deeply agitated, he struggled to repress his sobs as he told her that the old man's longing was fulfilled and his Saviour had summoned him. To die thus, richly outweighed the many sacrifices he had so willingly made here below during a long life. If Eva had witnessed his death she would have perceived the aptness of the saying that a monk's life is bitter, but his death is sweet. Such an end was granted only to those who cast the world aside. Let her consider this once more, ere she renounced the eternal bliss for which formerly she had so devoutly yearned.

Eva's only answer was the expression of her grief for his friend's decease. But whilst passing out into the darkness she thought: the holy Brother certainly had a beautiful and happy death, yet how gently, trusting in the mercy of her Redeemer, my mother also passed away, though during her life and on her deathbed she remained in the world. And then --whilst Father Benedictus was closing his eyes--what concern did he probably have for aught save his own salvation, but my mother forgot herself and thought only of others, of those whom she loved, whilst the Saviour summoned her to Himself. Her eyes were already dim and her tongue faltered when she uttered the words which had guided her daughter until now. The forge fire of life burns fiercely, yet to it my gratitude is due if the resolutions I formed in the forest after I had gathered the flowers for her and saw Heinz kneeling in prayer have not been vain, but have changed the capricious, selfish child into a woman who can render

some service to others.

If Heinz comes now and seeks me, I think I can say trustingly, "Here I am!" We have both striven for the divine Love and recognised its glorious beauty. If later, hand in hand, we can interweave it with the earthly one, why should it not be acceptable to the Saviour? If Heinz offers me his affection I will greet it as "Sister Love," and it will certainly summon me with no lower voice to praise the Father from whom it comes and who has bestowed it upon me, as do the sun, the moon and stars, the fire and water.

Whilst speaking she went out, and after learning that Frau Christine and her husband had not yet returned, she rode with the Swabians towards the city.

In order not to pass through the whole length of Nuremberg, Eva guided her friends around the fortifications. Their destination was almost the same, and they chose to enter at the Thiergartnerthor, which was in the northwestern part of the city, under the hill crowned by the castle, whilst the road to Schweinau usually led through the Spitalthor.

On the way Lady Wendula induced Eva to tell her many things about herself, urging her to describe her father and her dead mother. Her daughter Maria, on the other hand, was most interested in her sister Els, who, as she had heard from Biberli, was the second beautiful E.

Eva liked to talk about her relatives, but her depression continued and she spoke only in reply to questions, for the Minorite's death had affected her, and her heart throbbed anxiously when she thought of the moment that she must appear amongst the courtiers and see the Emperor.

Would her errand be vain? Must poor Biberli pay for his resolute fidelity with his life? What pain it would cause her, and how heavily it would burden his master's soul that he had failed to intercede for him!

Not until Lady Schorlin questioned her did Eva confess what troubled her, and how she dreaded the venture which she had undertaken on her own responsibility.

They were obliged to wait outside the Thiergartnerthor, for it had just been opened to admit a train of freight waggons.

Whilst Eva remained on the high-road, with the castle before her eyes, she sighed from the depths of her troubled heart: "Why should the Emperor Rudolph grant me, an insignificant girl, what he refused his sister's husband, the powerful Burgrave, to whom he is so greatly indebted? Oh, suppose he should treat me harshly and bid me go back to my spinning wheel!"

Then she felt the arm of the dignified lady at her side pass round her and heard her say: "Cheer up, my dear girl. The blessing of a woman who feels as kindly towards you as to her own daughter will accompany you, and no Emperor will ungraciously rebuff you, you lovely, loyal,

charitable child."

At these words from her kind friend Eva's heart opened as if the dear mother whom death had snatched from her had inspired her with fresh courage, and from the very depths of her soul rose the cry, "Oh, how I thank you!"

She urged her nimble palfrey nearer the lady's horse to kiss her left hand, which held the bridle, but Lady Wendula would not permit it and, drawing her towards her, exclaimed, "Your lips, dear one," and as her red mouth pressed the kind lady's, Eva felt as if the caress had sealed an old and faithful friendship. But this was not all. Maria also wished to show the affection she had won, and begged for a kiss too.

Without suspecting it, Eva, on the way to an enterprise she dreaded, received the proof that her lover's dearest relatives welcomed her with their whole hearts as a new member of the family.

On the other side of the gate she was obliged to part from the Swabians.

Lady Wendula bade her farewell with an affectionate "until we meet again," and promised positively to go to the reception at the castle.

Eva uttered a sigh of relief. It seemed like an omen of success that this lady, who had so quickly inspired her with such perfect confidence, was to witness her difficult undertaking. She felt like a leader who takes the field with a scanty band of soldiers and is unexpectedly joined by the troops of a firm friend.

CHAPTER XVII

When Arnold, the warder from Berne, helped Eva from the saddle, a blaze of light greeted her from the imperial residence. The banquet was just beginning.

Frau Gertrude had more than one piece of good news to tell while assisting the young girl. Among the sovereign's guests was her uncle the magistrate, who had accompanied the Emperor to the beekeeper's, and with his wife, whom she would also find there, had been invited to the banquet. Besides--this, as the best, she told her last--her father, Herr Ernst Ortlieb, had returned from Ulm and Augsburg, and a short time before had come to the fortress to conduct Jungfrau Els, by the Burgrave's gracious permission, to her betrothed husband's hiding place. Frau Gertrude had lighted her way, and a long separation might be borne for such a meeting.

The ex-maid was obliged to bestir herself that Eva might have a few minutes for her sister and Wolff, yet she would fain have spent a much longer time over the long, thick, fair hair, which with increasing

pleasure she combed until it flowed in beautiful waving tresses over the rich Florentine stuff of her plain white mourning robe.

The Swiss had also provided white roses from the Burgrave's garden to fasten at the square neck of Eva's dress. The latter permitted her to do this, but her wish to put a wreath of roses on the young girl's head, according to the fashion of the day, was denied, because Eva thought it more seemly to appear unadorned, and not as if decked for a festival when she approached the Emperor as a petitioner. The woman whose life had been spent at court perceived the wisdom of this idea, and at last rejoiced that she had not obtained her wish; for when her work was finished Eva looked so bewitching and yet so pure and modest, that nothing could be removed or--even were it the wreath of roses--added without injuring the perfect success of her masterpiece.

Lack of time soon compelled the young girl to interrupt the exclamations of admiration uttered by the skilful tiring woman herself, her little daughter, the maidservant, and the friend whom Fran Gertrude had invited to come in as if by accident.

While following the warder's wife through various corridors and rooms, Eva thought of the hour in her own home before the dance at the Town Hall, and it seemed as if not days but a whole life intervened, and she was a different person, a complete contrast in most respects to the Eva of that time.

Before the dance she had secretly rejoiced in the applause elicited by her appearance; now she was indifferent to it--nay, the more eagerly the spectators expressed their delight the more she grieved that the only person whom she desired to please was not among them.

How easy it had been to be led to the dance, and how hard was the errand awaiting her! Her heart shrank before the doubt awakened by the flood of light pouring from the windows of the imperial residence; the doubt whether her lover would not avoid her if--ah, had it only been possible!--if he should meet her among the guests yonder; whether the eloquent Father Ignatius, who had followed him, might not already have won from the knight a vow compelling him to turn from her and summon all his strength of will to forget her.

But, no! He could no more renounce his love than she hers. She would not, dare not, let such terrible thoughts torture her now.

Heinz was far away, and the fate of her love would be decided later. The cause of her presence here was something very different, and the conviction that it was good, right, and certain of his approval, dispelled the pain that had overpowered her, and raised her courage.

Unspeakingly hard trials lay behind her, and harder ones must, perhaps, yet be vanquished. But she no longer needed to fear them, for she felt that the strength which had awakened within her after she became conscious of her love was still sustaining and directing her, and would enable her to govern matters which she could not help believing that she

herself would be too weak to guide to their goal. She felt freed from her former wavering and hesitation, and as formerly in the modest house of the Beguines, now in the stately citadel she realised that, in sorrow and severe trial, she had learned to assert her position in life by her own strength. Her father, whom she was to meet presently, would find little outward change in her, but when he had perceived the transformation wrought in the character of his helpless "little saint" it would please him to hear from her how wonderfully her mother's last prophetic words were being fulfilled.

She was emerging from the forge fire of life, steeled for every conflict, yet those would be wrong who believed that, trusting to her own newly won strength, she had forgotten to look heavenward. On the contrary, never had she felt nearer to her God, her Saviour, and the gracious Virgin. Without them she could accomplish nothing, yet for the first time she had undertaken tasks and sought to win goals which were worthy of beseeching them for aid. Love had taught her to be faithful in worldly life, and she said to herself, "Better, far better I can certainly become; but firmer faith cannot be kept."

Wolff's hiding place was a large, airy room, affording a view of the Frank country, with its meadows, fields, and forests. Eva saw there by the light of the blazing pine chips her father, sister, and brother-in-law.

Yet the meeting between all these beloved ones after a long separation partook more of sorrow than of joy. Els had really resolved to leave the Eysvogel mansion, yet she met her Aunt Christine with the joyful cry: "I shall stay! Wolff's father and I have become good friends."

In fact, a few hours before Herr Casper had looked at her kindly and gratefully, and when she showed him how happy this rendered her, warmly entreated her in a broken voice not to leave him. She had proved herself to be his good angel, and the sight of her was the only bright spot in his clouded life. Then she had gladly promised to stay, and intended to keep her word. She had only accompanied her father, who had unexpectedly returned for a short time, because she could trust the nun who shared her nursing of the paralysed patient, and he rarely recognised his watcher at night.

How long Els had been separated from her lover! When Eva greeted the reunited pair they had already poured forth to each other the events which had driven them to the verge of despair, and which now once more permitted them with budding hope to anticipate new happiness.

Eva had little time, yet the sisters found an opportunity to confide many things to each other, though at first their father often interrupted them by opposing his younger daughter's intention of going to the Emperor as a supplicant.

The girl whose wishes but a short time ago he had refused or gratified, according to the mood of the moment, like those of a child, had since gained, even in his eyes, so well founded a claim to respect, she opposed

him in her courteous, modest way with such definiteness of purpose, Biberli's fate interested him so much, and the prospect of seeing his daughters brought before the court was so painful, that he admitted the force of Eva's reasons and let her set forth on her difficult mission accompanied by his good wishes.

Els had dropped her maternal manner; nay, she received her sister as her superior, and began to describe her work in the hospital to Wolff in such vivid colours that Eva laid her hand on her lips and hurried out of the room with the exclamation, "If you insist upon our changing places, we will stand in future side by side and shoulder to shoulder! Farewell till after the battle!"

She could not have given much more time to her relatives under any circumstances, for the Burgravine's maid of honour who was to attend her to the reception was already waiting somewhat impatiently in Frau Gertrude's room, and took her to the castle without delay.

The place where they were to stay was the large apartment adjoining the dining hall.

The confidence which Eva had regained on her way to her relatives vanished only too quickly in the neighbourhood of the sovereign and the sight of the formal reception bestowed on all who entered. Her heart throbbed more and more anxiously as she realised for the first time how serious a step she had taken; nay, it was long ere she succeeded in calming herself sufficiently to notice the clatter of the metal vessels and the Emperor's deep voice, which often drowned the lower tones of the guests. Reverence for royalty was apparent everywhere.

How much quieter this banquet was than those of the princes and nobles! The guests knew that the Emperor Rudolph disliked the boisterous manners of the German nobility. Besides, the sovereign's mourning exerted a restraint upon mirth and recklessness. All avoided loud laughter, though the monarch was fond of gaiety and heroically concealed the deep grief of his own soul.

When the lord high steward announced to the maid of honour who had brought Eva here that dessert was served, the latter believed that the dreaded moment when she would be presented to the Emperor was close at hand, but quarter of an hour after quarter of an hour passed and she still heard the clanking of metal and the voices of the guests, which now began to grow louder, and amidst which she sometimes distinguished the strident tones of the court fool, Eyebolt, and the high ones of the Countess Cordula.

Time moved at a snail's pace, and she already fancied her heart could no longer endure its violent throbbing, when at last--at last--the heavy oak chairs were pushed noisily back over the stone floor of the dining hall.

From the balcony of the audience chamber a flourish of trumpets echoed loudly along the arches of the lofty, vaulted ceiling of the apartment, and the Emperor, leading the company, crossed the threshold attended by

several dignitaries, the court jesters, and some pages.

His august sister, the Burgravine Elizabeth, leaned on his arm. The papal ambassador, Doria, in the brilliant robe of a cardinal, followed, escorting the Duchess Agnes, but he parted from her in the hall. Among many other secular and ecclesiastical princes and dignitaries appeared also Count von Montfort and his daughter, the old First Losunger of Nuremberg, Berthold Vorchtel, and Herr Pfinzing with his wife.

Several guests from the city entered at the same time through another door, among whom, robed in handsome festal garments, were Eva's new Swabian acquaintances. How gladly she would have hastened to them! But a grey-haired stately man of portly figure, whose fur-trimmed cloak hung to his ankles--Sir Arnold Maier of Silenen, led them to a part of the hall very distant from where she was standing.

To make amends, Count von Montfort and Cordula came very near her; but she could not greet them. Each person--she felt it--must remain in his or her place. And the restraint became stronger as the Duchess Agnes, giving one guest a nod, another a few words, advanced nearer and nearer, pausing at last beside Count von Montfort.

The old huntsman advanced respectfully towards the Bohemian princess, and Eva heard the fourteen-year-old wife ask, "Well, Count, how fares your wish to find the right husband for your wilful daughter?"

"Of course it must be fulfilled, Duchess, since your Highness deigned to approve it," he answered, with his hand upon his heart.

"And may his name be known?" she queried with evident eagerness, her dark eyes sparkling brightly and a faint flush tingeing the slight shade of tan on her child face.

"The duty of a knight and paternal weakness unfortunately still seal my lips," he answered. "Your Highness knows best that a lady's wish--even if she is your own child--is a command."

"You are praised as an obedient father," replied the Bohemian with a slight shrug of the shoulders. "Yet you probably need not conceal whether the happy man, who is not only encouraged, but this time also chosen by the charming huntress of many kinds of game, is numbered among our guests."

"Unfortunately he is denied the pleasure, your Highness," replied the count; but Cordula, who had noticed Eva, and had heard the Duchess Agnes's last words, approached her royal foe, and with a low, reverential bow, said: "My poor heart must imagine him far away from here amid peril and privation. Instead of breaking ladies' hearts, he is destroying the castles of robber knights and disturbers of the peace of the country."

The duchess, in silent rage, clenched her white teeth upon her quivering lips, and was about to make an answer which would scarcely have flattered Cordula, when the Emperor, who had left his distinguished attendants,

approached Eva, with the Burgravine still leaning on his arm.

She did not notice it; she was vainly trying to interpret the meaning of Cordula's words. True, she did not know that when no messenger brought Heinz Schorlin's intercession for Biberli, in whose fate the countess felt a sincere interest, she had commanded her own betrothed husband to ride his horse to death in order to tell the master of the sorely imperilled man what danger threatened his faithful servant, and remind him, in her name, that gratitude was one of the virtues which beseeemed a true knight, even though the matter in question concerned only a servant Boemund Altrosen had obeyed, and must have overtaken Heinz long ago and probably aided him to rout the Siebenburgs and their followers. But Cordula read the young Bohemian's child heart, and it afforded her special pleasure to deal her a heavy blow in the warfare they were waging, which perhaps might aid another purpose.

The surprise and bewilderment which the countess's answer had aroused in Eva heightened the spell of her beauty.

Had she heard aright? Could Heinz really have sued for the countess's hand and been accepted? Surely, surely not! Neither was capable of such perfidy, such breach of faith. Spite of the testimony of her own ears, she would not believe it. But when she at last saw the Emperor's tall figure before her, and he gazed down at her with a kind, fatherly glance, she answered it with her large blue eyes uplifted beseechingly, and withal as trustilly, as if she sought to remind him that, if he only chose to do so, his power made it possible to convert everything which troubled and oppressed her to good.

The tearful yet bright gaze of those resistless eyes pierced the Emperor's very soul, and he imagined how this lovely vision of purity and innocence, this rare creature, of whom he had heard such marvellous things from Herr Pfinzing during their ride through the forest, would have fired the heart of his eighteen-year-old son, so sensitive to every impression, whom death had snatched from him so suddenly. And whilst remembering Hartmann, he also thought of his dead son's most loyal and dearest friend, Heinz Schorlin, who was again showing such prowess in his service, and had earned a right to recognition and reward.

He did not know his young favourite's present state of mind concerning his desire for a monastic life, but he had probably become aware that his swiftly kindled, ardent love for yonder lovely child had led him into an act of culpable imprudence. Besides, that very day many things had reached his ears concerning these two who suited each other as perfectly as Heinz Schorlin seemed--even to the Hapsburg, who was loyally devoted to the Holy Church--unfit for a religious life.

The Emperor could do much to further the union of this pair, yet he too was obliged to exercise caution. If he joined them in wedlock as though they were his own children he might be sure of causing loud complaints from the priesthood, and especially the Dominicans, who were very influential at the court of Rome--nay, he must be prepared for opposition directed against himself as well as the young pair. The prior of the

order had already complained to the nuncio of the lukewarmness of the Superior of the Sisters of St. Clare, who idly witnessed the estrangement from the Church of the soul of a maiden belonging to a distinguished family; and Doria had told the sovereign of this provoking matter, and expressed the prior's hope that Sir Heinz Schorlin, who enjoyed the monarch's favour, would be won for the monastic life. Opposition to this marriage, which he approved, and therefore desired to favour, was also to be expected from another quarter. Therefore he must act with the utmost caution, and in a manner which his antagonists could not oppose.

At this reflection a peculiar smile, familiar to the courtiers as an omen of a gracious impulse, hovered around his lips, which during the past month had usually revealed by their expression the grief that burdened his soul and, raising his long forefinger in playful menace, he began:

"Aha, Jungfrau Eva Ortlieb! What have you been doing since I had the boon of meeting so rare a beauty at the dance? Do you know that you have caused a turmoil amongst both ecclesiastical and secular authorities, and that many a precious hour has been shortened for me on your account? You have disturbed both the austere Dominican Fathers and the devout Sisters of St. Clare. The former think the gentle nuns treat you too indulgently, and the latter charge the zealous followers of St. Domingo with too much strictness concerning you.

"And, besides, if you were not so well aware of it yourself, you would scarcely believe it: for the sake of an insignificant serving man, who is under your special protection, I, who carry the burden of so many serious and weighty affairs, am beset by those of high and low degree. How much, too, I have also suffered on account of his master, Sir Heinz Schorlin--again in connection with you, you lovely disturber of the peace! To say nothing of the rest, your own father brings a charge against him. The accusation is made in a letter which Meister Gottlieb, our protonotary, was to withhold by Herr Ortlieb's desire, but through a welcome accident it fell into my hands. This letter contains statements, my lovely child, which I--Nay, don't be troubled; the roses on your cheeks are glowing enough already, and for their sake I will not mention its contents; only they force me to ask the question--come nearer--whether, though it caused you great annoyance that a certain young Swiss knight forced his way into your father's house under cover of the darkness, you do not hope with me, the more experienced friend, that this foolhardy fellow, misguided by ardent love, with the aid of the saints to whom he is beginning to turn, may be converted to greater caution and praiseworthy virtue? Whether, in your great charity--which I have heard so highly praised--you would be capable"--Here he paused and, lowering his voice to a whisper, added:

"Do me the favour to lend your ear--what a well-formed little thing it is!--a short time longer, to confide to the elderly man who feels a father's affection for you whether you would be wholly reluctant to attempt the reformation of the daring evil-doer yourself were he to offer, not only his heart, but the little ring with--I will guarantee it --his honourable, knightly hand?"

"Oh, your Majesty!" cried Eva, gazing at the gracious sovereign with an

expression of such imploring entreaty in her large, tearful blue eyes that, as if regretting his hasty question, he added soothingly:

"Well, well, we will reach the goal, I think, at a slower pace. Such a confession will probably flow more easily from the lips when sought by the person for whom it means happiness or despair, than when a stranger --even one as old and friendly as I--seeks to draw it from a modest maiden."

Here he paused; he had just recognised Lady Wendula Schorlin. Waving his hand to her in joyous greeting, he ordered a page to conduct her to him and, again turning to Eva, said: "Look yonder, my beautiful child: there is someone in whom you would confide more willingly than in me. I think Sir Heinz's mother, who is worthy of all reverence and love--"

Here surprise and joy forced from Eva's lips the question, "His mother?" and there was such amazement in the tone that, as the Lady Wendula, bowing low, approached the Emperor, after exchanging the first greetings which pass between old friends who have been long separated, he asked how it happened that though Eva seemed to have already met the matron, she heard with such surprise that she was the mother of his brave favourite.

Lady Wendula then confessed the name she had given herself, that she might study the young girl without being known; and again that peculiar smile flitted across the Emperor Rudolph's beardless face, and lingered there, as he asked the widow of his dead companion in arms whether, after such an examination, she believed she had found the right wife for her son; and she replied that a long life would not give her time enough to thank Heaven sufficiently for such a daughter.

The maiden who was the subject of this whispering, whose purport only a loving glance from the Lady Wendula revealed, pressed her hand upon her heart, whose impetuous throbbing stifled her breath. Oh, how gladly she would have hastened to the mother of the man she loved and his young sister, who stood at a modest distance, to clasp them in her arms, and confide to them what seemed too great, too much, too beautiful for herself alone, yet which might crumble at a single word from her lover's lips like an undermined tower swept away by the wind! But she was forced to have patience, and submit to whatever might yet be allotted to her.

Nor was she to lack agitating experiences, for the Emperor's murmured question whether she desired to hear herself called "daughter" by this admirable lady had scarcely called forth an answer, which, though mute, revealed the state of her heart eloquently enough, than he added in a louder tone, though doubtfully: "Then, so far, all would be well; but, fair maiden, my young friend, unfortunately, was by no means satisfied, if I heard aright, with knocking at the door of a single heart. Things have reached my ears--But this, too, must be----"

Here he suddenly paused, for already during this conversation with the ladies there had been a noise at the door of the hall, and now the person whom the Emperor had just accused entered, closely followed by the chamberlain, Count Ebenhofen, whose face was deeply flushed from his vain

attempts to keep Sir Heinz Schorlin back.

Heinz's cheeks were also glowing from his struggle with the courtier, who considered it a grave offence that a knight should dare to appear before the Emperor at a peaceful social assembly clad in full armour.

His appearance created a joyful stir among the other members of the court--nay, in spite of the sovereign's presence, cordial expressions of welcome fell from the lips of ladies and nobles. The Bohemian princess alone cast an angry glance at the blue ribbon which adorned the helmet of the returning knight; for "blue" was Countess von Montfort's colour, and "rose red" her own.

The ecclesiastics whom Heinz passed whispered eagerly together. The Duchess Agnes's confessor, an elderly Dominican of tall stature, was listening to the provost of St. Sebald's, a grey-haired man a head shorter than he, of dignified yet kindly aspect, who, looking keenly at Heinz, remarked: "I fear that your prior hopes too confidently to win yonder young knight. No one walks with that bearing who is on the eve of renouncing the world. A splendid fellow!"

"To whom armour is better suited than the cowl," observed the Bishop of Bamberg, a middleaged prelate of aristocratic appearance, approaching the others. "Your prior, my dear brothers, would have little pleasure, I think, in the fish he is so eagerly trying to drag from the Minorite's net into his own. He would leap ashore again all too quickly. He is not fit for the monastery. He would do better for a priest, and I would bid him welcome as a military brother in office."

"Bold enough he certainly is," added the Dominican. "I would not advise every one to enter the Emperor's presence and this distinguished gathering in such attire."

In fact, Heinz showed plainly that he had come directly from the battlefield and the saddle, for a suit of stout chain armour, which covered the greater part of his tolerably long tunic, encased his limbs, and even the helmet which he bore on his arm, spite of the blue ribbon that adorned it, was by no means one of the delicate, costly ones worn in the tournament. Besides, many a bruise showed that hard blows and thrusts had been dealt him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

At Heinz Schorlin's quarters the day before his young hostess, Frau Barbel, had had the costly armour entrusted to her care, and the trappings belonging to it, cleaned and put in order, but her labour was vain; for Heinz Schorlin had ridden directly to the fortress from Schweinau, without stopping at his lodgings in the city.

Only a short time before he had learned that his two messengers had been

captured and failed to reach their destination. He owed this information to Sir Boemund Altrosen--and many another piece of news which Cordula had given him.

The main portion of Heinz Schorlin's task was completed when the countess's ambassador reached him, so he set out on his homeward way at once, and this time his silent friend had been eloquent and told him everything which had occurred during his absence.

He now knew that Boemund and Cordula had plighted their troth, what the faithful Biberli had done and suffered for him, and lastly--even to the minutest detail--the wonderful transformation in Eva.

When he had ridden forth he had hoped to learn to renounce her whom he loved with all the might of his fervid soul, and to bring himself to close his career as a soldier with this successful campaign; but whilst he destroyed castles and attacked the foe, former wishes were stilled, and a new desire and new convictions took their place. He could not give up the profession of arms, which all who bore the name of Schorlin had practised from time immemorial, and to resign the love which united him to Eva was impossible. She must become his, though she resembled an April day, and Biberli's tales of the danger which threatened the husband from a sleep-walking wife returned more than once to his memory.

Yet what beautiful April days he had experienced, and though Eva might have many faults, the devout child, with her angel beauty, certainly did not lack the will to do what was right and pleasing to God. When she was once his she should become so good that even his mother at home would approve his choice.

He had wholly renounced the idea of going into the monastery. The Minorite Ignatius, whom Father Benedictus had sent after him that he might finish the work which the latter had begun, was a man who lacked neither intellect nor eloquence; but he did not possess the fiery enthusiasm and aristocratic confidence of the dead man. Yet when the zealous monks, whom the prior of the Dominicans had despatched to complete Heinz's conversion, opposed him, the former entered into such sharp and angry arguments with them that the young knight, who witnessed more than one of their quarrels, startled and repelled, soon held aloof from all three and told them that he had resolved to remain in the world, and his onerous office gave him no time to listen to their well-meant admonitions.

He was not created for the monastery. If Heaven had vouchsafed him a miracle, it was done to preserve his life that--as Eva desired--he might fight to the last drop of his blood for the Church, his holy faith, and the beloved Emperor. But if he remained in the world, Eva would do the same; they belonged to each other inseparably. Why, he could not have explained, but the voice which constantly reiterated it could not lie.

After he had slain Seitz Siebenburg in the sword combat, and destroyed his brother's castle, his resolve to woo Eva became absolutely fixed.

His heart dictated this, but honour, too, commanded him to restore to the maiden and her sister the fair fame which his passionate impetuosity had injured.

During the rapid ride which he and Boemund Altrosen took to Nuremberg he had stopped at Schweinau hospital, and found in Biberli, Eva's former enemy, her most enthusiastic panegyrist. Heinz also heard from him how quickly she had won the hearts of his mother and Maria, and that he would find all three at the fortress.

Lastly, Sister Hildegard had informed him of the great peril threatening his beloved faithful servant and companion, "old Biber," which had led Eva there to appeal to the Emperor.

Beside the body of Father Benedictus he learned how beautiful had been the death of the old man who had so honestly striven to lead him into the path which he believed was the right one for him to tread. In a brief prayer beside his devout friend Heinz expressed his gratitude, and called upon him to witness that, even in the world, he would not forget the shortness of this earthly pilgrimage, but would also provide for the other life which endured forever. True, Heinz had but a few short moments to devote to this farewell, the cause of the faithful follower who, unasked, had unselfishly endured unutterable tortures for him, took precedence of everything else and would permit no delay.

When the knight, with his figure drawn up to its full height, strode hastily into the royal hall, he beheld with joyful emotion those who were most dear to him, for whose presence he had longed most fervently during the ride--his mother, Eva, his sister, and the imperial friend he loved so warmly.

Overwhelmed by agitation, he flung himself on his knees before his master, kissing his hand and his robe, but the Emperor ordered him to rise and cordially greeted him.

Before speaking to his relatives, Heinz informed the monarch that he had successfully executed his commission and, receiving a few words of thanks and appreciation, modestly but with urgent warmth entreated the Emperor, if he was satisfied with his work, instead of any other reward, to save from further persecution the faithful servant who for his sake had borne the most terrible torture.

The face of the sovereign, who had welcomed Heinz as if he were a long-absent son, assumed a graver expression, and his tone seemed to vibrate with a slight touch of indignation, as he exclaimed: "First, let us settle your own affairs. Serious charges have been made against you, my son, as well as against your servant, on whose account I have been so tormented. A father, who is one of the leading men in this city, accuses you of having destroyed his daughter's good name by forcing yourself into his house after assuring his child of your love."

Heinz turned to Eva, to protest that he was here to atone for the wrong he had done her, but the Emperor would not permit him to speak. It was

important to silence at once any objection which could be made against the marriage by ecclesiastical and secular foes; therefore, eagerly as he desired to enjoy the happiness of the young pair, he forced himself to maintain the expression of grave dissatisfaction which he had assumed, and ordered a page to summon the imperial magistrate, the First Losunger of the city, and his protonotary, who were all amongst the guests, and, lastly, the Duchess Agnes.

He could read the latter's child eyes like the clear characters of a book, and neither the radiant glow on her face at Heinz Schorlin's entrance nor her hostile glance at the Countess von Montfort had escaped his notice. Both her affection and her jealous resentment should serve him.

The young Bohemian now thought herself certain that Heinz Schorlin, and no other, was Cordula's chosen knight; the countess, at his entrance, had exclaimed to her father loudly enough, "Here he is again!"

When the princess stood before the Emperor, with the gentlemen whom he had summoned, he asked her to decide the important question.

"Yonder knight--he motioned towards Heinz--had been guilty of an act which could scarcely be justified. Though he had wooed the daughter of a noble Nuremberg family, and even forced his way into her father's house, he had apparently forgotten the poor girl.

"And," cried the young wife indignantly, "the unprincipled man has not only made a declaration of love to another, but formally asked her hand."

"That would seem like him," said the Emperor. "But we must not close our ears to the charge of the Nuremberg Honourable. His daughter, a lovely, modest maiden of excellent repute, has been seriously injured by Heinz Schorlin, and so I beg you, child, to tell us, with the keen appreciation of the rights and duties of a lady which is peculiar to you, what sentence, in your opinion, should be imposed upon Sir Heinz Schorlin to atone for the wrong he has done to the young Nuremberg maiden."

He beckoned to the protonotary, as he spoke, to command him to show Ernst Ortlieb's accusation to the duchess, but she seemed to have practised the art of reading admirably; for, more quickly than it would otherwise have appeared possible to grasp the meaning of even the first sentences, she exclaimed, drawing herself up to her full height and gazing at Cordula with haughty superiority: "There is but one decision here, if the morality of this noble city is to be preserved and the maiden daughters of her patrician families secured henceforward from the misfortune of being a plaything for the wanton levity of reckless heart breakers. But this decision, on which I firmly and resolutely insist, as lady and princess, in the name of my whole sex and of all knightly men who, with me, prize the reverence and inviolable fidelity due a lady, is: Sir Heinz Schorlin must ask the honourable gentleman who, with full justice, brought this complaint to your imperial Majesty, for his daughter's hand and, if the sorely injured maiden vouchsafes to accept it, lead her to the marriage altar before God and the world."

"Spoken according to the feelings of my own heart," replied the Emperor and, turning to the citizens of Nuremberg, he added: "So I ask you, gentlemen, who are familiar with the laws and customs of this good city and direct the administration of her justice, will such a marriage remove the complaint made against Sir Heinz Schorlin and his servant?"

"It will," replied old Herr Berthold Vorchtel, gravely and firmly.

Herr Pfinzing also assented, it is true, but added earnestly that an unfortunate meeting had caused another to suffer even more severely than Eva from the knight's imprudence. This was her older sister, the betrothed bride of young Eysvogel. For her sake, as well as to make the bond between Sir Heinz Schorlin and the younger Jungfrau Ortlieb valid, the father's consent was necessary. If his imperial Majesty desired to bring to a beautiful end, that very day, the gracious work so auspiciously commenced there was no obstacle in the way, for Ernst Ortlieb was at the von Zollern Castle with the daughter who had been so basely slandered.

The Emperor asked in surprise how they came there, and then ordered Eva's father and sister to be brought to him. He was eager to make the acquaintance of the second beautiful E.

"And Wolff Eysvogel?" asked the magistrate.

"We agreed to release him after we had turned our back on Nuremberg," replied the sovereign. "Much as we have heard in praise of this young man, gladly as we have shown him how gratefully we prize the blood a brave man shed for us upon the Marchfield, no change can be made in what, by virtue of our imperial word----"

"Certainly not, little brother," interrupted the court fool, Eyebolt, "but for that very reason you must open the Eysvogel's cage as quickly as possible and let him fly hither, for on the ride to the beekeeper's you crossed in your own seven-foot tall body the limits of this good city, whose length does not greatly surpass it--your imperial person, I mean. So you as certainly turned your back upon it as you stand in front of things which lie behind you. And as an emperor's word cannot have as much added or subtracted as a fly carries off on its tail, if it has one, you, little brother, are obliged and bound to have the strange monster, which is at once a wolf and a bird, immediately released and summoned hither."

"Not amiss," laughed the Emperor, "if the boundaries of Nuremberg saw our back for even so brief a space as it needs to make a wise man a fool.

"We will follow your counsel, Eyebolt.--Herr Pfinzing, tell young Eysvogel that the Emperor's pardon has ended his punishment. The breach of the country's peace may be forgiven the man who so heroically aided the battle for peace."

Then turning to Meister Gottlieb, the protonotary, he whispered so low

that he alone could hear the command, that he should commit to paper a form of words which would give the bond between Heinz Schorlin and Eva Ortlieb sufficient legal power to resist both secular authority and that of the Dominicans and Sisters of St. Clare.

During this conference court etiquette had prevented the company from exchanging any remarks. Whatever one person might desire to say to another he was forced to entrust to the mute language of the eyes, and a sportive impulse induced Emperor Rudolph to maintain the spell which held apart those who were most strongly attracted to each other.

Meantime, whilst he was talking with the protonotary, the bolder guests ventured to move about more freely, and of them all Cordula imposed the least restraint upon herself.

Ere Heinz had found time to address a word to Eva or to greet his mother she glided swiftly to his side and, with an angry expression on her face, whispered: "If Heaven bestowed the greatest happiness upon the most deserving, you must be the most favoured of mortals, for a more exquisite masterpiece than your future wife--I know her--was never created. But now open your ears and follow my advice: Do not reveal the state of your heart until you have left the castle so far behind that you are out of sight of the Bohemian princess, or your ship of happiness may be wrecked within sight of port."

Then, with a well-assumed air of indignation, she abruptly turned her back upon him.

After moving away, she intentionally remained standing near the duchess, with drooping head. The latter hastily approached her, saying with admirably simulated earnestness: "You, Countess, will probably be the last to refuse your approval of my interference against our knightly butterfly and in behalf of the poor inexperienced girl, his victim."

"If that is your Highness's opinion," replied Cordula, shrugging her shoulders as if it were necessary to submit to the inevitable, "for my part I fear your kind solicitude may send me behind convent walls."

"Countess von Montfort a nun!" cried the child wife, laughing. "If it were Sir Heinz Schorlin to whom you just alluded, you, too, are among the deluded ones whom we must pity, yet with prudent foresight you provided compensation long ago. Instead of burying yourself in a convent, you, whom so many desire, would do better to beckon to one of your admirers and bestow on him the happiness of which the other was not worthy."

Cordula fixed her eyes thoughtfully on the floor a short time, then, as if the advice had met with her approval, exclaimed: "Your Royal Highness's mature wisdom has found the right expedient this time also. I am not fit for the veil. Perhaps you may hear news of me to-morrow. By that time my choice will be determined. What would you say to the dark-haired Altrosen?"

"A brave champion!" replied the Bohemian, and this time the laugh which

accompanied her words came from the heart. "Try him, in the name of all the saints! But look at Sir Heinz Schorlin! A gloomy face for a happy man! He does not seem quite pleased with our verdict."

She beckoned, as she spoke, to her chamberlain and the high steward, took leave of her imperial father-in-law and, with her pretty little head flung proudly back, rustled out of the hall.

Soon after Herr Pfinzing ushered Ernst Ortlieb, his daughter, and Wolff into the presence of the sovereign, who gazed as if restored to youth at the handsome couple whose weal or woe was in his hands. This consciousness afforded him one of the moments when he gratefully felt the full beauty and dignity of his responsible position.

With friendly words he restored Wolff's liberty, and expressed the expectation that, with such a companion, he would raise the noble house of his ancestors to fresh prosperity.

When he at last turned to Heinz again he asked in a low tone: "Do you know what this day means to me?"

"Nineteen years ago it gave you poor Hartmann," replied the knight, his downcast eyes resting sadly on the floor.

The kind-hearted sovereign nodded significantly, and said, "Then it must benefit those who, so long as he lives, may expect his father's favour."

He gazed thoughtfully into vacancy and, faithful to his habit of fixing his eye on a goal, often distant, and then carefully carrying out the details which were to ensure success, ere he turned to the next one, he summoned the imperial magistrate and the First Losunger to his side.

After disclosing to them his desire to allow the judges to decide and, should the verdict go against Biberli, release him from punishment by a pardon, both undertook to justify the absence of the accused from the trial. The wise caution with which the Emperor Rudolph avoided interfering with the rights of the Honourable Council afforded old Herr Berthold Vorchtel great satisfaction. Both he and the magistrate, sure of the result, could promise that this affair, which had aroused so much excitement, especially among the artisans, would be ended by the marriage of the two Ortlieb sisters and the payment of the blood money to the wounded tailor. Any new complaint concerning them would then be lawfully rejected by both court and magistrate.

Never had Heinz thanked his imperial benefactor more warmly for any gift, but though the Emperor received his gallant favourite's expressions of gratitude and appreciation kindly, he did not yet permit him to enjoy his new happiness.

There were still some things which must be decided, and for the third time his peculiar smile showed the initiated that he was planning some pleasant surprise for those whom it concerned.

The mention of the blood money which Herr Ernst Ortlieb owed the slandering tailor, who had not yet recovered from his wound, induced the Emperor to look at the father of the beautiful sisters.

He knew that Herr Ernst had also lost a valiant son in the battle of Marchfield, and Eva's father had been described as an excellent man, but one with whom it was difficult to deal. Now, spite of the new happiness of his children, the sovereign saw him glance gloomily, as if some wrong had been done him, from his daughters to Heinz, and then to Lady Schorlin and Maria, to whom he had not yet been presented. He doubtless felt that the Emperor had treated him and his family with rare graciousness, and was entitled to their warmest gratitude yet, as a father and a member of the proud and independent Honourable Council of the free imperial city of Nuremberg, he considered his rights infringed--nay, it had cost him a severe struggle not to protest against such arbitrary measures. He had his paternal rights even here--Els and Eva were not parentless orphans.

The noble monarch and shrewd judge of human nature perceived what was passing in the Nuremberg merchant's mind, but the pleasant smile still rested on his lips as, with a glance at the ill-humoured Honourable, he exclaimed to his future son-in-law: "I have just remembered something, Heinz, which might somewhat cool your warm expressions of gratitude. Yonder lovely child consented to become yours, it is true, but that does not mean very much, for it was done without the consent of her father, by which the compact first obtains signature and seal. Herr Ernst Ortlieb, however, seems to be in no happy mood. Only look at him! He is certainly mutely accusing me of vexatious interference with his paternal rights, and yet he may be sure that I feel a special regard for him. His son's blood, which flowed for his Emperor's cause, gives him a peculiar claim upon our consideration, and we therefore devoted particular attention to his complaint. In this he now demands, my son, that you restore to him, Herr Ernst Ortlieb, the two hundred silver marks which are awarded to the tailor as blood money and he must pay to the injured artisan. The prudent business man can scarcely be blamed for making this claim, for the wound he inflicted upon the ill-advised tradesman who so basely, insulted those dearest to him would certainly not have been dealt had not your insolent intrusion into the Ortlieb mansion unchained evil tongues. So, Heinz, you caused his hasty act, and therefor, are justly bound to answer for the consequence; If he brings the accusation, the judges will condemn you to pay the sum. I therefore ask whether you have it ready."

Here Herr Ernst attempted to explain that, in the present state of affairs, there could be no further mention of a payment which was only, intended to punish the disturber of his domestic peace more severely; but the Emperor stopper him and bade Heinz speak.

The latter gazed in embarrassment at the helmet he held in his hand, and had not yet found; fitting answer when the Emperor cried: "What am I to think? Was the Duke of Pomerani; wrong when he told me of a heap of gold----"

"No, Your Majesty," Heinz here interrupter without raising his eyes.

"What was left of the money would have more than sufficed to cover the sum required----"

"I thought so!" exclaimed the sovereign with out letting him finish; "for a young knight who like a great lord, bestows a fine estate upon the pious Franciscans, certainly need only command his treasurer to open the strong box----"

"You are mocking me, Your Majesty," Heinz quietly interposed. "You are doubtless well aware whence the golden curse came to me. I thrust it aside like noxious poison, and if I am reluctant to use it to buy, as it were, what is dearest and most sacred to me, indeed it does not spring from parsimony, for I had resolved to offer the two remaining purses to the devout Sisters of St. Clare and the zealous Minorite Brothers, one of the best of whom laboured earnestly for the salvation of my soul."

"That is right, my son," fell from the Emperor's lips in a tone of warm approval. "If the gold benefits the holy poverty of these pious Brothers and Sisters, the devil's gift may easily be transformed into a divine blessing. You both--" he gazed affectionately at Heinz and Eva as he spoke--"have, as it were, deserted the cloister, and owe it compensation. But your depriving yourself of your golden treasure, my friend--for two hundred silver marks are no trifle to a young knight--puts so different a face upon this matter that--that----" Here he lowered his voice and continued with affectionate mirthfulness--"that a friend must determine to do what he can for him. True, my gallant Heinz, I see that your future father-in-law, the other Nuremberg Honourables, and even your mother, are ready to pay the sum; but he who is most indebted to you holds fast this privilege, and that man am I, my brave champion! What you did for your Emperor and his best work, the peace of the country, deserves a rich reward and, thanks to the saints, I have something which will discharge my debt. The Swabian fief of Reichenbach became vacant. It has a strong citadel, from which we command you to maintain the peace of the country and overthrow robber knights. This fief shall be yours. You can enjoy it with your dear wife. It must belong to your children and children's children forever; for that a Schorlin should be born who would be unworthy of such a fief and faithless to his lord and Emperor seems to me impossible. Three villages and broad forests, with fields and meadows, pertain to the estate. As lord of Reichenbach, it will be easy for you to pay the blood money, if your father-in-law is not too importunate a creditor."

The latter certainly would not be that, and it cost Ernst Ortlieb no effort to bend the knee gratefully before the kindly monarch.

The Emperor Rudolph accepted the homage, but he clasped the young lord of Reichenbach to his heart like a beloved son, and as he placed Eva's hand in his, and she raised her beautiful face to him, he stooped and kissed her with fatherly kindness.

When Wolff entreated him to bless his alliance in the place of his suffering father, he did so gladly; and Els also willingly offered him her lips; when he requested the same favour her sister had granted him,

that he might boast of the kisses bestowed on him by the two beautiful Es, Nuremberg's fairest maidens.

CHAPTER XIX.

Heinz heeded Cordula's warning. In the royal hall every one would have been justified in believing him a very cool lover, but during the walk with Eva to the lodgings of his cousin Maier of Silenen, where the Schurlins, Ortliebs, Wolff, and Herr Pfinzing and his wife were to meet to celebrate the betrothal, the moon, whose increasing crescent was again in the sky, beheld many things which gave her pleasure.

The priest soon united Heinz and Eva, but the celestial pilgrim willingly resigned the power formerly exerted over the maiden to the husband, who clasped her to his heart with tender love.

Luna was satisfied with Wolff and Els also. She afterwards watched the fate of both couples in Swabia and Nuremberg, and when the showy escutcheon was removed from the Eysvogel mansion, and a more modest one put in its place, she was gratified.

She soon saw that a change had also been made in the one above the door of the Ortlieb house, for the Ortlieb coat of arms, in accordance with the family name, had borne the figure of a cat, the animal which loves the place,--[Ort, place.]--the house to which it belongs, but on the wedding day of the two beautiful Es the Emperor Rudolph had commanded that, in perpetual remembrance of its two loveliest daughters, the Ortliebs should henceforward bear on their escutcheon two linden leaves under tendrils, the symbol of loyal steadfastness.

When, a few months after Wolff's union with his heart's beloved, the coffin of old Countess Rotterbach, adorned with a handsome coronet upon the costly pall, was borne out of the house at the quiet evening hour, she thought there was no cause to mourn.

On the other hand, she grieved when, for a long time, she did not see old Casper Eysvogel, whose tall figure she had formerly watched with pleasure when, at a late hour, he returned from some banquet, his bearing erect, and his step as firm as if wine could not get the better of him. But suddenly one warm September noon, when her pale, waxing crescent was plainly visible in the blue sky by daylight, she beheld him again. He was less erect than before, but he seemed content with his fate; for, as a cooler breeze waved the light cobwebs in the little garden, into which he had been led, his daughter-in-law Els with loving care wrapped his feet in the rug which she had embroidered for him with the Eysvogel coat of arms, and he gratefully kissed her brow.

It was fully ten years later that Luna saw him also borne to the grave. Frau Rosalinde, his son, and his beautiful wife followed his coffin with sincere sorrow. The three gifted children whom Els had given to her

Wolff remained standing in front of the house with Frau Rickel, their nurse. The carrier's widow, who had long since regained her health in the Beguine House at Schweinau, had been taken into Frau Eysvogel's service. Her little adopted daughter Walpurga, scarcely seventeen years old, had just been married to the Ortlieb teamster Ortel. The moon heard the nurse tell what a pleasant, quiet man Herr Casper had been, and how, away from his own business affairs and those of the Council, his sole effort had seemed to be to interfere with no one.

The moon had forgotten to look at Frau Rosalinde. Besides, after her mother's death she was rarely seen even by the members of her own household, but when Els desired to seek her she was sure of finding her with the children. The parents willingly afforded her the pleasure she derived from the companionship of the little ones, but they were often obliged to oppose her wish to dress her grandchildren magnificently.

Frau Rosalinde rarely saw the twin sons of her daughter Isabella, who took the veil after her husband's death to pray for his sorely imperilled soul.

The Knight Heideck, the uncle and faithful teacher of the boys, was unwilling to let them go to the city. He ruled them strictly until they had proved that Countess Cordula's wish had been fulfilled and, resembling their unfortunate father only in figure and beauty, strength and courage, they had grown into valiant, honourable knights.

Wolff justified the expectations of Berthold Vorchtel and the Honourable Council concerning his excellent ability. When, eight years after he undertook the sole guidance of the business, the Reichstag again met in Nuremberg, it was the house of Eysvogel which could make the largest loan to the Emperor Rudolph, who often lacked necessary funds.

At the Reichstag of the year 1289, whose memory is shadowed by many a sorrowful incident, most of the persons mentioned in our story met once more.

Countess Cordula, now the happy wife of Sir Boemund Altrosen, had also come and again lodged in the Ortlieb house. But this time the only person whose homage pleased her was the grey-haired, but still vigorous and somewhat irascible Herr Ernst Ortlieb.

The Abbess Kunigunde alone was absent. When, after many an arduous conflict, especially with the Dominicans, who did not cease to accuse her of lukewarmness, she felt death approaching, she had summoned her darling Eva from Swabia, and the young wife's husband, who never left her save when he was wielding his sword for the Emperor, willingly accompanied her to Nuremberg.

With Eva's hand clasped in hers, and supported by Els, the abbess died peacefully, rich in beautiful hopes. How often she had described such an end to her pupil as the fairest reward for the sacrifices in which convent life was so rich! But the memory of her mother's decease had brought to Eva, while in Schweinau, the firm conviction that dwellers in

the world were also permitted to find a similar end. The Saviour Himself had promised the crown of eternal life to those who were faithful unto death, and she and her husband maintained inviolable fidelity to the Saviour, to each other, and to every duty which religion, law, and love commanded them to fulfil. Therefore, why should they not be permitted to die as happily and confidently as her aunt, the abbess?

Her life was rich in happiness, and though Heinz Schorlin as a husband and father, as the brave and loyal liegeman of his Emperor, and the prudent manager of his estate, regained his former light-heartedness, and taught his wife to share it, both never forgot the painful conflict by which they had won each other.

When Eva passed the village forge and saw the smith draw the glowing iron from the fire and, with heavy hammer strokes, fashion it upon the anvil as he desired, she often remembered the grievous days after her mother's death, which had made the "little saint"--she did not admit it herself, but the whole Swabian nobility agreed in the opinion--the most faithful of wives and mothers, the Providence of the poor, the zealous promoter of goodness, the most simply attired of noblewomen far and near, yet the most aristocratic and distinguished in her appearance of them all.

Hand in hand with her husband she devoted the most faithful care to their children, and if Biberli, the castellan of the castle, and Katterle his wife, who had remained childless, were too ready to read the wishes of their darlings in their eyes, she exclaimed warningly to the loyal old friend, "The fire of the forge!" He and Katterle knew what she meant, for the ex-schoolmaster had explained it in the best possible way to his docile wife.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

His sole effort had seemed to be to interfere with no one
No virtue which can be owned like a house or a steed
Retreat behind the high-sounding words "justice and law"
Strongest of all educational powers--sorrow and love
Usually found the worst wine in the taverns with showy signs

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