YONGE CHARLOTTE MARY

THE DOVE IN THE EAGLE'S NEST

Charlotte Yonge

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Yonge C.

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Содержание

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INTRODUCTION

In sending forth this little book, I am inclined to add a few explanatory words as to the use I have made of historical personages. The origin of the whole story was probably Freytag's first series of pictures of German Life: probably, I say, for its first commencement was a dream, dreamt some weeks after reading that most interesting collection of sketches. The return of the squire with the tidings of the death of the two knights was vividly depicted in sleep; and, though without local habitation or name, the scene was most likely to have been a reflection from the wild scenes so lately read of.

In fact, waking thoughts decided that such a catastrophe could hardly have happened anywhere but in Germany, or in Scotland; and the contrast between the cultivation in the free cities and the savagery of the independent barons made the former the more suitable region for the adventures. The time could only be before the taming and bringing into order of the empire, when the Imperial cities were in their greatest splendour, the last free nobles in course of being reduced from their lawless liberty, and the House of Austria beginning to acquire its preponderance over the other princely families.

M. Freytag's books, and Hegewisch's History of Maximilian, will, I think, be found fully to bear out the picture I have tried to give of the state of things in the reign of the Emperor Friedrich III., when, for want of any other law, *Faust recht*, or fist right, ruled; *i.e.* an offended nobleman, having once sent a *Fehde-brief* to his adversary, was thenceforth at liberty to revenge himself by a private war, in which, for the wrong inflicted, no justice was exacted.

Hegewisch remarks that the only benefit of this custom was, that the honour of subscribing a feud-brief was so highly esteemed that it induced the nobles to learn to write! The League of St. George and the Swabian League were the means of gradually putting down this authorized condition of deadly feud.

This was in the days of Maximilian's youth. He is a prince who seems to have been almost as inferior in his foreign to what he was in his domestic policy as was Queen Elizabeth. He is chiefly familiar to us as failing to keep up his authority in Flanders after the death of Mary of Burgundy, as lingering to fulfil his engagement with Anne of Brittany till he lost her and her duchy, as incurring ridicule by his ill-managed schemes in Italy, and the vast projects that he was always forming without either means or steadiness to carry them out, by his perpetual impecuniosity and slippery dealing; and in his old age he has become rather the laughing-stock of historians.

But there is much that is melancholy in the sight of a man endowed with genius, unbalanced by the force of character that secures success, and with an ardent nature whose intention overleapt obstacles that in practice he found insuperable. At home Maximilian raised the Imperial power from a mere cipher to considerable weight. We judge him as if he had been born in the purple and succeeded to a defined power like his descendants. We forget that the head of the Holy Roman Empire had been, ever since the extinction of the Swabian line, a mere mark for ambitious princes to shoot at, with everything expected from him, and no means to do anything. Maximilian's own father was an avaricious, undignified old man, not until near his death Archduke of even all Austria, and with anarchy prevailing everywhere under his nominal rule. It was in the time of Maximilian that the Empire became as compact and united a body as could be hoped of anything so unwieldy, that law was at least acknowledged, *Faust recht* for ever abolished, and the Emperor became once more a real power.

The man under whom all this was effected could have been no fool; yet, as he said himself, he reigned over a nation of kings, who each chose to rule for himself; and the uncertainty of supplies of men or money to be gained from them made him so often fail necessarily in his engagements, that he acquired a shiftiness and callousness to breaches of promise, which became the worst flaw in his character. But of the fascination of his manner there can be no doubt. Even Henry VIII.'s English ambassadors, when forced to own how little they could depend on him, and how dangerous it was to let subsidies pass through his fingers, still show themselves under a sort of enchantment of devotion to his person, and this in his old age, and when his conduct was most inexcusable and provoking.

His variety of powers was wonderful. He was learned in many languages—in all those of his empire or hereditary states, and in many besides; and he had an ardent love of books, both classical and modern. He delighted in music, painting, architecture, and many arts of a more mechanical description; wrote treatises on all these, and on other subjects, especially gardening and gunnery. He was the inventor of an improved lock to the arquebus, and first divined how to adapt the disposition of his troops to the use of the newly-discovered fire-arms. And in all these things his versatile head and ready hand were personally employed, not by deputy; while coupled with so much artistic taste was a violent passion for hunting, which carried him through many hairbreadth 'scapes. "It was plain," he used to say, "that God Almighty ruled the world, or how could things go on with a rogue like Alexander VI. at the head of the Church, and a mere huntsman like himself at the head of the Empire." His *bon-mots* are numerous, all thoroughly characteristic, and showing that brilliancy in conversation must have been one of his greatest charms. It seems as if only self-control and resolution were wanting to have made him a Charles, or an Alfred, the Great.

The romance of his marriage with the heiress of Burgundy is one of the best known parts of his life. He was scarcely two-and-twenty when he lost her, who perhaps would have given him the stability he wanted; but his tender hove for her endured through life. It is not improbable that it was this still abiding attachment that made him slack in overcoming difficulties in the way of other contracts, and that he may have hoped that his engagement to Bianca Sforza would come to nothing, like so many others.

The most curious record of him is, however, in two books, the materials for which he furnished, and whose composition and illustration he superintended, *Der Weise King*, and *Theurdank*, of both of which he is well known to be the hero. The White, or the Wise King, it is uncertain which, is a history of his education and exploits, in prose. Every alternate page has its engraving, showing how the Young White King obtains instruction in painting, architecture, language, and all arts and sciences, the latter including magic—which he learns of an old woman with a long-tailed demon sitting, like Mother Hubbard's cat, on her shoulder—and astrology. In the illustration of this study an extraordinary figure of a cross within a circle appears in the sky, which probably has some connection with his scheme of nativity, for it also appears on the breast of Ehrenhold, his constant companion in the metrical history of his career, under the name of Theurdank.

The poetry of *Theurdank* was composed by Maximilian's old writing-master, Melchior Pfinznig; but the adventures were the Kaisar's own, communicated by himself, and he superintended the wood-cuts. The name is explained to mean "craving glory,"—Gloriæmemor. The Germans laugh to scorn a French translator, who rendered it "Chermerci." It was annotated very soon after its publication, and each exploit explained and accounted for. It is remarkable and touching in a man who married at eighteen, and was a widower at twenty-two, that, in both books, the happy union with his lady love is placed at the end—not at the beginning of the book; and in *Theurdank*, at least, the eternal reunion is clearly meant.

In this curious book, König Römreich, by whom every contemporary understood poor Charles of Burgundy—thus posthumously made King of Rome by Maximilian, as the only honour in his power, betroths his daughter Ehrenreich (rich in honour) to the Ritter Theurdank. Soon after, by a

most mild version of Duke Charles's frightful end, König Römreich is seen on his back dying in a garden, and Ehrenreich (as Mary really did) despatches a ring to summon her betrothed.

But here Theurdank returns for answer that he means first to win honour by his exploits, and sets out with his comrade, Ehrenhold, in search thereof. Ehrenhold never appears of the smallest use to him in any of the dire adventures into which he falls, but only stands complacently by, and in effect may represent Fame, or perhaps that literary sage whom Don Quixote always supposed to be at hand to record his deeds of prowess.

Next we are presented with the German impersonation of Satan as a wise old magician, only with claws instead of feet, commissioning his three captains (*hauptleutern*), Fürwitz, Umfallo, and Neidelhard, to beset and ruin Theurdank. They are interpreted as the dangers of youth, middle life, and old age—Rashness, Disaster, and Distress (or Envy). One at a time they encounter him,—not once, but again and again; and he has ranged under each head, in entire contempt of real order of time, the perils he thinks owing to each foe. Fürwitz most justly gets the credit of Maximilian's perils on the steeple of Ulm, though, unfortunately, the artist has represented the daring climber as standing not much above the shoulders of Fürwitz and Ehrenhold; and although the annotation tells us that his "hinder half foot" overhung the scaffold, the danger in the print is not appalling. Fürwitz likewise inveigles him into putting the point (*schnäbel*) of his shoe into the wheel of a mill for turning stone balls, where he certainly hardly deserved to lose nothing but the beak of his shoe. This enemy also brings him into numerous unpleasant predicaments on precipices, where he hangs by one hand; while the chamois stand delighted on every available peak, Fürwitz grins malevolently, and Ehrenhold stands pointing at him over his shoulder. Time and place are given in the notes for all these escapes. After some twenty adventures Fürwitz is beaten off, and Umfallo tries his powers. Here the misadventures do not involve so much folly on the hero's part—though, to be sure, he ventures into a lion's den unarmed, and has to beat off the inmates with a shovel. But the other adventures are more rational. He catches a jester—of admirably foolish expression—putting a match to a powder-magazine; he is wonderfully preserved in mountain avalanches and hurricanes; reins up his horse on the verge of an abyss; falls through ice in Holland and shows nothing but his head above it; cures himself of a fever by draughts of water, to the great disgust of his physicians, and escapes a fire bursting out of a tall stove.

Neidelhard brings his real battles and perils. From this last he is in danger of shipwreck, of assassination, of poison, in single combat, or in battle; tumults of the people beset him; he is imprisoned as at Ghent. But finally Neidelhard is beaten back; and the hero is presented to Ehrenreich. Ehrenhold recounts his triumphs, and accuses the three captains. One is hung, another beheaded, the third thrown headlong from a tower, and a guardian angel then summons Theurdank to his union with his Queen. No doubt this reunion was the life-dream of the harassed, busy, inconsistent man, who flashed through the turmoils of the early sixteenth century.

The adventures of Maximilian which have been adverted to in the story are all to be found in Theurdank, and in his early life he was probably the brilliant eager person we have tried in some degree to describe. In his latter years it is well known that he was much struck by Luther's arguments; and, indeed, he had long been conscious of need of Church reform, though his plans took the grotesque form of getting himself made Pope, and taking all into his own hands.

Perhaps it was unwise to have ever so faintly sketched Ebbo's career through the ensuing troubles; but the history of the star and of the spark in the stubble seemed to need completion; and the working out of the character of the survivor was unfinished till his course had been thought over from the dawn of the Wittenberg teaching, which must have seemed no novelty to an heir of the doctrine of Tauler, and of the veritably Catholic divines of old times. The idea is of the supposed course of a thoughtful, refined, conscientious man through the earlier times of the Reformation, glad of the hope of cleansing the Church, but hoping to cleanse, not to break away from her—a hope that Luther himself long cherished, and which was not entirely frustrated till the re-assembly at Trent in

the next generation. Justice has never been done to the men who feared to loose their hold on the Church Catholic as the one body to which the promises were made. Their loyalty has been treated as blindness, timidity, or superstition; but that there were many such persons, and those among the very highest minds of their time, no one can have any doubt after reading such lives as those of Friedrich the Wise of Saxony, of Erasmus, of Vittoria Colonna, or of Cardinal Giustiniani.

April 9, 1836.

CHAPTER I
MASTER GOTTFRIED'S WORKSHOP

The upper lattices of a tall, narrow window were open, and admitted the view, of first some richly-tinted vine leaves and purpling grapes, then, in dazzling freshness of new white stone, the lacework fabric of a half-built minster spire, with a mason's crane on the summit, bending as though craving for a further supply of materials; and beyond, peeping through every crevice of the exquisite open fretwork, was the intensely blue sky of early autumn.

The lower longer panes of the window were closed, and the glass, divided into circles and quarrels, made the scene less distinct; but still the huge stone tower was traceable, and, farther off, the slope of a gently-rising hill, clothed with vineyards blushing into autumn richness. Below, the view was closed by the gray wall of a court-yard, laden with fruit-trees in full bearing, and inclosing paved paths that radiated from a central fountain, and left spaces between, where a few summer flowers still lingered, and the remains of others showed what their past glory had been.

The interior of the room was wainscoted, the floor paved with bright red and cream-coloured tiles, and the tall stove in one corner decorated with the same. The eastern end of the apartment was adorned with an exquisite small group carved in oak, representing the carpenter's shop at Nazareth, with the Holy Child instructed by Joseph in the use of tools, and the Mother sitting with her book, "pondering these things in her heart." All around were blocks of wood and carvings in varying states of progress—some scarcely shaped out, and others in perfect completion. And the subjects were equally various. Here was an adoring angel with folded wings, clasped hands, and rapt face; here a majestic head of an apostle or prophet; here a lovely virgin saint, seeming to play smilingly with the instrument of her martyrdom; here a grotesque *miserere* group, illustrating a fairy tale, or caricaturing a popular fable here a beauteous festoon of flowers and fruit, emulating nature in all save colour; and on the work-table itself, growing under the master's hand, was a long wreath, entirely composed of leaves and seed-vessels in their quaint and beauteous forms—the heart-shaped shepherd's purse, the mask-like skull-cap, and the crowned urn of the henbane. The starred cap of the poppy was actually being shaped under the tool, copied from a green capsule, surmounted with purple velvety rays, which, together with its rough and wavy leaf, was held in the hand of a young maiden who knelt by the table, watching the work with eager interest.

She was not a beautiful girl—not one of those whose "bright eyes rain influence, and judge the prize." She was too small, too slight, too retiring for such a position. If there was something lily-like in her drooping grace, it was not the queen-lily of the garden that she resembled, but the retiring lily of the valley—so purely, transparently white was her skin, scarcely tinted by a roseate blush on the cheek, so tender and modest the whole effect of her slender figure, and the soft, downcast, pensive brown eyes, utterly dissimilar in hue from those of all her friends and kindred, except perhaps the bright, quick ones of her uncle, the master-carver. Otherwise, his portly form, open visage, and good-natured stateliness, as well as his furred cap and gold chain, were thoroughly those of the German burgomaster of the fifteenth century; but those glittering black eyes had not ceased to betray their French, or rather Walloon, origin, though for several generations back the family had been settled at Ulm. Perhaps, too, it was Walloon quickness and readiness of wit that had made them, so soon as they became affiliated, so prominent in all the councils of the good free city, and so noted for excellence in art and learning. Indeed the present head of the family, Master Gottfried Sorel, was so much esteemed for his learning that he had once had serious thoughts of terming himself Magister Gothofredus Oxalicus, and might have carried it out but for the very decided objections of his wife, Dame Johanna, and his little niece, Christina, to being dubbed by any such surname.

Master Gottfried had had a scapegrace younger brother named Hugh, who had scorned both books and tools, had been the plague of the workshop, and, instead of coming back from his wandering year of improvement, had joined a band of roving Lanzknechts. No more had been heard of him for a dozen or fifteen years, when he suddenly arrived at the paternal mansion at Ulm, half dead with intermittent fever, and with a young, broken-hearted, and nearly expiring wife, his spoil in his Italian campaigns. His rude affection had utterly failed to console her for her desolated home and slaughtered kindred, and it had so soon turned to brutality that, when brought to comparative peace and rest in his brother's home, there was nothing left for the poor Italian but to lie down and die, commending her babe in broken German to Hausfrau Johanna, and blessing Master Gottfried for his flowing Latin assurances that the child should be to them even as the little maiden who was lying in the God's acre upon the hillside.

And verily the little Christina had been a precious gift to the bereaved couple. Her father had no sooner recovered than he returned to his roving life, and, except for a report that he had been seen among the retainers of one of the robber barons of the Swabian Alps, nothing had been heard of him; and Master Gottfried only hoped to be spared the actual pain and scandal of knowing when his eyes were blinded and his head swept off at a blow, or when he was tumbled headlong into a moat, suspended from a tree, or broken on the wheel: a choice of fates that was sure sooner or later to befall him. Meantime, both the burgomeister and burgomeisterinn did their utmost to forget that the gentle little girl was not their own; they set all their hopes and joys on her, and, making her supply the place at once of son and daughter, they bred her up in all the refinements and accomplishments in which the free citizens of Germany took the lead in the middle and latter part of the fifteenth century. To aid her aunt in all house-wifely arts, to prepare dainty food and varied liquors, and to spin, weave, and broider, was only a part of Christina's training; her uncle likewise set great store by her sweet Italian voice, and caused her to be carefully taught to sing and play on the lute, and he likewise delighted in hearing her read aloud to him from the hereditary store of MSS. and from the dark volumes that began to proceed from the press. Nay, Master Gottfried had made experiments in printing and wood-engraving on his own account, and had found no head so intelligent, no hand so desirous to aid him, as his little Christina's, who, in all that needed taste and skill rather than strength, was worth all his prentices and journeymen together. Some fine bold wood-cuts had been produced by their joint efforts; but these less important occupations had of late been set aside by the engrossing interest of the interior fittings of the great "Dome Kirk," which for nearly a century had been rising by the united exertions of the burghers, without any assistance from without. The foundation had been laid in 1377; and at length, in the year of grace 1472, the crown of the apse had been closed in, and matters were so forward that Master Gottfried's stall work was already in requisition for the choir.

"Three cubits more," he reckoned. "Child, hast thou found me fruits enough for the completing of this border?"

"O yes, mine uncle. I have the wild rosehip, and the flat shield of the moonwort, and a pea-pod, and more whose names I know not. But should they all be seed and fruit?"

"Yea, truly, my Stina, for this wreath shall speak of the goodly fruits of a completed life."

"Even as that which you carved in spring told of the blossom and fair promise of youth," returned the maiden. "Methinks the one is the most beautiful, as it ought to be;" then, after a little pause, and some reckoning, "I have scarce seed-pods enough in store, uncle; might we not seek some rarer shapes in the herb-garden of Master Gerhard, the physician? He, too, might tell me the names of some of these."

"True, child; or we might ride into the country beyond the walls, and seek them. What, little one, wouldst thou not?"

"So we go not far," faltered Christina, colouring.

"Ha, thou hast not forgotten the fright thy companions had from the Schlangenwald reitern when gathering Maydew? Fear not, little coward; if we go beyond the suburbs we will take Hans and

Peter with their halberts. But I believe thy silly little heart can scarce be free for enjoyment if it can fancy a Reiter within a dozen leagues of thee."

"At your side I would not fear. That is, I would not vex thee by my folly, and I might forget it," replied Christina, looking down.

"My gentle child!" the old man said approvingly. "Moreover, if our good Raiser has his way, we shall soon be free of the reitern of Schlangenwald, and Adlerstein, and all the rest of the mouse-trap barons. He is hoping to form a league of us free imperial cities with all the more reasonable and honest nobles, to preserve the peace of the country. Even now a letter from him was read in the Town Hall to that effect; and, when all are united against them, my lords-mousers must needs become pledged to the league, or go down before it."

"Ah! that will be well," cried Christina. "Then will our wagons be no longer set upon at the Debateable Ford by Schlangenwald or Adlerstein; and our wares will come safely, and there will be wealth enough to raise our spire! O uncle, what a day of joy will that be when Our Lady's great statue will be set on the summit!"

"A day that I shall scarce see, and it will be well if thou dost," returned her uncle, "unless the hearts of the burghers of Ulm return to the liberality of their fathers, who devised that spire! But what trampling do I hear?"

There was indeed a sudden confusion in the house, and, before the uncle and niece could rise, the door was opened by a prosperous apple-faced dame, exclaiming in a hasty whisper, "Housefather, O Housefather, there are a troop of reitern at the door, dismounting already;" and, as the master came forward, brushing from his furred vest the shavings and dust of his work, she added in a more furtive, startled accent, "and, if I mistake not, one is thy brother!"

"He is welcome," replied Master Gottfried, in his cheery fearless voice; "he brought us a choice gift last time he came; and it may be he is ready to seek peace among us after his wanderings. Come hither, Christina, my little one; it is well to be abashed, but thou art not a child who need fear to meet a father."

Christina's extreme timidity, however, made her pale and crimson by turns, perhaps by the infection of anxiety from her aunt, who could not conceal a certain dissatisfaction and alarm, as the maiden, led on either side by her adopted parents, thus advanced from the little studio into a handsomely-carved wooden gallery, projecting into a great wainscoated room, with a broad carved stair leading down into it. Down this stair the three proceeded, and reached the stone hall that lay beyond it, just as there entered from the trellised porch, that covered the steps into the street, a thin wiry man, in a worn and greasy buff suit, guarded on the breast and arms with rusty steel, and a battered helmet with the vizor up, disclosing a weather-beaten bronzed face, with somewhat wild dark eyes, and a huge grizzled moustache forming a straight line over his lips. Altogether he was a complete model of the lawless Reiter or Lanzknecht, the terror of Swabia, and the bugbear of Christina's imagination. The poor child's heart died within her as she perceived the mutual recognition between her uncle and the new comer; and, while Master Gottfried held out his hands with a cordial greeting of "Welcome, home, brother Hugh," she trembled from head to foot, as she sank on her knees, and murmured, "Your blessing, honoured father."

"Ha? What, this is my girl? What says she? My blessing, eh? There then, thou hast it, child, such as I have to give, though they'll tell thee at Adlerstein that I am more wont to give the other sort of blessing! Now, give me a kiss, girl, and let me see thee! How now!" as he folded her in his rough arms; "thou art a mere feather, as slight as our sick Jungfrau herself." And then, regarding her, as she stood drooping, "Thou art not half the woman thy mother was—she was stately and straight as a column, and tall withal."

"True!" replied Hausfrau Johanna, in a marked tone; "but both she and her poor babe had been so harassed and wasted with long journeys and hardships, that with all our care of our Christina, she has never been strong or well-grown. The marvel is that she lived at all."

"Our Christina is not beautiful, we know," added her uncle, reassuringly taking her hand; "but she is a good and meek maiden."

"Well, well," returned the Lanzknecht, "she will answer the purpose well enough, or better than if she were fair enough to set all our fellows together by the ears for her. Camilla, I say—no, what's her name, Christina?—put up thy gear and be ready to start with me to-morrow morning for Adlerstein."

"For Adlerstein?" re-echoed the housemother, in a tone of horrified dismay; and Christina would have dropped on the floor but for her uncle's sustaining hand, and the cheering glance with which he met her imploring look.

"Let us come up to the gallery, and understand what you desire, brother," said Master Gottfried, gravely. "Fill the cup of greeting, Hans. Your followers shall be entertained in the hall," he added.

"Ay, ay," quoth Hugh, "I will show you reason over a goblet of the old Rosenburg. Is it all gone yet, brother Goetz? No? I reckon there would not be the scouring of a glass left of it in a week if it were at Adlerstein."

So saying, the trooper crossed the lower room, which contained a huge tiled baking oven, various brilliantly-burnished cooking utensils, and a great carved cupboard like a wooden bedstead, and, passing the door of the bathroom, clanked up the oaken stairs to the gallery, the reception-room of the house. It had tapestry hangings to the wall, and cushions both to the carved chairs and deep windows, which looked out into the street, the whole storey projecting into close proximity with the corresponding apartment of the Syndic Moritz, the goldsmith on the opposite side. An oaken table stood in the centre, and the gallery was adorned with a dresser, displaying not only bright pewter, but goblets and drinking cups of beautifully-shaped and coloured glass, and saltcellars, tankards, &c. of gold and silver.

"Just as it was in the old man's time," said the soldier, throwing himself into the housefather's chair. "A handful of Lanzknechts would make short work with your pots and pans, good sister Johanna."

"Heaven forbid!" said poor Johanna under her breath. "Much good they do you, up in a row there, making you a slave to furbishing them. There's more sense in a chair like this—that does rest a man's bones. Here, Camilla, girl, unlace my helmet! What, know'st not how? What is a woman made for but to let a soldier free of his trappings? Thou hast done it! There! Now my boots," stretching out his legs.

"Hans shall draw off your boots, fair brother," began the dame; but poor Christina, the more anxious to propitiate him in little things, because of the horror and dread with which his main purpose inspired her, was already on her knees, pulling with her small quivering hands at the long steel-guarded boot—a task to which she would have been utterly inadequate, but for some lazy assistance from her father's other foot. She further brought a pair of her uncle's furred slippers, while Reiter Hugh proceeded to dangle one of the boots in the air, expatiating on its frail condition, and expressing his intention of getting a new pair from Master Matthias, the sutor, ere he should leave Ulm on the morrow. Then, again, came the dreaded subject; his daughter must go with him.

"What would you with Christina, brother?" gravely asked Master Gottfried, seating himself on the opposite side of the stove, while out of sight the frightened girl herself knelt on the floor, her head on her aunt's knees, trying to derive comfort from Dame Johanna's clasping hands, and vehement murmurs that they would not let their child be taken from them. Alas! these assurances were little in accordance with Hugh's rough reply, "And what is it to you what I do with mine own?"

"Only this, that, having bred her up as my child and intended heiress, I might have some voice."

"Oh! in choosing her mate! Some mincing artificer, I trow, fiddling away with wood and wire to make gauds for the fair-day! Hast got him here? If I like him, and she likes him, I'll bring her back when her work is done."

"There is no such person as yet in the case," said Gottfried. "Christina is not yet seventeen, and I would take my time to find an honest, pious burgher, who will value this precious jewel of mine."

"And let her polish his flagons to the end of her days," laughed Hugh grimly, but manifestly somewhat influenced by the notion of his brother's wealth. "What, hast no child of thine own?" he added.

"None, save in Paradise," answered Gottfried, crossing himself. "And thus, if Christina should remain with me, and be such as I would have her, then, brother, my wealth, after myself and my good housewife, shall be hers, with due provision for thee, if thou shouldst weary of thy wild life. Otherwise," he added, looking down, and speaking in an under tone, "my poor savings should go to the completion of the Dome Kirk."

"And who told thee, Goetz, that I would do ought with the girl that should hinder her from being the very same fat, sourkrout-cooking, pewter-scrubbing housewife of thy mind's eye?"

"I have heard nothing of thy designs as yet, brother Hugh, save that thou wouldst take her to Adlerstein, which men greatly belie if it be not a nest of robbers."

"Aha! thou hast heard of Adlerstein! We have made the backs of your jolly merchants tingle as well as they could through their well-lined doublets! Ulm knows of Adlerstein, and the Debateable Ford!"

"It knows little to its credit," said Gottfried, gravely; "and it knows also that the Emperor is about to make a combination against all the Swabian robber-holds, and that such as join not in it will fare the worse."

"Let Kaiser Fritz catch his bear ere he sells its hide! He has never tried to mount the Eagle's Ladder! Why, man, Adlerstein might be held against five hundred men by sister Johanna with her rock and spindle! 'Tis a free barony, Master Gottfried, I tell thee—has never sworn allegiance to Kaiser or Duke of Swabia either! Freiherr Eberhard is as much a king on his own rock as Kaiser Fritz ever was of the Romans, and more too, for I never could find out that they thought much of our king at Rome; and, as to gainsaying our old Freiherr, one might as well leap over the abyss at once."

"Yes, those old free barons are pitiless tyrants," said Gottfried, "and I scarce think I can understand thee aright when I hear thee say thou wouldst carry thy daughter to such an abode."

"It is the Freiherr's command," returned Hugh. "Look you, they have had wondrous ill-luck with their children; the Freiherrinn Kunigunde has had a dozen at least, and only two are alive, my young Freiherr and my young Lady Ermentrude; and no wonder, you would say, if you could see the gracious Freiherrinn, for surely Dame Holda made a blunder when she fished her out of the fountain woman instead of man. She is Adlerstein herself by birth, married her cousin, and is prouder and more dour than our old Freiherr himself—fitter far to handle shield than swaddled babe. And now our Jungfrau has fallen into a pining waste, that 'tis a pity to see how her cheeks have fallen away, and how she mopes and fades. Now, the old Freiherr and her brother, they both dote on her, and would do anything for her. They thought she was bewitched, so we took old Mother Ilsebill and tried her with the ordeal of water; but, look you, she sank as innocent as a puppy dog, and Ursel was at fault to fix on any one else. Then one day, when I looked into the chamber, I saw the poor maiden sitting, with her head hanging down, as if 'twas too heavy for her, on a high-backed chair, no rest for her feet, and the wind blowing keen all round her, and nothing to taste but scorched beef, or black bread and sour wine, and her mother rating her for foolish fancies that gave trouble. And, when my young Freiherr was bemoaning himself that we could not hear of a Jew physician passing our way to catch and bring up to cure her, I said to him at last that no doctor could do for her what gentle tendance and nursing would, for what the poor maiden needed was to be cosseted and laid down softly, and fed with broths and possets, and all that women know how to do with one another. A proper scowl and hard words I got from my gracious Lady, for wanting to put burgher softness into an Adlerstein; but my old lord and his son opened on the scent at once. 'Thou hast a daughter?' quoth the Freiherr. 'So please your gracious lordship,' quoth I; 'that is, if she still lives, for I left her a puny infant.' 'Well,' said my lord, 'if thou wilt bring her here, and her care restores my daughter to health and strength,

then will I make thee my body squire, with a right to a fourth part of all the spoil, and feed for two horses in my stable.' And young Freiherr Eberhard gave his word upon it."

Gottfried suggested that a sick nurse was the person required rather than a child like Christina; but, as Hugh truly observed, no nurse would voluntarily go to Adlerstein, and it was no use to wait for the hopes of capturing one by raid or foray. His daughter was at his own disposal, and her services would be repaid by personal advantages to himself which he was not disposed to forego; in effect these were the only means that the baron had of requiting any attendance upon his daughter.

The citizens of old Germany had the strongest and most stringent ideas of parental authority, and regarded daughters as absolute chattels of their father; and Master Gottfried Sorel, though he alone had done the part of a parent to his niece, felt entirely unable to withstand the nearer claim, except by representations; and these fell utterly disregarded, as in truth every counsel had hitherto done, upon the ears of Reiter Hugh, ever since he had emerged from his swaddling clothes. The plentiful supper, full cup of wine, the confections, the soft chair, together perhaps with his brother's grave speech, soon, however, had the effect of sending him into a doze, whence he started to accept civilly the proposal of being installed in the stranger's room, where he was speedily snoring between two feather beds.

Then there could be freedom of speech in the gallery, where the uncle and aunt held anxious counsel over the poor little dark-tressed head that still lay upon good Johanna's knees. The dame was indignant and resolute: "Take the child back with him into a very nest of robbers!—her own innocent dove whom they had shielded from all evil like a very nun in a cloister! She should as soon think of yielding her up to be borne off by the great Satan himself with his horns and hoofs."

"Hugh is her father, housewife," said the master-carver.

"The right of parents is with those that have done the duty of parents," returned Johanna. "What said the kid in the fable to the goat that claimed her from the sheep that bred her up? I am ashamed of you, housefather, for not better loving your own niece."

"Heaven knows how I love her," said Gottfried, as the sweet face was raised up to him with a look acquitting him of the charge, and he bent to smooth back the silken hair, and kiss the ivory brow; "but Heaven also knows that I see no means of withholding her from one whose claim is closer than my own—none save one; and to that even thou, housemother, wouldst not have me resort."

"What is it?" asked the dame, sharply, yet with some fear.

"To denounce him to the burgomasters as one of the Adlerstein retainers who robbed Philipp der Schmidt, and have him fast laid by the heels."

Christina shuddered, and Dame Johanna herself recoiled; but presently exclaimed, "Nay, you could not do that, good man, but wherefore not threaten him therewith? Stand at his bedside in early dawn, and tell him that, if he be not off ere daylight with both his cut-throats, the halberdiers will be upon him."

"Threaten what I neither could nor would perform, mother? That were a shrewish resource."

"Yet would it save the child," muttered Johanna. But, in the meantime, Christina was rising from the floor, and stood before them with loose hair, tearful eyes, and wet, flushed cheeks. "It must be thus," she said, in a low, but not unsteady voice. "I can bear it better since I have heard of the poor young lady, sick and with none to care for her. I will go with my father; it is my duty. I will do my best; but oh! uncle, so work with him that he may bring me back again."

"This from thee, Stina!" exclaimed her aunt; "from thee who art sick for fear of a lanzknecht!"

"The saints will be with me, and you will pray for me," said Christina, still trembling.

"I tell thee, child, thou knowst not what these vile dens are. Heaven forfend thou shouldst!" exclaimed her aunt. "Go only to Father Balthazar, housefather, and see if he doth not call it a sending of a lamb among wolves."

"Mind'st thou the carving I did for Father Balthazar's own oratory?" replied Master Gottfried.

"I talk not of carving! I talk of our child!" said the dame, petulantly.

"*Ut agnus inter lupos*," softly said Gottfried, looking tenderly, though sadly, at his niece, who not only understood the quotation, but well remembered the carving of the cross-marked lamb going forth from its fold among the howling wolves.

"Alas! I am not an apostle," said she.

"Nay, but, in the path of duty, 'tis the same hand that sends thee forth," answered her uncle, "and the same will guard thee."

"Duty, indeed!" exclaimed Johanna. "As if any duty could lead that silly helpless child among that herd of evil men, and women yet worse, with a good-for-nothing father, who would sell her for a good horse to the first dissolute Junker who fell in his way."

"I will take care that he knows it is worth his while to restore her safe to us. Nor do I think so ill of Hugh as thou dost, mother. And, for the rest, Heaven and the saints and her own discretion must be her guard till she shall return to us."

"How can Heaven be expected to protect her when you are flying in its face by not taking counsel with Father Balthazar?"

"That shalt thou do," replied Gottfried, readily, secure that Father Balthazar would see the matter in the same light as himself, and tranquillize the good woman. It was not yet so late but that a servant could be despatched with a request that Father Balthazar, who lived not many houses off in the same street, would favour the Burgomeisterinn Sorel by coming to speak with her. In a few minutes he appeared,—an aged man, with a sensible face, of the fresh pure bloom preserved by a temperate life. He was a secular parish-priest, and, as well as his friend Master Gottfried, held greatly by the views left by the famous Strasburg preacher, Master John Tauler. After the good housemother had, in strong terms, laid the case before him, she expected a trenchant decision on her own side, but, to her surprise and disappointment, he declared that Master Gottfried was right, and that, unless Hugh Sorel demanded anything absolutely sinful of his daughter, it was needful that she should submit. He repeated, in stronger terms, the assurance that she would be protected in the endeavour to do right, and the Divine promises which he quoted from the Latin Scriptures gave some comfort to the niece, who understood them, while they impressed the aunt, who did not. There was always the hope that, whether the young lady died or recovered, the conclusion of her illness would be the term of Christina's stay at Adlerstein, and with this trust Johanna must content herself. The priest took leave, after appointing with Christina to meet her in the confessional early in the morning before mass; and half the night was spent by the aunt and niece in preparing Christina's wardrobe for her sudden journey.

Many a tear was shed over the tokens of the little services she was wont to render, her half-done works, and pleasant studies so suddenly broken off, and all the time Hausfrau Johanna was running on with a lecture on the diligent preservation of her maiden discretion, with plentiful warnings against swaggering men-at-arms, drunken lanzknechts, and, above all, against young barons, who most assuredly could mean no good by any burgher maiden. The good aunt blessed the saints that her Stina was likely only to be lovely in affectionate home eyes; but, for that matter, idle men, shut up in a castle, with nothing but mischief to think of, would be dangerous to Little Three Eyes herself, and Christina had best never stir a yard from her lady's chair, when forced to meet them. All this was interspersed with motherly advice how to treat the sick lady, and receipts for cordials and possets; for Johanna began to regard the case as a sort of second-hand one of her own. Nay, she even turned it over in her mind whether she should not offer herself as the Lady Ermentrude's sick-nurse, as being a less dangerous commodity than her little niece: but fears for the well-being of the master-carver, and his Wirthschaft, and still more the notion of gossip Gertrude Grundt hearing that she had ridden off with a wild lanzknecht, made her at once reject the plan, without even mentioning it to her husband or his niece.

By the time Hugh Sorel rolled out from between his feather beds, and was about to don his greasy buff, a handsome new suit, finished point device, and a pair of huge boots to correspond, had been laid by his bedside.

"Ho, ho! Master Goetz," said he, as he stumbled into the Stube, "I see thy game. Thou wouldst make it worth my while to visit the father-house at Ulm?"

"It shall be worth thy while, indeed, if thou bringest me back my white dove," was Gottfried's answer.

"And how if I bring her back with a strapping reiter son-in-law?" laughed Hugh. "What welcome should the fellow receive?"

"That would depend on what he might be," replied Gottfried; and Hugh, his love of tormenting a little allayed by satisfaction in his buff suit, and by an eye to a heavy purse that lay by his brother's hand on the table, added, "Little fear of that. Our fellows would look for lustier brides than yon little pale face. 'Tis whiter than ever this morning,—but no tears. That is my brave girl."

"Yes, father, I am ready to do your bidding," replied Christina, meekly.

"That is well, child. Mark me, no tears. Thy mother wept day and night, and, when she had wept out her tears, she was sullen, when I would have been friendly towards her. It was the worse for her. But, so long as thou art good daughter to me, thou shalt find me good father to thee;" and for a moment there was a kindliness in his eye which made it sufficiently like that of his brother to give some consolation to the shrinking heart that he was rending from all it loved; and she steadied her voice for another gentle profession of obedience, for which she felt strengthened by the morning's orisons.

"Well said, child. Now canst sit on old Nibelung's croup? His back-bone is somewhat sharper than if he had battened in a citizen's stall; but, if thine aunt can find thee some sort of pillion, I'll promise thee the best ride thou hast had since we came from Innspruck, ere thou canst remember."

"Christina has her own mule," replied her uncle, "without troubling Nibelung to carry double."

"Ho! her own! An overfed burgomaster sort of a beast, that will turn restive at the first sight of the Eagle's Ladder! However, he may carry her so far, and, if we cannot get him up the mountain, I shall know what to do with him," he muttered to himself.

But Hugh, like many a gentleman after him, was recusant at the sight of his daughter's luggage; and yet it only loaded one sumpter mule, besides forming a few bundles which could be easily bestowed upon the saddles of his two knappen, while her lute hung by a silken string on her arm. Both she and her aunt thought she had been extremely moderate; but his cry was, What could she want with so much? Her mother had never been allowed more than would go into a pair of saddle-bags; and his own Jungfrau—she had never seen so much gear together in her life; he would be laughed to scorn for his presumption in bringing such a fine lady into the castle; it would be well if Freiherr Eberhard's bride brought half as much.

Still he had a certain pride in it—he was, after all, by birth and breeding a burgher—and there had been evidently a softening and civilizing influence in the night spent beneath his paternal roof, and old habits, and perhaps likewise in the submission he had met with from his daughter. The attendants, too, who had been pleased with their quarters, readily undertook to carry their share of the burthen, and, though he growled and muttered a little, he at length was won over to consent, chiefly, as it seemed, by Christina's obliging readiness to leave behind the bundle that contained her holiday kirtle.

He had been spared all needless irritation. Before his waking, Christina had been at the priest's cell, and had received his last blessings and counsels, and she had, on the way back, exchanged her farewells and tears with her two dearest friends, Barbara Schmidt, and Regina Grundt, confiding to the former her cage of doves, and to the latter the myrtle, which, like every German maiden, she cherished in her window, to supply her future bridal wreath. Now pale as death, but so resolutely composed as to be almost disappointing to her demonstrative aunt, she quietly went through her home partings; while Hausfrau Johanna adjured her father by all that was sacred to be a true guardian and protector

of the child, and he could not forbear from a few tormenting auguries about the lanzknecht son-in-law. Their effect was to make the good dame more passionate in her embraces and admonitions to Christina to take care of herself. She would have a mass said every day that Heaven might have a care of her!

Master Gottfried was going to ride as far as the confines of the free city's territory, and his round, sleek, cream-coloured palfrey, used to ambling in civic processions, was as great a contrast to raw-boned, wild-eyed Nibelung, all dappled with misty grey, as was the stately, substantial burgher to his lean, hungry-looking brother, or Dame Johanna's dignified, curled, white poodle, which was forcibly withheld from following Christina, to the coarse-bristled, wolfish-looking hound who glared at the household pet with angry and contemptuous eyes, and made poor Christina's heart throb with terror whenever it bounded near her.

Close to her uncle she kept, as beneath the trellised porches that came down from the projecting gables of the burghers' houses many a well-known face gazed and nodded, as they took their way through the crooked streets, many a beggar or poor widow waved her a blessing. Out into the market-place, with its clear fountain adorned with arches and statues, past the rising Dome Kirk, where the swarms of workmen unbonneted to the master-carver, and the reiter paused with an irreverent sneer at the small progress made since he could first remember the building. How poor little Christina's soul clung to every cusp of the lacework spire, every arch of the window, each of which she had hailed as an achievement! The tears had well-nigh blinded her in a gush of feeling that came on her unawares, and her mule had his own way as he carried her under the arch of the tall and beautifully-sculptured bridge tower, and over the noble bridge across the Danube.

Her uncle spoke much, low and earnestly, to his brother. She knew it was in commendation of her to his care, and an endeavour to impress him with a sense of the kind of protection she would require, and she kept out of earshot. It was enough for her to see her uncle still, and feel that his tenderness was with her, and around her. But at last he drew his rein. "And now, my little one, the daughter of my heart, I must bid thee farewell," he said.

Christina could not be restrained from springing from her mule, and kneeling on the grass to receive his blessing, her face hidden in her hands, that her father might not see her tears.

"The good God bless thee, my child," said Gottfried, who seldom invoked the saints; "bless thee, and bring thee back in His own good time. Thou hast been a good child to us; be so to thine own father. Do thy work, and come back to us again."

The tears rained down his cheeks, as Christina's head lay on his bosom, and then with a last kiss he lifted her again on her mule, mounted his horse, and turned back to the city, with his servant.

Hugh was merciful enough to let his daughter gaze long after the retreating figure ere he summoned her on. All day they rode, at first through meadow lands and then through more broken, open ground, where at mid-day they halted, and dined upon the plentiful fare with which the housemother had provided them, over which Hugh smacked his lips, and owned that they did live well in the old town! Could Christina make such sausages?

"Not as well as my aunt."

"Well, do thy best, and thou wilt win favour with the baron."

The evening began to advance, and Christina was very weary, as the purple mountains that she had long watched with a mixture of fear and hope began to look more distinct, and the ground was often in abrupt ascents. Her father, without giving space for complaints, hurried her on. He must reach the Debateable Ford ere dark. It was, however, twilight when they came to an open space, where, at the foot of thickly forest-clad rising ground, lay an expanse of turf and rich grass, through which a stream made its way, standing in a wide tranquil pool as if to rest after its rough course from the mountains. Above rose, like a dark wall, crag upon crag, peak on peak, in purple masses, blending with the sky; and Hugh, pointing upwards to a turreted point, apparently close above their heads, where a star of light was burning, told her that there was Adlerstein, and this was the Debateable Ford.

In fact, as he explained, while splashing through the shallow expanse, the stream had changed its course. It was the boundary between the lands of Schlangenwald and Adlerstein, but it had within the last sixty years burst forth in a flood, and had then declined to return to its own bed, but had flowed in a fresh channel to the right of the former one. The Freiherren von Adlerstein claimed the ground to the old channel, the Graffen von Schlangenwald held that the river was the landmark; and the dispute had a greater importance than seemed explained from the worth of the rushy space of ground in question, for this was the passage of the Italian merchants on their way from Constance, and every load that was overthrown in the river was regarded as the lawful prey of the noble on whose banks the catastrophe befell.

Any freight of goods was anxiously watched by both nobles, and it was not their fault if no disaster befell the travellers. Hugh talked of the Schlangenwald marauders with the bitterness of a deadly feud, but manifestly did not breathe freely till his whole convoy were safe across both the wet and the dry channel.

Christina supposed they should now ascend to the castle; but her father laughed, saying that the castle was not such a step off as she fancied, and that they must have daylight for the Eagle's Stairs. He led the way through the trees, up ground that she thought mountain already, and finally arrived at a miserable little hut, which served the purpose of an inn.

He was received there with much obsequiousness, and was plainly a great authority there. Christina, weary and frightened, descended from her mule, and was put under the protection of a wild, rough-looking peasant woman, who stared at her like something from another world, but at length showed her a nook behind a mud partition, where she could spread her mantle, and at least lie down, and tell her beads unseen, if she could not sleep in the stifling, smoky atmosphere, amid the sounds of carousal among her father and his fellows.

The great hound came up and smelt to her. His outline was so-wolfish, that she had nearly screamed: but, more in terror at the men who might have helped her than even at the beast, she tried to smooth him with her trembling hand, whispered his name of "Festhold," and found him licking her hand, and wagging his long rough tail. And he finally lay down at her feet, as though to protect her.

"Is it a sign that good angels will not let me be hurt?" she thought, and, wearied out, she slept.

CHAPTER II
THE EYRIE

Christina Sorel awoke to a scene most unlike that which had been wont to meet her eyes in her own little wainscoted chamber high in the gabled front of her uncle's house. It was a time when the imperial free towns of Germany had advanced nearly as far as those of Italy in civilization, and had reached a point whence they retrograded grievously during the Thirty Years' War, even to an extent that they have never entirely recovered. The country immediately around them shared the benefits of their civilization, and the free peasant-proprietors lived in great ease and prosperity, in beautiful and picturesque farmsteads, enjoying a careless abundance, and keeping numerous rural or religious feasts, where old Teutonic mythological observances had received a Christian colouring and adaptation.

In the mountains, or around the castles, it was usually very different. The elective constitution of the empire, the frequent change of dynasty, the many disputed successions, had combined to render the sovereign authority uncertain and feeble, and it was seldom really felt save in the hereditary dominions of the Kaiser for the time being. Thus, while the cities advanced in the power of self-government, and the education it conveyed, the nobles, especially those whose abodes were not easily accessible, were often practically under no government at all, and felt themselves accountable to no man. The old wild freedom of the Suevi, and other Teutonic tribes, still technically, and in many cases practically, existed. The Heretogen, Heerzogen, or, as we call them, Dukes, had indeed accepted employment from the Kaiser as his generals, and had received rewards from him; the Gerefen, or Graffen, of all kinds were his judges, the titles of both being proofs of their holding commissions from, and being thus dependent on, the court. But the Freiherren, a word very inadequately represented by our French term of baron, were absolutely free, "never in bondage to any man," holding their own, and owing no duty, no office; poorer, because unendowed by the royal authority, but holding themselves infinitely higher, than the pensioners of the court. Left behind, however, by their neighbours, who did their part by society, and advanced with it, the Freiherren had been for the most part obliged to give up their independence and fall into the system, but so far in the rear, that they ranked, like the barons of France and England, as the last order of nobility.

Still, however, in the wilder and more mountainous parts of the country, some of the old families of unreduced, truly free Freiherren lingered, their hand against every man, every man's hand against them, and ever becoming more savage, both positively and still more proportionately, as their isolation and the general progress around them became greater. The House of Austria, by gradually absorbing hereditary states into its own possessions, was, however, in the fifteenth century, acquiring a preponderance that rendered its possession of the imperial throne almost a matter of inheritance, and moreover rendered the supreme power far more effective than it had ever previously been. Freidrich III. a man still in full vigour, and with an able and enterprising son already elected to the succession, was making his rule felt, and it was fast becoming apparent that the days of the independent baronies were numbered, and that the only choice that would soon be left them would be between making terms and being forcibly reduced. Von Adlerstein was one of the oldest of these free families. If the lords of the Eagle's Stone had ever followed the great Konrads and Freidrichs of Swabia in their imperial days, their descendants had taken care to forget the weakness, and believed themselves absolutely free from all allegiance.

And the wildness of their territory was what might be expected from their hostility to all outward influences. The hostel, if it deserved the name, was little more than a charcoal-burner's hut, hidden in the woods at the foot of the mountain, serving as a halting-place for the Freiherren's retainers ere they attempted the ascent. The inhabitants were allowed to ply their trade of charring

wood in the forest on condition of supplying the castle with charcoal, and of affording a lodging to the followers on occasions like the present.

Grimy, half-clad, and brawny, with the whites of his eyes gleaming out of his black face, Jobst the Kohler startled Christina terribly when she came into the outer room, and met him returning from his night's work, with his long stoking-pole in his hand. Her father shouted with laughter at her alarm.

"Thou thinkest thyself in the land of the kobolds and dwarfs, my girl! Never mind, thou wilt see worse than honest Jobst before thou hast done. Now, eat a morsel and be ready—mountain air will make thee hungry ere thou art at the castle. And, hark thee, Jobst, thou must give stable-room to yon sumpter-mule for the present, and let some of my daughter's gear lie in the shed."

"O father!" exclaimed Christina, in dismay.

"We'll bring it up, child, by piecemeal," he said in a low voice, "as we can; but if such a freight came to the castle at once, my lady would have her claws on it, and little more wouldst thou ever see thereof. Moreover, I shall have enough to do to look after thee up the ascent, without another of these city-bred beasts."

"I hope the poor mule will be well cared for. I can pay for—" began Christina; but her father squeezed her arm, and drowned her soft voice in his loud tones.

"Jobst will take care of the beast, as belonging to me. Woe betide him, if I find it the worse!"—and his added imprecations seemed unnecessary, so earnest were the asseverations of both the man and his wife that the animal should be well cared for.

"Look you, Christina," said Hugh Sorel, as soon as he had placed her on her mule, and led her out of hearing, "if thou hast any gold about thee, let it be the last thing thou ownest to any living creature up there." Then, as she was about to speak—"Do not even tell me. I *will* not know." The caution did not add much to Christina's comfort; but she presently asked, "Where is thy steed, father?"

"I sent him up to the castle with the Schneiderlein and Yellow Lorentz," answered the father. "I shall have ado enough on foot with thee before we are up the Ladder."

The father and daughter were meantime proceeding along a dark path through oak and birch woods, constantly ascending, until the oak grew stunted and disappeared, and the opening glades showed steep, stony, torrent-furrowed ramparts of hillside above them, looking to Christina's eyes as if she were set to climb up the cathedral side like a snail or a fly. She quite gasped for breath at the very sight, and was told in return to wait and see what she would yet say to the Adlerstreppe, or Eagle's Ladder. Poor child! she had no raptures for romantic scenery; she knew that jagged peaks made very pretty backgrounds in illuminations, but she had much rather have been in the smooth meadows of the environs of Ulm. The Danube looked much more agreeable to her, silver-winding between its green banks, than did the same waters leaping down with noisy voices in their stony, worn beds to feed the river that she only knew in his grave breadth and majesty. Yet, alarmed as she was, there was something in the exhilaration and elasticity of the mountain air that gave her an entirely new sensation of enjoyment and life, and seemed to brace her limbs and spirits for whatever might be before her; and, willing to show herself ready to be gratified, she observed on the freshness and sweetness of the air.

"Thou find'st it out, child? Ay, 'tis worth all the feather-beds and pouncet-boxes in Ulm; is it not? That accursed Italian fever never left me till I came up here. A man can scarce draw breath in your foggy meadows below there. Now then, here is the view open. What think you of the Eagle's Nest?"

For, having passed beyond the region of wood they had come forth upon the mountain-side. A not immoderately steep slope of boggy, mossy-looking ground covered with bilberries, cranberries, &c. and with bare rocks here and there rising, went away above out of her ken; but the path she was upon turned round the shoulder of the mountain, and to the left, on a ledge of rock cut off apparently on their side by a deep ravine, and with a sheer precipice above and below it, stood a red stone pile, with one turret far above the rest.

"And this is Schloss Adlerstein?" she exclaimed.

"That is Schloss Adlerstein; and there shalt thou be in two hours' time, unless the devil be more than usually busy, or thou mak'st a fool of thyself. If so, not Satan himself could save thee."

It was well that Christina had resolution to prevent her making a fool of herself on the spot, for the thought of the pathway turned her so dizzy that she could only shut her eyes, trusting that her father did not see her terror. Soon the turn round to the side of the mountain was made, and the road became a mere track worn out on the turf on the hillside, with an abyss beneath, close to the edge of which the mule, of course, walked.

When she ventured to look again, she perceived that the ravine was like an enormous crack open on the mountain-side, and that the stream that formed the Debateable Ford flowed down the bottom of it. The ravine itself went probably all the way up the mountain, growing shallower as it ascended higher; but here, where Christina beheld it, it was extremely deep, and savagely desolate and bare. She now saw that the Eagle's Ladder was a succession of bare gigantic terraces of rock, of which the opposite side of the ravine was composed, and on one of which stood the castle. It was no small mystery to her how it had ever been built, or how she was ever to get there. She saw in the opening of the ravine the green meadows and woods far below; and, when her father pointed out to her the Debateable Ford, apparently much nearer to the castle than they themselves were at present, she asked why they had so far overpassed the castle, and come by this circuitous course.

"Because," said Hugh, "we are not eagles outright. Seest thou not, just beyond the castle court, this whole crag of ours breaks off short, falls like the town wall straight down into the plain? Even this cleft that we are crossing by, the only road a horse can pass, breaks off short and sudden too, so that the river is obliged to take leaps which nought else but a chamois could compass. A footpath there is, and Freiherr Eberhard takes it at all times, being born to it; but even I am too stiff for the like. Ha! ha! Thy uncle may talk of the Kaiser and his League, but he would change his note if we had him here."

"Yet castles have been taken by hunger," said Christina.

"What, knowest thou so much?—True! But look you," pointing to a white foamy thread that descended the opposite steeps, "yonder beck dashes through the castle court, and it never dries; and see you the ledge the castle stands on? It winds on out of your sight, and forms a path which leads to the village of Adlerstein, out on the other slope of the mountains; and ill were it for the serfs if they victualled not the castle well."

The fearful steepness of the ground absorbed all Christina's attention. The road, or rather stairs, came down to the stream at the bottom of the fissure, and then went again on the other side up still more tremendous steeps, which Hugh climbed with a staff, sometimes with his hand on the bridle, but more often only keeping a watchful eye on the sure-footed mule, and an arm to steady his daughter in the saddle when she grew absolutely faint with giddiness at the abyss around her. She was too much in awe of him to utter cry or complaint, and, when he saw her effort to subdue her mortal terror, he was far from unkind, and let her feel his protecting strength.

Presently a voice was heard above—"What, Sorel, hast brought her! Trudchen is wearying for her."

The words were in the most boorish dialect and pronunciation, the stranger to Christina's ears, because intercourse with foreign merchants, and a growing affectation of Latinism, had much refined the city language to which she was accustomed; and she was surprised to perceive by her father's gesture and address that the speaker must be one of the lords of the castle. She looked up, and saw on the pathway above her a tall, large-framed young man, his skin dyed red with sun and wind, in odd contrast with his pale shaggy hair, moustache, and beard, as though the weather had tanned the one and bleached the other. His dress was a still shabbier buff suit than her father had worn, but with a richly-embroidered belt sustaining a hunting-horn with finely-chased ornaments of tarnished silver, and an eagle's plume was fastened into his cap with a large gold Italian coin. He stared hard at the

maiden, but vouchsafed her no token of greeting—only distressed her considerably by distracting her father's attention from her mule by his questions about the journey, all in the same rude, coarse tone and phraseology. Some amount of illusion was dispelled. Christina was quite prepared to find the mountain lords dangerous ruffians, but she had expected the graces of courtesy and high birth; but, though there was certainly an air of command and freedom of bearing about the present specimen, his manners and speech were more uncouth than those of any newly-caught apprentice of her uncle, and she could not help thinking that her good aunt Johanna need not have troubled herself about the danger of her taking a liking to any such young Freiherr as she here beheld.

By this time a last effort of the mule had climbed to the level of the castle. As her father had shown her, there was precipice on two sides of the building; on the third, a sheer wall of rock going up to a huge height before it reached another of the Eagle's Steps; and on the fourth, where the gateway was, the little beck had been made to flow in a deep channel that had been hollowed out to serve as a moat, before it bounded down to swell the larger water-course in the ravine. A temporary bridge had been laid across; the drawbridge was out of order, and part of Hugh's business had been to procure materials for mending its apparatus. Christina was told to dismount and cross on foot. The unrailed board, so close to the abyss, and with the wild water foaming above and below, was dreadful to her; and, though she durst not speak, she hung back with an involuntary shudder, as her father, occupied with the mule, did not think of giving her a hand. The young baron burst out into an unrestrained laugh—a still greater shock to her feelings; but at the same time he roughly took her hand, and almost dragged her across, saying, "City bred—ho, ho!" "Thanks, sir," she strove to say, but she was very near weeping with the terror and strangeness of all around.

The low-browed gateway, barely high enough to admit a man on horseback, opened before her, almost to her feelings like the gate of the grave, and she could not help crossing herself, with a silent prayer for protection, as she stepped under it, and came into the castle court—not such a court as gave its name to fair courtesy, but, if truth must be told, far more resembling an ill-kept, ill-savoured stable-yard, with the piggeries opening into it. In unpleasantly close quarters, the Schneiderlein, or little tailor, *i.e.* the biggest and fiercest of all the knappen, was grooming Nibelung; three long-backed, long-legged, frightful swine were grubbing in a heap of refuse; four or five gaunt ferocious-looking dogs came bounding up to greet their comrade Festhold; and a great old long-bearded goat stood on the top of the mixen, looking much disposed to butt at any newcomer. The Sorel family had brought cleanliness from Flanders, and Hausfrau Johanna was scrupulously dainty in all her appointments.

Christina scarcely knew how she conveyed herself and her blue kirtle across the bemired stones to the next and still darker portal, under which a wide but rough ill-hewn stair ascended. The stables, in fact, occupied the lower floor of the main building, and not till these stairs had ascended above them did they lead out into the castle hall. Here were voices—voices rude and harsh, like those Christina had shrunk from in passing drinking booths. There was a long table, with rough men-at-arms lounging about, and staring rudely at her; and at the upper end, by a great open chimney, sat, half-dozing, an elderly man, more rugged in feature than his son; and yet, when he roused himself and spoke to Hugh, there was a shade more of breeding, and less of clownishness in his voice and deportment, as if he had been less entirely devoid of training. A tall darkly-robed woman stood beside him—it was her harsh tone of reproof and command that had so startled Christina as she entered—and her huge towering cap made her look gigantic in the dim light of the smoky hall. Her features had been handsome, but had become hardened into a grim wooden aspect; and with sinking spirits Christina paused at the step of the daïs, and made her reverence, wishing she could sink beneath the stones of the pavement out of sight of these terrible personages.

"So that's the wench you have taken all this trouble for," was Freiherrinn Kunigunde's greeting.

"She looks like another sick baby to nurse; but I'll have no trouble about her;—that is all. Take her up to Ermentrude; and thou, girl, have a care thou dost her will, and puttest none of thy city fancies into her head."

"And hark thee, girl," added the old Freiherr, sitting up. "So thou canst nurse her well, thou shalt have a new gown and a stout husband."

"That way," pointed the lady towards one of the four corner towers; and Christina moved doubtfully towards it, reluctant to quit her father, her only protector, and afraid to introduce herself. The younger Freiherr, however, stepped before her, went striding two or three steps at a time up the turret stair, and, before Christina had wound her way up, she heard a thin, impatient voice say, "Thou saidst she was come, Ebbo."

"Yes, even so," she heard Freiherr Eberhard return; "but she is slow and town-bred. She was afraid of crossing the moat." And then both laughed, so that Christina's cheeks tingled as she emerged from the turret into another vaulted room. "Here she is," quoth the brother; "now will she make thee quite well."

It was a very bare and desolate room, with no hangings to the rough stone walls, and scarcely any furniture, except a great carved bedstead, one wooden chair, a table, and some stools. On the bare floor, in front of the fire, her arm under her head, and a profusion of long hair falling round her like flax from a distaff, lay wearily a little figure, beside whom Sir Eberhard was kneeling on one knee.

"Here is my sisterling," said he, looking up to the newcomer. "They say you burgher women have ways of healing the sick. Look at her. Think you you can heal her?"

In an excess of dumb shyness Ermentrude half rose, and effectually hindered any observations on her looks by hiding her face away upon her brother's knee. It was the gesture of a child of five years old, but Ermentrude's length of limb forbade Christina to suppose her less than fourteen or fifteen. "What, wilt not look at her?" he said, trying to raise her head; and then, holding out one of her wasted, feverish hands to Christina, he again asked, with a wistfulness that had a strange effect from the large, tall man, almost ten years her elder, "Canst thou cure her, maiden?"

"I am no doctor, sir," replied Christina; "but I could, at least, make her more comfortable. The stone is too hard for her."

"I will not go away; I want the fire," murmured the sick girl, holding out her hands towards it, and shivering.

Christina quickly took off her own thick cloth mantle, well lined with dressed lambskins, laid it on the floor, rolled the collar of it over a small log of wood—the only substitute she could see for a pillow—and showed an inviting couch in an instant. Ermentrude let her brother lay her down, and then was covered with the ample fold. She smiled as she turned up her thin, wasted face, faded into the same whitey-brown tint as her hair. "That is good," she said, but without thanks; and, feeling the soft lambswool: "Is that what you burgher-women wear? Father is to give me a furred mantle, if only some court dame would pass the Debateable Ford. But the Schlangenwaldern got the last before ever we could get down. Jobst was so stupid. He did not give us warning in time; but he is to be hanged next time if he does not."

Christina's blood curdled as she heard this speech in a weak little complaining tone, that otherwise put her sadly in mind of Barbara Schmidt's little sister, who had pined and wasted to death. "Never mind, Trudchen," answered the brother kindly; "meantime I have kept all the wild catskins for thee, and may be this—this—*she* could sew them up into a mantle for thee."

"O let me see," cried the young lady eagerly; and Sir Eberhard, walking off, presently returned with an armful of the beautiful brindled furs of the mountain cat, reminding Christina of her aunt's gentle domestic favourite. Ermentrude sat up, and regarded the placing out of them with great interest; and thus her brother left her employed, and so much delighted that she had not flagged, when a great bell proclaimed that it was the time for the noontide meal, for which Christina, in spite of all her fears of the company below stairs, had been constrained by mountain air to look forward with satisfaction.

Ermentrude, she found, meant to go down, but with no notion of the personal arrangements that Christina had been wont to think a needful preliminary. With all her hair streaming, down she

went, and was so gladly welcomed by her father that it was plain that her presence was regarded as an unusual advance towards recovery, and Christina feared lest he might already be looking out for the stout husband. She had much to tell him about the catskin cloak, and then she was seized with eager curiosity at the sight of Christina's bundles, and especially at her lute, which she must hear at once.

"Not now," said her mother, "there will be jangling and jingling enough by and by—meat now."

The whole establishment were taking their places—or rather tumbling into them. A battered, shapeless metal vessel seemed to represent the salt-cellar, and next to it Hugh Sorel seated himself, and kept a place for her beside him. Otherwise she would hardly have had seat or food.' She was now able to survey the inmates of the castle. Besides the family themselves, there were about a dozen men, all ruffianly-looking, and of much lower grade than her father, and three women. One, old Ursel, the wife of Hatto the forester, was a bent, worn, but not ill-looking woman, with a motherly face; the younger ones were hard, bold creatures, from whom Christina felt a shrinking recoil. The meal was dressed by Ursel and her kitchen boy. From a great cauldron, goat's flesh and broth together were ladled out into wooden bowls. That every one provided their own spoon and knife—no fork —was only what Christina was used to in the most refined society, and she had the implements in a pouch hanging to her girdle; but she was not prepared for the unwashed condition of the bowls, nor for being obliged to share that of her father—far less for the absence of all blessing on the meal, and the coarse boisterousness of manners prevailing thereat. Hungry as she was, she did not find it easy to take food under these circumstances, and she was relieved when Ermentrude, overcome by the turmoil, grew giddy, and was carried upstairs by her father, who laid her down upon her great bed, and left her to the attendance of Christina. Ursel had followed, but was petulantly repulsed by her young lady in favour of the newcomer, and went away grumbling.

Nestled on her bed, Ermentrude insisted on hearing the lute, and Christina had to creep down to fetch it, with some other of her goods, in trembling haste, and redoubled disgust at the aspect of the meal, which looked even more repulsive in this later stage, and to one who was no longer partaking of it.

Low and softly, with a voice whence she could scarcely banish tears, and in dread of attracting attention, Christina sung to the sick girl, who listened with a sort of rude wonder, and finally was lulled to sleep. Christina ventured to lay down her instrument and move towards the window, heavily mullioned with stone, barred with iron, and glazed with thick glass; being in fact the only glazed window in the castle. To her great satisfaction it did not look out over the loathsome court, but over the opening of the ravine. The apartment occupied the whole floor of the keep; it was stone-paved, but the roof was boarded, and there was a round turret at each angle. One contained the staircase, and was that which ran up above the keep, served as a watch-tower, and supported the Eagle banner. The other three were empty, and one of these, which had a strong door, and a long loophole window looking out over the open country, Christina hoped that she might appropriate. The turret was immediately over the perpendicular cliff that descended into the plain. A stone thrown from the window would have gone straight down, she knew not where. Close to her ears rushed the descending waterfall in its leap over the rock side, and her eyes could rest themselves on the green meadow land below, and the smooth water of the Debateable Ford; nay—far, far away beyond retreating ridges of wood and field—she thought she could track a silver line and, guided by it, a something that might be a city. Her heart leapt towards it, but she was recalled by Ermentrude's fretfully imperious voice.

"I was only looking forth from the window, lady," she said, returning.

"Ah! thou saw'st no travellers at the Ford?" cried Ermentrude, starting up with lively interest.

"No, lady; I was gazing at the far distance. Know you if it be indeed Ulm that we see from these windows?"

"Ulm? That is where thou comest from?" said Ermentrude languidly.

"My happy home, with my dear uncle and aunt! O, if I can but see it hence, it will be joy!"

"I do not know. Let me see," said Ermentrude, rising; but at the window her pale blue eyes gazed vacantly as if she did not know what she was looking at or for.

"Ah! if the steeple of the Dome Kirk were but finished, I could not mistake it," said Christina. "How beauteous the white spire will look from hence!"

"Dome Kirk?" repeated Ermentrude; "what is that?"

Such an entire blank as the poor child's mind seemed to be was inconceivable to the maiden, who had been bred up in the busy hum of men, where the constant resort of strange merchants, the daily interests of a self-governing municipality, and the numerous festivals, both secular and religious, were an unconscious education, even without that which had been bestowed upon her by teachers, as well as by her companionship with her uncle, and participation in his studies, taste and arts.

Ermentrude von Adlerstein had, on the contrary, not only never gone beyond the Kohler's hut on the one side, and the mountain village on the other, but she never seen more of life than the festival at the wake the hermitage chapel there on Midsummer-day. The only strangers who ever came to the castle were disbanded lanzknechts who took service with her father, or now and then a captive whom he put to ransom. She knew absolutely nothing of the world, except for a general belief that Freiherren lived there to do what they chose with other people, and that the House of Adlerstein was the freest and noblest in existence. Also there was a very positive hatred to the house of Schlangenwald, and no less to that of Adlerstein Wildschloss, for no reason that Christina could discover save that, being a younger branch of the family, they had submitted to the Emperor. To destroy either the Graf von Schlangenwald, or her Wildschloss cousin, was evidently the highest gratification Ermentrude could conceive; and, for the rest, that her father and brother should make successful captures at the Debateable Ford was the more abiding, because more practicable hope. She had no further ideas, except perhaps to elude her mother's severity, and to desire her brother's success in chamois-hunting.

The only mental culture she had ever received was that old Ursel had taught her the Credo, Pater Noster, and Ave, as correctly as might be expected from a long course of traditionary repetitions of an incomprehensible language. And she knew besides a few German rhymes and jingles, half Christian, half heathen, with a legend or two which, if the names were Christian, ran grossly wild from all Christian meaning or morality. As to the amenities, nay, almost the proprieties, of life, they were less known in that baronial castle than in any artisan's house at Ulm. So little had the sick girl figured them to herself, that she did not even desire any greater means of ease than she possessed.

She moaned and fretted indeed, with aching limbs and blank weariness, but without the slightest formed desire for anything to remove her discomfort, except the few ameliorations she knew, such as sitting on her brother's knee, with her head on his shoulder, or tasting the mountain berries that he gathered for her. Any other desire she exerted herself to frame was for finery to be gained from the spoils of travellers.

And this was Christina's charge, whom she must look upon as the least alien spirit in this dreadful castle of banishment! The young and old lords seemed to her savage bandits, who frightened her only less than did the proud sinister expression of the old lady, for she had not even the merit of showing any tenderness towards the sickly girl, of whom she was ashamed, and evidently regarded the town-bred attendant as a contemptible interloper.

Long, long did the maiden weep and pray that night after Ermentrude had sunk to sleep. She strained her eyes with home-sick longings to detect lights where she thought Ulm might be; and, as she thought of her uncle and aunt, the poodle and the cat round the stove, the maids spinning and the prentices knitting as her uncle read aloud some grave good book, most probably the legend of the saint of the day, and contrasted it with the rude gruff sounds of revelry that found their way up the turret stairs, she could hardly restrain her sobs from awakening the young lady whose bed she was to share. She thought almost with envy of her own patroness, who was cast into the lake of Bolsena with a millstone about her neck—a better fate, thought she, than to live on in such an abode of loathsomeness and peril.

But then had not St. Christina floated up alive, bearing up her millstone with her? And had not she been put into a dungeon full of venomous reptiles who, when they approached her, had all been changed to harmless doves? Christina had once asked Father Balthazar how this could be; and had he not replied that the Church did not teach these miracles as matters of faith, but that she might there discern in figure how meek Christian holiness rose above all crushing burthens, and transformed the rudest natures. This poor maiden-dying, perhaps; and oh! how unfit to live or die!—might it be her part to do some good work by her, and infuse some Christian hope, some godly fear? Could it be for this that the saints had led her hither?

CHAPTER III
THE FLOTSAM AND JETSAM OF THE DEBATEABLE FORD

Life in Schloss Adlerstein was little less intolerable than Christina's imagination had depicted it. It was entirely devoid of all the graces of chivalry, and its squalor and coarseness, magnified into absurdity by haughtiness and violence, were almost inconceivable. Fortunately for her, the inmates of the castle resided almost wholly below stairs in the hall and kitchen, and in some dismal dens in the thickness of their walls. The height of the keep was intended for dignity and defence, rather than for habitation; and the upper chamber, with its great state-bed, where everybody of the house of Adlerstein was born and died, was not otherwise used, except when Ermentrude, unable to bear the oppressive confusion below stairs, had escaped thither for quietness' sake. No one else wished to inhabit it. The chamber above was filled with the various appliances for the defence of the castle; and no one would have ever gone up the turret stairs had not a warder been usually kept on the roof to watch the roads leading to the Ford. Otherwise the Adlersteiners had all the savage instinct of herding together in as small a space as possible.

Freiherrin Kunigunde hardly ever mounted to her daughter's chamber. All her affection was centred on the strong and manly son, of whom she was proud, while the sickly pining girl, who would hardly find a mate of her own rank, and who had not even dowry enough for a convent, was such a shame and burthen to her as to be almost a distasteful object. But perversely, as it seemed to her, the only daughter was the darling of both father and brother, who were ready to do anything to gratify the girl's sick fancies, and hailed with delight her pleasure in her new attendant. Old Ursel was at first rather envious and contemptuous of the childish, fragile stranger, but her gentleness disarmed the old woman; and, when it was plain that the young lady's sufferings were greatly lessened by tender care, dislike gave way to attachment, and there was little more murmuring at the menial services that were needed by the two maidens, even when Ermentrude's feeble fancies, or Christina's views of dainty propriety, rendered them more onerous than before. She was even heard to rejoice that some Christian care and tenderness had at last reached her poor neglected child.

It was well for Christina that she had such an ally. The poor child never crept down stairs to the dinner or supper, to fetch food for Ermentrude, or water for herself, without a trembling and shrinking of heart and nerves. Her father's authority guarded her from rude actions, but from rough tongues he neither could nor would guard her, nor understand that what to some would have been a compliment seemed to her an alarming insult; and her chief safeguard lay in her own insignificance and want of attraction, and still more in the modesty that concealed her terror at rude jests sufficiently to prevent frightening her from becoming an entertainment.

Her father, whom she looked on as a cultivated person in comparison with the rest of the world, did his best for her after his own views, and gradually brought her all the properties she had left at the Kohler's hut. Therewith she made a great difference in the aspect of the chamber, under the full sanction of the lords of the castle. Wolf, deer, and sheep skins abounded; and with these, assisted by her father and old Hatto, she tapestried the lower part of the bare grim walls, a great bear's hide covered the neighbourhood of the hearth, and cushions were made of these skins, and stuffed from Ursel's stores of feathers. All these embellishments were watched with great delight by Ermentrude, who had never been made of so much importance, and was as much surprised as relieved by such attentions. She was too young and too delicate to reject civilization, and she let Christina braid her hair, bathe her, and arrange her dress, with sensations of comfort that were almost like health. To train her into occupying herself was however, as Christina soon found, in her present state, impossible. She could spin and sew a little, but hated both; and her clumsy, listless fingers only soiled and wasted

Christina's needles, silk, and lute strings, and such damage was not so easily remedied as in the streets of Ulm. She was best provided for when looking on at her attendant's busy hands, and asking to be sung to, or to hear tales of the active, busy scenes of the city life—the dresses, fairs, festivals, and guild processions.

The gentle nursing and the new interests made her improve in health, so that her father was delighted, and Christina began to hope for a return home. Sometimes the two girls would take the air, either, on still days, upon the battlements, where Ermentrude watched the Debateable Ford, and Christina gazed at the Danube and at Ulm; or they would find their way to a grassy nook on the mountain-side, where Christina gathered gentians and saxifrage, trying to teach her young lady that they were worth looking at, and sighing at the thought of Master Gottfried's wreath when she met with the asphodel seed-vessels. Once the quiet mule was brought into requisition; and, with her brother walking by her, and Sorel and his daughter in attendance, Ermentrude rode towards the village of Adlerstein. It was a collection of miserable huts, on a sheltered slope towards the south, where there was earth enough to grow some wretched rye and buckwheat, subject to severe toll from the lord of the soil. Perched on a hollow rock above the slope was a rude little church, over a cave where a hermit had once lived and died in such odour of sanctity that, his day happening to coincide with that of St. John the Baptist, the Blessed Freidmund had acquired the credit of the lion's share both of the saint's honours and of the old solstitial feast of Midsummer. This wake was the one gaiety of the year, and attracted a fair which was the sole occasion of coming honestly by anything from the outer world; nor had his cell ever lacked a professional anchorite.

The Freiherr of his day had been a devout man, who had gone a pilgrimage with Kaiser Friedrich of the Red Beard, and had brought home a bit of stone from the council chamber of Nicæa, which he had presented to the little church that he had built over the cavern. He had named his son Friedmund; and there were dim memories of his days as of a golden age, before the Wildschlossen had carried off the best of the property, and when all went well.

This was Christina's first sight of a church since her arrival, except that in the chapel, which was a dismal neglected vault, where a ruinous altar and mouldering crucifix testified to its sacred purpose. The old baron had been excommunicated for twenty years, ever since he had harried the wains of the Bishop of Augsburg on his way to the Diet; and, though his household and family were not under the same sentence, "Sunday didna come abune the pass." Christina's entreaty obtained permission to enter the little building, but she had knelt there only a few moments before her father came to hurry her away, and her supplications that he would some day take her to mass there were whistled down the wind; and indeed the hermit was a layman, and the church was only served on great festivals by a monk from the convent of St. Ruprecht, on the distant side of the mountain, which was further supposed to be in the Schlangenwald interest. Her best chance lay in infusing the desire into Ermentrude, who by watching her prayers and asking a few questions had begun to acquire a few clearer ideas. And what Ermentrude wished had always hitherto been acquiesced in by the two lords.

The elder baron came little into Christina's way. He meant to be kind to her, but she was dreadfully afraid of him, and, when he came to visit his daughter, shrank out of his notice as much as possible, shuddering most of all at his attempts at civilities. His son she viewed as one of the thickwitted giants meant to be food for the heroism of good knights of romance. Except that he was fairly conversant with the use of weapons, and had occasionally ridden beyond the shadow of his own mountain, his range was quite as limited as his sister's; and he had an equal scorn for all beyond it. His unfailing kindness to his sister was however in his favour, and he always eagerly followed up any suggestion Christina made for her pleasure.

Much of his time was spent on the child, whose chief nurse and playmate he had been throughout her malady; and when she showed him the stranger's arrangements, or repeated to him, in a wondering, blundering way, with constant appeals to her attendant, the new tales she had heard, he used to listen with a pleased awkward amazement at his little Ermentrude's astonishing cleverness,

joined sometimes with real interest, which was evinced by his inquiries of Christina. He certainly did not admire the little, slight, pale bower-maiden, but he seemed to look upon her like some strange, almost uncanny, wise spirit out of some other sphere, and his manner towards her had none of the offensive freedom apparent in even the old man's patronage. It was, as Ermentrude once said, laughing, almost as if he feared that she might do something to him.

Christina had expected to see a ruffian, and had found a boor; but she was to be convinced that the ruffian existed in him. Notice came up to the castle of a convoy of waggons, and all was excitement. Men-at-arms were mustered, horses led down the Eagle's Ladder, and an ambush prepared in the woods. The autumn rains were already swelling the floods, and the passage of the ford would be difficult enough to afford the assailants an easy prey.

The Freiherrinn Kunigunde herself, and all the women of the castle, hurried into Ermentrude's room to enjoy the view from her window. The young lady herself was full of eager expectation, but she knew enough of her maiden to expect no sympathy from her, and loved her well enough not to bring down on her her mother's attention; so Christina crept into her turret, unable to withdraw her eyes from the sight, trembling, weeping, praying, longing for power to give a warning signal. Could they be her own townsmen stopped on the way to dear Ulm?

She could see the waggons in mid-stream, the warriors on the bank; she heard the triumphant outcries of the mother and daughter in the outer room. She saw the overthrow, the struggle, the flight of a few scattered dark figures on the farther side, the drawing out of the goods on the nearer. Oh! were those leaping waves bearing down any good men's corpses to the Danube, slain, foully slain by her own father and this gang of robbers?

She was glad that Ermentrude went down with her mother to watch the return of the victors. She crouched on the floor, sobbing, shuddering with grief and indignation, and telling her beads alike for murdered and murderers, till, after the sounds of welcome and exultation, she heard Sir Eberhard's heavy tread, as he carried his sister up stairs. Ermentrude went up at once to Christina.

"After all there was little for us!" she said. "It was only a wain of wine barrels; and now will the drunkards down stairs make good cheer. But Ebbo could only win for me this gold chain and medal which was round the old merchant's neck."

"Was he slain?" Christina asked with pale lips.

"I only know I did not kill him," returned the baron; "I had him down and got the prize, and that was enough for me. What the rest of the fellows may have done, I cannot say."

"But he has brought thee something, Stina," continued Ermentrude. "Show it to her, brother."

"My father sends you this for your care of my sister," said Eberhard, holding out a brooch that had doubtless fastened the band of the unfortunate wine-merchant's bonnet.

"Thanks, sir; but, indeed, I may not take it," said Christina, turning crimson, and drawing back.

"So!" he exclaimed, in amaze; then bethinking himself,—"They are no townsfolk of yours, but Constance cowards."

"Take it, take it, Stina, or you will anger my father," added Ermentrude.

"No, lady, I thank the barons both, but it were sin in me," said Christina, with trembling voice.

"Look you," said Eberhard; "we have the full right—'tis a seignorial right—to all the goods of every wayfarer that may be overthrown in our river—as I am a true knight!" he added earnestly.

"A true knight!" repeated Christina, pushed hard, and very indignant in all her terror. "The true knight's part is to aid, not rob, the weak." And the dark eyes flashed a vivid light.

"Christina!" exclaimed Ermentrude in the extremity of her amazement, "know you what you have said?—that Eberhard is no true knight!"

He meanwhile stood silent, utterly taken by surprise, and letting his little sister fight his battles.

"I cannot help it, Lady Ermentrude," said Christina, with trembling lips, and eyes filling with tears. "You may drive me from the castle—I only long to be away from it; but I cannot stain my soul by saying that spoil and rapine are the deeds of a true knight."

"My mother will beat you," cried Ermentrude, passionately, ready to fly to the head of the stairs; but her brother laid his hand upon her.

"Tush, Trudchen; keep thy tongue still, child! What does it hurt me?"

And he turned on his heels and went down stairs. Christina crept into her turret, weeping bitterly and with many a wild thought. Would they visit her offence on her father? Would they turn them both out together? If so, would not her father hurl her down the rocks rather than return her to Ulm? Could she escape? Climb down the dizzy rocks, it might be, succour the merchant lying half dead on the meadows, protect and be protected, be once more among God-fearing Christians? And as she felt her helplessness, the selfish thoughts passed into a gush of tears for the murdered man, lying suffering there, and for his possible wife and children watching for him. Presently Ermentrude peeped in.

"Stina, Stina, don't cry; I will not tell my mother! Come out, and finish my kerchief! Come out! No one shall beat you."

"That is not what I wept for, lady," said Christina. "I do not think you would bring harm on me. But oh! I would I were at home! I grieve for the bloodshed that I must see and may not hinder, and for that poor merchant."

"Oh," said Ermentrude, "you need not fear for him! I saw his own folk return and lift him up. But what is he to thee or to us?"

"I am a burgher maid, lady," said Christina, recovering herself, and aware that it was of little use to bear testimony to such an auditor as poor little Ermentrude against the deeds of her own father and brother, which had in reality the sort of sanction Sir Eberhard had mentioned, much akin to those coast rights that were the temptation of wreckers.

Still she could not but tremble at the thought of her speech, and went down to supper in greater trepidation than usual, dreading that she should be expected to thank the Freiherr for his gift. But, fortunately, manners were too rare at Adlerstein for any such omission to be remarkable, and the whole establishment was in a state of noisy triumph and merriment over the excellence of the French wine they had captured, so that she slipped into her seat unobserved.

Every available drinking-horn and cup was full. Ermentrude was eagerly presented with draughts by both father and brother, and presently Sir Eberhard exclaimed, turning towards the shrinking Christina with a rough laugh, "Maiden, I trow thou wilt not taste?"

Christina shook her head, and framed a negative with her lips.

"What's this?" asked her father, close to whom she sat. "Is't a fast-day?"

There was a pause. Many were present who regarded a fast-day much more than the lives or goods of their neighbours. Christina again shook her head.

"No matter," said good-natured Sir Eberhard, evidently wishing to avert any ill consequence from her. "'Tis only her loss."

The mirth went on rough and loud, and Christina felt this the worst of all the miserable meals she had partaken of in fear and trembling at this place of her captivity. Ermentrude, too, was soon in such a state of excitement, that not only was Christina's womanhood bitterly ashamed and grieved for her, but there was serious danger that she might at any moment break out with some allusion to her maiden's recusancy in her reply to Sir Eberhard.

Presently however Ermentrude laid down her head and began to cry—violent headache had come on—and her brother took her in his arms to carry her up the stairs; but his potations had begun before hers, and his step was far from steady; he stumbled more than once on the steps, shook and frightened his sister, and set her down weeping petulantly. And then came a more terrible moment; his awe of Christina had passed away; he swore that she was a lovely maiden, with only too free a tongue, and that a kiss must be the seal of her pardon.

A house full of intoxicated men, no living creature who would care to protect her, scarce even her father! But extremity of terror gave her strength. She spoke resolutely—"Sir Eberhard, your sister is ill—you are in no state to be here. Go down at once, nor insult a free maiden."

Probably the low-toned softness of the voice, so utterly different from the shrill wrangling notes of all the other women he had known, took him by surprise. He was still sober enough to be subdued, almost cowed, by resistance of a description unlike all he had ever seen; his alarm at Christina's superior power returned in full force, he staggered to the stairs, Christina rushed after him, closed the heavy door with all her force, fastened it inside, and would have sunk down to weep but for Ermentrude's peevish wail of distress.

Happily Ermentrude was still a child, and, neglected as she had been, she still had had no one to make her precocious in matters of this kind. She was quite willing to take Christina's view of the case, and not resent the exclusion of her brother; indeed, she was unwell enough to dread the loudness of his voice and rudeness of his revelry.

So the door remained shut, and Christina's resolve was taken that she would so keep it while the wine lasted. And, indeed, Ermentrude had so much fever all that night and the next day that no going down could be thought of. Nobody came near the maidens but Ursel, and she described one continued orgie that made Christina shudder again with fear and disgust. Those below revelled without interval, except for sleep; and they took their sleep just where they happened to sink down, then returned again to the liquor. The old baroness repaired to the kitchen when the revelry went beyond even her bearing; but all the time the wine held out, the swine in the court were, as Ursel averred, better company than the men in the hall. Yet there might have been worse even than this; for old Ursel whispered that at the bottom of the stairs there was a trap-door. Did the maiden know what it covered? It was an oubliette. There was once a Strasburg armourer who had refused ransom, and talked of appealing to the Kaiser. He trod on that door and—Ursel pointed downwards. "But since that time," she said, "my young lord has never brought home a prisoner."

No wonder that all this time Christina cowered at the discordant sounds below, trembled, and prayed while she waited on her poor young charge, who tossed and moaned in fever and suffering. She was still far from recovered when the materials of the debauch failed, and the household began to return to its usual state. She was soon restlessly pining for her brother; and when her father came up to see her, received him with scant welcome, and entreaties for Ebbo. She knew she should be better if she might only sit on his knee, and lay her head on his shoulder. The old Freiherr offered to accommodate her; but she rejected him petulantly, and still called for Ebbo, till he went down, promising that her brother should come.

With a fluttering heart Christina awaited the noble whom she had perhaps insulted, and whose advances had more certainly insulted her. Would he visit her with his anger, or return to that more offensive familiarity? She longed to flee out of sight, when, after a long interval, his heavy tread was heard; but she could not even take refuge in her turret, for Ermentrude was leaning against her. Somehow, the step was less assured than usual; he absolutely knocked at the door; and, when he came in, he acknowledged her by a slight inclination of the head. If she only had known it, this was the first time that head had ever been bent to any being, human or Divine; but all she did perceive was that Sir Eberhard was in neither of the moods she dreaded, only desperately shy and sheepish, and extremely ashamed, not indeed of his excess, which would have been, even to a much tamer German baron, only a happy accident, but of what had passed between himself and her.

He was much grieved to perceive how much ground Ermentrude had lost, and gave himself up to fondling and comforting her; and in a few days more, in their common cares for the sister, Christina lost her newly-acquired horror of the brother, and could not but be grateful for his forbearance; while she was almost entertained by the increased awe of herself shown by this huge robber baron.

CHAPTER IV
SNOW-WREATHS WHEN 'TIS THAW

Ermentrude had by no means recovered the ground she had lost, before the winter set in; and blinding snow came drifting down day and night, rendering the whole view, above and below, one expanse of white, only broken by the peaks of rock which were too steep to sustain the snow. The waterfall lengthened its icicles daily, and the whole court was heaped with snow, up even to the top of the high steps to the hall; and thus, Christina was told, would it continue all the winter. What had previously seemed to her a strangely door-like window above the porch now became the only mode of egress, when the barons went out bear or wolf-hunting, or the younger took his crossbow and hound to provide the wild-fowl, which, under Christina's skilful hands, would tempt the feeble appetite of Ermentrude when she was utterly unable to touch the salted meats and sausages of the household.

In spite of all endeavours to guard the windows and keep up the fire, the cold withered the poor child like a fading leaf, and she needed more and more of tenderness and amusement to distract her attention from her ailments. Christina's resources were unfailing. Out of the softer pine and birch woods provided for the fire, she carved a set of draughtsmen, and made a board by ruling squares on the end of a settle, and painting the alternate ones with a compound of oil and charcoal. Even the old Baron was delighted with this contrivance, and the pleasure it gave his daughter. He remembered playing at draughts in that portion of his youth which had been a shade more polished, and he felt as if the game were making Ermentrude more hike a lady. Christina was encouraged to proceed with a set of chessmen, and the shaping of their characteristic heads under her dexterous fingers was watched by Ermentrude like something magical. Indeed, the young lady entertained the belief that there was no limit to her attendant's knowledge or capacity.

Truly there was a greater brightness and clearness beginning to dawn even upon poor little Ermentrude's own dull mind. She took more interest in everything: songs were not solely lullabies, but she cared to talk them over; tales to which she would once have been incapable of paying attention were eagerly sought after; and, above all, the spiritual vacancy that her mind had hitherto presented was beginning to be filled up. Christina had brought her own books—a library of extraordinary extent for a maiden of the fifteenth century, but which she owed to her uncle's connexion with the arts of wood-cutting and printing. A Vulgate from Dr. Faustus's own press, a mass book and breviary, Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation* and the *Nuremburg Chronicle* all in Latin, and the poetry of the gentle Minnesinger and bird lover, Walther von Vogelweide, in the vernacular: these were her stock, which Hausfrau Johanna had viewed as a foolish encumbrance, and Hugh Sorel would never have transported to the castle unless they had been so well concealed in Christina's kirtles that he had taken them for parts of her wardrobe.

Most precious were they now, when, out of the reach of all teaching save her own, she had to infuse into the sinking girl's mind the great mysteries of life and death, that so she might not leave the world without more hope or faith than her heathen forefathers. For that Ermentrude would live Christina had never hoped, since that fleeting improvement had been cut short by the fever of the wine-cup; the look, voice, and tone had become so completely the same as those of Regina Grundt's little sister who had pined and died. She knew she could not cure, but she could, she felt she could, comfort, cheer, and soften, and she no longer repined at her enforced sojourn at Adlerstein. She heartily loved her charge, and could not bear to think how desolate Ermentrude would be without her. And now the poor girl had become responsive to her care. She was infinitely softened in manner, and treated her parents with forms of respect new to them; she had learnt even to thank old Ursel, dropped her imperious tone, and struggled with her petulance; and, towards her brother, the

domineering, uncouth adherence was becoming real, tender affection; while the dependent, reverent love she bestowed upon Christina was touching and endearing in the extreme.

Freiherr von Adlerstein saw the change, and congratulated himself on the effect of having a town-bred bower woman; nay, spoke of the advantage it would be to his daughter, if he could persuade himself to make the submission to the Kaiser which the late improvements decided on at the Diet were rendering more and more inevitable. *Now* how happy would be the winner of his gentle Ermentrude!

Freiherrinn von Adlerstein thought the alteration the mere change from child to woman, and felt insulted by the supposition that any one might not have been proud to match with a daughter of Adlerstein, be she what she might. As to submission to the Kaiser, that was mere folly and weakness —kaisers, kings, dukes, and counts had broken their teeth against the rock of Adlerstein before now! What had come over her husband and her son to make them cravens?

For Freiherr Eberhard was more strongly convinced than was his father of the untenableness of their present position. Hugh Sorel's reports of what he heard at Ulm had shown that the league that had been discussed at Regensburg was far more formidable than anything that had ever previously threatened Schloss Adlerstein, and that if the Graf von Schlangenwald joined in the coalition, there would be private malice to direct its efforts against the Adlerstein family. Feud-letters or challenges had been made unlawful for ten years, and was not Adlerstein at feud with the world?

Nor did Eberhard look on the submission with the sullen rage and grief that his father felt in bringing himself to such a declension from the pride of his ancestors. What the young Baron heard up stairs was awakening in him a sense of the poorness and narrowness of his present life. Ermentrude never spared him what interested her; and, partly from her lips, partly through her appeals to her attendant, he had learnt that life had better things to offer than independence on these bare rocks, and that homage might open the way to higher and worthier exploits than preying upon overturned waggons.

Dietrich of Berne and his two ancestors, whose lengthy legend Christina could sing in a low, soft recitative, were revelations to him of what she meant by a true knight—the lion in war, the lamb in peace; the quaint oft-repeated portraits, and still quainter cities, of the Chronicle, with her explanations and translations, opened his mind to aspirations for intercourse with his fellows, for an honourable name, and for esteem in its degree such as was paid to Sir Parzival, to Karl the Great, or to Rodolf of Hapsburgh, once a mountain lord like himself. Nay, as Ermentrude said, stroking his cheek, and smoothing the flaxen beard, that somehow had become much less rough and tangled than it used to be, "Some day wilt thou be another Good Freiherr Eberhard, whom all the country-side loved, and who gave bread at the castle-gate to all that hungered."

Her brother believed nothing of her slow declension in strength, ascribing all the change he saw to the bitter cold, and seeing but little even of that alteration, though he spent many hours in her room, holding her in his arms, amusing her, or talking to her and to Christina. All Christina's fear of him was gone. As long as there was no liquor in the house, and he was his true self, she felt him to be a kind friend, bound to her by strong sympathy in the love and care for his sister. She could talk almost as freely before him as when alone with her young lady; and as Ermentrude's religious feelings grew stronger, and were freely expressed to him, surely his attention was not merely kindness and patience with the sufferer.

The girl's soul ripened rapidly under the new influences during her bodily decay; and, as the days lengthened, and the stern hold of winter relaxed upon the mountains, Christina looked with strange admiration upon the expression that had dawned upon the features once so vacant and dull, and listened with the more depth of reverence to the sweet words of faith, hope and love, because she felt that a higher, deeper teaching than she could give must have come to mould the spirit for the new world to which it was hastening.

"Like an army defeated,

The snow had retreated,"

out of the valley, whose rich green shone smiling round the pool into which the Debateable Ford spread. The waterfall had burst its icy bonds, and dashed down with redoubled voice, roaring rather than babbling. Blue and pink hepaticas—or, as Christina called them, liver-krauts—had pushed up their starry heads, and had even been gathered by Sir Eberhard, and laid on his sister's pillow. The dark peaks of rock came out all glistening with moisture, and the snow only retained possession of the deep hollows and crevices, into which however its retreat was far more graceful than when, in the city, it was trodden by horse and man, and soiled with smoke.

Christina dreaded indeed that the roads should be open, but she could not love the snow; it spoke to her of dreariness, savagery, and captivity, and she watched the dwindling stripes with satisfaction, and hailed the fall of the petty avalanches from one Eagle's Step to another as her forefathers might have rejoiced in the defeat of the Frost giants.

But Ermentrude had a love for the white sheet that lay covering a gorge running up from the ravine. She watched its diminution day by day with a fancy that she was melting away with it; and indeed it was on the very day that a succession of drifting showers had left the sheet alone, and separated it from the masses of white above, that it first fully dawned upon the rest of the family that, for the little daughter of the house, spring was only bringing languor and sinking instead of recovery.

Then it was that Sir Eberhard first really listened to her entreaty that she might not die without a priest, and comforted her by passing his word to her that, if—he would not say when—the time drew near, he would bring her one of the priests who had only come from St. Ruprecht's cloister on great days, by a sort of sufferance, to say mass at the Blessed Friedmund's hermitage chapel.

The time was slow in coming. Easter had passed with Ermentrude far too ill for Christina to make the effort she had intended of going to the church, even if she could get no escort but old Ursel—the sheet of snow had dwindled to a mere wreath—the ford looked blue in the sunshine—the cascade tinkled merrily down its rock—mountain primroses peeped out, when, as Father Norbert came forth from saying his ill-attended Pentecostal mass, and was parting with the infirm peasant hermit, a tall figure strode up the pass, and, as the villagers fell back to make way, stood before the startled priest, and said, in a voice choked with grief, "Come with me."

"Who needs me?" began the astonished monk.

"Follow him not, father!" whispered the hermit. "It is the young Freiherr.—Oh have mercy on him, gracious sir; he has done your noble lordships no wrong."

"I mean him no ill," replied Eberhard, clearing his voice with difficulty; "I would but have him do his office. Art thou afraid, priest?"

"Who needs my office?" demanded Father Norbert. "Show me fit cause, and what should I dread? Wherefore dost thou seek me?"

"For my sister," replied Eberhard, his voice thickening again. "My little sister lies at the point of death, and I have sworn to her that a priest she shall have. Wilt thou come, or shall I drag thee down the pass?"

"I come, I come with all my heart, sir knight," was the ready response. "A few moments and I am at your bidding."

He stepped back into the hermit's cave, whence a stair led up to the chapel. The anchorite followed him, whispering—"Good father, escape! There will be full time ere he misses you. The north door leads to the Gemsbock's Pass; it is open now."

"Why should I baulk him? Why should I deny my office to the dying?" said Norbert.

"Alas! holy father, thou art new to this country, and know'st not these men of blood! It is a snare to make the convent ransom thee, if not worse. The Freiherrinn is a fiend for malice, and the Freiherr is excommunicate."

"I know it, my son," said Norbert; "but wherefore should their child perish unassoilzied?"

"Art coming, priest?" shouted Eberhard, from his stand at the mouth of the cave.

And, as Norbert at once appeared with the pyx and other appliances that he had gone to fetch, the Freiherr held out his hand with an offer to "carry his gear for him;" and, when the monk refused, with an inward shudder at entrusting a sacred charge to such unhallowed hands, replied, "You will have work enow for both hands ere the castle is reached."

But Father Norbert was by birth a sturdy Switzer, and thought little of these Swabian Alps; and he climbed after his guide through the most rugged passages of Eberhard's shortest and most perpendicular cut without a moment's hesitation, and with agility worthy of a chamois. The young baron turned for a moment, when the level of the castle had been gained, perhaps to see whether he were following, but at the same time came to a sudden, speechless pause.

On the white masses of vapour that floated on the opposite side of the mountain was traced a gigantic shadowy outline of a hermit, with head bent eagerly forward, and arm outstretched.

The monk crossed himself. Eberhard stood still for a moment, and then said, hoarsely,—"The Blessed Friedmund! He is come for her;" then strode on towards the postern gate, followed by Brother Norbert, a good deal reassured both as to the genuineness of the young Baron's message and the probable condition of the object of his journey, since the patron saint of her race was evidently on the watch to speed her departing spirit.

Sir Eberhard led the way up the turret stairs to the open door, and the monk entered the death-chamber. The elder Baron sat near the fire in the large wooden chair, half turned towards his daughter, as one who must needs be present, but with his face buried in his hands, unable to endure the spectacle.

Nearer was the tall form of his wife, standing near the foot of the bed, her stern, harsh features somewhat softened by the feelings of the moment. Ursel waited at hand, with tears running down her furrowed cheeks.

For such as these Father Norbert was prepared; but he little expected to meet so pure and sweet a gaze of reverential welcome as beamed on him from the soft, dark eyes of the little white-checked maiden who sat on the bed, holding the sufferer in her arms. Still less had he anticipated the serene blessedness that sat on the wasted features of the dying girl, and all the anguish of labouring breath.

She smiled a smile of joy, held up her hand, and thanked her brother. Her father scarcely lifted his head, her mother made a rigid curtsey, and with a grim look of sorrow coming over her features, laid her hand over the old Baron's shoulder. "Come away, Herr Vater," she said; "he is going to hear her confession, and make her too holy for the like of us to touch."

The old man rose up, and stepped towards his child. Ermentrude held out her arms to him, and murmured—

"Father, father, pardon me; I would have been a better daughter if I had only known—" He gathered her in his arms; he was quite past speaking; and they only heard his heavy breathing, and one more whisper from Ermentrude—"And oh! father, one day wilt thou seek to be absolved?" Whether he answered or not they knew not; he only gave her repeated kisses, and laid her down on her pillows, then rushed to the door, and the passionate sobs of the strong man's uncontrolled nature might be heard upon the stair. The parting with the others was not necessarily so complete, as they were not, like him, under censure of the Church; but Kunigunde leant down to kiss her; and, in return to her repetition of her entreaty for pardon, replied, "Thou hast it, child, if it will ease thy mind; but it is all along of these new fancies that ever an Adlerstein thought of pardon. There, there, I blame thee not, poor maid; it thou wert to die, it may be even best as it is. Now must I to thy father; he is troubled enough about this gear."

But when Eberhard moved towards his sister, she turned to the priest, and said, imploringly, "Not far, not far! Oh! let them," pointing to Eberhard and Christina, "let them not be quite out of sight!"

"Out of hearing is all that is needed, daughter," replied the priest; and Ermentrude looked content as Christina moved towards the empty north turret, where, with the door open, she was in

full view, and Eberhard followed her thither. It was indeed fully out of earshot of the child's faint, gasping confession. Gravely and sadly both stood there. Christina looked up the hillside for the snow-wreath. The May sunshine had dissolved it; the green pass lay sparkling without a vestige of its white coating. Her eyes full of tears, she pointed the spot out to Eberhard. He understood; but, leaning towards her, told, under his breath, of the phantom he had seen. Her eyes expanded with awe of the supernatural. "It was the Blessed Friedmund," said Eberhard. "Never hath he so greeted one of our race since the pious Freiherrinn Hildegarde. Maiden, hast thou brought us back a blessing?"

"Ah! well may she be blessed—well may the saints stoop to greet her," murmured Christina, with strangled voice, scarcely able to control her sobs.

Father Norbert came towards them. The simple confession had been heard, and he sought the aid of Christina in performing the last rites of the Church.

"Maiden," he said to her, "thou hast done a great and blessed work, such as many a priest might envy thee."

Eberhard was not excluded during the final services by which the soul was to be dismissed from its earthly dwelling-place. True, he comprehended little of their import, and nothing of the words, but he gazed meekly, with uncovered head, and a bewildered look of sadness, while Christina made her responses and took her part with full intelligence and deep fervour, sorrowing indeed for the companion who had become so dear to her, but deeply thankful for the spiritual consolation that had come at last. Ermentrude lay calm, and, as it were, already rapt into a higher world, lighting up at the German portions of the service, and not wholly devoid of comprehension of the spirit even of the Latin, as indeed she had come to the border of the region where human tongues and languages are no more.

She was all but gone when the rite of extreme unction was completed, and they could only stand round her, Eberhard, Christina, Ursel, and the old Baroness, who had returned again, watching the last flutterings of the breath, the window thrown wide open that nothing might impede the passage of the soul to the blue vault above.

The priest spoke the beautiful commendation, "Depart, O Christian soul." There was a faint gesture in the midst for Christina to lift her in her arms—a sign to bend down and kiss her brow—but her last look was for her brother, her last murmur, "Come after me; be the Good Baron Ebbo."

CHAPTER V
THE YOUNG FREIHERR

Ermentrude von Adlerstein slept with her forefathers in the vaults of the hermitage chapel, and Christina Sorel's work was done.

Surely it was time for her to return home, though she should be more sorry to leave the mountain castle than she could ever have believed possible. She entreated her father to take her home, but she received a sharp answer that she did not know what she was talking of: the Schlangenwald Reitern were besetting all the roads; and moreover the Ulm burghers had taken the capture of the Constance wine in such dudgeon that for a retainer of Adlerstein to show himself in the streets would be an absolute asking for the wheel.

But was there any hope for her? Could he not take her to some nunnery midway, and let her write to her uncle to fetch her from thence?

He swore at woman's pertinacity, but allowed at last that if the plan, talked of by the Barons, of going to make their submission to the Emperor at Linz, with a view to which all violence at the ford had ceased, should hold good, it might be possible thus to drop her on their way.

With this Christina must needs content herself. Poor child, not only had Ermentrude's death deprived her of the sole object of her residence at Schloss Adlerstein, but it had infinitely increased the difficulties of her position. No one interfered with her possession of the upper room and its turrets; and it was only at meal times that she was obliged to mingle with the other inhabitants, who, for the most part, absolutely overlooked the little shrinking pale maiden but with one exception, and that the most perplexing of all. She had been on terms with Freiherr Eberhard that were not so easily broken off as if she had been an old woman of Ursel's age. All through his sister's decline she had been his comforter, assistant, director, living in intercourse and sympathy that ought surely to cease when she was no longer his sister's attendant, yet which must be more than ever missed in the full freshness of the stroke.

Even on the earliest day of bereavement, a sudden thought of Hausfrau Johanna flashed upon Christina, and reminded her of the guard she must keep over herself if she would return to Ulm the same modest girl whom her aunt could acquit of all indiscretion. Her cheeks flamed, as she sat alone, with the very thought, and the next time she heard the well-known tread on the stair, she fled hastily into her own turret chamber, and shut the door. Her heart beat fast. She could hear Sir Eberhard moving about the room, and listened to his heavy sigh as he threw himself into the large chair. Presently he called her by name, and she felt it needful to open her door and answer, respectfully:

"What would you, my lord?"

"What would I? A little peace, and heed to her who is gone. To see my father and mother one would think that a partridge had but flown away. I have seen my father more sorrowful when his dog had fallen over the abyss."

"Mayhap there is more sorrow for a brute that cannot live again," said Christina. "Our bird has her nest by an Altar that is lovelier and brighter than even our Dome Kirk will ever be."

"Sit down, Christina," he said, dragging a chair nearer the hearth. "My heart is sore, and I cannot bear the din below. Tell me where my bird is flown."

"Ah! sir; pardon me. I must to the kitchen," said Christina, crossing her hands over her breast, to still her trembling heart, for she was very sorry for his grief, but moving resolutely.

"Must? And wherefore? Thou hast nought to do there; speak truth! Why not stay with me?" and his great light eyes opened wide.

"A burgher maid may not sit down with a noble baron."

"The devil! Has my mother been plaguing thee, child?"

"No, my lord," said Christina, "she reeks not of me; but"—steadying her voice with great difficulty—"it behoves me the more to be discreet."

"And you would not have me come here!" he said, with a wistful tone of reproach.

"I have no power to forbid you; but if you do, I must betake me to Ursel in the kitchen," said Christina, very low, trembling and half choked.

"Among the rude wenches there!" he cried, starting up. "Nay, nay, that shall not be! Rather will I go."

"But this is very cruel of thee, maiden," he added, lingering, "when I give thee my knightly word that all should be as when she whom we both loved was here," and his voice shook.

"It could not so be, my lord," returned Christina with drooping, blushing face; "it would not be maidenly in me. Oh, my lord, you are kind and generous, make it not hard for me to do what other maidens less lonely have friends to do for them!"

"Kind and generous?" said Eberhard, leaning over the back of the chair as if trying to begin a fresh score. "This from you, who told me once I was no true knight!"

"I shall call you a true knight with all my heart," cried Christina, the tears rushing into her eyes, "if you will respect my weakness and loneliness."

He stood up again, as if to move away; then paused, and, twisting his gold chain, said, "And how am I ever to be what the happy one bade me, if you will not show me how?"

"My error would never show you the right," said Christina, with a strong effort at firmness, and retreating at once through the door of the staircase, whence she made her way to the kitchen, and with great difficulty found an excuse for her presence there.

It had been a hard struggle with her compassion and gratitude, and, poor little Christina felt with dismay, with something more than these. Else why was it that, even while principle and better sense summoned her back to Ulm, she experienced a deadly weariness of the city-pent air, of the grave, heavy roll of the river, nay, even of the quiet, well-regulated household? Why did such a marriage as she had thought her natural destiny, with some worthy, kind-hearted brother of the guild, become so hateful to her that she could only aspire to a convent life? This same burgomaster would be an estimable man, no doubt, and those around her were ruffians, but she felt utterly contemptuous and impatient of him. And why was the interchange of greetings, the few words at meals, worth all the rest of the day besides to her? Her own heart was the traitor, and to her own sensations the poor little thing had, in spirit at least, transgressed all Aunt Johanna's precepts against young Barons. She wept apart, and resolved, and prayed, cruelly ashamed of every start of joy or pain that the sight of Eberhard cost her. From almost the first he had sat next her at the single table that accommodated the whole household at meals, and the custom continued, though on some days he treated her with sullen silence, which she blamed herself for not rejoicing in, sometimes he spoke a few friendly words; but he observed, better than she could have dared to expect, her test of his true knighthood, and never again forced himself into her apartment, though now and then he came to the door with flowers, with mountain strawberries, and once with two young doves. "Take them, Christina," he said, "they are very like yourself;" and he always delayed so long that she was forced to be resolute, and shut the door on him at last.

Once, when there was to be a mass at the chapel, Hugh Sorel, between a smile and a growl, informed his daughter that he would take her thereto. She gladly prepared, and, bent on making herself agreeable to her father, did not once press on him the necessity of her return to Ulm. To her amazement and pleasure, the young Baron was at church, and when on the way home, he walked beside her mule, she could see no need of sending him away.

He had been in no school of the conventionalities of life, and, when he saw that Hugh Sorel's presence had obtained him this favour, he wistfully asked, "Christina, if I bring your father with me, will you not let me in?"

"Entreat me not, my lord," she answered, with fluttering breath.

She felt the more that she was right in this decision, when she encountered her father's broad grin of surprise and diversion, at seeing the young Baron help her to dismount. It was a look of receiving an idea both new, comical, and flattering, but by no means the look of a father who would resent the indignity of attentions to his daughter from a man whose rank formed an insuperable barrier to marriage.

The effect was a new, urgent, and most piteous entreaty, that he would find means of sending her home. It brought upon her the hearing put into words what her own feelings had long shrunk from confessing to herself.

"Ah! Why, what now? What, is the young Baron after thee? Ha! ha! petticoats are few enough up here, but he must have been ill off ere he took to a little ghost like thee! I saw he was moping and doleful, but I thought it was all for his sister."

"And so it is, father."

"Tell me that, when he watches every turn of that dark eye of thine—the only good thing thou took'st of mine! Thou art a witch, Stina."

"Hush, oh hush, for pity's sake, father, and let me go home!"

"What, thou likest him not? Thy mind is all for the mincing goldsmith opposite, as I ever told thee."

"My mind is—is to return to my uncle and aunt the true-hearted maiden they parted with," said Christina, with clasped hands. "And oh, father, as you were the son of a true and faithful mother, be a father to me now! Jeer not your motherless child, but protect her and help her."

Hugh Sorel was touched by this appeal, and he likewise recollected how much it was for his own interest that his brother should be satisfied with the care he took of his daughter. He became convinced that the sooner she was out of the castle the better, and at length bethought him that, among the merchants who frequented the Midsummer Fair at the Blessed Friedmund's Wake, a safe escort might be found to convey her back to Ulm.

If the truth were known, Hugh Sorel was not devoid of a certain feeling akin to contempt, both for his young master's taste, and for his forbearance in not having pushed matters further with a being so helpless, meek, and timid as Christina, more especially as such slackness had not been his wont in other cases where his fancy had been caught.

But Sorel did not understand that it was not physical beauty that here had been the attraction, though to some persons, the sweet, pensive eyes, the delicate, pure skin, the slight, tender form, might seem to exceed in loveliness the fully developed animal comeliness chiefly esteemed at Adlerstein. It was rather the strangeness of the power and purity of this timid, fragile creature, that had struck the young noble. With all their brutal manners reverence for a lofty female nature had been in the German character ever since their Velleda prophesied to them, and this reverence in Eberhard bowed at the feet of the pure gentle maiden, so strong yet so weak, so wistful and entreating even in her resolution, refined as a white flower on a heap of refuse, wise and dexterous beyond his slow and dull conception, and the first being in whom he had ever seen piety or goodness; and likewise with a tender, loving spirit of consolation such as he had both beheld and tasted by his sister's deathbed.

There was almost a fear mingled with his reverence. If he had been more familiar with the saints, he would thus have regarded the holy virgin martyrs, nay, even Our Lady herself; and he durst not push her so hard as to offend her, and excite the anger or the grief that he alike dreaded. He was wretched and forlorn without the resources he had found in his sister's room; the new and better cravings of his higher nature had been excited only to remain unsupplied and disappointed; and the affectionate heart in the freshness of its sorrow yearned for the comfort that such conversation had supplied: but the impression that had been made on him was still such, that he knew that to use rough means of pressing his wishes would no more lead to his real gratification than it would to appropriate a snow-bell by crushing it in his gauntlet.

And it was on feeble little Christina, yielding in heart, though not in will, that it depended to preserve this reverence, and return unscathed from this castle, more perilous now than ever.

CHAPTER VI
THE BLESSED FRIEDMUND'S WAKE

Midsummer-Day arrived, and the village of Adlerstein presented a most unusual spectacle. The wake was the occasion of a grand fair for all the mountain-side, and it was an understood thing that the Barons, instead of molesting the pedlars, merchants, and others who attended it, contented themselves with demanding a toll from every one who passed the Kohler's hut on the one side, or the Gemsbock's Pass on the other; and this toll, being the only coin by which they came honestly in the course of the year, was regarded as a certainty and highly valued. Moreover, it was the only time that any purchases could be made, and the flotsam of the ford did not always include all even of the few requirements of the inmates of the castle; it was the only holiday, sacred or secular, that ever gladdened the Eagle's Rock.

So all the inmates of the castle prepared to enjoy themselves, except the heads of the house. The Freiherr had never been at one of these wakes since the first after he was excommunicated, when he had stalked round to show his indifference to the sentence; and the Freiherrinn snarled out such sentences of disdain towards the concourse, that it might be supposed that she hated the sight of her kind; but Ursel had all the household purchases to make, and the kitchen underlings were to take turns to go and come, as indeed were the men-at-arms, who were set to watch the toll-bars.

Christina had packed up a small bundle, for the chance of being unable to return to the castle without missing her escort, though she hoped that the fair might last two days, and that she should thus be enabled to return and bring away the rest of her property. She was more and more resolved on going, but her heart was less and less inclined to departure. And bitter had been her weeping through all the early light hours of the long morning—weeping that she tried to think was all for Ermentrude; and all, amid prayers she could scarce trust herself to offer, that the generous, kindly nature might yet work free of these evil surroundings, and fulfil the sister's dying wish, she should never see it; but, when she should hear that the Debateable Ford was the Friendly Ford, then would she know that it was the doing of the Good Baron Ebbo. Could she venture on telling him so? Or were it not better that there were no farewell? And she wept again that he should think her ungrateful. She could not persuade herself to release the doves, but committed the charge to Ursel to let them go in case she should not return.

So tear-stained was her face, that, ashamed that it should be seen, she wrapped it closely in her hood and veil when she came down and joined her father. The whole scene swam in tears before her eyes when she saw the whole green slope from the chapel covered with tents and booths, and swarming with pedlars and mountaineers in their picturesque dresses. Women and girls were exchanging the yarn of their winter's spinning for bright handkerchiefs; men drove sheep, goats, or pigs to barter for knives, spades, or weapons; others were gazing at simple shows—a dancing bear or ape—or clustering round a Minnesinger; many even then congregating in booths for the sale of beer. Further up, on the flat space of sward above the chapel, were some lay brothers, arranging for the representation of a mystery—a kind of entertainment which Germany owed to the English who came to the Council of Constance, and which the monks of St. Ruprecht's hoped might infuse some religious notions into the wild, ignorant mountaineers.

First however Christina gladly entered the church. Crowded though it were, it was calmer than the busy scene without. Faded old tapestry was decking its walls, representing apparently some subject entirely alien to St. John or the blessed hermit; Christina rather thought it was Mars and Venus, but that was all the same to every one else. And there was a terrible figure of St. John, painted life-like, with a real hair-cloth round his loins, just opposite to her, on the step of the Altar; also poor Friedmund's bones, dressed up in a new serge amice and hood; the stone from Nicæa was in a gilded

box, ready in due time to be kissed; and a preaching friar (not one of the monks of St. Ruprecht's) was in the midst of a sermon, telling how St. John presided at the Council of Nicæa till the Emperor Maximius cut off his head at the instance of Herodius—full justice being done to the dancing—and that the blood was sprinkled on this very stone, whereupon our Holy Father the Pope decreed that whoever would kiss the said stone, and repeat the Credo five times afterwards, should be capable of receiving an indulgence for 500 years: which indulgence must however be purchased at the rate of six groschen, to be bestowed in alms at Rome. And this inestimable benefit he, poor Friar Peter, had come from his brotherhood of St. Francis at Offingen solely to dispense to the poor mountaineers.

It was disappointing to find this profane mummery going on instead of the holy services to which Christina had looked forward for strength and comfort; she was far too well instructed not to be scandalized at the profane deception which was ripening fast for Luther, only thirty years later; and, when the stone was held up by the friar in one hand, the printed briefs of indulgence in the other, she shrunk back. Her father however said, "Wilt have one, child? Five hundred years is no bad bargain."

"My uncle has small trust in indulgences," she whispered.

"All lies, of course," quoth Hugh; "yet they've the Pope's seal, and I have more than half a mind to get one. Five hundred years is no joke, and I am sure of purgatory, since I bought this medal at the Holy House of Loretto."

And he went forward, and invested six groschen in one of the papers, the most religious action poor Christina had ever seen him perform. Other purchasers came forward—several, of the castle *knappen*, and a few peasant women who offered yarn or cheeses as equivalents for money, but were told with some insolence to go and sell their goods, and bring the coin.

After a time, the friar, finding his traffic slack, thought fit to remove, with his two lay assistants, outside the chapel, and try the effects of an out-of-door sermon. Hugh Sorel, who had been hitherto rather diverted by the man's gestures and persuasions, now decided on going out into the fair in quest of an escort for his daughter, but as she saw Father Norbert and another monk ascending from the stairs leading to the hermit's cell, she begged to be allowed to remain in the church, where she was sure to be safe, instead of wandering about with him in the fair.

He was glad to be unencumbered, though he thought her taste unnatural; and, promising to return for her when he had found an escort, he left her.

Father Norbert had come for the very purpose of hearing confessions, and Christina's next hour was the most comfortable she had spent since Ermentrude's death.

After this however the priests were called away, and long, long did Christina first kneel and then sit in the little lonely church, hearing the various sounds without, and imagining that her father had forgotten her, and that he and all the rest were drinking, and then what would become of her? Why had she quitted old Ursel's protection?

Hours of waiting and nameless alarm must have passed, for the sun was waxing low, when at length she heard steps coming up the hermit's cell, and a head rose above the pavement which she recognized with a wild throb of joy, but, repressing her sense of gladness, she only exclaimed, "Oh, where is my father!"

"I have sent him to the toll at the Gemsbock's Pass," replied Sir Eberhard, who had by this time come up the stairs, followed by Brother Peter and the two lay assistants. Then, as Christina turned on him her startled, terrified eyes in dismay and reproach for such thoughtlessness, he came towards her, and, bending his head and opening his hand, he showed on his palm two gold rings. "There, little one," he said; "now shalt thou never again shut me out."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.