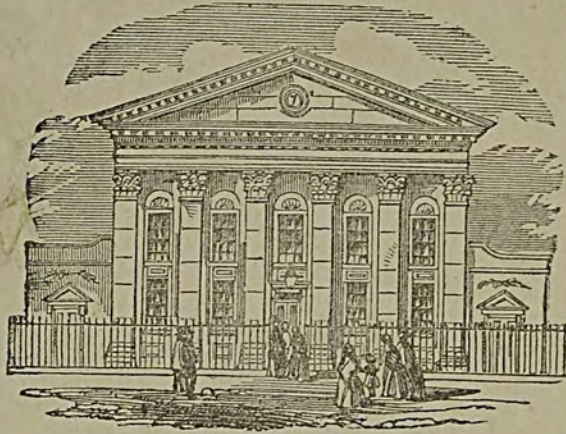


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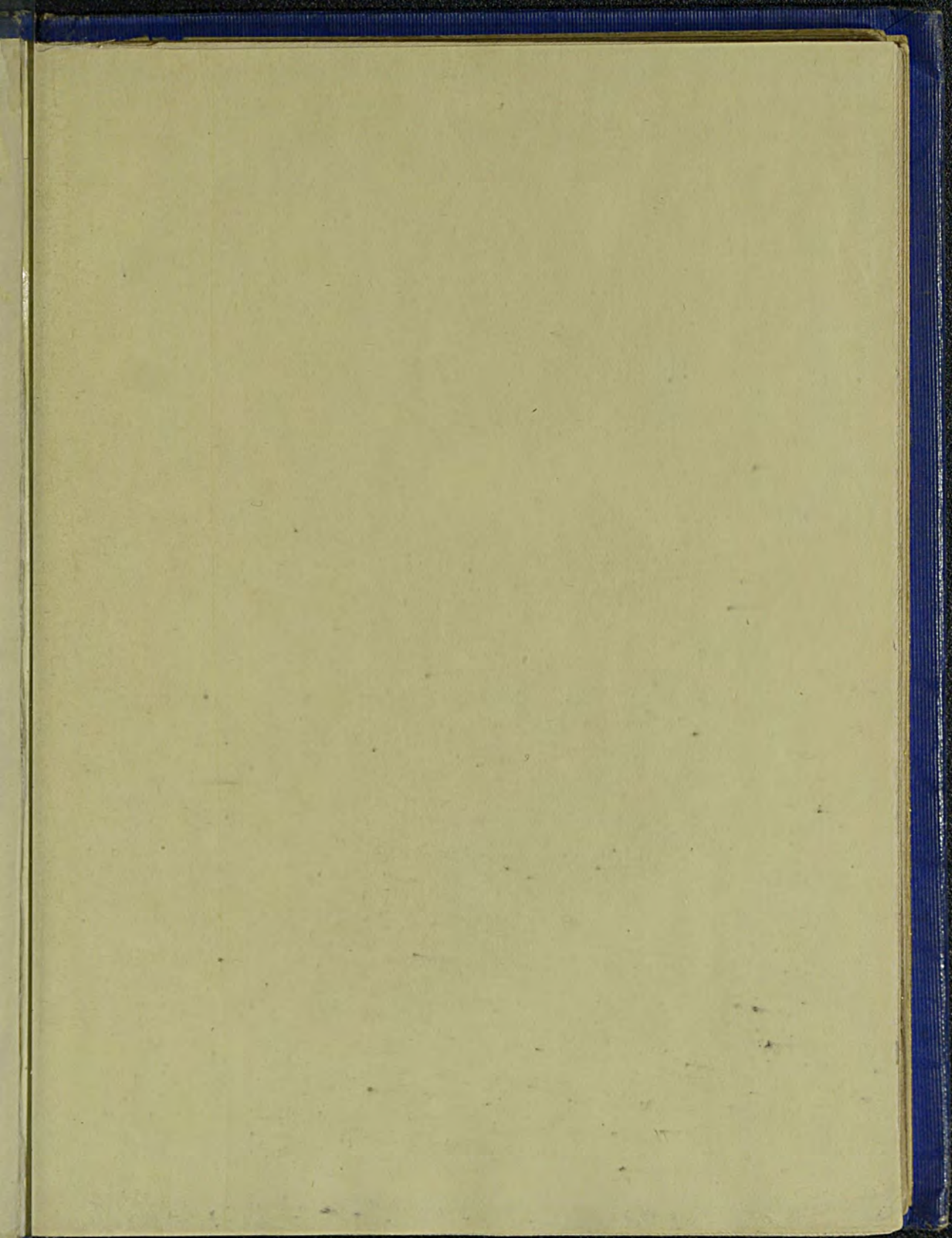


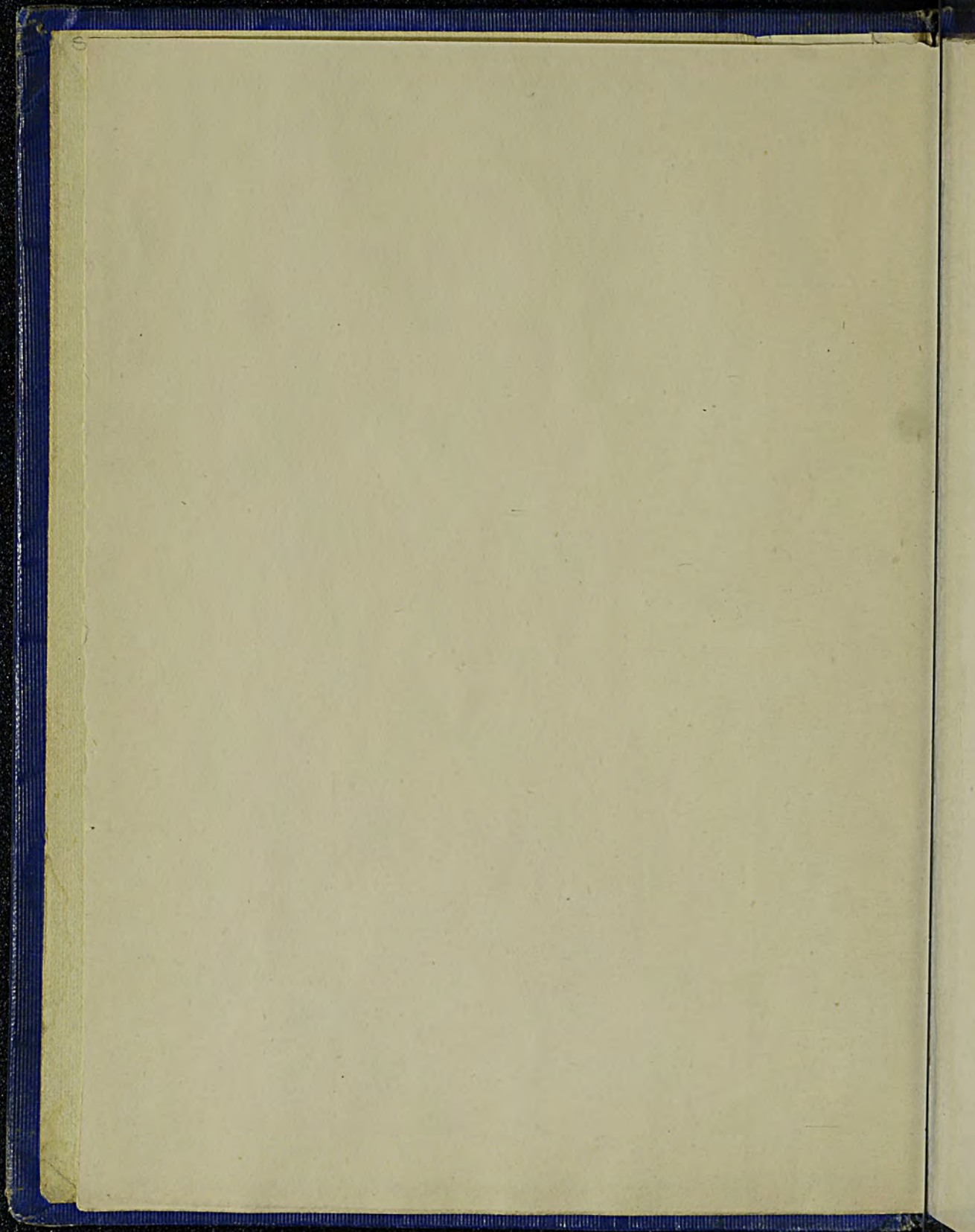
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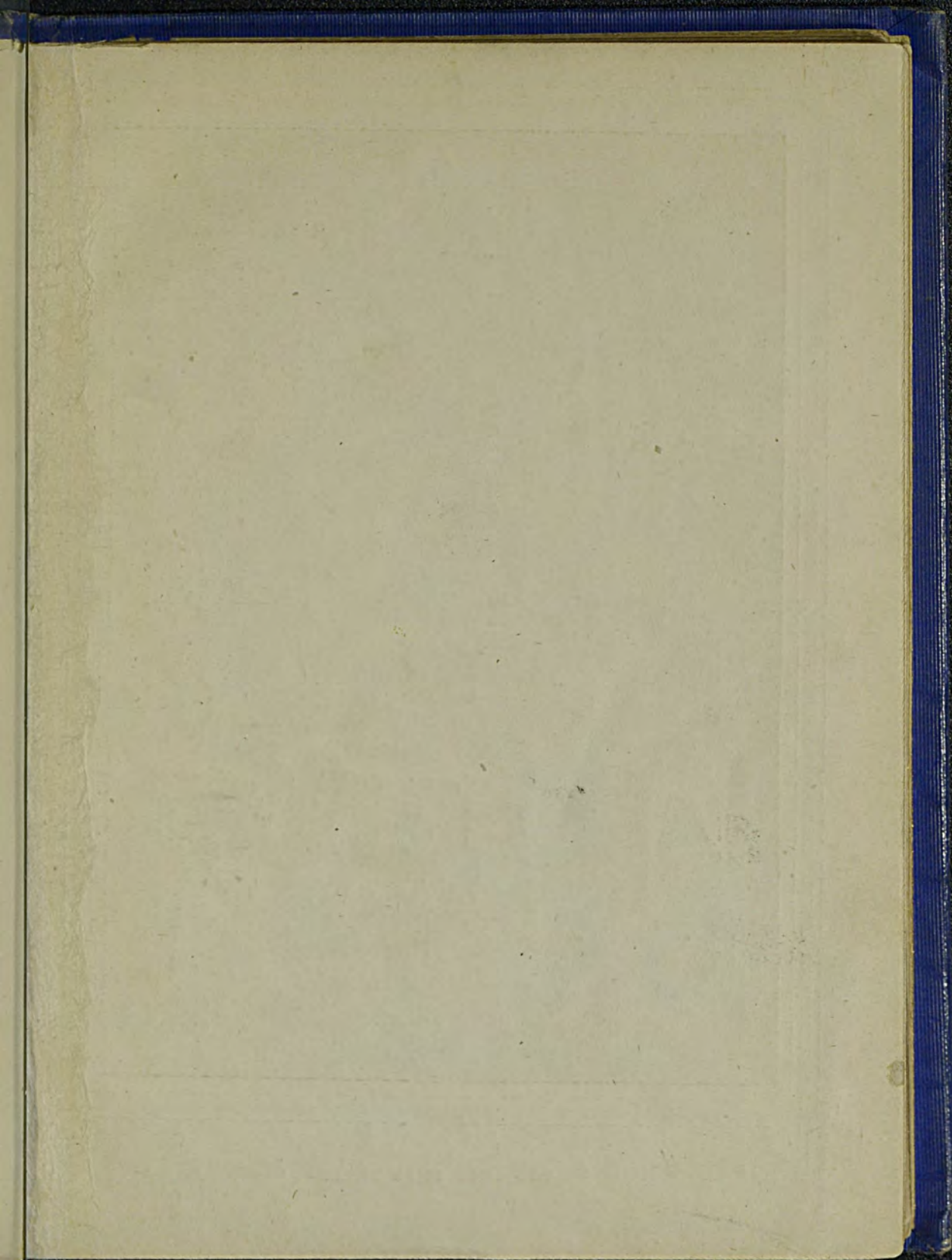
AT THE

Annual Jubvenile Entertainment,

JANUARY 2nd, 1866.









THE CHRISTMAS TREE.



A Story about a Christmas
in
The Seventeenth Century.

BY MRS. PERCY SINNETT.



LONDON:
CHAPMAN AND HALL, 186 STRAND.

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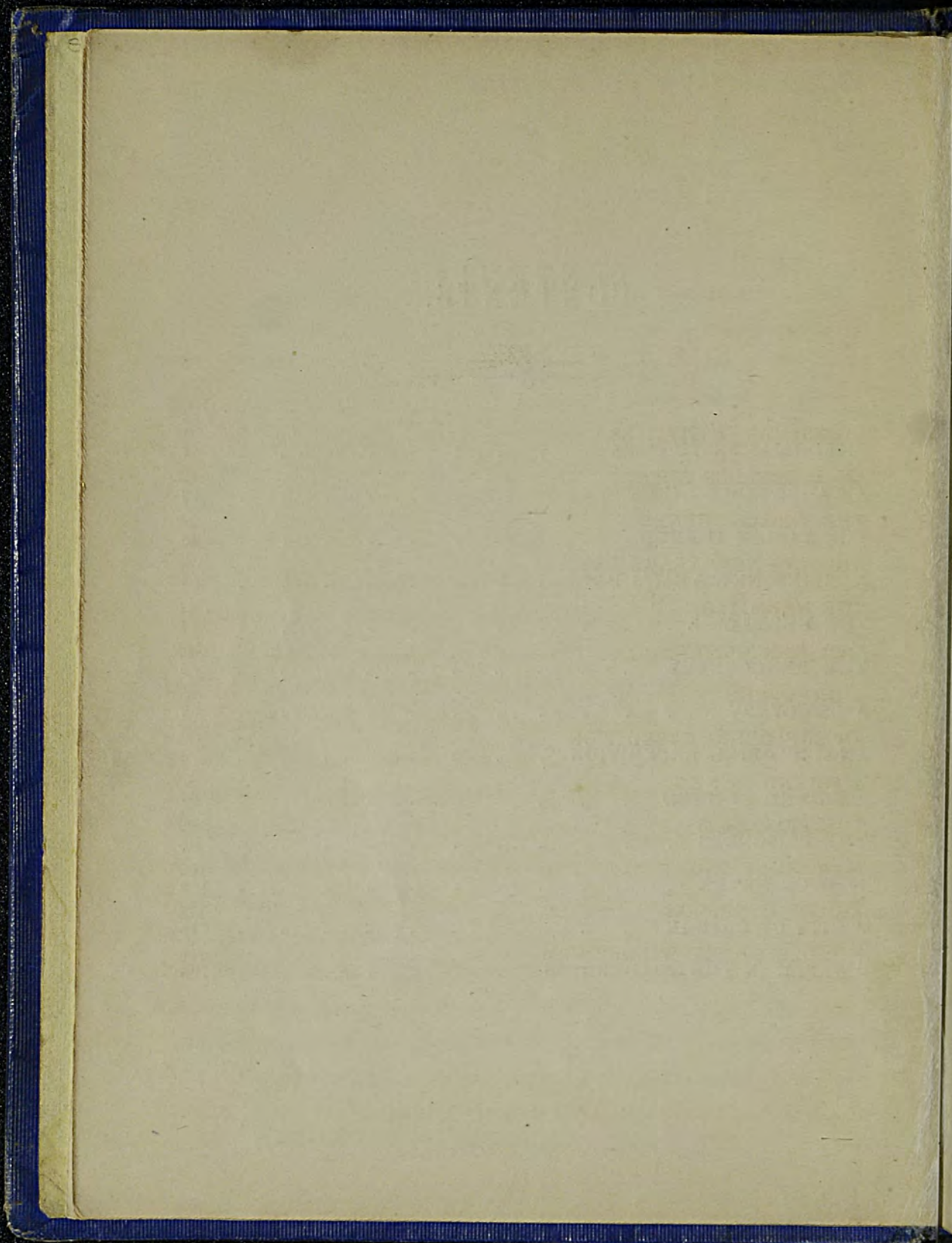
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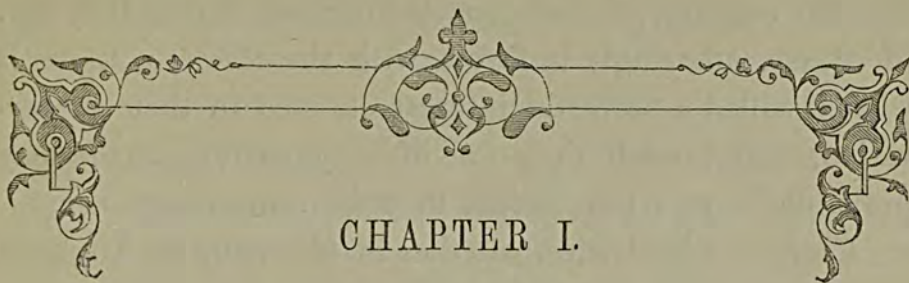
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CHAPTER I.

CHRISTMAS FESTIVITIES.

MOST people have heard—perhaps till they have been tired—of the mode of celebrating Christmas Eve in Germany; of the fir tree, with its numerous wax lights, and bunches of sweetmeats, and toys, and gaily coloured ribbons set up in the parlour, and the tables placed round the room with the names of all the members of the family, to which, somehow or other, all sorts of pretty things find their way. Nobody is in the secret but the papa and mamma, and now and then an odd aunt or so; and when the important evening arrives, the children have to wait, generally for a long time, upstairs or downstairs, or in some out of the way corner, while the decoration of the room is going on, but at a given signal, in they rush, to be dazzled and astonished at its brilliant appearance, and to wonder at the gorgeous display on each of their tables.

These customs are, indeed, like the Christmas games of our own country, somewhat on the decline; but as they are, of course, amazingly in favour with the children, there is what is called a powerful interest enlisted in their preservation, and though they are of very early date, it may probably be very long before they die away altogether.

Christmas festivities, whether in Germany or England, are no doubt pleasant things for those who can join in them with light hearts, and even those who cannot may hope that the social gaieties of such a time may, if carried on in a right spirit and not without thought, help to keep alive good will and kindly feeling amongst all who acknowledge with thankfulness and joy the great event they are intended to commemorate.

There are, however, some drawbacks on the advantages of such elaborate merry-makings, and it is generally wiser to cultivate a taste for simpler and more inexpensive pleasures. In Germany the cost of a Christmas Eve is often a matter of serious vexation to people who are not rich; and we recollect to have seen in Paris a gentleman purchasing on New Year's-day large packets of *bon-bons*, wherewith to illustrate his gallantry among the ladies of his acquaintance, with as rueful a countenance as if he had been enjoined to it by way of penance for his sins. Besides this, various sorrows will often darken and overcloud the season of Christmas, as well as all other seasons, and

are then more keenly felt from the notion that it is a time when people have a sort of right to be happy. On the whole, therefore, it seems more advisable to take thankfully any occasions of innocent pleasure that come in our way, but not to go far out of it to seek them: and we cannot agree with those who are inclined to mourn, as a sort of national calamity, the decay of old Christmas pastimes, or to wish their revival; for as they are unsuited to the times in which we live, though we may try with all our might to be pleased with them, we cannot sometimes help feeling that they are rather foolish and rather coarse. It would be well, also, in talking about the joys of the "days of old," to look sometimes a little on the other side of the picture, and see to what kind of interruptions these joys were liable: and this reminds us of our tale.

The Christmas concerning which we have a story to tell, was one which, for a great number of people, was likely to be a melancholy one enough. England was torn to pieces with civil dissensions; and in Germany a war had been raging for many years, which had filled it from end to end with ruin, and blood, and tears. Thousands and tens of thousands of men had been killed, cities taken and burnt, beautiful corn-fields and pleasant green meadows trampled into wastes of mud and sand, and numberless families driven from their homes, and left to starve.

Every useful art, and every kind of peaceful industry

declined from day to day ; for as there was no security for any kind of property, nor safety for the quiet citizen, there was, of course, less and less trade going on every year.

The soldier alone ruled in those iron times ; and he mostly fought, without any motive of duty, or honour, or patriotism, merely for the sake of pay or plunder.

The leaders of all parties had adopted the maxim that the war must " support itself ;" that is to say, the troops must live at the expense of every country they came into : so that to the poor inhabitants it mattered little whether those who came to rob them were called friends or foes. In Bohemia, before the end of the war, more than two millions of people had perished in consequence of it ; in the small state of Wurtemberg thirty thousand houses had been laid in ashes ; many districts were entirely depopulated ; and countries, once populous and fertile, were becoming changed into a howling wilderness.

The war had now lasted many years, yet there appeared no chance of peace ; and of those who had hitherto escaped these miseries, no one knew whose turn was to come next, or what the morrow might bring forth. Even if people had no immediate cause of fear for themselves, they could not but be sad to see the wretchedness around them.

In the family of Leopold Merck, a rich merchant of the town of Schweidnitz, in Silesia, where all anniversaries, and more especially this of Christmas, had been hitherto

most zealously observed, it was this time a matter of great hesitation whether it should be kept by any merry-making at all.

Leopold Merck was, notwithstanding many losses, still one of the richest men in his city; for, as he was known to be highly honourable in his dealings, and was a most active and indefatigable man of business, he had been able to bear up better than most others through these bad times.

He and his wife were also both kind, charitable people; living always in a much simpler manner than their income might have warranted, and doing all they could for the poor sufferers: yet there were many whom neither they nor any one else could help; and it seemed almost a sin to be lighting up rooms and enjoying one's self, when so many were without a roof to shelter them, or a morsel of food. But as the time drew near, Frau Merck could not help grieving over the disappointment the children would feel; and her husband, who had often enough distressing news to bring home that could not but grieve his wife and children, thought he would like to see them again look happy, for one night at least; and so, after all, it was settled only a few days before that there should be a Christmas Eve. "The children, poor things," the mother said, "would feel all these troubles soon enough; there was no harm in their being merry while they could."

The time left for preparation was now so short, that

Frau Merck was in a bustle up to the last minute. The wants and wishes of all parties were to be cunningly found out, and every one, down to the lowest servant, was to be surprised with some unexpected present. Fortunately, it was not thought necessary that a present should be of no use; and gowns and caps for the maids, and books for the children, formed a sort of solid foundation for the more showy trifles on the Christmas table. All the purchases were to be secretly smuggled into the house, and stowed away in odd corners, that their presence might not be suspected; and when the time came, they were to be got out without any one seeing, and conveyed into the usual family sitting-room, which, being one of the largest rooms in the house, was to be transformed into a festal hall "for this night only." While this was going on, it was necessary that the children should be locked up in a place that contained none of these hidden treasures; and on Frau Merck consulting with the nurse, it appeared there was no prison so eligible for this purpose as the store-room or the counting-house. Now the counting-house was at all times forbidden ground to the children, so they had to troop into the store-room, which fortunately was (as it mostly is in old German houses) a good large room; and Frau Merck took the baby, that the nurse might help in carrying in the extra tables that were wanted, and went to her well stored presses to take out some fine snow-white breakfast cloths to

cover them; for the white showed off better the various colours of the commodities, and made the room look lighter. The book-keeper, Albert Thorn, who was a great favourite in the family, was called up to decorate a beautiful little crib, with a waxen baby in it, which served to recall the original occasion of the festival—a custom retained from the Roman Catholic times, although the family were stanch Protestants, as might have been guessed, by a very handsome figure of Dr. Martin Luther, and a very ugly one of his opponent, Tetzal, which figured among the decorations of the Christmas tree. The “Hausfrau” was going about from one table to another distributing a judicious mixture of the useful and the agreeable: clothes, and playthings, and rattletraps, and sometimes hard dollars; and dividing, with wise and scrupulous impartiality, the various portions of gingerbread-nuts, marchpane, and sweetmeats, disguised mostly under the agreeable and tempting forms of coals, bits of candle, old shoes, and other ingenious devices suggested by the fancy and wit of the artist. The book-keeper at length finished his cradle, though it had taken him a long time to manage an obstinate wax angel, who ought to have rested lightly on the edge, and looked, in a tender manner, on the infant within, but who, being rather top-heavy, would pitch over upon it. However, the difficulty was at length got over by softening the angel’s feet in the candle, and sticking him on the rim

of the crib; by which means, though he looked web-footed and a little stumpy, he was kept in the right place.

In the middle of the room stood a large round table, and on the top of that a washing tub turned upside down, covered with white drapery, and hung round with garlands of everlasting and artificial flowers, and on the top of that, in a large pot concealed by many frills and furbelows of pink, blue, and gilt paper, a young fir tree rising like a pyramid to the ceiling, and bearing on every branch and twig little wax candles, and sugar apples and pears, and Nuremberg toys, and such like rare fruit. Among these nurse had contrived to introduce several caricature figures, intended to represent the leading members of the Catholic party, each in the form of some disagreeable animal, with the name inscribed beneath, but slyly spelt backwards. To her great discomfiture Albert Thorn spied them out, and brought them to Frau Merck: "Dear Madam," said he, "you will not, I am sure, wish the children to have these things; scorn and hatred are bad weapons to fight with in the cause of religion."

"Heaven forbid!" said the mother, taking them with a look of great vexation: "these unhappy differences have brought sorrow enough to us all; we need not embitter even our children's plays with them. Take them away, nurse." And she tossed the gingerbread mischief into the apron of the nurse, who, as she walked away with them,

muttered, that, perhaps, to judge by looks, the book-keeper had not always been so peaceably inclined.

This was an allusion to a marked scar on the forehead, looking very like a sabre cut, which rather disfigured a handsome face, and which, coupled with the tall soldier-like figure of the young man, seemed rather out of character for a clerk.

“Nurse, I desire you will never utter a word upon that subject,” said Frau Merck, in a tone of more severity than she often used towards an attached old servant, who was mostly allowed to do as she pleased, and who oftener found fault with her mistress than her mistress with her; “you must know that the safety, perhaps the life, of Master Albert depends on our prudence.”

Now the fact was, nurse knew this perfectly well, and would have been as sorry as any one of the family that any harm should happen to him; but she had been vexed at his interfering with her mode of insinuating what she thought sound religious principles into *her* children, as she called them; and as she could never get her master and mistress to join her in hating the Papists, she thought in her heart that their Protestantism was not of the first quality.

What she said in reply Frau Merck could not well make out, and thought it as well not to inquire, but went on with her decorations; and when all was ready, sent down to request the presence of her husband previous to

summoning the children. Great was her disappointment, when a man servant, usually employed in the counting-house, entered with a message: "Master had sent him to say the festival must begin without him, or it would be too late. Some important letters had just come in which he must attend to immediately."

"Oh! that is bad news for us," said the "Hausfrau," as she turned, with a sigh, to assist in lighting the candles, and repeated the words of a song, meaning much the same thing as the old Scotch one:—

"There's little pleasure in the house
When our good man's awa'."

She knew, besides, that it would be no trifling matter that would detain Leopold Merck among his books and ledgers on Christmas Eve, and it was too probable that it was of a nature little in harmony with a festive occasion.

She felt, therefore, already that a damp had been thrown over the gaiety of the evening, and that it required something of an effort to welcome, with the proper amount of hilarity, a few friends and neighbours, who happening to have no children of their own, did not hold the "high solemnity" at their own houses, and had therefore been invited to join in hers.

The apartment was now soon all radiant with the glitter of the numerous little candles; and Frau Merck laid hold

of a hand-bell that stood beside her, and smiled as she gave a very gentle ring. It was answered by a distant shout of joy from the prisoners in the store-room. She waited a moment, and then rung a second time; and then was heard the sound of many little feet clattering up stairs like a troop of horse, and the clamour of many merry little voices. Frau Merck now put down the bell, saying, in a tone of educational severity, that it was very good for young people to learn to wait, and that it would add to their pleasure afterwards; but she did not, nevertheless, put their patience to a very severe trial, for in half a minute the third and last ring was given, the door burst open as if by a petard, and, with a tremendous yell of rapture, in rushed the whole horde, with sparkling eyes and red faces, staring wildly about at the Christmas splendours. At first they were dazzled; for as there was a great deal of straw on the floor of the store-room, on which heaps of apples were laid up for winter use, nurse would not allow them a candle; and now, after being so long in the dark, the glare of light blinded them, and in their eagerness they could see nothing. Gradually, however, cries of "Look here!" and "Look here!" and "This is mine!" and "Oh, how beautiful!" and so forth, announced that they were becoming acquainted with their several possessions, and enjoying

"The sober certainty of waking bliss."

"And will you not look what the Christmas child has

brought you?" said Frau Merck to the book-keeper; for there is a story, rather a foolish story, sometimes told to children in Germany, that all the presents are brought by a sort of heavenly child, who makes his appearance all on a sudden on Christmas Eve. With a half melancholy smile, the young man turned towards the spot she pointed to, as, drawing aside a curtain which concealed the recess of a window, she displayed a table not hitherto seen, on which were laid out the various articles of a rich and complete costume for an opulent citizen of the period, including a quantity of fine linen, and a very handsome sword, without which the dress would not have been complete.

"Oh, come and look at what Master Albert has got!" screamed the children, as they ran up to the table.

"See!" said a little boy, who, being a delicate child, and not over-courageous, was rather warlike in his talk, "with that sword Master Albert can go and fight Wallenstein." And he lifted it up with both hands and gave it a flourish, to the imminent danger of the eyes of the company.

Albert took it from the hands of the child, and contemplated it with evident pleasure, trying its temper in various ways.

"You have been too generous, dear Madam, to the destitute stranger, who already owes so much to your bounty," said he, turning to the "Hausfrau," and respect-

fully kissing her hand; "I have little use for such a weapon now, and my old one might have served."

"Nay," said she, "I do not like the looks of that; the hacked hilt and the spots upon the blade tell disagreeable tales. A burgher's sword ought never to look as if it had been used."

"Heaven grant I may have no need to use this, unless it should be in defence of the hospitable hearth that has sheltered me," replied Albert.

Just then, the door opened, and the master of the house entered, with an open letter in his hand. The children rushed towards him, and jumped upon him in a fury of gratitude; but he was not, as usual, in a humour to romp with them, and it was evident there was something wrong.

"I have just received this from your mother," said he, addressing his wife, and handing her the letter; "I am sorry to say it contains worse news than usual. My friend," he added, when he had beckoned Albert aside into the recess of a window, "I have an unpleasant service to ask of you. Wallenstein is playing the tyrant in his wonted fashion in his new dukedom, and has just issued an edict that all orphan lads under twenty shall be sent by their guardians to a new military school that he has set up. He has thrown my wife's uncle into prison for not sending for a ward of his, who, you know, is at school here, and,

for fear of worse, we must let the boy go. The duke is also pulling down whole streets in Sagan to improve the view from his castle windows, often without offering any compensation to the owners. You know there are three houses belonging to Kramer Meyer, of this city, on which I have lent large sums. They are threatened next, and it is just possible that if you were there, you might obtain an audience, and do something for us. My poor mother-in-law, too, being a widow, is sadly oppressed and tormented by the soldiers quartered upon her, and your presence might be of use."

"I am ready to go this moment," said Albert, "if you can let me have a horse. It would be better to lose no time, and you can best spare me during the holidays."

"I would fain say do not leave us to-night," said Merck; "but poor Engelmann is lying in prison, and the boy cannot go alone. If it should be possible, try and bring the women over here. Those brutal soldiers are bad company for them, and especially for pretty little Greta. Tell her not to mind a little loss in worldly goods, if she cannot come without. These are times when we must not set our affections too much on these things; and, thank God, I have still a roof to shelter them. I will tell them to saddle brown Hans for you directly; old Peter and the lad shall go with you; and see that you are all well armed, for the roads are not over safe: and, above all, mind and do not get into

a quarrel with this swaggering captain of whom my poor mother complains.”

Loud were the lamentations of the children, and terrible the threats uttered of what they would do to Wallenstein—if *they could*—as their mother left the room to make some arrangements for the comfort of the travellers; and with their arms full of their newly acquired property, they sorrowfully came up to take leave of their favourite.

In less than an hour he was gone, and they stood amidst all the Christmas finery, with sorrowful hearts, mournfully munching their gingerbread, and listening to the departing sound of the horses' hoofs as they clattered over the hard frozen ground.





CHAPTER II.

AN AGREEABLE GUEST.

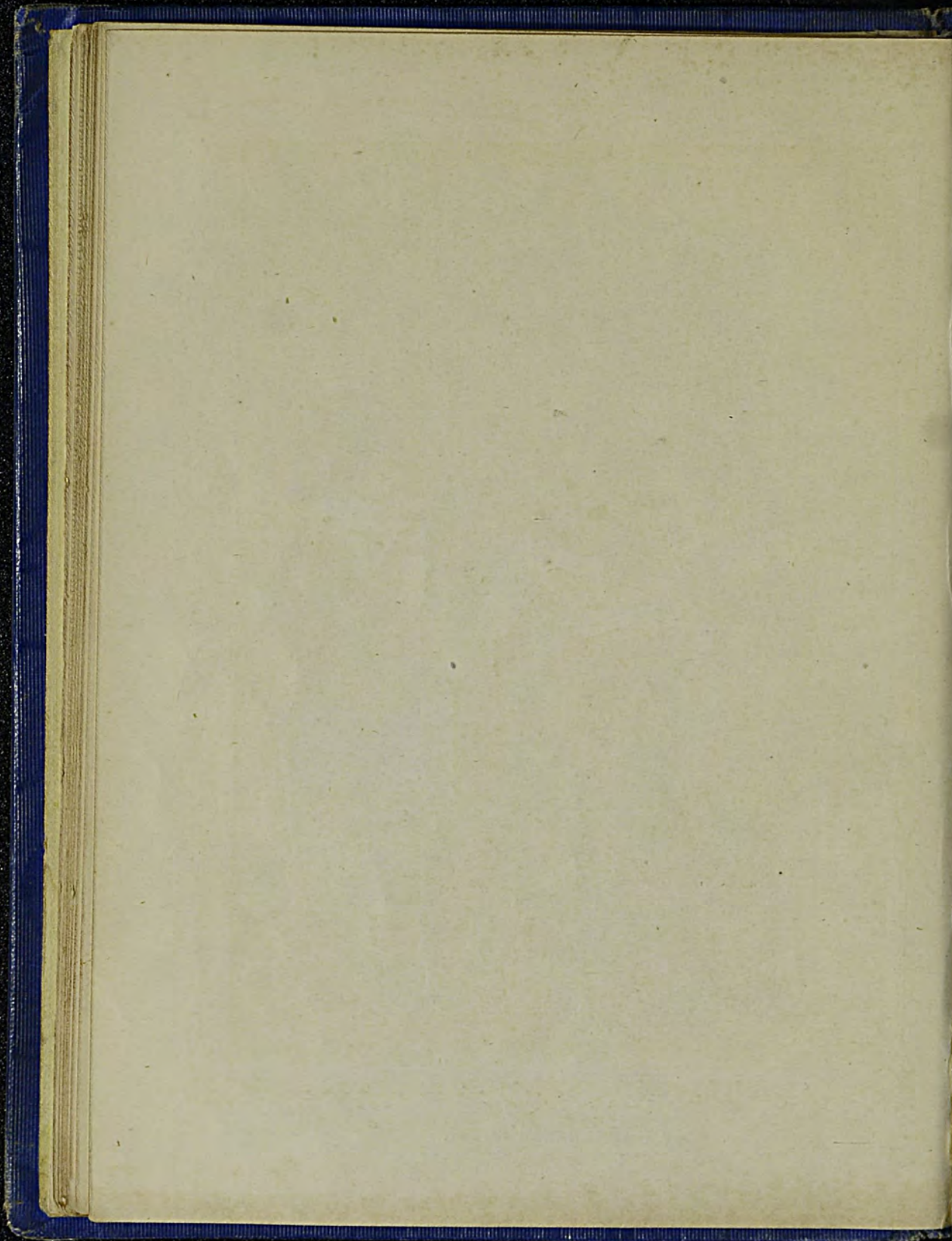
SILESIA, as my readers probably know, is that province of Prussia, which Frederick, surnamed the Great, took the opportunity to clutch when it fell to the inheritance of a neighbouring sovereign, who was a mere girl, and therefore no match for him.

Now, he really in many respects deserved the name of Great, better than most kings on whom it has been bestowed; but he committed this shabby robbery, according to his own account, principally in order that the world might think him a clever fellow; just as some people, whom nobody ever called great, will do things which they own to be wrong, because "it will *look so*" if they do n't.

This province is bounded on the south and south-west by the Giant Mountains; a magnificent range, from many



AN AGREEABLE GUEST.



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of whose summits not only Silesia, but all Saxony and Bohemia, lie spread out like a map at the feet of the spectator. It is now inhabited by peaceful industrious people, who ought to be prosperous, but are not; for they are still obliged to devote a considerable part of their time and labour to the benefit of the lords of the great estates.

It once had a separate sovereign of its own, who used to be elected by the people; and there is a story that when one of these elections was going to take place, an angel happened to make a call upon one of the candidates, who entertained him so plentifully with roast pork, that the angel, who was partial to this dainty dish, left as a blessing on the house, that loins and griskins should be spontaneously produced upon its table; and by this means the voters were so plenteously regaled, that the candidate gained his election—we fear by something very like bribery and corruption. After this, Silesia rejoiced in no less than sixteen dukes, all reigning at once; but at the time we are speaking of—in the earlier half of the seventeenth century—it had fallen to the dominions of the house of Austria.

Although it afterwards suffered as much, or more, from the war than almost any other part of Germany, it had, up to the time we are speaking of, in a great measure escaped.

Many evidences, indeed, there were of the presence of this cruel scourge; but in the vicinity of the town of Sagan the presence of the Duke of Friedland, the all-powerful

General Wallenstein, had suddenly called forth an appearance of splendour and festivity, strangely at variance with the real condition of the country.

If successful ambition could possibly make a man happy, this Wallenstein might now have been the happiest mortal breathing; for he had raised himself from being a mere friendless soldier to be second in rank only to the Emperor, and, in some respects, even more powerful. He was at the head of a hundred thousand men, who knew no law but his will; he had the privileges of coining his own money, and appointing his own officers without consulting the Emperor. He possessed immense estates and vast revenues, and lived in a style of regal splendour. Gentlemen of the best families vied with each other for the honour of serving him; the Emperor's chamberlains left his court to be taken into that of Wallenstein; he had sixty pages and fifty yeomen in his anti-chambers, and six noblemen and as many knights in constant attendance on his person. The richness of his liveries, the splendour of his equipages, the costly decorations of his palace, were constant themes of wonder. On one occasion, when he was leaving Prague, the procession consisted of fourteen carriages, each drawn by six horses, twenty cavaliers of high rank, and a hundred and twenty livery servants following: all these attendants were dressed in new scarlet and blue uniforms; ten trumpeters sounding their silver

gilt trumpets opened the way; and even the baggage wag-gons were covered with gilt leather. When he was about to visit one of his palaces in a small town of Bohemia, orders were sent to have the apartments hung with satin and velvet, and stabling prepared for eight hundred horses. Yet, surrounded by all this power and grandeur, Wallenstein appears to have been a melancholy and unhappy man. He seldom spoke a word more than was quite unavoidable, was scarcely ever seen to smile, and he was at last murdered by men whom he had trusted and loaded with benefits; instigated to the deed, and afterwards rewarded, by the sovereign, who owed to him the preservation of his throne, and probably, also, of his life.

It was on the evening of the third day after leaving Schweidnitz (for people did not travel in those days at railroad pace), that Albert Thorn and his companions stopped before the door of Frau Rosentiel, in the town of Sagan. The snow was coming down thick and fast, and her agreeable guest, Captain Gripenclau, had been at home the whole day, and was now lying at full length on a settle in her sitting-room, drinking spiced wine out of a handsome silver goblet, which was one of the few relics now left to the widow of the opulence of her early days, and entertaining her and her daughter with stories of various pleasant jests wherewith he had amused himself in different houses where he had been quartered. How, when

the family did not serve him up as good a dinner as he thought himself entitled to, he had pitched the whole concern, dishes and all, out of the window ; and how he had threatened to hang a lad of fifteen for refusing to tell where his mother had hidden her money,—and immediately the mother had come screaming from her hiding place, and brought him her apron full of gold and silver pieces.

The widow, whom many sufferings had drilled into patience, sat bending her head over her knitting, and listening in sad silence to these brutal boasts ; but her daughter, Greta, appeared hardly able to contain her indignation ; her cheeks were flushed, her eyes sparkling, and her hands trembled so that she could scarcely continue her work ; and when, from time to time, the worthy captain thought proper to look admiringly at her, and tried to throw a loving expression into his ogre-like features, her disgust became too much to conceal. She complied with his request to pour him out some wine, turning away her head as she did so, at the imminent risk of spilling it, to avoid looking at him, and was then preparing to leave the room to give vent to her feelings in tears, which she would not that her mother should see, when a maid servant entered and announced a stranger just arrived, who wished to speak with Frau Rosentiel alone.

“ Oh, don't make any secrets with me,” said the cap-

tain, "I like to see all that's going on. Show him up, wench, he can say what he's got to say here, I trow."

This was a new piece of impertinence, but it would have been imprudent to resent it; and, sitting down again, the widow quietly desired the stranger might be shown in. The servant retired, and in a minute or two returned, ushering in our acquaintance, Albert Thorn, who saluted the captain with cold formality, the widow and her daughter with respectful cordiality.

"I am the book-keeper of your son-in-law, Master Leopold Merck, in the town of Schweidnitz," said he, "and bring with me your letter to him, dated a few days back, as my credentials. I am charged by him to request you and your daughter to accompany me back to Schweidnitz."

"How! what's that? you want to leave the place?" asked the captain, fiercely twitching his mouth and nose about in a way he always did when he was angry, his red whiskers seeming to bristle up like the hair of an angry dog.

"Family circumstances require my presence in Schweidnitz," said the widow faintly.

"And my circumstances require your presence here," growled the man of war. "Your business now is to wait on the honourable officers and soldiers billeted in your house, and see that they are made comfortable."

“ I will make arrangements to provide for your comfort while I am away, Sir Captain,” urged the mistress of the house timidly.

“ Go, then, wherever you will,” said he with an oath, “ but I shall keep little Greta here to wait upon me.”

A crimson flush rose in the pale face of the mother, but she was spared the necessity of a reply to this insult by Albert, who, gently taking Greta’s hand, and placing her on the other side of him as he advanced a step or two towards the captain, said, calmly,—

“ Make yourself easy, dear Madam ; unless you are by the Duke of Friedland’s order a prisoner in your own house, the captain will be good enough to allow you to leave it without requiring hostages.”

“ How ! what’s that ?” said the captain, turning suddenly round on the speaker, and measuring him from head to foot, while Greta glanced anxiously and gratefully up at her protector. “ You’re a pretty fellow !” continued the captain, with a scornful laugh : “ strong, and well grown, and bold enough—you ought to belong to us. Come, let’s be friends, and drink a cup together to the health of our most gracious Emperor, Ferdinand.”

“ I must decline that honour till we are better acquainted,” said Thorn coldly, putting aside the offered goblet.

“ What !” roared the captain, “ you wo’n’t drink the

Emperor's health, and you affront me in return for my civility! You're one of the rebels, and—

“Oh drink, I beseech you!” said Greta, eagerly and terrified for her new friend. He smiled as he took the proffered silver cup from her trembling hand, and drank, saying,—

“God save the Emperor, and enlighten his understanding to see what will be for his own true glory, and the welfare of his subjects.”

“Bravo, comrade!” shouted the captain, springing up, and clapping him on the shoulder. “You'll never repent of entering the service.”

“Entering the service!” repeated Albert, in a tone of astonishment.

“Aye, my fine fellow,” said Gripenclau with a grin; “you've drunk the Emperor's health with me, a captain in the Imperial Army, and that's quite enough to enlist you. Take my word for it, in less than a month you shall be a corporal.”

“Is it possible that you can disgrace your Emperor and the service by such tricks as this?” asked Albert indignantly. “I am a citizen of Schweidnitz, and you can have no right over me.”

“Right! don't talk to me about right,” was the reply. “There's my right—that's a good one, all the world over.” And he threw his long heavy sword upon the table, and

striding to the door, tore it open, and shouted some words below. A heavy step was heard on the stairs; a gigantic guardsman, of one of Wallenstein's regiments, entered, and stooping to pass through the low door, rose up again like a tower, and stood perfectly still to receive orders. "Take this recruit to the guard-house," said the captain; "he shall be sworn in to-morrow."

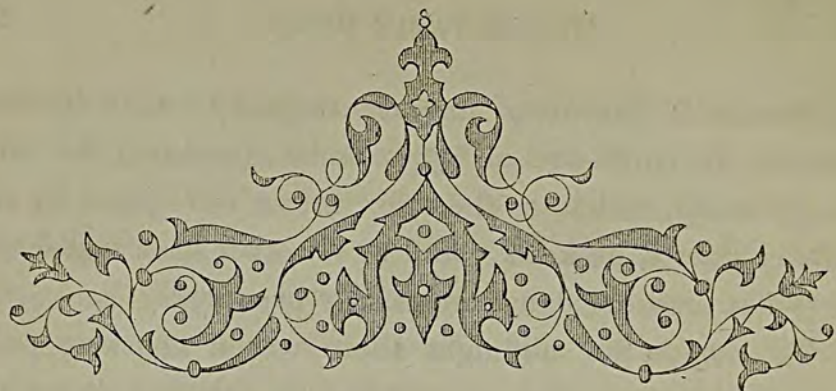
"March!" said the figure pointing to the door; but Albert quietly drew a parchment from his pocket, and held it up before the eyes of the captain, saying, "My patent as a captain in the service of his majesty, King Christian of Denmark, with whom the duke has just made peace, protects me from the honour of serving under you. You must, however, give me immediate satisfaction for the insult. Follow me!"

The captain, however, who, in spite of his fierce looks, had no particular wish to fight more than was necessary to earn his pay or get a share in some plunder, now saw that he had met with one whom he could not easily frighten, and muttering something about important business, and saying he would meet Albert on the following morning, left the room rather hastily, followed by his orderly; and Thorn, after soothing the fears of Greta and her mother by assurances of his and their perfect safety, requested them to make preparations for their departure on the morrow. He then wrapped himself in his cloak, and lay down on

the floor with the air of one accustomed to take his rest wherever he could find an opportunity, declining the offer of a bedroom, which, as the spare rooms were filled by the military guests, he knew could be no other than that which the widow and her daughter usually occupied.

Till long after midnight there was a constant noise through the house, the opening and shutting of doors, the tread of heavy boots, armed with the jingling spurs then in fashion, which had a particular contrivance to make as much noise as possible, uproarious songs shouted in various tongues, for the army of Wallenstein was collected from almost every country in Europe, and not unfrequently loud sudden brawls; but at length even these died away, and for awhile there was silence and peace.





CHAPTER III.

THE TABLES TURNED.

ANXIETY to fulfil the mission he had undertaken, prevented Albert from sleeping more than three or four hours; and, long before the winter's morning dawned, he had arisen from his hard bed, and was occupying himself in writing, by the light of a small lamp which had been left burning, a petition to the Duke of Friedland.

Humble as was his position, he was not without hopes of obtaining redress, if he could obtain an audience; for this Wallenstein, though often guilty of tyrannical acts, as he allowed nothing to stand in the way of his will, was not a mean tyrant, and was quite as ready, or, perhaps, rather more so, to attend to the complaints of the lowest vassal as of the greatest prince.

He was also at leisure just at present, for he had

retired to his palace at Sagan in a fit of resentment against the court,—a resentment which had really just grounds; for though the Emperor Ferdinand was sure to come caressing and fawning upon him, whenever he was in trouble, and wanted Wallenstein's assistance, he was always jealous and suspicious of him; and at last rewarded the greatest services any subject ever rendered to a king, by a most cruel and treacherous murder.

Wallenstein professed just now, whether sincerely or not, to be quite willing to resign the command of the Imperial Armies, and appeared wholly occupied in overlooking alterations and improvements in his estate; but as he was, as usual, surrounded by all the state of a monarch, it was no easy matter to obtain access to him.

This difficulty, however, was got over in rather an unexpected manner, for Albert was aroused from his employment, almost as soon as it was daylight, by a great noise below, and by the sound of the tramp of armed men ascending the stairs. Presently the door opened, and a corporal, with six halberdiers, advanced into the room; and, to his great surprise, Albert was informed, that they had orders to bring him before the Duke of Friedland, and that he must follow them immediately.

Concluding that his arrest was probably a mere mistake, he was by no means unwilling to obey the summons, for he knew not how else to come to speech of the

mighty Wallenstein, and he followed, therefore, with great alacrity.

The streets of the little town, early as was the hour, were all bustle and animation. Troops of gaily attired servants, with richly caparisoned horses, were prancing about; herds of cattle, and waggon-loads of provisions and wine were arriving; the place was all alive with brilliant uniforms and martial music; soldiers were lolling out of the windows, laughing, drinking, and gaming; and the poor citizens running too and fro on their several errands, with anxious, melancholy faces, that contrasted strongly with the insolent jollity of their unbidden guests. In the immediate vicinity of the castle, however, all noise was hushed; sentinels were pacing before the gates, no one was allowed to approach without a written permission, and every voice was lowered to a reverential whisper. Albert and his escort advanced up the stately avenues, formed by pulling down several streets, and entered the precincts of the palace. The six halberdiers were left waiting in the inner court, and he was then conducted into an antechamber, filled with soldiers; and through a door, opening into it, he could see another apartment, occupied by persons of higher rank, who appeared to be waiting for an audience of the duke. Among them were several envoys from sovereign princes of various states of Germany, who chose to address their requests to Wallen-

stein instead of to the Emperor. They were ushered into the audience chamber with all the ceremonies of a court: and it was not till nearly two hours had elapsed, that an officer approached to where Albert Thorn had been stationed, and gave him a signal to follow.

On a raised platform, covered with rich carpets, at the upper end of the apartment, was placed a magnificently gilt arm-chair, from which a tall, stately-looking man, in a dress of black Spanish velvet, covered with glittering stars and orders, appeared just to have arisen. From his shoulders hung a crimson velvet mantle, lined with ermine, and his high, stern features, and piercing eagle glance, suited well with his almost regal habiliments. At a table, just below the platform, were seated three secretaries, writing diligently, and a priest of the order of Jesuits seemed also to be taking notes of all that passed.

It was not, however, the first time that Albert had been brought into the imposing presence of Wallenstein; and after making a respectful salutation, he drew himself up in soldierly style, and awaited, with composure, the permission to speak.

The duke looked at him sharply and in silence for a few moments, and then said, in a quick, peremptory tone, "Captain in the Danish service?"

"I was so,—there is my commission," said Albert, presenting it.

The duke glanced at it for a moment, and then returned it, saying, "A prisoner of war, then?"

"Your highness's pardon," replied Albert; "it is now two years since I have become a citizen of Schweidnitz. I am serving as a book-keeper in the house of Merck and Company, of that city."

"A spy," said the duke, knitting his brow.

"My passport is ready for your highness's inspection," said Albert, in a more haughty tone than often met the ears of the mighty Wallenstein; and, after a pause, he added, calmly meeting the searching glance of the duke, "When your highness drove Count Mansfield out of Silesia, I was left behind, severely wounded, and was found by the benevolent merchant, who is now my principal, and carried to his house, and kindly treated."

"What are you doing here?" was the next question.

"I came hither to bring a scholar to the new Military School, and to conduct back to Schweidnitz the mother-in-law and sister of Master Merck.

"Prove this."

"May it please your highness, send to Jacob Engelmann, the lad's guardian, who has been detained under arrest till he should be produced. For the rest of my errand, I refer to the widow Rosentiel, from whose house I have been brought. She must still have the letter I brought with me as my credentials."

“Is the woman here?”

An attendant replied, that she was waiting without.

Albert was ordered to stand aside until she should appear. In the meantime various other persons were introduced, all with the same ceremonies as were used in approaching a sovereign; and short, peremptory answers were given to them, as if Wallenstein consulted only what he chose to do, and had no need to appeal to any one.

Presently Albert was ordered to stand forward again, and a group advanced, amongst whom he had no difficulty in recognising the widow Rosentiel and her daughter, though their hoods were closely drawn over their faces. They were followed by his acquaintance of the preceding evening, the worthy Captain Gripenclau.

“You are accused,” said Wallenstein, addressing Albert, but glancing towards the captain as he spoke, “of having uttered treasonable words concerning his Majesty the Emperor.”

A young female voice uttered an indignant denial, and there was something as much like a laugh, as could be ventured in such a presence.

The girl shrunk back, and the widow advanced with hasty though trembling steps, and, kneeling, presented a paper, which was passed to one of the secretaries for examination, while Albert hastened to relate, in a few words, what had taken place after his drinking the health.

“Shame on you, captain,” said Wallenstein. “Does not all Europe supply recruits for our armies, that you would disgrace the service thus?”

“It is a heretic plot!” exclaimed the captain, though in manifest confusion. “The widow and her daughter are Lutherans. I have watched them going to a preaching at Eibersdorf.”

“A soldier should be no priest’s spy,” said the duke. “The Emperor’s subjects may think as they please for me, if they will only *do* as I please. You are placed under arrest for eight and forty hours.” And the bullying captain retired, like a whipped schoolboy, from the presence of the dreaded chief; who then addressing Albert, said in a more friendly tone, “Have not I seen you somewhere before?”

“Perhaps at Dessau, on the Elbe,” replied Albert.

“Right!” exclaimed the duke. “You are the officer who held out so gallantly in the last redoubt?” Albert bowed. “I was much pleased with you on that occasion. You know we have made peace with Denmark. If it is your wish to take service with the Emperor, your patent need be no hindrance.”

“Many thanks to your highness,” replied Thorn, “but I cannot fight against my fellow Protestants.”

“T is well!” said the duke rather haughtily; and then, as if scorning to shew any displeasure, added, in a gracious tone, “Have you any boon to ask?”

Albert silently bent one knee to the ground, and presented the petition he had prepared. It was looked over by the duke, a few words written on it with a pencil, and passed to the secretary.

“Anything else?”

“Your highness’s gracious permission to take back with me Frau Rosentiel and her daughter, and the poor lad I brought hither, who likes not the company of strangers.”

“I perceive, camerado,” said the duke, with something as much like a smile as ever lighted his stern features, “thou art of those who lose nothing for want of asking. Be it as thou wilt then, and away with thee!”


“He has escaped like Daniel from the den of lions,” said Frau Rosentiel, as she joyfully followed her protector from the audience-chamber, and hastened home to make preparations for her journey.





CHAPTER IV.

KEEPING NEW YEAR'S DAY.

HE news contained in the letter Herr Merck had received from his mother-in-law, was not the only unwelcome intelligence that had reached him on the Christmas-Eve, when a stranger, looking in upon them, might have thought the family so gay and happy. The terrible war, of which we have spoken, which had desolated Germany for so many years, was called a religious war;—that is to say, it was one in which the quarrels, really stirred up by the pride, and covetousness, and bad passions, of both Catholics and Protestants, were covered by pretences of conscientious and religious motives. In the beginning, indeed, something like right feeling had existed on both sides. The Catholics really thought the souls of the Protestants so much in danger from what they called their heresy, that it would be merciful to try and induce them

by any means to renounce it: the Protestants, on their side, knew that they were right in resisting the tyrannical measures adopted to force them into professing doctrines which they did not and could not believe. But as the war went on, and both parties had been for many years trying, as contending parties in war always do, to injure each other as much as possible, they began really to hate each other; for it is a terrible consequence of people allowing themselves to indulge angry and revengeful feelings, that those feelings, instead of being satisfied, grow worse and worse; as, in the same way, to perform, from motives of duty, good actions towards our fellow-creatures, is a sure way really to love them at last.

In the year of which we have been speaking, the Catholic party, that of the Emperor of Germany, had gained several great victories over the Protestant princes who had joined together against him; and as they now thought themselves sure of triumphing over their enemies, they began to repent of the little moderation they had hitherto shewn towards such of the Emperor's subjects as were known or suspected to be Protestants. Amongst others, the town of Schweidnitz began to be threatened with very severe treatment, if the citizens persisted in remaining separate from the Catholic Church. It had hitherto been fortunate in escaping many of the heavy inflictions to which other cities had been subjected, partly because it contained

among its citizens men of considerable property, who had offered costly bribes to people in power, which, at that time, few were well principled enough to decline. Now, however, it was resolved that a great effort should be made to restore this wealthy city to the Church of Rome; and if the effort should fail, the citizens of Schweidnitz should be subjected to such punishment as it was thought their obstinacy would deserve. People, of all parties, sometimes give the name of obstinacy to a steady adherence to principles which they do not themselves approve.

It happened that Leopold Merck had had occasion to oblige one or two of the Catholic nobles, who held high appointments about the court, and who, from a feeling of private friendship, lost no time in warning him of the approaching danger. As to precisely what was intended, they could give him no information; but this very circumstance made the peril seem more formidable. They advised him, if he were not prepared to submit, and renounce what he believed the truth at the bidding of the Emperor, to lose no time in leaving Schweidnitz, and taking refuge in some place beyond his dominions. In pursuance of this advice, the merchant had been for some time past withdrawing such sums as could be spared from his business, and lodging them in the hands of a friend in the city of Hamburgh; whither he intended to remove his family on the first appearance of danger.

He had hitherto avoided mentioning the matter to his wife, as he was unwilling to disturb her with apprehensions which, after all, might prove groundless; but he was now convinced that no time was to be lost. A body of the Imperial troops was to be immediately ordered to Schweidnitz; the churches in which the Protestants had been hitherto allowed to perform divine service, were to be taken from them; their schools were to be shut up; and even force employed, if necessary, to bring them back to the profession of Catholicism. "I will rather," the Emperor Ferdinand had said, "be cut to pieces, or beg my bread outside the gates of my palace, than suffer heresy to exist any longer in my country!"

As some excuse for the many cruel things that were done in consequence of this resolution, we must recollect that he really thought it was for the good of his subjects, to compel them, by any means, to change their religion. "It is because I love the heretics," he had added, "that I wish to convert them from the paths of evil; and I would lay my head upon the block to-morrow, if, by so doing, I could make them renounce their errors!"

The Christmas room was still gaily lighted up with its numerous candles; the tables still displayed their treasures, but they were no longer heeded by even the youngest children. They were gathered in an anxious group around the settle on which their father and mother were

seated, and were listening, in silent wonder, to the news that they would probably have to leave their native city.

At first it seemed quite incredible; for no member of the family, except the father, had ever slept a single night beyond its walls; and none of the children had ever journeyed as much as five miles from it.

In these restless days, we can hardly fancy how people lived on contentedly from day to day, and from year to year, not only in the same town, but in the same rooms, and saw their children born, and grown up, and becoming old in their turn, without thinking any more of changing their house than a snail might do. Like the snail, they were somewhat slow in their movements; but, though moving about is sometimes very pleasant, their plan, too, had its advantages. With these old homes, that were the abodes of several generations, and which it seemed scarcely possible for any other family to inhabit, were connected many dear associations; and around them were entwined many beautiful and pious feelings, that have often no time to spring up in the brief periods during which most modern families of the middle class occupy houses;—we say of the middle class, because in this respect, perhaps, families of high rank have an advantage, as they generally have mansions which have descended from father to son, through many generations. A position of wealth and grandeur is, however, far less favourable to the kindly influences of

home and family, than a more humble one; and a family that has four or five homes, may be said to have none.

On the first day of the new year that was to be so eventful to the people of Schweidnitz, the cloth was laid for dinner in the house of Merck at the usual hour, and even with such appearance of extra abundance, as belonged to a day almost everywhere celebrated as a holiday. It was with a heavy heart that the mistress of the family had given her orders for this purpose; but she was kindly anxious to keep up as much as possible an appearance of cheerfulness, and prevent her mother and sister from feeling that they were not on a mere friendly visit, but had been driven from their home by the misfortunes of the time. The rather long grace, customary among the Lutherans of the time, had been said, the family served, and a little playful conversation was springing up, when a messenger arrived, pale and breathless, from the town-house, and requested the immediate presence of Merck. A certain Colonel Von Hardenfels, he said, an officer in the Imperial army, notorious for his bigotries and the ruthless cruelties he had been known to practise towards Protestants, was before the gates, and demanded a passage through the town for seven companies of his regiments. The gates had been closed till it was known whether the Senate would grant this request, which all agreed in thinking was a mere pretence to gain admission. If the citizens could

gain time to petition either the Emperor or Wallenstein, they might at all events obtain the favour of having other troops than these so dreaded ones quartered upon them.

Merck and Albert sprang up from table at the same moment, when they heard the message; and the former hurried to the council-house, to urge the Senate boldly to refuse admission to the soldiers, until proper measures could be taken to ensure the city's safety. But it was in vain that he, and a few other brave men, represented the necessity of a manly resistance: that they were under no obligation to admit the troops without an express order from the Emperor, which it did not appear the colonel had; that, in the worst case, they had strong walls and broad ditches, and might, with stout hearts, defend themselves until succour could be obtained, or terms made concerning the treatment they were to receive. But stout hearts were scarce among the senators; and many of them had capital dinners at home, which they were very unwilling to leave for the chance of spending a cold night upon the ramparts: so they tried to hide their cowardice under pretence of reliance on the honour of Colonel Hardenfels, and a benevolent wish to spare the troops the necessity of marching in such severe cold eight or ten miles round the city, as they would have to do if refused a passage through it.

It was with the deepest disappointment that Merck

returned home to announce the rejection of his councils, and the determination of the senate to admit the troops and trust all to the promise of the commanding officer.

“It is madness!” exclaimed Albert Thorn, who from the beginning had appeared excessively agitated. “I know Colonel Hardenfels well: he is one of those who hold as a principle that no faith is to be kept with heretics. Unless Heaven should work a miracle in their favour, they will bitterly repent this.” As he spoke, a sound seemed to catch his ear, though audible to none else. He rushed to the window and threw it open; and the family, listening with breathless anxiety, caught the distant sounds of military music. “It is too late,” he said, calmly, but with a face as pale as death; “the troops are already in the town. Herr Merck, let me entreat you to persuade the ladies to retire from this apartment to some one more remote from the street. We will protect them from insult as long as we can.”

“Are you not somewhat overrating our danger, my young friend?” replied Herr Merck, looking at him with some surprise. “Whatever may ultimately happen, surely no immediate violence is to be apprehended now that we have complied with their demands.”

“It is precisely that compliance that increases our peril; for it betrays our fear. But I have reasons to dread the approach of Colonel Hardenfels, which I will confide

to you on a better opportunity. In any other case I might hope to be of service, but where he is concerned, I do but increase your danger. Hark!" The sounds of a lively march were heard approaching, and then after a while gradually dying away.

"They have turned round the corner by St. Wenceslaus' church," said Frau Merck; "they are going towards the Lower Gate."

"Heaven grant they may!" replied Albert, "but to me the sounds appear to continue precisely at the same distance."

"At this moment the music suddenly stopped; there was a heavy sound, accompanied by something like a distant shriek; and immediately after the nurse rushed into the room, wringing her hands, and exclaiming,—

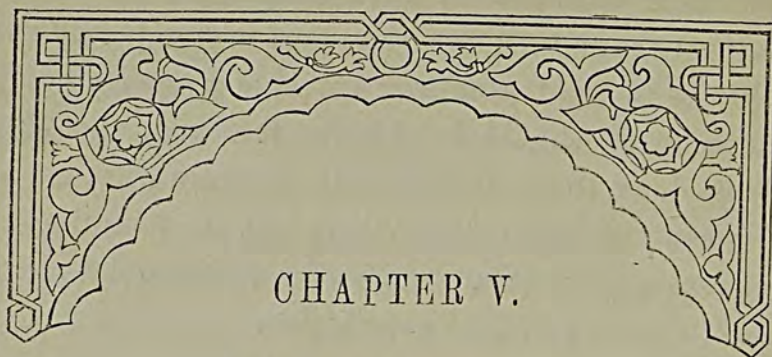
"Lord have mercy on us!—the soldiers have halted at the Lower Gate, and driven away the Burgher Guard. They are now in full march back to the middle of the town."

This was too true. The house of Merck was situated in the great street which touched at one end on the small river, and at the other on the ramparts. To reach this end from the Lower Gate, about one quarter of the rampart had to be traversed; and along them the troops were now rapidly advancing.

To leave the town was now, of course, impossible; it

was therefore settled, after a few moments' anxious deliberation, that the more defenceless part of the family should be kept out of sight, whatever valuable property admitted of concealment should be hastily removed, that Merck should go down to the Rathhaus to ascertain what measures were in contemplation, and Albert into the counting-house to make some hasty arrangements for an immediate removal in case it should be found practicable.





CHAPTER V.

THE HERMITAGE.

THE people who built the town of Schweidnitz had not been quite so anxious to save room as those who build houses about London usually are; and though the Mercks' house stood in the centre of the city, it had a garden that would be thought sufficient for two or three of our suburban cottages, or "villas," as they are politely called.

As the ground, also, was very irregular, it presented many odd ups and downs, and among others a ridge of sandstone rock, which had been found so troublesome to remove, that it had been at length determined to leave it where it was. There was another reason also; for in ancient days, when the town was nothing more than a cluster of huts round a feudal castle, a cave in this rock had been tenanted by a hermit renowned far and wide

for his sanctity; miracles had been said to have been performed in it: and though even then hermits and their miracles were growing into disrepute, still no one cared to meddle with his abode. So it was left where it was, and merely turned to account by having a row of houses built up against it on one side, in the way they sometimes are in the old town of Edinburgh; a very bad way, we may remark, for houses so built are always close and unwholesome. The other side of the rock served as a wall to the Mercks' garden, and was hidden by a mantle of ivy, as well as by a group of firs, that stood before it. A thick matting of ivy, also, hung down over the entrance to the hermit's cave from the projecting rock above; but as the aperture was large, a tolerable allowance of light and air was admitted to the interior through the curtain of green leaves.

This retreat had always been an especial favourite with the children of the family; and during the summer a great part of their leisure time had been usually passed in playing in and about it. They had obtained from their mother the favour of having it, from time to time, swept clear of the spiders and various creeping things that had found an asylum in it, which they had vainly hoped inviolable by the broom; and a table and a few stools had been placed there for them, that they might sometimes have the pleasure of inviting their parents, or some of the neighbours' children, to a feast in their Patmos. As the last

summer had been cold and damp, the maternal solicitude of Frau Merck had induced her, also, to place in it a small stove, that she might not be obliged to forbid it to the children before the severe cold came.

As this cave was, of course, much more removed from observation than any part of the house, it immediately occurred to all, that it would be as a desirable hiding-place for money and other valuable articles. No time was to be lost, as Leopold Merck was one of the principal Merchants of the town; and known as a rich man, he was pretty sure to be one of the first whose house would have to receive a party of the unwelcome visitors, and as not more than an hour or two would probably elapse before their arrival. Fortunately an abundant meal was ready for the officers in the dinner provided for the family, and of which they had taken very little.

While these preparations were going on, the children had climbed up to the small high windows, and were looking, in spite of their fears, with a kind of pleasure at the bustle in the streets. The soldiers, preceded by an anxious and terrified crowd, had now turned the long street that came out on the rampart. Nearer and nearer came the inspiring sounds of a lively martial air; presently the hoarse voice of the officers were heard commanding a halt, the music ceased, the heavy musquets came rattling down upon the pavement, and the long line of soldiers stood like a dark wall, without sound or movement.

“ Oh Greta! Greta! look here!” said one of the little ones, who was quite in admiration of the waving banners and glittering weapons; “ here’s a beautiful man! how big he is, and what a fine plume he has on his helmet! He has a nasty face, though, and great ugly red whiskers.” Greta approached hastily, and gave a faint shriek as she saw her old acquaintance, the Captain Gripenclau. She withdrew instantly, but not before she saw, or thought she saw, him glance up at the window.

Greta’s fears were but too well founded. The captain, who knew himself to be no favourite with Wallenstein, had immediately, on his release from arrest, applied for leave to exchange into the regiment of Colonel Hardenfels, to whom an affectation of excessive zeal for the Catholic cause had recommended him. He had represented himself, also, as a martyr to the intrigues of heretics, unjustly favoured by the Duke of Friedland, and the story was believed, as the duke was known greatly to disapprove the severities exercised towards the Protestants. In Schweidnitz, also, the captain did not doubt he should find means to revenge himself on Albert Thorn, as well as on the widow Rosentiel and her daughter, against whom he nourished sentiments of the most unmanly vindictiveness.

The conduct of Albert Thorn, at this juncture, was a cause of much distress and perplexity to the Mercks. His

conduct, when an officer in the Danish army, had been so uniformly gallant, almost to rashness, and he had since given so many proofs of high spirit, that it was not possible to attribute his present dejection to any unworthy motive; but it was evident there was nothing he so much desired as to escape observation. That he had some secret cause of anxiety, connected with Colonel Hardenfels, he had himself hinted, but whatever it was, he appeared in no hurry to communicate it; and though Herr Merck would gladly have received his confidence, he would make no attempt to force it from him.

It was soon ascertained that the fears of the family were but too well founded. A large number of officers and soldiers were to be quartered in the house, and among them Captain Gripenclau, who had solicited it as an especial favour.

People in England, especially young people, can have very little idea of the annoyance and suffering occasioned to a family by having even friendly soldiers billeted upon them; but at the time we are speaking of, all these sufferings were increased a hundred times by the violent and licentious character of the soldiery, who, in the course of the long wars in which they continually changed sides, and fought for anybody that would pay them, were become little better than bands of ferocious robbers.

The citizens of Schweidnitz had now more cause than

ever to dread them; for as it was the declared purpose of their presence to enforce a profession of the Roman Catholic faith, an excuse would be afforded for their worst atrocities. It seems almost incredible, that the task of conversion, as it was called, should have been committed to such hands; and many sincere Roman Catholics were deeply grieved and ashamed at such a profanation of the cause. Even the Emperor, probably, would have been shocked, had he witnessed half the crimes that were committed by his order, in the name of religion; but, unfortunately, people in power are often little aware of all the consequences of the commands they issue.

Sad, indeed, was the celebration of this Christmas. The gates of the city were locked, and a proclamation was issued, that all persons were to bring in a certificate of their having been to confession to a priest of the Church of Rome. In case of refusal, their property was to be immediately forfeited; they were to be thrown into prison, and there await such further punishment as their judges might award to their offence. A search was made through all the houses for Protestant books; and the people saw with horror, a great pile of Lutheran bibles and other books flaming in the market-place. Every family was watched by a party of spies, in the soldiers quartered upon them, who, having a ready excuse for every atrocity, set no bounds to their insolence.

We may judge with what feelings Leopold Merck now found himself compelled, either to expose his family to every peril, or to protect them by the utterance of a solemn and deliberate falsehood. After a severe struggle with himself, however, like a brave and pious man as he was, he resolved to retain a clear conscience at all hazards. The best he could hope for was, to find some means to make escape, with his wife and children, from the town; and, by the sacrifice of the greatest part of his fortune, to save at all events life, and, what was better than life, conscience and truth.

After a short and anxious deliberation with his wife, it had been agreed, on the day the troops entered the town, that the females of the family should retire into the Hermitage, and, if possible, the unbidden guests be led to suppose that they had left the house altogether. An opportunity might, perhaps, then be found for them to leave the city. The personal inconvenience of remaining there in such severe weather, might have seemed formidable at a happier moment, but was now not thought of. Even in this respect, also, they would not be much worse off than if they had remained in the house, for almost the whole of it had to be given up to the soldiers, and nothing left to the family but two or three small and inconvenient chambers that their guests had refused to occupy. Such preparations for their comfort as were possible, at such short

notice, had been immediately made. A quantity of fuel was carried down, as well as feather-beds, and coverings of various kinds, and such articles as seemed absolutely necessary, and could not well have been removed afterwards without notice. Fortunately, there was a narrow path running along the wall nearly the length of the garden, and covered by a quickset hedge, which reached to within a short distance of the fir grove; so that it was thought there would not be much difficulty in conveying food and whatever else might be wanted, without being observed from the house.

That evening saw Captain Gripenclau seated in great state at the head of the Mercks' table; and after a time, when the quantity of good things he had eaten and drunk had put him into good humour, graciously inviting the master of the house to take a seat also. Below, in the great hall, or "diele," as it was called, which, in old German houses of the better class, is sometimes almost as large as a church, tables were laid for the common soldiers; and the sound of their uproarious merriment rendered the hearts of the family still sadder; for there is nothing more melancholy than mirth in which we cannot partake. The little boys, though very hungry—for nobody had thought of attending to them—heroically declined the fat carp and other Christmas dainties, with which the table was spread, when offered them by those who they saw were treating

their father with insolence, and silently took refuge behind his chair with two slices of black bread.

The Captain had finished his meal; and after muttering a few words in his helmet, and crossing himself, turned to Herr Merck with a malicious smile, saying, "So I understand, Master, your mother-in-law and little Greta made a short stay with you in Schweidnitz. It's very odd, but I could have sworn I saw the girl at the window an hour or two ago, when I was standing on the market-place."

"It might have been my wife, perhaps," replied Merck; "she has but just left us, and, being sisters, they are much alike."

"What! and has she run away, too, then? My fellows are not fit company, perhaps, for the wives of base mechanics and traders. They can't have gone far yet, though,—it would serve them right to send a couple of dragoons to bring them back again;" and the captain sprung up, apparently with the intention of executing his threat, but at that moment there was heard an uproar without, the door burst open, and an old clerk rushed in, bleeding profusely from a wound in the head.

"What's the matter now? How dare you disturb me at table," bellowed the Captain.

"Under favour," said the clerk, "your sergeant has robbed me of all the money I had, and then made a cut at me with his sword for not giving him more."

“ Pooh! you’ve not gone the right way to work, my boy,” said the officer. “ My fellows are as quiet as lambs, if people know how to deal with them. There, go and tie up your broken head, and take better care another time.”

“ Is that all the satisfaction my servant is to receive for this injury?” said Herr Merck; “ we will see if your Colonel is inclined to justify this outrage?”

“ You will see, will you?” said the Captain, turning upon him with the more fury, because, in spite of himself, he felt half ashamed of the matter. “ Do you know what we’re here for? We are here to punish you for your heresy and rebellion,—rebellion against God and the Emperor. You are given up to us,—life and goods, body and soul. Take him away,” he continued, addressing four soldiers, who had followed the wounded clerk into the apartment; “ let him be placed under arrest. Keep a sharp eye upon him, and if he attempts to escape, shoot him.”

The poor little boys screamed as they saw the soldiers lay hands on their father, and clung to the knees of the Captain; but he thrust them out of the door, banged it to, and locked it; and then went striding up and down the room, trying to drown the voice of his conscience in fierce imprecations.

Ruffian as he was, he felt more pain than he inflicted,

for there is no suffering equal to that occasioned by violent and malignant passion; but he tried to hide from himself that his conduct was disgraceful, by heaping abusive epithets on those whom he was injuring. By dint of calling names, and tossing down the while bumper after bumper of wine, he at last succeeded pretty well in persuading himself, that if not positively doing right, he was, at any rate, only practising a very fair retaliation.

Perhaps no one ever committed a crime, which he all the time distinctly saw and knew to be a crime, until he had first succeeded in confusing his understanding, and confounding his notions of right and wrong.





CHAPTER VI.

THE RENCONTRE.

GRETA and her mother had been in so much terror at meeting again with Captain Gripenclau, that they felt quite happy when they found themselves, for the present, safe from him in the concealment of the Hermitage; but to Frau Merck it was very painful to be separated from her husband at such a moment. A thousand times rather would she have encountered every annoyance and every peril at his side; but when she saw how great a relief it would be to his mind to know her and her little girls safe from the brutal insolence of the soldiers, and considered how much more likely he would be to get into a quarrel with them on her account than on his own, she submitted at once.

For a good while, the unwilling hermits tried to busy themselves in putting the beds into the most convenient

corners, keeping up the fire, plastering up with clay sundry chinks in the stove, through which the smoke came out, and doing everything that could be thought of, for the improvement of their temporary habitation.

If their mother had not looked so sad, the little girls would almost have begun to think there was some fun in the shifts they were put to. It was, perhaps, fortunate for them that the snow was coming down thick and fast; for it not only prevented the soldiers from having any inclination to look abroad, but covered again with a thick white mantle the traces of footsteps that had been made all about the grove, when the beds and other things were brought from the house.

There was little reason, they found, to apprehend suffering from cold; for, when a thick horse-cloth had been hung up before the entrance, and the stove had become well heated, the cave was almost warmer than was agreeable. When the soldiers were all busy at supper, the nurse had contrived to steal down, and bring them what was wanted; and had cheered them with the news that all seemed to be going on well. Fortunately, she had come before the arrest of their father.

He had promised, it is true, to come also; but, as he had warned them that he might not find an opportunity, as he would be, of course, more closely watched than the servants, his not doing so excited no alarm.

As there is always a good side to every thing, nurse furthermore declared, this would be a most excellent opportunity for weaning the baby; which she had been for several weeks past trying to get her mistress to consent to. He must, at all events, be kept away from his mother now, or his noise would betray them; and if he kept nurse awake at night, it would make no difference, for there was no chance of sleeping, at any rate, for the noise and swearing of these godless soldiers.

On the following morning nurse again made her appearance before daylight, while the soldiers were still sleeping off the effects of the drinking and carousing of the previous night. A sentinel had been planted before the front of the house, but as the walls of the garden were very high, it had not been thought necessary to watch the back, so that she found it easy to slip down the garden unperceived. She spoke in a cheerful tone, but her eyes were red as if with weeping; although, when her mistress remarked this, she laid it all upon baby, and said it was because he had kept her awake in the night.

Frau Merck did not seem quite satisfied, for it seemed to her that the stream of nurse's gossip ran by no means so freely as usual, and that something lay heavy on her mind. She persisted, however, in saying that her master and the boys were well—were fast asleep, she believed; but on being more closely questioned, burst into tears, and said,

the news from the town were bad enough: that no one was allowed to go in or out of his own house without a pass; that worthy Dr. Beatus, the pastor of St. Wenceslaus' church, had been cruelly ill-treated because he had refused to submit; and that the soldiers were growing every hour more insolent and cruel.

Master Albert the nurse had scarcely seen, she said. He must be in the house, she thought, for it was not likely he would be allowed to go in and out; but he had only come up to her room for a few minutes very late last night to ask about the family; he had never joined any of the meals, and the bed made up for him had not been slept in.

There was not much comfort in this news; and the day dragged slowly and heavily along, and would have been even more intolerable, but that nurse had bethought herself to bring an assortment of knitting needles and a quantity of wool; and with these Greta, and her mother, and the little girls contrived to maintain a pretty good fight against the *ennui* and dejection that was creeping upon them. Frau Merck tried in vain to find comfort in a stocking; for when hour after hour passed, and her husband did not appear, her anxiety became more and more intolerable. In the evening, too, instead of coming herself, nurse had sent the cook to wait upon her mistress, as if to avoid being questioned.

The night again closed in; it was cold and tem-

pestuous, and in the howling of the wind it was impossible to catch any sound that might indicate what was going on in the house. The cloth, which had been hung up before the entrance to the cave, flapped about so much that there was some fear that a gleam of light from the lamp on the table might betray the hiding-place, should any of the soldiers chance to look out. It was thought prudent, therefore, to extinguish the lamp at an early hour; and the day had seemed so long, that those who hoped to sleep were glad to put an end to it, and retire to rest. The "Hausfrau" was not, however, of this number. After reading in a low voice a chapter or two from her Lutheran Bible, which was among the treasures she had first conveyed to the Hermitage, and joining her children in a fervent prayer for the Divine protection, she had lain down and endeavoured to lose the sense of her anxieties and sorrows in forgetfulness; the blessing of which the happy can never know. But it was in vain. We may sink into sleep under the burden of the heaviest sorrow, but uncertainty and suspense deny us even this relief. She closed her eyes, but lay listening to the winter wind, and, in spite of herself, conjuring up every possible form of misfortune that might be in store; for the imagination is never so vivid as when the material world is shut out from our senses. Her head ached, her heart beat violently, and her blood seemed to rush faster and faster through her

veins, till she was in a perfect fever. She could bear it no longer, but, rising softly, resolved to steal down to the house, and ascertain, if possible, the position of the inmates.

She lifted up the cloth of the entrance of the cave, and the curtain of overhanging ivy, and crept out into the clear frosty air. The clouds were driving swiftly across the heavens, so that they were sometimes quite obscured, but sometimes the moon and stars shone out brilliantly for a few minutes, and then again all was dark. The ground was covered with snow, so that she could not advance directly towards the house without leaving the marks of footsteps too conspicuously visible, but had to creep round close to the wall, and gain the cover of the holly hedge. She stole softly up to the house, it seemed perfectly quiet, and through the bars of a lower window she could look into a room where some of the servants had slept, but which was now occupied by soldiers. Some lay round in different beds that had been prepared for them, and appeared asleep, but two were seated at a table, drinking and playing with dice. As the door of this room was open into a passage leading from the garden, she dared not enter, but stood watching them through the window, in hopes that they also would lie down. At length one who seemed to have been unlucky dashed the dice down on the floor, and sprang up with a violent exclamation. Pro-

bably he caught a glimpse at that moment of her pale face through the window; for the moon had just then gleamed out for a second, and then was hid again behind black heavy clouds. He said something in a low tone to his comrade, who answered him in a roar of laughter, and snatching the lamp from the table, he strode along the passage to the garden door, opened it, and looked out. A sudden gust of wind, however, accompanied by a drift of snow, whirled into his face, extinguished the lamp, and rendered it impossible to distinguish any object; and with a shower of oaths, which he had ready on all occasions, he returned into the room. Frau Merck seized the opportunity of the darkness, flew past, and found herself on a flight of stairs leading up to the hall. With a palpitating heart she looked through the balustrade, and could scarcely have recognised her peaceful and orderly home. The spacious floor, on which had formerly been piled up, in exact order, costly bales of merchandise, was now covered with a litter of arms, accoutrements, dice, dirty boots, and a miscellaneous assortment of articles that appeared to have been obtained by plunder, mingled in confusion with wine and various kinds of provisions, and with many evidences of the unclean and disorderly habits of its present inmates.

At any other time such a sight might have filled the heart of a good housewife with mourning, but now it was scarcely noticed; but she hurried along to the upper end,

to the door of a little room, where it had been arranged that her husband and the boys should sleep; the best room being, of course, given up to the guests. It was dark and empty, but, by a gleam of light from the hall, she perceived a letter on the table. She caught it eagerly up, scarcely knowing why, and then turned, sick with fear and anxiety, and, forgetful of all else, stood still in the hall to read its contents. The letter was not sealed or signed, for the writer appeared to have been interrupted, but it contained, in her husband's writing, these few words:—
“Dearest wife, I am to be taken to the castle. As there can be no charge against me, I shall probably not be detained long. The boys are with me. God bless you.”
Her fears were then but too well founded. Her husband was a prisoner. Scarcely knowing what she did, she turned, rather from instinct than thought, to seek her infant in the apartment of the nurse. There was a light on the table, as the nurse appeared to have just left it. In the cradle lay the baby, looking pale and ill, and on the table stood a cup with medicine. She knelt down by his side, her tears fell thick and fast over his little wan face, and she tried to pray, but though her lips moved, she knew not what she said. Suddenly she heard a step behind her, and shrieked as she found herself seized with a rough grasp.

“So, so, mistress,” said a harsh voice; “we are playing

at hide and seek, are we? I'll teach you to play with me;"—and he dragged her up by the arm, and looked sharply in her face, saying, "You're the sister of little Greta? And where may she be?"

"She is not here," said Frau Merck, faintly.

"She is not far off, mistress, I'll be sworn," said the Captain. "Bring her out, or it shall be worse for you, and the old woman, and the rest of the young brood. Out with them! Do you hear?"

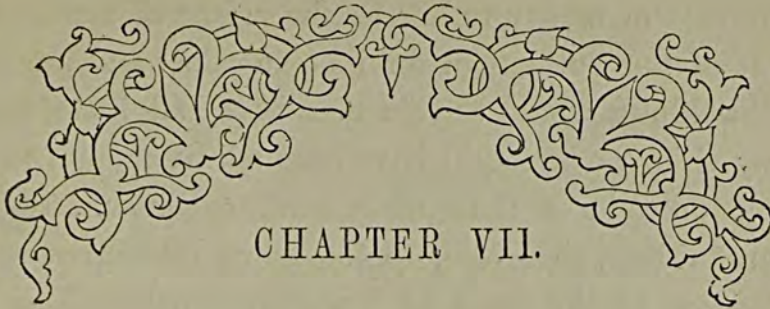
Frau Merck sat down with a face as pale as death, but did not speak. After waiting a minute, the captain strode to the door, locked it, took the key, came close up to her, and, speaking through his teeth, said, "You refuse, then, to tell me what I have asked, and are prepared no doubt for the consequences!" She sank on her knees, beside her infant's cradle, and bowed her head over it in silence. She felt as if her senses were forsaking her, when a bright thought seemed to strike the ruffian. He suddenly snatched the baby from his bed, and, holding it high up, roared, "Speak, hag! or I'll dash the brains out of the young worm."

"Oh, man, man! you will need mercy one day,—show some to me!" screamed the agonised mother. At this moment there was the sound of a struggle outside, of a heavy fall, and the door was dashed in by Albert Thorn, who, rushing on the Captain, struck him a sudden blow on

the head, that felled him to the earth, but was immediately seized by the halberdiers, who, with other soldiers, now filled the room. "I am your prisoner," said he, addressing them; "take me to Colonel Hardenfels."

When Frau Merck awaked from the swoon into which she had fallen, she found leaning over her the pitying face of good Father Anselmus, a Franciscan friar, well known in the town, who was seldom far off, wherever there was a deed of mercy to be done. In his mind, the belief that in the bosom of his Church only could salvation be found, had produced not hatred of heretics, but the deepest pity; and he saw, with grief and disgust, the task of bringing back the lost lambs to the fold, intrusted to ravening wolves.

Supporting her head on his knee, as she lay still on the ground, he patted it caressingly, as a mother might have done a sick child, and gently soothed her, as her senses returned, with assurances of her infant's safety. His pitying voice unlocked the flood-gates of misery in her heart, and, hiding her face in the monk's frock, which at another time the poor Lutheran woman would have shrunk from with horror, she burst into tears, and wept long and undisturbed,—the holy bond of human sympathy uniting those whom human prejudice would have separated.



CHAPTER VII.

A DISCOVERY.

CONSIDERING the nature of the means employed to convert them, it will not appear surprising, that the good people of Schweidnitz became every day more zealously attached to their own form of religion. All who were exposed to the same persecution forgot now the little differences of opinion which had separated them before into many parties, and became united by a bond of sympathy and fellow feeling, which often enabled them to set their oppressors at defiance. Those who were not naturally courageous, were animated to resistance by the thought, that their fellow-townsmen were looking on, and approving their conduct; and such as were by nature brave and stout-hearted, rose almost to a spirit of martyrdom. Pecuniary fines and exactions were comparatively little regarded, for most

people esteem money rather as the means of securing the respect of the world than for its own sake ; and the world of Schweidnitz would at this time have had little respect for any citizen who might have been adroit enough to save himself only in a time of general calamity. It soon became evident, therefore, to the more intelligent among the leaders of the party of "proselyte-makers," as they were called, that their scheme so far had failed ; and that they must, in all probability, either give it up altogether, or resort to still more severe measures. Those who had once entered on a course of conduct so unjust and tyrannical, were not likely to stop short in the middle of it from motives of humanity ; and they had now also become irritated at the opposition they met with : so that things looked worse and worse for the poor burghers.

In the Town Hall, which was for the time chosen as his head quarters, Colonel von Hardenfels was seated at the head of a table, around which were assembled two or three nobles who owned lands in the neighbourhood, the principal officers of his regiment, and several priests. In the centre, along with flasks of wine, silver goblets, swords, and gauntlets, stood a tall crucifix, the holy image on which seemed to look down with sorrow on the deeds done in its name. In a group, at the door, stood some of the principal citizens, who had come thither in the hope of obtaining, by enormous sacrifices, a release from the

humiliating necessity of signing a confession, which even those who required it knew to be false.

As far as the Colonel was concerned, this hope was vain, for with him it was grim earnest with his projects of conversion, and not a mere pretence for extortion; but many of his officers were carrying on a profitable trade in this proselyte making, and sundry significant glances and private signals were exchanged from time to time between them and the citizens.

“It is, after all, a cursed business,” said the Colonel at length, striking on the table with his clenched fist; “I repent that I had anything to do with it. It’s plain enough that our fellows are looking more after the money-bags than the souls of the heretics. Every thief in the regiment thinks to become a rich man; there are as many Lutherans as there were before, and every dog of them that should be shot now would pass for a holy martyr.”

“This matter has been, indeed, but rashly undertaken,” said a priest. “It would have been better to have gone softly to work, and to have avoided scandal. All Silesia might have been restored in a year.”

“Yes,” said one of the soldiers, with an obstreperous laugh; “softly as the cat did when she licked up the cream; that’s the way with you Churchmen.”

“Methinks the cream hath not all fallen to the Church

on this occasion," replied the priest. "The costly silver service I saw at your quarters, noble Captain, bears a marvellous likeness to that which, awhile ago, belonged to the rich burgher Meyer."

"My motto is, 'Bend or break,'" said the soldier, tossing off a bumper of wine, by way of avoiding a direct answer. "A year! Give me men enough, and I'd undertake to restore all Europe in half the time."

The priest smiled contemptuously; but before he could reply there was a bustle at the lower end of the hall, the group at the door opened, and, escorted by two musqueteers, Albert Thorn was led up to the head of the table. Colonel Hardenfels did not look up for a minute or two, as he was employed in entering some memoranda in a note-book. He turned his head at length somewhat carelessly towards the prisoner, but when he caught a glimpse of his features, he gave a convulsive start, his lips opened, as if he would speak, but no sound came forth, and he fixed his eyes with a wild stare upon the composed but melancholy face of the young man.

"Of what is the prisoner accused?" said the priest who had spoken before, perceiving, with astonishment, that the Colonel was unable to speak.

"Of the assassination of an imperial officer," was the answer.

"I am no assassin," said Albert. "I have inflicted

well-merited punishment on a villain, who would have trampled under foot the holiest laws of God and man."

"In Heaven's name who are you?" faltered Colonel Hardenfels at length.

"Albert looked up earnestly into his face, and replied in a low tone, "Your son."

"The father sunk back in his chair, covering his face with his hands; and Albert threw himself on his knees before him, saying,

"I know my doom, father, but do not you speak it. Give me your blessing at once, and let me die a soldier's death, and not by the vile hands of the headsman."

"Miserable boy!" said his father; "would that thou hadst never arisen from the bloody field where I saw thee laid! Thou art twice doomed; for thou hast basely deserted the standard of the Emperor, and murdered his officer!"

"Oh! would to Heaven, indeed, that field had been my last!" replied Albert passionately; "but it was the will of God that I should live. I fled because I dared not any longer draw my sword against those who were fighting for the holy gospel. Father! the strife which has rent the vitals of our fatherland has opened a great gulf between us two!"

"And whither didst thou fly?" said the Colonel, after a pause, in a voice low and hoarse with contending emotion, but which was distinctly heard in the deep silence.

“I took service with the Dane,” answered Albert; “but two years ago, when again severely wounded, I was received and kindly tended by a merchant of this city, whose wife I have but now saved from cruel outrage. I thank God that he has preserved me to die in so good a cause!” The Colonel did not answer, but the agitation of his features showed the inward struggle. The priest arose, and whispered in his ear. The Colonel grasped his hand as if thanking him for the suggestion; the former then turning to the prisoner, said: “My son, the times are evil; much may be forgiven to one who sincerely desires to be reconciled to the holy church which he has offended—‘*Domino Deo nostro misericordia et propitiatio!*’ Thy sins, are many, but it may not yet be too late, if thou wilt truly repent, to save thy soul, and even to obtain the Emperor’s pardon.”

“My sins are indeed many, father,” replied Albert; “may Heaven forgive them! But nothing have I yet done that would lie so heavy on my conscience as the denial of what I believe to be the truth, from a craven fear of death. It was for no light matter that I made myself an alien in my father’s house; but you know it is written, ‘*Qui amat patrem aut matrem supra me, non est me dignus.*’”

“Rash boy!” said Colonel Hardenfels, “beware how you reject the hopes of mercy held out to you. Make no hasty resolve. I give you four-and-twenty hours to con-

sider, but count on no further grace. Repent of your double treason, or be assured you shall pay the forfeit."

"Father, if this be, indeed, my only hope," said Albert, "would the delay were not so long. Could a fear of those 'who can but kill the body' move me to renounce the sacred cause for which alone I will ever again unsheath a sword, I were no son of yours."

"Traitor and heretic! thou art no son of mine!" exclaimed Colonel Hardenfels, snatching his sword from the table, and making a furious pass at him; for even the anguish he suffered at the peril of his son, took in his harsh character the form of ungovernable rage.

It was rather from instinct than from any wish to avoid the stroke, that Albert, by a quick movement, turned it aside, but received a severe cut on the hand in doing so. The priest at the same instant caught the arm of the father, whom the sight of his son's blood seemed to restore in a moment to his senses. He sunk back in his chair, and the priest, in an authoritative manner, ordering the prisoner to be removed, and the room to be cleared, was left alone with the unhappy parent.

Albert Thorn—or, rather, as we have seen, Albert von Hardenfels—having lost his mother at an early age, had been brought up almost from his infancy in a camp; but, perhaps, from having witnessed the excesses and licentiousness of the Imperialists, had been, almost as soon as

he could think at all on such subjects, inclined to embrace the reformed opinions. He had struggled long, but vainly, to resist a conviction that he knew must separate him from his family and friends; but when, after being severely wounded in a desperate service into which he had volunteered, he had been left for dead, and had only afterwards been saved by means which, at the time, seemed quite inexplicable, he regarded this as a solemn warning from Heaven to forsake all for the cause of religious truth. He knew his father's character too well to hope for his pardon in the step he was about to take; for it was with Colonel Hardenfels a distinct belief, that the universe was ruled by the Almighty in no other way than a well disciplined regiment: and that renouncing the Catholic form of religion was, in all cases, to be considered as desertion, and punished accordingly. His son preferred, therefore, allowing him to suppose that he had fallen in what he would regard as the field of honour, to informing him that he still lived as an alien from the faith, which, in the Colonel's eyes, alone gave a title to honour in this world, or salvation in the next. Having, like most other young men of the noble class of that age, no notion of any other profession than that of arms, he had entered at first the service of the Protestant King of Denmark; but when, after some years, it was again his fate to receive a dangerous wound, which kept him for months on a sick bed, he had fallen, for-

tunately for him, into the kind hands of the Mercks, who not only nursed him carefully till his recovery, but offered him the means of subsistence, in a humble position indeed, but one which saved him from the necessity of drawing his sword against his former associates: and, in this obscure station, he had hoped he might await the termination of this dreadful civil war.





CHAPTER VIII.

AN EXPLORING EXPEDITION.

GREAT was the terror of the occupants of the cave when they discovered, on awaking on the following morning, the absence of Frau Merck. The children would have rushed out immediately to seek her, but that Greta opposed this measure with a mixture of authority and persuasion, which few could exercise more effectually. Though a young and lovely girl she had been brought up in the midst of events so terribly serious, and had been placed so entirely out of the way of the various kinds of frivolities, which, under many names, so frequently occupy the time of young women, that her character had acquired a strength and decision little suspected by those who noticed only her gentle and quiet manners.

The sorrows and oppressions Frau Rosentiel had suffered, added to very feeble health, had worn her down so much, that she had both the appearance and the infirmity of much more advanced age; and it had often happened that her young daughter had found herself compelled to act for both. On this occasion the mother could do little else but weep, without being able to decide whether or not it would be better to remain in their concealment. Greta urged that their leaving it without orders might be productive of much mischief, and could not possibly do any good, and that it was necessary to wait as patiently as possible until they could hear from one of the servants, who was sure to come before long, how the parents were situated. In order to occupy the hour or two of painful suspense which would probably intervene, she offered to the children to comply with a request, which they had made several times,—to explore with them the extent and limits of a dark recess at the back of the second chamber in the rock,—which they had already ascertained to be much greater than had been hitherto imagined, and which it appeared probable had some opening, from the eddying gusts of wind that now and then swept through it. Arming herself, therefore, with a broom—an instrument, we may observe, much more familiar to her than to a young lady in the same situation in life of our day,—she advanced, in bold defiance of spiders, bats, and each and every creeping

thing that might therein be found, on her expedition of discovery. The roof of the larger cave, in which the family had made their abode, was nearly as high as that of a well built room; but, in the second recess, the rocky floor sloped upward, so as much to contract its dimensions. This inner cave, it very soon appeared, gave admission to a third, which was still lower, as the upward inclination of the floor continued; and, as there was no other aperture for the admission of light than that of the first chamber, it was, of course, totally dark. The children felt somewhat afraid of prosecuting their discoveries farther; but Greta now felt her own curiosity excited, and would not turn back. Passing the broom round the sides of the cave, a narrow opening was found, of greater depth than could be measured by it and her extended arm; and, advancing along the passage thus presenting itself, with slow and cautious steps, she arrived at a turn, at the end of which a glimmer of light was perceptible. Greta was young enough to be pleased with anything like an adventure; and also fortunately recollected that it would really be very desirable to ascertain if there were any other mode of egress from their place of concealment besides that to her brother's garden. She had been aware, that on the other side of the rock, a row of houses, forming one side of a narrow street, called the "Enge Gasse," had been built up; but she had always supposed, as all the family had

done, that the rock was solid. The light grew stronger as she proceeded, and she at length perceived that it glimmered between the chinks of some boards, which seemed to have been roughly nailed across the entrance of the passage. At the same time she could distinguish a low continuous sound like that of a person reading or praying aloud. She stood still, and listened with the children, who had crept after her, clinging to her dress; and after a few minutes she could make out the words, "whom God loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." Suddenly it occurred to her that this was Sunday morning; and no stronger proof could be given of the entire confusion into which the family had been thrown, than the circumstance that it had not been thought of before.

A small congregation of Lutherans had gathered together in a back room of one of the houses which were inhabited by the poorer class of people. Their churches had been shut up, and, for fear of discovery, they were compelled to omit all the musical part of their service; but the holy fire of devotion kindled their hearts, as they poured them out in prayer, and listened to the exhortations of the preacher. Part of what he said was necessarily lost on the listeners, only they could hear that he spoke in a tone at first low, and almost melancholy; but gradually rising into passionate and even joyful fervour as

he proceeded, he besought them not to allow their present sorrows to shake their faith in the goodness and protection of God; to remember the far greater sufferings and persecutions undergone by the early Christians; and to keep always in mind the words of the apostle, which declare, that "our light afflictions, which are but for a moment, shall work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

Greta and the children sunk reverently on their knees, rejoicing that, in this unexpected manner, they had again been able to join in the sacred services which belonged to the day. They would not, of course, disturb the congregation by attempting to discover themselves, even if they could have been sure that it would have been right to do so.

The hour was still very early—much earlier than the customary time of divine service—and had probably been chosen, as exposing those who attended it less to observation. After about half an hour, they dispersed, and the minister appeared to be left alone in the room. Being a stranger in the place, Greta did not know him, but the children had recognised him immediately, and had whispered to her his name. It was that of a well known Lutheran clergyman, Dr. Beatus, who, being unmarried, had preferred giving up his house, and leaving it entirely in the hands of the soldiers quartered upon him, to remain-

ing merely to endure hourly insult. Taking with him only a small sum of money and a few changes of linen, he had retired to this little obscure lodging in the house of one of the poorest of his flock, and had thus accidentally escaped the further severities exercised on the Protestants. In this poor little room he had offered to perform service for such of his congregation as had courage to attend it; and finding how much consolation he was still able to afford them in their hour of need, he had given up his original intention of endeavouring to leave the city, and resolved, like a good shepherd, to remain, at all hazards, with his flock.

Greta continued for some time standing in great uncertainty, whether, and in what manner, she should make known her presence. The opening of the passage, which, as we have said, had been roughly boarded over, it appeared, formed the back of a cupboard; on the shelves of which were deposited the few pewter plates, cups, and such other articles, as the good woman, who attended to the worldly wants of the worthy Dr. Beatus, had deemed indispensable for his household economy. It was impossible, therefore, to enter the room until these were removed; and even a voice, proceeding from what was supposed to be solid rock, would naturally startle any one in the room, and perhaps induce them to give an alarm. She could see that the pastor had now sat down by the little deal table,

opened again the large Bible to which he had been referring during his exhortation, and seemed once more profoundly occupied. She moved, so as to make a little noise, but he only looked up for a moment, and then down again at his book, and took no further notice. She gave a slight cough, and this time he started; for the pastor, though he had all the moral courage of a good Christian, had nerves that were none of the strongest. After listening for a moment, he seemed, however, to make up his mind that the disturbance had been occasioned by rats or mice; for he rose, and, going to the door, opened it, and called "Puss! puss!" Immediately a large black cat came running up stairs, and entering, with tail erect and arching back, began to walk round the doctor, bowing and smiling, and expressing, in the most complimentary manner, his satisfaction at being summoned.

"Puss, puss! I fear thou art neglecting thy duty," said the minister, stooping down to stroke his favourite Tom: "thou art wandering about the town spending thy time in idle diversions, while thy master's bread and cheese is devoured by lawless intruders. Thou must e'en work, though it be the sabbath," and he pushed puss into the cupboard.

Tommy jumped upon the shelf, but, after smelling a little at the aperture, seemed to make up his mind that it was no business of his, and made his way out again, with an air of great indifference.

The children now began to giggle a little, for there was something funny, they thought, in peeping at the pastor this way through the cupboard; and it was impossible any longer to mistake the noise for that of rats and mice. The doctor rose in evident trepidation, for the idea of a supernatural visitation was by no means so much out of the question in those days as it would be in ours, and he stood gazing at the cupboard with eyes wide open and lips apart, in a state of no little excitement; whilst Tommy, who, for his part, was above superstitious terror, took the opportunity to leap up on the table, and seat himself majestically, with folded arms, upon the open Bible,—an act of profanation for which he would probably have been severely chastised, had his master's attention not been otherwise occupied.

“Herr Dr. Beatus!” said Greta at length in a soft voice.

“*Gott bewahre!*” exclaimed the divine, recoiling a step or two back; but, recovering himself, he advanced boldly, though with a beating heart, to the cupboard, and threw it wide open, making use at the same time of the form usually prescribed in Germany for all cases of ghosts,—“All good spirits, praise the Lord!”

“The Lord be praised now and for evermore. Amen!” responded Greta.

This was satisfactory; and the pastor now proceeded

to inquire rather more calmly into the cause of the mysterious sounds, thus proceeding from the midst of his household utensils. When he could once be brought to listen quietly, the matter was soon explained; and the worthy Dr. Beatus rejoiced not a little to find, that, by having taken up his abode in this house, he might have it in his power to render a very essential service to the family of his old friend and esteemed fellow-townsmen, Leopold Merck. He began, therefore, with great alacrity to take down the pots and pans, and little articles of provision, that had been deposited there by his housekeeper, and placed them on the floor, for greater expedition, preparatory to attempting to remove the shelves, when—suddenly he stopped in great consternation; for he heard a footstep on the stairs, and recollected, for the first time, that he had not had his breakfast, and that if his attendant entered the room just now, she must be admitted into the secret. Now, though he was content, knowing her attachment to him, to trust his own safety to her keeping, he had in general but a low opinion of feminine discretion, and was not very willing to take one of that talkative sex into confidence in an important matter. Hastily desiring Greta, therefore, to remain quiet for the present, he closed the cupboard door, and placed his back against it, eyeing old Elsbeth with some alarm, as to what she might say to all this disorder among her moveables.

She stopped short at the door, with an expression of great astonishment, and began pouring forth many apologies for her unaccountable forgetfulness in having neglected to replace the things after she had swept and dusted the cupboard on the Saturday night. She could have sworn she had done so, she said; but she was growing old, and, perhaps, her memory was failing. But good Dr. Beatus could not bear that she should reproach herself for a fault of which she had not been guilty; and so, with some stammering, confessed, that he had done it himself: and this made the matter worse; for the poor woman looked quite frightened, and evidently thought that trouble must have turned the pastor's brain; and so, for fear of worse, he was obliged to let her into the secret.

There was no risk in doing so; for her love of gossiping was quite overpowered by her intense hatred of the soldiers: and, besides, she knew Frau Merck, who had shown her many little kindnesses, and would not, for worlds, have done or said anything to injure her or hers. Old as she was, too, Elsbeth, as she had all her life been used to labour, was able to attack the shelves with more effect than Greta and the pastor together; and in a very short time,—having first taken the precaution to fasten the outer door,—such a breach was made as would easily admit any one to pass through.

The children, meanwhile, had been running backwards

and forwards, conveying to their grandmother intelligence of all that was passing.

On returning to the cave, Greta found the nurse waiting with the breakfast of brown bread and milk. She informed them of the arrest of Albert, in consequence of a quarrel with Captain Gripenclau; but said nothing of the cause of the quarrel, nor of the imprisonment of their father,—a great piece of self-denial on the part of poor nurse, who would have felt much relief in unburdening her whole packet of griefs.

Not the least among these did she count the circumstance, that the only chance of safety for the family now lay in the watchful protection of Father Anselmus. She was so zealous a hater of Papists, that she would, for her own part, have consented to be turned out of house and home as soon as have owed her safety to the good offices of a monk; and she began to have many fears for the Protestantism of the family. Even her own might be in danger from the gratitude she could not help feeling towards the Franciscan, for having interfered with the soldiers to insist that milk enough should be left for her baby. Her heart warmed towards him, in spite of herself; but, unluckily, it was an article of her creed, that priests and monks never did any good without having some artful motive at bottom, so she struggled hard to resist this kindly feeling.

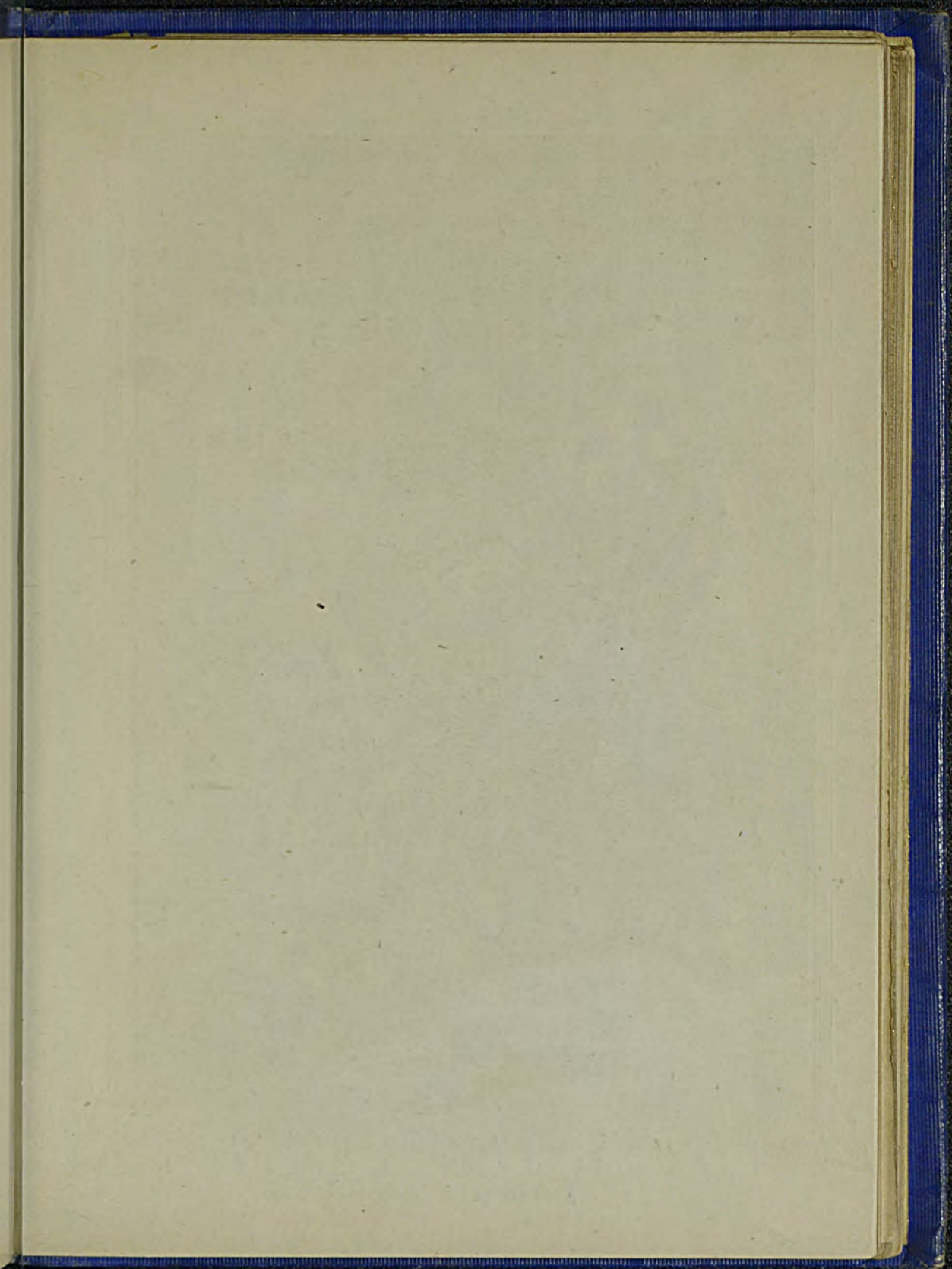
Bad as were the news she had brought, it was evident to Greta that worse remained behind; but she forbore to question her, that the children might not be made sharers in her uneasiness. They had received unsuspectingly the account, in part a true one, that thinking herself safe now that Captain Gripenclau was confined to his room, their mother had preferred remaining the day with baby; and they set to work with great alacrity, when they had had their breakfasts, to appropriate their several portions of the bundle of clean linen, which nurse would have thought it an absolute profanation of the Sabbath to neglect bringing.

The discovery of Greta had been made in good time; for, after the lapse of a few hours, it appeared that Captain Gripenclau had merely swooned, from the effects of the severe blow he had received, and his heavy fall; and had no sooner returned to his senses, than he had uttered the most terrible threats of vengeance against the Merck family, and vowed he would find out their hiding-place, if he burned down the house for it. Even the servants were now so closely watched, that it became extremely difficult for them to continue their necessary attendance upon the occupants of the cave; and it appeared obvious, that it would be impossible for them to remain much longer in concealment.

As a last resource, therefore, Frau Merck had re-

solved to communicate the whole secret to Father Anselmus, throw herself upon his mercy, and entreat his assistance in attempting an escape from the city; but so strong were the prejudices that at that time divided Protestants and Catholics, that even she could not take this resolution without grievous misgivings, and nurse prophesied no less from it than the ruin of the whole family.







A FRIEND IN NEED.



CHAPTER IX.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

T was nearly midnight; the streets of Schweidnitz, muffled in deep snow, had become profoundly still, and the stars shone out brightly in the dark sky and frosty air.

The citizens kept themselves shut up as closely as possible in their houses, even when they were not compelled to do so, that they might avoid the sight of the soldiers; and these, satiated with plunder, seemed to be growing weary of their odious task. All was silent; but Albert still continued to pace the narrow limits of his cell, tortured by a thousand contending feelings—What was to be the fate of the kind friends who had sheltered him when he was sick and a stranger?—The upright, honourable citizen and loving father—the tender wife and mother—the innocent children, so lately dwelling in joy

and peace in their home,—were they to be now scattered, driven out, perhaps, like so many others, to become outcasts and destitute wanderers over the face of a country, a prey to all the horrors of war? And, for himself, what was to be his fate? The brief respite allowed him had long expired. Would his father, indeed, condemn his son to death? It seemed by no means improbable; for the anger of the offended parent was strengthened by religious bigotry, and by the military pride of a soldier who piqued himself on his inflexible discipline. In those days, too, a single human life seemed comparatively a matter of little moment; for thousands were every day staked and cast away, for the most trifling objects, in the terrible game of war. Mingled with these dark thoughts, too, like a gleam of moonlight across a troubled sky, came the remembrance of the sweet girl, who had been so grateful for his protection. Was she, too, and her widowed mother, to be left to struggle with this cruel world of strife, and bloodshed, and wrong? He was looking through the grated window of the tower, sometimes down on the city, sleeping in the moonlight, under whose aspect of profoundest peace lay hidden so much of sin and sorrow; sometimes upward, at the bright worlds beyond our own, which never attract us so powerfully as in seasons of suffering—when he heard the opening of a gate below, and, shortly afterwards, the steps of armed men ascending the stairs, and stopping before

his door. He started as they entered, and, brave as he was, an icy chill ran through his veins, as the thought occurred that some unforeseen circumstance had occasioned his sentence to be forestalled, and that these were the messengers of death! Such informal proceedings were by no means uncommon in those good old times.

The party, consisting of three men, of whom one appeared to be a Sergeant, ordered him to follow them immediately. "For what purpose?" he asked; "this is no hour to hold a court—or," he added, with bitterness, "do you come hither on another errand? Does my father think even these few short hours too long for a son, who has offended him, to live? You do well, then; the darkness befits such a deed better than the light. Lead on, friends! If my last hour be indeed come, let me meet it as becomes a soldier and a Christian! I have a heavenly parent, if no earthly one!" He drew his cloak around him, and followed the men down the steep rugged stairs with unfaltering step.

They crossed the market-place, their steps making no sound as they fell on the thick covering of snow, and entered the street in which the house of the Mercks was situated. The windows were all dark; for as there had been once or twice an alarm of fire in the city, an order had been issued that lights and fires should be extinguished at an early hour. On this evening last Christmas, almost

every house had shone with innocent revelry, and the streets been filled with a merry crowd; now, the party traversed the long street, and, turning the corner, came out upon the rampart, without meeting a living creature but the patrol, with whom a watchword was exchanged. They reached the gate of the city, and a little delay took place while a paper, handed in by the Sergeant, was read by the officer on guard. A small door was then opened, and they passed out; and a ray of hope darted into the mind of Albert, as he heard it closed behind them, but this died away, and was succeeded by a cold shudder, as he perceived that he was to be conducted to a churchyard, about a quarter of a mile beyond the gate, where he knew that many of these military executions had taken place, in order that the bodies of the victims might be more readily disposed of.

How happy would a death on the field of battle have seemed to the young soldier, compared with this midnight murder! "For God's sake do not bury me ere life be fled!" said he, looking round on the too ready grave yard as they halted, "and grant me the boon to make no long delay! Tell me where I am to kneel, and take your aim steadily!"

"Kneel where thou wilt, my boy, and thank the Lord for thy deliverance!" said a voice, which suddenly brought back to his mind a time long, long past. He looked up with

the sensation of one awaking from a painful dream, and perceived that two of the soldiers had disappeared behind the tombs, and that he was left alone with the Sergeant. "Have you forgotten Hans Kuhnherz?" said the veteran, taking off his helmet, and allowing his long grey hair to stream in the wind. "He looks none the better, it's likely, for all the ups and downs of this ten years past; but you'll surely know him again, even by starlight!"

"Hans! my good faithful Hans!" exclaimed the young man, springing to his feet. "Am I awake? What is all this? Whence come you, and why am I brought hither?"

"You're awake enough, boy of my heart!" said the old soldier, embracing Albert with a warmth that scarcely left him any breath in his body; "and you're brought here that you may get away again as fast as your legs will carry you. As for where I came from, it's just from everywhere, and many places else;—but we'd better talk of that as we go along, for this frost wind makes a man's teeth rattle like a pair of Spanish castanets. The host of the Golden Lion is an honest fellow, as everybody knows, and, moreover, what everybody doesn't know, a Lutheran in his heart—worse luck for him! We have no time to be nice, though, so I must even trust to him; for you might as well have been shot, as left to be frozen to death among these tombstones." He led the way out of the churchyard as he spoke, and across two fields into a by-road.

By this time, however, the dizziness produced in the mind of Albert by his sudden rescue from the fear of immediate death began to subside, and all the circumstances of his position again became clear. "Stop!" said he, "life is sweet, indeed, and never more so than when it has been in peril; but I am bound to this unhappy town by ties as strong as life itself. I will not save myself, and leave those whose lives are more valuable than mine to perish. The merchant Leopold Merck is in prison—his wife and children, God knows where! They have been to me as kind parents, and may well claim from me the duty of a son. Come what may, I will return into the city to seek them!"

"*Potz tausend!*" said the old soldier testily, "if you do, you will find it no easy matter to get out again. These are times when one mustn't be too hard to please. It's every one for himself, as the bear said when he danced among the chickens."

"My good Hans," said Albert, "you were the first to teach me never to desert a comrade in the hour of danger, in the old days when you used to carry me in your arms about the camp. Would you have me now think only of my own safety, and forsake those to whom I am bound by more than ties of brotherhood in arms or blood?"

The allusion to those long past days had touched a soft chord in the heart of the scarred and weather-beaten

Sergeant. His life, since early youth, had been passed amid scenes of blood and strife. Of all the charities of home and domestic affection he had known no more than he had found in the love of his only son, a boy who reached only the age of five years, having been killed by a chance shot in straying after his father too near the field of battle. Albert, then about the same age, had been his playfellow; and, with the sure instinct of childhood, had recognised and loved the warm, soft heart that beat beneath the rough rind of the outward man in the sorrowing father. He had soothed him with his innocent caresses, followed him about the camp, and often escaped from nurses and priests to share the soldier's tent, and listen to his stories; amid all the chances and changes of a military life, and, after all the terrible scenes he had witnessed, the affection of this child had remained as a green spot in his memory.

On the field of Lutter, where Albert, then a mere lad, had been wounded and left for dead, it was he who had returned, at his own imminent peril, to seek him among the heaps of slain; and on finding that he still breathed, had borne him in his arms for many a weary mile, and never left him till he had seen him placed in careful hands. He had been taken prisoner in consequence, but obtained his liberty again when the fortress, to which he had been sent, was stormed by Wallenstein; and he had then returned to the regiment of his old Colonel Hardenfels. Of

all this Albert knew nothing, for he had been still insensible when Hans Kuhnherz had been taken; and they had never met since that day, until the one when Albert had been brought as a prisoner before his father in the Town Hall of Schweidnitz. In spite of the lapse of time and the total change of costume, the veteran had instantly recognised his foster-child; and on finding the turn that matters were likely to take with him, had immediately applied for his discharge.

It did not require many questions from the Colonel to learn the cause of his Sergeant's sudden weariness of the service; nor more penetration, than even Hans possessed, to discover that, high as he carried the matter, the resolution the stern Colonel had adopted was wringing the heart of the father with agony. Permission was given to visit Albert in his prison; and, almost without a word being spoken on either side, it was well enough understood between them, that the Serjeant should attempt his rescue. A piece of blank paper, signed with the name of Colonel Hardenfels, was found in that containing the discharge, and Hans readily understood the hint. Here, however, a difficulty presented itself that had not occurred to the Colonel. The Sergeant could as soon have written a "Defence of the Faith" as his own name; and it was necessary that the paper should be filled up with an order to the keeper of the tower where Albert was confined. He was obliged,

therefore, to have recourse to a comrade who had been a runaway clerk, who was induced to assist him by the offer of a large bribe, as well as by the consideration that this would afford him and another an opportunity they had long meditated of deserting. This circumstance was very agreeable to Hans, as he had had some misgiving that the very man who would take his bribe would be the most likely to betray him.

An order was, therefore, made out that Albert was to be removed to a temporary prison outside the town, which had been made out of a Lutheran school-house that had been shut up; and though there was something irregular in the appearance of it, the signature was found to be undoubtedly genuine, and it was allowed to pass.

So far, therefore, the scheme had been perfectly successful; but the unexpected resolution of Albert, not to leave Schweidnitz unless in the company of his friends, threatened to defeat it in the very moment of victory. For a trooper of those days, Hans Kuhnherz was rather abstemious in oaths; but we are sorry to say, he could not help trying what they would do for him on this occasion. His foster son stood firm, however, under this battery, so he was obliged, at last, to consider whether there was any other resource, and, like most people in perplexity, he thought it would be something to gain time. He obtained, therefore, from Albert the promise that he would go now

to the place prepared for him, and remain there until the following day, by which time some information might be obtained concerning the position of the Mercks, and the chance of effecting their escape.

About half-an-hour's swift walking brought them to the inn, or "Wirthshaus," of the Golden Lion, of which the Sergeant had spoken. It consisted merely of one large wooden building, like a barn; one end of which was appropriated to the use of guests, as well as of the host and his family, and the other to cows, horses, and poultry. A great fire was burning at one end on an open hearth, and the rafters of the roof were draped with sides of bacon, smoked geese, ropes of onions, sausages, and other appearances of plenty, very seldom seen in these times, and for which, some years after, the whole province of Silesia might have been searched in vain.

There was no second apartment, even for sleeping; but round the walls were various apertures, like closets, some shut in by wooden doors, and others merely by curtains, these were the only bedchambers of the family, and such travellers as stopped at the place. The inn and its inhabitants were, of course, objects too familiar to attract a moment's attention from Albert or the Sergeant; but after exchanging a few words with the host, and swallowing a cup of wine, the former inserted his tall person into one of these holes in a way known only to Germans, and the

Sergeant set out to return for one night more to his quarters in the city. Hans was too old a soldier to allow many things to disturb his slumbers, for he was always willing to leave the morrow to take care of itself; but on this occasion he found, to his own great surprise, that he could not sleep till he had arranged some plan of operation in the affair he had undertaken.

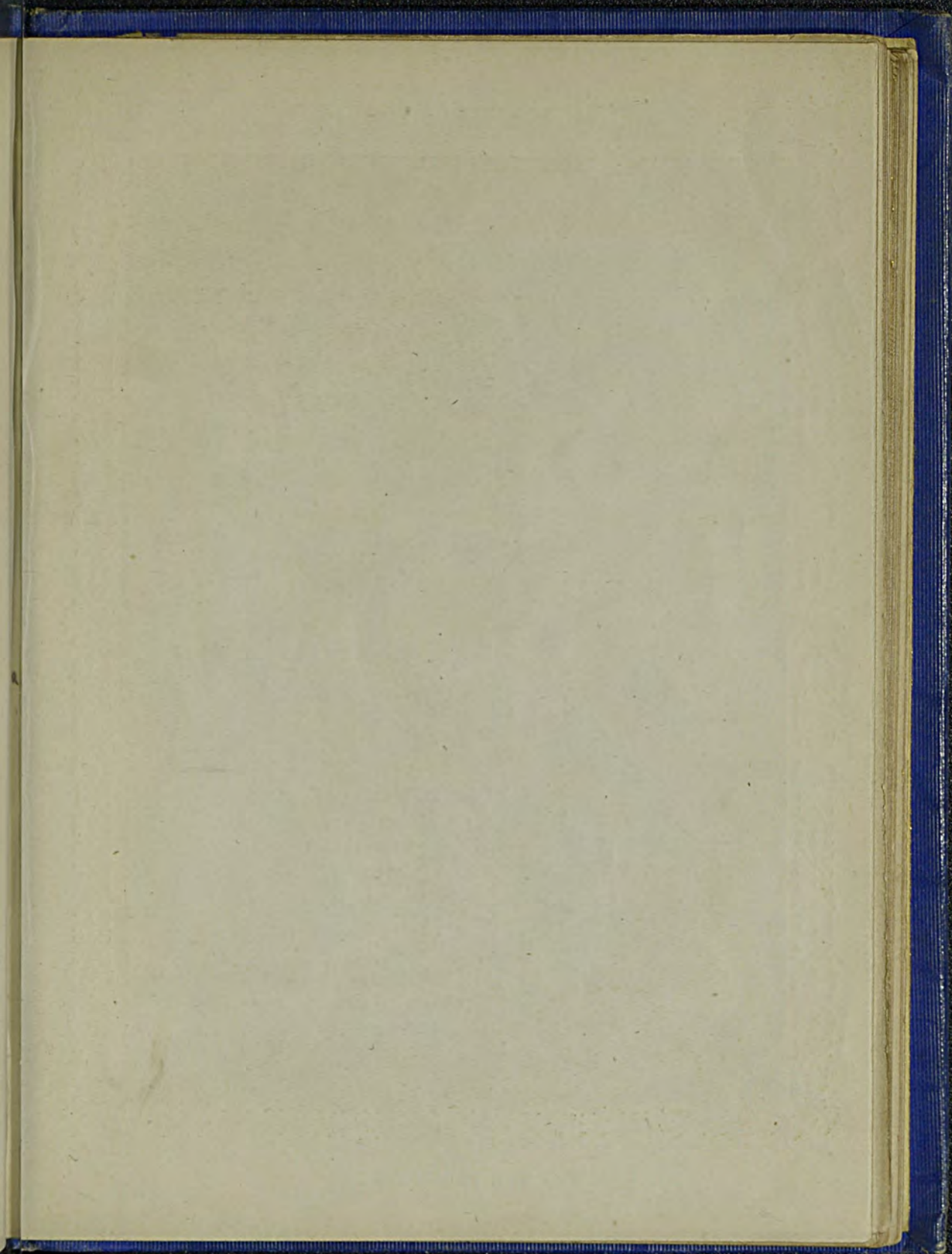
He could not help thinking, indeed, in his heart, that, as cities and citizens were of very little more use in the world than to raise contributions and supplies for armies, his dear foster son was unreasonably scrupulous in the matter; but he was resolved to gratify him, if possible, just as in Albert's boyhood he had often toiled to make him a plaything, or please any childish whim on which he had set his fancy.

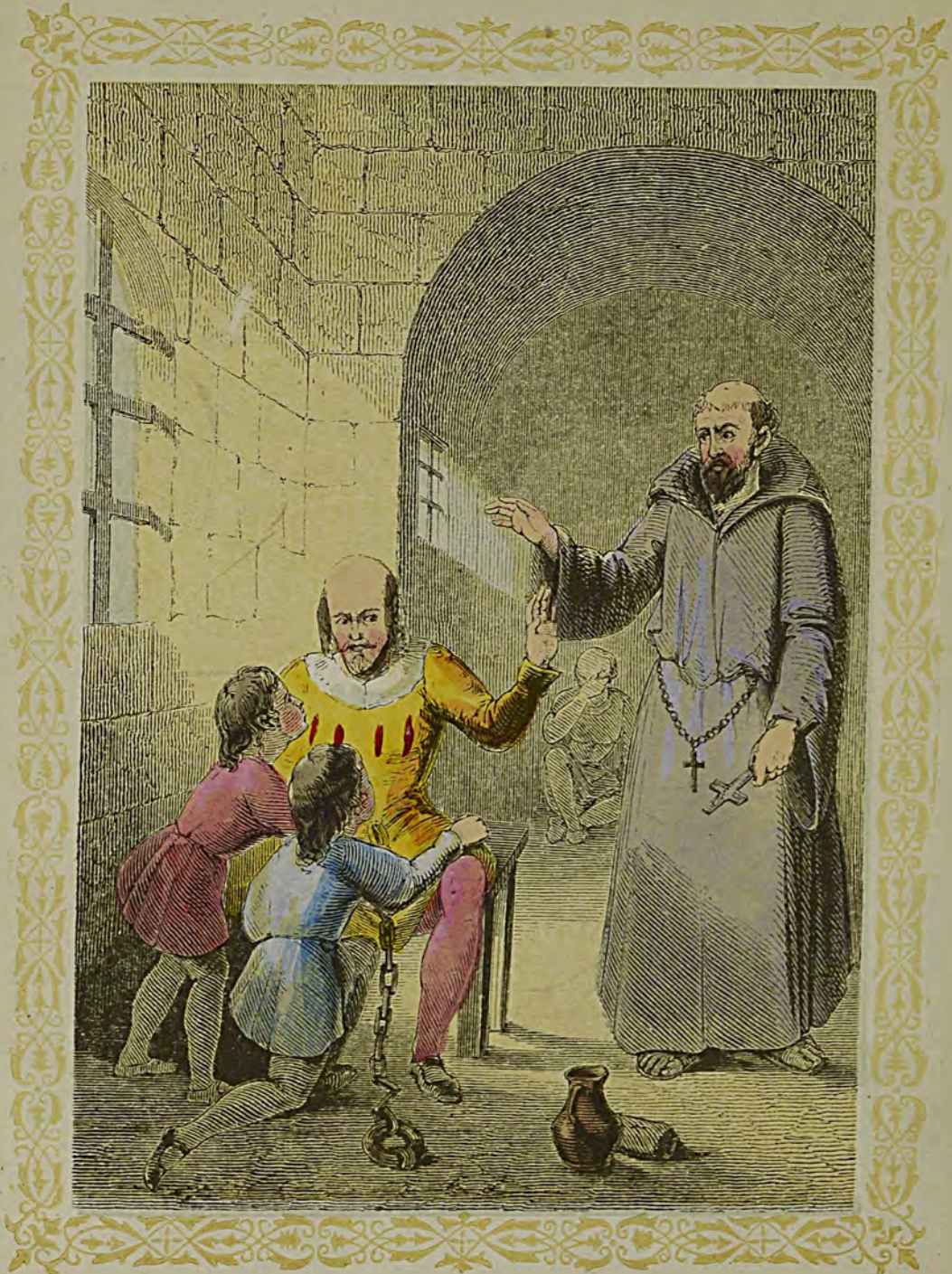
After much deeper cogitation than he had troubled his brains to perform for many years, he determined that Father Anselmus was the most likely man to afford him assistance, if he were so minded; but knowing his zeal in the service of his church, the old soldier was too cautious to trust him with the whole secret, until he had ascertained whether the humanity of the man would outweigh the bigotry of the monk.

He resolved, therefore, and prided himself much on the contrivance, to confess to him as a grievous sin that lay heavy on his conscience, the having assisted a heretic to

escape; and trusted to his own sagacity to discover whether, in the penance he might impose, the priest should be acting from his heart, or merely obeying orders. The priest, however, knew rather more of human nature than, considering his ignorance of military matters, Hans could have supposed possible, and soon found out what sort of penitent he had got before him; so that the old soldier had to retire with a severe reproof, and without knowing anything of the intentions of the Franciscan.








THE PRISONERS.



CHAPTER X.

THE PRISONERS.

S our business at present is merely to relate what happened to a private family, we have avoided as much as possible saying anything about the public history of that unhappy period; but in order to make the remainder of our story intelligible, we find it necessary to mention some events that took place about this time, and which had a very important influence on the fate of Schweidnitz and the family of Merck.

The heroic and pious King, Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden, had landed in the north of Germany, to undertake the cause of the oppressed Protestants. In less than a year he had driven the Emperor's troops out of all Pomerania and Mecklenburg, and would have advanced further in his victorious career, but that he was hindered by the

cowardly and selfish conduct of two princes, the Electors of Brandenburg and Saxony, who professed to be Protestants, but who were induced, by a mean jealousy of the renown of the King of Sweden, to refuse to enter into an alliance with him, although it was evident that without him the cause of freedom and of the Protestant religion must be wholly lost. As the Swedish army was very small, it was necessary that before advancing further into Germany, Gustavus should make sure that he should not be cut off from the communication with his own country; and for this purpose, as well as to secure a place of refuge for his soldiers in case of their being defeated by the immensely greater armies to which they would be opposed, he required that they should put him in possession of some fortresses in the country which he had saved.

While they were hesitating to comply with this very reasonable request, the city of Magdeburg, to which Gustavus would willingly have brought assistance, was taken by storm by the troops of the Emperor; and so dreadful were the scenes of cruelty and horror that took place on that occasion, that, even in that age of war and bloodshed, they excited a cry of terror and execration from one end of Europe to the other. For several hours the soldiers of the Imperial general, Tilly, raged like infuriated tigers through the streets of the devoted city; murdering all whom they met, spearing infants at the breasts of

their mothers, setting fire to the houses, throwing women and children into the flames, and being only driven back by the terrible heat of the conflagration they had raised. In less than twelve hours, thirty thousand people had been killed, and one of the largest, finest, and most prosperous cities of Germany, reduced to a heap of smoking ashes.

This most wicked action was announced in a tone of the greatest triumph; and the murderers, reeking from the slaughter, dared to sing a grand *Te Deum*—a thanksgiving to God for their victory. It was calculated, that the terrible fate of this city would overpower with fear all the Protestants of Germany, and induce them to submit at once to the tyranny of the Emperor; but, fortunately, its effect proved the very reverse of what had been anticipated. It put an end, in a great measure, to their dissensions and hesitations; they saw that their only hope of safety from their enemies lay, in supporting the hero who seemed to have been sent by Heaven for their deliverance; and the great victory gained by Gustavus at Leipsic soon changed the whole aspect of affairs. He advanced rapidly, taking town after town; his allies, the Saxons, as had been agreed on, broke into Bohemia; and it became necessary that the Emperor should immediately make up his quarrel with Wallenstein, and by his assistance raise a fresh army, if he would not see the victorious Swedes besieging him in his capital.

Amongst others, Colonel Hardenfels had received orders

to hold himself in readiness to join the main body of the Imperial army at any moment when it should be required; and it became evident, that if he would have the credit of having purified the city of Schweidnitz from its heresy, he must make no delay. An edict was, therefore, published, that whoever should not, within eight days, renounce the Protestant confession, solemnly calling God to witness that he was now, by the intercession of the Blessed Saints, converted to the Catholic faith, should suffer the penalty of death. Several of the priests who had accompanied the regiment into the town, and who were supposed to be the great instigators of these measures, in secret disapproved them; but having once called in the aid of brutal violence to accomplish their purpose, they had set in motion an instrument of mischief which they had no power to control. Terrified by the nearness of the danger, many of the citizens submitted at once; but a few brave men, among whom was Leopold Merck, could not be induced, by any threats, to sign their names to a declaration of falsehood.

In a strong room in the castle, where, though their hands were left at liberty, it was thought necessary to attach each prisoner by a chain to a staple in the floor, sat a few of these companions in misfortune. In the appearance of Merck, although he had been but a short time in confinement, a fearful change had been wrought. To a

man of such active habits of life, at a moment, too, when his family so much needed his protection, imprisonment was, perhaps, one of the acutest tortures that could have been devised; and the uncertainty concerning the fate of his wife and his little girls harassed him day and night, and robbed him of the peace which his firm resolution to do his duty, might otherwise have afforded him.

He was seated one afternoon on a low pallet, holding a hand of each of his two boys, who lay on the floor, resting a cheek on either knee: his face was pale and haggard, his lips compressed, his beard long, and his dress soiled and disordered. The children, too, were wan and silent, and though not sleeping, kept their eyes closed. They might have been released, but preferred remaining with their father; and he, judging that in whatever way he should be set free, he could hardly remain long in captivity, had not insisted, as yet, on their leaving him, for they had now no longer a home.

A few yards off a neighbour, a zealous Calvinist, was finding a solace in what he intended for prayer, but which sounded much like cursing:—

“Oh, Lord, break the teeth of the ungodly, and smite all mine enemies upon the cheek bone; destroy them, and cast them out; let a sudden destruction come upon them; let their waters be turned into blood; and let them be smitten with hot thunderbolts!”

“Dear brother,” said Merck at length, “do not pray in that dreadful manner! Have you not also read, ‘Forgive them, for they know not what they do?’”

The poor deacon hung his head, rebuked, and in the sudden revulsion of his feelings, wept like a child. In a deep gash across his head, and down one side of his face, he bore evidence enough that he was not without excuse for his vindictive feelings.

At length he seemed calmer, and lifting up his head, said, “Worthy Master Merck, I sometimes think we would do well to subscribe the declaration: the sin thereof would surely lie at the door of those who take such means to constrain us. If ‘the heathen rage against us’ in this wise, the blessed light of the Reformation must else surely be quenched altogether.”

Merck shook his head, and replied, “The event, dear friend, we must leave in the hands of Him who knows the issue of all things. We poor short-sighted mortals cannot rule our conduct by calculation of consequences. We can but do right, and leave the rest to Him.”

The door opened slowly as he spoke, and, little as they agreed with him in doctrinal matters, the prisoners rejoiced to see the grey cowl and frock of the benevolent Father Anselmus.

He had, since the commencement of the persecution, been unwearied in his attendance upon the victims of a

tyranny which his soul abhorred, though the tenets in which he had been brought up led him to think it justifiable. But though he had been incessant both in prayer and argument, that they might be brought to see their errors, he had had as yet little success; and of the proselytes he had made, as he was not blinded by self-conceit, he could not avoid seeing, that the near prospect of the executioner had more to do with their conversion than his skill in controversy.

His blessing, as he entered, was given with as much kindness, and received with as much gratitude, as if they had belonged to the same communion; but when he seated himself beside Merck, imagining he was about to resume the controversy, the brow of the prisoner contracted with an appearance of irritation, as he motioned him away, and said, "I beseech you tempt me no more. How sorely I have been tempted already, you, reverend Father, who have neither wife nor child, can, perhaps, scarcely imagine."

Something like a sigh escaped the monk as he answered, "Various and manifold are the temptations of this life, my son. There is for frail mortals but one refuge from them—the bosom of the only true Church. I pray, that, by the intercession of the Blessed Saints, thou mayst yet reach this haven: though it has not been granted to me to guide thee thither. Yet I came not now to speak of this matter, but to bring thee tidings of thy wife and little ones."

The Franciscan now went on to relate all that occurred in the house since Merck's imprisonment; with most of which our readers are acquainted. After receiving the confession of Hans Kuhnherz, he had made several attempts to gain access to Colonel Hardenfels, with a view of communicating the connection between his son and the Merck family; but the Colonel was said to be dangerously ill, and would see no one. There had appeared, therefore, no other course than to remove them, if possible, beyond the reach of their oppressor. The cave was no longer safe, for with every day the danger of discovery became more imminent; but Dr. Beatus had offered to resign the little room he had hitherto occupied to the family, contenting himself with a space cleared for him in a loft above, which had been generally used as a store-house for wood for winter fuel. This had also suggested the plan of filling the cave, as soon as it had been abandoned, with the logs thus removed, so that when at length it was discovered by Gripenclau and his myrmidons, there was no trace of its having served as a habitation.

Should it not be possible to effect their escape from the city, Father Anselmus promised to find them, at all events, an asylum within the walls of a convent, of which his sister was abbess, and where they should remain unmolested.

"May the Almighty bless and reward you!" exclaimed Merck fervently, when the monk had finished his narration.

“The bitterest drop in this bitter cup is, that I must leave these dear ones to struggle alone through this world of storm and sorrow.”

“Leave them, father!” cried the elder boy, springing up, with a half shriek, from the ground where he had lain. “What do you mean? What are they going to do to you?”—and he fixed his eyes, which looked large and hollow, with a look of terror on his father’s face.

The only answer that Leopold Merck believed he could give with truth to this question, was one which it was hard to make to a loving child. Yet the moment was fast approaching when concealment would be impossible. He took the boy in his arms, and, lifting him as high as he could, towards the narrow barred window, bade him look out on the distant snowy summit of the “Giant’s Cap,” shining all radiant in the sun, while heavy masses of black clouds were sweeping across the lower regions of the mountain. “See, Ulrich!” he said, “the dwellers in those valleys are now involved in mist, and rain, and storm; but above there is, as thou seest, a region of calm and brightest sunshine. Even so do the clouds now gather above our heads, and our path of life lies through darkness and tempest; but above are realms of glory and everlasting peace. It may be, that I shall have to leave you behind in the darkness, and go before you to that world where no storms come! But grieve not for me; think only, we are

all journeying thitherward, and I shall but have gone by a shorter road."

The boy burst into tears, and clasped his arms tightly round his father's neck. He knew his meaning now, and it was unexpressibly bitter. His life had hitherto been so peaceful, so happy, he wished for no better world. The storms that raged without had been like the wintry winds that come sweeping from the mountains, but which found no entrance into his warm sheltered home. Now for the first time he felt how uncertain a thing is earthly happiness. Poor Ulrich! This was his birthday, too!





CHAPTER XI.

NOW OR NEVER.

ULTRICH had wept long—so long, that his grief seemed stunned and deadened; and he remained in a sort of stupor, that left him scarcely conscious of the lapse of time. It had grown quite dark; and as his father had thrown himself by the side of his younger boy on the pallet, and Ulrich could not see his face, he remained silent and motionless that he might not disturb him if he slept, when he became aware of the repetition of a sound that he had heard several times before. It was that of a distant shout, accompanied by a heavy noise that he could not understand. The side of the castle, on which this room was situated, was turned away from the town, and looked across a moat, and a broad rampart, to the country; the view being terminated by the line of the Giant Moun-

tains. On the town side it was defended by extensive fortifications, so that it was not easy to hear any ordinary sound that came from the streets; but it soon became evident that the noise that now proceeded from them was of no ordinary kind. It had been market-day, and as it was no part of the Imperialist plan to throw any difficulties in the way of provisions being brought into the town, the country people were freely admitted, receiving only tickets at the gates on entering, which they were required to exhibit when they wished to pass through again on their return to the country, in order that it might be ascertained that the number was the same. It had been remarked, that great numbers had come in on this day, that there were fewer women than usual among them, and that they appeared not to be from the country immediately round Schweidnitz, but wore the dress of the more distant parts of the province; but as the troops were not well acquainted with the habits of the people of the surrounding districts, these circumstances had not excited their attention so much as that of the townspeople. As the hour approached when it was usual for them to leave the city, very few seemed inclined to do so; but they lingered about the streets and the market-place on various pretences, or gathered in groups round the doors of the beer houses, although very little beer seemed to be drunk.

In one large house of this description, in the great

square, there was music and dancing, in which the country people and the soldiers were mingled indiscriminately together. The large room became every moment more crowded, and, cold as the weather was, the doors and windows were thrown wide open. On a sudden—no one knew why or how,—almost as if at a given signal, the music ceased—a tumult arose—the dance changed into a conflict; drinking cups, pewter and wooden vessels went flying about, or were dashed through the windows—benches were torn up and used as weapons—long knives hitherto concealed, were brandished by the peasants, and a general attack made on the soldiers. Some of these, who had come without arms, snatched burning brands from the kitchen hearth; and, whether by accident or design, the whole house was soon in flames. Some men, who wore the dress of the country people, ran through the streets, uttering loud cries, and calling on the inhabitants to make a bold effort to rid themselves of their oppressors. From every house soldiers and citizens poured into the streets, and every street became the scene of a separate struggle. The great object with the people was to prevent the soldiers from assembling and forming into regular order, as in that case they would have been too strong for them; but as long as they were fighting separately, hand to hand, they could maintain a tolerably equal battle.

It had been known that on this evening many of the

principal officers were to be absent from the city at a grand banquet given by a nobleman in the neighbourhood. The troops, too, had been lately indulging in habits of excess, very unfavourable to discipline, and very few were ready to act on this sudden emergency. A few officers, with Colonel Hardenfels at their head, who had sprang from his bed at the news of the riot, rushed out and endeavoured to cut their way with their swords through the crowd, and rally their men, but the throng became every moment more dense; for at the moment the flames from the burning house rose into the air, a large body of peasants, who appeared to have been in waiting outside the town, made a sudden attack on one of the gates, seized it, and tore it down, and burst in to join the people in the town. The officers, of course, as soon as they made their appearance, became marked objects of attack; and a peasant, who had succeeded in wresting a musket from a soldier with whom he had been engaged, was just in the act of levelling it at Colonel Hardenfels, and would in all probability have hit him, when the weapon was suddenly struck from his hand,—it was said, by one of his own party, a tall countryman, who seemed to act as leader in the affray,—and a cry raised of “To the castle! to the castle!” The impulses of tumultuous crowds are easily swayed; and many who had been hitherto fighting, without any more definite purpose than that of revenge for injuries received,

were glad to have thus a distinct and important object presented to them.

The cry was taken up and echoed on every side, and the tide now set in from all quarters towards this point. It was just then that the sound became distinctly audible, not to Ulrich only, but to all the prisoners in the castle. Louder and louder grew the roar of voices, more frequent the shots, and heavier the battering on the outer gates. There was but a small garrison in the castle, but there was abundance of ammunition, of arms, and even of cannon, though, fortunately for the people, not in a state of preparation. If, however, they could not succeed in obtaining an entrance soon, it was probable these might be brought to bear upon them, and it was also rumoured that a trooper had succeeded in making his escape out of one of the gates, with a message to the Commander of a body of Imperial troops, lying at a town about ten miles off, summoning him to the assistance of those in the town.

The people were informed of these circumstances by the tall peasant before mentioned, and animated to renewed exertions by the thought, that it was now or never with them. Tools were not wanting, nor hands accustomed to use them; and, in this instance, the spades were useful auxiliaries: the outer works were torn down, the materials flung in to fill up the ditch, along with as much earth and rubbish as could be collected, and a passage was soon

formed across it. The drawbridge was up, but it was not of a strength to resist the attack now made upon it, and made with a method and order, that showed the mob to be under the guidance of some person well acquainted with military affairs. A tremendous shout announced that this also was gained, and the people were pouring through all the passages, snatching the keys of the different apartments, and, where these could not be instantly found, battering down the doors, and setting free the prisoners with which they were filled.

Amongst others, the door of that in which Leopold Merck and his companions were confined, was burst in by the tall peasant, who, rushing in, struck off the fetters by which they were confined, caught the youngest boy up in his arms, and, bidding his father follow with the elder, commenced the rather more difficult task of forcing his way out again. He accompanied them, however, no farther than to the inner court of the castle, where he consigned them to the charge of a companion, with a few hasty words of direction. The suddenness and totally unexpected nature of the event, the wild uproar in the street, after the deep silence in which he had lately lived, so confused the senses of Leopold Merck and his boys, that familiar as they were with the streets of their native city, they did not perceive which way they were going, but followed their conductor, as with rapid strides he passed through

two or three by-streets and narrow lanes, without once looking up. Presently he halted before a low door, pushed it open, and ascended a narrow, half dilapidated staircase, and, in another second, Merck was clasped in the arms of his wife and children.

The house to which he had been brought, was that one in the Enge Gasse, which we have so often had occasion to mention, and in which terminated the rocky passage that led from the Hermitage.

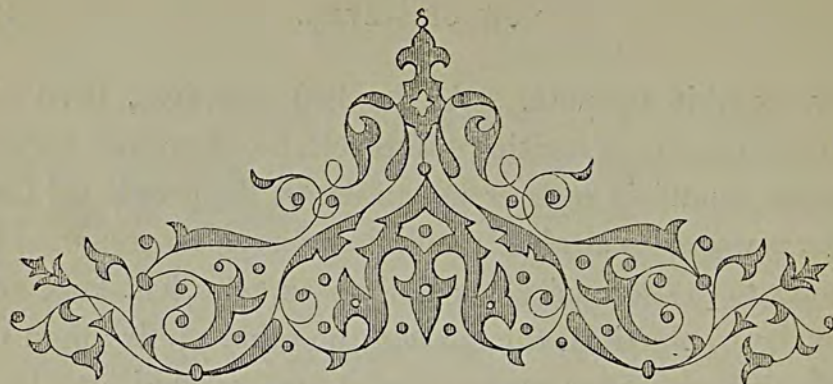
Need we describe the joy of that meeting,—of a beloved father—husband restored to his family, snatched as if from the tomb!

Our readers will have no difficulty in conjecturing, that the tall young man in the peasant's dress, who had acted as leader of the people, but had interfered to save the life of Colonel Hardenfels, was no other than Albert. He had found the minds of the country people violently excited against the Imperialists, not only on account of their behaviour in the town of Schweidnitz, but also of the forced contributions of corn and various kinds of provisions, which they had been compelled to make to them, at a season of the year, when such extortion would expose them and their families to the risk of starving. Even such of their produce as had been said to be purchased, had been paid for at a certain price, fixed by the buyers, which was much below what the peasants could really afford to sell

for. But by far the greater part was paid for only in promises, which both debtor and creditor were perfectly well aware would never be kept. In addition to these causes of dissatisfaction, the people in many of the districts were secretly or openly inclined to Protestantism, and had looked on with the deepest sympathy and indignation, at the sufferings to which the townspeople had been exposed on account of their religion. The spirits of all who were of this way of thinking, had also been lately raised by the accounts of the brilliant successes of the Swedes; but they would not probably have been inclined to run the risk of a revolt in favour of the oppressed people of Schweidnitz, had it not been for the hope of getting back a great part of their stores, which they knew to be still in the town, before the arrival of other troops, who even if they should chance to be friends—they were pretty sure would be no less hungry than their enemies. The plan was arranged in such haste, that many who were to take part in it, were uncertain, till the moment of its execution, whether it would be carried into effect at all or not; but it was necessary to lose no time, for summary trials and executions were daily taking place, and every day that passed might toll the knell of some brave man.

The object which Albert had most at heart, was the liberation of Merck and his family; for he could not resolve to act against his father any further than was neces-

sary for this purpose. As he had, however, been the principal means of inciting this revolt, he, of course, deemed himself bound in honour not to desert the people till their objects were also attained; and, therefore, after resigning his friends to the care of Hans Kuhnherz, who had kept near him the whole time, though with no other motive than the wish to keep him company, and a general desire to be in the middle of whatever was stirring, he returned to act as their leader, as long as they might require his services. After setting free the prisoners from the castle, the next object was to open the storehouses, and seize their contents. This did not take long,—the doors were broken open, the peasants' carts, which were all in readiness on the market-place, were drawn up, loaded, and driven off rapidly into the country; and those who were not engaged in this work, employed themselves in barricading all the avenues to it with the beams and rafters from the booths, and whatever other materials could be collected. As soon as this was done, their leader advised them to disperse with all speed over the country, and, in the course of an hour or two, the insurgents had all disappeared, the city was once more quiet, and only the smoking ruins of the houses burnt, and the confusion and disorder on the market-place, remained to give evidence of what had taken place.



CHAPTER XII.

A CITY OF REFUGE.

THE next day was far spent, and the red rays of the afternoon sun were falling aslant across the trunks of the majestic pines and firs, with which the sides of the Giant Mountains are in many parts clothed, and dyeing their thousand snowy peaks of a deep rose colour, when a peasant's cart, containing a family attired in the winter costume of the country, arrived at the limit, beyond which it is no longer possible to use even those rough vehicles. There was but a short distance remaining to reach the Bohemian frontier, but this it was necessary to traverse on foot. The trees gradually diminish in height as you ascend these mountains, till, at about half way up, they shrink to little more than

the height of a man's knee, though still retaining the form of trees, and extending their branches sometimes to a circumference of sixty feet. Between these dwarf trees, or bushes, a lane is now cut, which forms the frontier line, separating Bohemia from Silesia. Above this line there is nothing but naked rock.

The party was large, consisting of three men and several women and children, and they were well wrapped up, and furnished with pointed staves, and shoes adapted for walking over the snow; yet, short as the way was, the weaker of the party seemed almost worn out when they reached the last ledge of rock, on which the inn, or *baude* as it was called, was situated. A loud barking of dogs announced their approach to the inmates, and presently several women and children, came running out of the door, and gazed, with looks of astonishment and many exclamations, at the advancing party. They were followed by an athletic looking, middle aged man, in the dress of the Bohemian peasantry, who drove back the women and children, and advancing towards the travellers with a civil salutation, ushered them into the house.

This inn or farmhouse which was known by the name of "Hempel's Baude," was, like most of the habitations in these mountains, divided into four apartments: one of which was a stable for cattle; another, a dairy; the third, the dwelling-place of the family; and the fourth was

appropriated to the use of strangers. The latter was, in this instance, larger than usual, since, as the house was the first met with after crossing the Silesian frontier line, it was often used as an inn. On some straw, laid down on one side of the apartment, four men were lying, apparently asleep, and near them four large dogs, who lifted up their heads as the travellers entered, and uttered a low simultaneous growl, but seemed to wait for further orders before manifesting any other signs of hostility. An aged man, of a high stern aspect, with a long grey beard, and clothed in a single leathern garment, with a girdle round his waist, into which was stuck a broad knife, which might be used either for hunting purposes or as a weapon, was seated at the table. He rose as the travellers entered; but neither of the other men moved, although the noise made by the entrance of so large a party could hardly fail to have roused them.

The hostess now appeared, and offered, as there were other guests, to take the women and children into the inner apartment, which was occupied only by her own family; the offer was gratefully accepted: the host placed wine on the table, and the newly arrived travellers, whom our readers will probably have guessed to be no other than their old acquaintances, Albert Von Hardenfels, Leopold Merck, and the Sergeant, who had insisted on accompanying them thus far on their journey, seated themselves to

partake of the refreshment they so much needed. The old man seemed to wish to engage them in conversation, but all the while he was speaking of quite trivial matters, kept his dark eyes fixed upon them so piercingly, as to be somewhat annoying to those who had, of course, no particular wish to attract observation. At length he said: "You are fugitives, as I hear, for the sake of the faith?"

"It is hardly the time for a journey of pleasure," replied Albert, smiling, and not knowing whether it was prudent to give a more direct answer.

"From Jauer, or Lowenberg, or, perhaps, from Schweidnitz?" continued the old man, in a tone of inquiry.

"These are not times when men are willing to answer too freely the questions of strangers," said Merck.

"It is my business to ask questions," said the Bohemian. "I am here on the Emperor's service, to prevent the escape of Silesian heretics and rebels across the frontier."

The four men, who were lying on the straw, half raised themselves as he spoke, and a gleam as of weapons was seen in their hands; the dogs sprung up at the same moment, and stood waiting for the signal to fly at the newcomers. Albert and Leopold Merck leaped to their feet; the latter snatched a knife from the table, and the former drew his sword.

To their surprise, however, the Bohemian made no movement either to attack them, or defend himself; but, after looking at them for a moment, waved his hand, saying, "It is well—put up your weapons; I did but purpose to put you to the test; for the snares of our enemies are so many, that we cannot be too much on our guard. May the Lord deliver us from them!" He poured out a cup of wine as he spoke, saying, "Pledge me, friends, the Bohemian goose and the Saxon swan!"

"Huss and Luther!" exclaimed Albert and Merck, joyfully; for this was the watchword they were told to expect; and this, then, was the guide who was to conduct them to a place of security.

After the publication, by the Emperor Ferdinand, of what was called the "restitution edict," when it became evident that he intended to keep no terms with his Protestant subjects, more than thirty thousand families had emigrated from different parts of his dominions; but among the poorer classes in Bohemia, were some small communities, whose means would not allow them to take this mode of avoiding persecution. They fled, therefore, no farther than to the mountains—those everlasting walls, behind which the suffering and the persecuted have so often found a refuge; and founded, in their most hidden recesses, little settlements, where they supported themselves, and supplied their few wants by the produce of the chase, and by the

manufacture of different kinds of wooden wares, which were afterwards disposed of in the cities of Bohemia and Silesia. They did not, indeed, dare to venture thither themselves, but they easily found agents for this purpose among the country people, who were, for the most part, inclined to their doctrines, as well as glad to keep among them such peaceful and industrious neighbours.

One of these little communities had established itself near the large pastoral village of Stohnsdorf, in a secluded valley, that lay really not much more than a day's journey from Schweidnitz, but which could not be reached, by the ordinary road, without traversing double that distance.

Immediately beyond the ridge on which Hempel's Baude was situated, extends a mile or two of mere rocky labyrinth, consisting of enormous masses of granite tumbled together in the wildest confusion; sometimes forming large caverns, where one rock, supported by another at various points, serves as the roof of a chamber twenty feet high: at others, a sort of covered way, or narrow lane, is made by two vast perpendicular cliffs, with another lying across, like a bridge, and seeming to have been thrown there by some great convulsion of nature. By taking advantage of such accidents as this, and clearing, with great labour, the snow from the intervening spaces, a communication had been, of late, kept up, even during the winter, between the village of Stohnsdorf and Hempel's

Baude; although most of the villages among the Giant Mountains are, during more than six months of the year, cut off from all intercourse with the rest of the world, and lie half buried in snow.

It sometimes happened, indeed, when the weather had been very unfavourable, that the passage was entirely stopped for some weeks, by the accumulation of snow; but as the heat from the rays of the sun, reflected from the perpendicular granite cliffs into the deep valleys, was very considerable, a few fine days generally softened it sufficiently to allow an opening to be cut through. Such a path was not, indeed, without its perils, for it might easily happen that the high wall of snow on either side might fall in on the passenger; but these people were exposed to too many dangers to trouble themselves much about uncertain contingencies, and as their friends were always aware of the possibility of such an occurrence, they had every chance of a rescue. It was for the purpose of cutting a passage through some places in which snow drifts had settled, that the Bohemian had brought with him the four men, mentioned as accompanying him, and as they were exposed even here to meet with spies of the Jesuits, or parties of soldiers sent out to scour the country, they had taken the precaution to come armed.

The fugitives were hospitably received by the little community, whose sympathy was excited by the recol-

lection of what they had themselves suffered when forced to quit their homes. A cottage was vacated for their use, by the removal of some of the young people into Stohnsdorf, the pastoral village in the neighbourhood of which they had fixed their settlement, and sweetly and thankfully did the Merck family rest that night on the beds of hay which their kind neighbours had prepared for them.





CHAPTER XIII.

A TABLE IN THE WILDERNESS.

THE winter passed away swiftly and happily for the fugitives. It was impossible to think of proceeding further at present; for, independently of the season, which made so long a journey almost impracticable, the whole country between the mountains and Hamburg was now one continued scene of conflict and devastation, and all communication was cut off as if by a raging sea. It was thought, that if, when the season should be sufficiently far advanced, they could, by keeping mainly along the line of the mountains, reach the river Elbe, where it enters Saxony, their route might be continued in comparative safety by water; but this could not be for many months, as the spring in these mountainous regions is almost always late and uncertain.

In the mean time they felt little inclined to hurry their departure. The joy and thankfulness for being rescued

from so many dangers and sufferings, and restored to each other's society, would for the Mercks have almost made a paradise of a dungeon; but here, among these glorious mountain solitudes, their feelings rose to rapture. Pent up, as they had been hitherto, within the walls of a city, and unacquainted, even by description, with the beauty of nature (for in those days nobody dreamt of writing descriptions of scenery, or making journeys in search of the picturesque), the wonders that lay within little more than a day's journey had been almost as unknown to them as the recesses of the Himmelaya.

They were never weary of gazing at the soft radiance of the distant snowy peaks, which shone against the blue sky as if cut from mother-of-pearl; or gazing down into the jaws of precipices, where the black basaltic rocks rose in irregular pyramidal shafts; or peeping from some opening into the land of Bohemia, with its hills, and dales, and villages, and pastures; or at sunset watching the bright hues of purple, and scarlet, and light pink, which gleamed across the mountains to the eastward, as the level rays of the sun shot through the valleys.

When the weather would not allow them to leave the shelter of the cottages, they found perpetual occupation or amusement in the customs,—to them strange and new—of the country people. During the evening, and sometimes even in the day time, it was, and in many places, is still

the practice among these mountaineers, for the women to assemble with their spinning-wheels and distaffs, at one or other of the houses, while the men sit round on the tables and benches, and sing, or tell stories. Not unfrequently these parties begin as early as nine o'clock in the morning, and are continued all day, being only interrupted for a couple of hours, while the women retire to their respective homes to prepare the dinner. This interval is often employed by the gentlemen in tying the threads of the wheels of their particular favourites, among the girls and women, into as many hard knots as possible.

The stories which form the entertainment are legends and fables of various kinds; those of ghosts and witches being most in favour, and, of course, the more horrible and grisly the better. As the interest of the tale rises, the company draw nearer together, leaning their chins on both hands on the table, and the little ones catch up their feet, lest there should be some monster beneath it; while such exclamations as—"Go on! go on!" "Hush!" "Now we shall hear!" "Silence, girls!" "Boys, be quiet, or I'll kick ye out!"—and so forth, betoken attentive listeners, and reward the narrator. And sometimes in the evening, when the family was seated quietly in the warm room, a clatter would be heard without, and a terrible ugly face would peep through the window, and then another and another, till it was full; and the children would run

squealing and laughing into the corners; and then the sounds of a fiddle would be heard at the door, and when it was opened, in would come a merry troop of masques, something like those that used, in former days in England, to form the retinue of Old Father Christmas, and perform a variety of comic dances for the amusement of the company, or sometimes seize on some of them, and drag them out to have a dance in the snow. These masqueraders were the lads from the neighbouring village. And when the spring came forth, and the soft warm winds began to blow, and the snow melted away from all but the highest peaks, and left visible the fantastic forms of the granite rocks, like towers, and palaces, and temples, glittering with diamonds; and the numberless rippling springs, with which these mountains are so abundantly provided, freed from their icy fetters, came bursting forth, gushing melodiously through their hundred channels; and the dark green pines and firs became tipped with the bright young growth of the new year; and away over the fields of Bohemia the young corn sprang up, and the snowy and sweet-scented blossoms gleamed out on the hedges and orchards—now the hearts of the children bounded as they had never done before, and they could not help wondering how all this happiness could have come forth out of the dark cloud of what was called misfortune.

And now came the grand epoch when the cattle and

sheep were led out to their summer pastures. A few days before the first of May, the shepherd of the village made his rounds, provided with a file, and a large stock of mostly poetical, but always pious and edifying chants. He was received at each house with marks of great consideration, and after partaking of the offered viands, demanded to see the cattle and the stalls. The master of the house opened the door accordingly, and, standing on the threshold, the shepherd pronounced a blessing on the cows, oxen, and sheep. He then with the file took off the sharp points of the horns grown during the winter, and made a searching investigation into the state of health of each individual animal, and sprinkled each stall with holy water. The cattle were then led out into the open air, in order that the crowd, always assembled on the occasion, might judge of their condition, and of the care that had been bestowed on them during the winter; on which points a lively debate went on the whole time.

On May-day the whole village resounded, as soon as the sun rose, with cheerful noises;—the tinkling of bells, the lowing of cattle, the bleating of sheep, and the joyous calls of the villagers. Each bore in his hand a holy rod, or birch twig, adorned at the end with a bunch of palm, brought from the church on the Palm Sunday, and to which was ascribed, by ancient faith, a power of hindering the frequently destructive combats of the horned cattle,

or of guarding an animal from any mortal hurt during the whole year.

At six o'clock in the morning the shepherd was standing before the last house, giving three blasts with a horn made of the bark of a tree, and calling out,—“In the Holiest name! drive out the flocks!”—and immediately the sheep issued forth, under the care of the several shepherds' boys. Then came another and stronger blast, and a running and bawling of men, and bellowing and trampling of beasts, and out rushed the herds in wild tumult, and the peace-making powers of the birchen twig were kept in constant requisition; but gradually the noise died away, the cattle moved peaceably on their appointed track, and the several owners went back to their dwellings, leaving them to the care of the herdsmen.

On Sunday only the Protestants thought it better to keep themselves apart from their neighbours, and to refrain from the ricketty diversions in which it was their custom to indulge. But in the interval between the long morning and evening services, from which no individual was ever absent, the Merck family would wander forth into the sublime temple that the Almighty hand had reared around them. A favourite haunt was what is called the “City of Rocks”—an immense range of broken cliffs, resembling in appearance the ruins of a great city destroyed by fire or earthquake; where the walls of vast buildings, from

a hundred and fifty to two hundred feet high, have been left standing, and where the streets, and lanes, and alleys are still passable. Some of the broken masses of rock seem to hang one upon another; others stand singly, like one side of a house, and often resting upon points so narrow, that they seem as if they must fall the next moment. Many of these summits are very oddly shaped, and have been named after various objects, which they have been thought to resemble,—as the Priest, the Kettle-drum, the Chimney, the Gallows, or the Burgomaster.

Greta and Albert were never weary of roaming about among these rocky streets; but sometimes the children would run shuddering back, as they found themselves in a deep dark ravine between high perpendicular masses of black basalt; and, looking up, saw, as if from the bottom of a well, the sky dark, and the stars appearing at noon-day.

Now and then there would be pleasures of a more noisy description, in which they were allowed to partake. There was, perhaps, a wedding in the village; and early in the morning the family were awakened by the sound of music and the firing of pistols from doors and windows, and the wedding guests came forth in their Sunday clothes, and even those who were not invited put on what milliners call a "demi-toilette," and came out to see them pass. And then the young men, the friends of the bride-

groom, came out, singing, and laughing, and shouting, and throwing up their caps, and boys and dogs frisked and yelped, and the musicians assembled in the bridegroom's house, and dancing began even before breakfast, while groups of fat rosy faces of children looked in at all the windows, and, when the feasting time came were regaled with cakes and sausages handed out by the guests. But after breakfast the music suddenly ceased; the company took off their hats and stood round, the bridal pair knelt down, the mother of the bride sprinkled them with holy water, and the father laid his hands upon them, and gave them a solemn blessing before the procession set off for the church.

And then, after two or three weeks, came the grand ceremony of escorting the young pair to their future home, and carrying thither the dower of the bride; and, as this did not consist of money, but of goods and chattels, a great waggon was brought before her parent's door, and harnessed with the four finest horses that could be procured, adorned with flowers and coloured trappings, and metal ornaments; and upon it were mounted—not higgledy piggledy, but in such order as to display them to the best advantage—chairs, and tables, and bedsteads, and chests of linen, and kitchen utensils of brightly scoured brass, and, high on the top, a gaily decorated cradle.

Swiftly and pleasantly flew the days for the Merck

family in this mountain retreat; and the noise of war, and the various sorrows and distractions of the time, seemed to die away far below them; and as they saw how vast and beautiful was nature, and gazed up into the infinite worlds of light above, they felt the full power and magnificence of the Creator as they had never done before, and learned to look upon the troubles of this life but as passing clouds, above which the everlasting sun was shining in undiminished power and glory.

We are almost sorry to think they could not remain there the rest of their lives; but life cannot be all a holiday—not even all a *holy day*, for it has been appointed that we shall work six days, as well as rest on the seventh.

We have not been able, however, to gather much more information concerning the history of the family, or even whether they did or did not leave Stohnsdorf, and settle in the north of Germany, as had been intended, and which appears probable, as they would there be free from persecution, on account of their religion, and would also find the means of support, for Herr Merck had at length received assurance of the safe arrival of the sums he had transmitted to Hamburg for that purpose.

All the conjectures we can form on the subject, are furnished by a little incident which accidentally came to our knowledge.

On the New Year's Eve following that on which our

tale commenced, a family, living in that city, but said to be fugitive Protestants from some distant part of Germany, were seated round a table in a small room, less gaily illuminated than that where we found the Mercks on the year preceding, but full of what was still better than even Christmas candles—kind hearts and happy faces. Their numbers and appearance precisely corresponded with those of our old acquaintances, and the only difference we can perceive is, that the young man, whom we take to be Albert Hardenfels, instead of the costume of a merchant's clerk, wore the undress of a Danish military officer. It does not seem, however, unlikely, that, as soldiers were wanted by the Protestant King, Christian of Denmark, he might have returned to the service.

Frau Merck,—as we suppose,—was seated in a high cushioned chair, such as was then seldom used but by invalids, and she looked thin and pale, as if just recovering from illness; but this, too, is not unlikely, if we recollect the hardships and sufferings of the past year; her husband's arm was round her, and she was smiling through tears, that looked like tears of joy, as she contemplated the group before her. There were, as we have said, few candles lit about the room, and no presents on the table; but this year of misfortunes had raised the minds even of the youngest child above caring for such things. All were busy playing at various games, several of which had for

their object, as Christmas and New Year's games often have, to dive into the secrets of the coming year. There was one, which, if we mistake not, is played also in country places in England and Scotland. A large bowl of water was placed upon the table, and nutshells carefully split, and, containing small pieces of lighted taper, were set floating on it, and were launched in pairs, intended to represent any married couples, either present or expectant; and according to the manner in which the shells performed the voyage across the bowl, would the life's voyage of the parties represented prove prosperous or otherwise.

“Who shall swim first?” cried one; and there was a unanimous shout of, “Father and mother!” in reply.

Two of the shells were accordingly launched, and floated slowly and steadily over nearly to the other side, but, before it was reached, one of the lights gave suddenly a flare and a sputter, and went out. “Who was that? who was that?” exclaimed several voices; and forgetting, for a moment, the childish nature of the play, the parents eagerly bent over to see, and a wish flashed involuntarily through the minds of each, that it might be their own, and not that of the beloved companion. Fortunately, it appeared, as the children said, that the shell had been awkwardly launched, and wetted inside, so that the oracle had been unfairly tried, and must be tried again; and, considering that our good Protestant family were enlightened

people, and scorned all these foolish old superstitions, we are rather ashamed to say, that nobody cared to try again; but everybody cried out, "Who next? who next?" in a great hurry, as if they wanted to forget it.

Then one of the little ones looked very sly, and whispered something to Greta, and Greta laughed and coloured, and said something like, "Pooh! Nonsense!" but we presume she did not look very awfully angry, for the little niece persisted that Greta and Albert should swim next. In the case of people not yet married, it was the law of the game that they should not be launched together, but separately; and if the two did not approach, and float on together, it was evident the fates did not intend the union to take place. The good ships, Albert and Greta, were launched accordingly, on opposite sides, and went out a little way in good style; but then they stood still, and, to the astonishment and indignation of the company, began slowly to move back again to their previous places, and continued to burn away apart in single blessedness.

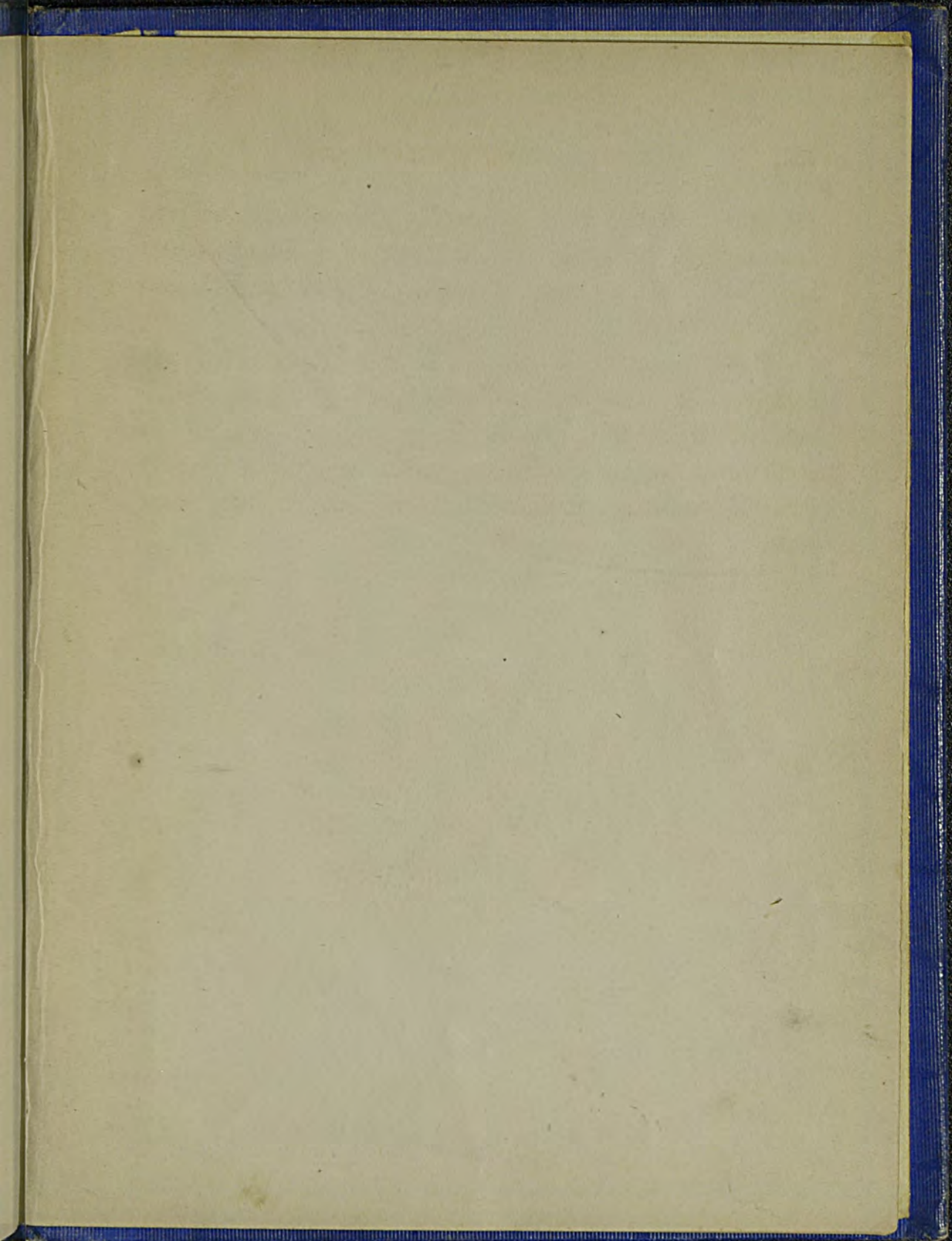
"Intolerable!" exclaimed Albert; "throw some nutshells at them." Greta laughed, but her laugh was not quite as clear and hearty as usual; when, behold! suddenly great waves arose in the bowl, the ships left their anchoring ground, approached each other, and floated merrily over in company to the opposite shore.

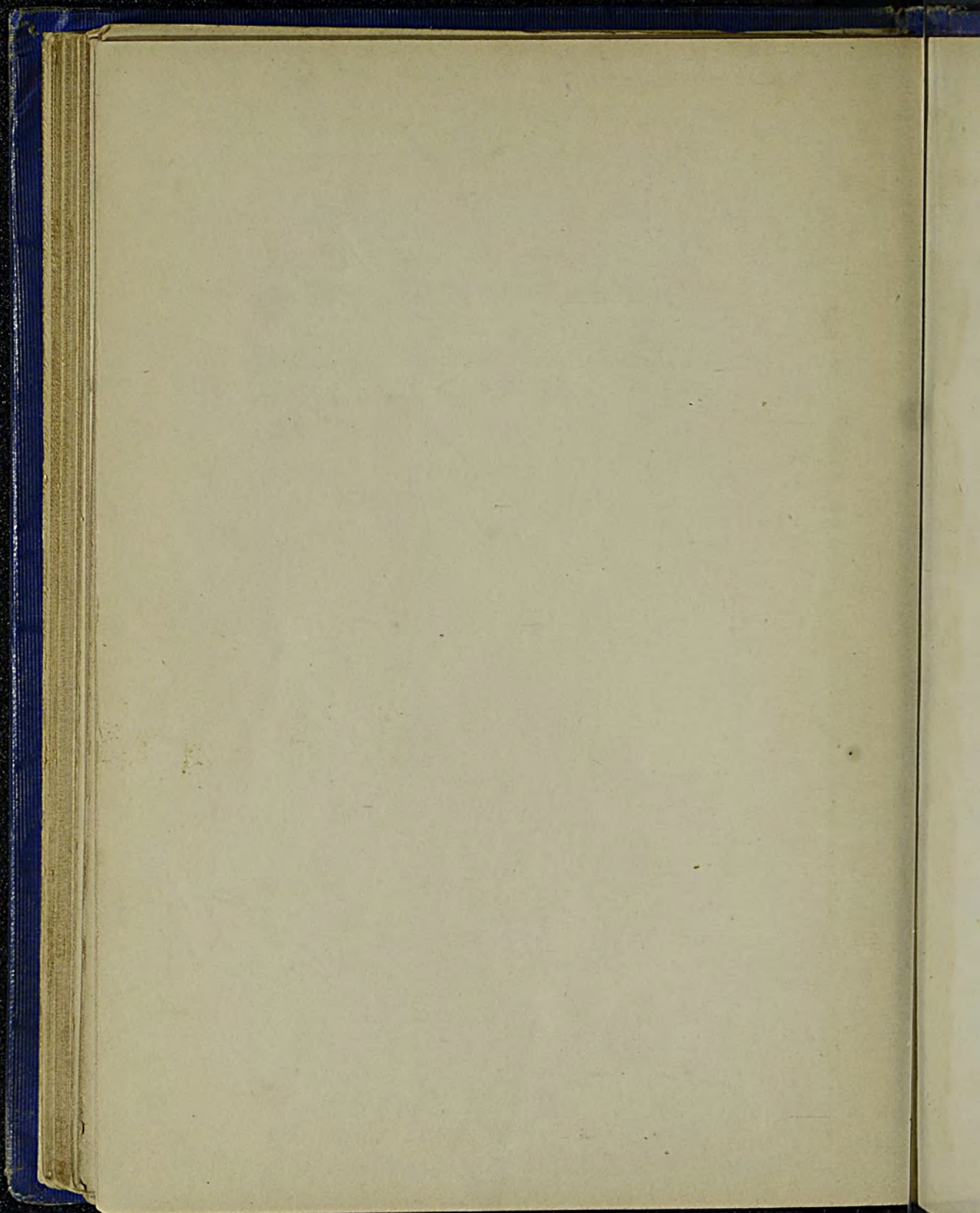
"Victory!" shouted Albert, springing up; but little

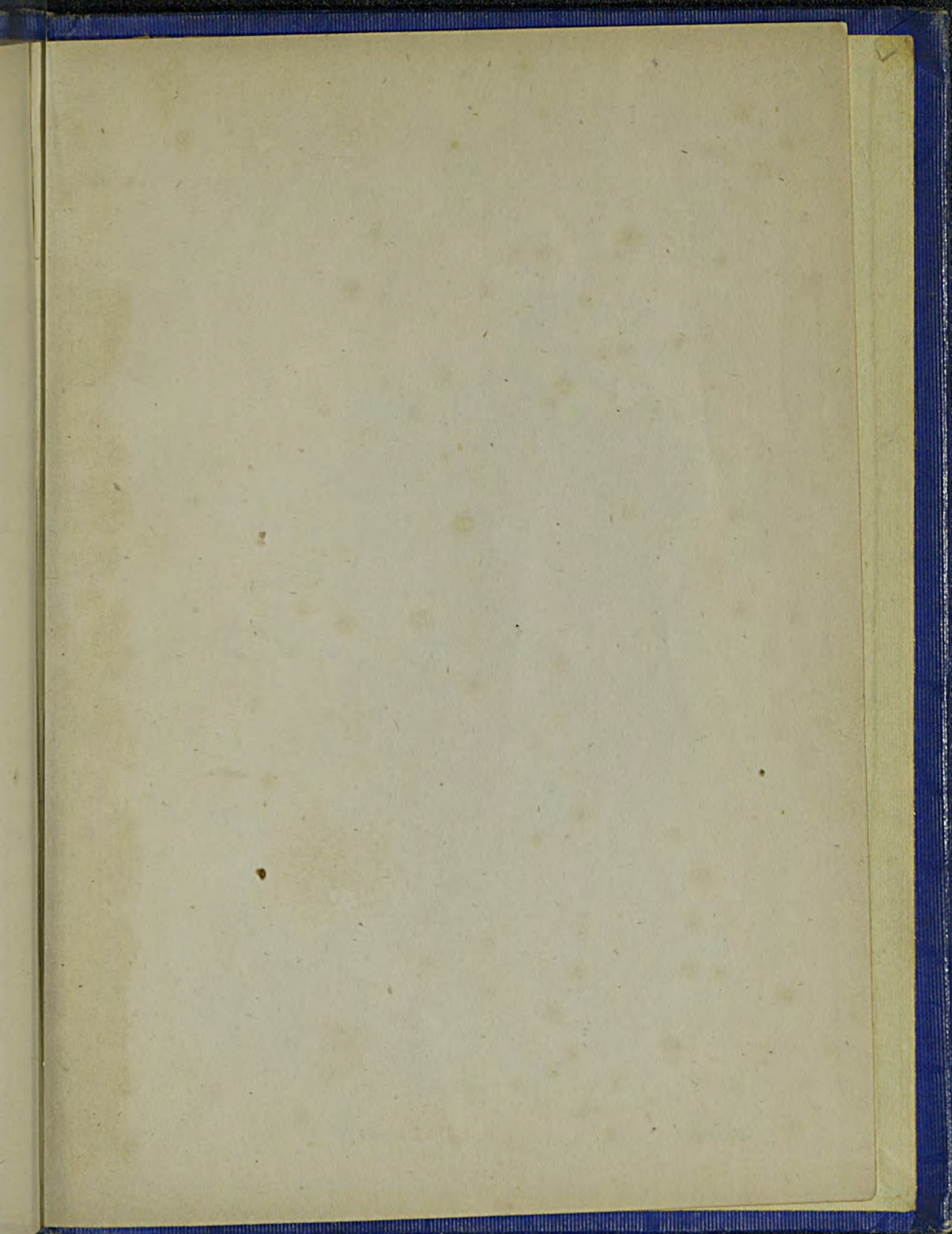
Heinrich bounced from under the table with a very red face, crying, "It's not fair! it's not fair! I saw Albert and Greta, both together, give a great push to the leg of the table!"

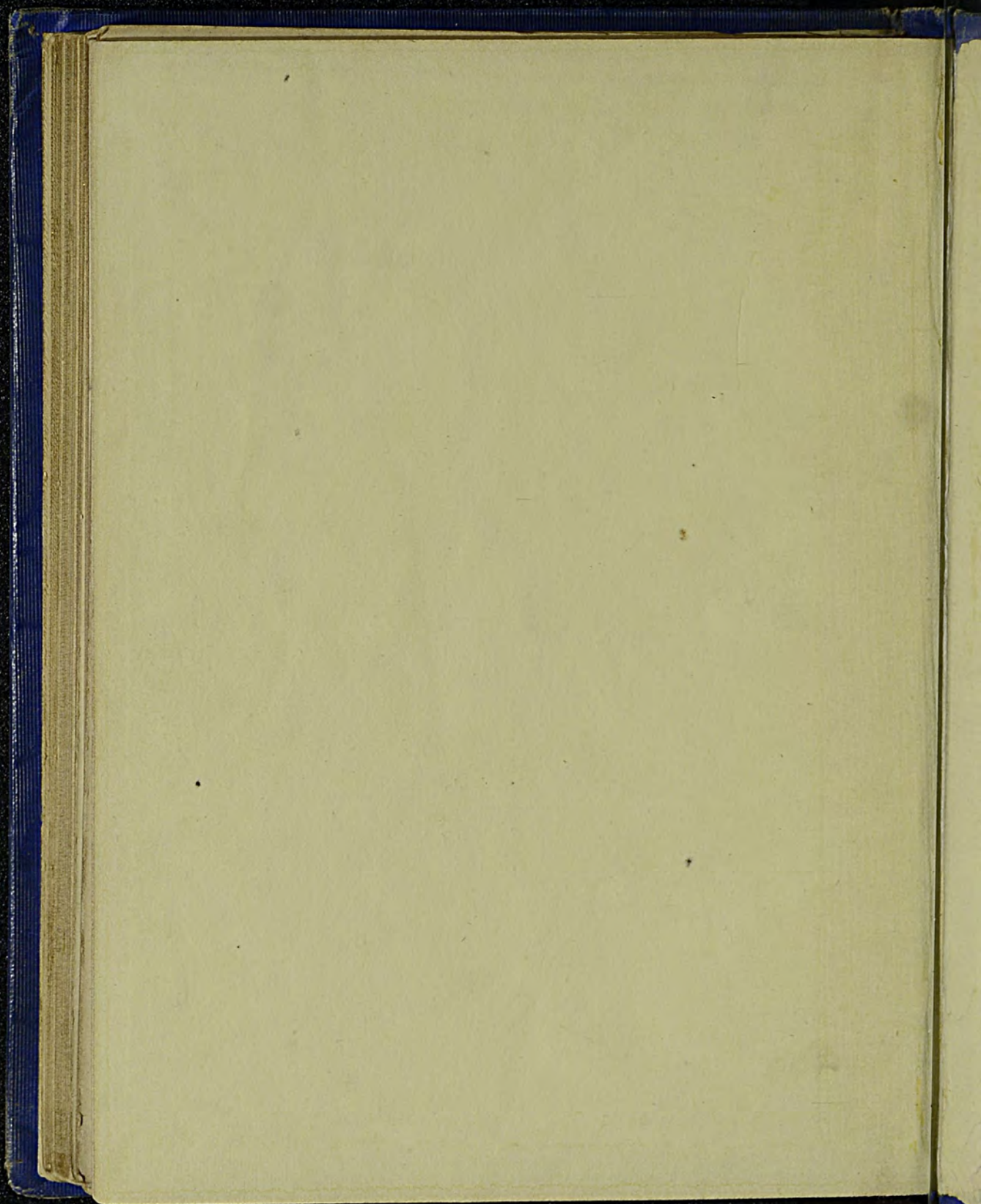
We who are lucky enough to live in the nineteenth century, need not ask whether the nutshells really foretold coming events; but this oracle, at any rate, told us one secret, which those who are as sagacious as ourselves will probably have discovered too. Those who are not, must try and guess.











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