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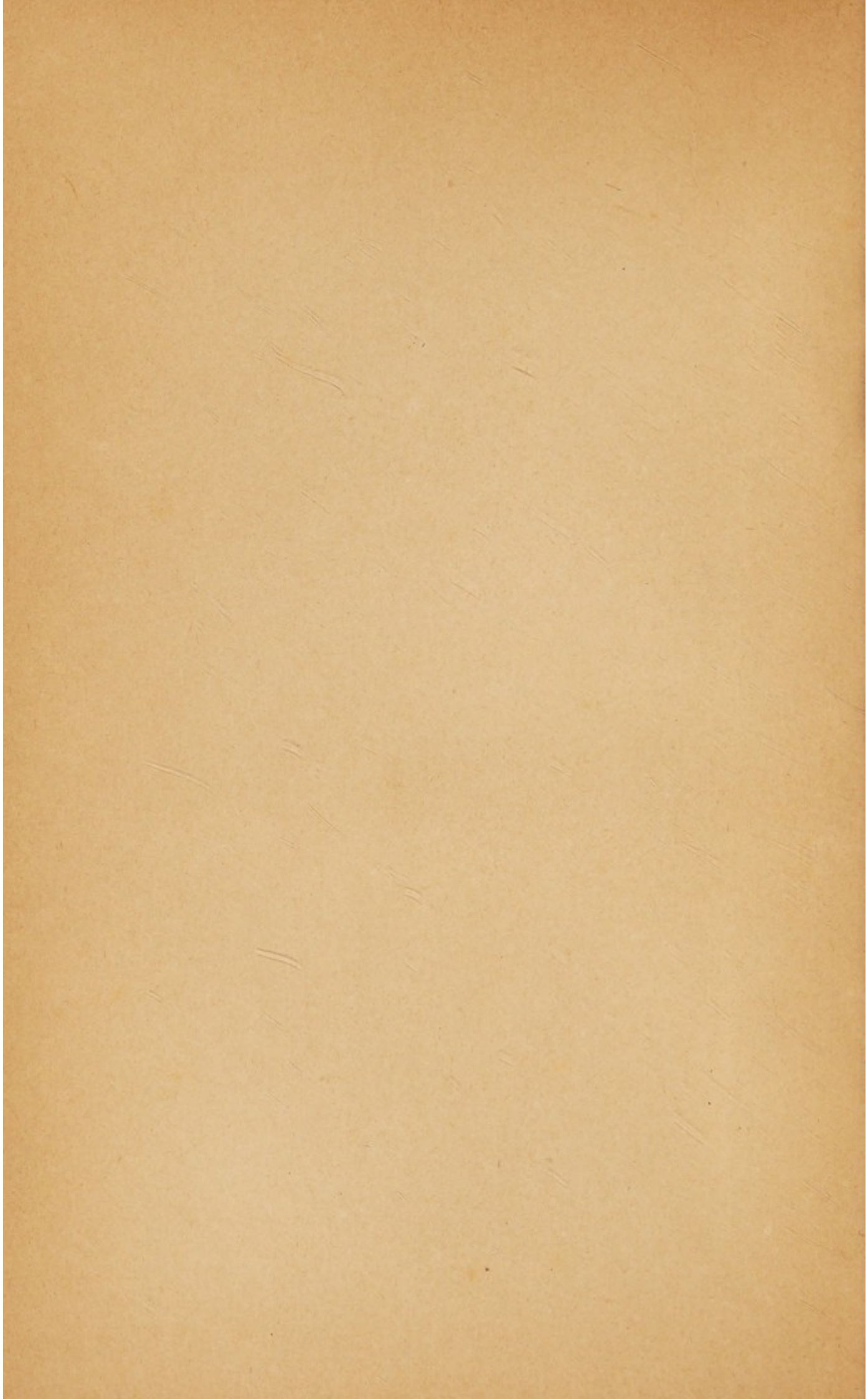
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ZORASTRO

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ZORASTRO

A ROMANCE

BY

CRESWICK J. THOMPSON

*Author of "Poison Romance and Poison Mysteries,"
"The Mystery and Romance of Alchemy and
Pharmacy," etc., etc.*

LONDON

GREENING & CO.

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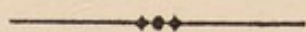
1899

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“ He lived
Too much advanced before his brother men ;
They kept him still in front : 'twas for their good,
But yet a dangerous station. It were strange
That he should tell God he had never ranked
With men : so, here at least he is a man.”

—*Robert Browning.*

ZORASTRO



CHAPTER I

ONE bright May morning, in the year 1512, a solitary traveller might have been seen, mounted on a sturdy pony, picking his way along the rough road that runs through the valley of the Pegnitz. On his right hand the river flowed silently and swiftly, save where it swept the tall rushes that grew in thick clusters here and there along its banks, and over the grey stones in the shallows, making a soft, soothing melody which alone broke the silence. The sun had not yet risen above the tops of the pine-clad hills that towered aloft on the left of the road, and which appeared a dense, unbroken mass of sombre green.

The traveller seemed to take but little notice of the scene, but with bent head pursued his way, apparently lost in deep thought. His appearance was youthful, and his spare but well-knit limbs gave evidence of physical strength. He was well but plainly clad in a doublet and long cloak of dark blue cloth, edged with fur, which reached to the tops of his russet leather riding-boots. His cap was also of blue cloth, without ornament, and from beneath, his reddish brown hair escaped in crisp curls that almost touched his shoulders. His face, though innocent of hair, betokened unusual strength of character, and the keen, deeply-set eyes of dark brown indicated singular penetrative power. His nose was well-formed and straight, while the chin, which curved sharply outward from the lower lip, gave a stern cast to a face which otherwise would have been almost feminine in its beauty.

A long, straight sword hung from his waist-belt, sheathed in a handsome scabbard of black leather and gold. The pommel, which was visible outside his cloak, was also richly worked in gold and ornamented with

a large stone, the size of a pigeon's egg, of a peculiar greyish-green colour.

As he thus rode on, his attention was suddenly aroused by a shrill cry, which seemed to come from the direction of the river. The rider halted and listened.

"'Twas but some wild bird," he muttered. "Get on, Nello."

But before his nimble steed had time to answer the jerk of the rein the cry was again heard, and this time ended in a prolonged wail.

The traveller, now quite alert, dismounted, and leaving his pony to crop the herbage at the roadside, made his way towards a dense clump of tall rushes on the riverside.

"'Tis surely some creature in pain," he said to himself, as he pushed aside the high reeds that barred his progress.

"Ha! ha! ha!" came from the rushes, as the traveller waded into the shallow water.

"By Apollo! it is a child," he exclaimed, as he caught a glimpse of a little curly head, and then a roguish laughing face to which the tears still clung, between the rushes below him. Another stride brought him to the

spot, and there, wedged between the thick growth, seated in a shallow basket roughly cased in skins, was a bonny boy, of some two or three years of age, beating the sides of the frail craft with his brown fists.

“Hallo! my little man, how camest thou here? A second Moses, forsooth!”

The child looked up and smiled a reply, holding out two sturdy arms to the stranger. His clothing simply consisted of a little woollen shirt which barely covered his knees, while his head was crowned with a thick mass of golden curls.

“A handsome lad, too, which speaks well for Pharoah’s daughter,” murmured the rescuer, “but I can’t leave him here.” And carefully lifting the basket and its freight, he made his way back to the bank.

Placing the boy in front of him, the traveller sat down on a grassy knoll and looked at him closely.

“Poor little atom of frail humanity,” he mused. “I wonder who caused thee to come to life. Thou wast not consulted, I warrant. And why wast thou cast on the stream of life, and abandoned, perhaps by she

who bore thee? Thou who hast within thee the germ of man, the highest being in existence, in which Nature has reached the culmination of her evolutionary efforts. In thee wisdom may become manifest, and the powers of thy soul—good as well as evil—may be developed to an extent little dreamed of by our speculative philosophers. Eh?”

While the traveller thus meditated, the child, attracted by the glitter of his sword-hilt, had crept to his side.

“Tell me, mannikin, how camest thou here?”

The boy shook his head.

“No? Well, I cannot leave thee either to starve or become food for the fishes yonder. Can I? But stay; what is that about thy neck?”

And the young man drew him to his knee to examine it more closely. Around the child's neck was a narrow strip of leather.

As he drew it from beneath his shirt, he discovered that a small piece of green jasper of curious shape was attached to it, in the centre of which was cut the following characters :

יְהוָה

“An amulet!” exclaimed the traveller, as he examined it closely, and then replaced it on the child’s neck. “It may prove useful to him yet. Who can tell?”

“Well, well, I must delay no longer,” he said aloud, and, taking the boy up in his arms, he made his way on to the road.

“Come, Nello, lass,” he cried, as the pony whinnied at his approach, “thou wilt have to carry two this journey.”

Placing the boy in the saddle-bow, the traveller soon mounted, and Nello set off at a brisk pace, the child shouting with delight as he dug his little hands into her mane.

The road now left the river bank, and, after winding between the hills for some distance, emerged into a broad, open plain, across which, some distance away, the grey towers and spires of a large city could be seen.

“What is thy name, mannikin?” asked the traveller, as the pony slackened her pace.

“Karl,” replied the youngster.

“Karl, eh! And now thou hast proved the use of thy tongue, where dost thou come from?”

“Dunno. Me hungry.”

“Ah, well, so am I; but we will soon cure that, for yonder is the great city of Nuremberg, where I warrant we shall have a right royal meal.”

They were now rapidly approaching the city, whose massive walls, flanked by numerous turrets and watch towers, gleamed white in the morning sun.

Prominent among the many buildings, the hoary towers of the Burg looked down grimly on the pointed red-tiled roofs that clustered below, while to the right the twin towers of St. Sebald's, and the beautiful spires of the Church of St. Lawrence, formed a scene of feudal grandeur it would be difficult to surpass.

At this time Nuremberg was one of the strongest fortified cities in Europe, being completely surrounded by walls of great thickness, which were strengthened by numerous ramparts, bastions, and towers, the latter numbering as many as the days

of the year. These again were enclosed by a deep moat a hundred feet wide, the sides of which were faced with solid masonry.

The road the traveller followed brought him to the New Gate. Crossing the draw-bridge, and passing under its double archway, which was flanked by a mighty watch tower like some gigantic sentinel, he guided his pony through the narrow streets lined with high gabled houses, which led towards the Rathhaus. Turning to the right he skirted the market-place, now thronged with burghers and peasantry busy buying and selling at their stalls and booths, and who sometimes blocked his progress. They stared at the young traveller as he passed with the child seated on his saddle-bow, who shouted lustily now and again at the hubbub around. Another turn brought them from the busy crowd into the Spital Strasse, a dull thoroughfare close to the river, and so narrow that the pointed gables of its tall houses seemed almost to meet overhead. Across the street from side to side, here and there a rope was stretched, from which hung an iron lantern, while above the doorways

great iron brackets stood out like gaunt arms, bearing the several signs of the artificers who carried on their handicrafts within.

Beneath a gilded alligator of large proportions, which swung over a low arched doorway, the traveller paused. Dismounting with his burden, he entered a dark, narrow passage, on the right of which an open door gave entrance to a shop, which, from the mingled aromatic odours that assailed the nostrils, indicated the abode of an apothecary.

Seated behind an oaken desk within, which bore a ponderous folio volume over which he pored intently, was a man of advanced years, whose long grey beard almost reached to his waist.

His face was deeply lined, but his blue eyes, which were shadowed by bushy brows, were still bright, and had a merry twinkle in their corners. He wore a velvet cap with a pointed crown, while the long gown in which he was enveloped was of sombre black, edged with crimson velvet. He rose as the traveller entered, and approached him with a salutation.

"Do I speak with Erasmus Ebner?" asked the young man, a smile playing about his features.

"Thou dost, young master," replied the apothecary, scanning his visitor more closely. Then drawing nearer the light which dimly struggled through the window, he exclaimed, "Surely it cannot be little Philip, son of my old master?"

"Yes, dear Erasmus, I am indeed Philip, son of Michael Valdagno, of Hechingen, who played at thy knee, and with whom thou didst gather wild flowers in the wood of Einsiedeln."

"Welcome, thrice welcome to Nuremberg," cried the old man, embracing the traveller warmly. "And who is the little one?" catching sight of the boy, who was quietly making friends with a large black cat that had emerged from the recesses of the shop.

"I know not more than thou, good Erasmus, beyond that I picked him up on my journey hither this morning, and had not the heart to leave him to his fate. I found him floating in an old basket on the river."

“Poor little waif. Well, he shall come and see our Dulcie. I reckon we shall find her with Dame Margaret, who thou must know, Philip. My man shall see to your horse,” said Erasmus, as he took the child by the hand, and led the way through a door at the back of his laboratory into a large bright room that opened on to a small courtyard.

The room evidently served for both kitchen and parlour, for its many shelves were bright with crockery, and pots and pans of burnished brass and copper, while the ingle nooks on either side of the blue-tiled fireplace on which the pine logs burnt briskly, looked cosily inviting.

Behind a table, with sleeves rolled up above her elbows, busy kneading flour in a large bowl, stood a woman of middle-age, from beneath whose cap of spotless linen beamed a kindly face. Seated at her feet was a girl of some three or four years, moulding a piece of dough to her own design.

“Goodwife, I bring thee a guest, and an honoured one in Master Philip Valdagno, son of my old master, of whom thou hast often heard me speak.”

"I give thee welcome and greeting, good Master Philip," said the dame graciously, as she placed a seat for her visitor.

"I thank thee both heartily for thy welcome," said Philip, seating himself. "I shall but crave thy hospitality for one night, as tomorrow I pursue my journey to Würzburg, where I go to seek instruction from the illustrious Johann Trithemius in the arts of alchemy and magic."

"Thou shalt always be welcome in my house," said Erasmus.

"And who, pray, is the little maid?" continued Philip.

"Dulcie is our grandchild, and a ray of sunshine to the goodwife and me," replied the old man.

"Come hither, lass; here is a new playmate for thee," he continued, and drawing Karl, who was shyly clinging to his knee, the children soon made friends.

Philip meanwhile related the story of the foundling, and begged them to keep him until his relatives might be traced. Erasmus promised to make every effort to do this, and, if unsuccessful, he undertook to keep the

child until Philip came again to claim him.

The goodwife having completed her bread-making, now spread the guest table with a load of substantial viands, of which the children had the first share.

Seated on a stool, enveloped in a little cloak the dame had found for him, Karl, occupied in eating a crust of bread, and staring with open eyes at his new friend, was heard to say :

“ Me likes 'oo.”

To which the maiden, with the superiority of years, replied :

“ If thou art a good boy thou shalt kiss me.”

And their elders smiled.

CHAPTER II

TWELVE years had elapsed since Philip left the house of Erasmus Ebner, on his journey to Würzburg. Time had wrought but little change in the household in the Spital Strasse. Although Erasmus had made enquiries from all the gossips in the city, and the story of the foundling had been passed from mouth to mouth, no one had come to claim the child, and nothing had been discovered concerning his parentage. In a few months' time, good Dame Margaret had declared that she would never give him up, come what may ; and so Karl grew up with Dulcie, and had developed into a fair, broad-shouldered lad, tall in stature, and straight as a dart. His dark brown curls and blue eyes formed a contrast to those of his playfellow, whose hair was the colour of ruddy gold, with a gleam in it like burnished copper.

Dulcie, too, had grown into a lissom maid,

lithe as a willow wand, with merry brown eyes, and a little red mouth shaped like Cupid's bow. Her features could not be called regular or particularly beautiful, but they possessed that piquant charm which is sometimes more attractive than beauty. Old Hans Hertz, the cobbler and poet, would say, when Dulcie's figure tripped past his door, there goes the bonniest lass in Nuremberg, and Hans considered himself a connoisseur of beauty. The officers of the Duke's guard, when they passed her crossing the market-place on an errand for Dame Margaret, would stare and twist their fierce moustachios; but Dulcie gave them no heed.

Time had dealt lightly too with the apothecary and his good wife, and although his long beard was whitened, and her hair was now grey, they were still a hale and hearty couple.

No tidings had been heard of Philip Valdagno since his departure for Würzburg, and Erasmus at length decided to teach Karl the mystery and art of an apothecary. So Karl was sent to a friar who lived near the Frauen Kirche to be instructed in penmanship and

the Latin tongue. The rest of the day was spent in assisting Erasmus, and being initiated into the mysteries of distillation, and the preparation of herbs and simples in the dark laboratory at the back of the shop.

The laboratory where the apothecary carried on these mystic processes was separated from the shop by a long bench or counter, on which stood a tall pair of scales, with numerous jars and bottles, some of which contained small snakes, lizards, and monstrous tape-worms preserved in oil. The shelves which lined the walls were covered with curious bottles of dark green glass, and blue delft gallipots of varied shape bearing strange labels, heraldic devices, and inscriptions; while from the black beams which crossed the ceiling, hung bladders of seeds, long strings of poppy heads, rue, centaury, ostrich eggs, and a huge tortoise. On another bench stood mortars of brass and bronze, and along the walls were racks of alembics, flasks, and long-necked retorts of every shape and size. At the end of the cross bench was the desk, bearing a ponderous volume of Dioscorides, at which Erasmus sat

to receive his patients. Behind this on a wooden block stood the big iron mortar, its long pestle being suspended by means of a chain from the end of a wooden beam-spring which lightened the labour of pounding. Here the shelves were set out with a further array of glass still-heads, alembics of various patterns, curious receivers, and glass vessels of fantastic design. In the corner was the furnace, from the door of which came a dull red glow, revealing by the side a stand of crucibles and tongs of varied size. Above all, hanging from a great black beam which crossed the ceiling, was an enormous crocodile, whose open mouth displayed a formidable array of teeth. At his head a sunfish was suspended, and near his long tail a flying fish kept them company.

Beneath the little window of the shop ran a long bench, where the patients sat who came to consult the wise apothecary concerning their ailments, and in front of the counter stood a massive high-backed chair of oak, which was used for those who wished to be bled or have an aching tooth extracted.

Besides the patients who were sick, there

were many customers for cordials, conserves, and juleps; charms to wear against fevers and ague; talismans to drive away melancholy and evil spirits, and even love philtres, for which maidens came with blushing faces half-concealed beneath their hoods. To these Karl now attended with befitting grave demeanour, and when Erasmus was absent visiting those who could not come to see him, he would prescribe a clyster or an unguent with as much aplomb as his master.

At such times Dulcie would oft steal in through the courtyard door and flit about the old laboratory like a gay butterfly, teasing the life out of the embryo apothecary, and upsetting crucibles and pots in her flight when Karl lost patience and gave chase.

One afternoon when Erasmus was out visiting a man who was sick of a fever, Karl was occupied in spreading a large plaster of burgundy pitch, the fumes from which almost enveloped him in a dense cloud, when suddenly he felt something tickle his ear.

"Peste on these flies!" he exclaimed.

"And peste on those who make smoke enough to choke one," replied a voice at his

elbow, and Mistress Dulcie, with a laugh, perched herself on the bench above him.

"How now, tormentor, hast come to plague me again?"

"Nay, learned Karl, I never torment thee. I come but to see thee make this pudding."

"'Tis a plaster, not a pudding, pert one. Take care or thou wilt get some of it on thy kirtle, and then—"

"Then thou wilt have to buy me a new one, wise Karl," replied the maid, as she again applied the long feather she carried to his other ear.

"A murrain on thee and thy feather! Wilt thou come down and let me finish my work?" cried the irate youth.

"I will, dear Karl, if thou wilt not be angry, and wilt show me the crab's eyes and the funny little men of mandrake root in the drawers yonder. Promise now."

"Very well," replied Karl, who could not resist the pleader as he lifted her down.

Further converse was stopped by footsteps entering the shop, and Karl went forth to see who it was.

A tall woman stood at the counter, clad in

a red cloak and gown of bright colours. Her swarthy face and black hair, which fell over her shoulders, bespoke her to belong to one of the Bohemian tribes that wandered over the west of Europe.

"Hast thou the blood of dragons, young master?" she asked.

"Aye, both strong and of good quality, mistress," replied Karl.

"Give me some, I pray thee, that will suffice to make a charm."

"What dost thou know of charms?" said Karl, smiling, as he gave her a small packet.

"Perchance I could tell thee something thou dost not know," replied the gipsy, taking hold of his hand and examining it closely. "Ah! the lines tell me a mystery overshadoweth thy birth, and many dangers will yet beset thee. Thou must beware, young master."

"Hast thou then the gift of chiromancy?" asked Karl. "If so, thou canst tell me of this mystery."

"They say it is in the blood of our race," replied the woman; "but I must not tell thee

more. Perhaps we may meet again. Farewell."

In a moment she had gone.

"What did that strange woman say?" asked Dulcie, when Karl rejoined her.

"She professed to read my hand, and said a mystery overshadowed my birth. Doubtless she had heard some gossip in the marketplace," replied Karl, "for when I asked her to tell me more she hurried away."

"I wonder, Karl, if thou wilt ever find thy father and mother," said Dulcie softly.

"Perchance they do not wish to find me. Whoever they may be, they could not love me better than our good foster parents, and thou, Dulcie," replied Karl gently.

"I did not say that I loved thee, malapert," said the maid, with an arch look in her eyes.

"Nay ; but, sweetheart, I say that—"

"There, now, thou hast sat down on thy plaster," cried Dulcie, with a merry peal of laughter, as Karl, in his endeavour to get nearer the maid on the bench, sat down on the sticky mass of pitch he had placed there to dry.

"Ho, there, apothecary!" cried a great voice in the shop, and away ran Karl with the plaster sticking fast to the seat of his trunk-hose, while Dulcie tried to stifle her mirth with her kerchief.

The voice came from a big stout Gascon soldier who stood leaning on his long sword by the counter. He was a man of gigantic stature, with muscles and sinews like an ox, which were well displayed by a tight-fitting buff jacket he wore. This was crossed from his left shoulder by a broad baldrick or sash of crimson silk, from which hung his sword. His trunk-hose was profusely slashed with purple silk, while a black velvet cap, cocked on one side, gave a most ludicrous appearance to a full round face and little twinkling eyes, his cheeks being rendered broader still by an enormous swelling in one of them.

"Donner and blitz, but thou takest thy time, Sir Apothecary," he roared.

"Cease thy noise and tell me thy complaint," said Karl.

"Hagel and Sturmwette, but I am nigh mad with an ache in my face," growled the man of arms.

"Seat thyself in the chair yonder, and I will look into thy mouth," replied Karl.

The soldier seated himself, and Karl proceeded to diagnose the complaint, much to the discomfiture of his huge patient, who writhed and rolled from side to side.

"Ah, I see thou hast a corrupt and evil-favoured tooth there that gives thee pain," said Karl learnedly. "I must pluck it out to cure thee. Be seated and prepare thyself."

The soldier winced, but braced himself firmly in the chair, gripping the arms as tightly as he could, while Karl, with much deliberation, selected from a drawer a formidable looking iron instrument, shaped like a pair of pincers, the curved handles of which were over a foot long.

"Open thy mouth," said Karl.

The soldier complied, disclosing a cavernous entrance that vied with an alligator's in size.

Karl fixed his instrument round the offending molar, and, grasping the long handles with both hands, pulled with all his strength. The warrior roared like a bull. Karl pulled harder, but the tooth remained as firm as a mountain.

"Now, hold fast," gasped Karl, almost breathless, as he braced himself for a final assault, which the soldier answered with another roar.

With a tremendous effort Karl gave another tug which raised the unfortunate Gascon from the chair, to the arms of which he still held fast. How this heroic struggle would have ended it would be unsafe to predict, had not Dulcie, who had been watching the operation from the dark recesses of the laboratory, suddenly darted forward with a pair of red hot tongs which she had snatched from the glowing furnace, and brandished them within an inch of the soldier's nose. This caused him to spring backwards with such rapidity that it jerked out the troublesome fang, and left Karl the victor.

"Well done, Dulcie," cried Karl, as soon as he had regained his breath.

While the soldier, ruefully rubbing his face, declared it was not the first time a woman had turned the tide of battle.

CHAPTER III

DURING the early part of the sixteenth century, Nuremberg attained the height of its prosperity, and ranked as one of the wealthiest commercial cities in Europe. Its manufactures were known all over the world, which gave rise to the couplet :

“ Nuremberg’s hand
Goes through every land.”

Besides being the home of German freedom, it was also the cradle of the fine arts, for its many workers in metals, armourers, cutlers, casters in bronze, gold and silver smiths, were true artists in every sense of the word, and accounted the most cunning and skilful craftsmen in Europe. Its painters, sculptors, poets, and carvers in wood, were also world-renowned, and still live in the names of Albert Dürer, Peter Vischer, Adam

Krafft, and many others of genius and inventive skill.

The city possessed a constitution of its own, enjoying the privileges, grants, and immunities which had been bestowed upon it by various emperors.

Its ancient form of government was decidedly aristocratic, and resembled that of Venice. For a long period a small number of patrician families monopolised the chief authority, and from among them was chosen the Council of State, consisting of eight members, who formed the executive. At a later period, however, the Burgraf was appointed by the Emperor, who generally selected a member of some noble family to occupy the office. He lived at the castle within the city walls, and was the titular protector of the city, although he frequently came into collision with the burghers, who still held the rights of free election of magistrates and independent courts of justice.

The appointment of a new Burgraf was always made the occasion of general festivity and holiday, so when news came that the Duke Ernest of Bavaria had been appointed

Burgraf, the magistrates decided that the event should be celebrated by a great procession and general rejoicings, to welcome the noble stadtholder. This they thought might also have the effect of impressing him with the independence of the free burghers of Nuremberg, a fact which they had had to remind his predecessor in a manner that was not altogether agreeable to him.

It was announced early in the week that the Duke would arrive with his retinue at the city on the following Saturday, and it was arranged he should be received by the magistrates and councillors at the Frauen Gate, and be conducted through the city to the Haupt Market, where the guilds should be assembled. Here a procession was to be formed to escort the Duke to the Burg, the royal proclamation being made *en route* in front of the Rathhaus.

The great day dawned at last, and Karl and Dulcie set forth early to secure a good place to view the pageant. Dulcie was in high spirits, and a comely maid she looked in her kirtle of fine grey worsted, with a little apron white as driven snow, while her

hair was confined by a white kerchief secured with silver pins.

The sun shone gaily, brightening up the lofty houses and the stately though narrow streets through which they passed, already crowded by burghers and their wives, passing and repassing, with looks of eager expectancy.

Now and again they had to make way for a huge wain laden with wine barrels—for the city conduits were to run with wine for certain hours of the day in honour of the occasion—or a couple of men who in full armour and horses gaily caparisoned would come clattering through the street. As they neared the Rathhaus the throng grew greater. Here long streamers and banners fluttered from tall poles, and from the windows and balconies hung rich arras, tapestries, or brocades of crimson, gold, and silver, adding varied colour to the scene.

At length they reached their goal, which was the house of Conrad Kellner, a worker in metals, whose windows overlooked the back of St. Sebald's, and from which a good view of the proceedings could be obtained.

Here they were heartily received by Dame Agnes, the wife of Conrad, who conducted them to an upper room which faced the corner of the street. Dulcie was a great favourite with Dame Agnes, who was a kind and cheerful soul, though afflicted with total blindness for more than twenty years, and she was always pleased to render any little service she could to the good-wife.

Thus it happened that Dulcie had promised to describe the procession to her as it passed beneath their window.

At length the sound of trumpets was heard in the distance, and the crowd below drew closer together. Those who were at the back craned their necks and stood on tip-toe, and the children were hoisted shoulder high.

"They are coming," cried Karl from the window, looking down towards the Haupt Market.

"Yes, I see the sun shining on the arms and the banners," exclaimed Dulcie.

"Here they are," roared the crowd, as the sound of drums, the blare of trumpets, and the tramp of feet drew nearer.

First came a number of mounted archers of the guard in their hocketons diapered with silver, to clear the road and prevent the people pressing on those who followed. Then followed the trumpeters, thirty-six in all, blowing a lively fanfare on their silver trumpets, from which hung banners bearing the city arms.

"Here come the drummers in vests of buff with crimson waist-bands," cried Dulcie.

"And there are the city marshals on horseback, with their broad shoulder scarfs of red and gold," said Karl.

Then followed a company of the city guard in steel breastplates and caps, carrying long pikes, and others bearing standards and banners.

"There is the herald," exclaimed Dulcie, clapping her hands, as that stately individual in a magnificently embroidered tabard quartered and blazoned, preceded by six gentlemen-at-arms in rich laced tunics with bright broadswords drawn, marched past. Afterwards came the men appointed to make the proclamation, clad in black silk velvet,

with hanging sleeves of yellow, grey, and blue, the duke's colours.

Six more trumpeters heralded the approach of the Duke Ernest himself.

"There he is!" cried Karl, joining in the loud cheers with the crowd, while Dulcie clapped her hands and shouted with the rest.

The new Burgraf made a fine commanding figure as he appeared, clad in a gorgeous suit of the most superb Milan armour of polished steel, inlaid and embossed with gold. On his bright cuirass rested many jewelled orders, which sparkled and flashed in the sunlight. He was mounted on a magnificent white charger, richly caparisoned in embroidered velvet and leather. Behind him rode his page bearing his plumed helmet, while his mounted retinue of knights, all fully clad in steel armour, with lances and fluttering pennants, formed a brilliant escort. Then came another band of trumpeters and drummers, and more city marshals. Following a score of ushers bearing wands, walked the magistrates and councillors in rich robes, wearing gold chains about their necks.

Another company of the city guard brought up the rear of the procession.

“Look, Karl,” cried Dulcie, “they are now forming in front of the Rathhaus for the proclamation.”

The trumpets sounded, and after a pause loud shouts of “Long Live the Duke” and huzzas, announced that the Duke Ernest had been proclaimed Burgraf of the city of Nuremberg.

After noon they set forth to see the various sights which had been provided for the amusement of the burghers.

In the Haupt Market many of the guilds had erected stages on which pageants were represented. Thus on one, five figures were arranged, depicting Concord, Peace, Melody, Charity, and Harmony. The latter was personated by a lady of great gravity, wearing a dark brown peruke curiously curled, on which was planted an imperial crown. She was seated on a gilded throne, and garbed in a robe of French green velvet embroidered with gold, over which was a crimson-coloured mantle of silk and silver. On another was erected a triumphal Ionic

arch to represent the Palace of Pleasure, in which sat nine beautiful maidens garbed as Jollity, Delight, Fancy, Felicity, Wit, Invention, Tumult, Slaughter, and Gladness, each of them posed to represent their part. In front sat six men artfully playing instruments of music, which caused great delight.

The goldsmiths' pageant represented all the distinct departments of their art. In the centre of the stage sat St. Dunstan, the ancient patron of the company, attired to express his prelatical dignity in a robe of fine lawn, and over it a cope of shiny cloth of gold which reached to the ground. On his head was a golden mitre set with precious stones, and he bore in his left hand a golden crosier, and in his right a pair of goldsmith's tongs.

Behind him stood Orpheus and Amphion playing on musical instruments, and on either side were figures representing the Cham of Tartary and the grand Sultan, doing homage. At the steps of the throne was a goldsmith's forge and furnace, with fire, crucibles and gold, and a workman blowing the bellows. On each side of this was a press of gold and

silver plate, while towards the front were shops of artificers and jewellers all at work, with anvils, hammers, and instruments for enamelling and beating out gold and silver. On a step below St. Dunstan, sat an assay master with his trial balance and implements, and next to him two apartments showing the process of flatting and drawing gold and silver wire. Indeed it was a very brave show, and attracted crowds of the burghers, so that the road was nigh impassable.

“Look, Dulcie, at the man on the rope,” cried Karl, as they made their way to the other side of the market-place

There on a stout rope, which was stretched from the bell tower of the Frauen Kirche, and fastened by a great anchor to the ground, was a man, his head forward, casting his arms and legs about, and running on his breast on the rope, from the tower to the ground, like an arrow shot from a bow. Then he would crawl up again, until nearly at the top, and there play certain mysteries, such as tumbling and hanging by one foot, which mightily pleased those who were looking on.

Towards evening, crowds made their way to the Spital Platz, where a mystery called "The Creation" was to be played. Karl and Dulcie wedged their way in among the audience, who were now collecting in great numbers round a large stage, which was erected at one end of the Platz. The sides and back were hung with tapestry, and across the front a curtain was stretched. When all was ready, a bell was tolled, the curtain divided in the centre, and was drawn back on each side. In a few moments a stupid-looking capuchin, who was supposed to personate the Creator, entered through the tapestry on the left.

He wore a large, full-bottom wig, with a false beard, and had over the rusty dress of his order a brocaded morning gown, lined with light blue silk, of which he seemed very proud.

Professing to grope his way about, and running his head against anything that came in his way, he exclaimed, in a shrill voice, "Let there be light," at the same time pushing the tapestry at the back to the right and left, disclosing a glimmer through linen cloths from candles placed behind them.

The creation of the sea was represented by the pouring of water along the stage, and the making of dry land by the throwing of earth in handfuls. Angels were personated by girls and young priests dressed in white garments, having the wings of geese attached to their shoulders. These angels actively assisted the capuchin in the brocaded dressing-gown, in producing the stars, moon, and sun. A number of cocks and hens were driven on the stage to represent winged fowl, and for other living things, some sheep, a horse, and two pigs, with rings through their noses.

At length Adam appeared, personated by a big stout man. He also wore a large wig, and was clad in a kind of stocking, which fitted him closely. He stalked about, apparently wondering at everything, followed by a big mastiff dog.

After a while he lay down on one side of the stage to sleep, preparatory to the production of Eve, and the mastiff lay down beside him.

This occasioned some strife between the capuchin, Adam, and the dog, as the latter

would not quit his master even when the angels tried to whistle him off. The capuchin was then supposed to extract a rib from the sleeping Adam, which he did, bringing it forward and exhibiting it to the audience ; then again approaching Adam, he dragged Eve up from a hole in the stage behind his back. Eve was personated by a young, effeminate-looking priest of very angular form. His hair hung in long locks stiffly down his back, which were afterwards brought round, and fastened becomingly in front, below the waist.

Adam now rose, and looked at her with astonishment, then took her by the arm and showed her the various animals and things round about.

The devil was represented by a thin youth, encased in pasteboard, painted in green and yellow like a snake's skin, who crawled about on his stomach, while the apple, which Eve eventually plucked, was stitched to the tapestry. The expulsion out of Paradise was entrusted to a priest dressed as an angel, whose sword of tin, coloured yellow, was angrily broken by Adam, in consequence of

a blow he received from it on the head, on which the angel produced from beneath his habit his knotted capuchin rope, which he applied to Adam's back with a vigour that caused his speedy exit. So ended the mystery, which was received by the stolid burghers with the greatest gravity, but with evident satisfaction.¹

Karl now placed himself in front of Dulcie, in order to work their way out of the crowd. He was elbowing his way through the throng when he heard a cry from her, and turning round, saw that a tall, richly-dressed man, with a sallow face and long black moustachios, had placed his arm through hers, and was attempting to draw her away.

"Come with me, pretty one ; there are yet more sights to be seen," Karl heard him say, as Dulcie cried out and tried to release herself.

"What dost thou mean? Unhand the maid," said Karl fiercely, his face flushing with anger.

"What is that to thee, my young game

¹ The description of this performance is taken from Hone's "Ancient Mysteries."

cock?" rejoined the gallant, with an evil look in his eyes as he leered at Dulcie. "Come, young mistress, thy bright eyes are much too pretty for such as he. Gad's head, I could love thee."

"Begone, sirrah, or thou shalt rue it," replied Karl, drawing Dulcie away.

"Thou crowest loudly, my little jack-snipe," said the gallant, with a laugh, getting in front of them, and putting his arm round Dulcie's waist.

"Stand aside," cried Karl, whose anger was now at white heat.

"Not for thee, knave," replied the man, attempting to draw his rapier.

But Karl was too quick for him, and with a well-directed blow straight from the shoulder, he caused his opponent to stagger backwards.

At the same moment he felt a tug at his cloak, and a voice he recognised said:

"Quick, lad; this way, for thy life. I'll see to the maid."

Looking round quickly, he saw it was Hans Hertz, a friend and neighbour. Turning sharply, someone dragged him from the

crowd, which had fallen back, and he saw Hans and Dulcie running in front. In a few moments he overtook them, and they reached the Spital Strasse without further molestation.

“Dost thou know who the gallant was?” asked Hans, when he left them at their door.

“No,” replied Karl; “and I care not.”

“He was Count Wolf, the son of the new Burgraf,” was the reply.

CHAPTER IV

Two or three weeks passed quietly away, and the stir which had been excited by the arrival of the new Burgraf had subsided. Strange rumours, however, were abroad concerning the wild escapades of his son, the Count Wolf. His mother had died while he was a boy, and the Duke, having married for a second time the Baroness Anna, widow of the Lord of Ledzburg, the youth had been brought up by an uncle, who bore anything but an enviable reputation, in his feudal stronghold in the Black Mountains.

It was a dark, stormy night, and the wind blew in fitful gusts down a narrow, tortuous street which led to the river. Karl drew his cloak closer round him as he passed along on an errand for Erasmus. As he turned the corner to cross the bridge, a man, heavily cloaked, quickly emerged from the shadow

of the houses, and touched him on the shoulder.

"Art thou Karl Ebner?" he asked.

"I am."

"I have this for thee," said the man, thrusting a folded paper into his hand.

Before Karl had time to reply, the figure had disappeared again up a dark passage that ran to the right, and he was left with the paper in his hand.

By the bridge a lantern hung, which cast a feeble glimmer on the roadway. Karl made for it, curious to see the contents of the missive. Standing beneath, by its flickering light he quickly broke the seal, and, unfolding the paper, read the following words:

"If thou wouldst solve the mystery of thy birth, seek the writer without delay at the sign of the 'Red Hand' in the Buttner's Strasse; knock softly three times."

Karl turned the paper over and examined it, but it bore no signature or any indication as to who the writer was. He read it over

two or three times, and then proceeded on his way to execute his errand, which was to bear some medicine to a sick patient. This accomplished, he started on his return, still haunted by the words written on the paper in his pocket, and wondering who could have sent it. It was someone who knew him and his story evidently, and then his thoughts suddenly reverted to the gipsy who professed to read the lines on his hand some months ago. He had almost forgotten her. He remembered now ; she had mentioned something about a mystery, and said they might meet again. Yes, she must be the sender of the paper. However, he would find out this house, and see for himself. The Buttners Strasse was not far away, and it was not very late. Having thus reasoned and made up his mind on the matter, he determined to seek the sign of the " Red Hand."

The Buttners Strasse was in the eastern part of the city, and the centre of a quarter mostly inhabited by Jews. In a few minutes, Karl was treading the narrow thoroughfare, and, after some difficulty, at length discovered the house he sought, over the doorway of which

hung a hand carved in wood and painted red. There was no light visible from the lower room, but a bright beam issued from a window on the second floor, over which a red curtain was drawn.

At this moment he recollected he had come out unarmed, beyond a short dagger he carried in his waist-belt ; but having made up his mind, he was not to be daunted, and, approaching the door, he knocked three times. After a little while he heard footsteps approaching, a key grated in the lock, the door was partly opened, and a deep voice said, " Enter, and walk forward."

The passage inside was as dark as pitch, and he could see no one, but grasping the hilt of his dagger, he stepped inside. No sooner had he done so, than he was gripped firmly by the elbows from behind, and a thick cloth was thrown over his head. He struggled and kicked vigorously, but his arms were powerless, and call out he could not. He heard the door slammed and the lock turned, then he was pushed forward till his foot knocked against a staircase. This he was compelled to climb by his cap-

tor, who held him firmly pinioned from behind. One, two, three, four long flights they ascended, their footsteps sounding loudly on the wooden stairs, which creaked beneath until they reached the top. Then he was suddenly thrust forward into what seemed to be a room, and released. He heard a door close, a bolt shot, and heavy footsteps retreating down the stairs.

Quickly he removed the cloth from his face, and sprang to the door, but it was firmly secured. Feeling for his dagger, he found it had gone. Then he turned his attention to the room, which was unlighted. There was a narrow window at one end, through which he could just discern the gables of the houses on the opposite side of the street. It was utterly devoid of furniture as far as he could tell, beyond a great press or chest, against which he knocked his shins in his exploration. He called out loudly and stamped on the floor, but the long room only re-echoed the sound of his own cries. Then he listened, but all was as silent as the tomb.

He had been trapped, and was a prisoner.

At length, weary and exhausted with his

efforts, he groped his way to the chest, and wrapping his cloak around him, lay down upon it. Hours seemed to pass, and at last, unable to keep awake longer, he dozed off to sleep.

He was awakened by hearing heavy footsteps tramping up the stairs, and then a bright streak of light shone beneath the door. The bolt was drawn, and two men entered the room. The first, who carried a lantern, was a big muscular fellow, with a cropped, black beard and a shock of hair that fell over his face. Behind him came a thinner man wrapped in a long cloak, and wearing a hat with a large brim, which shadowed his features. In one hand he grasped a drawn rapier.

"So this is where the bird is caged, eh?" he said, casting his eyes round the room, and trying to penetrate its dark corners.

"Yes, there he is on the chest yonder," replied the man with the lantern.

Karl sprang to his feet as they came a few steps nearer.

"Ah! my young friend is awake, is he?" said the younger man.

“Who art thou? Why dost thou keep me here?” cried Karl.

“Not so fast, young springald. Look, dost thou know me?” he asked, as he pushed back his hat from his face.

Karl started as he recognised his assailant of the Spital Platz.

“Ha! I see thou rememberest me. Thou gavest me cause to remember thee, too,” he continued with a laugh. “Well, it’s my turn this time. Don’t be alarmed—we shall not kill thee; but here thou must remain for a while at my pleasure and expense. Come, Fritz, we will not disturb his rest longer,” and the pair quickly passed without, securing the door after them.

Karl sat down in despair and reflected. What a fool he had been to fall into the trap so easily. Then he pictured the anxiety of those at home and how they would wonder at his absence. What could be the man’s object, he asked himself. It must be Dulcie. Yes, his object must be to decoy Dulcie away by some stratagem or other, and the thought of her in the power of this libertine drove him almost to a frenzy. Yet how

could he warn them? With a mind tortured by these conflicting emotions, he could not rest. It was nearly dawn when he fell into a sound slumber, and did not wake again until the sun was pouring through the window in the gable.

It was difficult for some time to realise where he was, but the long bare room and the stiffness of his limbs, resulting from his hard bed, soon reminded him, and recalled the incidents of the previous night.

His first thought was of escape, and with this resolve he at once explored the room in the hope of finding some way of egress. The little window was out of the question, it being scarcely nine inches wide. The door was of stout oak, thick and strong, so that also was impossible. Facing it was an old fireplace, to which Karl next turned his attention. Stooping and putting his head under the flue, he found the shaft was a wide one, and being in the top room of the house was only a few yards long. There was the blue sky visible above. But his hopes were suddenly dashed when he saw, a short distance from the entrance to the flue, a

thick iron bar fixed across. If it could only be removed there was certainly a chance of escape.

The metal sheath of his dagger still hung at his belt, and with its point he might be able to dislodge it.

He was just about to set to work and try, when he heard footsteps ascending the stairs, and presently the door opened, and the big hulking fellow who had accompanied the Count entered, bearing a loaf of black bread and a bowl of water, which he placed on the floor.

"Here, young one, thou canst make a meal of this," he said, with a grunt, and turning on his heel, bolted the door and retreated downstairs.

As soon as all was quiet again, Karl dragged the chest underneath the flue, and standing on it, was soon attacking the stonework which held one end of the bar with the point of his dagger sheath. Several hours passed before he succeeded in getting the first stone loosened. Stiff and sore, his face blackened with soot and dirt, he came down and rested a while, afraid of another visit

from his gaoler. Again he listened, but all below was still. After refreshing himself with a draught of water, he set to work once more with renewed vigour.

It was not until the sun was beginning to sink behind the housetops that his labours were at last rewarded, and with a shower of dirt he wrenched the bar free, and the passage was clear.

All was quiet below, and he determined to climb the grimy shaft without delay. Doffing his cloak and standing on the chest once more, he slowly commenced the ascent. Getting foothold on the rough stones, step by step, he at length reached the top, nearly choked, and blackened from head to foot. Taking a survey round, he found himself between the gables of two houses. Crawling along to the edge, he looked down in the hope of discovering some means of descent, and to his great delight saw, hanging from a short beam which projected from a neighbouring gable to which a pulley was attached, a rope evidently used for hoisting heavy goods and produce to the upper floors. Climbing across the roofs he soon reached it,

and attaching one end round his body, he slowly lowered himself down, and at last landed safely in a courtyard, from which he speedily found means of exit. Once in the street he set off with all speed, and panting for breath he soon arrived in the Spital Strasse.

Erasmus, who was at work in the laboratory, scarcely recognised him as he rushed in, without cap and cloak, and his face begrimed.

"It is I, father," cried Karl, as the old man came towards him, throwing up his hands in amazement.

"My son, my son!" he exclaimed, embracing him, "where hast thou been and what has happened to thee?"

"And where is Dulcie?" cried Dame Margaret, who had run in as she heard his voice.

"Is not Dulcie here?" asked Karl excitedly.

"No," said the dame, "she went with the woman thou didst send with the message."

"For heaven's sake tell me all quickly,"

cried Karl; "I sent no message and know nought of any woman."

"Early this morning, a tall dark woman, wearing a blue kirtle, came asking for Dulcie, and said Karl Ebner had been hurt last night without the city wall, and had sent for her to come to the house where he lay. I helped her to get ready quickly, and she went forth with the stranger to show her the way," said the dame quickly.

"'Tis all a plot of that villainous Count," exclaimed Karl, as he rapidly related his adventure of the previous night, and his escape. "But we must lose no time," he continued. "I will save her yet."

"Go, then, and get ready," said Erasmus, "and I will have the horse saddled without delay."

"Bring her back, Karl; bring my Dulcie back," sobbed the old dame.

"I will, good mother; believe me, I would give my life to save her."

Karl cleansed himself, and dressed with all speed, and in a few minutes was ready, booted and spurred, for the pursuit.

"Which way did they go?" he asked.

“They turned towards the New Gate, and, alas, that is all I know,” replied the dame.

“Well, I must try and trace them as I go along,” said Karl, as he mounted the horse.

“Take this,” said Erasmus, handing him a long pistol; “it is loaded, and thou mayest need it.”

“Farewell; keep a good heart; I will bring her back.”

“God speed and hold thee safe,” cried the old people, as with a wave of the hand Karl set off at a gallop down the street.

CHAPTER V

THE dusk of evening was creeping over the western sky, and the sun was tinting the clouds with a ruddy glow as Karl sped on to the New Gate. In another hour the draw-bridge would be raised, and then all might be lost. Clue he had practically none as to the road Dulcie and the woman had taken. They might not, indeed, have left the city.

He drew rein at the narrow doorway of the main gate tower, where stood a sergeant of the guard. Karl pulled up his horse to speak with him.

"Hast thou seen two women pass without this morning—one tall and dark, wearing a blue kirtle, and with her a younger maid?" he asked.

"Ay, lad, I've seen more than two pass in and out to-day; but I don't reckon much

on such cattle, or their kirtles either," the burly janitor replied.

"Then thou canst not help me," said Karl, biting his lip, undecided what to do, or which way to turn.

As he was thus considering what course to take, an empty wagon approached the gate, seated on the front of which was a red-faced old farmer, whom Karl recognised.

"Good-day to thee, young master," he called out, as he slowed up his team to cross the bridge.

"A good day to thee Simon," answered Karl.

"Art thou waiting for the young maid?"

"What maid?"

"Thy young mistress, to be sure. Didn't I meet her riding on the road yonder this forenoon. I thought maybe she was off on a journey."

"Was she alone?"

"Nay; there were two men with her—one carrying a pack."

"Tell me quickly, which road did they take?" cried Karl excitedly.

“They were on the Bamberg road for certes when I saw them, and—”

But before the man had finished his sentence, Karl had put spurs to his horse, and was across the bridge and galloping along the road, which stretched away in front.

“He’s got scent of his kirtle now,” said the sergeant to Simon, with a knowing wink, as the latter and his wagon jolted through the gateway.

The high road from Nuremberg to Bamberg is a straight one, and follows the course of the river for several miles. Karl did not spare his horse; but before he had got far night closed in, and he was compelled to slacken speed. The inns along the road were few and far between, and besides being wretchedly dirty, they had the reputation of being frequented by cut-throats and thieves from the Bohemian bands which infested the thickly-wooded country round about. At length, after some hours, the lights of Stratberg came in sight, and Karl was soon riding down the main street. He pulled up his horse at the “White Hart,” the only inn the little town could boast of.

Securing his horse to an iron ring which hung by the door, he entered the long, low apartment which served as a general guest chamber. The landlord, who was a little, stout man, with beady eyes and a fringe of red whisker round his face, came forward to meet him. Smoothing his big apron, which nearly reached to his toes, he asked his pleasure.

"I should like some refreshment, and a word with thee presently," said Karl, seating himself at a table at one end of the room.

The landlord bustled off to attend to his wants.

At the other end of the room three men sat round another table drinking, while on a long settle by the fireplace was stretched a burly monk in the rough garb of his order. His eyes were closed, and his head was nodding, either from the effects of slumber or the host's good wine.

The landlord soon reappeared bearing a loaf, a huge sausage, and a cup of sack, which he set before Karl.

"And what would the young master with me?" he asked.

"Hast thou noticed two men and a young maid pass this way to-day?" said Karl, in a low voice.

The landlord scratched his head, and slowly shook it from side to side.

"No, I don't remember seeing such a party; but stay, I will ask Anton, who looks after the horses; perchance he may have done."

"Here, Anton! Anton, thou varlet, come here," he shouted from the door, and presently a queer shambling little creature, with a wisp of straw protruding from the corner of his mouth, entered.

"Tell the noble master if thou didst see a party—two men and a woman—ride past to-day."

"No, I see'd no such party as I know of," answered the man, pulling his forelock, and looking at his master with a cunning leer.

"Enough, it matters not," said Karl, settling his score, and rising to go.

"Will not the noble master stay the night? The roads just now are not very safe for travellers," said the landlord, in a cringing tone.

"No, I go on. Good-night," replied Karl, as he passed outside, and quickly untied and mounted his horse.

The night was very dark, and he could scarcely see the road as he shook the reins and started once more. He had not ridden far when he thought he heard footsteps running close behind him, and then a voice he recognised as the ostler's called out of the darkness, "Stop, noble master, stop." He pulled up, and the little man from the inn was soon at his side.

"A young maid and two men did stop at the 'White Hart' about five hours ago," he stammered. "One of their horses had a shoe loose, but they said they could not wait. They asked if there was a smithy at Muggendorf, and I told them there was, close by the inn, which is this side of the village."

"How far is it to Muggendorf?" asked Karl.

"Barely a league. They will be there by this time," replied the man. "Keep to the right as thou leav'st the town."

Karl slipped a silver piece into the man's

hand, and then, putting spurs to his horse, set off once more.

The road was rough and hilly, and the high cliffs which now rose on either side made it still darker ; but trusting to his horse's instinct, he pushed on with all speed. Gradually the ascent got steeper, and the animal panted at every stride. He would not go much farther. The pine trees stood out like huge giants by the roadside, as he passed them quickly one by one. At last he began to descend, and below in the valley the lights of a village were visible. A few minutes more brought him close to it, and dismounting, he decided to lead his horse and proceed cautiously until he should find the inn.

A short distance ahead he saw a low building which stood alone, and which, perchance, was the one he sought; so, tethering the horse to a tree, he crept forward quietly to reconnoitre.

The door was closed, but from the windows on each side, a bright light shone. Approaching the nearest, which was partly open, as noiselessly as he could, he looked in. There

were several people in the room, but his attention was attracted by two men, who sat at a table close by the window, tossing dice. They were both dressed for travel, and their dusty appearance betokened hard riding. The elder looked like a rough soldier, and wore a plain leather jacket and velvet cap; but the younger, who was richly dressed, had the appearance of a gallant. His black moustache curled to his ears, and his cap, which lay by his side, was surmounted by a short feather, fastened with the badge of the Duke of Bavaria's guard. Karl was sure he had seen him before, but where he could not recall.

The face of the younger man was flushed and angry, as he partly rose from his seat, to throw in his turn.

"Zounds! Lost again! Curse my luck," he exclaimed. "That's two hundred crowns to-night. I'll play no more."

"Come, then," said his companion, with a quiet smile, as they rose and crossed to the door, "we had better see if that horse is ready, and push on."

Karl slipped quickly into the shadow by

the side of the house. In a moment they had opened the door and were in the road.

"I would the Count had given someone else his dirty work to do," said the voice of the elder man, as they passed within a few feet of Karl, walking towards the village.

"I feel almost inclined to run off with the baggage myself," rejoined the other, with a laugh.

Karl's heart gave a sudden jump, and he almost cried out for joy. Was it Dulcie they spoke of? If so, how was he to get her out of the place? Such were the thoughts that rushed through his mind. There was not a second to be lost. The smithy was doubtless close by, and they would return shortly. Perchance there were other rooms at the back of the building. Feeling his way by the wall, he crept swiftly but noiselessly round to the rear of the house. In a small window near the roof there was a dim light, and beneath it there was a rough outhouse, on to the roof of which he soon climbed, and approached the window. Pressing his face against the lattice, he looked through into a small, bare room. On a stool near the door

a girl sat with her face buried in her hands. He felt his heartstrings tighten. He did not need a second glance. It was Dulcie. Tapping softly, he called "Dulcie." She sprang to the window and threw it open.

"Dulcie," he said quickly, "it is I—Karl. Canst thou get through the window? Quick, we haven't a moment to lose."

"Karl, Karl, is it really thee?" she exclaimed, with a sob in her voice, stretching her arms through the casement.

In a minute he had dragged her through, and she was standing by his side.

"Not a word," he whispered under his breath, as he jumped to the ground, and then lifted her down.

Silently they stole round the other side of the building, and were soon in the road.

"Now we must run, my horse is close by," he whispered; and, taking her hand, they set off.

They hadn't gone far when shouts from the inn told them the flight had been discovered.

Glancing behind, Karl saw, by the light which shone from the open door of the inn,

a man just mounting a horse. His own was blown, he knew, and could never carry the double burden, even if they had time to reach him.

"We must take to the forest. It's our only chance," he cried to Dulcie.

The clatter of hoofs now rang out sharply on the road. Their pursuer was close behind them.

"Run, Dulcie," cried Karl, loosening her hand, "in quickly between the trees to the left."

Karl turned and stood, and, drawing his pistol, fired straight at the approaching horseman, who was now but a few paces off. There was a loud cry and a crash as the animal reared and fell over on his side, bringing the rider to the ground with him. Then he turned and ran. In a moment he had rejoined Dulcie, and hand in hand they plunged into the darkness of the forest.

CHAPTER VI

WITHIN the forest the darkness was intense, not a sound could be heard save the crackling of the twigs beneath their feet as they carefully felt their way forward. Now and again they stopped and listened. All seemed quiet. Had their pursuers given up the chase already?

"Hush," said Karl, beneath his breath, instinctively drawing Dulcie closer to him, "they are following us."

The sound of someone forcing a way through the undergrowth could now be distinctly heard, and then a voice which seemed but a short distance away gave vent to a muttered curse, as its owner knocked his shins against a fallen bough. Karl quickly drew his companion behind the broad trunk of a great tree and clutched the haft of his dagger, which still hung in his belt. He had scarcely done so when a bulky form stumbled past, so

close that they could have touched him. Judging from his laboured breathing, he had already had enough of the quest.

"Fritz, Fritz!" cried another voice from the distance, "where art thou, man? Thou wilt lose thyself."

"I'm coming," was the reply in gasps, "I've had enough of this game of hide and seek in the dark, though if I catch my bird I'll pin him to a tree till morning."

The voices soon grew fainter and fainter, and it was evident that the pursuers were endeavouring to retrace their steps to the road. In a few minutes all was quiet again.

"Now we must go," said Karl; and again they slowly pushed onward.

But the way was rough and difficult. Now and again they stumbled over some fallen branches, or their feet caught in the undergrowth; then they sank ankle deep in wet moss, but they struggled on in silence.

"Courage," said Karl, as Dulcie uttered a sharp cry of pain and clutched hold of his arm. "What is it?"

"Oh, Karl, I've hurt my foot, and I can't move another step."

“Lean on me, and try. We must surely come across a path before long, and then thou shalt rest a while.”

Dulcie limped on gamely for a few steps and then collapsed altogether.

“It is no use, Karl; thou must go on alone and leave me here.”

“Be brave, Dulcie,” replied her companion cheerily, “it’s scarce likely I shall do that. Now I am going to carry thee, and trust me, before long we shall find some place to rest.”

So gathering her up in his arms as if she had been a child, Karl strode on.

At last fortune seemed to favour them, for soon the way got clearer, and the moon shone out from behind a dark bank of cloud, revealing a good pathway in front.

“My poor Karl,” murmured Dulcie, as she nestled closer to him, “surely thou must be tired of thy heavy burden ; do rest awhile.”

“Heavy,” re-echoed Karl, “why, I could carry thee for leagues. But here is a fallen trunk, we will sit down and hold a council of war.”

“Now, what shall we do?” said Karl as he deposited Dulcie gently, and sat beside her.

“ Shall we go forward or retrace our steps? This forest, I know, extends a long way to the east. If we follow this path it should bring us to the Bayreuth road, and then our way is clear. On the other hand, if we go back we shall emerge on the Bamberg road, and may meet with those miscreants again.”

“ Oh, let us go on,” replied Dulcie ; “ my foot gives me no pain now, and after this rest I shall be able to walk.”

“ Then forward it shall be, and thou shalt tell me what befel thee after leaving Nuremberg as we go along.”

“ Early this morning, though it seems like a week ago,” commenced Dulcie, “ a strange woman came with a message that thou hadst met with an accident some distance beyond the city walls and had sent for me. We had been very anxious at thy absence during the night, and felt sure some ill had befallen thee. So I quickly got ready to accompany the woman, who said she had been sent to guide me. We hurried so quickly to the New Gate that she gave me little time to ask any questions. A short distance outside the walls I noticed two men riding slowly to-

wards us, one of whom led a third horse without a rider. They stopped and dismounted as we approached them, and made signs to my companion, who suddenly said she could go no farther, and that these men had been sent to take me to thee. I asked, and even begged her, to accompany us, but she replied there was some distance to travel, and they had but the one spare horse. One of the men then came forward, and said I must mount without delay, and after helping me to the saddle we rode off quickly. We had ridden a long distance when a shoe of one of the horses became loose, and we had to go at a walking pace until we arrived at a village. We stopped at the inn, where they got off and consulted together in undertones. In a few moments they had evidently made up their minds to go on, for we proceeded at a slow pace again till we got to another village, where the younger man said we must rest a while, as he thought we had missed the way. I was conducted to a room upstairs by the woman of the place, who also brought me some food. Hours seemed to pass, and I had no sign from them, till at

length I decided to go downstairs. On trying the door I found it was fastened from without. I called and knocked till I was exhausted, then I sat down to think, and must have fallen half asleep, when I heard thy voice at the window. Oh! I was thankful. But I cannot understand their object. What did they want with me, and how cam'st thou there?"

"I think I know," replied Karl.

And then briefly he recounted his own adventures to the now astonished Dulcie.

"It is evident," he continued, "this fellow Wolf wished to inveigle thee to some lonely place, and he wanted to detain me till he had carried out his plot successfully. We must be thankful we've escaped, and must be on guard in future, for he is a powerful enemy."

"I shudder when I think of it," said Dulcie; "and but for thee I should have been in their hands now."

"Thank Heaven thou art safe, dear one," replied Karl; "but we must tarry no longer here."

They both rose renewed in strength, and

with fresh courage set out again through the silent forest. The stars looked down through the branches of the trees, which spread their mighty arms above like the groined roof of some vast cathedral.

"Look, Karl. Dost thou see a red light through the trees yonder?" asked Dulcie, presently.

"Yes, I was wondering what it could be; perchance it comes from the hut of some charcoal burner, where we may find shelter for the night."

The path now began to descend, and as they went on the red glow in front grew brighter.

"I can't make out where it comes from. It looks like the reflection of some fire burning in the earth," said Karl, as they made their way cautiously towards it.

As they drew closer, it appeared to come from behind an elevated ridge fringed with young trees that rose on the right.

Karl resolved to reconnoitre, and bidding Dulcie remain, he crept quietly up the slope. On reaching the top he crouched down and looked over.

It was a weird sight indeed that met his eyes. Below him was a great hollow, which appeared like a mighty cave with the top taken off, leaving two arches standing, that formed a natural bridge over the gulf which yawned below like the mouth of some vast crater. The rugged, limestone rocks that composed the walls of this singular place were fashioned in terraces, honey-combed with small caverns, from which rough flights of steps led to the bottom of the hollow, which formed an almost level plateau. In the centre, a huge fire of pine logs burnt brightly, and round it there sat or lounged a number of people. Their faces were swarthy, and their long hair hung over their shoulders. Most of them wore silver rings in their ears, which glittered in the firelight. Their dress mainly consisted of a loose shirt of red or green cloth, with ragged trunk hose, bound from the ankles to the knees with leather thongs. Some wore a wide scarf or band round their waists, from which the hafts of several knives protruded. Two or three who appeared to be leaders wore scarlet cloaks across their shoulders. The few women present were

as evil-looking as the men. Their clothing consisted of an old duffle garment tied over the shoulders and secured by a band round the waist.

Standing in the midst of this strange throng, and facing the fire, which cast a lurid light on his features, was a remarkable-looking man. His head, which was bare, had but a sparse covering of hair, which scarcely met his high and prominent forehead. His face was full and fresh coloured, and from beneath a pair of heavy brows his deeply-set eyes flashed with singular penetrative power. The firm, straight mouth and protruding chin betokened a character of exceptional strength. His burly form was garbed in a loose, flowing robe, secured round the waist by a girdle of skin, from which hung a long, straight sword and a leathern pouch.

With arms upraised, he was repeating some formula in measured tones. Now and again he would throw something on the fire, which sent the flames shooting upward with great brilliance.

While Karl was thus gazing, fascinated by

this curious scene, a heavy hand was suddenly laid on his shoulder, and a voice cried, "Rise, not a word, if thou valueth thy life." Half turning as he sprang to his feet, he saw he was grasped by a ruffianly-looking fellow, who evidently belonged to the band below. With the other hand the man held Dulcie by the wrist. Seeing resistance was useless with such numbers within call, Karl motioned to Dulcie to remain silent, and they followed their captor.

A few paces brought them to a flight of rough steps which the gipsy (for such he was) made a sign for them to descend, and, drawing a long thin knife from his waistband, he followed at their heels. On arriving at the plateau they were led forward to the fire and at once surrounded by the band, many of whom had jumped to their feet on noticing the intrusion.

"Whom have we here? What meaneth this, Landroc?" said a powerful-looking man, who was somewhat better dressed than the others, and whose cap was adorned with a long eagle's feather. He slowly raised himself from a ledge of rock on which he was reclining.

"I found them spying upon us in the forest, captain," replied the man, thrusting his captives forward in front of the leader.

"And who brought'st thee here, my young cockerel?" asked the captain, as he turned to Karl.

"Yonder fellow," replied Karl boldly, pointing to his captor.

"Have a care. Those who jest with me often find their tongues slit as a tribute to folly. Answer truthfully, or we'll find means to make thee."

"We sought but shelter for the night," said Karl.

"Marry, and thou shalt have it, and the pretty wench too. Bind him, and we'll look after the maid till the morning," replied the captain with, a coarse laugh.

"Stay!" cried a stentorian voice, and all eyes turned to the speaker, who strode majestically into the circle.

"And why, worthy magician?" asked the captain good-humouredly. "Dost thou not fear our wrath? Wherefore wouldst thou interfere with our prisoners?"

"Nay, mine host, Zorastro fears neither

man nor devil ; but it seems to me thou treatest yonder stripling and the maid with a harshness which ill becomes thy strength. They bode thee no harm, I'll warrant. Let me question them," he continued, drawing nearer to Karl. "Whence comest thou?"

"From Nuremberg," Karl answered, emboldened by the kindly voice.

"Dost thou belong to that city?"

"We do, and wish to return thither."

"Then thou shalt do so, and in my company, for I also journey there tomorrow. Now, my good host, I demand their freedom in return for my spell. I will be answerable for their good conduct. I ask for them the same hospitality thou offerest to my unworthy self."

"Be it so, good Zorastro. We grant thy request in payment for thy good augury," said the captain. "Free them, Landroc, and find the travellers shelter for the night. But before we seek our rest we will broach another keg to drink the health of our guest. Come, fill your cups, good friends all," he shouted, as a keg of wine was rolled forward,

and the band crowded round it, eager to get a supply.

“We drink to the health and long life of Zorastro, the great healer and magician,” cried the captain, as he stood and raised his wine-cup.

With a great shout of “Life to Zorastro!” the cups were drained, and again refilled, till all the wine was exhausted.

Then Karl and Dulcie were conducted to one of the many caverns which surrounded this strange place, the floor of which was spread with skins. Having seen Dulcie comfortably settled and bade her sleep in safety, Karl threw himself down across the entrance, determined to remain on guard till morning. One by one he watched the gipsies disappear like foxes into their holes. The fire burnt low, then at length, tired out by the fatigues of the day, he sank into a sound sleep.

CHAPTER VII

THE sun had risen a full hour when Karl woke. He rubbed his eyes and looked about him in wonderment. For a few moments he could hardly realise where he was, but a glimpse of Dulcie, whose fair hair flowed in great waves around her head as she still lay wrapt in placid slumber, soon brought back to his mind the events of the previous night. On the plateau below the colony was all astir. Fires had been kindled, and over each swung an iron pot, to which the women of the tribe gave their attention. Some of the men were busy cleaning arms, while others carried fresh fuel which they had gathered in the forest.

Karl stretched himself and went outside.

"A good morning to thee, my young friend," said a cheery voice in his ear.

He turned and beheld the man they called Zorastro seated on a boulder, viewing with

evident satisfaction the preparations for the morning meal.

"I have to thank thee, sir, for thy timely help last night, and I do so with all my heart," said Karl, as he returned his salutation.

"A truce to thanks, good lad. I saw thou wast no robber, and these Bohemians are but half savages, and think no more of slitting a man's weasand than that of a fat buck. But I know their tribe, and they know me, and I have spent many a merry night with them in their strongholds in the course of my wanderings. And now, tell me, how camest thou here last night?"

Karl then related as much of his adventure as he thought necessary, and said he wished for his companion's sake to return to Nuremberg as quickly as possible, as their friends would be anxious for their safety.

"And what is thy name?" asked Zorastro.

"They call me Karl Ebner."

"Ebner? Why, I seek one of that name in Nuremberg. I wonder if thou know'st aught of Erasmus Ebner, an apothecary of that city?"

"Erasmus Ebner is my foster father," replied Karl, in some astonishment.

"Come, this is indeed strange. And tell me, are my old friends Erasmus and his wife alive and well?"

"Quite well when I left the city."

"And the maid with thee, who is she?"

"Their grandchild, Dulcie."

"Well, well, and so the wheel of time goes round. It is nigh eighteen years since I saw them, and now I do remember a little girl and boy who used to play about their knees," said Zorastro, as he scanned Karl closely, and a curious smile began to play about the corners of his mouth. "But see, here they come to bid us to the meal."

Around the fire various groups had gathered, and Karl, having roused Dulcie and brought her forth, they followed their new friend. Great bowls of kid's broth were ladled out of the steaming pots and passed along, to which they all did full justice, for the young folk by this time were nearly famished with hunger.

When the meal was finished, Zorastro having thanked the captain of the tribe for

his hospitality, which Karl re-echoed for himself and Dulcie, they at once made preparations for departure.

Karl noticed their host cast a longing eye on his dagger, so taking it from his belt he gave it to him as a parting gift. It was indeed all he had to offer, for he found that the Bohemians, acting up to their reputation, had emptied his wallet of all he possessed during the night.

Having exchanged farewells, they were conducted out of the hollow and put on the right path by the chief himself.

The sun was shining brilliantly, making the dewdrops which gemmed the ferns sparkle like diamonds. The birds sang a joyous song as the trio journeyed along the path which led to the Bayreuth road. Zorastro acted as guide, and an interesting companion he proved, for he seemed to know every wild flower, herb, and simple they passed, and the ills of the flesh each served to relieve.

It was almost noon when they emerged from the forest on to the road, and turned their faces towards the city. Karl saw that

Dulcie was both tired and footsore, and proposed a halt at a wayside inn which they now approached. After refreshing themselves they were fortunate enough to find a wagon going to Nuremberg, the driver of which agreed to give them a lift. Thus, reclining on a soft bed of straw at the tail of the long vehicle, they made the rest of the journey in comfort, while Zorastro beguiled the time by relating stories of strange adventures in Eastern lands.

Night was beginning to close in when they entered the city once more by the Laufer Gate, from whence they made their way on foot.

On reaching the corner of the Spital Strasse, Dulcie sped like an arrow and was soon locked in Dame Margaret's arms, who cried and laughed over her in turns, long before the others reached the apothecary's dwelling.

Erasmus ran out to welcome Karl, and having embraced him looked hard at his companion.

"What, Erasmus, dost thou not know me?" said he, smiling, while signing to Karl to remain silent.

"Know thee, Philip? In truth I do," cried the old man with delight, grasping his hands and drawing him into the shop.

"Come in and welcome," he continued, as he led the way into the room, where the dame was still hugging Dulcie to her breast as she told her story.

"Thank heaven thou art both safe back again, my children," said Erasmus, as in his joy he embraced them both again.

"Here, dame, dame," he cried, "dost thou see who's here? Bustle about, good wife, and look alive. Why, it's Philip come back again. What think'st thou of that, good wife?"

"It's a joyful day that has brought thee back to Nuremberg again," said the dame, releasing Dulcie at last, and heartily saluting the visitor and Karl on both cheeks.

"And now for supper," said Erasmus, as soon as the dame had spread the board, "and then we'll hear the adventures afterwards."

Soon they were all seated round the table, busily engaged in discussing the goodly fare. While thus employed a knock was heard at the door. Dulcie rose and opened it.

“Why, it’s Hans,” she exclaimed, as she kissed the face of a grey-bearded old man who entered the room.

His thickset figure was wrapped in a russet cloak much the worse for wear, beneath which showed a leathern apron, while his back was bent as if from continual stooping. His kindly face, which seemed a perfect net-work of wrinkles, was lit up by a pair of bright eyes that twinkled like stars, and a fringe of white hair escaped from beneath his cap in short curls.

“Come along, Hans, thou’rt just in time to join us,” cried Erasmus, as he made room for the newcomer. “Thou wilt have much to hear afterwards.”

“Philip, this is Hans Hertz, who, while he mends our shoon, makes fun and rhymes for all who need them—”

“Nay, nay, old friend, thou dost praise me overmuch,” said the old man modestly.

“But does not Albert Dürer (who is no mean judge) say there is fairer poesy made in Nuremberg than all the other side of Rhine, and for pricking a papist, one of Hans’ songs can’t be beaten, I vow.”

"We must get Master Hertz to give us a taste of his quality by and by," said Philip.

When the meal was over and they drew round the fireside, Karl was called upon to recount his adventures, which were punctuated now and again by "Well done, lad," from Erasmus, and maledictions on the Count by the company generally.

"But what became of this magician of whom thou speakest?" asked Erasmus.

"There he sits before thee," replied Karl, and all eyes turned to Philip.

"Yes, I am he whom they call Zorastro, friend," he said in a quiet voice.

"What!" cried the old man in astonishment, "the great leech and physician whose fame is spreading throughout the land?"

"Is your old pupil, Philip Valdagno!"

"Wonder upon wonders," exclaimed Erasmus, lifting up his hands in amazement. "Karl, my lad, behold not only thy preserver of yesterday, but he who found thee a little child floating on the river nigh eighteen years ago; thou owest him double thanks. It is just like a story."

Karl rose in astonishment. This the man

to whom he owed his life? He grasped Zorastro by the hand, and said :

“Forgive me ; I never suspected it. I do thank thee, indeed.”

“Well, now, come tell us what has happened all these long years,” said Erasmus.

“My tale, good friend, would take too long to tell,” said Zorastro (as we must now call him), “but I will relate thee something of my travels.

“On leaving Nuremberg, I journeyed to Würzburg, where I studied for a twelve-month with Johann Trithemius, the good Abbot of St. Jacob, who imparted to me great secrets in magic and alchemy.

“From thence I made my way to Schwatz, where I sat at the feet of the learned Sigismund Függer. Then a restless spirit coming upon me, I travelled into France, and from thence made my way north to Flanders, Denmark, Sweden, and Russia, seeing and learning divers strange and curious things. From Russia I journeyed further east, and lived among the Tartars, from whom I gathered much concerning the elementals or spirits of nature. From Tartary I made my

way through the country of the Turk to the Danube, and followed the army in Italy for a while. During these long years, I have been gathering knowledge of my art from all these strange peoples and lands.

“In Italy, where I exercised my skill with much success, they called me Zorastro, from the magic crystal I always carried, and with which they believed I performed my cures.

“When I crossed the border once more, something seemed to call me this way, and I remembered the babe I had entrusted to your good care. And here I am in the old city again, where the rolling stone will rest awhile, until some unseen force impels him to roll on again.

“Now, Master Hertz, as the good dame and Mistress Dulcie are looking as if sleep were not far away from their eyelids, let us hear a sample of thy poesy before we too go to rest.”

“Yes, Hans,” cried Dulcie, clapping her hands; “do tell us the story of the flower we love.”

The old man rose to his feet, and his eyes brightened as he said, in a clear voice :

“Be it so. To please the young maid
I will give thee the old legend of the
Cornflower.

“*Crimson and gold. Crimson and gold.*

*The ripe corn gleamed in the morning sun,
As the warm wind played with its drooping ears,
And the poppies quivered and seemed to sigh,
For the field was ripe for the harvest.
Fair it waved in the radiant light,
All crimson and gold.*

“*Silent and sad Cyanthus sat,*

*'Mid the tall and yellow sheaves,
Weaving a garland of ruby red from the poppies strewn
around,
For he loved their silky petals.
Clad in blue like the azure sky,
He stretched himself on the crimson couch,
And thought of the stricken flowers.
Thus as he mused, the poppies' breath
Soothed him to slumber deep ;
And so he slept his life away
Among the corn and the poppies gay,
He loved so well.*

“*Crimson and blue. Crimson and blue.*

*Lulled by the poppies Cyanthus lay,
Till Flora espied him, and quickly flew
From her lofty height to the earth beneath ;
And folding her arms round his slumb'ring form,
She bore him away to her own fair realm,
Where the flowers bloom and never fade.*

*And since in the cornfields for ever and aye,
A blue flower grows with the poppy gay,
Raised by the goddess Flora's hand
In remembrance of Cyanthus."*

Loud was the applause that followed. Good-nights were exchanged, and as the curfew tolled out from the tower of St. Lawrence, Hans Hertz took his way to his dwelling close by. Erasmus conducted his illustrious guest with much ceremony to his chamber, and the household was soon all abed.

CHAPTER VIII

AT the dawn of the sixteenth century, the art of medicine, which had then reached the lowest point of its decadence, was split up into two divisions, each of which contended for supremacy.

The leaders of one based their belief on the Arabian school, and claimed to follow in the footsteps of Rhazes and Avicenna its founders ; while their opponents professed to practise the art as laid down by the ancient Greeks, and avowed adherence only to the precepts of Hippocrates, Galen, and other great lights.

The former chiefly relied on the administration of physic in prodigious quantities, while the latter pinned their faith on blood-letting, cutting, and cauterising at every possible opportunity. At this period the whole art was but a mixture of religion, superstition, and magic. The physicians who dwelt in

the larger cities were pompous personages, puffed up with self-conceit and importance, and played on the ignorance and credulity of the people; while the apothecaries, who formed a lower class of practitioners, were mostly empirics, whose chief aim was to mystify their patients and induce them to swallow as much physic as possible.

Perhaps the most conscientious practitioners of the time were the monks, who administered to the wants of the poor people living in the neighbourhood of the monasteries throughout the country. Some of them were well versed from experience in the use of medicinal herbs, which were cultivated in the monastery gardens. Many were also profound students of alchemy and astrology, and contributed much of value to the science of the time, as instanced by the discoveries of Raymund Lully, Roger Bacon, Trithemius, and many others.

The same period also saw the birth of a new era of thought. The world seemed to wake as if from a long sleep, and begin to shake off many of the dark shadows and superstitions which had stopped the progress

of art, science, and religion during the dark ages. The era of printing was one of the chief factors in dispersing the mists and vapours of ignorance which obscured the light, and in the dissemination of truth.

The great struggle for liberty in the battle-field of religious thought, which culminated in the reformation of the Church, caused a revolution in other great branches of knowledge, and in science there was a corresponding conflict of reason against sophistry, and truth against error.

In his early youth Philip Valdagno had been instructed in the elements of medicine and chirurgery as then known, by his father, a worthy physician of his time, who practised his art in the little town of Hechingen. His mother had been the matron of the hospice belonging to a neighbouring abbey, and was a woman of much amiability and sweetness of character, who devoted the early part of her life to nursing the sick and administering to the wants of the suffering.

At the age of sixteen he was sent to study at the University of Basle, one of the chief seats of learning. But to a disposition which

longed for constant change, and inspired with a prodigious thirst for knowledge, the regular routine soon got irksome, and leaving the university before completing his term for graduation, he set out to travel and gather all the experience he could. His profound love for the occult sciences, as time went on, led him to be regarded as a magician, who could work wonders and cures beyond the reach of the ordinary practitioners. Thus, as his fame increased, the physicians became greatly embittered against him, and denounced him as a charlatan and empiric.

And so he roved from place to place, rarely remaining more than a few months in any city, but preferring to roam at his own free will from one country to another, mixing with all kinds of people, from bandits, gipsies, and fortune-tellers, to great nobles and princes. Thus he wandered once more to Nuremberg, which he hadn't visited since his youth.

The story of the attempt to carry off Dulcie and her rescue, was soon noised about the city. The burghers discussed it in the market-place, and angry murmurs against

the Count Wolf were heard on every side. Erasmus was urged to lay the matter before the Burgraf, but in the meantime the story reached the Burg, and soon after, it was made known that the Count Wolf had been sent to join the army in the North. This report was received with general satisfaction by the burghers, and especially by the homestead in the Spital Strasse.

In the course of a few weeks Zorastro had established himself in one of the tall houses in the Berg Strasse, and before long his fame as a physician had spread throughout the city. The account of his travels in distant countries, and the wonderful cures he had performed, became the talk of the community, and when it was made known that he would give his advice to the poor at certain times without fee or charge, his door was daily besieged by a crowd of sufferers from all manner of diseases.

Some came hobbling on crutches with crooked and twisted limbs, others who could not walk were carried on litters, and put down in the street to wait their turn. They were of all sorts and conditions — old and

young, rich and poor. They were admitted through the narrow door of the dwelling by a stately janitor, who was clad in a doublet and jerkin of black cloth trimmed with silver. In his hand he carried a white wand tipped with a silver ornament fashioned like a human skull, and, carrying this symbol of importance, he conducted the patients with much solemnity into the presence of his master.

Through a door draped with heavy black curtains, they were ushered into a large room, which was again divided by hangings of the same sombre hue. Beyond, a glimpse of a laboratory could be obtained, with glowing furnace and an array of crucibles, alembics, mattresses, and other apparatus of the alchemist's art. In the centre stood a curiously formed still. The body was pear-shaped, and above it a spiral worm entered an alembic, which was connected with a large green glass receiver. This imposing piece of apparatus was used for distilling the Water of Life.

On one side of the front apartment was a baldachin hung with scarlet curtains, round

the top of which were inscribed, in white characters, the signs of the Zodiac. On a circular table beneath, stood the magic crystal, a skull, and a dead hand; while on the floor was a pile of oaken-backed books with heavy clasps of brass. Another table in the centre of the room bore the astrolabe and a litter of bottles, gallipots and jars. In one corner stood a bronze brazier on a tripod, while from the ceiling, which was crossed by heavy oak beams, hung a brass lamp of curious workmanship, having seven flames.

Seated in a massive chair, wearing a long robe of rich purple cloth, heavily trimmed with fur, Zorastro waited to receive his patients. Around his waist was a broad belt of lion's skin, while his head was covered by a close-fitting cap of black velvet.

Into this mysterious apartment the trembling sufferers were ushered one by one. Here Zorastro heard their woeful tale and after careful examination would give them the necessary advice, and sometimes a phial of medicine. Then they would depart, showering blessings on his head, until cut

short by the janitor, who showed them quickly outside.

When he passed through the busy streets or markets, a whispering crowd followed him, from which, now and again, an enthusiast would step forward and kiss the edge of his cloak.

Thus his popularity increased day by day, until his doings became the talk of the city.

One morning found Erasmus Ebner on his way to the Berg Strasse. He pushed his way through the crowd that had already gathered round the door of the great Wonder-Worker, as he was now called, and was soon admitted.

"Well, old friend," cried Zorastro, greeting him heartily, "right glad am I to see thee."

"I almost feared it might be otherwise since thou hast become so famous," replied Erasmus, with a quiet smile. "Why, thy name is on everyone's lips."

"Tush, man, what of it? They would forget me in a few short days. To be successful but means success."

"But such is thy success the physicians are complaining they have no work to do, and

are denouncing thee right and left as a charlatan and impostor. I came to warn thee that even now they are concocting a plot to get thee expelled from the city."

"Nay, look not so serious, old friend," said Zorastro with a jolly laugh, as he clapped Erasmus on the shoulder. "I can plot as well as these old addlepates, and we'll see who will have the best of it. I have heard their vapourings and threats, and to-day have challenged them, by asking the Council to place under my care one Max Teufel, a sergeant of the guard, whose limbs for ten years have been swollen to thrice their proper size. His face is as big as a pumpkin, and he can scarce see out of his eyes."

"I know the fellow," said Erasmus; "he has tried all the physicians in the city without avail."

"Well, I have publicly undertaken to cure him in a month, and produce him whole in body and limb in the presence of these boasting Solons.

"Ho, ho!" laughed Zorastro, as he paced up and down the room. "I can see their faces lengthen out, and their heads wag to-

gether. It will be worth a bag of gold to see, good Erasmus, I warrant thee. By the way, he comes to-day for his course of treatment. I shall keep him here, closely watched, till the cure is complete."

At this moment the janitor put his head between the curtained doorway and informed his master, that a crowd of patients in the street were clamouring for admission.

"Admit first the man called Max Teufel," said Zorastro. "And now, old friend, thou shalt see this man, and be able to testify for me."

After giving three taps on the floor with his wand, the janitor parted the curtains and admitted a terrible and extraordinary specimen of humanity, who rolled rather than walked into the apartment. His head, which was swollen to an enormous size, was nigh unrecognisable for a human face; his eyes seemed completely buried in the mass of flesh. His limbs were misshapen, and swollen to huge dimensions, while his skin was as coarse as an elephant's hide, and altogether the unfortunate creature looked more like some hideous animal than a human being.

"Art thou Max Teufel?" asked Zorastro.

"That is my name, master," was the reply in a gruff voice.

"And thou hast heard I have undertaken to cure thee of this malady, and restore thy limbs whole within a month?"

"I have, good master."

"Dost thou believe I can do this thing, and promise, meanwhile, to obey me in all things?"

"I do."

"Enough. Thou must remain in this house till thou art cured."

Zorastro struck a gong and the janitor appeared.

"Conduct this man to the chamber thou hast prepared," he said. The janitor led him away.

"What think'st thou of him, Erasmus?"

"If thou canst cure him, thou canst work miracles," was the reply,

"Faith has worked miracles before, and will do so again. I say he *shall* be cured," cried Zorastro, his deep voice ringing like a trumpet through the room, as he paced to and fro excitedly.

“Then thou wilt indeed be rightly called the ‘Wonder-Worker,’” said Erasmus, as he quitted the apartment and made his way into the street, where a great throng still waited patiently for admittance.

CHAPTER IX

As the moon waned towards its last quarter, so the interest in the challenge made by Zorastro to the physicians increased. The burghers were divided in their opinions. Those who had been themselves cured, or had their friends healed by Zorastro, strongly supported him ; while, on the other hand, the older physicians of the city were not without their partisans. And so discussion waxed hot, and the excitement grew intense as the day approached when Max Teufel was to be shown to the population, cured, or not cured.

No one had seen him for some weeks, and the opposition faction had spread a rumour abroad that Zorastro, in league with the devil, had spirited him away, and nothing would be heard of him again.

As the time approached, the magistrates, fearing that the affair would end in a riot,

waited on the Burgraf and informed him of the facts of the case. On hearing their story, he commanded that the meeting should take place in the Rathhaus, and promised that he himself would be present to preserve order.

Thus it was proclaimed in the market-places by the city crier, that, on the day appointed, at the hour of noon, the Rathhaus would be open to all good burghers who desired to be present at the meeting of the physicians, to decide on the case of one Max Teufel.

At last the great day dawned, and hours before noon the streets were thronged with burghers and their wives on their way to the place of meeting. At the doors the press was so great, that the city guard had to lower their pikes more than once to stem the torrent of the crowd which, as the hour of noon drew near, surged round St. Sebald's in a dense mass.

Erasmus, with Karl and Dulcie, had set out early, and, by dint of much squeezing, had managed to work their way into the great hall, where they were wedged in a corner close to the raised dais, in the centre

of which, on an elevated platform, stood the Burgraf's chair. It was covered with crimson cloth, edged with gold, and embroidered on the back with the arms of the city. On either side stood a number of the Duke's guard, carrying silver halberds, and they were flanked by the city trumpeters. In the front of the dais a number of chairs had been placed for the chief physicians.

As the last stroke of twelve was heard from the clock of St. Sebald's, the trumpeters blew a fanfare, heralding the approach of the Burgraf.

The great hall was now crowded to suffocation, while the murmur of those outside who had been unable to gain admission, could be heard within. After another blast of the trumpets the Burgraf entered, and bowing to the assembly, took his seat. He was soon followed by a number of the chief physicians and civic dignitaries, who vied with each other in the richness of their robes and the length of their grey beards.

Bowing to the Burgraf, and then to the audience, they also seated themselves.

A hush now fell on the great throng, who

were wrought to the highest pitch of expectancy, and all eyes were turned to the chief crier who walked to the front of the dais to read the proclamation.

“Be it known to all present, burghers of the free city of Nuremberg,” he cried, “that the learned and honourable physicians of this city having denounced Philip Valdagno, commonly known as ‘Zorastro,’ as a charlatan and impostor, and an unworthy professor of the art of medicine, the said Philip Valdagno, to purge himself of that charge, undertook the cure of one Max Teufel, a late sergeant of the guard, and to produce him before you healed of a foul disease within one month, which expires on this day. We therefore now call on the said Philip Valdagno to produce this man before his Excellency, the Duke Ernest, Burgraf of this free city, the learned and honourable physicians, and the burghers thereof, and prove his challenge.”

The crier’s voice had scarce died away when an uproar arose at the back of the hall, and above the hubbub of voices were heard shouts of, “Down with the impostor! Down with the charlatan!”

The guard ground their halberds, and the trumpeters blew a blast to command silence.

All eyes now turned to the dais, and at the same moment the burly form of Zorastro was seen to emerge quietly from behind the Burgraf's chair. He was clad in his purple robe, and had a rich chain of gold about his neck. He was followed by a man who held himself stiff and erect, and who bore a long, straight sword in his hands. There was breathless silence as the two figures made their way slowly to the front, and stood before the assembly side by side.

Zorastro held up his hand for silence, and then spoke.

“Burghers of Nuremberg, behold at my side Max Teufel, thy fellow-citizen. Thou knew'st him as he once was, disfigured and corrupted by a foul disease, which had been pronounced hopeless by his physicians. He stands here before thee to-day, by the grace of God, whole and sound in body once more. I claim no merit. Everything that happens takes place through the will of the Supreme, and the exercise of faith. Faith is a luminous star that leads the honest seeker into the

mysteries of Nature. If thou dost possess divine, sincere, pure, and strong faith, the God of Wisdom will not withhold His truth to thee. I know that I am a man who does not speak to everyone, only that which might please him, and I am not used to give submissive answers to arrogant questions. I know my ways, and I do not wish to change them, neither would I change my nature. I am a rough man, born in a rough country. I have been brought up in pine woods, and I may have inherited some knots. I need say no more. I here produce Max Teufel before thee and this honourable assembly, as I promised. I only ask him to swear on the Cross that what I have said concerning him is true, and I leave the rest to God."

A deep murmur of approval surged through the hall.

Amid the suppressed excitement Max Teufel then solemnly raised the cross-hilted sword before him, and cried in a loud voice, "I swear it is true," after which he handed the sword to Zorastro, who girt it at his side.

The change in the man's appearance was

indeed marvellous. His features and limbs were apparently free from disfigurement, and had once more assumed their natural size. And now, as the physicians pressed forward to examine him, a great shout arose from the people, who could contain themselves no longer, and loud cries of, "Long live Zorastro! Long live the Wonder-Worker!" burst from hundreds of throats, till the rafters of the hall rang again.

As the shouts began to subside, a stentorian voice was heard to cry, "Burghers, he has deceived ye. That man is not Max Teufel."

This was followed by howls of "Down with him! Down with him!"

Then a murmur went round, "Look, his old mother goes to him," as an aged woman was lifted over the heads of the people towards the platform. When she was placed thereon, Max rushed to meet her, and she was seen to tear open his jerkin, and there disclose a great mole on his breast.

"It is indeed my son, my son!" she cried, embracing him, while tears of joy ran down her cheeks.

Then the shouts of "Long live Zorastro!" were revived with renewed vigour.

The faces of the physicians lengthened visibly as their last prop was knocked away, and they began to disappear one by one behind the Burgraf's chair, scarce able to conceal their chagrin and disappointment.

All at once the crowd pressed forward to the platform and, regardless of the guard, seized Zorastro, and aloft on their shoulders bore him down the hall. Eager hands then grasped Max Teufel, and he also was carried bodily into the street. Here the throng was swelled by those outside who had been unable to gain admittance, and amid shouts and cheers Zorastro was borne in triumph through the streets to the door of his house.

Meanwhile, Erasmus, Karl, and Dulcie, in order to escape the crush, had remained in the hall, where they heard the crier announce that by the order of the Duke the wonderful cure of Max Teufel by Zorastro was to be recorded in the archives of the city. After which the Burgraf and the civic dignitaries took their departure.

The hall having then cleared, they made

the best of their way home. Here they found Dame Margaret waiting, eager to hear the news, and they were soon recounting to her the doings of the morning and its result. When Karl's breath gave out, Dulcie took up the story, and Erasmus, chuckling with glee, chimed in a comment whenever he could get an opportunity.

While they were thus occupied, a knock was heard at the door, and Zorastro himself entered.

"I've escaped them at last," he cried. "They nearly tore me to pieces."

"I am proud to know thee this day. It is a triumph," exclaimed Erasmus, grasping his hands, while the others joined in a chorus of congratulations.

"But thou didst not hear that the Burgraf commanded it to be inscribed on the city archives," said Karl.

"And the old physicians tore their hair out by the handful when they got outside," cried Dulcie gleefully.

"Such is fame," quoth Zorastro. "But I have more news for ye, good folk. When I got to the Berg Strasse, I found a man

awaiting me who had ridden from Basle, bearing credentials and a message from the Council of that city, asking me to accept the office of professor of physic and medicine at their University. He awaits my answer. Now, what think'st thou of that?"

"It is great news indeed," replied Erasmus; "but what will be their gain will be our loss. And are we to lose thee so soon?"

"Well, it is time the stone was rolling again, and now I have refuted the charges of these men, I shall leave Nuremberg with a clear conscience. But one thing I want, Erasmus, and it is a hard one to ask of thee."

"And what is that?"

"I want to take Karl with me, old friend."

"What, take our boy from us!" cried the dame in dismay.

"Hush, wife," said Erasmus gently, "we but held the lad in trust for his preserver, and he has the first right to take him if he so wills."

"He shall not come against his will," said Zorastro. "What say'st thou, Karl? Wilt thou bear me company in my wanderings?"

The question, so suddenly put, was a hard

one for Karl to answer readily, and he looked first at Dulcie and then at the old people, who had been the only parents he had ever known, and he strove hard to control his voice.

“Nay, lad,” said Erasmus quietly, putting his hand on his shoulder, “let us not weigh with thee. Thine own future has to be thought of.”

“My foster parents,” said Karl, as his eyes filled with tears, “I owe thee more than I can ever repay; but if he who saved my life bids me follow, I must needs go, though it shall not be farewell.”

CHAPTER X

IN a short time it was all settled. Zorastro decided to accept the invitation to Basle, and take Karl with him to act as his scrivener.

The hours fled all too swiftly as the time for their departure drew near. The last day at length arrived. Dame Margaret and Dulcie were busy helping Karl with loving hands to make preparations for the journey. Erasmus had provided him with a good useful horse with suitable appointments, including a trusty Toledo blade with a basket hilt, a weapon of defence which Karl knew how to use well.

There had been an atmosphere of quiet and sadness about the house all day, and towards evening Karl drew Dulcie out of doors, and side by side they sauntered through the quiet streets, to look once more on the spots he loved so well. Together they lingered round the old fountain of the merry

piper near the Spital Platz, where they had so often romped when children. Thence they made their way across the Haupt Market, now almost deserted, pausing by the Beautiful Fountain, with its fretted canopy and exquisite carvings. Then they wandered up the hilly street on to the little bridge, and looked down on the placid river below, that reflected the gabled houses with their wooden balconies as in a mirror.

Occupied with their own thoughts, they scarcely spoke, but now and again Karl's hand would seek his companion's, and a gentle pressure gave expression to thoughts which were deeper than words. Thus they strolled on till they came to the church of St. Lawrence.

"Let us go in and sit awhile," said Karl.

They entered the building by the Brides' Door, and sat down in the great arched nave. The setting sun streamed through the richly-painted windows, illuminating the traced and fretted stonework with iridescent hues, and the air was heavy with the fragrance of incense. The hoary sculptured memorials of the past threw dark shadows on the pave-

ment, and from the choir came the sound of voices chanting in low monotone.

"I scarce can realise that in a few hours thou wilt have left us," said Dulcie quietly.

"Thou dost not think hard of me for going, Dulcie?"

"Nay, 'tis only right that thou shouldst go. Who knows but in thy travels thou mayst solve the mystery of thy birth, and then—"

"It would make no difference. I shall come back again for thee, Dulcie."

"For me? Nay, thou mayst, perchance, become a great man, and will soon forget thine old playmate."

"Never while life lasts," cried Karl softly, putting his arm round the girl's shoulders and drawing her closer to him.

"Dulcie, Dulcie," he whispered, "I love thee—I love thee dearly. Wilt thou wait for me?"

"Hush, Karl," said the maid, her bosom heaving as her breath came quickly. "Thou dost not know—"

"I know I love thee, and that is enough. Look up, dear heart, and let me see the answer in thine eyes."

One swift, upward glance Dulcie turned towards him, and he saw the answer he longed for. Then her long eyelashes drooped, and she buried her face in his breast.

Presently she raised her head, and two sweet unreasonable tears rolled down her cheeks, and her arms stole round his neck as she said softly :

“ My love, I will wait for thee.”

Words were not needed now, and they sat with hands clasped in silence, till the shadows lengthened, and at last the sun went down, leaving the building in grey and solemn gloom.

Then they went forth into the quiet streets again, their hearts filled with a wondrous joy they had never felt before, and the very air seemed laden with the sweetness of love.

CHAPTER XI

SOON after the sun had risen, Karl was up and making ready for the journey, for Zorastro had arranged to start an hour after sunrise in order to avoid any public demonstration.

Dame Margaret and Dulcie had been early astir, and were busy preparing the morning meal, when Karl, arrayed in a doublet of dark brown cloth, with jerkin and hose to match, and his legs encased in long riding-boots, came in from saddling his horse. Dulcie, whose eyes were suspiciously red, was flitting about and chattering like a magpie, to keep the dame from thinking of the parting so soon at hand.

"Look, mother," she cried; "is he not spruce? Why, he only lacks a pair of long moustachios, instead of that down on his cheeks, to look a fine gallant."

"Tush, child," said the dame, but at the

same time casting an admiring look at Karl's stalwart young figure. "What dost thou know of such things? Our lad is brave and true, and no dressed-up popinjay. Karl," she continued, "thou wilt not forget all I have told thee, and take care shouldst thou get wet to put thine hose to dry before thou goest to bed."

"And be sure not to cut that down off thy cheeks, or thou wilt surely catch an ague," broke in the audacious Dulcie.

"Very well, Mistress Malapert," said Karl, smiling. "I will remember all, and come back with moustachios an ell long, if so that will please thee."

"Please me, forsooth! 'Twill be to brush the cheeks of the fair maids of Basle who thou wilt soon make eyes at, I'll warrant."

Further badinage was cut short by a clatter of hoofs outside, and in a few moments the tall figure of Zorastro appeared in the doorway, bidding them all a good morning.

While Dame Margaret held converse with him, Karl seized the opportunity to draw Dulcie into the old laboratory, so they might have a few minutes alone. Here the pent-

up tears broke forth, and the girl buried her face in his breast and sobbed as if her heart would break. Karl tried his best to comfort her in the way only a lover can.

“Keep up a brave heart, dear one,” he said gently. “We shall not be parted for long, and I will come back and claim thee for mine own.”

“But oh, Karl,” she said between her sobs, “I have had forebodings of evil, and last night I dreamt—”

“Never mind the evil dream, dear. If thou wilt trust me, I will trust thee, and all will yet be well. Look up, and let me see thee smile again before I go, so I may carry it with me in my heart.”

“Karl! Dulcie!” cried the voice of Erasmus.

Karl had just time to clasp the maid to his breast once more, when Erasmus entered.

“Come, children, we wait thee,” he said, and they followed him to the room.

The meal was a quiet one and soon over. Then the travellers made final preparations for departure. Karl buckled on his sword with an air of pride, and Dulcie fastened a

leathern wallet she had given him to his belt, while Zorastro looked to the horses and saw all was right.

“God guard and speed ye,” said old Erasmus as Karl embraced him; and then the dame threw her arms round him as if she would never let him go, and whispered in his ear :

“Never fear, I’ll look after the lassie,” as great tears gathered in her eyes.

Then with a last good-bye to Dulcie, Karl sprang nimbly to his saddle, and Zorastro having said his farewells mounted also.

With a wave of their caps they cantered up the street towards the Spittler Gate.

As they turned the corner, Karl glanced back and caught a last glimpse of red gold hair and a kerchief waving from the upper window.

Passing through the gate and over the bridge they soon left the city behind. After riding a league or more, they turned, and had a last look at it before a bend of the road hid its many towers and spires from sight.

Soon after noon had passed, they came to

the foot of a steep hill up which the road wound. As the horses needed a rest, they dismounted and walked them to the top. Just over the summit, where four roads met, a gallows stood, from which hung the body of a man in chains. The grim object swayed backwards and forwards in the wind, while the rusty links which secured it, clanked dismally.

"Poor humanity! The temple of the soul, a meal for the crows," said Zorastro, as he stood and contemplated the ghastly object.

"Look! One of his legs has gone," exclaimed Karl.

"Yes," replied Zorastro, a grim smile playing about the corners of his mouth. "It is not an uncommon sight, and before long it is likely all that is left of the poor fellow will be carried off to the laboratory of some apothecary who is short of mummy. After that, he will no doubt be administered to the first fine lady who suffers from the megrims."

"But surely they do not use the bodies of malefactors for that purpose?"

"There are many who believe there is no better material, I do assure thee. Is it not the learned Garcious who says, the best mummy is made from the body of a lusty young man who has met a violent death, after he has been properly cured by being soaked in spirit, then dried in the air, and finally hung in a chimney over a fire of juniper wood till he becomes as dry as hung beef. It is curious indeed how instinctively man preys on man.

"See, here the mandrake groweth," continued Zorastro, stooping to gather a purple flower that grew near the foot of the gibbet. "Have a care that thou dost not pull the root, or thou wilt surely die. Knowest thou not how the ancients gathered it?"

"No," replied Karl, who was anxious to leave the gruesome spot. "But thou shalt tell me as we go down the hill to yonder town."

"Well," said Zorastro, when they had mounted once more and were descending the hill, "the ancients believed, that an evil spirit dwelt in the root of the mandrake, who would wreak vengeance on the head

of him who plucked it from the earth. So they gathered it in the dead of night by tying the plant to a dog's tail. As the struggles of the animal dragged the root from the earth, it uttered dreadful shrieks, and the dog fell dead. Thus they got the mandrake that sends to sleep him who eats it, or whose fruit inspires the intensest love or hatred in the human heart."

On arriving at the small town which they had seen from the top of the hill, they rode down the main street. Outside the church, the cries of a "klenker" or professional beggar, many of whom infested the country, attracted their attention. The man, a woe-ful looking creature, was sitting on the ground, his back being supported by the church wall and by his side lay a pair of stout crutches.

"Pity, I pray, good masters, for the love of heaven," he whined as they approached. "My limbs are dead and will not carry me," and he lifted his cap, which was heavy with the coins of the sympathetic townsfolk. One bare leg was thrust out from beneath a tattered cloak he had wrapped round him.

"Rein in, Karl, and thou shalt see some fun," said Zorastro, as he dismounted and joined the circle of onlookers.

The klenker again rattled the coins in his cap and cried, as they approached:

"Pity I pray, good masters."

"What is the matter with thy limbs?" asked Zorastro.

"They are both dead these twenty years, good master. Look at this one," he replied, pointing to the lifeless-looking member, which was quite bare, and taking a sharp skewer from his cloak he thrust it right through the fleshy part of the leg, while the spectators, who had now increased in numbers, murmured in amazement and sympathy, and felt in their pouches for more money.

"Let me see the other leg," said Zorastro. "I am a physician and may be able to cure thee."

The beggar began to look uneasy.

"I only ask your alms, good master. The other leg (which was concealed beneath his cloak) is just the same, quite dead these twenty years."

"Thou art a lying old rogue," cried Zorastro, as he stooped suddenly and seized the outstretched leg and gave it a tug.

It came detached in his hands and he shook it in the fellow's face, much to the astonishment of the crowd.

With one spring the beggar jumped to his *own* feet, which had been doubled up beneath his cloak, and which proved to be very much alive, for he took to his heels and ran down the street, followed by the shouts and laughter of the spectators.

"It's a very old trick," said Zorastro to Karl. "I thought we shouldn't have to ride very far to find the missing leg of the poor fellow on the gallows yonder."

After they had refreshed themselves and their horses, they again set out, and just after darkness had closed in, they entered the little town of Dunkensbuhl, where they resolved to spend the night. The only inn they could find was one called the "Three Crowns," an old rambling house in a street off the market-place. Here they dismounted, and fastening up their horses at the door they entered.

The room was large but low-ceiled, and crossed by heavy timbers blackened with age and smoke.

One end was filled by a gigantic fireplace heaped with a pile of blazing logs, in front of which a man sat warming himself. Two long tables occupied the sides of the room, and on one stood a lantern, the remains of a repast, and several empty bottles. The penetrating smell of burning wood filled the place. They seated themselves at the empty table, on which Zorastro rapped loudly with his sword, and in a few moments a shuffling was heard without and a man entered. He was a thin, diminutive specimen of humanity, with a shrivelled-up face surrounded by a mop of lank hair. Bobbing his head and blinking his eyes, he stood before the travellers.

“Art thou the landlord?” inquired Zorastro.

“Yes, good master; leastwise, I think I am,” replied the man, with a sidelong glance at the door.

“Thou liest,” roared a deep voice from the rear, as a big stout woman bounced into the

room, and, administering a sound cuff on the ear to the little man, said, "Begone to the kitchen, Jan, or I'll—"

Jan needed no more telling, but fled incontinently, leaving his stalwart spouse, whose feet were encased in big leathern boots that reached to her knees, in possession of the floor.

"What be thy pleasure, good masters?" she said, as she stood with her brawny arms resting on her hips, and eyed them up and down.

"We first want some food, and then lodging for the night for ourselves and horses, good dame," said Zorastro.

"That thou shalt have. Jan shall see to thy cattle, and ye shall have supper in a trice."

Whereupon she bustled round, and soon had the board spread with substantial viands, to which both Zorastro and Karl proceeded to do full justice.

Meanwhile, the man who was apparently asleep in the inglenook, began to rouse, and, stretching himself, he turned his head and gazed hard at Zorastro and his companion.

He was a sinister-looking fellow of powerful build, with a mass of black hair on his head and chin. He was garbed like a monk, in a long gown reaching to his feet, which was secured round his waist by a stout cord, while his feet were shod with sandals.

Presently he crossed the room, and approaching Zorastro with a profound bow and a smile that ill became his evil features, said:

“Do I address the most learned and honourable Zorastro?”

“Of a certes thou dost,” replied Zorastro, scanning him closely; “but I do not remember thee.”

“The memory of the mighty physician is short, yet has he forgotten Petro of Milan?”

“Petro of Milan? Surely not. Now I recollect thy face, but I did not know thee in that guise.”

“‘The wolf has more than one coat,’ runs the old proverb,” replied the man, showing a row of yellow teeth as he grinned.

“So it seems. I thought perchance the wolf had been killed long ago,” said Zorastro, rising from the table as he finished his meal.

But, come, thou shalt have a cup of sack, and tell us what thou hast been doing."

The sack having been brought, they seated themselves by the fireside, and Petro stretched out his toes to the blaze.

It was not long before the liquor, of which he had had more than enough already, began to loosen his tongue.

"And what bringest thee here?" asked Zorastro.

"The old trade. I have a commission to perform, though 'tis a poor one enough. My fees are higher now I work with the most recent discovery."

"What may that be?"

"Hast thou not heard of the wonderful 'Italian comfortive' discovered by Porta? Then thou art indeed behind the times, oh learned physician. It is a most subtle and certain remedy for all ills. It never fails me, and is so tempered that I can also make a man suffer from whatever sickness I will."

"From which he never recovers. Eh?"

"Well, that depends upon the fee, of course. But perchance thou canst recom-

mend me. Let me tell thee my charges. Now, for a prince I only ask 3,000 ducats, for a grand duke 2,000, for a count but 1,000, while for the baser kind,—well, I treat them for as little as 100 ducats.”

“I should like to see this ‘comfortive’ thou speakest of,” said Zorastro. “Come fill thy cup up again.”

“Good sack,” hiccuped Petro, “and thou art a good fellow. Here’s health to ye,” and he drained the cup at a draught.

“Oh, thou shalt see the comfortive. Is he trusty?” he whispered hoarsely, pointing to Karl.

“Aye, as myself,” replied Zorastro.

Fumbling at the breast of his gown, he at length produced a small metal box, which he opened, and took from it a smaller one still. Then stretching across to Zorastro, he carefully raised the lid. It contained a heavy white powder.

“There! there is the key to heaven or hell,” he cried with glee, as he shut the lid, and replacing the box in its case, he restored it to his bosom. “It is precious, and all I have left.”

"Then thou canst not spare me some of it?"

"Not a grain, unless it be a commission, good Zorastro," was the reply, with a cunning leer. "Oh, 'tis right good to watch the effect. Listen. It is like this. After the first day there is a feeling of langour, then the second a nausea, the third vomiting, then soon after a flux, or what ye will, and as long as thou wilt. Slowly, slowly, and surely it works, till the— I like not thine eyes fixed so upon me, Zo—Zorast—ro," hiccuped the knave uncomfortably.

"Nay, go on with thy story," said Zorastro, still fixing the man with his eyes until they seemed to penetrate his brain.

"Slowly and surely," repeated Petro, in a drowsy voice. "Nay, I like not—"

His voice broke off again. Zorastro continued to stare intently at his face.

"Slowly and—"

His voice grew fainter, and then his head dropped forward on his chest.

"He sleeps, the infernal devil," murmured Zorastro, under his breath. "Now, Karl, thine help quickly," he cried softly, as he

crossed the floor to the now prostrate Petro. "Secure the doors a moment, and we'll extract his fangs, for a time, at any rate."

Karl crept across and bolted both doors quietly, while Zorastro opened the breast of the man's gown and possessed himself of the metal box, which he threw into the blazing fire ; then unfastening the cord at his waist, he took away a long dagger which hung from an inner belt, and put it in the sash of his own doublet.

The flames shot up brightly as they consumed the box, and a strong odour of garlic filled the room.

"Arsenic," said Zorastro. "I thought so. 'Italian comfortive,' forsooth!"

"And now, what art thou going to do with him?" asked Karl.

Zorastro thought a few moments.

"I know," he said at last. "He'll sleep sound for twelve hours, at least. We'll tell the dame he has had too much of her good sack ; then we'll carry him to bed and make him secure with his own girdle."

Before long the tramp of the landlady's

heavy boots was heard approaching, and she entered the room.

"Our friend has partaken too freely of thy sack, good dame," said Zorastro.

"Well-a-day, he is not the first to do that," said the woman complacently. "He wants me to cure him, as I do my Jan."

"And how is that?"

"Why, when he is troubled with the same complaint, I pick him up and put him to stand in the waterbutt till morning."

"A good cure indeed, dame," laughed Zorastro. "But leave this fellow to us, and we'll see him to his chamber as we go to bed."

"All right, good masters, and thank ye. It is the little room to the left, at the end of the passage."

And bidding them good-night, the dame retired.

"Now," said Zorastro, as soon as the house seemed quiet, "we'll tie up this drunken fiend and then to bed."

Petro had by this time slipped from the bench on to the floor, where he lay like a log.

“Take hold of his legs, Karl, and go first with the lantern,” said Zorastro, gripping the man under the shoulders.

And so they carried him to the room at the end of the passage, and laid him on the low, wooden bed. Then taking the stout cord that Petro had used as a girdle, they securely tied his arms and legs to each of the bed-posts, and fastening the door from the outside, they left him snoring.

Then our travellers sought their beds, and were soon both lost in the land of dreams.

CHAPTER XII

"KARL! Karl!" cried a loud voice, "rouse, lad, we must up and be going."

Karl opened his eyes and looked lazily around. He found the sunlight was streaming through the little window, and Zorastro standing by his bedside.

"Petro still sleeps like a log, and I've told the landlady he must not be wakened till midday," said Zorastro, with a merry chuckle.

Karl tumbled out, and stretching himself, repaired to the pump in the yard, where, after a refreshing douche of cold water, he was ready to do justice to the baked oatcakes and milk he found waiting for him.

By the time he had finished, Jan had the horses waiting at the door, and after settling the score, they mounted and set off at a brisk pace.

"I should like to see Petro's face when he

wakes, and finds his box and dagger gone," said Karl, laughing.

"The miscreant deserves no mercy, and it's a marvel he has not met with his deserts long ago," replied Zorastro.

"Where didst thou meet him before?"

"I think it was at Padua, some years ago, where I saved him from some rough handling. Afterwards I learnt that he was suspected of having administered poison to an abbot, and he was ready to poison anyone if bribed with sufficient money."

"It is a wonder he has escaped the hangman."

"He takes good care of that, and is as cunning as an old fox. He is an Italian, and boasts that he is employed by the Council of Ten, by whose orders many secret murders are perpetrated. He is one of many such vagabonds I have met with, and from whom I have not been ashamed to learn anything which seemed useful to me. Thou knowest, Karl, that a lover will go a long way to meet the woman he adores, and so the real lover of wisdom is tempted to go much further in search of his divine mistress."

“And thou believest that travel is necessary for all who seek knowledge?”

“Yea; no one becomes a master of practical experience in his own house, neither will he find a teacher of the secrets of Nature in the corners of his room.”

“Tell me, then, I pray thee, how to search for these secrets?”

“We must seek for knowledge where we may expect to find it. Those who remain at home have more comfort and grow richer than those who wander, no doubt; but I neither desire to live comfortably, nor do I wish to become rich. Happiness is better than riches, and happy is he who possesses nothing that requires his care. He who wants to study the Book of Nature must wander with his feet over its leaves. Every part of the world represents a page in that book, and the whole forms the work that contains the great revelations.”

“But then Nature will not reveal her secrets to all.”

“Whatever we cannot learn from the external appearance of Nature, we can learn from her spirit. Both are one. Everything

is taught by Nature to her disciple if he seeks it in the right way. Nature is a light, and by looking at Nature in her own light she will make herself plain to us," replied Zorastro.

And so they journeyed through the day without further adventure, until evening brought them in sight of a broad river, which stretched like a silver streak away to the west.

"There is the Danube," remarked Zorastro, "and yonder the tower of the Minster of Ulm," as he pointed to a fine tower that appeared above the mists on the horizon. "We shall rest to-night at the house of my old fellow-student and friend, the Count von Rosteine, who follows the study of alchemy, and is an adept of the highest order."

In about an hour's time they were riding through the narrow streets of the fair city of Ulm, and on Zorastro inquiring for the house of the Count, they were directed through a narrow passage to an ancient stone building under the shadows of the grey minster. Feeling their way carefully, for it was now dark, they came at length to a narrow gothic

archway, which was just rendered visible by the feeble glimmer from a lantern which hung above. Zorastro knocked at an iron-studded door, and in a few moments a grid was shot back, and a face appeared behind it.

"Who cometh to disturb our peace at this hour?" said a querulous voice.

"Go tell the Count von Rosteine, his old friend, Philip Valdagno, waits without."

The face disappeared, and the grid closed with a snap.

In a few minutes they heard the sound of heavy bolts being withdrawn, and the door was slowly opened by a little old man, who carried a lantern in one hand.

"Enter, the Count will see thee," he said.

Tying up their horses at the gate, Zorastro and Karl passed through the door, which the servitor closed and bolted; then telling them to follow, he led the way along a dark stone passage.

Turning to the right, they descended a flight of steps, then stopped before a low door, on which the man knocked softly with his knuckles.

"Come in," said a thin, weak voice.

Entering the room, which was lit by a curious lamp of metal, which hung from the dark recesses of a groined stone roof, a man, who was seated at a table turning the leaves of a ponderous book, rose to meet them.

“Welcome, Philip; right glad am I to see thee again,” he cried, as Zorastro greeted him, and then introduced Karl. “Come, be seated, and tell me of thy doings. It is a long time since we sat together at the feet of Trithemius.”

While the two old friends talked of their student days, Karl had time to observe their host and his surroundings. He was little more than a dwarf in stature, and presented a most singular appearance, clad all in black. An old velvet cloak of the same hue was wrapt about him. His face, over which the skin was tightly drawn like parchment, was destitute of colour, while his grey hair hung over his shoulders and mingled with a straggly, unkempt beard. On his head he wore a close-fitting black velvet cap. His hands, which were very long and thin, appeared like the claws of some large bird.

The lofty room was a complete litter of

all kinds of instruments, books, and implements of the alchemist's art. There were several furnaces, two of which were glowing. Stills of immense size and curious shape, retorts, cucurbites, and alembics in endless variety were scattered about in every direction. Against the wall stood a large oak cabinet, strangely carved with grotesque faces of men and animals. An embrasure at the far end of the apartment was filled by a long bench or table, on which lay a shapeless mass completely covered with a black cloth. Karl's eyes were fascinated by this object, and as he gazed at it, he seemed to discern the profile of a face, and the outline of a human figure beneath the covering.

Then his ear caught the conversation again, in which Zorastro and the Count were deeply engaged. The latter was holding in his outstretched hand a small flask partly filled with a dark red liquid.

"I am now studying the great problem of life and death," he said, in his thin, high-pitched voice, "which to me is more attractive than the Stone. This medium, the *arcanum sanguinis hominis*, has been the

goal of my life. It is the vivifying ether that will re-animate the lifeless clay. But it is not yet perfect."

His voice sank almost to a whisper.

"Come, thou shalt see for thyself," he continued, and carrying the flask, he motioned to Zorastro to follow him to the embrasure where the bench stood.

Standing at the side of it, he raised the black cloth and disclosed the body of a man, apparently about thirty years of age, stiff and rigid, as if carved in marble.

"The ethereal body is said to have left the corporeal nigh thirty days; yet observe it is not yet decayed. Thrice daily I have treated it with my medium through which life acts, and which consists of the elementary bodies that are found in Nature that form the quintessence of all things. Behold, the body is inanimate."

Raising one arm, he allowed it to drop with a heavy thud on the bench. Zorastro placed his hand over the region of the heart, but felt no responsive beat; the body was cold and apparently lifeless.

"Now see," said the Count, as he bent

down and poured some of the contents of the flask between the parted lips.

They watched in silence for a few moments.

Slowly a soft flush appeared on the face, the eyelids began to twitch as if about to open, and the fingers moved convulsively.

Zorastro stretched out his hand and again placed it on the breast, and now felt a faint degree of warmth.

Then as they looked, after a while the movements gradually ceased, the flush died away, and the body became rigid like stone once more.

"It is not yet," said the Count softly, as he replaced the cloth reverently over the body.

"Thou hast made great progress," said Zorastro, as they turned from the bench, "but thy medium still lacks something more."

"I know it ; I know it," replied the Count, "and 'twill be the work of my life to find it."

"Life itself cannot die," said Zorastro, "because it is not born of a form. It is an eternal power, and always will exist."

"And what is death," said the Count

“but the transformation of one kind of activity into another? The ethereal body may sleep, and it may be re-kindled.”

“If it has not vacated the corporeal, perhaps,” answered Zorastro. “For my own part, I do not believe we shall ever be able to reverse the laws of Nature, and whatever dies a natural death cannot be resuscitated by man.”

“Animals awaken from their winter sleep ; the life of the toad may remain suspended for years ; flies that have become torpid from cold become nimble again when warmed. A tree may bear no fruit for twenty years, and then begin to bloom and bear fruit, as it did when it was young. If inanimate objects then can be kept from destruction, why should there be no possibility of preserving the life essence of animate forms?” asked the Count.

“I know we differ on this point, Philip,” he continued ; “but there is one thing I know on which we are in accord, and that is in the existence of homanculi.”

“Yes, I believe with Trithemius, that by the Spagyric art human beings may come

into existence without natural parents, under certain conditions," answered Zorastro.

"In this," continued the Count, "I have been more fortunate, for I have been able to develop a red and a blue spirit which thou shalt see for thyself."

Lighting a small lamp he led the way to the great oak cabinet, and shading the light with his hand, opened the massive doors very cautiously.

"There," he said, pointing to two large cylindrical glass jars, which stood within. They contained nothing apparently but clear water. The mouths were covered with bladder, and each bore a great red seal on the top.

"They must not be exposed to too strong a light," said the Count, taking one of the jars in his hands carefully. "Now, behold," he cried, as he tapped the seal three times with his forefinger, and then slowly and solemnly pronounced a Hebrew formula.

No sooner had he done so, than a curious change took place in the appearance of the liquid, and it began to turn blue. As they drew closer and gazed at it intently, a small face

appeared, as if pressed against the inside of the glass. It gradually grew, till it attained the size of an ordinary human face. It was that of a young girl of great beauty ; every feature was distinct.

After it had assumed a certain degree of clearness, it gradually disappeared, the colour faded, and the water became colourless once more. The Count replaced it in the cabinet, then taking the other jar, he tapped the top in the same manner, and again repeated the formula. No sooner had he done so than the water became blood red, and the face of a man, bearing a horrible expression, gradually appeared, and then, after a few moments, like the other, slowly faded away.

“ They have now existed sixty days,” said the Count, as he replaced the jars and closed the doors of the cabinet ; “ but I hope they will yet grow and assume form.”

“ Thou hast been more successful than Trithemius or myself,” said Zorastro.

“ On what do they subsist ? ” asked Karl.

“ Simply on a little fresh chicken’s blood, which is placed in the jars once a week,” replied the Count.

"It has to be introduced very rapidly," he continued, "for if they are exposed to the air or light, they do not appear, or, if they do, their eyes are closed, as if weak and unconscious and about to die."

"But I am forgetting my duties as host, old friend," said the Count, as he took Zorastro by the arm.

"We but crave thy hospitality for the night, for we continue our journey to Basle to-morrow. Our horses we left at the gate," said Zorastro.

"Martin shall see to them," said the Count.

He struck a gong as he spoke, and the old servitor appeared.

"Prepare a chamber for our guests, and see to their horses. We will have some refection at once, Martin."

"The supper is laid, master," replied the old man.

"Come, then, let us seek it, for the corporeal body does ill without corporeal meats. What sayest thou, Philip?" said the Count, as he led the way along the passage to another apartment, the walls of which were hung with rich tapestries.

In the centre stood a table laden with a wonderful profusion of viands, including fruit of every description.

The platters and cups were of gold and silver, exquisitely chased, and the feast itself, washed down with ancient wines of rare vintage, bespoke the Count Von Rosteine to be a Sybarite indeed.

CHAPTER XIII

IN the course of a few days, Zorastro and Karl reached Basle without further adventure, and eventually took up their abode in the Frein Strasse.

Zorastro, after being installed as professor of physic and medicine, entered on his duties with vigour. His fame had preceded him, and he soon grew popular with the students, although his appointment was regarded with mixed feelings by those of his colleagues who were opposed to his doctrines. His method of teaching was essentially original, and not confined to mere repetitions of the opinions of others.

As time went on, and his popularity with the students increased, his lecture-room was crowded, and he became the talk of the University. His brother professors were horrified by his contempt of their established customs—of teaching nothing but what was

supported by the old authorities, irrespective of whether or not it was compatible with reason and truth.

When not occupied at the University, he spent his time in his own laboratory in the study of medicine and alchemical research, with Karl as his confidant and assistant. Night after night they sat up perfecting the process for preparing a universal remedy, which he called the Alcahest. It was devised to purify the constitution of man and renew the life-giving principles. The greatest care was necessary for its proper preparation, which was conducted in secret.

First of all some warm caustic lime was placed in a retort, and as much pure alcohol added to it. Then with a gentle heat it was distilled, drop by drop, into a receiver, and this process was repeated ten times. The residue was then quickly mixed with carbonate of potash, more spirit added, and when the white vapours ceased to rise to the ceiling, it was set on fire, and the residue, the Divine Alcahest, reverently collected and preserved.

Patients of all ranks, from prince to pea-

sant, came to consult Zorastro from far and near, and his healing powers were popularly supposed to be derived from a special power bestowed by the Divine being.

As his fame waxed greater, so the jealousy of his colleagues increased, until they openly derided his methods of treatment and the doctrines of which he was the author. They professed to be astounded at his impudence in setting aside the teachings of Hippocrates Galen, and other fathers of medicine.

So as time went on, Zorastro naturally grew somewhat inflated with the praise and adulation that was showered upon him by the people; and the attitude of his fellow physicians only spurred him on to greater lengths in order to astonish them still more.

Thus it happened when the last lecture of his course was announced, the ordinary room was found too small to accommodate the students, and it was ordered to be held in the great hall of the University.

It was a bright frosty morning, and the crowd of students congregated round the entrance to the hall betokened something unusual was astir. When the door was

opened they surged into the building, laughing and talking as they went.

"The professor is going to raise our hair to-day. I saw his lamp alight at three o'clock this morning," said a big lanky youth, whose coarse locks stood on end like the quills of a porcupine.

"Thine is stiff enough already, old scratch back," replied a little round fellow with a merry face.

"Marry, I wish he'd cut thee up to see where thy laugh comes from."

"Aye, but didst thou hear how he cured old Cornelius of the falling sickness, and sent him home dancing?"

"Nay," said another; "but he gave my cousin's old hen, who had cast all her feathers, a dose of his physic tincture, and the next day all her feathers grew again, and she went and laid six eggs in my maiden aunt's best bed."

"To thy seats," cried a voice, as a bell rang; and at once there was a scramble for the benches.

The hour for the lecture had come, and a hush now fell upon the assembly.

The great hall was crowded by this time, and the bright sun shining through the windows lit up the faces of the waiting students.

On a low platform stood the professor's chair and desk, the latter heaped with big folio volumes, the works of Galen, Rhazes Avicenna, and other great founders of the art of medicine. By the side of the platform was a large open fireplace, on which the logs burned brightly.

Presently, from a small door at the back, Zorastro entered, clad in his now famous purple robe edged with fur, and quickly ascended the platform.

A dead silence pervaded the hall, and the very air seemed charged with expectancy. A smile played about the corners of his mouth as he arranged his notes, and then rose to begin his lecture.

"Medicine is much more an art than a science," he commenced, in a quiet voice. "To know the experience of others may be useful to a physician, but all the learning in the world cannot make a man a physician unless he has the necessary talents, and is so destined by Nature.

“If thou dost want to learn to know the inner man by studying only the appearance of the exterior man, thou wilt never come to an end, because each man’s constitution differs in some respect from that of another. If a physician knows nothing more about his patient than what the latter can tell him, he knows very little indeed. Nature causes and cures disease, and it is therefore necessary that the physician should know the processes of Nature, the invisible, as well as the visible man. He will then be able to recognise the cause and the course of a disease, and he will know much more by using his own reason, than by all that the books or his patients may tell him.

“The medical art may be acquired by learning, but medical wisdom is given by God. They complain of me because I do not follow the methods prescribed by the ancients in things which I know they are wrong. They could not know things of which they had no experience, and it would be foolish to follow them in things in which they were mistaken. Whatever I know, I say unto thee, I have learned by mine own

experience, and I therefore depend upon mine own knowledge and not upon the ignorance of others."

Proceeding to deal with the invisible causes of disease and their cure, he continued :

"Imagination is the cause of many diseases ; faith is a cure for nearly all. The curative power of medicines often consists, not so much in the spirit that is hidden in them as in the spirit in which they are taken. Faith will make them efficacious ; doubt will often destroy their virtues. One poison may render another poison harmless, and the effect of the imagination of one person may neutralise the effect of the imagination of another. We have no right to call a disease incurable. We have only the right to say that we cannot cure it. Belief in opinions is no faith. He who wants to obtain true faith must know, because faith grows out of experience and knowledge.

"And what shall I say unto thee about all thine alchemical formulæ ; about all thy retorts and bottles, crucibles, mortars, and glasses ; of all thy complicated processes of distilling,

melting, cohibiting, coagulating, sublimating, precipitating, and filtering; of all the tomfoolery on which thou dost throw away thy time and money. They are rather an impediment than a help to arrive at the truth.

“Harken unto me. Reading never made a physician. Medicine is an art that requires practice. If it were sufficient to learn to talk Latin, Greek, and Hebrew to become a physician, it would also be sufficient for one to read Livius to become a great commander-in-chief.

“I began to study this art by imagining that there was not a single teacher in the world capable to teach it unto me, but that I had to acquire it myself. It was the book of Nature written by the finger of God which I studied, not those of the scribblers, for each scribbler writes down the rubbish that may be found in his head; and who can sift the true from the false? My accusers complain that I have not entered the temple of knowledge through the legitimate door.”

Bending forward over the desk he cried :

“But tell me, which one is the truly legitimate door? Is it Galen and Avicenna,

or Nature?" he cried, striking the works of those masters as he spoke.

Then drawing himself up to his full height, he exclaimed :

"I have entered through the door of Nature. Her light has illuminated my way. Yea, I have more wisdom in the down on my bald pate, aye, and even in the buckles of my shoes, than you will find in these ancients."

And seizing the ponderous tomes which lay before him, he flung them one by one into the midst of the blazing logs. Then amidst a breathless silence, as the sparks flew up, and the fire roared, his voice rang like a clarion through the hall.

"After me ye Avicenna, Galen, Rhazes, and thou, Montagnana!" as the last volume flew from his hands and fell with a crash into the flames.

"Ye after me, not I after ye! Ye of Paris, Montpellier, Suevia, Meissen, Cologne; ye of Vienna, and all that come from the countries along the Danube and the Rhine, and from the islands of the ocean! Ye of Italy, ye of Dalmatia, ye of Sarmatia, Athens, Greece, and Arabia! Follow me! It is not

for me to follow ye, because mine is monarchy! Come out of the night of the mind! Yea, the time will come when none of ye shall remain in his dark corner who will not be an object of contempt to the world, because *I shall be the monarch* and the monarchy will be mine!"

The effect of this peroration was startling. The students sprang to their feet, and, standing on the benches, shouted lustily and cheered till they were hoarse.

The professors and other officials rushed into the hall to see what was the cause of the disturbance. Zorastro quickly left the throng to escape from their attentions, and made his way home; while the account of his lecture and the burning of the books was passed from mouth to mouth, and was soon known throughout the city.

That night the students, carrying torches, assembled in hundreds round his house, singing and cheering as they threw their caps in the air and called for "Zorastro the Wonder-Worker!" "Zorastro the Healer!" until he appeared at his window and bade them disperse.

CHAPTER XIV

Two long years passed away, when one day on his return from a herborising Karl found a bulky packet awaiting him, which had been left by a merchant who had travelled west from Nuremberg. It bore his name in bold characters, that drew his thoughts back to home, and with a beating heart he eagerly undid the wrappings. A roll of papers fell out, closely inscribed in a hand he knew at once to be Dulcie's, and after pressing them to his lips, he quickly opened them.

"My well beloved," the letter began, "I wist not if this packet, which I send by the favour of one Master Wentzel, will reach thy hand. He is an honest merchant who travels to France, and who assures me he will find thee out as he passes through the city of Basle. I pray Heaven he may, for we have been in sore trouble, Karl, since thou didst leave us. I know not even if thou didst

escape the perils of the road, and still wait in hope to hear of thee, who art so far off. I would spare thee if I could the ill news of the sorrow that has befallen us, and it wrings my heart to tell thee of it even now ; but I am impelled, as it were, by necessity to tell thee how it happed that we are bereft of the two kind souls who were father and mother to us both. It is nigh a month ago since that dread scourge the plague fell upon our city, having been brought here from the East, where it had been ravaging the country ; and despite all precautions, such as sending the sick outside the city walls, and allowing none who came from the East to enter, it spread with dreadful rapidity from house to house. It attacked old and young, strong and weak alike, and even the act of touching the clothes or any part of the body of those who were suffering from it, was sufficient to impart the disease to others. Neither physicians, apothecaries, nor medicines seemed able to check it, and many of the former were among the first victims. Terrible indeed have been the sights in our streets. The churchyards were filled in a very short time, and the bodies have been

buried in great trenches outside the city, without rite or ceremony. Many have died in the streets, and remained there till taken up by the plague servants—men who have been hired to walk the streets with biers or carts to take away and bury the dead. They rang a bell as they thus went about, so those who had dead in their houses might bring them forth, and lay them outside their doors. Oh, Karl! such sights I shall never forget. I saw Master Martin Remnitz, his wife, and son, whom thou knowest were neighbours, carried away at the same time to be buried, they say, like dogs in a deep pit they have dug by the Laufer Gate. Great fires have been kept burning night and day in the market squares, which they say will purify the air. For many weeks all had been well with us, although grandfather had been busy night and day doing what he could to relieve those who were suffering. Indeed, he had no rest, and we thought, despite what we could do, he would succumb from very weariness; but he would not give in, and went from house to house, giving amulets to those who had not been affected and plague water

to those who were sick. He would not let us go outside our door, and food was passed in at our window.

“At last one day he came home, and our hearts sank as we saw his tottering steps. He dropped into his chair and could not speak. Grandmother gave him what she could, while I ran in haste to seek the aid of a physician. I found one leaving a house in the Juden Strasse, and begged him to come with me, which he did with all speed.

“When we got back, he just raised his head and looked with a sad smile at us and said, ‘It is no use.’ The physician quickly bared his arm, and there were the fatal blue spots which betold the death plague. He never spoke again, and that night his life ebbed away.

“Even now my tears flow fast. I cannot tell thee more just yet.

.

“The next day I alone followed the bier, and saw him laid to rest in his own grave in the Church of St. Lawrence.

“Then grandmother and I tried to comfort one another and talked of thee. The neigh-

bours were afraid to visit us for fear of taking the foul disease. And so the days went on. Grandmother's heart seemed broken, and she would not let me leave her sight. One morning I went to her room to wake her and found I could not. She had died in her sleep.

"I was stunned. I could not believe that both were gone and I was now alone. When I think of those dreadful days now, I wonder that I did not die too. I got Dame Agnes, whose husband had died of the plague some weeks before, to come to me. Together we saw her laid by the side of him she loved so much in life and death.

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"And now I am alone—alone in all the world but for thee, dear Karl. Dame Agnes is still with me, and we will live in the old home together till thou dost come. These months seem to have changed me from a girl to a woman. I have money to supply our wants for a long time, and I live in hope and wait for thee, my Karl. Try and send me just a word to say thou art alive.

"Commend me to Master Zorastro, and

that Heaven may guard and keep thee safe,
dear one, is the prayer of thy loving

“DULCIE.”

Karl was sitting stunned with the news, still staring at the letter he held between his fingers, and his heart full of grief, when Zorastro came in.

“What hast thou there, Karl? Thou lookest as if thou hadst been moonstruck,” he asked.

“Read it,” replied Karl, as he buried his face in his hands and sobbed audibly.

Zorastro took the letter and read it.

“Poor lad, poor lad,” he said gently, putting his hand on Karl’s shoulder. “They were indeed good, kind souls. God rest them!”

CHAPTER XV

WHEN the plague at length had worn itself out, it left Nuremberg a city of mourning. Business was paralysed for the time, and the people went about the streets in a listless manner.

Scarcely a home had escaped the visitation, and in many cases whole families had been swept away. The opportunity was seized upon by those resolute spirits who sought the reformation of the Church, to stir up the people to action, and they carried on their agitation against the dominating power of the Romish faith with renewed vigour. The country was scoured by men of indomitable will and perseverance, who, fired with a religious zeal, spoke and preached in the market-places of the cities and villages, by the roadside, or wherever they could get a hearing.

Many of these men, like Luther and Melancthon their leaders, were monks, who,

with the courage of their convictions, had left their monasteries, or had been excommunicated by the Church. Some were charged by the authorities with stirring up the people to sedition, and were hunted from place to place.

Late one afternoon, when Dulcie was returning home through the Haupt Market, her attention was arrested by a voice which rang with great clearness across the square. As she came nearer, she saw it came from a little, wiry man in monk's garb, who was standing on a pile of wood, and addressing, with much earnestness, a knot of people who surrounded him. His face, like his body, was thin and angular, but the clear-cut features were lit up with a pair of eyes which seemed to burn as live coal, and flashed like fire as he spoke.

His hearers were mostly loungers and men occupied in the market, but gradually the crowd, increased by the passers-by, grew to considerable dimensions, and the voice, which now rose in declamation and then sank in deepest cadence, held their attention.

Dulcie stopped to listen.

“What of the monks?” he cried, in mocking tones, “ye think their lives are given up to charity and fasting. I tell ye their charity is little compared with their good living. They give ye, like the dogs, what they don’t want. Oh, fools! believe not in their charity, for they lust after the flesh-pots and live on the fat of the land. They are the palmer worms, the locusts, the canker worms, and the caterpillars, which, Joel saith, hath eaten up all the earth. And ye who take their charity are like unto the dead leaves and the crawling snails they tread upon. Ye are content with the crumbs which fall from their table. Ye receive their indulgences and fill their coffers to overflowing. While they give ye a crumb, they take a handful. Yea, charity covereth a multitude of sins. Arouse ye like men, stand firm, be steadfast! Ye can overthrow these tyrants and blood-suckers if ye will. Aye, and those also in temporal power who grind ye under their iron heels, and torture ye and your wives and children. But ye are chicken-hearted and craven.”

Here a growl of dissent was heard from the crowd, and a stone hurtled through the air, narrowly missing the speaker's head.

"Cowards!" he exclaimed with a gesture of contempt; "I care not for thy stones. I tell ye but the truth and ye are ashamed to own it."

His courage cowed the people to silence, and he commenced again.

Dulcie went on her way homeward, thinking of the brave man and his words.

Dame Agnes was sitting in the ingle-nook, and heard her light footstep as she raised the latch of the door.

"Thou hast been a long time, Dulcie," she said; "I was afraid something had happened thee, child."

"Nay, dame; I am here quite safe," replied Dulcie, as she kissed the old woman's cheek softly. "I stayed listening to a monk in the market-place, who spoke as I have heard no man speak before."

"I have heard of these preaching monks, though it is said they but stir up strife and discord."

"But this one thou couldst not help

listening to. He spoke so bravely, and looked so good and true ; I could have cried shame when one hurled a stone at him," said Dulcie, seating herself on a great oak chest which stood beneath the window, and, taking up her knitting, began to ply the needles vigorously.

"Hark!" said Dame Agnes ; "what is that uproar?"

The door leading to the courtyard stood open, and the sound of a great tumult, the noise of running feet and shouting as of an angry mob, was now heard outside.

"I will go and see," said Dulcie, starting up and running across the courtyard to the door which opened to the street.

As she looked, a strange sight met her eyes. Down the street towards her came the monk, running as hard as he could, his face streaming with blood from a wound in his forehead, and his clothes torn and bemoiled. Following at his heels was a great crowd, shouting and yelling like a pack of hungry wolves.

Dulcie trembled, but her heart was stirred

as she caught the imploring look of the hunted man's eyes.

"Quick! in here for thy life," she cried as he came close.

Seizing him by the arm she dragged him through the doorway into the courtyard, then swung the heavy door to with a clang and locked it, just as the mob arrived.

"Follow me," she said to the monk in a low voice, who leaned panting against the wall.

Swiftly she drew him across the room, and without a word to Dame Agnes she lifted the lid of the oak chest, which she knew was empty, and signed to the monk to get inside without delay.

Without hesitation he stepped into the chest. He had no sooner done so than Dulcie shut down the lid, then seating herself upon it quietly took up her needles and proceeded to knit.

"What was it, and what is all that noise, Dulcie?" said Dame Agnes, as a loud knocking was heard at the outer door.

"Only some noisy folk without."

Again the hammering was renewed, and

now a voice shouted, "Open in the name of the Burgraf."

Both women rose from their seats.

"Come, sit here, dame, and do not move for the love of Heaven, while I see what they want," said Dulcie hastily, leading the blind woman to the oak chest and seating her thereon.

Then running across the courtyard she unlocked the door and flung it open. Without stood a sergeant of the city guard, with a couple of his men, and at their backs the howling crowd.

The pressure was so great from behind that the burly sergeant, as the door opened, was precipitated into the courtyard in a very undignified manner, almost into Dulcie's arms. Recovering himself, he placed his men at the door to prevent the people entering, and addressing Dulcie said :

"We come to arrest a seditious person who has taken refuge here."

"We have no seditious person here," replied Dulcie as calmly as she could.

"Take care what thou sayest, young

mistress. He was seen to enter this door just now."

"Thou canst come and see for thyself," said Dulcie, as she led the way into the house.

"Who is it, Dulcie?" said Dame Agnes, as she heard the voice and the footsteps as they entered.

"A sergeant of the guard, who says a seditious person has taken refuge here."

"A seditious person!" echoed the dame, in indignant tones. "We have no one here. What have two lone women done that ye must needs break into their dwelling?"

"A man was seen to enter thy courtyard door just now, dame, whom we have orders to arrest, for preaching sedition in the market-place," said the sergeant, peering round the room.

"Tush, man," cried the dame, "we have no man, good or bad, in this house. I have been sitting here this last four hours, and no man but thyself has entered. If he came into the courtyard he must have gone out again. Go, search the house if ye will; thou wilt find no other man, I'll warrant."

"I must search the other rooms," said the sergeant, in judicial tones.

"Thou canst, and welcome," said Dulcie, scarce able to conceal the mischievous look in her eyes. "That is the way," she cried, pointing to the staircase, up which the sergeant at once marched with a somewhat shame-faced look.

Soon they heard him tramping overhead, and poking his pike-staff under beds and cupboards. After a while he descended again.

"Well, hast found him?" asked Dame Agnes.

"I see no one," he replied, "and I'm sorry to disturb thy peace."

"Enough, man; 'tis a pity thou canst not take the word of two honest women. Seditious persons, indeed!" said the dame, tossing her head.

The sergeant retired very crestfallen, and gave his men the order to march. Dulcie saw him outside the courtyard, and at the rear of the throng that still waited, she thought she spied the leering face of the Count Wolf. She secured the door quickly, and heard the disappointed crowd jeering at

the guard as they marched off without their prisoner.

Then the girl sped back to the room to release the fugitive from his not too comfortable hiding - place. The monk emerged from the chest half-suffocated, and, grasping Dulcie's hand, said :

"My daughter, how can I thank thee sufficiently?"

"Who is that speaking, Dulcie?" said Dame Agnes.

"'Tis the monk the sergeant sought."

"The monk!" cried the dame in horror.

"Where has he come from?"

"Why, he has been here all the while, hiding inside the chest on which thou hast been sitting. Fortunately he has survived," replied Dulcie laughingly.

"Oh, Dulcie, Dulcie, child, thou mightest have brought trouble upon us, indeed!" said the dame, lifting up her hands in dismay.

"Nay, I will not permit that," said the monk. "Thou hast already saved me from imprisonment, or worse, and shall run no further risk for my sake. I will go."

"Not till thou hast washed thy wound and

broken bread with us, father," said Dulcie. "See, I am going to prepare the meal now. It will be dark very soon, and thou canst then go forth in safety."

"Yea, stay awhile. They will not return now," added Dame Agnes.

"I thank ye heartily; the wound I had almost forgotten," replied the monk.

"See," said Dulcie, as she entered with a bowl of water and some clean soft linen, "I will bind it up for thee. It is not deep."

"Thou art indeed an angel of mercy, and my courage has almost gone."

"Nay, I heard thy brave words in the market-place," said Dulcie, as with deft fingers she washed the wound and fashioned a bandage, then tied it round his head. "There, that will staunch the blood."

"I haven't words sufficient to thank thee, maiden," said the monk gratefully.

Then they sat round the table, and he told them of his wanderings about the country, and of the great doings of Master Martin Luther, of whom he was a follower. When they had finished the meal, he gave them his blessing and rose to depart. Dulcie preceded

him across the courtyard to the outer door and opened it. The stars were now shining in the darkened sky, and the street was quiet and almost deserted.

“God bless and reward thee, child,” said the monk in a low voice, as he pressed her hand. “Take this ; it is all I have.”

Taking a small book from his wallet, he placed it in her hand, and in a moment was gone.

Presently Dulcie, kneeling by the firelight, opened the little book. It was a copy of the New Testament. Within the cover was written in small characters the words, Martin Cellarius.”

CHAPTER XVI

TOWARDS the close of the following day, Dulcie and Dame Agnes were sitting by the fireside when a loud knocking was heard at the door.

Dulcie rose to open it, and a sergeant of the guard stepped into the room. A glance was sufficient to tell her, it was the same man who had searched the house for the monk.

“Art thou Dulcie Ebner?” he asked, in a pompous voice, as he drew a paper from his doublet.

“That is my name,” replied Dulcie.

“Then I have an order for thy arrest,” he said, placing a hand on the girl’s shoulder.

“What means this? I pray thee don’t take her,” cried Dame Agnes, starting up in alarm and wringing her hands. “He was a good man, and no heretic, and—”

“Ha, ha!” said the sergeant, chuckling, “thou dost admit he was here, then?”

“Hush, dame,” said Dulcie quickly; “say no more. I will go with him and explain it all. Remain here till I return.”

And, taking her hood from a peg, she kissed the old woman, whose tears were flowing fast, and signed to the sergeant she was ready.

Crossing the courtyard they passed into the street. Here they were joined by two of the city guard, who had been waiting at the outer door, and on the sergeant giving the command, they took their places on each side of their prisoner, and marched off at a brisk pace in the direction of the Rathhaus. It was almost dark, and in the uncertain light few of the passers-by took notice of the slim, girlish figure, with her face almost hidden by her hood, who marched with a firm step between her captors.

At length they arrived at the Rathhaus, where the sergeant dismissed the escort, and, placing a heavy hand on Dulcie's shoulder, they entered the building through a small side-door.

Along a dark, dismal passage, lit here and there by lanterns fastened to the wall, they went, until they came to a heavy door of iron. This the sergeant unlocked, and passing through and descending a steep flight of steps, they came to another iron door, which led into a long, low apartment. Here Dulcie was told she might sit down on a bench which was placed facing a wooden screen of lattice-work, which divided the room in the centre. There the sergeant left her, and disappeared through a door in the screen.

There were no windows in the room, which was lit by two lanterns only. The massive stone walls were dripping with moisture, and filled the place with a mouldy, damp smell. From the spot where she sat, Dulcie could see through a small opening in the screen to the part beyond, which was brightly lighted. The sound of voices raised her curiosity, and she looked through the aperture.

A thrill of horror passed through her, and her whole body shook with a sudden terror. The sight held her with an irresistible fascination.

At one end of the apartment three men were standing engaged in conversation, with their backs towards her.

In the centre was a low couch covered with leather, to the corners of which thick straps were attached, and close to it a huge wooden trough, with rockers fashioned like a cradle, the inside of which was thickly studded with sharp nails. The walls of the place were hung with a variety of horrible-looking instruments, pincers and tongs, hideous masks, and iron collars lined with long spikes, the use of which she could only imagine.

At one side of the leathern couch stood a heavy chair with high arms, from the seat and back of which hundreds of pointed steel spikes projected.

On the other side was a wooden platform, somewhat like a low bed with studded rollers across, and a kind of windlass at the head—this she knew to be the much-dreaded rack! In the background, half in gloom, was dimly visible a great iron figure of hideous shape, which it flashed through her mind must be

the dreadful *Iron Virgin*, of whose horrors she had often heard !

She had scarcely time to take in all these devilish instruments of torture when she saw a man cross to the door of the screen, and heard her name called.

The unfortunate girl tried to rise from the bench, but both courage and strength seemed to have forsaken her, and her limbs refused to move. Assisted by the sergeant, who grasped her by the arm, she entered the terrible room.

At one end, behind a long table strewn with papers, sat a man clad in a black robe and cap, with silver chain about his neck. His sinister face was fringed with a heavy black beard, and his small, deep-set eyes seemed to pierce the girl through and through. By his side stood a tall, powerfully-built fellow, clad in red trunk hose and jerkin, and girt with a leathern apron. His brawny arms were bare, and the upper part of his face was concealed by a black mask. In the shadow at the back, another man lounged in a chair. His face was hidden by the brim of a large hat he wore, and a heavy cloak con-

cealed his dress. A pair of long riding-boots with spurred heels, and the point of a sword scabbard protruded from underneath his cloak.

"Thy name is Dulcie Ebner?" said the man seated at the table, fixing his eyes upon the trembling girl.

"It is," was the reply, in a voice scarcely audible.

"Yesterday thou didst aid the escape of a man whom the guard sought to arrest? Dost thou confess to this charge that is laid against thee?"

"I but shielded a monk from the anger of the mob," answered Dulcie, gathering courage.

"Ha, that is good; then perhaps thou wilt tell us where this man is still hidden?"

"I know not."

"And his name?"

"I cannot tell thee."

"Thou wilt not, thou meanest, girl? Now consider a moment before I ask thee for the second time. We have means here to make thee answer, I'll warrant. Do not compel us to use them."

The girl seemed stupefied, and looked indifferently at the ghastly apparatus which surrounded her.

“Now, where is this man?”

“I tell thee truly I know not,” replied Dulcie in despair, and her tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of her mouth.

“Then we shall be obliged to perform the duty of our office,” said the examiner slowly, at the same time making a sign to the man in red who stood behind him.

With a look of terror Dulcie sprang forward, and threw herself at the feet of the examiner.

“For the love of Heaven, have mercy. I know not, indeed, I know not!” she cried wildly.

“Torturer, do thy duty,” said the examiner, in unyielding tones.

The girl sank powerless to the floor. The torturer raised her, his coarse hands leaving white marks on her arms as he carried her like a child across the room, to where stood an upright frame of wood, shaped like a triangle. To the top of it a stout rope was attached, which passed over a pulley sus-

pended from the roof. A heavy stone hung at the other end of the rope, which reached to within a short distance of the floor.

Placing the girl against the triangle, he secured her wrists by means of straps to the upper corners, and fastened her feet to an iron ring which was let into the floor, then lighting a torch, he stood ready to hold it under her arm. The slightest movement on the part of the victim attached to the frame, was sufficient to cause the weighted rope to tighten and almost wrench the limbs from their sockets, and cause the most excruciating agony.

"Look up, girl," said the deep voice of the examiner, who still sat in his chair unperturbed. "For the last time I ask thee, where is this man?"

There was no answer from Dulcie but a low moan of suffering. Then her head dropped. She had swooned away.

"Enough of this," cried a voice, as the man in the cloak, who had been seated in the shadow, sprang forward. "Thou art a devil incarnate, Wagner," he exclaimed. "Unloose her!" he shouted to the torturer.

“Since when hast thou become so sensitive, Count?” asked the examiner, with a sneer. “I but carried out thine orders.”

“Thou hast carried them out too far. Leave her to me; I will be responsible. Out of my way, varlet,” he cried with an oath to the torturer, who had now unloosed Dulcie’s inanimate form from the frame.

Snatching up the torch, which was still lighted, he raised the girl, and, grasping her round the waist, strode across the room.

Touching a spring in the wall, a secret door flew back, disclosing a narrow passage. Without a word he plunged forward into the darkness, bearing Dulcie in his arms.

CHAPTER XVII

THROUGH a long and tortuous passage, cut out of the solid rock, Count Wolf bore the unconscious girl. Now and again he would stumble against some stone that lay in his path with a muttered oath, or suddenly sink ankle-deep in water; but on he went, his torch casting a lurid light in front, which scared the lizards and other reptiles that ran along the slimy walls as he approached.

At length the path began to ascend, and his feet knocked against a step which proved the first of a steep flight. Up and up he toiled, till, panting for breath, he came to an iron door that blocked the way. Laying his torch down, he took a key from his belt, and unlocking it, passed through, and then refastened it. The door led into a vault-like apartment, with a high groined roof supported by pillars.

Crossing this, he began the ascent of a

circular staircase, which seemed interminable. At the top was another door, which yielded to his touch and opened into a gallery, the walls of which were hung with arms and trophies of the chase. Here he stopped a moment and listened; then extinguishing the torch, he crept noiselessly along till he came to the foot of a wide staircase. Peering cautiously at every step, he ascended it; then turning into a long corridor, at length stopped at a door, which he opened, and entered a richly-furnished room, that was well lit with candles. The walls were hung with tapestries, while the floor was almost completely covered with the soft skins of various animals.

Placing Dulcie on a low couch, over which was spread a magnificent bear skin, he opened the door of a cabinet, and taking from it a flask, he poured some of its contents into a small silver goblet; then approaching the girl, poured some between her lips. Her face appeared almost ethereal in its pallor, and her long hair, which had broken loose, flowed in disorder over the end of the couch. Her bodice, which had burst open

in her struggles, disclosed a bosom and neck of symmetrical beauty. Draining the remainder of the liquid in the goblet, he quickly filled it again and again, and drank till the contents of the flask were exhausted. Then he bent over the girl and pressed a passionate kiss on her brow.

“Dulcie!” he cried, in a hoarse whisper.

Her eyelids quivered, then opened wide.

“Where am I?” she moaned half-unconsciously, as she turned her head from side to side.

“With a friend,” was the reply.

She raised herself and looked round the room with startled eyes, then catching sight of the man’s figure standing close to her, she gave a little cry and clutched her bodice eagerly.

“Oh, tell me, where am I?”

“Thou art with a friend,” answered the Count, as he drew nearer his eyes flamed with passion. “Dost thou remember me, pretty one? Look again. Do I frighten thee?” he asked, noticing the look of horror that came over the girl’s face, as he seated himself on the couch beside her.

"Remember? Yes, I remember now," exclaimed the girl, starting up and pushing her hair back from her face, "the sergeant, then that terrible room, and the torture."

"From which I saved thee."

"Thou?"

"Yea! I was seated behind the examiner, and when they would have hurt thee, I carried thee away and brought thee here, because I love thee, Dulcie," said the Count eagerly, as he tried to grasp her hand.

"Thou lovest me," said the girl, absently, still eluding him.

"Yes. Dost thou not remember me? I have loved thee ever since I saw thee in the market-place years ago, and have sworn thou shalt be mine; sworn by Heaven—dost hear me," he cried fiercely—"and Wolf keeps his oath."

"Wolf!"

"Ha! Thou knowest me now. I have caged the little bird this time, and my rooms in the Burg are safe," he cried, with a tipsy laugh, as he saw the look of amazement in the girl's eyes quickly change to one of terror.

"Come," he continued, placing his arm around her and drawing her towards the couch.

"Count Wolf," cried Dulcie, as she wrenched herself from his grasp, "I have heard what thou hast said. If thou didst save me from the hands of those who would have unjustly tortured me, I thank thee with all my heart, but I do not, and cannot, love thee. Have pity, I am but a friendless girl, and let me go from here at once."

"Nay, my beauty, thou shalt not go yet," he replied fiercely, throwing his arms round the shrinking girl, and as he held her, showering kisses on her face.

Dulcie, now powerless, uttered a piercing shriek, and fought with all her strength to free herself.

"Do not hurt thyself, my little wild cat. No one can hear thee," he cried hoarsely, as her cries for help rang through the room, and he dragged her towards the couch once more.

"Now I have thee," he hissed between his teeth, as, panting, he tried to hold her struggling form.

"Wolf!" exclaimed a voice of command.

He turned his head for a moment in amazement.

A woman of regal presence stood in the doorway, her eyes flaming with anger. A long travelling cloak, edged with sable, which hung from her shoulders to her feet, was thrown back, revealing a kirtle of rich blue velvet beneath.

The Count, releasing Dulcie, sprang to his feet, and bowed low.

"I am indeed honoured by thy presence in my apartments, Duchess; but thou comest unannounced. I thought thou hadst departed on thy journey," he said, with suppressed rage in his voice.

"So it seems," was the reply.

"May I ask to what I owe the honour of this visit?"

"It appears strange that the son of the Burgraf cannot be satisfied with practising his debaucheries for which he is so famous, in the city, without bringing his minions within the castle walls," replied the Duchess, with a fine irony in her voice.

The Count winced as if he had been struck.

"Oh, hear me, I pray thee," cried Dulcie, clasping her hands and throwing herself at the feet of the Duchess. "I call Heaven to witness I am not what thou sayest. Do not leave me; save me from this man."

The Count made a movement as if to drag her away.

"Nay, I did mean honestly by her," he said savagely.

"Pray spare me thine excuses and thy presence also," said the Duchess, slowly.

Muttering an oath between his teeth, the Count withdrew like a whipped hound, and the two women were left alone.

"Rise, child," said the Duchess, in a gentler tone, "and tell me how camest thou here."

With eyes brimming over with tears of thankfulness, Dulcie then told her story from the beginning. How she had been arrested and taken to the Rathhaus to be tortured, and then she remembered no more until she recovered consciousness in the room with the Count.

Her beauty, and the earnest way in which she related her story impressed the

Duchess with sincerity, and her heart warmed to the friendless girl.

“And thou sayest thou art an orphan?” she asked, when Dulcie had finished.

“Yea, I have no one left but Karl, who was brought up by my grandparents with me, but who is now far away in Basle.”

“Poor child, thou hast seen trouble, indeed, and have narrowly escaped a worse danger to-night. The Count’s character is well known, and, if I mistake not, because I have thwarted him, he will redouble his efforts to obtain his desire. He is both crafty and cruel.”

“Oh, tell me, I pray thee, what can I do, and where shall I go? I have no friend but Karl, and I know not when he will come again.”

The Duchess seemed lost in thought for a few moments, then placing her hand on Dulcie’s shoulder, she said :

“Listen, child, I believe thy story, and something in thy face, I wot not, seems to draw me to thee. I have thought of a plan. Within an hour I leave on a long journey to Ledzburg ; if thou wilt, thou shalt accompany

me. As one of my women thou wilt be safe from persecution. Word shall be sent to this old woman of whom thou speakest, that thou art safe, and whither thou goest. Now, tell me, what thinkest thou of this?"

"Heaven bless thee," replied Dulcie, as she took the hand of the Duchess and kissed it. "I will gladly go with thee."

"Come, then, follow me closely, for we must prepare for departure at once."

The Duchess led the way from the room, and passed quickly along the corridor. Dulcie followed her through what seemed a labyrinth of passages and galleries. At length they arrived at a door which led to a magnificent suite of rooms, through which they went till they reached the tiring-room, where two maids sat waiting.

"We start at once," said the Duchess to them. "Get all ready."

Then, opening the doors of a large armoire, which was filled with clothes, she told Dulcie to select what was needful, and left her.

Presently she returned, and bidding Dulcie draw her hood closely and follow with the other maids, she led the way down the grand

staircase to the main entrance, where the major-domo, with a white wand, stood at the head of a numerous assembly of servants and men-at-arms bearing torches. Without the gate, surrounded by a troop of mounted men, two coaches were drawn up, into one of which the Duchess was conducted with much ceremony, while the maids, with Dulcie, got into the second. The doors were shut, the word of command given, and with much creaking the vehicles rumbled down the rough roadway into the darkness.

CHAPTER XVIII

SINCE receiving Dulcie's letter, Karl had been much troubled and concerned about her. Unprotected and friendless as he knew she must now be, he felt it was his duty to return to Nuremberg. The subject was constantly in his mind, and he talked it over with Zorastro many times, who, however, bade him be patient and wait a while.

In the meantime, Zorastro, whose popularity with the people had in no way diminished, had been elected to the office of city physician, an appointment fraught with great responsibility, and one he was determined to discharge conscientiously.

The apothecaries, the majority of whom were mere charlatans at this time, had grown to be a powerful body in Basle, and being entirely unlicensed, began to wax exceedingly wealthy, trading as they did on the credulity and ignorance of the people. Nothing was

too horrible or disgusting to foist on their patients as valuable medicines. Many of their vaunted remedies consisted of blood, fat, bones, and almost every conceivable organ of both human and animal bodies.

Such curious articles as moss grown on a human skull, wonderful stones found in the heads of toads, snakes, and foals, the horn of the unicorn, and the excrements of beasts, birds, fishes, and reptiles, found a prominent place in their *materia medica*, and for which they charged extortionate prices. Many of these things, indeed, were simply manufactured.

With a view to protecting the people from being thus imposed upon, Zorastro was at last constrained to offer a resolution to the council of the city, that the apothecaries' shops should be subjected to his supervision, also that he should be permitted to examine whether or not these practitioners understood their business, and ascertain if many of the extraordinary articles they sold were genuine.

On hearing this the apothecaries were up in arms, and turned on Zorastro their

concentrated hatred. The professors and physicians who were envious of his success, both as a healer and a teacher, were secretly rejoiced, and joined the apothecaries in their persecution, with the object of driving him from the city.

Thus matters rapidly approached a crisis.

One night Karl was seated in his room alone, awaiting Zorastro's return from a serious case to which he had been called.

Ensconced in a great arm-chair which he had drawn up to the fireplace, he read Dulcie's letter through for the twentieth time, and replaced it in his doublet. The small lamp which stood on the table was nearly out, and the fire had burnt low, leaving the room almost in darkness. With legs outstretched and his head resting on his hand, Karl was lost in a reverie.

Whilst thus absorbed in his thoughts, a whitish mist appeared to fill the far end of the room, which gradually grew luminous and bright. In the midst of it the dim outline of a figure seemed slowly to form and assume shape.

His eyes were riveted by the apparition,

and all power of motion seemed gone from his limbs. Was he dreaming? No. He could feel his heart throbbing, and the hard wood of the chair arm as he grasped it tightly in his hand. He tried to speak, but he could not utter a sound. His body seemed dead, yet he could see the objects in the room clearly, but he could neither act nor move.

The nebulous shape grew clearer and clearer, till at length it assumed the form of a woman kneeling, with arms raised and hands clasped in the act of supplication. Her hair flowed over her shoulders like a stream of molten gold.

It was Dulcie! With uplifted face, white and drawn with anguish, her beseeching eyes brimming with tears seemed to draw him forward, yet he could not move a limb.

His brain seemed to reel. He could bear it no longer, and, with a final effort to burst his unseen bonds, he uttered a loud cry and sprang forward with outstretched arms.

As he did so, the figure and the mist vanished instantly, and the room was in darkness again. He stood as one dazed.

All was quiet within the house, but from outside came the clash of steel, and as he listened, a cry for help fell upon his ear. Seizing his sword, which hung on the wall, he groped his way down the stairs and opened the door which led into the street.

It was a dark night, and a small, thick rain was falling. After going a few steps he stopped to listen. The sound of a combat came from a narrow passage which led to the right towards the cathedral. Again he heard the cry. The voice seemed familiar to him. Drawing his sword, he made with all speed down the passage in the direction from which the sound came.

After running a short distance he made out, by the light of the lantern which hung over the entrance to the passage, the bulky form of a man, who, with his back against the wall, was hard-pressed by two assailants. One of these was tall and gaunt, while his companion was a little, thick-set man. The sparks flew from their swords as they met. A glance revealed to Karl the man with his back to the wall was Zorastro, and uttering

a shrill cry, he attacked the tall man, who happened to be nearest to him.

Seeing he was engaged by a fresh foe, he left Zorastro to his companion, and turned to Karl. Defending himself, and parrying adroitly Karl's fierce lunges, he waited till he was pretty well blown, then, taking the offensive with a smart attack in tierce, he drove Karl steadily backwards. Karl found he had no mean opponent to deal with, and was beginning to feel spent, when his opponent, in endeavouring to counter a fierce thrust, slipped on the wet stones and fell heavily. Karl turned quickly to see how Zorastro was faring. No sooner did the little man see his companion had fallen, than he took to his heels and ran, and Karl went after him. He was stopped, however, by a shout from Zorastro, and on returning, he found the other bold assailant had jumped to his feet and decamped in the opposite direction.

"The enemy has flown. It's not worth while pursuing them," said Zorastro, with a grim laugh, as he rolled up his sleeve to examine a wound on his arm as Karl came up.

"Thou art hurt!"

"Nothing to speak of. 'Tis but a slight flesh wound which we can soon put right. Thou cam'st just in the nick of time, lad. I must confess I was pretty nearly spent keeping both of them at bay, and I roared lustily."

"Yes, I heard the cry and sallied out, not knowing it was thine till I got here."

"Well, let us homeward," said Zorastro, leaning on Karl's shoulder.

"Where did they attack thee?" asked Karl.

"Just within the entrance to the passage. I had hardly crossed the square when two figures darted out of the archway, and the dastards were upon me. I had only just time to draw. Fortunately, my blade being longer than theirs, I was able to keep them at a distance till I got my back against the wall."

"Who dost thou think they were?"

"I've no doubt they were two of the apothecaries' hirelings commissioned to get rid of me. I half expected it. They won't rest now till they drive me forth, and, by

my faith, I've almost had enough of them."

They soon reached their own dwelling, and on examination Zorastro's wound proved to be but slight.

Karl made no mention of his strange experience until the next day, when he recounted it to Zorastro, and asked him if he could explain it.

Zorastro listened attentively, and then said:

"Such an apparition as thou didst see is rare but not impossible. The imagination of women is usually stronger than that of men. The former are more emotional, stronger in love and in hate, and their imaginations may carry them, in certain conditions, to other places, where they may be seen by others who are in the same state. They are then really at those places, although without their physical bodies, for the mind is the real person, not the body, that is asleep. I know from experience that one may communicate his thoughts to another with whom he is in sympathy, at any distance, however great it may be. We may act upon the spirit of

another person in such a manner as to influence his actions. Karl," continued Zorastro, after a while, "I have made up my mind to fight these blockheads of Basle no longer. Why should I waste my knowledge upon them? I will resign my offices. We will strike our tents and commence our wanderings again."

"When shall we start?" asked Karl, scarce able to conceal his delight.

"Before many days are over."

CHAPTER XIX

FOR the next few days Zorastro was busy in his laboratory, endeavouring to perfect a new Elixir of Life, a remedy for all ills, on which he had spent many years of labour and research, and which he hoped to complete before leaving Basle. It was the dream of his life to discover some substance that would solve the problem which had baffled men for centuries.

On a table in front of him stood a flask, containing a quantity of blood he had that day drawn from the median vein of a robust young man. In his hand he held a phial, which had been carefully warmed to the heat of the human body. Pouring the blood into the phial, he took up a jar containing a white powder, none other than his now celebrated Alcahest, and carefully measured a certain quantity of it into the phial, then closing it with his thumb he watched the result.

Gradually the red fluid separated into two

layers. The upper one he cautiously decanted off, while the lower, he poured into a shallow silver dish and placed it over a brazier for a few moments, then proceeded to filter it through a linen cloth. Drop by drop it steadily fell into a glass receiver, which, after a while, became partly filled with a clear, topaz-coloured liquid.

From a large bag he next took several old toads of great size, which appeared to be in a moribund condition, and placing them on the table in front of him, he administered to each by means of a quill, a small quantity of the bright yellow liquid.

Then he watched them intently.

Presently, to his great joy, the toads began to show signs of life. Stretching one leg and then the other, their fat bodies slowly began to quiver. First one sprang to the floor, then another, and the others followed.

Zorastro jumped to his feet with a cry of joy.

"I have found it! I have found it at last!" he exclaimed, as he fairly danced round the room, while the toads jumped after him.

He was thus occupied when the door suddenly opened and Karl burst in, evidently agog with news.

"Why, what is the matter?" he cried, as he gazed in astonishment at the spectacle before him.

"I have found it at last, my lad," said Zorastro, embracing him.

"What—the Elixir?"

"Yea, the true Elixir. Karl, thou shalt live to the age of Methuselah an' thou wilt."

"I am indeed glad thou hast met with success, but I, too, have news of great import. A little while ago I met Oporinus, who was on his way here, big with a story of a plot against thee, which he says will be carried out to-night. He was coming to warn us."

"A plot, eh?" ejaculated Zorastro, as his eyes still followed the now lively toads.

"It seems the apothecaries, joined by the professors and a section of the students and townsfolk, have represented to the council that thou art in league with the devil. Also that thou hast cast certain councillors who have supported thee, under a spell. That it

was thou who didst cause the cathedral clock to stop the other day, which only the devil could do. Last of all, the story has got abroad, that when thou wast attacked the other night the devil came suddenly to thine aid, and caused thine assailants to fly," said Karl, smiling.

"Good, indeed," cried Zorastro, slapping his thigh and laughing heartily. "Then thou art the devil, Karl. And what are these poor folk going to do?"

"Not satisfied with the reply of the council that thou hast resigned thine offices, Oporinus tells me, the whole rabble have agreed to meet here shortly to drive thee forth."

"Well, we'll give them some amusement, lad. Listen, I have a plan. We will depart for Nuremberg to-night. I trust to thee to have the horses saddled and all ready just after sundown, at the end of the passage leading from the back of the house. There thou must wait till I join thee."

Karl soon collected his belongings and departed to carry out his orders.

After he had gone, Zorastro proceeded to

pack the most precious of his possessions (which were very few) in a capacious wallet. His apparatus he dismantled and broke. Then taking a stout cudgel, he set to work and smashed all his flasks, retorts, receivers, and other vessels, till there was nothing left but a huge heap of broken glass.

The work of demolition finished, he took an old robe he had formerly worn, tied it together in front, and stuffed it inside with straw. Manufacturing a head, by covering the bulb of a retort with a cloth, he fixed it on top of the stuffed body. Then he fashioned a pair of horns with sticks, which he attached to the head. He chuckled audibly as he put this finishing touch and contemplated his own effigy. Collecting all the rushlights and candles he had, he set them in a row on the table to make a goodly light and after well securing the front door on the lower floor which led to the street, he sat down to await events.

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It was almost dark when the hum of an approaching throng and the sound of many footsteps fell upon his ear. He threw open

the window and looked out. A great crowd was marching down the street with much noise and shouting. On they came, until they halted in front of his dwelling, howling and hooting like wild beasts. A glance showed him they chiefly consisted of the rabble of the city. Many of them carried torches, while others flourished sticks.

"I should like to stay and see what the end will be," said Zorastro to himself, with a grim smile, as he proceeded to drag forward the effigy he had made and prop it up in front of the open window. As he did so a great shout went up from the mob below.

"There he is!" they cried.

"Down with him. Down with the son of the devil!" they shouted. "Burn him out!"

"No," yelled a voice, "we'll throw him in the river!"

At this moment, above the din and noise below, Zorastro thought he heard the sound of singing. The sound came nearer. What could it mean? Then the words of Luther's hymn came borne on the evening air, as

they were chanted by scores of lusty throats.
It was the student's war-song :

*" And were this world all devils o'er,
And watching to devour us,
We lay it not to heart so sore ;
Not they can overpower us.
And let the prince of ill
Look grim as e'er he will,
He harms us not a whit ;
For why ? His doom is writ,
A word shall quickly slay him."*

This was followed by shouts of " Long live Zorastro ! " " Long live the Wonder-Worker ! "

There was a lull for a time, then someone cried, " The students are coming ! "

A hoarse murmur rose from the crowd.

" The faithful ones," muttered Zorastro, with a smile. " There will be a fight shortly. Now for the lights, then I must go."

Taking his tinder box he soon lit up the row of candles and rushlights he had placed behind the effigy, which threw it up in bold relief in full view of the mob below.

"There he is! There he is!" they yelled.

"It's the devil himself," some cried in awe.

"Look at his horns!"

"Come down, son of Belial!"

"Set a light to his door!" shouted the more courageous ones.

A big stone crashed into the room just as Zorastro passed through the doorway and descended the stairs.

"Fools! fools! They think I am like themselves," he said to himself, as he drew his cloak around him.

Letting himself out by a small door at the back of the house, he walked quickly along the narrow passage. There was no one in sight, and round the corner he found Karl already waiting with the horses.

Once in the saddle they set off at a smart trot, and soon left Basle behind. In an hour's time they were well on their way towards Seckingen, which they reached before midnight, and knocking up the landlord of the inn, they found lodgings for the night.

CHAPTER XX

YIELDING to Karl's request, Zorastro decided to push on with all speed to Nuremberg, and in a little over a week's time they were once more riding through the valley of the Pegnitz within a short distance of the city.

The river flowed as swiftly as ever over the grey stones, and time had wrought few changes in the pine-clad hillsides since the morning on which Zorastro had first journeyed along its banks. As they rode on, his thoughts went back to the day when he found Karl in the long rushes, and he recounted the story once more as they passed near the spot.

"Who knoweth but the mystery may yet be fathomed some day. Time is a great revealer," said Zorastro.

"There seems but little chance, and I have given up hope long ago," replied Karl.

"Hast thou the talisman still that was found about thy neck?"

"Yea, I always carry it. She who placed it there cannot have had much natural affection for the child she so cruelly abandoned," answered Karl bitterly.

"Who can tell, she may not be entirely to blame. The mind of woman, Karl, is one of the greatest mysteries the Creator ever produced. Those who have made any attempt to study its mutability (I have not given much thought to it myself) say the artifices of the shallow thou mayst perhaps solve; the processes of the deep are as unfathomable as the sea. But after all it is this faculty that makes woman interesting, and when a man solves it she ceases to be interesting."

"And what of man?" asked Karl.

"Man at his best is indisputably the greatest of the Almighty's creatures. He is a twofold being, having a human and an animal nature. If he feels and thinks and acts as a human being should act, he is a man; if he feels and acts like an animal he is then an animal, and the equal of those

animals whose mental characteristics are manifested in him. An exalted imagination caused by a desire for the good raises him up, a low imagination drags him down and degrades him to a level with the beasts. But we must tarry no longer."

Putting their horses to a trot, in about an hour's time they were once more riding through the streets of Nuremberg and making with all speed to the Spital Strasse.

Karl's heart gave a great bound as they came in sight of his old home, and a flood of thoughts rushed through his mind.

What a surprise it would be for Dulcie. He could imagine her face, and almost see her bright eyes beaming with joy as she put out her arms to meet him.

He threw himself from his horse and ran to the door of the shop. It was closed and bolted. Then he tried the door leading into the courtyard and found it unfastened. Creeping softly across the courtyard to the house door, which stood open, he cautiously looked inside.

There was the old room with the big fireplace and its clean tiles, looking as bright

as of old. Seated in the great arm-chair in which Erasmus used to sit, was an old woman placidly knitting. It was Dame Agnes. But there was no sign of Dulcie.

In a moment he had crossed the floor and had grasped the dame by the hand.

"Who art thou?" she cried, as she rose from the chair.

"It is I. Karl Ebner, dame. Dost thou not remember me?"

"Karl, Karl! I know the voice. To be sure, I remember now," cried the old dame, passing her hands over his face.

"I have come back again, but where is Dulcie?" asked Karl impatiently, as Zorastro, who had followed him, came into the room.

"Dulcie?" echoed the dame. "Sit down, lad, while I tell thee all I know."

A cold chill seemed to strike Karl to the heart.

"Some weeks ago she was arrested here one night by the guard."

"Arrested! What for?" cried Karl in dismay.

"They said she had given shelter to a

monk who had been preaching sedition. She hid him while the guard searched the house, but they did not find him. They suspected he had been here, and came the next day and took her to the Rathhaus. Late that night a man came with a message that she was safe with friends, and was about to journey to Ledzburg, but I was to tell no one but thee."

"Great heaven! My poor Dulcie!" cried Karl, as he buried his face in his hands.

"Courage, lad," said Zorastro, "she may be safe and well. Canst thou tell us no more, dame?"

"Alas! that is all I know, and I have heard nothing since," replied Dame Agnes.

"Remain here, Karl, and see to the horses, while I go and make inquiries," said Zorastro. "If I am not successful, we will to horse again, and start for Ledzburg to-night."

Karl pressed his hand in silence. The dame busied herself preparing a meal for her guests, and meanwhile told Karl all she knew of what had happened in his absence.

Then he wandered about the house and

into the old laboratory, where he had spent so many happy days. As he went from room to room he came across many traces of his old playmate, her cloak hanging on a peg; a belt he had given her, on which she had worked the letters D. and K. On a table in her room lay a little book which he opened. Inside the cover was written the name, Martin Cellarius.

Surely that was the name of the man who was causing such a stir throughout the country. Could he have been the monk she had sheltered? If so, here was damning evidence, indeed.

Taking the book with him, he descended the stairs to find that Zorastro had returned.

"Any news?" he asked eagerly.

"None," said Zorastro, seating himself at the table. "I cannot learn anything."

"Then our only course is to journey on to Ledzburg in the hope the message was true."

"That will be the best plan, and we'll start as soon as the horses are rested," said Zorastro, cutting himself a huge slice of sausage. "Come lad, eat, and cheer up.

A man always feels sad on an empty stomach, and a full one alters his view of things."

But Karl had little appetite for food, and was not content till the horses were at the door again, and ready to start.

Placing the book he had found in his saddlebag, he bade farewell to the dame, to whom he gave instructions what to do till she heard from them again.

Then once more they were in the saddle, and leaving the city by the Frauen Gate, they turned their horses' heads towards the south.

CHAPTER XXI

By the following evening they had reached Ratisbon, where they spent the night. The next day they pushed on again with all speed, and towards afternoon were well on the way to Wasserberg.

For a considerable distance the road skirted a dense forest. The air was sultry and oppressive, and before long, heavy drops of rain foretold a storm was at hand.

Putting spurs to their horses, they galloped forward, hoping to find some place of shelter before it burst. But they had not proceeded far, when a brilliant flash of lightning, which was followed by a deafening crash of thunder, caused Karl's horse to rear on its haunches and nearly throw its rider. By dint of coaxing, the animal was at last persuaded to go forward. The rain now increased to a torrent, and quickly soaked them both to the skin.

"We must find shelter somewhere," cried

Zorastro, peering ahead through the gathering darkness.

Another blinding flash of purple light, which seemed to rend the heavens asunder, cut short further speech ; and the roar of the hail, which, as it fell, cut the leaves from the trees, increased with terrific violence.

“ Look ! ” shouted Karl, as they turned a bend of the road. “ A house at last.”

Sure enough, a short distance ahead, standing to the left by the roadside, was a small dwelling. Urging the tired animals forward, they soon reached the tumble-down looking place, over the door of which a dilapidated bush drooped, proclaiming it to be an inn.

Springing from their horses, they hammered at the door, which was presently opened by a sour-visaged man, who stared in amazement at the two dripping figures.

“ We want shelter for man and beast,” said Zorastro, as he pushed his way past the man, followed by Karl, into the low room within.

“ Wilt thou see to our horses quickly, good fellow, and give them a rub down ? ”

The man mumbled something in reply,

and throwing a cloak over his shoulders, passed outside and shut the door.

Looking round the room, which was almost filled with a dense smoke that rose from a peat fire which burned on a flat stone, the only outlet for which was a hole in the roof, they observed two men, seated at a table which stood between the solitary window and the fire. Against the wall, on the other side, were three or four broad shelves placed one above the other, on each of which was a bundle of straw. These furnished the sleeping accommodation. Four rickety chairs, a few wine kegs and bottles, which stood on the clay floor, completed the furniture.

"We can at least dry ourselves," said Zorastro, as he divested himself of his cloak and doublet, and spread them over the back of a chair to dry, while Karl did likewise.

The lightning still illuminated the room with brilliant flashes now and again, and the thunder growled incessantly.

"As thou hast lost all thy money, I'll toss thee for thy cloak, Ludovic," said a long-

legged fellow with a fair beard, who was seated nearest the window.

His clothes were ragged and dirty, and his long legs from knee to foot were bound with strips of cloth. In a broad band, which encircled his waist, a couple of long knives were stuck, and a rusty-looking sword lay across the table by his side.

"Marry, but I think I'll need it more than thee if it goes on raining like this," replied his companion, as a stream of water poured through the roof close by him.

He was a short, heavy man, with a face and head almost covered with brown hair. He was wrapped in a long cloak which reached from his shoulders to his knees, and his legs were encased in heavy riding-boots. The tall man rattled the dice in a horn wine-cup and threw.

"Ten," he cried, passing the cup across the table.

"Three," whined the other in a lugubrious tone.

"Let us have some wine, landlord," cried Zorastro to the sour-faced man who now came in, shaking himself like a dog.

“Hand over thy cloak, Ludo. I’ve fairly won,” roared the tall man.

The other unfastened his cloak and threw it over the table to his companion.

“By cock and pie,” he exclaimed, “I’ll wager my boots against the cloak and a silver piece.”

“Done,” cried the other.

They threw again.

“Lost,” cried the little man, stamping his foot.

“Pass over thy boots, Ludo. I reckon they’ll fit me well. I haven’t had a pair of boots since—”

“Now, by the powers,” said the little man, kicking off the boots, which his opponent proceeded to put on with imperturbable gravity, “I won’t be done. I’ll lay thee my doublet and jerkin against thy winnings.”

“Done.”

Again the dice rattled. Twice they threw, and each time the big man won.

“Lost again, Ludo. Pass over thy doublet and jerkin; I can do with a better.”

“Zounds, man, but thou hast the devil’s own luck,” replied the other, as he began to

divest himself of his upper clothes. He was now stripped to the waist, and presented a most ludicrous spectacle as he again sat down, clad only in his trunk hose.

"Thou wilt soon be back to the garb of Adam again at this rate," remarked Zorastro, who was watching the pair.

"He'd wager his skin, master, if he could take it off," said the big man with a grin.

"I prithee leave him his hose for decency's sake," replied Zorastro.

"Nay," said the man called Ludo; "he must give me a last chance. It shall be the hose against the lot."

Just then the landlord approached Zorastro quietly and whispered in his ear:

"Master, art thou a physician, or hast thou any skill in leech-craft?"

"Some say I have, good fellow; but why dost thou ask?"

"If thou hast, for the love of Heaven come and see my poor wife, who lies grievous sick."

"Where is she?"

"Follow me," he said in a low voice, as he led Zorastro through a door at the back of

the room into a yard outside, in one corner of which stood a small outhouse. This they entered.

On a pallet in the corner, laid with straw and covered only by a ragged cloth, lay the emaciated form of a woman. She looked little more than a skeleton. Her face was a ghastly pallor, and her grey hair fell in disorder round it.

Zorastro bent over her and laid his hand over the region of her heart.

"I'm afraid I can do little for her," he said to the man who stood by his side. "She has not many hours to live."

The woman opened wide her eyes, and looked at him intently.

Taking a small phial from a pocket in his jerkin, Zorastro moistened her lips with a little of its contents. In a few moments her lips moved, as if she would speak. He bent over her to listen.

"Send him away," she said in a hoarse whisper, pointing to her husband.

"Leave us," said Zorastro to the man.

After pouring a few more drops of the restorative between the woman's lips, she

seemed to gather new life, and fixing her gaze on Zorastro, said in a weak voice :

“Thou art not a monk?”

“No ; I am a physician.”

“It matters not. Neither can do me much good. But I have something to say before it is too late. It will help me to die easier.”

“Say on. If I can help thee I will.”

She tried to clear her throat, and he wiped her clammy lips with the cloth that covered her.

“Come near and listen,” she said. “I was born in Ledzburg, and lived many happy years in the service of the baron’s lady at the castle. Then I married and bore one son, when my husband died. Time went on, and he grew to a fine, handsome lad, full of life and spirit, and my only joy. One day he did not return home, and a horse was found missing from the baron’s stables. He was seen with it, brought back, and although I begged hard for his life, by my lord’s command he was hanged. My bright boy—my son ! I did not leave the village—”

Here her voice sank to a whisper. Zorastro had to bend lower to catch what she

said, and raising her head supported her. As she continued, so his interest increased. The whispers grew fainter and fainter, till at last with a sigh she fell back in his arms.

“And your name?” he cried anxiously.

Her lips moved, but there was no response.

Again he applied the restorative. It was too late.

Laying her down gently, he was about to creep noiselessly away, when the landlord opened the door.

“I can do nothing more,” Zorastro said gently. “Stay with her; it is near the end.”

The man plucked him by the sleeve and drew him aside.

“I thank thee, master, for what thou hast done. Ye must leave here at once,” he said hurriedly. “Those men inside are robbers and cut-throats. One has already gone to warn their band, and they will be here shortly. The horses are ready at the end of this lane, and thy companion is with them. Come this way.”

He led Zorastro round the back of the

house to the top of a narrow lane or bridle-path, where Karl stood with the horses.

The storm had now cleared, and the stars were beginning to shine.

"Follow this path and it will bring ye into the main road again, but a few hours' ride from Wasserburg," said the landlord.

Pressing a gold piece into the man's hand and thanking him, they mounted to their saddles and set off at a brisk pace.

"What did the fellow want with thee?" asked Karl. "He came and whispered to me, that we must leave the place at once."

"His wife lay dying of a consumption. I could do but little for her, but she made a very strange confession to me. Karl, the hand of fate led us to that inn," said Zorastro impressively.

"And what was this confession?" asked Karl idly.

"It was one of great import. It has set my brain working, and I must think. I will tell thee more about it anon."

CHAPTER XXII

THE Castle of Ledzburg, a feudal citadel of great strength, stands like a mighty sentinel on the summit of a rock, commanding the little grey straggling town which lies below and the surrounding country. Between it and another precipitous height the river Ledza, fed by the rains and snows of the Alps, flows, tearing past the town with the speed of a torrent. The scene is one of great beauty, the mountain ridges rising one above the other in serried array, till they are overtopped by some snow-clad giant of the main chain of the Alps, while the river winds its way through a lovely valley of green fields and emerald meadows till it is lost in the distance.

The Castle was one of the ancient seats of the Barons of Ledzburg, and was still held by the Duchess of Bavaria in the absence of a male heir. Hither the Duchess had come to

meet her husband on his return from the war in Italy.

Dulcie by her brightness and amiability soon became a favourite with the Duchess, and was a frequent recipient of her favour and confidence. She treated her more as a companion than an attendant. Free for the time from her anxieties and persecutions, she had regained her charm and beauty, and was as light-hearted as of old. When not engaged in attendance on her mistress, she loved to take her spinning-wheel and sit on one of the upper galleries of the Castle, from which an exquisite prospect of the distant mountains could be obtained, thinking of Karl, and wondering if they should ever meet again.

While thus occupied one day, a light step on the pavement caused her to look round, and she saw the Duchess approaching. She rose and curtsied as she drew near.

"I have some news for thee, Dulcie," she said. "The Duke has been telling me he has arranged for a marriage between his son, the Count Wolf, and the Princess Cintra of Genoa. The Count knows nothing of this as yet, but his father has already sent for him to come

here, and he is expected to arrive at the Castle hourly. Of course, he does not know thou art here, and I will keep thee in close attendance on myself. Should he yield to his father's wishes, he will doubtless depart for the south shortly, and thou wilt be safe."

"I thank thee indeed for all thy kindness," said Dulcie gratefully. "What can I do to repay it?"

"Nothing, child; I am more than repaid already by thy devotion and service. I should do ill without thee now. Look yonder. Is not that a cavalcade coming along the road? Thine eyes are younger than mine."

"Yea; it is a party of horsemen riding quickly towards the Castle."

"It will be the Count and his attendants, no doubt. Look again."

"A man in armour rides at their head. Perchance 'tis the Count," replied Dulcie.

"Come," said the Duchess, "we will retire to our apartments."

After some time the blast of a trumpet announced the arrival of the party at the Castle gate. With a rattle the drawbridge was

lowered, and, headed by the Count Wolf clad in a glittering suit of steel armour, richly embossed, and mounted on a black charger, the brilliant cavalcade rode into the courtyard. His men-at-arms were attired in leather coats, with breast plates and morions of steel, and looked a hardy lot of fellows.

Throwing the reins to a groom, the Count dismounted from his horse and passed through the great doorway into the hall—a magnificent apartment, the walls of which were hung with pictures, and a great collection of arms, and trophies of the chase. The panelled roof was enriched with elaborate carvings, picked out in crimson, blue, and gold.

At the foot of the staircase stood the Duke's seneschal, who, after informing the Count that his father awaited him in his private cabinet, conducted him to his apartments.

In a small but richly furnished room on the east side of the Castle, the windows of which overlooked a small garden, the Duke was pacing to and fro. Though considerably over sixty, he bore his years lightly and was still erect. His fine figure was clad in a

suit of brocaded velvet embroidered with silver. For a long time, the wild escapades and intrigues of his headstrong son had been a source of trouble to him, and he thought he now saw a way out of the difficulty, if he could only get him to agree to the alliance he had arranged.

The house of Fracasetti was an old one but impoverished, and on their side were willing enough to carry out their part of the bargain, with so desirable a suitor as the heir to the Dukedom of Bavaria.

While thus absorbed in thought, the door opened, and the Count, who had doffed his armour, entered the room. The meeting between father and son was by no means an affectionate one, and the Duke broached the subject of the interview at once.

"I have sent for thee, Wolf, to talk over a matter to which I trust thou wilt give the closest attention. Being my only son and heir, it has long been my desire that thou should'st marry, and give up the wild life thou hast been leading for some time past. To this end I have arranged an alliance with a daughter of the house of Fracasetti, which thou knowest

is one of illustrious reputation. The Princess Cintra, who, her father assures me, will be willing to bestow her hand on thee, is a lady of amiability and virtue, and possesses all the qualities which make an estimable wife. It only remains for thee to acquiesce in these proposals and present thyself as a suitor for her hand. Now what sayest thou to this proposition?"

"I thank thee, sire, for the interest thou dost show in my welfare, but I fail to see why I should be forced to give my word to marry a lady I have never seen, however virtuous and estimable she may be by reputation," replied the Count with a sneer.

"Because it is my wish, and the alliance will be a most desirable one for both our houses."

"And what if I refuse to carry out this wish, and barter myself like a parcel of goods?" said the Count, rising, with an angry gesture, and turning to the window.

"Then, sirrah, I shall cut off thy supplies, and thou wilt have no more from me. I am tired of thy extravagancies, extricating thee from difficulties, and paying for thy mistresses.

Think well before thou throwest this offer aside."

The Count was staring vacantly through the window.

At this moment, a girl crossed the garden below. Her red-gold hair attracted his attention. Suddenly she turned, and he caught a passing glimpse of her face before she disappeared. He started violently as he recognised her, and his wild blood rushed through his veins like fire as a mad thought flashed upon him. Turning on his heel, he answered :

"I must refuse to comply with thy wish, sire. As a soldier of fortune I daresay I shall be able to look after myself, and be dependent on thee no longer."

"Have a care, Wolf, before thou answereth thus rashly. Thou shalt have time to consider it over, and give me thy answer to-night," said the Duke, as the Count bowed and left the apartment.

It was just twilight, when Dulcie, pining for a breath of fresh mountain air, threw a hood over her head, and left her room noiselessly, determined to enjoy a few minutes on

one of the lower galleries which overlooked the river. It was really a kind of terrace cut in the side of the Castle rock and a favourite walk of hers. She ran quickly through the passages, and, descending the steps, gained her customary haunt. The view was enchanting. The sky, from a deep purple above, blended to the palest green, and seemed to touch the snow-capped peaks of the great mountains, which were tinted crimson by the rays of the setting sun. As she watched, a brilliant star shone out of the green, like some great diamond whose scintillating rays flashed every hue.

Thus absorbed in the beauty of the scene as she leaned over the low battlements, she did not notice a form steal silently towards her out of the shadow.

At the sound of a footstep close beside her, she turned quickly, and stood face to face with the Count Wolf.

"We meet once more, my beauty," he said, with a sinister smile. "'Truly the Fates seem to draw us together.'"

"Nay, do not go," he continued, as the girl attempted to step past him ; "I have taken

care we shall not be disturbed. I have locked the door leading hither. See, here is the key."

"Let me pass," said the terror-stricken girl, her whole body trembling. "If thou wilt not, I will call for help."

"It would be useless; no one can hear thee. Thou didst escape me before, but thou shalt not this time. Listen, girl, to-night I leave here, and thou must go with me. My men are even now ready waiting in the courtyard. Come thou shalt, I swear. No woman yet has refused Wolf; I will even marry thee, if it is thy wish. Give me thy promise not to try to escape, and thou shalt go with me untouched. If not, I will gag thee, and carry thee by force. Dost thou hear me?" he cried, fiercely, as he came closer, with a dangerous glitter in his eyes.

"Coward! Craven! That is my answer," she cried, as with all the strength she possessed, she struck him full in the face.

"So ho, my beauty, thou meanest fight. Peste on thee," he said, his face flushed with passion, as he tried to throw his arms around her.

Dulcie stepped back on to the battlements to elude him. He sprang after her with a loud shout, as he saw her peril, and again attempted to seize her in his arms, when suddenly, with a frightful shriek, she fell backwards, and disappeared into the abyss below.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE evening on which these events happened, Zorastro and Karl were rapidly approaching Ledzburg, which they hoped to reach before night. As they rode through a rugged pass shut in by mountains, at the foot of which the river tumbled and splashed, Zorastro at last broke the silence.

"The hand of destiny seems to be guiding us to this place. Thou rememberest, Karl, I told thee of the dying woman I saw at the little roadside inn two days ago."

"Yea, the innkeeper's wife."

"But I did not tell thee that her strange confession, if true, may alter the whole course of thy life."

"My life," said Karl, with sudden interest.

"Yes, thy life. It is remarkable indeed; I cannot tell thee more now, for in a short time we may be able to test the truth."

Reaching the end of the pass, they turned

sharply to the right, and rapidly descended into the beautiful valley of the Ledz.

The Castle, perched on the rock above the town, stood silhouetted against the evening sky.

The road ran close to the river bank as they drew nearer the town, and they could see the lights beginning to twinkle in the houses as it grew darker.

Suddenly a shrill cry rang through the still air.

"Didst thou hear that?" said Karl, reining in his horse.

"Yes. It seemed to come from the direction of the river. What could it be? Hark!"

They both stopped and listened.

In a moment a loud cry again broke the silence.

"It is from the river, and sounds as if some one was in danger," said Zorastro.

They both sprang from their horses and ran across the grassy bank to the river side.

"Look! What is that?" cried Karl, pointing to a white object floating rapidly towards

them in the centre of the swiftly-flowing stream. "Someone has fallen in."

"It looks like a woman," said Zorastro; "she will be dashed against the rocks presently."

In a moment Karl had thrown off his cloak and doublet, and plunging into the water, struck out boldly for the object now rapidly drawing near, but the force of the current carried him with it.

"Have a care! Have a care!" shouted Zorastro. "Make for the rocks."

Karl's aim was to try and intercept it as it passed him. He was only an arm's length from the white object now, and made a bold dash to grasp it as it passed.

"My God! he has missed," cried Zorastro from the bank.

Nothing daunted, Karl bravely struck out with all his strength down the stream, where it was narrower, and two or three ugly black rocks appeared above the surface. Nearer and nearer he drew, till at last the body was within his grasp, and with one supreme effort he seized it.

It was a woman's form.

Passing one arm around her, he tried to head for the bank, but his strength was exhausted, and the river carried them swiftly to destruction.

"The rocks," shouted Zorastro with all his might, as he followed their rapidly drifting forms down the bank.

Karl saw that his only chance was to try and grasp one of the rocks as they were carried along. Gathering all his remaining strength, as they approached one, he threw his disengaged arm around it and held fast.

"Hold on, help is coming," cried Zorastro, as he tore off a stout, thick branch from a tree.

"Quick," gasped Karl. "I can't hold out much longer," as he watched Zorastro, in what seemed an eternity of time, wading out into the stream with the huge branch in his hands. Standing up to his waist in the water, Zorastro took a firm grasp of the branch and pushed it out towards the rock, which it just reached.

"Now grasp it," he shouted, "and hold fast."

Karl slowly loosed the rock, and getting a

good grip with one hand of the branch, and holding tightly to the woman with the other, they were both gradually dragged by Zorastro to the bank.

“Bravo!” cried Zorastro, as he helped Karl to lay his burden gently on the bank.

“Great heavens above! Look, look! Oh, God! am I dreaming? It is Dulcie!” cried Karl, as he caught a glimpse of her face, which had been hidden by her draggled hair.

“Dulcie!” echoed Zorastro, in astonishment.

“Quick, oh quick!” cried Karl. “It is she! Oh, tell me, is she alive?” as he kissed the pale face of the girl passionately.

Zorastro put his hand over the region of her heart.

“She lives,” he said.

“Thank God.”

“Now help me to turn her on her face,” said Zorastro. “So. That is right. Bring me thy dry cloak. We must get her to the town as quickly as possible.”

Taking a phial from his doublet, he poured a little of the contents between the girl’s lips, then rolled the cloak around her body.

“Now help me to place her across my horse, while do thou ride on as quickly as thou canst to Ledzburg. Find out the White Horse Inn, close to the quay, see they have a good fire and a warm bed ready, and I will follow as speedily as I can. She will recover, please God, and all may yet be well. Thou may'st trust me.”

Karl needed no second bidding, but jumped on his horse and set off at full gallop for the town.

In a short time he was clattering down the main street, and crossing the bridge which spanned the river, on the left bank he found the inn near the quay without much difficulty.

Handing his steaming horse to a man, he sought out the landlord—a rotund, little fellow, with a good-tempered face—and bade him get a room ready and a good fire without delay.

Excited and anxious, he felt he could not wait there, so he set off once more on foot to meet them. Close to the town he found Zorastro riding slowly, bearing the still unconscious girl in his arms.

Thus they at length arrived at the inn. Bidding Karl seek out the landlady and send her to him, Zorastro bore Dulcie to the room which had been prepared. Soon she began to show signs of returning consciousness, and leaving her to the care of the good dame, Zorastro sought Karl, whom he found drying his clothes by a roaring fire of pine logs.

"She will soon be all right again, lad," he said cheerily, "and will, I hope, be none the worse for the wetting, although she is severely bruised and cut."

"But how came she in the river?" asked Karl.

"That we cannot tell until she recovers her senses, when I trust we shall be able to clear up the mystery. I said the hand of destiny was guiding us."

"Thank heaven it did. In a few moments we should have been too late. But here comes the landlady," as a buxom dame, girt with a large white apron, entered.

"Well, dame, how is she?" asked Zorastro.

"She is asking where she is, master, and

how she got here, so I thought you had better tell her."

"Good. Give me that cup of mulled wine, Karl, and remain here till I call."

A few minutes passed, which seemed like hours, before Karl heard his name called.

He entered the room quietly.

Dulcie was lying on a low bed, which had been drawn up to the fire. Her head, which rested on a pillow over which her fair hair strayed, was drawn and pallid, and her wide open eyes were looking round in wonderment. Zorastro held up a warning finger, while Karl stole noiselessly to the bedside.

"Dulcie," he cried softly, as he knelt by her side.

Slowly she turned her eyes towards him, then without a word stretched out her arms and folded them round him.

"I thought that would be the best remedy; I will give ye five minutes," said Zorastro, chuckling, as he left the room.

CHAPTER XXIV

A GOOD night's rest worked wonders, and the morning found Dulcie almost well and able to sit up, while she recounted her story to eager listeners.

She told them of the events of the previous day, and how the Count had surprised her in the gallery. When he had attempted to seize her, she had stepped backwards, forgetting she was so near the edge of the terrible abyss that yawned beneath.

It was a miracle she had not been dashed to pieces, but her fall had been broken by one of the stout bushes that grew on the side of the Castle rock. To this she clung till she must have become insensible, for she remembered nothing more till she found herself in the river. The shock must have momentarily restored consciousness, for it was then she uttered the loud cries for help, and she remembered no more till she opened her eyes in the room of the inn.

Then she told them all that had happened since they had left Nuremberg—of her being taken to the Rathhaus, of the torture-chamber, and how the Duchess had rescued and befriended her.

Karl's face darkened with rage as he heard the perils she had gone through, and he vowed if he ever met Count Wolf, he should pay for it with his life.

"And the Duchess," said Zorastro. "She will be alarmed at thine absence?"

"Yes," said Dulcie, "I must return to the Castle and tell her."

"Nay; not without us," said Karl. "Thou shalt not go back alone."

"Stay," said Zorastro. "I have a plan. I wish to have an audience with the Duchess, and will bear her news of thy safety. Thou shalt remain here, child, and I will set out at once."

To this they all agreed; and before long Zorastro took his way towards the Castle.

As he slowly climbed the hilly path that led to the main gateway, he noticed there was a considerable stir and excitement about. On arriving at the postern, he asked the

janitor to inquire if he might have an audience with the Duchess.

"It is impossible, master," replied the man. "Hast thou not heard the news?"

"What news?" asked Zorastro.

"Why, the Duke has been stricken suddenly last night, and they say he is nigh to death. Physicians have been sent for from the city, and the Duchess will not leave him."

"Let the Duchess be informed at once that Zorastro waits her pleasure."

"I tell you the Duchess will receive no one."

"Go, fellow," said Zorastro sternly, "carry my message instantly, or thou wilt have cause to regret it."

Seeing he was resolute, the man crossed the courtyard and gave the message to a page. After some delay the boy returned and bade Zorastro follow him.

A hush prevailed inside the Castle, as the page led Zorastro across the great hall, then up a broad staircase. At the top stood the Duchess, her face drawn and pale with anxiety and grief. Zorastro bowed low.

"I have heard of thy fame, sir physician,"

she said. "Thou comest in the hour of need, for the Duke is grievous sick."

"I did not know of this when I craved an interview. My business was of another nature; but that can wait. If I can be of any use, my services are at thy disposal. Command me."

"I thank thee. Come, follow me, and I will take thee to him without delay," the Duchess replied.

The apartment where the Duke lay was close at hand. It was large and gloomy, the walls being hung with sombre tapestries. On a bed of immense size, over which hung a huge canopy, lay the man who but yesterday appeared in the full vigour of health, but now inert and helpless.

Two grey-bearded physicians stood by the bedside watching. The Duchess motioned them to her and introduced Zorastro. After acknowledging their salutations, he at once proceeded to examine the sick man, and found that he had lost the power of speech and the use of his limbs. His face was drawn and rigid, and his eyes stared vacantly into space.

"Thou seest it is hopeless," said one of the physicians to Zorastro, as he concluded his examination.

"What remedies hast thou applied?" asked Zorastro, whose face was inscrutable.

"We have done everything that could be done," said the other. "We have blooded him thrice, also scarified his limbs, applied pigeons, split alive, to his feet and stomach, but all without avail."

"Thou might'st as lief have clapped them to the bedpost," said Zorastro.

Taking from his doublet a case he always carried with him, he selected a small phial, and allowing a few drops of the contents to fall into a cup, he added water to it. Then slightly opening the lips of the sick man, he allowed the liquid to trickle into his mouth. When the whole of the contents of the cup had been swallowed, he watched the result. After a while the Duke's features began to relax, his eyelids dropped, and his breathing grew more regular.

Zorastro set down the cup, and beckoning the Duchess aside, said :

"The Duke's condition is serious, without

a doubt ; but I believe his life may yet be saved. If thou hast faith in me, and will place him under my care (but it must be under mine alone, I cannot suffer interference from others,) I will remain and do what I can."

The Duchess seized his hand.

"I have faith in thee. Thou hast cheered my heart. Remain, and do thy best."

Signing to the other physicians to approach, she said :

"Ye have my thanks for doing what ye could. As it has been of no avail, I shall no longer require thy services."

With flashing eyes and angry looks at Zorastro, the indignant practitioners bowed to the Duchess, and at once retired without a word.

"Send me a trusty woman who can watch and carry out my orders," said Zorastro to the Duchess. "Then, with thy permission, I would speak with thee alone."

"I will bring thee such an one," she replied, as she left the room.

Zorastro looked at his patient intently. "There is a chance to keep the flicker of

life alive, and that is all," he muttered to himself, as he turned to prepare another draught of the remedy.

Presently the Duchess returned, bringing with her a capable middle-aged dame, to whom Zorastro gave explicit directions what to do.

The Duchess signed to Zorastro to follow, as she led the way to a smaller apartment, and closed the door.

"Now tell me, I pray thee, is there any hope?" she exclaimed anxiously.

"As I have said, thy husband's condition is a grave one," replied Zorastro. "The lamp of life burns low, but it is not yet extinguished. While it burns, we may hope. I am a plain man, and I will tell thee plainly. He may live for some years, but I fear he will never recover the use of his limbs, or speak again. He has had a shock. Tell me how it happened?"

"I can only tell thee what I know," said the Duchess, as she tried to stem the tears that flowed down her cheeks. "Last night he had an interview with his son, the Count Wolf. I'm afraid it was an angry

one, for the Count left the Castle immediately. Shortly afterwards a cry was heard from the Duke's room, and on his men entering, he was found as thou didst see him. He was carried to his chamber and since then has neither spoken nor moved."

"Other strange things seemed to have happened at the Castle last night. Thou hadst a maid, I think, attached to thy service, one Dulcie Ebner."

"Yes, dost thou know ought of her?" said the Duchess anxiously. "She has been missing since yesterday, and in my trouble I had almost forgotten her."

"She was found in the river last night."

"Drowned?"

"Nearly so. She was rescued, and is now safe. Thou shalt hear her story from her own lips."

"Thank heaven she is safe; I love her as mine own child," said the Duchess warmly.

"Forgive me if I open an old wound," continued Zorastro; "but I believe thou hadst once a child of thine own."

"I had, by my first marriage. He was a bright, healthy boy, and was the joy of my

heart," replied the Duchess, the tears again welling into her eyes.

"And he died?" asked Zorastro.

"Alas, we mourned him as dead," was the reply, in a low voice; "but perhaps thou hast heard the story?"

"I would like to hear it from thine own lips."

"It is now over twenty-three years ago," began the Duchess, "and my boy was just two years old. We called him Karl, and with his fair curls and blue eyes he was a treasure to us indeed. His nurse was a woman who had lived on the estate for many years, and we trusted her with all confidence. One day she took the child out as was her wont. When noon came, as they did not return, I grew anxious, and despatched messengers to find them. As the hours went by my anxiety increased, and when sunset came and no tidings had come I grew frantic. At night the messengers returned, they had been unable to find nurse or child. I was beside myself with grief, and did not rest till the Baron started with a band of armed men to search the country round. I

was now certain some harm had befallen them. The suspense was terrible. At length, as I watched from the highest turret of the Castle, I saw the Baron and his men returning. I could tell by their looks they had been unsuccessful. Tears rolled down their cheeks as he told me they had searched every hamlet and village for miles, without avail. They could not find a trace of the child or the woman. It was as if the earth had opened and swallowed them up. Weeks and months went by, but nothing could be learnt, although every road of the country side was scoured, and we began to mourn our boy as dead. Within twelve months my husband died. It broke his heart."

"Had the child anything about his person by means of which he could have been known?" asked Zorastro quietly.

"The only thing was a talisman of green jasper I hung about his neck soon after he was born. It was said to protect the wearer from danger and peril. Alas, it did not prove it."

"Who knows. It may have done its work after all. Hope and faith are jewels of

priceless value ; they are worth keeping," said Zorastro, as he rose, scarce able to conceal his joy. "I must now go to my inn for some remedies I need ; but I will return speedily, and bring Dulcie with me."

CHAPTER XXV

ZORASTRO lost no time in getting back to the inn, and somewhat disconcerted the long-parted lovers, who were still busy exchanging confidences. Dulcie had been relating the story of the monk, and how he had given her the Testament, which Karl had since restored to her.

“Why, what is the matter?” they both cried in a breath, as Zorastro burst into the room.

“I have great news for ye both. Dulcie, wilt thou get ready to accompany us to the Castle at once, while I speak a word with Karl?”

When they were alone, Zorastro, placing his hand on Karl's shoulder, said :

“My lad, prepare thyself for a great surprise. Thou rememberest what I told thee last night?”

“Yea, about the woman’s confession at the inn.”

“Well, the mystery of thy birth is solved at last. Karl, I have come to take thee to thy mother.”

Karl looked at Zorastro in amazement as he exclaimed :

“My mother !”

“Yes, thy mother awaits thee at the Castle yonder. I can explain in a few words ; the rest she herself will tell thee presently. Know, then, that thou art the son and heir of the Baron of Ledzburg, and thy mother is the present Duchess of Bavaria. When a child thou wast stolen by thy nurse, in revenge for a supposed wrong she thought she had suffered at the hands of thy father. At first she hid thee, then being reduced to want, she abandoned thee on the river near Nuremberg, whither she had wandered. She lived for some years in that city with some Bohemian woman and watched thee grow up. Then she became the wife of the inn-keeper near Ratisbon, and this was the confession she made to me as she lay dying, little thinking thou wast so near. This morning I heard

the story from thy mother's own lips. I have not told her yet that her son still lives, and is so near at hand."

"But how canst thou prove to her I am her child?" asked Karl, overwhelmed with the news and still incredulous.

"By the talisman she herself placed round thy neck when a babe, and which thou dost still wear. Thou must lend it to me for a while," replied Zorastro.

Karl took the talisman from his neck and handed it to him as one in a dream.

"Oh, Karl, this is indeed wonderful," cried Dulcie, as she came in and heard the end of the story.

"It will make no difference in my love for thee, dear heart," said Karl, as he drew her to him tenderly.

"Come, thou wilt have ample time for embracing in future," said Zorastro, with a twinkle in his eye; "but I have not told thee all yet. Last night the Duke was stricken with a sudden sickness after a stormy interview with his son, the Count, who at once left the Castle."

"And so the coward has fled," said Karl.

“Yes, and is not likely to return,” replied Zorastro. “He doubtless thinks Dulcie is dead. Stay but a moment while I get some remedies I require, and we will set out at once.”

Before long the trio were climbing the hill to the Castle. Crossing the courtyard they were met at the main entrance by the senechal, who had orders to conduct them direct to the apartments of the Duchess.

Bidding Karl wait in an ante-chamber, Zorastro led Dulcie into the room where the Duchess awaited them.

“Dulcie!” she cried, rising with outstretched arms as the girl entered. “Thank Heaven thou art safe.”

She kissed her and drew her to a chair by her side.

“I feared some evil had befallen thee, child. Tell me all, and how it happened.”

Dulcie repeated her story over again.

“Thou hadst indeed a narrow escape from a terrible death, and thou sayest the brave man who so gallantly saved thee was he whom thou hast looked for so long?”

"Yes," said Dulcie smiling, "he has returned at last."

"And now, Duchess, I have someone else to restore to thee, before I seek the Duke's chamber. Didst thou ever see this before?" said Zorastro, as he placed the jasper talisman in her hand.

The Duchess looked at it curiously, then started violently as she exclaimed in tremulous tones :

"Where didst thou find this? It is the talisman my child always wore."

"Be calm a moment and listen, I pray thee, for I too have a story to relate. About twenty years ago when travelling on my way to Nuremberg, I found a child floating on the river in a basket. This talisman hung about his neck. In his child-like prattle he told me his name was Karl. I took him with me to the city, where I left him with some kind and good-hearted people, whom I charged to take care of him while I pursued my wanderings. They did all they could to trace his parents without avail, and so they reared the lad as their own, with their grandchild Dulcie."

“My boy alive? Oh my God!” cried the Duchess, excitedly, as she rose from her seat.

“Listen one moment more. A few days ago, I heard from the lips of a dying woman a strange confession, that she had once wickedly stolen a child she nursed from the Baroness of Ledzburg. How she hid it for some time, then she wandered through the country, and when she could no longer support it she abandoned it in a basket on the river. This morning thy lips supplied the connecting link in the chain, which this talisman rivets together. For the rest,” concluded Zorastro, as he drew back the curtain of the ante-chamber and beckoned Karl to enter, “thy son is here and can speak for himself.”

For a moment mother and son looked into each others eyes, and then with a loud cry : “My son, my son!” the Duchess fell forward into Karl’s arms and swooned away.

CHAPTER XXVI

Joy and sorrow walked side by side in the Castle of Ledzburg.

The delight of the Duchess at having her son once more restored to her, whom she had so long regarded as dead, was dimmed by the grievous sickness of her husband, who, despite the skill of Zorastro, grew gradually weaker.

The Duchess would hardly allow Karl out of her sight, and in response to her wish Zorastro also had taken up his quarters at the Castle. The end came suddenly at last. One night the Duke lost consciousness altogether. The Duchess and Dulcie watched anxiously at the bedside, while Zorastro administered his strongest remedies without avail. Before morning the spirit had fled without a word, and the good Duke of Bavaria lay dead.

He was buried in the Cathedral with great

pomp and ceremony, and many princes and nobles followed him to his last resting-place.

The bereaved Duchess now turned for consolation to her son, to whom she clung. Karl did what he could to assuage her sorrow, and as time went on the gloom passed, for with Dulcie by his side the days grew full of happiness.

Steps were at once taken to prove his heirship to the barony of Ledzburg, and his claim properly attested was presented, and at length granted.

Then a day was appointed on which Karl as the Lord of Ledzburg, was to receive the allegiance and congratulations of the magistrates and councillors of the town.

Preparations were made to hold the reception in the great hall of the Castle, and the occasion was to be celebrated with much rejoicing and festivity.

The night previous, Karl drew Dulcie into one of the galleries, and together they stood beneath the starlit sky and looked down on the river below.

"Dulcie," said Karl softly, as he drew her closer to him, "dost thou remember the

evening when we sat together in the church of St. Lawrence, and thou didst promise thou wouldst wait for me? Strange things have happened since."

"Yes, Karl, it seems a long long time ago. Little didst thou dream then that thou wouldst one day be a great lord. I almost dread tomorrow, as if it would make a gulf between us, for thou knowest I am but a poor maid still."

"Dear heart, surely thou dost but jest? Look in mine eyes," said Karl tenderly, as he raised her face to his. "I love thee more than I ever did before, and the love of your true heart is a priceless jewel no riches could buy. I have come to claim thy promise. We have nought to wait for now. Nothing on earth shall part us again. Come."

Their eyes met, and with a little cry of content Dulcie nestled into his arms.

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The morning of the reception dawned auspiciously, and the sun shone brightly on the old grey town. The streets were alive betimes with citizens in holiday garb, and

the church bells rang merrily, as they thronged the riverside to watch the magistrates and councillors form in procession to march to the Castle.

The market-place was a scene of bustle and activity, for the men were busy putting up long tables and decking the fronts of the houses with coloured cloths and evergreens. The centre was kept clear, for here two fat oxen and twenty sheep were already being roasted whole, while wine to drink the young baron's health was to be had for the asking.

At noon, as the bell of the cathedral tolled out, Karl, richly dressed in a doublet and jerkin of blue velvet and silk, slashed with gold, took his place on a raised dais in the great hall of the Castle, which presented a brilliant scene of colour. On his right hand sat the Duchess and Dulcie, while on his left stood Zorastro, proud and erect, once more arrayed in his purple robe, with his long sword hanging by his side.

Hither came those who wished to pay their respects and offer congratulations to their new lord; then the ceremony over, the bells again rang out as the company

retired and took their way back to the city to commence the festivities.

Towards evening, there was dancing in the market-places, and merry-making of all kinds for the youths and maidens, and feasting for the elders, until at last the great day ended.

That night, Karl told his mother the story of his love and his desire to wed Dulcie as soon as could be. The Duchess, who already looked on Dulcie as a daughter, betrayed little surprise, and acquiesced in Karl's desire. Her only wish was for the happiness of her son and that he should not be parted from her. And so it was arranged the marriage should be celebrated at the Castle shortly.

CHAPTER XXVII

AFTER the festivities were all over, Zorastro betook himself to his room at the "White Horse" once more, resolved, for a time at least, to remain at Ledzburg, so he might complete several manuscripts on which he had long been engaged.

Locked in his room, the window of which looked over the fast-flowing river and the mighty Alps beyond, each day found him more and more engrossed in his work. Night after night he bent o'er his table, writing by the light of a little lamp which stood at his elbow, or pacing the floor, lost in deep thought. Sleep he forgot, and food he scarce touched, although it was brought and laid outside his door by the good dame of the inn. When weariness came over him, he would take a phial from a small leather case that lay on a shelf by the bedside, and moisten his lips with a few drops of its con-

tents, then again ply his pen with renewed vigour.

“Was not the Elixir, on which he had spent so many years of labour, sufficient to feed the flame of life?” he asked himself. “If not, then his work had been in vain.”

“But,” a voice seemed to whisper within, “the Elixir has failed.”

“Aye, failed—and why?”

Because the faith was wanting. He had faith, and with it all was possible.

At length, one evening when the sun was beginning to sink behind the Castle rock, his pen fell from his fingers. His powerful frame shook as with a palsy. A band of iron seemed pressing on his heart. He lay back in his chair in agonising pain and gasped for breath.

What could it be?

His numbed and weary brain seemed scarce able to respond to his thought.

“’Tis but more faith I want. The Elixir cannot fail,” he murmured between his chattering teeth. “Others had no faith, but mine will conquer.”

“You want help,” an inward voice seemed to cry.

"Help," he muttered derisively, as he tried to rise from his chair—human help which he, the Master, had so long despised.

A smile half-played o'er his drawn features as he pictured in his mind the old dame feeding him with broth from a spoon, like some pining child. He, Zorastro—the Monarch of his art.

"No," he cried aloud, as with a supreme effort he rose to his feet and staggered across the room. "Nature rebels, but I know her ways. This is but a passing weakness."

"The Elixir! the Elixir!" he exclaimed, as he grasped his precious phial and placed it to his trembling lips. "Courage, man. More faith is all thou need'st."

"I will rest," he murmured wearily, as he threw himself across the bed.

He lay with half-closed eyes, and looked out upon the mountain tops, now crimsoned with the glorious radiance of the setting sun.

"Nature is great," he whispered softly. "But Faith is greater."

And then the sunlight dimmed, leaving the room in gloom.

CHAPTER XXVIII

KARL had noticed that a curious change had come over Zorastro since the Duke's death, which he had taken much to heart and seemed to attribute to the failure of the remedies in which he trusted ; and, despite the efforts of his old friends, who sought to drive the cloud away, he became morose and gloomy.

Strange stories and gossip began to spread through the town of his doings. For several days no one had seen him, and it was currently reported he was in league with the devil. Weird forms were said to have been seen, after dark, flitting across his room, in the window of which a light burned night and day.

At length, the rumours reached the Castle, and Karl decided that he would insist on seeing him, and try and persuade

him to return to the Castle once more. So taking Dulcie with him, one morning they made their way to the inn.

The landlord received them with great deference, and, taking Karl on one side, told him he was greatly troubled concerning Zorastro, who had not emerged from his room, the door of which had been locked for over a week's time.

Bidding Dulcie remain below, Karl ascended the staircase and knocked at the door. There was no reply.

"Open, Zorastro," he shouted. "It is I—Karl."

Still there was no answer, and not a sound was heard from within.

Calling the landlord, and after consulting with him, they resolved to force the door, and, placing their shoulders against it, in a moment it fell inwards with a loud crash.

Karl sprang forward into the room, and uttered a great cry of dismay as a strange sight met his eyes.

In the corner, stretched across a low pallet, lay the dead form of Zorastro.

He was clad in his purple robe, and his glassy eyes stared vacantly into space.

His right hand still grasped a phial which contained his Elixir of Life!

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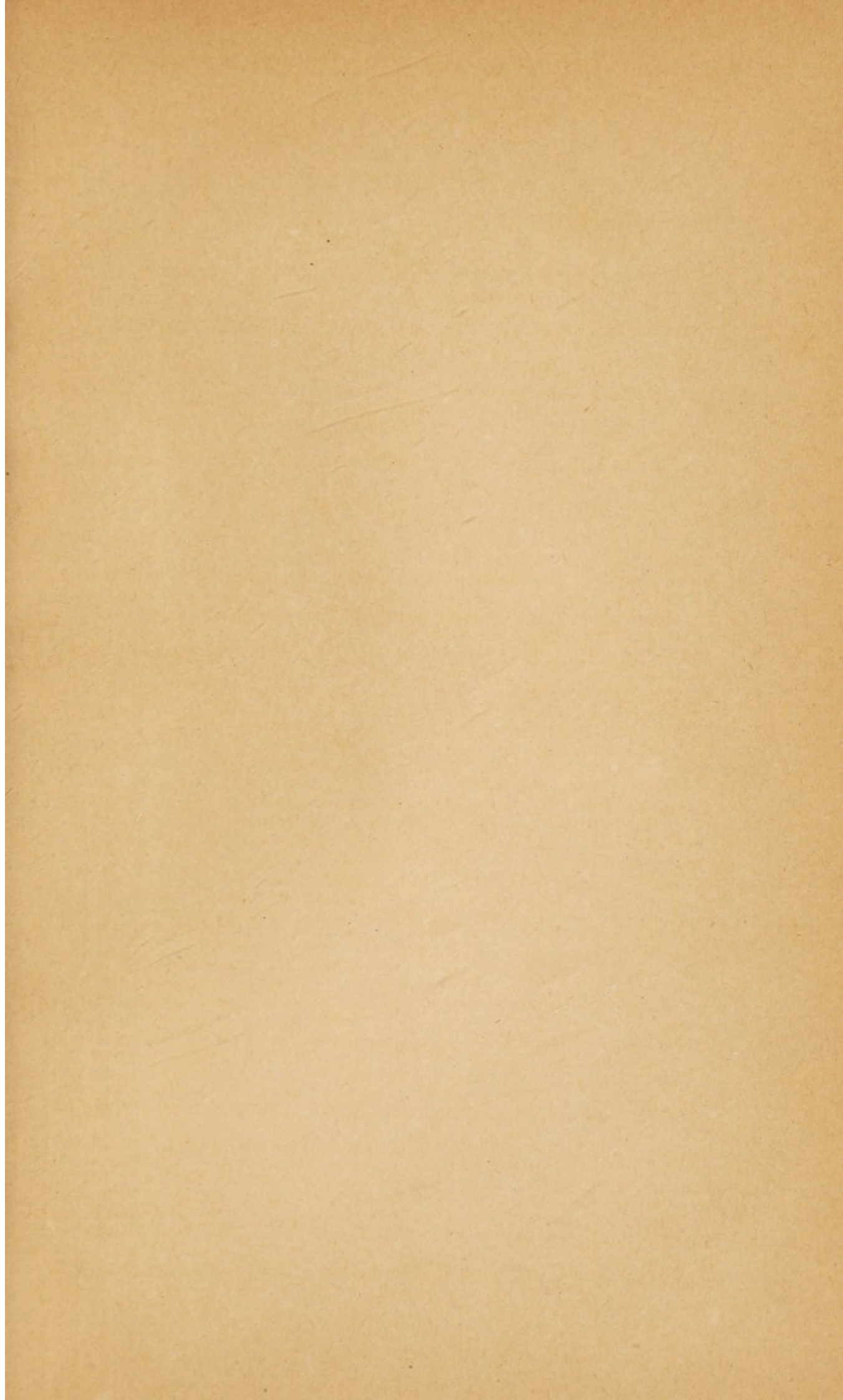
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