

Walter Scott

**Anne of Geierstein: or, The
Maiden of the Mist. Volume
1 of 2**



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Содержание

CHAPTER I	23
CHAPTER II	43
CHAPTER III	65
CHAPTER IV	92
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	100

Sir Walter Scott
Anne of Geierstein;
Or, The Maiden of the
Mist. Volume 1 (of 2)

INTRODUCTION

TO

ANNE OF GEIERSTEIN

This novel was written at a time when circumstances did not place within my reach the stores of a library tolerably rich in historical works, and especially the memoirs of the Middle Ages, amidst which I had been accustomed to pursue the composition of my fictitious narratives. In other words, it was chiefly the work of leisure hours in Edinburgh, not of quiet mornings in the country. In consequence of trusting to a memory, strongly tenacious certainly, but not less capricious in its efforts, I have to confess on this occasion more violations of accuracy in historical

details, than can perhaps be alleged against others of my novels. In truth, often as I have been complimented on the strength of my memory, I have through life been entitled to adopt old Beattie of Meikledale's answer to his parish minister when eulogising him with respect to the same faculty. "No, doctor," said the honest border-laird, "I have no command of my memory; it only retains what happens to hit my fancy, and like enough, sir, if you were to preach to me for a couple of hours on end, I might be unable at the close of the discourse to remember one word of it." Perhaps there are few men whose memory serves them with equal fidelity as to many different classes of subjects; but I am sorry to say, that while mine has rarely failed me as to any snatch of verse or trait of character that had once interested my fancy, it has generally been a frail support, not only as to names, and dates, and other minute technicalities of history, but as to many more important things.

I hope this apology will suffice for one mistake which has been pointed out to me by the descendant of one of the persons introduced in this story, and who complains with reason that I have made a peasant deputy of the ancestor of a distinguished and noble family, none of whom ever declined from the high rank to which, as far as my pen trenched on it, I now beg leave to restore them. The name of the person who figures as deputy of Soleure in these pages, was always, it seems, as it is now, that of a patrician house. I am reminded by the same correspondent of another slip, probably of less consequence. The Emperor of

the days my novel refers to, though the representative of that Leopold who fell in the great battle of Sempach, never set up any pretensions against the liberties of the gallant Swiss, but, on the contrary, treated with uniform prudence and forbearance such of that nation as had established their independence, and with wise, as well as generous kindness, others who still continued to acknowledge fealty to the imperial crown. Errors of this sort, however trivial, ought never, in my opinion, to be pointed out to an author, without meeting with a candid and respectful acknowledgment.

With regard to a general subject of great curiosity and interest, in the eyes at least of all antiquarian students, upon which I have touched at some length in this narrative, I mean the *Vehmic* tribunals of Westphalia, a name so awful in men's ears during many centuries, and which, through the genius of Goethe, has again been revived in public fancy with a full share of its ancient terrors, I am bound to state my opinion that a wholly new and most important light has been thrown upon this matter since Anne of Geierstein first appeared, by the elaborate researches of my ingenious friend, Mr. Francis Palgrave, whose proof-sheets, containing the passages I allude to, have been kindly forwarded to me, and whose complete work will be before the public ere this Introduction can pass through the press.

"In Germany," says this very learned writer, "there existed a singular jurisdiction, which claimed a *direct descent from the Pagan policy and mystic ritual of the earliest Teutons.*

"We learn from the Historians of Saxony, that the 'Frey Feld gericht,' or Free Field Court of Corbey, was, in Pagan times, under the supremacy of the Priests of the Eresburgh, the Temple which contained the Irminsule, or pillar of Irmin. After the conversion of the people, the possessions of the temple were conferred by Louis the Pious upon the Abbey which arose upon its site. The court was composed of sixteen persons, who held their offices for life. The senior member presided as the Gerefa or Graff; the junior performed the humbler duties of 'Frohner,' or summoner; the remaining fourteen acted as the Echevins, and by them all judgments were pronounced or declared. When any one of these died, a new member was elected by the Priests, from amongst the twenty-two septs or families inhabiting the Gau or district, and who included all the hereditary occupants of the soil. Afterwards, the selection was made by the Monks, but always with the assent of the Graff and of the 'Frohner.'

"The seat of judgment, the King's seat, or 'Königs-stuhl,' was always established on the greensward; and we collect from the context, that the tribunal was also raised or appointed in the common fields of the Gau, for the purpose of deciding disputes relating to the land within its precinct. Such a 'King's seat' was a plot sixteen feet in length, and sixteen feet in breadth; and when the ground was first consecrated, the Frohner dug a grave in the centre, into which each of the Free Echevins threw a handful of ashes, a coal, and a tile. If any doubt arose whether a place of judgment had been duly hallowed, the Judges sought for the

tokens. If they were not found, then all the judgments which had been given became null and void. It was also of the very essence of the Court, that it should be held beneath the sky, and by the light of the sun. All the ancient Teutonic judicial assemblies were held in the open air; but some relics of solar worship may perhaps be traced in the usage and in the language of this tribunal. The forms adopted in the Free Field Court also betray a singular affinity to the doctrines of the British Bards respecting their Gorseddau, or Conventions, which were 'always held in the open air, in the eye of the light, and in face of the sun.'¹

"When a criminal was to be judged, or a cause to be decided, the Graff and the Free Echevins assembled around the 'Königsstuhl;' and the 'Frohner,' having proclaimed silence, opened the proceedings by reciting the following rhymes:

"Sir Graff, with permission,
I beg you to say,
According to law, and without delay,
If I, your Knave,
Who judgment crave,
With your good grace,
Upon the King's seat this seat may place.

"To this address the Graff replied:

¹ Owen Pugh's *Elegies of Lewarch Hen*, Pref., p. 46. The place of these meetings was set apart by forming a circle of stones round the *Maen Gorsedd*, or Stone of the Gorsedd.

"While the sun shines with even light
Upon Masters and Knaves, I shall declare
The law of might, according to right.
Place the King's seat true and square,
Let even measure, for justice' sake,
Be given in sight of God and man,
That the plaintiff his complaint may make,
And the defendant answer, – if he can.

"In conformity to this permission, the 'Frohner' placed the seat of judgment in the middle of the plot, and then he spake for the second time:

"Sir Graff, Master brave,
I remind you of your honour, here,
And moreover that I am your Knaves;
Tell me, therefore, for law sincere,
If these mete-wands are even and sure,
Fit for the rich and fit for the poor,
Both to measure land and condition;
Tell me as you would eschew perdition.

"And so speaking, he laid the mete-wand on the ground. The Graff then began to try the measure, by placing his right foot against the wand, and he was followed by the other Free Echevins in rank and order, according to seniority. The length of the mete-wand being thus proved, the Frohner spake for the third time:

"Sir Graff, I ask by permission,
If I with your mete-wand may mete
Openly, and without displeasure,
Here the king's free judgment seat.

"And the Graff replied:

"I permit right,
And I forbid wrong,
Under the pains and penalties
That to the old known laws belong.

"Now was the time of measuring the mystic plot; it was measured by the mete-wand along and athwart, and when the dimensions were found to be true, the Graff placed himself in the seat of judgment, and gave the charge to the assembled Free Echevins, warning them to pronounce judgment, according to right and justice.

"On this day, with common consent,
And under the clear firmament,
A free field court is established here,
In the open eye of day;
Enter soberly, ye who may.
The seat in its place is pight,
The mete-wand is found to be right;
Declare your judgments without delay:

And let the doom be truly given,
Whilst yet the Sun shines bright in heaven.

"Judgment was given by the Free Echevins according to plurality of voices."

After observing that the author of *Anne of Geierstein* had, by what he calls a "very excusable poetical licence," transferred something of these judicial rhymes from the Free Field Court of the Abbey of Corbey, to the Free Vehmic Tribunals of Westphalia, Mr. Palgrave proceeds to correct many vulgar errors, in which the novel he remarks on no doubt had shared, with respect to the actual constitution of those last-named courts. "The protocols of their proceedings," he says, "do not altogether realise the popular idea of their terrors and tyranny." It may be allowed to me to question whether the mere protocols of such tribunals are quite enough to annul all the import of tradition respecting them; but in the following details there is no doubt much that will instruct the antiquary, as well as amuse the popular reader.

"The Court," says Mr. Palgrave, "was held with known and notorious publicity beneath the 'eye of light;' and the sentences, though speedy and severe, were founded upon a regular system of established jurisprudence, not so strange, even to England, as it may at first sight appear.

"Westphalia, according to its ancient constitution, was divided into districts called 'Freygraffschafften,' each of which usually

contained one, and sometimes many, Vehmic tribunals, whose boundaries were accurately defined. The right of the 'Stuhlherr,' or Lord, was of a feudal nature, and could be transferred by the ordinary modes of alienation; and if the Lord did not choose to act in his own person, he nominated a 'Freigraf' to execute the office in his stead. The Court itself was composed of 'Freyschöppfen,' Scabini, or Echevins, nominated by the Graff, and who were divided into two classes: the ordinary, and the 'Wissenden' or 'Witan,' who were admitted under a strict and singular bond of secrecy.

"The initiation of these, the participators in all the mysteries of the tribunal, could only take place upon the 'red earth,' or within the limits of the ancient Duchy of Westphalia. Bareheaded and ungirt, the candidate is conducted before the dread tribunal. He is interrogated as to his qualifications, or rather as to the absence of any disqualification. He must be free born, a Teuton, and clear of any accusation cognisable by the tribunal of which he is to become a member. – If the answers are satisfactory, he then takes the oath, swearing by the Holy Law, that he will conceal the secrets of the Holy Vehme from wife and child – from father and mother – from sister and brother – from fire and water – from every creature upon which the sun shines, or upon which the rain falls – from every being between earth and heaven.

"Another clause relates to his active duties. He further swears, that he will 'say forth' to the tribunal all crimes or offences which fall beneath the secret ban of the Emperor, which he

knows to be true, or which he has heard from trustworthy report; and that he will not forbear to do so, for love nor for loathing, for gold nor for silver nor precious stones. – This oath being imposed upon him, the new Freischopff was then intrusted with the secrets of the Vehmic tribunal. He received the password, by which he was to know his fellows, and the grip or sign by which they recognised each other in silence; and he was warned of the terrible punishment awaiting the perjured brother. – If he discloses the secrets of the Court, he is to expect that he will be suddenly seized by the ministers of vengeance. His eyes are bound, he is cast down on the soil, his tongue is torn out through the back of his neck – and he is then to be hanged seven times higher than any other criminal. And whether restrained by the fear of punishment, or by the stronger ties of mystery, no instance was ever known of any violation of the secrets of the tribunal.

"Thus connected by an invisible bond, the members of the 'Holy Vehme' became extremely numerous. In the fourteenth century, the league contained upwards of one hundred thousand members. Persons of every rank sought to be associated to this powerful community, and to participate in the immunities which the brethren possessed. Princes were eager to allow their ministers to become the members of this mysterious and holy alliance; and the cities of the Empire were equally anxious to enrol their magistrates in the Vehmic union.

"The supreme government of the Vehmic tribunals was vested in the great or general Chapter, composed of the Freegraves and

all the other initiated members, high and low. Over this assembly the Emperor might preside in person, but more usually by his deputy, the Stadtholder of the ancient Duchy of Westphalia; an office which, after the fall of Henry the Lion, Duke of Brunswick, was annexed to the Archbishopric of Cologne.

"Before the general Chapter, all the members were liable to account for their acts. And it appears that the 'Freegraves' reported the proceedings which had taken place within their jurisdictions in the course of the year. Unworthy members were expelled, or sustained a severer punishment. Statutes, or Reformations, as they were called, were here enacted for the regulation of the Courts, and the amendment of any abuses; and new and unforeseen cases, for which the existing laws did not provide a remedy, received their determination in the Vehmic Parliament.

"As the Echevins were of two classes, uninitiated and initiated, so the Vehmic Courts had also a twofold character; the 'Offenbare Ding' was an Open Court or Folkmoot; but the 'Heimliche Acht' was the far-famed Secret Tribunal.

"The first was held three times in each year. According to the ancient Teutonic usage, it usually assembled on Tuesday, anciently called 'Dingstag,' or court-day, as well as 'Dienstag,' or serving-day, the first open or working day after the two great weekly festivals of Sun-day and Moon-day. Here all the householders of the district, whether free or bond, attended as suitors. The 'Offenbare Ding' exercised a civil jurisdiction; and

in this Folkmoot appeared any complainant or appellant who sought to obtain the aid of the Vehmic tribunal, in those cases when it did not possess that summary jurisdiction from which it has obtained such fearful celebrity. Here also the suitors of the district made presentments or 'wroge,' as they are termed, of any offences committed within their knowledge, and which were to be punished by the Graff and Echevins.

"The criminal jurisdiction of the Vehmic Tribunal took the widest range. The 'Vehme' could punish mere slander and contumely. Any violation of the Ten Commandments was to be restrained by the Echevins. Secret crimes, not to be proved by the ordinary testimony of witnesses, such as magic, witchcraft, and poison, were particularly to be restrained by the Vehmic Judges; and they sometimes designated their jurisdiction as comprehending every offence against the honour of man or the precepts of religion. Such a definition, if definition it can be called, evidently allowed them to bring every action of which an individual might complain, within the scope of their tribunals. The forcible usurpation of land became an offence against the 'Vehme.' And if the property of an humble individual was occupied by the proud Burghers of the Hanse, the power of the Defendants might afford a reasonable excuse for the interference of the Vehmic power.

"The Echevins, as Conservators of the Ban of the Empire, were bound to make constant circuits within their districts, by night and by day. If they could apprehend a thief, a murderer,

or the perpetrator of any other heinous crime in possession of the 'mainour,' or in the very act – or if his own mouth confessed the deed, they hung him upon the next tree. But to render this execution legal, the following requisites were necessary: fresh suit, or the apprehension and execution of the offender before daybreak or nightfall; – the visible evidence of the crime; – and lastly, that three Echevins, at least, should seize the offender, testify against him, and judge of the recent deed.

"If, without any certain accuser, and without the indication of crime, an individual was strongly and vehemently suspected; or when the nature of the offence was such as that its proof could only rest upon opinion and presumption, the offender then became subject to what the German jurists term the inquisitorial proceeding; it became the duty of the Echevin to denounce the 'Leumund,' or manifest evil fame, to the secret tribunal. If the Echevins and the Freygraff were satisfied with the presentment, either from their own knowledge, or from the information of their compeer, the offender was said to be 'verfämbt;' – his life was forfeited; and wherever he was found by the brethren of the tribunal, they executed him without the slightest delay or mercy. An offender who had escaped from the Echevins was liable to the same punishment; and such also was the doom of the party who, after having been summoned pursuant to an appeal preferred in open court, made default in appearing. But one of the 'Wissenden' was in no respect liable to the summary process, or to the inquisitorial proceeding, unless he had revealed the secrets

of the Court. He was presumed to be a true man; and if accused upon vehement suspicion, or 'Leumund,' the same presumption or evil repute which was fatal to the uninitiated might be entirely rebutted by the compurgatory oath of the free Echevin. If a party, accused by appeal, did not shun investigation, he appeared in the open court, and defended himself according to the ordinary rules of law. If he absconded, or if the evidence or presumptions were against him, the accusation then came before the Judges of the Secret Court, who pronounced the doom. The accusatorial process, as it was termed, was also, in many cases, brought in the first instance before the 'Heimliche Acht.' Proceeding upon the examination of witnesses, it possessed no peculiar character, and its forms were those of the ordinary courts of justice. It was only in this manner that one of the 'Wissenden,' or Witan, could be tried; and the privilege of being exempted from the summary process, or from the effects of the 'Leumund,' appears to have been one of the reasons which induced so many of those who did not tread the 'red earth' to seek to be included in the Vehmic bond.

"There was no mystery in the assembly of the Heimliche Acht. Under the oak, or under the lime-tree, the Judges assembled, in broad daylight, and before the eye of heaven; but the tribunal derived its name from the precautions which were taken, for the purpose of preventing any disclosure of its proceedings which might enable the offender to escape the vengeance of the Vehme. Hence, the fearful oath of secrecy which bound the

Echevins. And if any stranger was found present in the Court, the unlucky intruder instantly forfeited his life as a punishment for his temerity. If the presentment or denunciation did chance to become known to the offender, the law allowed him a right of appeal. But the permission was of very little utility, it was a profitless boon, for the Vehmic Judges always laboured to conceal the judgment from the hapless criminal, who seldom was aware of his sentence until his neck was encircled by the halter.

"Charlemagne, according to the traditions of Westphalia, was the founder of the Vehmic tribunal; and it was supposed that he instituted the Court for the purpose of coercing the Saxons, ever ready to relapse into the idolatry from which they had been reclaimed, not by persuasion, but by the sword. This opinion, however, is not confirmed either by documentary evidence or by contemporary historians. And if we examine the proceedings of the Vehmic tribunal, we shall see that, in principle, it differs in no essential character from the summary jurisdiction exercised in the townships and hundreds of Anglo-Saxon England. Amongst us, the thief or the robber was equally liable to summary punishment, if apprehended by the men of the township; and the same rules disqualified them from proceeding to summary execution. An English outlaw was exactly in the situation of him who had escaped from the hands of the Echevins, or who had failed to appear before the Vehmic Court: he was condemned unheard, nor was he confronted with his accusers. The inquisitorial proceedings, as they are termed by

the German jurists, are identical with our ancient presentments. Presumptions are substituted for proofs, and general opinion holds the place of a responsible accuser. He who was untrue to all the people in the Saxon age, or liable to the malecredence of the inquest at a subsequent period, was scarcely more fortunate than he who was branded as 'Leumund' by the Vehmic law.

"In cases of open delict and of outlawry, there was substantially no difference whatever between the English and the Vehmic proceedings. But in the inquisitorial process, the delinquent was allowed, according to our older code, to run the risk of the ordeal. He was accused by or before the Hundred, or the Thanes of the Wapentake; and his own oath cleared him, if a true man; but he 'bore the iron' if unable to avail himself of the credit derived from a good and fair reputation. The same course may have been originally adopted in Westphalia; for the 'Wissend,' when accused, could exculpate himself by his compurgatory oath, being presumed to be of good fame; and it is, therefore, probable that an uninitiated offender, standing a stage lower in character and credibility, was allowed the last resort of the ordeal. But when the 'Judgment of God' was abolished by the decrees of the Church, it did not occur to the Vehmic Judges to put the offender upon his second trial by the visne, which now forms the distinguishing characteristic of the English law, and he was at once considered as condemned. The Heimliche Acht is a presentment not traversable by the offender.

"The Vehmic Tribunals can only be considered as the original

jurisdictions of the 'Old Saxons,' which survived the subjugation of their country. The singular and mystic forms of initiation, the system of enigmatical phrases, the use of the signs and symbols of recognition, may probably be ascribed to the period when the whole system was united to the worship of the Deities of Vengeance, and when the sentence was promulgated by the Doomsmen, assembled, like the Asi of old, before the altars of Thor or Woden. Of this connection with ancient pagan policy, so clearly to be traced in the Icelandic Courts, the English territorial jurisdictions offer some very faint vestiges; but the mystery had long been dispersed, and the whole system passed into the ordinary machinery of the law.

"As to the Vehmic Tribunals, it is acknowledged, that in a truly barbarous age and country, their proceedings, however violent, were not without utility. Their severe and secret vengeance often deterred the rapacity of the noble robber, and protected the humble suppliant; the extent, and even the abuse, of their authority was in some measure justified in an Empire divided into numerous independent jurisdictions, and not subjected to any paramount tribunal, able to administer impartial justice to the oppressed. But as the times improved, the Vehmic tribunals degenerated. The Echevins, chosen from the inferior ranks, did not possess any personal consideration. Opposed by the opulent cities of the Hanse, and objects of the suspicion and the enmity of the powerful aristocracy, the tribunals of some districts were abolished by law, and others took the form of ordinary territorial

jurisdictions; the greater number fell into desuetude. Yet, as late as the middle of the eighteenth century, a few Vehmic tribunals existed in name, though, as it may be easily supposed, without possessing any remnant of their pristine power." – Palgrave *on the Rise and Progress of the English Commonwealth. Proofs and Illustrations.* p. 157.

I have marked *by italic letters* the most important passage of the above quotation. The view it contains seems to me to have every appearance of truth and justice – and if such should, on maturer investigation, turn out to be the fact, it will certainly confer no small honour on an English scholar to have discovered the key to a mystery, which had long exercised in vain the laborious and profound students of German antiquity.

There are probably several other points on which I ought to have embraced this opportunity of enlarging; but the necessity of preparing for an excursion to foreign countries, in quest of health and strength, that have been for some time sinking, makes me cut short my address upon the present occasion.

Although I had never been in Switzerland, and numerous mistakes must of course have occurred in my attempts to describe the local scenery of that romantic region, I must not conclude without a statement highly gratifying to myself, that the work met with a reception of more than usual cordiality among the descendants of the Alpine heroes whose manners I had ventured to treat of; and I have in particular to express my thanks to the several Swiss gentlemen who have, since the

novel was published, enriched my little collection of armour with specimens of the huge weapon that sheared the lances of the Austrian chivalry at Sempach, and was employed with equal success on the bloody days of Granson and Morat. Of the ancient doublehanded *espadons* of the Switzer, I have, in this way, received, I think, not less than six, in excellent preservation, from as many different individuals, who thus testified their general approbation of these pages. They are not the less interesting, that gigantic swords, of nearly the same pattern and dimensions, were employed, in their conflicts with the bold knights and men-at-arms of England, by Wallace, and the sturdy foot-soldiers who, under his guidance, laid the foundations of Scottish independence.

The reader who wishes to examine with attention the historical events of the period which the novel embraces will find ample means of doing so in the valuable works of Zschokké and M. de Barante – which last author's account of the Dukes of Burgundy is among the most valuable of recent accessions of European literature – and in the new Parisian edition of Froissart, which has not as yet attracted so much attention in this country as it well deserves to do.

W.S

Abbotsford, *Sept. 17, 1831.*

CHAPTER I

The mists boil up around the glaciers; clouds
Rise curling fast beneath me, white and sulphurous,
Like foam from the roused ocean ...
... I am giddy.

Manfred.

The course of four centuries has well-nigh elapsed since the series of events which are related in the following chapters took place on the Continent. The records which contained the outlines of the history, and might be referred to as proof of its veracity, were long preserved in the superb library of the Monastery of St. Gall, but perished, with many of the literary treasures of that establishment, when the convent was plundered by the French revolutionary armies. The events are fixed, by historical date, to the middle of the fifteenth century – that important period, when chivalry still shone with a setting ray, soon about to be totally obscured: in some countries, by the establishment of free institutions; in others, by that of arbitrary power, which alike rendered useless the interference of those self-endowed redressers of wrongs, whose only warrant of authority was the sword.

Amid the general light which had recently shone upon Europe,

France, Burgundy, and Italy, but more especially Austria, had been made acquainted with the character of a people of whose very existence they had before been scarcely conscious. It is true, that the inhabitants of those countries which lie in the vicinity of the Alps, that immense barrier, were not ignorant that, notwithstanding their rugged and desolate appearance, the secluded valleys which winded among those gigantic mountains nourished a race of hunters and shepherds; men who, living in a state of primeval simplicity, compelled from the soil a subsistence gained by severe labour, followed the chase over the most savage precipices and through the darkest pine forests, or drove their cattle to spots which afforded them a scanty pasturage, even in the vicinage of eternal snows. But the existence of such a people, or rather of a number of small communities who followed nearly the same poor and hardy course of life, had seemed to the rich and powerful princes in the neighbourhood a matter of as little consequence, as it is to the stately herds which repose in a fertile meadow, that a few half-starved goats find their scanty food among the rocks which overlook their rich domain.

But wonder and attention began to be attracted towards these mountaineers, about the middle of the fourteenth century, when reports were spread abroad of severe contests, in which the German chivalry, endeavouring to suppress insurrections among their Alpine vassals, had sustained repeated and bloody defeats, although having on their side numbers and discipline, and the

advantage of the most perfect military equipment then known and confided in. Great was the wonder that cavalry, which made the only efficient part of the feudal armies of these ages, should be routed by men on foot; that warriors sheathed in complete steel should be overpowered by naked peasants who wore no defensive armour, and were irregularly provided with pikes, halberts, and clubs, for the purpose of attack; above all, it seemed a species of miracle, that knights and nobles of the highest birth should be defeated by mountaineers and shepherds. But the repeated victories of the Swiss at Laupen, Sempach,² and on other less distinguished occasions, plainly intimated that a new principle of civil organisation, as well as of military movements, had arisen amid the stormy regions of Helvetia.

Still, although the decisive victories which obtained liberty for the Swiss Cantons, as well as the spirit of resolution and wisdom with which the members of the little confederation had maintained themselves against the utmost exertions of Austria, had spread their fame abroad through all the neighbouring countries; and although they themselves were conscious of the character and actual power which repeated victories had acquired for themselves and their country, yet down to the middle of the fifteenth century, and at a later date, the Swiss retained in a great measure the wisdom, moderation, and simplicity of their ancient manners; so much so, that those who were intrusted with the

² See Editor's Notes at the end of the Volume. Wherever a similar reference occurs, the reader will understand that the same direction applies.

command of the troops of the Republic in battle, were wont to resume the shepherd's staff when they laid down the truncheon, and, like the Roman dictators, to retire to complete equality with their fellow-citizens, from the eminence of military command to which their talents, and the call of their country, had raised them.

It is, then, in the Forest Cantons of Switzerland, in the autumn of 1474, while these districts were in the rude and simple state we have described, that our tale opens.

Two travellers, one considerably past the prime of life, the other probably two or three and twenty years old, had passed the night at the little town of Lucerne, the capital of the Swiss state of the same name, and beautifully situated on the Lake of the Four Cantons. Their dress and character seemed those of merchants of a higher class, and while they themselves journeyed on foot, the character of the country rendering that by far the most easy mode of pursuing their route, a young peasant lad, from the Italian side of the Alps, followed them with a sumpter mule, laden apparently with men's wares and baggage, which he sometimes mounted, but more frequently led by the bridle.

The travellers were uncommonly fine-looking men, and seemed connected by some very near relationship, – probably that of father and son; for at the little inn where they lodged on the preceding evening, the great deference and respect paid by the younger to the elder had not escaped the observation of the natives, who, like other sequestered beings, were curious in proportion to the limited means of information which

they possessed. They observed also, that the merchants, under pretence of haste, declined opening their bales, or proposing traffic to the inhabitants of Lucerne, alleging in excuse that they had no commodities fitted for the market. The females of the town were the more displeas'd with the reserve of the mercantile travellers, because they were given to understand that it was occasioned by the wares in which they dealt being too costly to find customers among the Helvetian mountains; for it had transpired, by means of their attendant, that the strangers had visited Venice, and had there made many purchases of rich commodities, which were brought from India and Egypt to that celebrated emporium, as to the common mart of the Western World, and thence dispersed into all quarters of Europe. Now the Swiss maidens had of late made the discovery that gauds and gems were fair to look upon, and, though without the hope of being able to possess themselves of such ornaments, they felt a natural desire to review and handle the rich stores of the merchants, and some displeasure at being prevented from doing so.

It was also observed, that though the strangers were sufficiently courteous in their demeanour, they did not evince that studious anxiety to please, displayed by the travelling pedlars or merchants of Lombardy or Savoy, by whom the inhabitants of the mountains were occasionally visited; and who had been more frequent in their rounds of late years, since the spoils of victory had invested the Swiss with some wealth, and had taught many

of them new wants. Those peripatetic traders were civil and assiduous, as their calling required; but the new visitors seemed men who were indifferent to traffic, or at least to such slender gains as could be gathered in Switzerland.

Curiosity was further excited by the circumstance that they spoke to each other in a language which was certainly neither German, Italian, nor French, but from which an old man serving in the cabaret, who had once been as far as Paris, supposed they might be English; a people of whom it was only known in these mountains, that they were a fierce insular race, at war with the French for many years, and a large body of whom had long since invaded the Forest Cantons, and sustained such a defeat in the valley of Russwyl as was well remembered by the grey-haired men of Lucerne, who received the tale from their fathers.

The lad who attended the strangers was soon ascertained to be a youth from the Grisons country, who acted as their guide, so far as his knowledge of the mountains permitted. He said they designed to go to Bâle, but seemed desirous to travel by circuitous and unfrequented routes. The circumstances just mentioned increased the general desire to know more of the travellers and of their merchandise. Not a bale, however, was unpacked, and the merchants, leaving Lucerne next morning, resumed their toilsome journey, preferring a circuitous route and bad roads, through the peaceful cantons of Switzerland, to encountering the exactions and rapine of the robber chivalry of Germany, who, like so many sovereigns, made war each at his

own pleasure, and levied tolls and taxes on every one who passed their domains, of a mile's breadth, with all the insolence of petty tyranny.

For several hours after leaving Lucerne, the journey of our travellers was successfully prosecuted. The road, though precipitous and difficult, was rendered interesting by those splendid phenomena, which no country exhibits in a more astonishing manner than the mountains of Switzerland, where the rocky pass, the verdant valley, the broad lake, and the rushing torrent, the attributes of other hills as well as these, are interspersed with the magnificent and yet fearful horrors of the glaciers, a feature peculiar to themselves.

It was not an age in which the beauties or grandeur of a landscape made much impression either on the minds of those who travelled through the country, or who resided in it. To the latter, the objects, however dignified, were familiar, and associated with daily habits and with daily toil; and the former saw, perhaps, more terror than beauty in the wild region through which they passed, and were rather solicitous to get safe to their night's quarters, than to comment on the grandeur of the scenes which lay between them and their place of rest. Yet our merchants, as they proceeded on their journey, could not help being strongly impressed by the character of the scenery around them. Their road lay along the side of the lake, at times level and close on its very margin, at times rising to a great height on the side of the mountain, and winding along the verge of precipices

which sank down to the water as sharp and sheer as the wall of a castle descending upon the ditch which defends it. At other times it traversed spots of a milder character, – delightful green slopes, and lowly retired valleys, affording both pasturage and arable ground, sometimes watered by small streams, which wended by the hamlet of wooden huts with their fantastic little church and steeple, meandered round the orchard and the mount of vines, and, murmuring gently as they flowed, found a quiet passage into the lake.

"That stream, Arthur," said the elder traveller, as with one consent they stopped to gaze on such a scene as I have described, "resembles the life of a good and a happy man."

"And the brook, which hurries itself headlong down yon distant hill, marking its course by a streak of white foam," answered Arthur, – "what does that resemble?"

"That of a brave and unfortunate one," replied his father.

"The torrent for me," said Arthur; "a headlong course which no human force can oppose, and then let it be as brief as it is glorious."

"It is a young man's thought," replied his father; "but I am well aware that it is so rooted in thy heart, that nothing but the rude hand of adversity can pluck it up."

"As yet the root clings fast to my heart's strings," said the young man; "and methinks adversity's hand hath had a fair grasp of it."

"You speak, my son, of what you little understand," said his

father. "Know, that till the middle of life be passed, men scarce distinguish true prosperity from adversity, or rather they court as the favours of fortune what they should more justly regard as the marks of her displeasure. Look at yonder mountain, which wears on its shaggy brow a diadem of clouds, now raised and now depressed, while the sun glances upon, but is unable to dispel it; – a child might believe it to be a crown of glory – a man knows it to be the signal of tempest."

Arthur followed the direction of his father's eye to the dark and shadowy eminence of Mount Pilatus.

"Is the mist on yonder wild mountain so ominous, then?" asked the young man.

"Demand of Antonio," said his father; "he will tell you the legend."

The young merchant addressed himself to the Swiss lad who acted as their attendant, desiring to know the name of the gloomy height, which, in that quarter, seems the leviathan of the huge congregation of mountains assembled about Lucerne.

The lad crossed himself devoutly, as he recounted the popular legend, that the wicked Pontius Pilate, Proconsul of Judea, had here found the termination of his impious life; having, after spending years in the recesses of that mountain which bears his name, at length, in remorse and despair rather than in penitence, plunged into the dismal lake which occupies the summit. Whether water refused to do the executioner's duty upon such a wretch, or whether, his body being drowned, his

vexed spirit continued to haunt the place where he committed suicide, Antonio did not pretend to explain. But a form was often, he said, seen to emerge from the gloomy waters, and go through the action of one washing his hands; and when he did so, dark clouds of mist gathered first round the bosom of the Infernal Lake (such it had been styled of old), and then, wrapping the whole upper part of the mountain in darkness, presaged a tempest or hurricane, which was sure to follow in a short space. He added, that the evil spirit was peculiarly exasperated at the audacity of such strangers as ascended the mountain to gaze at his place of punishment, and that, in consequence, the magistrates of Lucerne had prohibited any one from approaching Mount Pilatus, under severe penalties. Antonio once more crossed himself as he finished his legend; in which act of devotion he was imitated by his hearers, too good Catholics to entertain any doubt of the truth of the story.

"How the accursed heathen scowls upon us!" said the younger of the merchants, while the cloud darkened and seemed to settle on the brow of Mount Pilatus. "*Vade retro!* Be thou defied, sinner!"

A rising wind, rather heard than felt, seemed to groan forth, in the tone of a dying lion, the acceptance of the suffering spirit to the rash challenge of the young Englishman. The mountain was seen to send down its rugged sides thick wreaths of heaving mist, which, rolling through the rugged chasms that seamed the grisly hill, resembled torrents of rushing lava pouring down from

a volcano. The ridgy precipices, which formed the sides of these huge ravines, showed their splintery and rugged edges over the vapour, as if dividing from each other the descending streams of mist which rolled around them. As a strong contrast to this gloomy and threatening scene, the more distant mountain range of Rigi shone brilliant with all the hues of an autumnal sun.

While the travellers watched this striking and varied contrast, which resembled an approaching combat betwixt the powers of Light and Darkness, their guide, in his mixed jargon of Italian and German, exhorted them to make haste on their journey. The village to which he proposed to conduct them, he said, was yet distant, the road bad, and difficult to find, and if the Evil One (looking to Mount Pilatus, and crossing himself) should send his darkness upon the valley, the path would be both doubtful and dangerous. The travellers, thus admonished, gathered the capes of their cloaks close round their throats, pulled their bonnets resolutely over their brows, drew the buckle of the broad belts which fastened their mantles, and each with a mountain staff in his hand, well shod with an iron spike, they pursued their journey, with unabated strength and undaunted spirit.

With every step the scenes around them appeared to change. Each mountain, as if its firm and immutable form were flexible and varying, altered in appearance, like that of a shadowy apparition, as the position of the strangers relative to them changed with their motions, and as the mist, which continued slowly though constantly to descend, influenced the rugged

aspect of the hills and valleys which it shrouded with its vapoury mantle. The nature of their progress, too, never direct, but winding by a narrow path along the sinuosities of the valley, and making many a circuit round precipices and other obstacles which it was impossible to surmount, added to the wild variety of a journey, in which, at last, the travellers totally lost any vague idea which they had previously entertained concerning the direction in which the road led them.

"I would," said the elder, "we had that mystical needle which mariners talk of, that points ever to the north, and enables them to keep their way on the waters, when there is neither cape nor headland, sun, moon, nor stars, nor any mark in heaven or earth, to tell them how to steer."

"It would scarce avail us among these mountains," answered the youth; "for though that wonderful needle may keep its point to the northern Pole-star, when it is on a flat surface like the sea, it is not to be thought it would do so when these huge mountains arise like walls, betwixt the steel and the object of its sympathy."

"I fear me," replied the father, "we shall find our guide, who has been growing hourly more stupid since he left his own valley, as useless as you suppose the compass would be among the hills of this wild country. – Canst tell, my boy," said he, addressing Antonio in bad Italian, "if we be in the road we purposed?"

"If it please St. Antonio" – said the guide, who was obviously too much confused to answer the question directly.

"And that water, half covered with mist, which glimmers

through the fog, at the foot of this huge black precipice – is it still a part of the Lake of Lucerne, or have we lighted upon another since we ascended that last hill?"

Antonio could only answer that they ought to be on the Lake of Lucerne still, and that he hoped that what they saw below them was only a winding branch of the same sheet of water. But he could say nothing with certainty.

"Dog of an Italian!" exclaimed the younger traveller, "thou deservest to have thy bones broken, for undertaking a charge which thou art as incapable to perform as thou art to guide us to heaven!"

"Peace, Arthur," said his father; "if you frighten the lad, he runs off, and we lose the small advantage we might have by his knowledge; if you use your baton, he rewards you with the stab of a knife, – for such is the humour of a revengeful Lombard. Either way, you are marred instead of helped. – Hark thee hither, my boy," he continued, in his indifferent Italian, "be not afraid of that hot youngster, whom I will not permit to injure thee; but tell me, if thou canst, the names of the villages by which we are to make our journey to-day."

The gentle mode in which the elder traveller spoke reassured the lad, who had been somewhat alarmed at the harsh tone and menacing expressions of his younger companion; and he poured forth, in his patois, a flood of names, in which the German guttural sounds were strangely intermixed with the soft accents of the Italian, but which carried to the hearer no intelligible

information concerning the object of his question; so that at length he was forced to conclude, "Even lead on, in Our Lady's name, or in St. Antonio's, if you like it better: we shall but lose time, I see, in trying to understand each other."

They moved on as before, with this difference, that the guide, leading the mule, now went first, and was followed by the other two, whose motions he had formerly directed by calling to them from behind. The clouds meantime became thicker and thicker, and the mist, which had at first been a thin vapour, began now to descend in the form of a small thick rain, which gathered like dew upon the capotes of the travellers. Distant rustling and groaning sounds were heard among the remote mountains, similar to those by which the Evil Spirit of Mount Pilatus had seemed to announce the storm. The boy again pressed his companions to advance, but at the same time threw impediments in the way of their doing so, by the slowness and indecision which he showed in leading them on.

Having proceeded in this manner for three or four miles, which uncertainty rendered doubly tedious, the travellers were at length engaged in a narrow path, running along the verge of a precipice. Beneath was water, but of what description they could not ascertain. The wind, indeed, which began to be felt in sudden gusts, sometimes swept aside the mist so completely as to show the waves glimmering below; but whether they were those of the same lake on which their morning journey had commenced, whether it was another and separate sheet of water of a similar

character, or whether it was a river or large brook, the view afforded was too indistinct to determine. Thus far was certain, that they were not on the shores of the Lake of Lucerne, where it displays its usual expanse of waters; for the same hurricane gusts which showed them water in the bottom of the glen gave them a transient view of the opposite side, at what exact distance they could not well discern, but near enough to show tall abrupt rocks and shaggy pine-trees, here united in groups, and there singly anchored among the cliffs which overhung the water. This was a more distinct landscape than the farther side of the lake would have offered, had they been on the right road.

Hitherto the path, though steep and rugged, was plainly enough indicated, and showed traces of having been used both by riders and foot passengers. But suddenly, as Antonio with the loaded mule had reached a projecting eminence, around the peak of which the path made a sharp turn, he stopped short, with his usual exclamation, addressed to his patron saint. It appeared to Arthur that the mule shared the terrors of the guide; for it started back, put forwards its fore feet separate from each other, and seemed, by the attitude which it assumed, to intimate a determination to resist every proposal to advance, at the same time expressing horror and fear at the prospect which lay before it.

Arthur pressed forward, not only from curiosity, but that he might if possible bear the brunt of any danger before his father came up to share it. In less time than we have taken to tell

the story, the young man stood beside Antonio and the mule, upon a platform of rock on which the road seemed absolutely to terminate, and from the farther side of which a precipice sank sheer down, to what depth the mist did not permit him to discern, but certainly uninterrupted for more than three hundred feet.

The blank expression which overcast the visage of the younger traveller, and traces of which might be discerned in the physiognomy of the beast of burden, announced alarm and mortification at this unexpected and, as it seemed, insurmountable obstacle. Nor did the looks of the father, who presently after came up to the same spot, convey either hope or comfort. He stood with the others gazing on the misty gulf beneath them, and looking all around, but in vain, for some continuation of the path, which certainly had never been originally designed to terminate in this summary manner. As they stood uncertain what to do next, the son in vain attempting to discover some mode of passing onward, and the father about to propose that they should return by the road which had brought them hither, a loud howl of the wind, more wild than they had yet heard, swept down the valley. All being aware of the danger of being hurled from the precarious station which they occupied, snatched at bushes and rocks by which to secure themselves, and even the poor mule seemed to steady itself in order to withstand the approaching hurricane. The gust came with such unexpected fury that it appeared to the travellers to shake the very rock on which they stood, and would have swept them from its surface

like so many dry leaves, had it not been for the momentary precautions which they had taken for their safety. But as the wind rushed down the glen, it completely removed for the space of three or four minutes the veil of mist which former gusts had only served to agitate or discompose, and showed them the nature and cause of the interruption which they had met with so unexpectedly.

The rapid but correct eye of Arthur was then able to ascertain that the path, after leaving the platform of rock on which they stood, had originally passed upwards in the same direction along the edge of a steep bank of earth, which had then formed the upper covering of a stratum of precipitous rocks. But it had chanced, in some of the convulsions of nature which take place in those wild regions, where she works upon a scale so formidable, that the earth had made a slip, or almost a precipitous descent, from the rock, and been hurled downwards with the path, which was traced along the top, and with bushes, trees, or whatever grew upon it, into the channel of the stream; for such they could now discern the water beneath them to be, and not a lake, or an arm of a lake, as they had hitherto supposed.

The immediate cause of this phenomenon might probably have been an earthquake, not unfrequent in that country. The bank of earth, now a confused mass of ruins inverted in its fall, showed some trees growing in a horizontal position, and others, which, having pitched on their heads in their descent, were at once inverted and shattered to pieces, and lay a sport to

the streams of the river which they had heretofore covered with gloomy shadow. The gaunt precipice which remained behind, like the skeleton of some huge monster divested of its flesh, formed the wall of a fearful abyss, resembling the face of a newly wrought quarry, more dismal of aspect from the rawness of its recent formation, and from its being as yet uncovered with any of the vegetation with which nature speedily mantles over the bare surface even of her sternest crags and precipices.

Besides remarking these appearances, which tended to show that this interruption of the road had been of recent occurrence, Arthur was able to observe, on the farther side of the river, higher up the valley, and rising out of the pine forests, interspersed with rocks, a square building of considerable height, like the ruins of a Gothic tower. He pointed out this remarkable object to Antonio, and demanded if he knew it; justly conjecturing that, from the peculiarity of the site, it was a landmark not easily to be forgotten by any who had seen it before. Accordingly, it was gladly and promptly recognised by the lad, who called out cheerfully that the place was Geierstein – that is, as he explained it, the Rock of the Vultures. He knew it, he said, by the old tower, as well as by a huge pinnacle of rock which arose near it, almost in the form of a steeple, to the top of which the lammer-geier (one of the largest birds of prey known to exist) had in former days transported the child of an ancient lord of the castle. He proceeded to recount the vow which was made by the Knight of Geierstein to Our Lady of Einsiedlen; and, while he spoke, the castle, rocks, woods, and

precipices again faded in mist. But as he concluded his wonderful narrative with the miracle which restored the infant again to its father's arms, he cried out suddenly, "Look to yourselves – the storm! – the storm!" It came accordingly, and, sweeping the mist before it, again bestowed on the travellers a view of the horrors around them.

"Ay!" quoth Antonio, triumphantly, as the gust abated, "old Pontius loves little to hear of Our Lady of Einsiedlen; but she will keep her own with him – Ave Maria!"

"That tower," said the young traveller, "seems uninhabited. I can descry no smoke, and the battlement appears ruinous."

"It has not been inhabited for many a day," answered the guide. "But I would I were at it, for all that. Honest Arnold Biederman, the Landamman [chief magistrate] of the Canton of Unterwalden, dwells near, and, I warrant you, distressed strangers will not want the best that cupboard and cellar can find them, wherever he holds rule."

"I have heard of him," said the elder traveller, whom Antonio had been taught to call Seigneur Philipson; "a good and hospitable man, and one who enjoys deserved weight with his countrymen."

"You have spoken him right, Seigneur," answered the guide: "and I would we could reach his house, where you should be sure of hospitable treatment, and a good direction for your next day's journey. But how we are to get to the Vulture's Castle, unless we had wings like the vulture, is a question hard to answer."

Arthur replied by a daring proposal, which the reader will find

in the next chapter.

CHAPTER II

Away with me.

The clouds grow thicker – there – now lean on me.

Place your foot here – here, take this staff, and cling

A moment to that shrub – now, give me your hand.

The chalet will be gained within an hour.

Manfred.

After surveying the desolate scene as accurately as the stormy state of the atmosphere would permit, the younger of the travellers observed, "In any other country, I should say the tempest begins to abate; but what to expect in this land of desolation, it were rash to decide. If the apostate spirit of Pilate be actually on the blast, these lingering and more distant howls seem to intimate that he is returning to his place of punishment. The pathway has sunk with the ground on which it was traced – I can see part of it lying down in the abyss, marking, as with a streak of clay, yonder mass of earth and stone. But I think it possible, with your permission, my father, that I could still scramble forward along the edge of the precipice, till I come in sight of the habitation which the lad tells us of. If there be actually such a one, there must be an access to it somewhere; and if I cannot find the path out, I can at least make a signal to those who

dwelt near the Vulture's Nest yonder, and obtain some friendly guidance."

"I cannot consent to your incurring such a risk," said his father; "let the lad go forward, if he can and will. He is mountain-bred, and I will reward him richly."

But Antonio declined the proposal absolutely and decidedly. "I am mountain-bred," he said, "but I am no chamois-hunter; and I have no wings to transport me from cliff to cliff, like a raven – gold is not worth life."

"And God forbid," said Seignor Philipson, "that I should tempt thee to weigh them against each other! – Go on, then, my son – I follow thee."

"Under your favour, dearest sir, no," replied the young man; "it is enough to endanger the life of one – and mine, far the most worthless, should, by all the rules of wisdom as well as nature, be put first in hazard."

"No, Arthur," replied his father, in a determined voice; "no, my son – I have survived much, but I will not survive thee."

"I fear not for the issue, father, if you permit me to go alone; but I cannot – dare not – undertake a task so perilous, if you persist in attempting to share it, with no better aid than mine. While I endeavoured to make a new advance, I should be ever looking back to see how you might attain the station which I was about to leave – And bethink you, dearest father, that if I fall, I fall an unregarded thing, of as little moment as the stone or tree which has toppled headlong down before me. But you – should

your foot slip, or your hand fail, bethink you what and how much must needs fall with you!"

"Thou art right, my child," said the father. "I still have that which binds me to life, even though I were to lose in thee all that is dear to me. – Our Lady and our Lady's Knight bless thee and prosper thee, my child! Thy foot is young, thy hand is strong – thou hast not climbed Plynlimon in vain. Be bold, but be wary – remember there is a man who, failing thee, has but one act of duty to bind him to the earth, and, that discharged, will soon follow thee."

The young man accordingly prepared for his journey, and, stripping himself of his cumbrous cloak, showed his well-proportioned limbs in a jerkin of grey cloth, which sat close to his person. The father's resolution gave way when his son turned round to bid him farewell. He recalled his permission, and in a peremptory tone forbade him to proceed. But, without listening to the prohibition, Arthur had commenced his perilous adventure. Descending from the platform on which he stood, by the boughs of an old ash-tree, which thrust itself out of the cleft of a rock, the youth was enabled to gain, though at great risk, a narrow ledge, the very brink of the precipice, by creeping along which he hoped to pass on till he made himself heard or seen from the habitation, of whose existence the guide had informed him. His situation, as he pursued this bold purpose, appeared so precarious, that even the hired attendant hardly dared to draw breath as he gazed on him. The ledge which supported

him seemed to grow so narrow, as he passed along it, as to become altogether invisible, while sometimes with his face to the precipice, sometimes looking forward, sometimes glancing his eyes upward, but never venturing to cast a look below, lest his brain should grow giddy at a sight so appalling, he wound his way onward. To his father and the attendant, who beheld his progress, it was less that of a man advancing in the ordinary manner, and resting by aught connected with the firm earth, than that of an insect crawling along the face of a perpendicular wall, of whose progressive movement we are indeed sensible, but cannot perceive the means of its support. And bitterly, most bitterly, did the miserable parent now lament, that he had not persisted in his purpose to encounter the baffling and even perilous measure of retracing his steps to the habitation of the preceding night. He should then, at least, have partaken the fate of the son of his love.

Meanwhile, the young man's spirits were strongly braced for the performance of his perilous task. He laid a powerful restraint on his imagination, which in general was sufficiently active, and refused to listen, even for an instant, to any of the horrible insinuations by which fancy augments actual danger. He endeavoured manfully to reduce all around him to the scale of right reason, as the best support of true courage. "This ledge of rock," he urged to himself, "is but narrow, yet it has breadth enough to support me; these cliffs and crevices in the surface are small and distant, but the one affords as secure a resting-place to my feet, the other as available a grasp to my hands, as if I stood

on a platform of a cubit broad, and rested my arm on a balustrade of marble. My safety, therefore, depends on myself. If I move with decision, step firmly, and hold fast, what signifies how near I am to the mouth of an abyss?"

Thus estimating the extent of his danger by the measure of sound sense and reality, and supported by some degree of practice in such exercise, the brave youth went forward on his awful journey, step by step, winning his way with a caution and fortitude and presence of mind which alone could have saved him from instant destruction. At length he gained a point where a projecting rock formed the angle of the precipice, so far as it had been visible to him from the platform. This, therefore, was the critical point of his undertaking; but it was also the most perilous part of it. The rock projected more than six feet forward over the torrent, which he heard raging at the depth of a hundred yards beneath, with a noise like subterranean thunder. He examined the spot with the utmost care, and was led, by the existence of shrubs, grass, and even stunted trees, to believe that this rock marked the farthest extent of the slip or slide of earth, and that, could he but turn round the angle of which it was the termination, he might hope to attain the continuation of the path which had been so strangely interrupted by this convulsion of nature. But the crag jutted out so much as to afford no possibility of passing either under or around it; and as it rose several feet above the position which Arthur had attained, it was no easy matter to climb over it. This was, however, the course which he chose, as the only mode

of surmounting what he hoped might prove the last obstacle to his voyage of discovery. A projecting tree afforded him the means of raising and swinging himself up to the top of the crag. But he had scarcely planted himself on it, had scarcely a moment to congratulate himself, on seeing, amid a wild chaos of cliffs and wood, the gloomy ruins of Geierstein, with smoke arising, and indicating something like a human habitation beside them, when, to his extreme terror, he felt the huge cliff on which he stood tremble, stoop slowly forward, and gradually sink from its position. Projecting as it was, and shaken as its equilibrium had been by the recent earthquake, it lay now so insecurely poised, that its balance was entirely destroyed, even by the addition of the young man's weight.

Aroused by the imminence of the danger, Arthur, by an instinctive attempt at self-preservation, drew cautiously back from the falling crag into the tree by which he had ascended, and turned his head back as if spell-bound, to watch the descent of the fatal rock from which he had just retreated. It tottered for two or three seconds, as if uncertain which way to fall, and, had it taken a sidelong direction, must have dashed the adventurer from his place of refuge, or borne both the tree and him headlong down into the river. After a moment of horrible uncertainty, the power of gravitation determined a direct and forward descent. Down went the huge fragment, which must have weighed at least twenty tons, rending and splintering in its precipitate course the trees and bushes which it encountered, and

settling at length in the channel of the torrent, with a din equal to the discharge of a hundred pieces of artillery. The sound was re-echoed from bank to bank, from precipice to precipice, with emulative thunders; nor was the tumult silent till it rose into the region of eternal snows, which, equally insensible to terrestrial sounds and unfavourable to animal life, heard the roar in their majestic solitude, but suffered it to die away without a responsive voice.

What, in the meanwhile, were the thoughts of the distracted father, who saw the ponderous rock descend, but could not mark whether his only son had borne it company in its dreadful fall! His first impulse was to rush forward along the face of the precipice, which he had seen Arthur so lately traverse; and when the lad Antonio withheld him, by throwing his arms around him, he turned on the guide with the fury of a bear which had been robbed of her cubs.

"Unhand me, base peasant," he exclaimed, "or thou diest on the spot!"

"Alas!" said the poor boy, dropping on his knees before him, "I too have a father!"

The appeal went to the heart of the traveller, who instantly let the lad go, and holding up his hands, and lifting his eyes towards heaven, said, in accents of the deepest agony, mingled with devout resignation, "*Fiat voluntas tua!*— he was my last, and loveliest, and best beloved, and most worthy of my love; and yonder," he added, "yonder over the glen soar the birds of

prey, who are to feast on his young blood. – But I will see him once more," exclaimed the miserable parent, as the huge carrion vulture floated past him on the thick air, – "I will see my Arthur once more, ere the wolf and the eagle mangle him – I will see all of him that earth still holds. Detain me not – but abide here, and watch me as I advance. If I fall, as is most likely, I charge you to take the sealed papers, which you will find in the valise, and carry them to the person to whom they are addressed, with the least possible delay. There is money enough in the purse to bury me with my poor boy, and to cause masses be said for our souls, and yet leave you a rich recompense for your journey."

The honest Swiss lad, obtuse in his understanding, but kind and faithful in his disposition, blubbered as his employer spoke, and, afraid to offer further remonstrance or opposition, saw his temporary master prepare himself to traverse the same fatal precipice over the verge of which his ill-fated son had seemed to pass to the fate which, with all the wildness of a parent's anguish, his father was hastening to share.

Suddenly there was heard, from beyond the fatal angle from which the mass of stone had been displaced by Arthur's rash ascent, the loud hoarse sound of one of those huge horns made out of the spoils of the urus, or wild bull, of Switzerland, which in ancient times announced the terrors of the charge of these mountaineers, and, indeed, served them in war instead of all musical instruments.

"Hold, sir, hold!" exclaimed the Grison. "Yonder is a signal

from Geierstein. Some one will presently come to our assistance, and show us the safer way to seek for your son. – And look you – at yon green bush that is glimmering through the mist, St. Antonio preserve me, as I see a white cloth displayed there! it is just beyond the point where the rock fell."

The father endeavoured to fix his eyes on the spot, but they filled so fast with tears that they could not discern the object which the guide pointed out. – "It is all in vain," he said, dashing the tears from his eyes – "I shall never see more of him than his lifeless remains!"

"You will – you will see him in life!" said the Grison. "St. Antonio wills it so – See, the white cloth waves again!"

"Some remnant of his garments," said the despairing father, – "some wretched memorial of his fate. – No, my eyes see it not – I have beheld the fall of my house – would that the vultures of these crags had rather torn them from their sockets!"

"Yet look again," said the Swiss; "the cloth hangs not loose upon a bough – I can see that it is raised on the end of a staff, and is distinctly waved to and fro. Your son makes a signal that he is safe."

"And if it be so," said the traveller, clasping his hands together, "blessed be the eyes that see it, and the tongue that tells it! If we find my son, and find him alive, this day shall be a lucky one for thee too."

"Nay," answered the lad, "I only ask that you will abide still, and act by counsel, and I will hold myself quit for my services."

Only, it is not creditable to an honest lad to have people lose themselves by their own wilfulness; for the blame, after all, is sure to fall upon the guide, as if he could prevent old Pontius from shaking the mist from his brow, or banks of earth from slipping down into the valley at a time, or young harebrained gallants from walking upon precipices as narrow as the edge of a knife, or madmen, whose grey hairs might make them wiser, from drawing daggers like bravos in Lombardy."

Thus the guide ran on, and in that vein he might have long continued, for Signor Philipson heard him not. Each throb of his pulse, each thought of his heart, was directed towards the object which the lad referred to as a signal of his son's safety. He became at length satisfied that the signal was actually waved by a human hand; and, as eager in the glow of reviving hope as he had of late been under the influence of desperate grief, he again prepared for the attempt of advancing towards his son, and assisting him, if possible, in regaining a place of safety. But the entreaties and reiterated assurances of his guide induced him to pause.

"Are you fit," he said, "to go on the crag? Can you repeat your Credo and Ave without missing or misplacing a word? for, without that, our old men say your neck, had you a score of them, would be in danger. – Is your eye clear, and your feet firm? – I trow the one streams like a fountain, and the other shakes like the aspen which overhangs it! Rest here till those arrive who are far more able to give your son help than either you or I are. I

judge, by the fashion of his blowing, that yonder is the horn of the Goodman of Geierstein, Arnold Biederman. He hath seen your son's danger, and is even now providing for his safety and ours. There are cases in which the aid of one stranger, well acquainted with the country, is worth that of three brothers who know not the crags."

"But if yonder horn really sounded a signal," said the traveller, "how chanced it that my son replied not?"

"And if he did so, as is most likely he did," rejoined the Grison, "how should we have heard him? The bugle of Uri itself sounded amid these horrible dins of water and tempest like the reed of a shepherd boy; and how think you we should hear the holloa of a man?"

"Yet, methinks," said Seignor Philipson, "I do hear something amid this roar of elements which is like a human voice – but it is not Arthur's."

"I wot well, no," answered the Grison; "that is a woman's voice. The maidens will converse with each other in that manner, from cliff to cliff, through storm and tempest, were there a mile between."

"Now, Heaven be praised for this providential relief!" said Seignor Philipson; "I trust we shall yet see this dreadful day safely ended. I will holloa in answer."

He attempted to do so, but, inexperienced in the art of making himself heard in such a country, he pitched his voice in the same key with that of the roar of wave and wind; so that, even

at twenty yards from the place where he was speaking, it must have been totally indistinguishable from that of the elemental war around them. The lad smiled at his patron's ineffectual attempts, and then raised his voice himself in a high, wild, and prolonged scream, which, while produced with apparently much less effort than that of the Englishman, was nevertheless a distinct sound, separated from others by the key to which it was pitched, and was probably audible to a very considerable distance. It was presently answered by distant cries of the same nature, which gradually approached the platform, bringing renovated hope to the anxious traveller.

If the distress of the father rendered his condition an object of deep compassion, that of the son, at the same moment, was sufficiently perilous. We have already stated, that Arthur Philipson had commenced his precarious journey along the precipice with all the coolness, resolution, and unshaken determination of mind which was most essential to a task where all must depend upon firmness of nerve. But the formidable accident which checked his onward progress was of a character so dreadful as made him feel all the bitterness of a death instant, horrible, and, as it seemed, inevitable. The solid rock had trembled and rent beneath his footsteps, and although, by an effort rather mechanical than voluntary, he had withdrawn himself from the instant ruin attending its descent, he felt as if the better part of him, his firmness of mind and strength of body, had been rent away with the descending rock, as it fell thundering,

with clouds of dust and smoke, into the torrents and whirlpools of the vexed gulf beneath. In fact, the seaman swept from the deck of a wrecked vessel, drenched in the waves, and battered against the rocks on the shore, does not differ more from the same mariner, when, at the commencement of the gale, he stood upon the deck of his favourite ship, proud of her strength and his own dexterity, than Arthur, when commencing his journey, from the same Arthur, while clinging to the decayed trunk of an old tree, from which, suspended between heaven and earth, he saw the fall of the crag which he had so nearly accompanied. The effects of his terror, indeed, were physical as well as moral, for a thousand colours played before his eyes; he was attacked by a sick dizziness, and deprived at once of the obedience of those limbs which had hitherto served him so admirably; his arms and hands, as if no longer at his own command, now clung to the branches of the tree, with a cramp-like tenacity over which he seemed to possess no power, and now trembled in a state of such complete nervous relaxation as led him to fear that they were becoming unable to support him longer in his position.

An incident, in itself trifling, added to the distress occasioned by this alienation of his powers. All living things in the neighbourhood had, as might be supposed, been startled by the tremendous fall to which his progress had given occasion. Flights of owls, bats, and other birds of darkness, compelled to betake themselves to the air, had lost no time in returning into their bowers of ivy, or the harbour afforded them by the rifts and holes

of the neighbouring rocks. One of this ill-omened flight chanced to be a lammer-geier, or Alpine vulture, a bird larger and more voracious than the eagle himself, and which Arthur had not been accustomed to see, or at least to look upon closely. With the instinct of most birds of prey, it is the custom of this creature, when gorged with food, to assume some station of inaccessible security, and there remain stationary and motionless for days together, till the work of digestion has been accomplished, and activity returns with the pressure of appetite. Disturbed from such a state of repose, one of these terrific birds had risen from the ravine to which the species gives its name, and having circled unwillingly round, with a ghastly scream and a flagging wing, it had sunk down upon the pinnacle of a crag, not four yards from the tree in which Arthur held his precarious station. Although still in some degree stupefied by torpor, it seemed encouraged by the motionless state of the young man to suppose him dead, or dying, and sat there and gazed at him, without displaying any of that apprehension which the fiercest animals usually entertain from the vicinity of man.

As Arthur, endeavouring to shake off the incapacitating effects of his panic fear, raised his eyes to look gradually and cautiously around, he encountered those of the voracious and obscene bird, whose head and neck denuded of feathers, her eyes surrounded by an iris of an orange-tawny colour, and a position more horizontal than erect, distinguished her as much from the noble carriage and graceful proportions of the eagle, as those

of the lion place him in the ranks of creation above the gaunt, ravenous, grisly, yet dastard wolf.

As if arrested by a charm, the eyes of young Philipson remained bent on this ill-omened and ill-favoured bird, without his having the power to remove them. The apprehension of dangers, ideal as well as real, weighed upon his weakened mind, disabled as it was by the circumstances of his situation. The near approach of a creature, not more loathsome to the human race than averse to come within their reach, seemed as ominous as it was unusual. Why did it gaze on him with such glaring earnestness, projecting its disgusting form, as if presently to alight upon his person? The foul bird, was she the demon of the place to which her name referred? and did she come to exult that an intruder on her haunts seemed involved amid their perils, with little hope or chance of deliverance? Or was it a native vulture of the rocks, whose sagacity foresaw that the rash traveller was soon destined to become its victim? Could the creature, whose senses are said to be so acute, argue from circumstances the stranger's approaching death, and wait, like a raven or hooded crow by a dying sheep, for the earliest opportunity to commence her ravenous banquet? Was he doomed to feel its beak and talons before his heart's blood should cease to beat? Had he already lost the dignity of humanity, the awe which the being formed in the image of his Maker inspires into all inferior creatures?

Apprehensions so painful served more than all that reason could suggest to renew in some degree the elasticity of the young

man's mind. By waving his handkerchief, using, however, the greatest precaution in his movements, he succeeded in scaring the vulture from his vicinity. It rose from its resting-place, screaming harshly and dolefully, and sailed on its expanded pinions to seek a place of more undisturbed repose, while the adventurous traveller felt a sensible pleasure at being relieved of its disgusting presence.

With more collected ideas, the young man, who could obtain, from his position, a partial view of the platform he had left, endeavoured to testify his safety to his father, by displaying, as high as he could, the banner by which he had chased off the vulture. Like them, too, he heard, but at a less distance, the burst of the great Swiss horn, which seemed to announce some near succour. He replied by shouting and waving his flag, to direct assistance to the spot where it was so much required; and, recalling his faculties, which had almost deserted him, he laboured mentally to recover hope, and with hope the means and motive for exertion.

A faithful Catholic, he eagerly recommended himself in prayer to Our Lady of Einsiedlen, and, making vows of propitiation, besought her intercession, that he might be delivered from his dreadful condition. "Or, gracious Lady!" he concluded his orison, "if it is my doom to lose my life like a hunted fox amidst this savage wilderness of tottering crags, restore at least my natural sense of patience and courage, and let not one who has lived like a man, though a sinful one, meet death

like a timid hare!"

Having devoutly recommended himself to that Protectress, of whom the legends of the Catholic Church form a picture so amiable, Arthur, though every nerve still shook with his late agitation, and his heart throbbed with a violence that threatened to suffocate him, turned his thoughts and observation to the means of effecting his escape. But, as he looked around him, he became more and more sensible how much he was enervated by the bodily injuries and the mental agony which he had sustained during his late peril. He could not, by any effort of which he was capable, fix his giddy and bewildered eyes on the scene around him; – they seemed to reel till the landscape danced along with them, and a motley chaos of thickets and tall cliffs, which interposed between him and the ruinous Castle of Geierstein, mixed and whirled round in such confusion, that nothing, save the consciousness that such an idea was the suggestion of partial insanity, prevented him from throwing himself from the tree, as if to join the wild dance to which his disturbed brain had given motion.

"Heaven be my protection!" said the unfortunate young man, closing his eyes, in hopes, by abstracting himself from the terrors of his situation, to compose his too active imagination, "my senses are abandoning me!"

He became still more convinced that this was the case, when a female voice, in a high-pitched but eminently musical accent, was heard at no great distance, as if calling to him. He opened his eyes

once more, raised his head, and looked towards the place whence the sounds seemed to come, though far from being certain that they existed saving in his own disordered imagination. The vision which appeared had almost confirmed him in the opinion that his mind was unsettled, and his senses in no state to serve him accurately.

Upon the very summit of a pyramidal rock, that rose out of the depth of the valley, was seen a female figure, so obscured by mist that only the outline could be traced. The form, reflected against the sky, appeared rather the undefined lineaments of a spirit than of a mortal maiden; for her person seemed as light, and scarcely more opaque, than the thin cloud that surrounded her pedestal. Arthur's first belief was, that the Virgin had heard his vows, and had descended in person to his rescue; and he was about to recite his Ave Maria, when the voice again called to him with the singular shrill modulation of the mountain halloo, by which the natives of the Alps can hold conference with each other from one mountain ridge to another, across ravines of great depth and width.

While he debated how to address this unexpected apparition, it disappeared from the point which it at first occupied, and presently after became again visible, perched on the cliff out of which projected the tree in which Arthur had taken refuge. Her personal appearance, as well as her dress, made it then apparent that she was a maiden of these mountains, familiar with their dangerous paths. He saw that a beautiful young woman stood

before him, who regarded him with a mixture of pity and wonder.

"Stranger," she at length said, "who are you, and whence come you?"

"I am a stranger, maiden, as you justly term me," answered the young man, raising himself as well as he could. "I left Lucerne this morning, with my father, and a guide. I parted with them not three furlongs from hence. May it please you, gentle maiden, to warn them of my safety, for I know my father will be in despair upon my account?"

"Willingly," said the maiden; "but I think my uncle, or some one of my kinsmen, must have already found them, and will prove faithful guides. Can I not aid you? Are you wounded? Are you hurt? We were alarmed by the fall of a rock – ay, and yonder it lies, a mass of no ordinary size."

As the Swiss maiden spoke thus, she approached so close to the verge of the precipice, and looked with such indifference into the gulf, that the sympathy which connects the actor and spectator upon such occasions brought back the sickness and vertigo from which Arthur had just recovered, and he sank back into his former more recumbent posture, with something like a faint groan.

"You are then ill?" said the maiden, who observed him turn pale. "Where and what is the harm you have received?"

"None, gentle maiden, saving some bruises of little import; but my head turns, and my heart grows sick, when I see you so near the verge of the cliff."

"Is that all?" replied the Swiss maiden. "Know, stranger, that I do not stand on my uncle's hearth with more security than I have stood upon precipices compared to which this is a child's leap. You too, stranger, if, as I judge from the traces, you have come along the edge of the precipice which the earth-slide hath laid bare, ought to be far beyond such weakness, since surely you must be well entitled to call yourself a cragsman."

"I might have called myself so half an hour since," answered Arthur; "but I think I shall hardly venture to assume the name in future."

"Be not downcast," said his kind adviser, "for a passing qualm, which will at times cloud the spirit and dazzle the eyesight of the bravest and most experienced. Raise yourself upon the trunk of the tree, and advance closer to the rock out of which it grows. Observe the place well. It is easy for you, when you have attained the lower part of the projecting stem, to gain by one bold step the solid rock upon which I stand, after which there is no danger or difficulty worthy of mention to a young man, whose limbs are whole, and whose courage is active."

"My limbs are indeed sound," replied the youth; "but I am ashamed to think how much my courage is broken. Yet I will not disgrace the interest you have taken in an unhappy wanderer, by listening longer to the dastardly suggestions of a feeling which till to-day has been a stranger to my bosom."

The maiden looked on him anxiously, and with much interest, as, raising himself cautiously, and moving along the trunk of

the tree, which lay nearly horizontal from the rock, and seemed to bend as he changed his posture, the youth at length stood upright, within what, on level ground, had been but an extended stride to the cliff on which the Swiss maiden stood. But instead of being a step to be taken on the level and firm earth, it was one which must cross a dark abyss, at the bottom of which a torrent surged and boiled with incredible fury. Arthur's knees knocked against each other, his feet became of lead, and seemed no longer at his command; and he experienced, in a stronger degree than ever, that unnerving influence, which those who have been overwhelmed by it in a situation of like peril never can forget, and which others, happily strangers to its power, may have difficulty even in comprehending.

The young woman discerned his emotion, and foresaw its probable consequences. As the only mode in her power to restore his confidence, she sprang lightly from the rock to the stem of the tree, on which she alighted with the ease and security of a bird, and in the same instant back to the cliff; and extending her hand to the stranger, "My arm," she said, "is but a slight balustrade; yet do but step forward with resolution, and you will find it as secure as the battlement of Berne." But shame now overcame terror so much, that Arthur, declining assistance which he could not have accepted without feeling lowered in his own eyes, took heart of grace, and successfully achieved the formidable step which placed him upon the same cliff with his kind assistant.

To seize her hand and raise it to his lips, in affectionate token

of gratitude and respect, was naturally the youth's first action; nor was it possible for the maiden to have prevented him from doing so, without assuming a degree of prudery foreign to her character, and occasioning a ceremonious debate upon a matter of no great consequence, where the scene of action was a rock scarce five feet long by three in width, and which looked down upon a torrent roaring some three hundred feet below.

CHAPTER III

Cursed be the gold and silver, which persuade
Weak man to follow far fatiguing trade.
The lily, peace, outshines the silver store,
And life is dearer than the golden ore.
Yet money tempts us o'er the desert brown,
To every distant mart and wealthy town.

Hassan, or the Camel-driver.

Arthur Philipson and Anne of Geierstein, thus placed together in a situation which brought them into the closest possible contiguity, felt a slight degree of embarrassment; the young man, doubtless, from the fear of being judged a poltroon in the eyes of the maiden by whom he had been rescued, and the young woman, perhaps, in consequence of the exertion she had made, or a sense of being placed suddenly in a situation of such proximity to the youth whose life she had probably saved.

"And now, maiden," said Arthur, "I must repair to my father. The life which I owe to your assistance can scarce be called welcome to me, unless I am permitted to hasten to his rescue."

He was here interrupted by another bugle-blast, which seemed to come from the quarter in which the elder Philipson and his guide had been left by their young and daring companion. Arthur looked in that direction; but the platform, which he had seen but

imperfectly from the tree, when he was perched in that place of refuge, was invisible from the rock on which they now stood.

"It would cost me nothing to step back on yonder root," said the young woman, "to spy from thence whether I could see aught of your friends. But I am convinced they are under safer guidance than either yours or mine; for the horn announces that my uncle, or some of my young kinsmen, have reached them. They are by this time on their way to the Geierstein, to which, with your permission, I will become your guide; for you may be assured that my uncle Arnold will not allow you to pass farther to-day; and we shall but lose time by endeavouring to find your friends, who, situated where you say you left them, will reach the Geierstein sooner than we shall. Follow me, then, or I must suppose you weary of my guidance."

"Sooner suppose me weary of the life which your guidance has in all probability saved," replied Arthur, and prepared to attend her; at the same time taking a view of her dress and person, which confirmed the satisfaction he had in following such a conductor, and which we shall take the liberty to detail somewhat more minutely than he could do at that time.

An upper vest, neither so close as to display the person, a habit forbidden by the sumptuary laws of the canton, nor so loose as to be an incumbrance in walking or climbing, covered a close tunic of a different colour, and came down beneath the middle of the leg, but suffered the ankle, in all its fine proportions, to be completely visible. The foot was defended by a sandal, the point

of which was turned upwards, and the crossings and knots of the strings, which secured it on the front of the leg, were garnished with silver rings. The upper vest was gathered round the middle by a sash of party-coloured silk, ornamented with twisted threads of gold; while the tunic, open at the throat, permitted the shape and exquisite whiteness of a well-formed neck to be visible at the collar, and for an inch or two beneath. The small portion of the throat and bosom thus exposed was even more brilliantly fair than was promised by the countenance, which last bore some marks of having been freely exposed to the sun and air, by no means in a degree to diminish its beauty, but just so far as to show that the maiden possessed the health which is purchased by habits of rural exercise. Her long fair hair fell down in a profusion of curls on each side of a face, whose blue eyes, lovely features, and dignified simplicity of expression implied at once a character of gentleness and of the self-relying resolution of a mind too virtuous to suspect evil, and too noble to fear it. Above these locks, beauty's natural and most befitting ornament – or rather, I should say, amongst them – was placed the small bonnet, which, from its size, little answered the purpose of protecting the head, but served to exercise the ingenuity of the fair wearer, who had not failed, according to the prevailing custom of the mountain maidens, to decorate the tiny cap with a heron's feather, and the then unusual luxury of a small and thin chain of gold, long enough to encircle the cap four or five times, and having the ends secured under a broad medal of the same costly metal.

I have only to add, that the stature of the young person was something above the common size, and that the whole contour of her form, without being in the slightest degree masculine, resembled that of Minerva, rather than the proud beauties of Juno, or the yielding graces of Venus. The noble brow, the well-formed and active limbs, the firm and yet light step – above all, the total absence of anything resembling the consciousness of personal beauty, and the open and candid look, which seemed desirous of knowing nothing that was hidden, and conscious that she herself had nothing to hide, were traits not unworthy of the goddess of wisdom and of chastity.

The road which the young Englishman pursued, under the guidance of this beautiful young woman, was difficult and unequal, but could not be termed dangerous, at least in comparison to those precipices over which Arthur had recently passed. It was, in fact, a continuation of the path which the slip or slide of earth, so often mentioned, had interrupted; and although it had sustained damage in several places at the period of the same earthquake, yet there were marks of these having been already repaired in such a rude manner as made the way sufficient for the necessary intercourse of a people so indifferent as the Swiss to smooth or level paths. The maiden also gave Arthur to understand, that the present road took a circuit for the purpose of gaining that on which he was lately travelling, and that, if he and his companions had turned off at the place where this new track united with the old pathway, they would

have escaped the danger which had attended their keeping the road by the verge of the precipice.

The path which they now pursued was rather averted from the torrent, though still within hearing of its sullen thunders, which seemed to increase as they ascended parallel to its course, till suddenly the road, turning short, and directing itself straight upon the old castle, brought them within sight of one of the most splendid and awful scenes of that mountainous region.

The ancient tower of Geierstein, though neither extensive nor distinguished by architectural ornament, possessed an air of terrible dignity by its position on the very verge of the opposite bank of the torrent, which, just at the angle of the rock on which the ruins are situated, falls sheer over a cascade of nearly a hundred feet in height, and then rushes down the defile, through a trough of living rock, which perhaps its waves have been deepening since time itself had a commencement. Facing, and at the same time looking down upon this eternal roar of waters, stood the old tower, built so close to the verge of the precipice that the buttresses with which the architect had strengthened the foundation seemed a part of the solid rock itself, and a continuation of its perpendicular ascent. As usual throughout Europe in the feudal times, the principal part of the building was a massive square pile, the decayed summit of which was rendered picturesque, by flanking turrets of different sizes and heights, some round, some angular, some ruinous, some tolerably entire, varying the outline of the building as seen against the stormy sky.

A projecting sallyport, descending by a flight of steps from the tower, had in former times given access to a bridge connecting the castle with that side of the stream on which Arthur Philipson and his fair guide now stood. A single arch, or rather one rib of an arch, consisting of single stones, still remained, and spanned the river immediately in front of the waterfall. In former times this arch had served for the support of a wooden drawbridge, of more convenient breadth, and of such length and weight as must have been rather unmanageable, had it not been lowered on some solid resting-place. It is true, the device was attended with this inconvenience, that even when the drawbridge was up, there remained a possibility of approaching the castle gate by means of this narrow rib of stone. But as it was not above eighteen inches broad, and could only admit the daring foe who should traverse it to a doorway regularly defended by gate and portcullis, and having flanking turrets and projections, from which stones, darts, melted lead, and scalding water might be poured down on the soldiery who should venture to approach Geierstein by this precarious access, the possibility of such an attempt was not considered as diminishing the security of the garrison.

In the time we treat of, the castle being entirely ruined and dismantled, and the door, drawbridge, and portcullis gone, the dilapidated gateway, and the slender arch which connected the two sides of the stream, were used as a means of communication between the banks of the river, by the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, whom habit had familiarised with the dangerous

nature of the passage.

Arthur Philipson had, in the meantime, like a good bow when new strung, regained the elasticity of feeling and character which was natural to him. It was not indeed with perfect composure that he followed his guide, as she tripped lightly over the narrow arch, composed of rugged stones, and rendered wet and slippery with the perpetual drizzle of the mist issuing from the neighbouring cascade. Nor was it without apprehension that he found himself performing this perilous feat in the neighbourhood of the waterfall itself, whose deafening roar he could not exclude from his ears, though he took care not to turn his head towards its terrors, lest his brain should again be dizzied by the tumult of the waters as they shot forward from the precipice above, and plunged themselves into what seemed the fathomless gulf below. But notwithstanding these feelings of agitation, the natural shame to show cowardice where a beautiful young female exhibited so much indifference, and the desire to regain his character in the eyes of his guide, prevented Arthur from again giving way to the appalling feelings by which he had been overwhelmed a short time before. Stepping firmly on, yet cautiously supporting himself with his piked staff, he traced the light footsteps of his guide along the bridge of dread, and followed her through the ruined sallyport, to which they ascended by stairs which were equally dilapidated.

The gateway admitted them into a mass of ruins, formerly a sort of courtyard to the donjon, which rose in gloomy dignity

above the wreck of what had been works destined for external defence, or buildings for internal accommodation. They quickly passed through these ruins, over which vegetation had thrown a wild mantle of ivy, and other creeping shrubs, and issued from them through the main gate of the castle into one of those spots in which Nature often embosoms her sweetest charms, in the midst of districts chiefly characterised by waste and desolation.

The castle in this aspect also rose considerably above the neighbouring ground, but the elevation of the site, which towards the torrent was an abrupt rock, was on this side a steep eminence, which had been scarped like a modern glacis, to render the building more secure. It was now covered with young trees and bushes, out of which the tower itself seemed to rise in ruined dignity. Beyond this hanging thicket the view was of a very different character. A piece of ground, amounting to more than a hundred acres, seemed scooped out of the rocks and mountains, which, retaining the same savage character with the tract in which the travellers had been that morning bewildered, enclosed, and as it were defended, a limited space of a mild and fertile character. The surface of this little domain was considerably varied, but its general aspect was a gentle slope to the south-west.

The principal object which it presented was a large house composed of huge logs, without any pretence to form or symmetry, but indicating, by the smoke which arose from it, as well as the extent of the neighbouring offices, and the improved and cultivated character of the fields around, that it was the

abode, not of splendour certainly, but of ease and competence. An orchard of thriving fruit-trees extended to the southward of the dwelling. Groves of walnut and chestnut grew in stately array, and even a vineyard, of three or four acres, showed that the cultivation of the grape was understood and practised. It is now universal in Switzerland, but was, in those early days, almost exclusively confined to a few more fortunate proprietors, who had the rare advantage of uniting intelligence with opulent, or at least easy, circumstances.

There were fair ranges of pasture-fields, into which the fine race of cattle which constitute the pride and wealth of the Swiss mountaineers had been brought down from the more Alpine grazings where they had fed during the summer, to be near shelter and protection when the autumnal storms might be expected. On some selected spots, the lambs of the last season fed in plenty and security, and in others, huge trees, the natural growth of the soil, were suffered to remain, from motives of convenience probably, that they might be at hand when timber was required for domestic use, but giving, at the same time, a woodland character to a scene otherwise agricultural. Through this mountain-paradise the course of a small brook might be traced, now showing itself to the sun, which had by this time dispelled the fogs, now intimating its course, by its gently sloping banks, clothed in some places with lofty trees, or concealing itself under thickets of hawthorn and nut bushes. This stream, by a devious and gentle course, which seemed to indicate a

reluctance to leave this quiet region, found its way at length out of the sequestered domain, and, like a youth hurrying from the gay and tranquil sports of boyhood into the wild career of active life, finally united itself with the boisterous torrent, which, breaking down tumultuously from the mountains, shook the ancient Tower of Geierstein as it rolled down the adjacent rock, and then rushed howling through the defile in which our youthful traveller had well-nigh lost his life.

Eager as the younger Philipson was to rejoin his father, he could not help pausing for a moment to wonder how so much beauty should be found amid such scenes of horror, and to look back on the Tower of Geierstein, and on the huge cliff from which it derived its name, as if to ascertain, by the sight of these distinguished landmarks, that he was actually in the neighbourhood of the savage wild where he had encountered so much danger and terror. Yet so narrow were the limits of this cultivated farm, that it hardly required such a retrospect to satisfy the spectator that the spot susceptible of human industry, and on which it seemed that a considerable degree of labour had been bestowed, bore a very small proportion to the wilderness in which it was situated. It was on all sides surrounded by lofty hills, in some places rising into walls of rock, in others clothed with dark and savage forests of the pine and the larch, of primeval antiquity. Above these, from the eminence on which the tower was situated, could be seen the almost rosy hue in which an immense glacier threw back the sun; and still higher over the frozen surface of that

icy sea arose, in silent dignity, the pale peaks of those countless mountains, on which the snow eternally rests.

What we have taken some time to describe, occupied young Philipson only for one or two hurried minutes; for on a sloping lawn, which was in front of the farm-house, as the mansion might properly be styled, he saw five or six persons, the foremost of whom, from his gait, his dress, and the form of his cap, he could easily distinguish as the parent whom he hardly expected at one time to have again beheld.

He followed, therefore, his conductress with a glad step, as she led the way down the steep ascent on which the ruined tower was situated. They approached the group whom Arthur had noticed, the foremost of which was his father, who hastily came forward to meet him, in company with another person, of advanced age, and stature well-nigh gigantic, and who, from his simple yet majestic bearing, seemed the worthy countryman of William Tell, Stauffacher, Winkelried, and other Swiss worthies, whose stout hearts and hardy arms had, in the preceding age, vindicated against countless hosts their personal liberty, and the independence of their country.

With a natural courtesy, as if to spare the father and son many witnesses to a meeting which must be attended with emotion, the Landamman himself, in walking forward with the elder Philipson, signed to those by whom he was attended, all of whom seemed young men, to remain behind. They remained accordingly, examining, as it seemed, the guide Antonio, upon

the adventures of the strangers. Anne, the conductress of Arthur Philipson, had but time to say to him, "Yonder old man is my uncle, Arnold Biederman, and these young men are my kinsmen," when the former, with the elder traveller, were close before them. The Landamman, with the same propriety of feeling which he had before displayed, signed to his niece to move a little aside; yet while requiring from her an account of her morning's expedition, he watched the interview of the father and son with as much curiosity as his natural sense of complaisance permitted him to testify. It was of a character different from what he had expected.

We have already described the elder Philipson as a father devotedly attached to his son, ready to rush on death when he had expected to lose him, and equally overjoyed at heart, doubtless, to see him again restored to his affections. It might have been therefore expected that the father and son would have rushed into each other's arms, and such probably was the scene which Arnold Biederman expected to have witnessed.

But the English traveller, in common with many of his countrymen, covered keen and quick feelings with much appearance of coldness and reserve, and thought it a weakness to give unlimited sway even to the influence of the most amiable and most natural emotions. Eminently handsome in youth, his countenance, still fine in his more advanced years, had an expression which intimated an unwillingness either to yield to passion or encourage confidence. His pace, when he first beheld

his son, had been quickened by the natural wish to meet him; but he slackened it as they drew near to each other, and when they met, said in a tone rather of censure and admonition than affection, – "Arthur, may the Saints forgive the pain thou hast this day given me."

"Amen," said the youth. "I must need pardon since I have given you pain. Believe, however, that I acted for the best."

"It is well, Arthur, that in acting for the best, according to your forward will, you have not encountered the worst."

"That I have not," answered the son, with the same devoted and patient submission, "is owing to this maiden," pointing to Anne, who stood at a few paces' distance, desirous perhaps of avoiding to witness the reproof of the father, which might seem to her rather ill-timed and unreasonable.

"To the maiden my thanks shall be rendered," said his father, "when I can study how to pay them in an adequate manner; but is it well or comely, think you, that you should receive from a maiden the succour which it is your duty as a man to extend to the weaker sex?"

Arthur held down his head and blushed deeply, while Arnold Biederman, sympathising with his feelings, stepped forward and mingled in the conversation.

"Never be abashed, my young guest, that you have been indebted for aught of counsel or assistance to a maiden of Unterwalden. Know that the freedom of their country owes no less to the firmness and wisdom of her daughters than to that

of her sons. – And you, my elder guest, who have, I judge, seen many years and various lands, must have often known examples how the strong are saved by the help of the weak, the proud by the aid of the humble."

"I have at least learned," said the Englishman, "to debate no point unnecessarily with the host who has kindly harboured me;" and after one glance at his son, which seemed to kindle with the fondest affection, he resumed, as the party turned back towards the house, a conversation which he had been maintaining with his new acquaintance before Arthur and the maiden had joined them.

Arthur had in the meantime an opportunity of observing the figure and features of their Swiss landlord, which, I have already hinted, exhibited a primeval simplicity mixed with a certain rude dignity, arising out of its masculine and unaffected character. The dress did not greatly differ in form from the habit of the female which we have described. It consisted of an upper frock, shaped like the modern shirt, and only open at the bosom, worn above a tunic or under doublet. But the man's vest was considerably shorter in the skirts, which did not come lower down than the kilt of the Scottish Highlander; a species of boots or buskins rose above the knee, and the person was thus entirely clothed. A bonnet made of the fur of the marten, and garnished with a silver medal, was the only part of the dress which displayed anything like ornament; the broad belt which gathered the garment together was of buff leather, secured by a

large brass buckle.

But the figure of him who wore this homely attire, which seemed almost wholly composed of the fleeces of the mountain sheep and the spoils of animals of the chase, would have commanded respect wherever the wearer had presented himself, especially in those warlike days, when men were judged of according to the promising or unpromising qualities of their thews and sinews. To those who looked at Arnold Biederman from this point of view, he displayed the size and form, the broad shoulders and prominent muscles, of a Hercules. But to such as looked rather at his countenance, the steady sagacious features, open front, large blue eyes, and deliberate resolution which it expressed, more resembled the character of the fabled King of Gods and Men. He was attended by several sons and relatives, young men, among whom he walked, receiving, as his undeniable due, respect and obedience, similar to that which a herd of deer are observed to render to the monarch stag.

While Arnold Biederman walked and spoke with the elder stranger, the young men seemed closely to scrutinise Arthur, and occasionally interrogated in whispers their relation Anne, receiving from her brief and impatient answers, which rather excited than appeased the vein of merriment in which the mountaineers indulged, very much, as it seemed to the young Englishman, at the expense of their guest. To feel himself exposed to derision was not softened by the reflection, that in such a society it would probably be attached to all who could

not tread on the edge of a precipice with a step as firm and undismayed as if they walked the street of a city. However unreasonable ridicule may be, it is always displeasing to be subjected to it, but more particularly is it distressing to a young man, where beauty is a listener. It was some consolation to Arthur that he thought the maiden certainly did not enjoy the jest, and seemed by word and look to reprove the rudeness of her companions; but this he feared was only from a sense of humanity.

"She, too, must despise me," he thought, "though civility, unknown to these ill-taught boors, has enabled her to conceal contempt under the guise of pity. She can but judge of me from that which she has seen – if she could know me better" (such was his proud thought), "she might perhaps rank me more highly."

As the travellers entered the habitation of Arnold Biederman, they found preparations made in a large apartment, which served the purpose of general accommodation, for a homely but plentiful meal. A glance round the walls showed the implements of agriculture and the chase; but the eyes of the elder Philipson rested upon a leathern corselet, a long heavy halberd, and a two-handed sword, which were displayed as a sort of trophy. Near these, but covered with dust, unfurbished and neglected, hung a helmet, with a visor, such as was used by knights and men-at-arms. The golden garland, or coronal twisted around it, though sorely tarnished, indicated noble birth and rank; and the crest, which was a vulture of the species which gave name to the old

castle and its adjacent cliff, suggested various conjectures to the English guest, who, acquainted in a great measure with the history of the Swiss revolution, made little doubt that in this relic he saw some trophy of the ancient warfare between the inhabitants of these mountains, and the feudal lord to whom they had of yore appertained.

A summons to the hospitable board disturbed the train of the English merchant's reflections; and a large company, comprising the whole inhabitants of every description that lived under Biederman's roof, sat down to a plentiful repast of goat's flesh, fish, preparations of milk of various kinds, cheese, and, for the upper mess, the venison of a young chamois. The Landamman himself did the honours of the table with great kindness and simplicity, and urged the strangers to show, by their appetite, that they thought themselves as welcome as he desired to make them. During the repast, he carried on a conversation with his elder guest, while the younger people at table, as well as the menials, ate in modesty and silence. Ere the dinner was finished, a figure crossed on the outside of the large window which lighted the eating-hall, the sight of which seemed to occasion a lively sensation amongst such as observed it.

"Who passed?" said old Biederman to those seated opposite to the window.

"It is our cousin, Rudolph of Donnerhugel," answered one of Arnold's sons eagerly.

The annunciation seemed to give great pleasure to the younger

part of the company, especially the sons of the Landamman; while the head of the family only said with a grave, calm voice, – "Your kinsman is welcome – tell him so, and let him come hither."

Two or three arose for this purpose, as if there had been a contention among them who should do the honours of the house to the new guest. He entered presently – a young man, unusually tall, well-proportioned and active, with a quantity of dark-brown locks curling around his face, together with mustaches of the same, or rather a still darker hue. His cap was small considering the quantity of his thickly clustering hair, and rather might be said to hang upon one side of his head than to cover it. His clothes were of the same form and general fashion as those of Arnold, but made of much finer cloth, the manufacture of the German loom, and ornamented in a rich and fanciful manner. One sleeve of his vest was dark green, curiously laced and embroidered with devices in silver, while the rest of the garment was scarlet. His sash was twisted and netted with gold, and besides answering the purpose of a belt, by securing the upper garment round his waist, sustained a silver-hilted poniard. His finery was completed by boots, the tips of which were so long as to turn upwards with a peak, after a prevailing fashion in the Middle Ages. A golden chain hung round his neck, and sustained a large medallion of the same metal.

This young gallant was instantly surrounded by the race of Biederman, among whom he appeared to be considered as the

model upon which the Swiss youth ought to build themselves, and whose gait, opinions, dress, and manners all ought to follow who would keep pace with the fashion of the day, in which he reigned an acknowledged and unrivalled example.

By two persons in the company, however, it seemed to Arthur Philipson that this young man was received with less distinguished marks of regard than those with which he was hailed by the general voice of the youths present. Arnold Biederman himself was at least no way warm in welcoming the young Bernese, for such was Rudolph's country. The young man drew from his bosom a sealed packet, which he delivered to the Landamman with demonstrations of great respect, and seemed to expect that Arnold, when he had broken the seal and perused the contents, would say something to him on the subject. But the patriarch only bade him be seated, and partake of their meal, and Rudolph found a place accordingly next to Anne of Geierstein, which was yielded to him by one of the sons of Arnold with ready courtesy.

It seemed also to the observant young Englishman, that the new comer was received with marked coldness by the maiden, to whom he appeared eager and solicitous to pay his compliments, by whose side he had contrived to seat himself at the well-furnished board, and to whom he seemed more anxious to recommend himself, than to partake of the food which it offered. He observed the gallant whisper her, and look towards him. Anne gave a very brief reply, but one of the young Biedermans, who

sat on his other hand, was probably more communicative, as the youths both laughed, and the maiden again seemed disconcerted, and blushed with displeasure.

"Had I either of these sons of the mountain," thought young Philipson, "upon six yards of level greensward, if there be so much flat ground in this country, methinks I were more likely to spoil their mirth than to furnish food for it. It is as marvellous to see such conceited boors under the same roof with so courteous and amiable a damsel, as it would be to see one of their shaggy bears dance a rigadon with a maiden like the daughter of our host. Well, I need not concern myself more than I can help about her beauty or their breeding, since morning will separate me from them for ever."

As these reflections passed through the young guest's mind, the father of the family called for a cup of wine, and having required the two strangers to pledge him in a maple cup of considerable size, he sent a similar goblet to Rudolph Donnerhugel. "Yet you," he said, "kinsman, are used to more highly flavoured wine than the half-ripened grapes of Geierstein can supply. – Would you think it, Sir Merchant," he continued, addressing Philipson, "there are burghers of Berne who send for wine for their own drinking both to France and Germany?"

"My kinsman disapproves of that," replied Rudolph; "yet every place is not blessed with vineyards like Geierstein, which produces all that heart and eye can desire." This was said with a glance at his fair companion, who did not appear to take

the compliment, while the envoy of Berne proceeded: "But our wealthier burghers, having some superfluous crowns, think it no extravagance to barter them for a goblet of better wine than our own mountains can produce. But we will be more frugal when we have at our disposal tuns of the wine of Burgundy, for the mere trouble of transporting them."

"How mean you by that, cousin Rudolph?" said Arnold Biederman.

"Methinks, respected kinsman," answered the Bernese, "your letters must have told you that our Diet is likely to declare war against Burgundy?"

"Ah! And you know, then, the contents of my letters?" said Arnold; "another mark how times are changed at Berne, and with the Diet of Switzerland. When did all her grey-haired statesmen die, that our allies should have brought beardless boys into their councils?"

"The Senate of Berne, and the Diet of the Confederacy," said the young man, partly abashed, partly in vindication of what he had before spoken, "allow the young men to know their purposes, since it is they by whom they must be executed. The head which thinks may well confide in the hand that strikes."

"Not till the moment of dealing the blow, young man," said Arnold Biederman, sternly. "What kind of counsellor is he who talks loosely the secrets of state affairs before women and strangers? Go, Rudolph, and all of ye, and try by manly exercises which is best fitted to serve your country, rather than give your

judgment upon her measures. — Hold, young man," he continued, addressing Arthur, who had arisen, "this does not apply to you, who are unused to mountain travel, and require rest after it."

"Under your favour, sir, not so," said the elder stranger. "We hold, in England, that the best refreshment after we have been exhausted by one species of exercise is to betake ourselves to another; as riding, for example, affords more relief to one fatigued by walking, than a bed of down would. So, if your young men will permit, my son will join their exercises."

"He will find them rough playmates," answered the Switzer; "but be it at your pleasure."

The young men went out accordingly to the open lawn in front of the house. Anne of Geierstein, and some females of the household, sat down on a bank to judge which performed best, and shouts, loud laughing, and all that announces the riot of juvenile spirits occupied by manly sports, was soon after heard by the two seniors, as they sat together in the hall. The master of the house resumed the wine-flask, and, having filled the cup of his guest, poured the remainder into his own.

"At an age, worthy stranger," he said, "when the blood grows colder, and the feelings heavier, a moderate cup of wine brings back light thoughts, and makes the limbs supple. Yet, I almost wish that Noah had never planted the grape, when of late years I have seen with my own eyes my countrymen swill wine like very Germans, till they were like gorged swine, incapable of sense, thought, or motion."

"It is a vice," said the Englishman, "which I have observed gains ground in your country, where within a century I have heard it was totally unknown."

"It was so," said the Swiss, "for wine was seldom made at home, and never imported from abroad; for indeed none possessed the means of purchasing that, or aught else, which our valleys produce not. But our wars and our victories have gained us wealth as well as fame; and in the poor thoughts of one Switzer, at least, we had been better without both, had we not also gained liberty by the same exertion. It is something, however, that commerce may occasionally send into our remote mountains a sensible visitor like yourself, worthy guest, whose discourse shows him to be a man of sagacity and discernment; for though I love not the increasing taste for trinkets and gewgaws which you merchants introduce, yet I acknowledge that we simple mountaineers learn from men like you more of the world around us, than we could acquire by our own exertions. You are bound, you say, to Bâle, and thence to the Duke of Burgundy's leaguer?"

"I am so, my worthy host," said the merchant – "that is, providing I can perform my journey with safety."

"Your safety, good friend, may be assured, if you list to tarry for two or three days; for in that space I shall myself take the journey, and with such an escort as will prevent any risk of danger. You will find in me a sure and faithful guide, and I shall learn from you much of other countries, which it concerns me to know better than I do. Is it a bargain?"

"The proposal is too much to my advantage to be refused," said the Englishman; "but may I ask the purpose of your journey?"

"I chid yonder boy but now," answered Biederman, "for speaking on public affairs without reflection, and before the whole family; but our tidings and my errand need not be concealed from a considerate person like you, who must indeed soon learn it from public rumour. You know doubtless the mutual hatred which subsists between Louis XI. of France and Charles of Burgundy, whom men call the Bold; and having seen these countries, as I understand from your former discourse, you are probably well aware of the various contending interests, which, besides the personal hatred of the sovereigns, make them irreconcilable enemies. Now Louis, whom the world cannot match for craft and subtlety, is using all his influence, by distributions of large sums amongst some of the counsellors of our neighbours of Berne, by pouring treasures into the exchequer of that state itself, by holding out the bait of emolument to the old men, and encouraging the violence of the young, to urge the Bernese into a war with the Duke. Charles, on the other hand, is acting, as he frequently does, exactly as Louis could have wished. Our neighbours and allies of Berne do not, like us of the Forest Cantons, confine themselves to pasture or agriculture, but carry on considerable commerce, which the Duke of Burgundy has in various instances interrupted, by the exactions and violence of his officers in the frontier towns, as is doubtless well known to

you."

"Unquestionably," answered the merchant; "they are universally regarded as vexatious."

"You will not then be surprised, that, solicited by the one sovereign, and aggrieved by the other, proud of past victories, and ambitious of additional power, Berne and the City Cantons of our confederacy, whose representatives, from their superior wealth and better education, have more to say in our Diet than we of the Forests, should be bent upon war, from which it has hitherto happened that the Republic has always derived victory, wealth, and increase of territory."

"Ay, worthy host, and of glory," said Philipson, interrupting him with some enthusiasm; "I wonder not that the brave youths of your states are willing to thrust themselves upon new wars, since their past victories have been so brilliant and so far-famed."

"You are no wise merchant, kind guest," answered the host, "if you regard success in former desperate undertakings as an encouragement to future rashness. Let us make a better use of past victories. When we fought for our liberties God blessed our arms; but will He do so if we fight either for aggrandisement or for the gold of France?"

"Your doubt is just," said the merchant, more sedately; "but suppose you draw the sword to put an end to the vexatious exactions of Burgundy?"

"Hear me, good friend," answered the Switzer; "it may be that we of the Forest Cantons think too little of those matters

of trade, which so much engross the attention of the burghers of Berne. Yet we will not desert our neighbours and allies in a just quarrel; and it is well-nigh settled that a deputation shall be sent to the Duke of Burgundy to request redress. In this embassy the General Diet now assembled at Berne have requested that I should take some share; and hence the journey in which I propose that you should accompany me."

"It will be much to my satisfaction to travel in your company, worthy host," said the Englishman. "But, as I am a true man, methinks your port and figure resemble an envoy of defiance rather than a messenger of peace."

"And I too might say," replied the Switzer, "that your language and sentiments, my honoured guest, rather belong to the sword than the measuring-wand."

"I was bred to the sword, worthy sir, before I took the cloth-yard in my hand," replied Philipson, smiling, "and it may be I am still more partial to my old trade than wisdom would altogether recommend."

"I thought so," said Arnold; "but then you fought most likely under your country's banners against a foreign and national enemy; and in that case I will admit that war has something in it which elevates the heart above the due sense it should entertain of the calamity inflicted and endured by God's creatures on each side. But the warfare in which I was engaged had no such gilding. It was the miserable war of Zurich, where Switzers levelled their pikes against the bosoms of their own countrymen;

and quarter was asked and refused in the same kindly mountain language. From such remembrances your warlike recollections are probably free."

The merchant hung down his head and pressed his forehead with his hand, as one to whom the most painful thoughts were suddenly recalled.

"Alas!" he said, "I deserve to feel the pain which your words inflict. What nation can know the woes of England that has not felt them – what eye can estimate them which has not seen a land torn and bleeding with the strife of two desperate factions, battles fought in every province, plains heaped with slain, and scaffolds drenched in blood! Even in your quiet valleys, methinks, you may have heard of the Civil Wars of England?"

"I do indeed bethink me," said the Switzer, "that England had lost her possessions in France during many years of bloody internal wars concerning the colour of a rose – was it not? – But these are ended."

"For the present," answered Philipson, "it would seem so."

As he spoke, there was a knock at the door; the master of the house said, "Come in!" the door opened, and, with the reverence which was expected from young persons towards their elders in those pastoral regions, the fine form of Anne of Geierstein presented itself.

CHAPTER IV

And now the well-known bow the master bore,
Turn'd on all sides, and view'd it o'er and o'er;
Whilst some deriding, "How he turns the bow!
Some other like it sure the man must know:
Or else would copy – or in bows he deals;
Perhaps he makes them, or perhaps he steals."

Pope's Homer's Odyssey.

The fair maiden approached with the half-bashful half-important look which sits so well on a young housekeeper, when she is at once proud and ashamed of the matronly duties she is called upon to discharge, and whispered something in her uncle's ear.

"And could not the idle-pated boys have brought their own errand – what is it they want that they cannot ask themselves, but must send thee to beg it for them? Had it been anything reasonable, I should have heard it din'd into my ears by forty voices, so modest are our Swiss youths become nowadays." She stooped forward, and again whispered in his ear, as he fondly stroked her curling tresses with his ample hand, and replied, "The bow of Buttisholz, my dear? Why, the youths surely are not grown stronger since last year, when none of them could bend it? But yonder it hangs with its three arrows. Who is the wise

champion that is challenger at a game where he is sure to be foiled?"

"It is this gentleman's son, sir," said the maiden, "who, not being able to contend with my cousins in running, leaping, hurling the bar, or pitching the stone, has challenged them to ride, or to shoot with the English long-bow."

"To ride," said the venerable Swiss, "were difficult where there are no horses, and no level ground to career upon if there were. But an English bow he shall have, since we happen to possess one. Take it to the young men, my niece, with the three arrows, and say to them from me, that he who bends it will do more than William Tell, or the renowned Stauffacher, could have done."

As the maiden went to take the weapon from the place where it hung amid the group of arms which Philipson had formerly remarked, the English merchant observed, "that were the minstrels of his land to assign her occupation, so fair a maiden should be bow-bearer to none but the little blind god Cupid."

"I will have nothing of the blind god Cupid," said Arnold, hastily, yet half laughing at the same time; "we have been deafened with the foolery of minstrels and strolling minnesingers, ever since the wandering knaves have found there were pence to be gathered among us. A Swiss maiden should only sing Albert Ischudi's ballads, or the merry lay of the going out and return of the cows to and from the mountain pastures."

While he spoke, the damsel had selected from the arms a bow

of extraordinary strength, considerably above six feet in length, with three shafts of a cloth-yard long. Philipson asked to look at the weapons, and examined them closely. "It is a tough piece of yew," he said. "I should know it, since I have dealt in such commodities in my time; but when I was of Arthur's age, I could have bent it as easily as a boy bends a willow."

"We are too old to boast like boys," said Arnold Biederman, with something of a reproving glance at his companion. "Carry the bow to thy kinsmen, Anne, and let him who can bend it say he beat Arnold Biederman." As he spoke, he turned his eyes on the spare yet muscular figure of the Englishman, then again glanced down on his own stately person.

"You must remember, good my host," said Philipson, "that weapons are wielded not by strength, but by art and sleight of hand. What most I wonder at, is to see in this place a bow made by Matthew of Doncaster, a bowyer who lived at least a hundred years ago, remarkable for the great toughness and strength of the weapons which he made, and which are now become somewhat unmanageable, even by an English yeoman."

"How are you assured of the maker's name, worthy guest?" replied the Swiss.

"By old Matthew's mark," answered the Englishman, "and his initials cut upon the bow. I wonder not a little to find such a weapon here, and in such good preservation."

"It has been regularly waxed, oiled, and kept in good order," said the Landamman, "being preserved as a trophy of

a memorable day. It would but grieve you to recount its early history, since it was taken in a day fatal to your country."

"My country," said the Englishman, composedly, "has gained so many victories, that her children may well afford to hear of a single defeat. But I knew not that the English ever warred in Switzerland."

"Not precisely as a nation," answered Biederman; "but it was in my grandsire's days, that a large body of roving soldiers, composed of men from almost all countries, but especially Englishmen, Normans, and Gascons, poured down on the Argau, and the districts adjacent. They were headed by a great warrior called Ingelram de Couci, who pretended some claims upon the Duke of Austria; to satisfy which, he ravaged indifferently the Austrian territory and that of our Confederacy. His soldiers were hired warriors – Free Companions they called themselves – that seemed to belong to no country, and were as brave in the fight as they were cruel in their depredations. Some pause in the constant wars betwixt France and England had deprived many of those bands of their ordinary employment, and battle being their element, they came to seek it among our valleys. The air seemed on fire with the blaze of their armour, and the very sun was darkened at the flight of their arrows. They did us much evil, and we sustained the loss of more than one battle. But we met them at Buttisholz, and mingled the blood of many a rider (noble, as they were called and esteemed) with that of their horses. The huge mound that covers the bones of man and steed is still called

the English barrow."

Philipson was silent for a minute or two, and then replied, "Then let them sleep in peace. If they did wrong, they paid for it with their lives; and that is all the ransom that mortal man can render for his transgressions. – Heaven pardon their souls!"

"Amen," replied the Landamman, "and those of all brave men! – My grandsire was at the battle, and was held to have demeaned himself like a good soldier; and this bow has been ever since carefully preserved in our family. There is a prophecy about it, but I hold it not worthy of remark."

Philipson was about to inquire further, but was interrupted by a loud cry of surprise and astonishment from without.

"I must out," said Biederman, "and see what these wild lads are doing. It is not now as formerly in this land, when the young dared not judge for themselves, till the old man's voice had been heard."

He went forth from the lodge, followed by his guest. The company who had witnessed the games were all talking, shouting, and disputing in the same breath; while Arthur Philipson stood a little apart from the rest, leaning on the unbent bow with apparent indifference. At the sight of the Landamman all were silent.

"What means this unwonted clamour?" he said, raising a voice to which all were accustomed to listen with reverence. – "Rudiger," addressing the eldest of his sons, "has the young stranger bent the bow?"

"He has, father," said Rudiger; "and he has hit the mark. Three such shots were never shot by William Tell."

"It was chance – pure chance," said the young Swiss from Berne. "No human skill could have done it, much less a puny lad, baffled in all besides that he attempted among us."

"But what *has* been done?" said the Landamman. – "Nay, speak not all at once! – Anne of Geierstein, thou hast more sense and breeding than these boys – tell me how the game has gone."

The maiden seemed a little confused at this appeal, but answered with a composed and downcast look —

"The mark was, as usual, a pigeon to a pole. All the young men, except the stranger, had practised at it with the cross-bow and long-bow, without hitting it. When I brought out the bow of Buttisholz, I offered it first to my kinsmen. None would accept of it, saying, respected uncle, that a task too great for you must be far too difficult for them."

"They said well," answered Arnold Biederman; "and the stranger, did he string the bow?"

"He did, my uncle, but first he wrote something on a piece of paper, and placed it in my hands."

"And did he shoot and hit the mark?" continued the surprised Switzer.

"He first," said the maiden, "removed the pole a hundred yards farther than the post where it stood."

"Singular!" said the Landamman, "that is double the usual distance."

"He then drew the bow," continued the maiden, "and shot off, one after another, with incredible rapidity, the three arrows which he had stuck into his belt. The first cleft the pole, the second cut the string, the third killed the poor bird as it rose into the air."

"By St. Mary of Einsiedlen," said the old man, looking up in amaze, "if your eyes really saw this, they saw such archery as was never before witnessed in the Forest States!"

"I say nay to that, my revered kinsman," replied Rudolph Donnerhugel, whose vexation was apparent; "it was mere chance, if not illusion or witchery."

"What say'st thou of it thyself, Arthur," said his father, half smiling. "Was thy success by chance or skill?"

"My father," said the young man, "I need not tell you that I have done but an ordinary feat for an English bowman. Nor do I speak to gratify that misproud and ignorant young man. But to our worthy host and his family, I make answer. This youth charges me with having deluded men's eyes, or hit the mark by chance. For illusion, yonder is the pierced pole, the severed string, and the slain bird, they will endure sight and handling; and, besides, if that fair maiden will open the note which I put into her hand, she will find evidence to assure you, that even before I drew the bow, I had fixed upon the three marks which I designed to aim at."

"Produce the scroll, good niece," said her uncle, "and end the controversy."

"Nay, under your favour, my worthy host," said Arthur, "it is but some foolish rhymes addressed to the maiden's own eye."

"And under your favour, sir," said the Landamman, "whatsoever is fit for my niece's eyes may greet my ears."

He took the scroll from the maiden, who blushed deeply when she resigned it. The character in which it was written was so fine that the Landamman in surprise exclaimed, "No clerk of St. Gall could have written more fairly. — Strange," he again repeated, "that a hand which could draw so true a bow, should have the cunning to form characters so fair." He then exclaimed anew, "Ha! verses, by Our Lady! What, have we minstrels disguised as traders?" He then opened the scroll, and read the following lines: —

If I hit mast, and line, and bird,

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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