

"Certain that God has placed his seal on your forehead and devoted you to holiness from your mother's womb, I should not trouble myself about these things, but retain the conviction that you would be as pure in the theatre as in the cloister."

"What! would not your strict ideas of morality be shocked at being brought in contact with an actress?"

"In the dawn of religion," said he, "the theatre and the temple were one and the same sanctuary. In the purity of their primitive ideas, religious worship took the form of popular shows. The arts have their birth at the foot of the altar. The dance itself, that art now consecrated to ideas of impure voluptuousness, was the music of the senses in the festivals of the gods. Music and poetry were the highest expressions of faith, and woman endowed with genius and beauty was at once a sybil and priestess. To these severely grand forms of the past, absurd and culpable distinctions succeeded. Religion proscribed beauty from its festivals, and woman from its solemnities. Instead of ennobling and directing love, it banished and condemned it. Beauty, woman, love, cannot lose their empire. Men have raised for themselves other temples which they call theatres, and where no other god presides. Is it your fault, Consuelo, if they have become dens of corruption? Nature, who perfects her prodigies without troubling herself as to how men may receive them, has formed you to shine among your sex, and to shed over the world the treasures of your power and genius.—The cloister and the tomb are synonymous: you cannot, without morally committing suicide, bury the gifts of providence. You were obliged to wing your flight to a freer atmosphere. Energy is the condition of certain natures; an irresistible impulse impels them; and the decrees of the Deity in this respect are so decided, that he takes away the faculties which he has bestowed, so soon as they are neglected. The artist perishes and becomes extinct in obscurity, just as the thinker wanders and pines in solitude, and just as all human intellect is deteriorated, and weakened, and enervated, by inaction and isolation. Repair to the theatre, Consuelo, if you please, and submit with resignation to the apparent degradation, as the representative for the moment of a soul destined to suffer, of a lofty mind which vainly seeks for sympathy in the world around us, but which is forced to abjure a melancholy that is not the element of its life, and out of which the breath of the Holy Spirit imperiously expels it."

Albert continued to speak in this strain for a considerable time with great animation, hurrying Consuelo on to the recesses of his retreat. He had little difficulty in communicating to her his own enthusiasm for art, as in making her forget her first feeling of repugnance to re-enter the grotto. When she saw that he anxiously desired it, she began to entertain a wish for this interview, in order to become better acquainted with the ideas which this ardent yet timid man dared to express before her so boldly. These ideas were new to Consuelo, and perhaps they were entirely so in the mouth of a person of noble rank of that time and country. They only struck her however as the bold and frank expression of sentiments which she herself had frequently experienced in all their force. Devout, and an actress, she every day heard the canoness and the chaplain unceasingly condemn her brethren of the stage. In seeing herself restored to her proper sphere by a serious and reflecting man, she felt her heart throb and her bosom swell with exultation, as if she had been carried up into a more ele-

vated and congenial life. Her eyes were moistened with tears and her cheeks glowed with a pure and holy emotion, when at the end of an avenue she perceived the canoness, who was seeking her.

"Ah! dear priestess," said Albert, pressing her arm against his breast, "will you not come to pray in my church?"

"Yes, certainly I shall go," she replied.

"And when?"

"Whenever you wish. Do you think I am able yet to undertake this new exploit?"

"Yes; because we shall go to the Schreckenstein in broad daylight and by a less dangerous route than the well. Do you feel sufficient courage to rise before the dawn and to escape through the gates as soon as they are opened? I shall be in this underwood which you see at the side of the hill there by the stone cross, and shall serve as your guide."

"Very well, I promise," replied Consuelo, not without a slight palpitation of heart.

"It appears rather cool this evening for so long a walk—does it not?" asked the canoness, accosting them in her calm yet searching manner.

Albert made no reply. He could not dissemble. Consuelo, who did not experience equal emotion, passed her other arm within that of the canoness, and kissed her neck. Wenceslawa vainly pretended indifference, but in spite of herself she submitted to the ascendancy of this devout and affectionate spirit. She sighed, and on entering the castle proceeded to put up a prayer for her conversion.

CHAPTER LII.

MANY days passed away however without Albert's wish being accomplished. It was in vain that Consuelo rose before the dawn and passed the drawbridge; she always found his aunt or the chaplain wandering on the esplanade, and from thence reconnoitering all the open country which she must traverse in order to gain the copsewood on the hill. She determined to walk alone within range of their observation, and give up the project of joining Albert, who, from his green and wooded retreat, recognized the enemy on the look-out, took a long walk in the forest glades; and re-entered the castle without being perceived.

"You have had an opportunity of enjoying an early walk, Signora Porporina," said the canoness at breakfast. "Were you not afraid that the dampness of the morning might be injurious to your health?"

"It was I, aunt, who advised the signora to breathe the freshness of the morning air; and I think these walks will be very useful to her."

"I should have thought that, for a person who devotes herself to the cultivation of her voice," said the canoness, with a little affectation, "our mornings are somewhat foggy. But if it is under your directions—"

"Have confidence in Albert," interrupted Count Christian; "he has proved himself as good a physician as he is a good son and a faithful friend."

The dissimulation to which Consuelo was forced to yield with blushes, was very painful to her. She complained gently to Albert when she had an opportunity of speaking to him in private, and begged him to renounce his project, at least until his aunt's vigilance should be foiled. Albert consented, but entreated her to continue her walks in the environs of the park, so that he might join her whenever an opportunity presented itself.

Consuelo would gladly have been excused, although she liked walking, and felt how necessary to her convalescence it was, to enjoy exercise for some time every day, free from the restraint of this enclosure of walls and moats, where her thoughts were stifled as if she had been a prisoner; yet it gave her pain thus to practise deception towards those whom she respected, and from whom she received hospitality. Love, however, removes many obstacles, but friendship reflects and Consuelo reflected much. They were now enjoying the last fine days of summer; for several months had passed since Consuelo had come to dwell in the Castle of the Giants. What a summer for Consuelo! The palest autumn of Italy was more light, and rich, and genial. But this warm, moist air, this sky, often veiled by white and fleecy clouds, had also their charm and their peculiar beauty. She found an attraction in these solitary walks, which increased perhaps her disinclination to revisit the cavern. In spite of the resolution she had formed, she felt that Albert would take a load from her bosom in giving her back her promise; and when she found herself no longer under the spell of his supplicating looks and enthusiastic words, she secretly blessed his good aunt, who prevented her fulfilling her engagement by the obstacles she every day placed in the way.

One morning, as she wandered along the bank of the mountain streamlet, she observed Albert leaning on the balustrade of the parterre, far above her. Notwithstanding the distance which separated them, she felt as if incessantly under the disturbed and passionate gaze of this man, by whom she suffered herself in so great a degree to be governed. "My situation here is somewhat strange!" she exclaimed; "while this persevering friend observes me to see that I am faithful to the promise I have made, without doubt I am watched from some other part of the castle, to see that I maintain no relations with him that their customs and ideas of propriety would proscribe. I do not know what is passing in their minds. The Baroness Amelia does not return. The canoness appears to grow cold towards me, and to distrust me. Count Christian redoubles his attentions, and expresses his dread of the arrival of Porpora, which will probably be the signal for my departure. Albert appears to have forgotten that I forbade him to hope. As if he had a right to expect everything from me, he asks nothing, and does not abjure a passion which seems, notwithstanding my inability to return it, to render him happy. In the mean time, here I am, as if I were engaged in attending every morning at an appointed place of meeting, to which I wish he may not come, exposing myself to the blame—nay, for aught I know, perhaps to the scorn—of a family who cannot understand either my friendship for him nor my position towards him; since indeed I do not comprehend them myself nor foresee their result.

"What a strange destiny is mine! Shall I then be condemned forever to devote myself to others, without being loved in return, or without being able to love those whom I esteem?"

In the midst of these reflections a profound melancholy seized her.

She felt the necessity of belonging to herself—that sovereign and legitimate want, the necessary condition of progress and development of the true artist. The watchful care which she had promised to observe towards Count Albert, weighed upon her as an iron chain. The bitter recollections of Anzoletto and of Venice clung to her, in the inaction and solitude of a life too monotonous and regular for her powerful organization.

She stopped near the rock which Albert had often shown her as being the place where he had first seen her, an infant, tied with thongs on her mother's shoulders like the pedlar's pack, and running over mountains and valleys, like the grasshopper of the fable, heedless of the morrow, and without a thought of advancing old age and inexorable poverty. "O, my poor mother!" thought the young zingarella, "here am I, brought back by my incomprehensible fate to a spot which you once traversed only to retain a vague recollection of it and the pledge of a touching kindness. You were then young and handsome, and doubtless could have met many a place where love and hospitality would have awaited you—society which would have absolved and transformed you, and in the bosom of which your painful and wandering life would have at last tasted comfort and repose. But you felt, and always said, that this comfort, this repose, were mortal weariness to the artist's soul. You were right—I feel it; for behold me in this castle, where, as elsewhere, you would pause but one night. Here I am, with every comfort around me, pampered, caressed, and with a powerful lord at my feet: and nevertheless, I am weary, weary, and suffocated with restraint."

Consuelo, overpowered with an extraordinary emotion, seated herself on the rock. She looked at the sandy path, as if she thought to find there the print of her mother's naked feet. The sheep in passing had left some locks of their fleece upon the thorns. This fleece, of a reddish brown, recalled the russet hue of her mother's coarse mantle—that mantle which had so long protected her against sun and cold, against dust and rain. She had seen it fall from her shoulders piece by piece. "And we, too," she said, "were wandering sheep; we, too, left fragments of our apparel on the wayside thorn, but we always bore along with us the proud love and the full enjoyment of our dear liberty."

While musing thus, Consuelo fixed her eyes upon the path of yellow sand which wound gracefully over the hill, and which, widening as it reached the valley, disappeared towards the north among the green pine-trees and the dark heath. "What is more beautiful than a road?" she thought. "It is the symbol and image of a life of activity and variety. What pleasing ideas are connected in my mind with the capricious turns of this! I do not recollect the country through which it winds, and yet I have formerly passed through it. But it should indeed be beautiful, were it only as a contrast to yonder dark castle, which sleeps eternally on its immovable rocks. How much pleasanter to the eye are these gravelled paths, with their glowing hue, and the golden broom which shadow them, than the straight alleys and stiff paling of the proud domain? With merely looking at the formal lines of a garden, I feel wearied and overcome. Why should my feet seek to reach that which my eyes and thoughts can at once embrace, while the free road, which turns aside and is half hidden in the woods, invites me to follow its windings and penetrate its mysteries? And then it is the path for all human kind—it is the

highway of the world. It belongs to no master, to close and open it at pleasure. It is only the powerful and rich that are entitled to tread its flowery margins and to breathe its rich perfume. Every bird may build its nest amid its branches; every wanderer may repose his head upon its stones—nor wall nor paling shuts out his horizon. Heaven does not close before him; so far as his eye can reach, the highway is a land of liberty. To the right, to the left, woods, fields—all have masters; but the road belongs to him to whom nothing else belongs, and how fondly therefore does he love it! The meanest beggar prefers it to asylums, which, were they rich as palaces, would be but prisons to him. His dream, his passion, his hope, will ever be the highway. O, my mother, you knew it well, and often told me so! Why cannot I reanimate your ashes which repose far from me, beneath the seaweed of the lagunes? Why canst thou not carry me on thy strong shoulders, and bear me far, far away, where the swallow skims onward to the blue and distant hills, and where the memory of the past and the longings after vanished happiness, cannot follow the light-footed artist, who travels still faster than they do, and each day places a new horizon, a second world, between her and the enemies of liberty? My poor mother, why canst thou not still by turns cherish and oppress me, and lavish alternate kisses and blows, like the wind which sometimes caresses and sometimes lays prostrate the young corn upon the fields, to raise and cast it down again according to its fantasy? Thou hadst a firmer soul than mine, and thou wouldst have torn me, either willingly or by force, from the bonds which daily entangle me!"

In the midst of this entrancing yet mournful reverie, Consuelo was struck by the tones of a voice that made her start as if a red-hot iron had been placed upon her heart. It was that of a man from the ravine below, humming in the Venetian dialect the song of the "Echo," one of the most original compositions of Chiozzetto.* The person who sung did not exert the full power of his voice, and his breathing seemed affected by walking. He warbled a few notes now and then, stopping from time to time to converse with another person, just as if he had wished to dissipate the weariness of his journey. He then resumed his song as before, as if by way of exercise, interrupted it again to speak to his companion, and in this manner approached the spot where Consuelo sat, motionless, and as if about to faint. She could not hear the conversation which took place, as the distance was too great; nor could she see the travellers in consequence of an intervening projection of the rock. But could she be for an instant deceived in that voice, in those accents, which she knew so well, and the fragments of that song which she herself had taught, and so often made her graceless pupil repeat?

At length the two invisible travellers drew near, and she heard one whose voice was unknown to her, say to the other, in bad Italian, and with the patois of the country, "Ah, signor, do not go up there—the horses could not follow you, and you would lose sight of me; keep by the banks of the stream. See, the road lies before us, and the way you are taking is only a path for foot-passengers."

The voice which Consuelo knew became more distant, and appeared to descend, and soon she heard him ask what fine castle that was on the other side.

* Jean Cocco de Chiozzia, sixteenth century.

"That is Reisenburg, which means the Castle of the Giants," replied the guide, for he was one by profession, and Consuelo could now distinguish him at the bottom of the hill, on foot, and leading two horses covered with sweat. The bad state of the roads, recently inundated by the torrent, had obliged the riders to dismount. The traveller followed at a little distance, and Consuelo could at length see him by leaning over the rock which protected her. His back was towards her, and he wore a travelling-dress, which so altered his appearance, and even his walk, that, had she not heard his voice, she could not have recognised him. He stopped, however, to look at the castle, and taking off his broad-leaved hat, wiped his face with his handkerchief. Although only able to distinguish him imperfectly from the great height at which she was placed, she knew at once those golden and flowing locks, and recognised the movement he was accustomed to make in raising them from his forehead or neck when he was warm.

"This seems a very fine castle," said he. "If I had time, I should like to ask the giants for some breakfast."

"Oh, do not attempt it," said the guide, shaking his head. "The Rudolstadt's only receive beggars and relations."

"Are they not more hospitable than that? May the devil seize them, then!"

"Listen—it is because they have something to conceal."

"A treasure or a crime?"

"Oh, nothing of that kind; it is their son, who is mad."

"Deuce take him, too, then; it would do them a service."

The guide began to laugh; Anzoleto commenced to sing.

"Come," said the guide, "we are now over the worst of the road; if you wish to mount, we may gallop as far as Tusta. The road is magnificent—nothing but sand. Once there, you will find the highway to Prague, and excellent post-horses."

"In that case," said Anzoleto, adjusting his stirrups, "I may say the fiends seize thee, too! for your jades, your mountain roads, and yourself, are all becoming very tiresome."

Thus speaking, he slowly mounted his nag, sunk the spurs in its side, and without troubling himself about the guide, who followed him with great difficulty, he darted off towards the north, raising clouds of dust on that road which Consuelo had so long contemplated, and on which she had so little expected to see pass, like a fatal vision, the enemy of her life, the constant torture of her heart. She followed him with her eyes, in a state of stupor impossible to express. Struck with disgust and fear, so long as she was within hearing of his voice, she had remained hidden and trembling. But when he disappeared, when she thought she had lost sight of him perhaps for ever, she experienced only violent despair. She threw herself over the rock to see him for a longer time; the undying love which she cherished for him awoke again with fervor, and she would have recalled him, but her voice died on her lips. The hand of death seemed to press heavily on her bosom; her eyes grew dim; a dull noise, like the dashing of the sea, murmured in her ears; and falling exhausted at the foot of the rock, she found herself in the arms of Albert, who had approached without being perceived, and who bore her, apparently lying, to a more shady and secluded part of the mountain.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE fear of betraying her emotion, a secret so long hidden in the depths of her soul, restored Consuelo to strength, and enabled her to control herself, so that Albert perceived nothing extraordinary in her situation. Just as the young Anzoleto and his guide disappeared among the distant pine-trees, and Albert might therefore attribute to his own presence the danger she had incurred of falling down the precipice. The idea of this danger, of which he supposed himself to be the cause in terrifying her by his sudden approach, so distressed him, that he did not at first perceive Consuelo's confused replies. Consuelo, in whom he still inspired a sort of superstitious terror, feared that he might divine the mystery. But Albert, since love had made him live the life of other men, seemed to have lost the apparently supernatural faculties which he had formerly possessed. She soon conquered her agitation, and Albert's proposal to conduct her to his hermitage, did not displease her at this moment, as it would have done a few hours previously. It seemed as if the grave and serious character and gloomy abode of this man, who regarded her with such devoted affection, offered themselves as a refuge in which she could find strength to combat the memory of her unhappy passion. "It is Providence," thought she, "who has sent me this friend in the midst of my trials, and the dark sanctuary to which he would lead me, is an emblem of the tomb in which I should wish to be buried, rather than pursue the track of the evil genius who has just passed me. Oh, yes, my God! rather than follow his footsteps, let the earth open to receive me, and snatch me forever from the living world!"

"Dear Consolation," said Albert, "I came to tell you that my aunt, having to examine her accounts this morning, is not thinking of us, and we are at length at liberty to accomplish our pilgrimage. Nevertheless, if you still feel any repugnance to revisit places which recall so much suffering and terror—"

"No, my friend," replied Consuelo: "on the contrary, I have never felt better disposed to worship with you, and to soar aloft together on the wings of that sacred song which you promised to let me hear."

They took the way together towards the Schreckenstein, and as they buried themselves in the wood in an opposite direction to that taken by Anzoleto, Consuelo felt more at ease, as if each step tended to weaken the charm of which she felt the force. She walked on so eagerly, that although grave and reserved, Count Albert might have ascribed her anxiety to a desire to please, if he had not felt that distrust of himself and of his destiny, which formed the principal feature of his character.

He conducted her to the foot of the Schreckenstein, and stopped at the entrance of a grotto filled with stagnant water, and nearly hidden by the luxuriant vegetation. "This grotto, in which you may remark some traces of a vaulted construction," said he, "is called in the country 'The Monk's Cave.' Some think it was a cellar of a convent, at a period when, in place of these ruins, there stood here a fortified town; others relate that it was subsequently the retreat of a repentant criminal, who turned hermit. However this may be, no one dares to penetrate the recesses; and every one says that the water is deep, and is imbued with a mortal poison, owing to the veins

of copper through which it runs in its passage. But this water is really neither deep nor dangerous; it sleeps upon a bed of rocks, and we can easily cross it, Consuelo, if you will once again confide in the strength of my arm and the purity of my love."

Thus saying, after having satisfied himself that no one had followed or observed them, he took her in his arms and entering the water, which reached almost to his knee, he cleared a passage through the shrubs and matted ivy, which concealed the bottom of the grotto. In a very short time he set her down upon a bank of fine dry sand, in a place completely dark. He immediately lighted the lantern with which he was furnished, and after some turns in subterranean galleries, similar to those which Consuelo had already traversed, they found themselves at the door of a cell, opposite to that which she had opened the first time.

"This subterranean building," said he, "was originally destined to serve as a place of refuge in time of war, either for the principal inhabitants of the town, which covered the hill, or for the lords of the Castle of the Giants, to whom this town belonged, who could enter it secretly by the passages with which you are already acquainted. If a hermit, as they assert, since inhabited the Monk's Cave, it is probable that he was aware of this retreat; because the gallery which we have just traversed, has been recently cleared out, whilst I have found those leading from the castle, so filled up in many places with earth and gravel, that I found difficulty in removing them. Besides, the relics I discovered here, the remnants of matting, the pitcher, the crucifix, the lamp, and above all the skeleton of a man lying on his back, his hands crossed on his breast, as if in a last prayer at the hour of his final sleep, proved to me that a hermit had here piously and peaceably ended his mysterious existence. Our peasants still believe that the hermit's spirit inhabits the depths of the mountain. They affirm that they have often seen him wander around it, or flit to the heights by the light of the moon; that they have heard him pray, sigh, sob, and that even a strange, incomprehensible music has been wafted towards them, like a suppressed sigh, on the wings of the breeze. Even I myself, Consuelo, when despair peopled nature around me with phantoms and prodigies, have thought I saw the gloomy penitent prostrate under the Hussite. I have fancied that I heard his plaintive sobs and heart-rending sighs ascend from the depths of the abyss. But since I discovered and inhabited this cell, I have never seen any hermit but myself—any spectre but my own figure—nor have I heard any sobs save those which issued from my own breast."

Since Consuelo's first interview with Albert in the cavern, she had never heard him utter an irrational word. She did not venture, therefore, to allude to the manner in which he had addressed herself, nor to the illusions in the midst of which she had surprised him. But she was astonished to observe that they seemed absolutely forgotten, and not wishing to recal them, she merely asked if solitude had really delivered him from the disquietude of which he spoke.

"I cannot tell you precisely," he replied; "and at least not till you exact it, can I urge my memory to the task. I must have been mad, and the efforts I made to conceal it, betrayed it yet more. When, thanks to one whom tradition had handed down the secret of these caverns, I succeeded in escaping from the solicitude of my relatives, and hiding my despair, my existence changed. I recovered a sort of empire over myself, and secure of concealment from troublesome wit-

nesses, I was able at length to appear tranquil and resigned in the bosom of my family."

Consuelo perceived that poor Albert was under an illusion in some respects, but this was not the time to enlighten him; and, pleased to hear him speak of the past with such unconcern, she began to examine the cell with more attention than she had bestowed on it the first time. There was no appearance of the care and neatness which she formerly observed. The dampness of the walls, the cold of the atmosphere, and the mouldiness of the books, betrayed complete abandonment. "You see that I have kept my word," said Albert, who had just succeeded with great difficulty in lighting the stove. "I have never set foot here since the day you displayed your power over me by tearing me away."

Consuelo had a question on her lips, but restrained herself. She was about to ask if Zdenko, the friend, the faithful servant, the zealous guardian, had also abandoned and neglected the hermitage. But she recollected the profound sorrow which Albert always displayed when she hazarded a question as to what had become of him, and why she had never seen him since the terrible encounter in the cavern? Albert had always evaded these questions, either by pretending not to understand her, or by begging her to fear nothing for the innocent. She was at first persuaded that Zdenko had received and faithfully fulfilled the command of his master never to appear before his eyes. But when she resumed her solitary walks, Albert, in order to completely reassure her, had sworn, while a deadly paleness overspread his countenance, that she should not encounter Zdenko, who had set out on a long voyage. In fact no one had seen him since that time, and they thought he was dead in some corner, or that he had quitted the country.

Consuelo believed neither of these suppositions. She knew too well the passionate attachment of Zdenko to Albert to think a separation possible. As to his death, she thought of it with a terror she hardly admitted to herself, when she recollected Albert's dreadful oath to sacrifice the life of this unhappy being if necessary to the repose of her he loved. But she rejected this frightful suspicion on recalling the mildness and humanity which the whole of Albert's life displayed. Besides he had enjoyed perfect tranquillity for many months, and no apparent demonstration on the part of Zdenko had reawakened the fury which the young count had for a moment manifested. He had forgotten that unhappy moment which Consuelo also struggled to forget; he only remembered what took place in the cavern whilst he was in possession of his reason. Consuelo therefore concluded that he had forbidden Zdenko to enter or approach the castle, and that the poor fellow, through grief or anger, had condemned himself to voluntary seclusion in the hermitage. She took it for granted that Zdenko would come out on the Schreckenstein only by night for air, and to converse with Albert, who no doubt took care of, and watched over him who had for so long a time taken care of himself. On seeing the condition of the cell, Consuelo was driven to the conclusion that he was angry at his master, and had displayed it by neglecting his retreat. But as Albert had assured her when they entered the grotto, that there was contained in it no cause of alarm, she seized the opportunity when his attention was otherwise engaged, to open the rusty gate of what he called his church, and in this way to reach Zdenko's cell, where doubtless she would find traces of his

recent presence.—The door yielded as soon as she had turned the key, but the darkness was so great that she could see nothing. She waited till Albert had passed into the mysterious oratory which he had promised to show her, and which he was preparing for her reception, and she then took a light and returned cautiously to Zdenko's chamber, not without trembling at the idea of finding him there in person. But there was not the faintest evidence of his existence. The bed of leaves and the sheepskins had been removed. The seat, the tools, the sandals of undressed hide—all had disappeared, and one would have said, to look at the dripping walls, that this vault had never sheltered a living being.

A feeling of sadness and terror took possession of her at this discovery. A mystery shrouded the fate of this unfortunate, and Consuelo accused herself of being perhaps the cause of a deplorable event. There were two natures in Albert: the one wise, the other mad: the one polished, tender, merciful; the other strange, untamed, perhaps violent and implacable. His fancied identity with the fanatic John Ziska, his love for the recollections of Hussite Bohemia, and that mute and patient, but at the same time profound passion which he nourished for herself—all occurred at this moment to her mind, and seemed to confirm her most painful suspicions. Motionless and frozen with horror, she hardly ventured to glance at the cold and naked floor of the grotto, dreading to find on it tracks of blood.

She was still plunged in these reflections, when she heard Albert tune his violin, and soon she heard him playing on the admirable instrument the ancient psalm which she so much wished to hear a second time. The music was so original, and Albert performed it with such sweet expression, that, forgetting her distress, and attracted and as if charmed by a magnetic power, she gently approached the spot where he stood.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE door of the church was open, and Consuelo stopped upon the threshold to observe the inspired virtuoso and the strange sanctuary.—This so-called church was nothing but an immense grotto, hewn, or rather cleft out of the rock irregularly by the hand of nature, and hollowed out by the subterranean force of the water. Scattered torches, placed on gigantic blocks, shed a fantastic light on the green sides of the cavern, and partially revealed dark recesses in the depths of which the huge forms of tall stalactites loomed like spectres alternately seeking and shunning the light. The enormous sedimentary deposits on the sides of the cavern assumed a thousand fantastic forms. Sometimes they seemed devouring serpents, rolling over and interlacing each other. Sometimes hanging from the roof and shooting upwards from the floor they wore the aspect of the colossal teeth of some monster, of which the dark cave beyond might pass for the gaping jaws. Elsewhere they might have been taken for misshapen statues, giant images of the demi-gods of antiquity. A vegetation appropriate to the grotto—huge lichens, rough as dragon's scales; festoons of heavy-leaved scolopendra, tufts of young cypresses recently planted in the middle of the enclosure on little heaps of artificial soil

not unlike graves—gave the place a terrific and sombre aspect which deeply impressed Consuelo. To her first feeling of terror, admiration however quickly succeeded. She approached and saw Albert standing on the margin of the fountain which sprang up in the midst of the cavern. This water, although gushing out abundantly, was enclosed in so deep a basin that no movement was visible on its surface. It was calm and motionless as a block of dark sapphire, and the beautiful aquatic plants with which Albert and Zdenko had clothed its margin, were not agitated by the slightest motion. The spring was warm at its source, and the tepid exhalations with which it filled the cavern, caused a mild and moist atmosphere favorable to vegetation. It gushed from its fountain in many ramifications, of which some lost themselves under the rocks with a dull noise, while others ran gently into limpid streams in the interior of the grotto and disappeared in the depths beyond.

When Count Albert, who until then had been only trying the strings of his violin, saw Consuelo advance towards him, he came forward to meet her, and assisted her to cross the channels, over which he had thrown, in the deepest spots, some trunks of trees, while in other places rocks on a level with the water, offered an easy passage to those habituated to it. He offered his hand to assist her, and sometimes lifted her in his arms. But this time Consuelo was afraid, not of the torrent which flowed silently and darkly under her feet, but of the mysterious guide towards whom she was drawn by an irresistible sympathy, while an indefinable repulsion at the same time held her back. Having reached the bank she beheld a spectacle not much calculated to reassure her. It was a sort of quadrangular monument, formed of bones and human skulls, arranged as if in a catacomb.

"Do not be uneasy," said Albert, who felt her shudder. "These are the honored remains of the martyrs of my religion, and they form the altar before which I love to meditate and pray."

"What is your religion then, Albert?" said Consuelo, in a sweet and melancholy voice.—"Are these bones Hussite or Catholic? Were not both the victims of impious fury, and martyrs of a faith equally sincere? Is it true that you prefer the Hussite doctrines to those of your relatives, and that the reforms subsequent to those of John Huss, do not appear to you sufficiently radical and decisive? Speak, Albert—what am I to believe?"

"If they told you that I preferred the reform of the Hussites to that of the Lutherans, and the great Procopius to the vindictive Calvin, as much as I prefer the exploits of the Taborites to those of the soldiers of Wallenstein, they have told you the truth, Consuelo. But what signifies my creed to you, who seem instinctively aware of truth, and who know the Deity better than I do? God forbid that I should bring you here to trouble your pure soul and peaceful conscience with my tormenting reveries! Remain as you are, Consuelo; you were born pious and good; moreover, you were born poor and obscure, and nothing has changed in you the pure dictates of reason and the light of justice. We can pray together without disputing—you who know everything although having learned nothing, and who know very little after a long and tedious study. In whatever temple you raise your voice, the knowledge of the true God will be in your heart, and the feeling of the true faith will kindle your soul. It is not to instruct you, but in order that your revelation may be im-

parted to me, that I wished our voices and our spirits to unite before this altar, formed of the bones of my fathers."

"I was not mistaken, then, in thinking that these honored remains, as you call them, are those of Hussites, thrown into the fountain of the Schreckenstein during the bloody fury of the civil wars, in the time of your ancestor John Ziska, who, they say, made fearful reprisals? I have been told that, after burning the village, he destroyed the wells. I fancy I can discover in the obscurity of this vault, a circle of hewed stones above my head, which tells me that we are precisely under a spot where I have often sat when fatigued after searching for you in vain. Say, Count Albert, is this really the place that you have baptized as the Stone of Expiation?"

"Yes, it is here," replied Albert, "that torments and atrocious violence have consecrated the asylum of my prayers, and the sanctuary of my grief. You see enormous blocks suspended above our heads, and others scattered on the banks of the stream. The just hands of the Taborites flung them there by the orders of him whom they called the Terrible Blind Man: but they only served to force back the waters towards those subterranean beds in which they succeeded in forcing a passage. The wells were destroyed, and I have covered their ruins with cypress, but it would have needed a mountain to fill this cavern. The blocks which were heaped up in the mouth of the well, were stopped by a winding stair, similar to that which you had the courage to descend in my garden at the castle. Since that time, the gradual pressure of the soil has thrust them closer together, and confines them better. If any portion of the mass escapes, it is during the winter frosts; you have therefore nothing to fear from this fall."

"It was not that of which I was thinking, Albert," replied Consuelo, looking towards the gloomy altar on which he had placed his Stradivarius. "I asked myself why you render exclusive worship to the memory of these victims, as if there were no martyrs on the other side, and as if the crimes of the one were more pardonable than those of the other?"

Consuelo spoke thus in a severe tone, and looking distrustfully at Albert. She remembered Zdenko, and all her questions, had she dared so to utter them, assumed in her mind a tone of interrogation, such as would befit a judge towards a criminal.

The painful emotion which suddenly seized upon the count seemed the confession of remorse. He passed his hands over his forehead, then pressed them against his breast, as if it were being torn asunder. His countenance changed in a frightful manner, and Consuelo feared that he might have only too well understood her.

"You do not know what harm you do me," said he, leaning upon the heap of bones, and drooping his head toward the withered skulls, which seemed to gaze on him from their hollow orbits. "No, you cannot know it, Consuelo, and your cold remarks recal the memory of the dreary past. You do not know that you speak to a man who has lived through ages of grief, and who, after being the blind instrument of inflexible justice in the hands of God, has received his recompense and undergone his punishment. I have so suffered, so wept, so expiated my dreary destiny, so atoned for the horrors to which my fate subjected me, that I had at last flattered myself I could forget them. Forgetfulness!—yes, forgetfulness!—that was the craving which consumed my aching breast; that was my vow and my daily prayer; that was the token of my alliance with man and my recon-

collation with God, which, during long years, I had implored, prostrate upon these mouldering bones. When I first saw you, Consuelo, I began to hope; when you pitied me, I thought I was saved. See this wreath of withered flowers ready to fall into the dust, and which encircles the skull that surmounts the altar. You do not recognise it, though I have watered it with many a bitter yet soothing tear. It is you who gathered them, you who sent them to me by the companion of my sorrows, the faithful guardian of this sepulchre. Covering them with kisses and tears, I anxiously asked myself if you could ever feel any true and heartfelt regard for one like myself—a pitiless fanatic, an unfeeling tyrant—”

“But what are the crimes you have committed?” said Consuelo, firmly, distracted with a thousand varying emotions, and emboldened by the deep dejection of Albert. “If you have a confession to make, make it here to me, that I may know if I can absolve and love you.”

“Yes, you may absolve me; for he whom you know, Albert of Rudolstadt, has been innocent as a child; but he whom you do not know, John Ziska of the Chalice, has been whirled by the wrath of Heaven into a career of iniquity.”

Consuelo saw the imprudence of which she had been guilty, in rousing the slumbering flame and recalling to Albert's mind his former madness. This, however, was not the moment to combat it, and she was revolving in her mind some expedient to calm him, and had gradually sunk into a reverie, when suddenly she perceived that Albert no longer spoke, no longer held her hand—that he was not at her side, but standing a few paces off, before the monument, performing on his violin the singular airs with which she had been already so surprised and charmed.

CHAPTER LV.

ALBERT at first attuned his instrument to several of those ancient chaunts, the authors of which are either unknown to us, or forgotten among the Bohemians; but the precious airs and melodies of which Zdenko had retained by ear, whence the Count had discovered the text by dint of study and meditation. He had so thoroughly fed his spirit on these compositions, which seem at a first hearing rude and barbaric, but which are deeply touching and truly fine in the ear of a serious and enlightened judgment, that he had so far assimilated them to himself as to have attained the power of carrying out long improvisations on the idea of those themes, of mingling with them his own ideas, of recovering and developing the primitive sentiment of the compositions, and of abandoning himself to his own personal inspirations, without allowing the original character, so striking and austere, of those ancient chaunts, to be lost or altered in his ingenious and scientific interpretation of them. Consuelo had promised herself that she would hear, and collect these invaluable specimens of the ardent popular genius of old Bohemia. But all power of criticism soon forsook her, as well on account of the meditative humor in which she fancied to be, as in consequence of the vague and rambling tone which pervaded that music, all unfamiliar to her ear.

There is a style of music which may be called natural, because it is

not the offspring of science or reflection, but of an inspiration which sets at defiance all the strictness of rules and convention. I mean popular music, and especially that of the peasantry. How many exquisite compositions are born, live and die, among the peasantry, without ever having been dignified by a correct notation, without ever having deigned to be confined within the absolute limits of a distinct and definite theme. The unknown artist who improvises his rustic ballad while watching his flocks, or guiding his ploughshare, and there are such even in countries which would seem the least poetical, will experience great difficulty in retaining and fixing his fugitive fancies. He communicates his ballad to other musicians, children like himself of nature, and these circulate it from hamlet to hamlet, from cot to cot, each modifying it according to the bent of his own individual genius. It is hence that these pastoral songs and romances, so artlessly striking or so deeply touching, are for the most part lost, and rarely exist above a single century in the memory of their rustic composers. Musicians completely formed under the rules of art rarely trouble themselves to collect them. Many even disdain them from very lack of an intelligence sufficiently pure, and a taste sufficiently elevated to admit of their appreciating them. Others are dismayed by the difficulties which they encounter the moment they endeavor to discover that true and original version, which, perhaps, no longer retains its existence even in the mind of its author, and which certainly was never at any time recognised as a definite and invariable type by any one of his numerous interpreters.

Some of these have altered it through ignorance, others have developed, adorned and embellished it, as an effect of their superiority, because the teachings of their art have not instructed them to repudiate its natural and instinctive spirit. They are not themselves aware that they have transformed the primitive composition, nor are their artless auditors more conscious of it than they. The peasant examines not nor compares. When heaven has made him a musician, he sings as the birds sing, especially as sings the nightingale, whose improvisation is everlasting, although the infinitely varied elements of its strain are the same for ever. Moreover, this popular genius is unlimited in its exuberance.* It has no need to commit its

* If you consider with any attention the bagpipe-players who perform the office of fiddlers in the rural districts in the centre of France, you will perceive that they do not know above two or three hundred compositions, all of the same style and character, which are however never borrowed the one from the other, and you will also ascertain that in less than three years this immense collection is entirely renewed. Not very long ago I had the following conversation with one of these wandering musicians:—“You have learned a little music, have you not?”—“Certainly—I have learned to play the thorough-bass-bagpipe, and the key-bagpipe.”—“Where did you take your lessons?”—“In the Bourbonnais, in the woods.”—“Who was your master?”—“A native of the woods.”—“Do you know your notes?”—“I believe so.”—“In what key do you play?”—“What key I what does that mean?”—“Do n't you play in re?”—“I don't know what you mean by re.”—“What are the names of your notes?”—“We call them notes. They have no particular names.”—“How do you retain so many different airs?”—“By ear.”—“By whom are these airs composed?”—“By many persons, famous musicians of the woods.”—“Do they compose many?”—“They are always composing. They never cease from it.”—“Have they any other occupation?”—“They cut wood.”—“Are they regular woodcutters?”—“Almost all of them are woodcutters. They say among us that music grows in the woods. It is there we always find it.”—“And do you go to the woods in quest of it?”—“Every year. Petty musicians do not go thither; they catch by ear whatever they hear on the roads and repeat it as well as they can. But to get the true account one must go and listen to the