

was much excited, struck his brow with his hands, and walked up and down the room. He wrung every joint, found courage, and, braving suspicion, bade Consuelo to revive, while he struck her violently.

"You wish to go," said he. "I am willing. You wish to see Albert. You wish to give him the final blow. There is no means of avoiding it. We have two days to spare. We should pass them at Dresden, but we will not be able to rest there. If we are not on the Prussian frontier by the eighteenth, we shall not be able to keep our engagements. The theatre opens on the twenty-fifth, and if you are not ready I will have to pay a considerable fine. I have but half the necessary sum, and in Prussia any one who cannot pay goes to prison. Once in prison, a man is forgotten, and ten, twenty years await you—until death comes. This is what awaits me, if you do not leave Riesenbergh at five o'clock on the morning of the fourteenth."

"Do not be uneasy, maestro," said Consuelo, with all the energy of resolution, "I have already thought of that. Do not make me uneasy at Riesenbergh, and we leave at the time you say."

"You must swear to do so."

"I will," said she, shrugging her shoulders impatiently. "When your life or liberty are at stake, I fancy you need no oath."

Just then the baron came in, followed by an old intelligent servant, who wrapped him up in a pelisse as if he had been a child, and took him to his carriage. They soon came to Beraun, and were at Pilsen before daybreak.

CHAPTER CII.

FROM Pilsen to Tauss they went as rapidly as possible, but much time was lost by the roads running through almost impenetrable forests, in passing which passengers underwent more than one danger. At last, after travelling scarcely more than a league an hour, they came to the Giants' Castle. Consuelo had never had a more fatiguing or a more disagreeable journey. The Baron of Rudolstadt seemed almost paralyzed, so indolent and gouty had he become. Only a year before, Consuelo had seen him strong as a boxer. Then, his iron frame was animated by a stout heart. He had ever obeyed his instincts; and at the first impression of unexpected misfortune, he had been crushed. The pity with which he inspired Consuelo increased her uneasiness. She said to herself "Shall I find all the inmates of Riesenbergh in this condition?"

The drawbridge was down, and the grating open. The servants stood in the hall with burning torches. No one was able to speak a word to the servants. Porpora, seeing that the baron could scarcely walk, took him by the arm and attempted to aid him, while Consuelo hurried rapidly up the main entrance.

She met the canoress in the doorway, and without even pausing to speak the common-place salutations, took her by the arm, and said—

"Follow me; we have not a moment to lose. Albert begins to grow impatient. He has counted the hours and minutes till your arrival, and announced your approach a moment before we heard the sound of your carriage wheels. He had no doubt on his mind of your coming; but he said, if any accident should happen to detain you, it

would be too late. Come, signora; and in the name of Heaven do not oppose any of his wishes; promise all he asks, pretend to love him, and if it must be, practise a friendly deceit. Albert's hours are numbered, his life draws to a close. Endeavor to soothe his sufferings, it is all that we ask of you."

Thus saying, Wenceslawa led Consuelo in the direction of the great saloon.

"He is up then—he is not confined to his chamber?" exclaimed Consuelo, hastily.

"He no longer rises, for he never retires to bed," replied the canoress. "For thirty days he has sat in his arm-chair in the saloon, and will not be removed elsewhere. The doctor says he must not be opposed on this point, and that he would die if he were moved. Take courage, signora, you are about to behold a terrible spectacle."

The canoress opened the door of the saloon, and added—

"Fly to him; you need not fear to surprise him, for he expects you, and has seen you coming hours ago."

Consuelo darted towards her betrothed, who, as the canoress had said, was seated in a large arm-chair beside the fire-place. It was no longer a man—it was a spectre which she beheld. His face still beautiful, notwithstanding the ravages of disease, was as a face of marble. There was no smile on his lips—no ray of joy in his eyes. The doctor, who held his arm and felt his pulse, let it fall gently, and looked at the canoress, as much as to say—"It is too late." Consuelo knelt before him; he looked fixedly at her, but said nothing. At last he signed with his finger to the canoress, who had learned to interpret all his wishes. She took his arms, which he was no longer able to raise, and placed them on Consuelo's shoulder. Then she made the young girl lay her head on Albert's bosom, and as the voice of the dying man was gone, he was merely able to whisper in her ear—"I am happy." He remained in this position for about two minutes, the head of his beloved resting on his bosom, and his lips pressed to her raven hair. Then he looked at his aunt, and by some hardly perceptible movement he made her understand that his father and his aunt were both to kiss his betrothed.

"From my very heart!" exclaimed the canoress, embracing Consuelo with deep emotion. Then she raised her to conduct her to Count Christian, whom Consuelo had not hitherto perceived.

Seated in a second arm-chair, placed opposite his son's at the other side of the fire-place, the old count seemed almost as much weakened and reduced. He was still able to rise, however, and take a few steps through the saloon; but he was obliged to be carried every evening to his bed, which had been placed in an adjoining room. At that moment he held his brother's hand in one of his, and Porpora's in the other. He then left them to embrace Consuelo fervently several times. The almoner of the chateau came also in his turn to salute her, in order to gratify Albert. He also seemed like a spectre, notwithstanding his *embonpoint* which had only increased; but his paleness was frightful. The habits of an indolent and effeminate life had so enervated him that he could not endure the sorrow of others. The canoress alone retained energy for all. A bright, red spot shone on each cheek, and her eyes burnt with a feverish brightness. Albert alone appeared calm. His brow was calm as a sleeping infant's, and his physical prostration did not seem to have affected his mental powers. He was grave, and not like his father and uncle, dejected.

In the midst of these different victims to disease or sorrow, the physician's calm and healthful countenance offered a striking contrast to all that surrounded him. Superville was a Frenchman who had formerly been attached to the household of Frederick when the latter was only crown prince. Early aware of the despotic fault-finding turn which lurked in the prince, he fixed himself at Bareith, in the service of Sophia Wilhelmina, sister to the King of Prussia. At once jealous and ambitious, Superville was the very model of a courtier. An indifferent physician, in spite of the local reputation he enjoyed, he was a complete man of the world, a keen observer, and tolerably conversant with the moral springs of disease. He had urged the canonesse to satisfy all the desires of her nephew, and had hoped something from the return of her for whom Albert was dying. But, however he might reckon his pulse and examine his countenance after Consuelo's arrival, he did not the less continue to reiterate that the time was past, and he determined to take his departure, in order not to witness scenes of despair which it was no longer in his power to avert.

He resolved, however, whether in conformity with some interested scheme, or merely to gratify his natural taste of intrigue, to make himself busy in family affairs; and seeing that no person in this bewildered family thought of turning the passing moments to account, he led Consuelo into the embrasure of a window, and addressed her as follows:—

"Mademoiselle, a doctor is in some sort a confessor, and I therefore soon became aware of the secret passion which hurries this young man to the grave. As a medical man, accustomed habitually to investigate the laws of the physical world which do not really vary, I must say that I do not believe in the strange vision and ecstatic revelations of the young count. As regards yourself, it is easy to ascribe them to secret communication with you, relative to your journey to Prague and your subsequent arrival here."

And as Consuelo made a sign in the negative, he continued:

"I do not question you, mademoiselle, and my conjectures need not offend you. Rather confide in me, and look upon me as entirely devoted to your interests."

"I do not understand you, sir," replied Consuelo, with a candor which was far from convincing the court doctor.

"Perhaps you will understand presently mademoiselle," he coolly rejoined. "The young count's relations have vehemently opposed the marriage up to this day. But now their opposition is at an end. Albert is about to die, and as he wishes to leave you his fortune, they cannot object to a religious ceremony that will secure it to you for ever."

"Alas! what matters Albert's fortune to me," said the bereaved Consuelo; "what has that to do with his present situation? It is not business that brings me here, sir; I came to endeavor to save him. Is there no hope then?"

"None! This disease, entirely proceeding from the mind, is amongst those which baffles all our skill. It is not a month since the young count, after an absence of fifteen days, the cause of which no one could explain, returned to his home attacked by a disease at once sudden and incurable. All the functions of life were as if suspended. For thirty days he has swallowed no sort of food; and it is a rare exception, only witnessed in the case of the insane, to see life supported by a few drops of liquid daily, and a few minutes sleep each night. His

vital powers, as you perceive, are now quite exhausted, and in a couple of days at the farthest he will have ceased to suffer. Arm yourself with courage then; do not lose your presence of mind. I am here to aid you, and you have only to act boldly."

Consuelo was still gazing at the doctor with astonishment, when the canonesse, on a sign from the patient, interrupted their colloquy by summoning him to Albert's side.

On his approach, Albert whispered in his ear for a longer period than his feebleness would have seemed to permit. Superville turned red and pale alternately. The canonesse looked at them anxiously, burning to know what wish Albert expressed.

"Doctor," said Albert, "I heard all you said just now to that young lady."

The doctor, who had spoken in a low whisper and at the farthest extremity of the saloon, became exceedingly confused at this remark, and his convictions respecting the impossibility of any superhuman faculty were so shaken that he stared wildly at Albert, unable to utter a word.

"Doctor," continued the dying man, "you do not understand that heavenly creature's soul, and you only interfere with my design by alarming her delicacy. She shares none of your ideas respecting money. She never coveted my fortune or my title. She never loved me, and it is to her pity alone you must appeal. Speak to her heart. I am nearer my end than you suppose; lose no time. I cannot expire happy if I do not carry with me into the night of my repose the title of her husband."

"But what do you mean by these last words," said Superville, who at that moment was solely busied in analyzing the mental disease of his patient.

"You could not understand them," replied Albert, with an effort, "but she will understand them. You have only to repeat them faithfully to her."

"Count," said Superville, raising his voice a little, "I find I cannot succeed in interpreting your ideas clearly; you have just spoken with more force and distinctness than you have done for the last eight days, and I cannot but draw a favorable augury from it. Speak to mademoiselle yourself; a word from you will convince her more than all I could say. There she is; let her take my place and listen to you."

Superville in fact found himself completely at fault in an affair which he thought he had understood perfectly; and thinking he had said enough to Consuelo to insure her gratitude in the event of her realizing the fortune, he retired, after Albert had further said to him:—

"Remember what you promised. The time has arrived; speak to my relatives. Let them consent, and delay not. The hour is at hand."

Albert was so exhausted by the effort he had just made, that he leaned his forehead on Consuelo's breast when she approached him, and remained for some moments in this position, as if at the point of death. His white lips turned livid, and Porpora, terrified, feared that he had uttered his last sigh. During this time Superville had collected Count Christian, the baron, the canonesse, and chaplain, round the fire-place, and addressed them earnestly. The chaplain was the only person who ventured on an objection, which, although apparently faint, was in reality as powerful as the old priest could urge.

"If your excellencies demand it," said he, "I shall lend my sacred

functions to the celebration of this marriage. But Count Albert, not being at present in a state of grace, must first through confession and extreme unction make his peace with the church."

"Extreme unction!" said the canoness, with a stifled groan. "Gracious God! is it come to that?"

"It is even so," replied Supperville, who, as a man of the world and a disciple of the Voltaire school of philosophy, detested both the chaplain and his objections; "yes, it is even so, and without remedy if his reverence the chaplain insists on this point, and is bent on tormenting Count Albert by the dreary apparatus of death."

"And do you think," said Count Christian, divided between his sense of devotion and his paternal tenderness, "that a gayer ceremony, and one more congenial with his wishes might prolong his days?"

"I can answer positively for nothing," replied Supperville, "but I venture to anticipate much good from it. Your excellency consented to this marriage formerly."

"I always consented to it. I never opposed it," said the count designedly raising his voice; "it was Master Porpora who wrote to say that he would never consent, and that she likewise had renounced all idea of it. Alas!" he added, lowering his voice, "it was the death blow to my poor child."

"You hear what my father says," murmured Albert in Consuelo's ear, "but do not grieve for it. I believed you had abandoned me, and I gave myself up to despair; but during the last eight days I have regained my reason, which they call my madness. I have read hearts as others open books—I have read, with one glance, the past, the present, and the future. I learned, in short, that you were faithful, Consuelo; that you had endeavored to love me; and that you had, indeed, for a time succeeded. But they deceived us both; forgive your master, as I forgive him."

Consuelo looked at Porpora, who could not indeed catch Albert's words, but who, on hearing those of Count Christian, was much agitated, and walked up and down before the fire with hurried strides. She looked at him with an air of solemn reproach; and the maestro understood her so well that he struck his forehead violently with his clenched hand. Albert signed to Consuelo to bring the maestro close to his couch, and to assist him to hold out his hand. Porpora pressed the cold fingers to his lips, and burst into tears. His conscience reproached him with homicide; but his sincere and heartfelt repentance palliated in some measure his fatal error.

Albert made a sign that he wished to listen what reply his relations made to the doctor, and he heard it, though they spoke so low that Porpora and Consuelo, who were kneeling by his side, could not distinguish a word.

The chaplain withstood, as well as he could, Supperville's bitter irony, while the canoness sought by a mixture of superstition and tolerance, of Christian charity and maternal tenderness, to conciliate what was irreconcilable to the Catholic faith. The question was merely one of form—that is to say, whether the chaplain would consider it right to administer the marriage sacrament to a heretic, unless indeed the latter would conform to the Catholic faith immediately afterwards. Supperville indeed did not hesitate to say that Count Albert had promised to profess and believe anything after the ceremony was over, but the chaplain was not to be duped. At last, Count Christian, call-

ing to his aid that quiet firmness and plain good sense with which, although after much weakness and hesitation, he had always put an end to domestic differences, spoke as follows:—

"Reverend Sir," said he to the chaplain, "there is no ecclesiastical law which expressly forbids the marriage of a Catholic to a schismatic. The church tolerates these alliances. Consider Consuelo then as orthodox, my son as a heretic, and marry them at once. Confession and betrothal, as you are aware, are but matters of precept, and in certain cases may be dispensed with. Some favorable change may result from this marriage, and when Albert is cured it will then be time to speak of his conversion."

The chaplain had never opposed the wishes of Count Christian, who was in his eyes a superior arbiter in cases of conscience even to the pope himself. There only now remained to convince Consuelo. This Albert alone thought of, and drawing her towards him, he succeeded in clasping the neck of his beloved with his emaciated and shadowy arms.

"Consuelo," said he, "I read at this hour in your soul that you would give your life to restore mine. That is no longer possible; but you can restore me forever by a simple act of your will. I leave you for a time, but I shall soon return to earth under some new form. I shall return unhappy and wretched if you now abandon me. You know that the crimes of Ziska still remain unexpiated, and you alone, my sister Wanda, can purify me in the new phase of my existence. We are brethren, to become lovers, death must cast his gloomy shadow between us. But we must, by a solemn engagement, become man and wife, that in my new birth I may regain my calmness and strength, and become, like other men, freed from the dreary memories of the past. Only consent to this engagement; it will not bind you in this life, which I am about to quit, but it will unite us in eternity. It will be a pledge whereby we can recognize each other, should death affect the clearness of our recollections. Consent; it is but a ceremony of the church which I accept, since it is the only one which in the estimation of men can sanction our mutual relation. This I must carry with me to the tomb. A marriage without the assent of my family would be incomplete in my eyes. Ours shall be indissoluble in our hearts, as it is sacred in intention. Consent!"

"I consent!" exclaimed Consuelo, pressing her lips to the pale, cold forehead of her betrothed.

These words were heard by all.

"Well," said Supperville, "let us hasten;" and he urged the chaplain vigorously, who summoned the domestics and gave them instructions to have everything prepared for the ceremony. Count Christian, a little revived, sat close beside his son and Consuelo. The good canoness thanked the latter warmly for her condescension, and was so much affected as even to kneel before her and kiss her hands. Baron Frederick wept in silence, without appearing to know what was going on. In the twinkling of an eye an altar was erected in the great saloon. The domestics were dismissed; they thought it was only the last rites of the church which were about to be administered, and that the patient required silence and fresh air. Porpora and Supperville served as witnesses. Albert found strength sufficient to pronounce the decisive *yes* and the other forms which the ceremony required, in a clear and sonorous voice, and the family from this received a lively hope of his recovery. Hardly had the chaplain recite-

the closing prayer over the newly-married couple, ere Albert arose, threw himself into his father's arms and embraced him, as well as his aunt, his uncle, and Porpora, earnestly and rapidly; then seating himself in his arm-chair, he pressed Consuelo to his heart and exclaimed:—

"I am saved!"

"It is the final effort, the last convulsion of nature," said Supperville, who had several times examined the features, and felt the pulse of the patient, while the marriage ceremony was proceeding.

In fact Albert's arms loosed their hold, fell forward, and rested on his knees. His aged and faithful dog, Cynabre, who had not left his feet during the whole period of his illness, raised his head and uttered thrice a dismal howl. Albert's gaze was rivetted on Consuelo; his lips remained apart as if about to address her; a faint glow animated his cheek, and then gradually that peculiar and indescribable shade which is the forerunner of death, crept from his forehead down to his lips, and by degrees overshadowed his whole face as with a snowy veil. The silence of terror which brooded over the breathless and attentive group of spectators was interrupted by the doctor, who, in solemn accents, pronounced the irrevocable decree—"It is the hand of death!"

CHAPTER CIII.

COUNT CHRISTIAN fell back senseless in his chair. The canoness, sobbing convulsively, flung herself on Albert's remains, as if she hoped by her caresses to rouse him to life again, while Baron Frederick uttered some unmeaning words with a sort of idiotic calm. Supperville approached Consuelo, whose utter immobility terrified him more than the agitation of the others.

"Do not trouble yourself about me, sir," she said; "nor you either, my friend," added she, addressing Porpora, who hastened to add his condolence, "but remove his unhappy relatives, and endeavor to sustain and comfort them; as for me, I shall remain here. The dead need nothing but respect and prayers."

The count and the baron suffered themselves to be led away without resistance; and as for the canoness, she was carried, cold and apparently lifeless, to her apartment, where Supperville followed to give assistance. Porpora, no longer knowing where he was or what he did, rushed out and wandered through the gardens like an insane person. He felt as if suffocated. His habitual insensibility was more apparent than real. Scenes of grief and terror had excited his impressionable imagination, and he hastened onward by the light of the moon, pursued by gloomy voices which chaunted a frightful *Dieu tre* incessantly in his ears.

Consuelo remained alone with Albert; for hardly had the chaplain begun to recite the prayers for the dead, when he fainted away, and was borne off in his turn. The poor man had insisted on sitting up along with the canoness during the whole of Albert's illness, and was utterly exhausted. The Countess of Rudolstadt, kneeling by the side of her husband, and holding his cold hands in hers, her head pressed against his which beat no longer, fell into deep abstraction. What Con-

suelo experienced at this moment was not exactly pain; at least it was not that bitter regret which accompanies the loss of beings necessary to our daily happiness. Her regard for Albert was not of this intimate character, and his death left no apparent void in her existence. The despair of losing those whom we love, not unfrequently resolves itself into selfishness and abhorrence of the new duties imposed upon us. One part of this grief is legitimate and proper; the other is not so, and it should be combated, though it is just as natural. Nothing of all this mingled with the solemn and tender melancholy of Consuelo. Albert's nature was foreign to her own in every respect, except in one—the admiration, respect, and sympathy with which he had inspired her. She had chalked out a plan of life without him, and had even renounced the idea of an affection which, until two days before, she had thought extinct. What now remained to her was the desire and duty of proving faithful to a sacred pledge. Albert had been already dead as regarded her; he was now nothing more, and was perhaps even less so in some respects, for Consuelo, long exalted by intercourse with his lofty soul, had come in her dreamy reverie to adopt in a measure some of his poetical convictions. The belief in the transmission of souls had received a strong foundation in her instinctive repugnance towards the idea of eternal punishment after death, and in her Christian faith in the immortality of the soul. Albert, alive, but prejudiced against her by appearances, seemed as if wrapped in a veil, transported into another existence incomplete in comparison with that which he had proposed to devote to pure and lofty affection and unshaken confidence. But Albert, restored to this faith in her and to his enthusiastic affection, and yielding up his last breath on her bosom—had he then ceased to exist as regarded her? Did he not live in all the plenitude of a cloudless existence in passing under the triumphal arch of a glorious death, which conducted him either to a temporary repose, or to immediate consciousness in a purer and more heavenly state of being? To die struggling with one's own weakness, and to awake endowed with strength; to die forgiving the wicked, and to awake under the influence and protection of the upright; to die in sincere repentance, and to awake absolved and purified by the innate influence of virtue—are not these heavenly rewards?

Consuelo, already initiated by Albert into doctrines which had their origin among the Hussites of old Bohemia, as well as among the mysterious sects of preceding ages, who had humbly endeavored to interpret the words of Christ—Consuelo, I repeat, convinced, more from her gentle and affectionate nature than by the force of reasoning, that the soul of her husband was not suddenly removed from her for ever, and carried into regions inaccessible to human sympathies, mingled with this belief some of the superstitious ideas of her childhood. She had believed in spirits as the common people believe in them, and had more than once dreamed that she saw her mother approach to protect and shield her from danger. It was a sort of belief in the eternal communion of the souls of the living and the dead—a simple and childlike faith, which has ever existed, as it were, against that creed which would for ever separate the spirits of the departed from this lower world, and assign them a perfectly different and far distant sphere of action.

Consuelo, still kneeling by Albert's remains, could not bring herself to believe that he was dead, and could not comprehend the dread na-

ture either of the word or of the reality. It did not seem possible that life could pass away so soon, and that the functions of heart and brain had ceased for ever. "No," thought she, "the divine spark still lingers, and hesitates to return to the hand which gave it, and who is about to resume his gift in order to send it forth under a renewed form into some loftier sphere. There is still, perhaps, a mysterious life existing in the yet warm bosom; and besides, wherever the soul of Albert is, it sees, understands, knows all that has taken place here. It seeks, perhaps, some aliment in my love—an impulsive power to aid it in some new and heavenly career." And, filled with these vague thoughts, she continued to love Albert, to open her soul to him, to express her devotion to him, to repeat her oath of fidelity—in short, in feeling and idea, to treat him, not as a departed spirit for whom one weeps without hope, but as a sleeping friend, whose awakening smiles we joyfully await.

When Porpora had become more composed, he thought with terror of the situation in which he had left his pupil, and hastened to rejoin her. He was surprised to find her as calm as if she had watched by the bedside of a sleeping friend. He would have spoken to her, and urged her to take some repose.

"Do not utter unmeaning words," said she, "in presence of this sleeping angel. Do you retire to rest, my dear master; I shall remain here."

"Would you then kill yourself?" said Porpora, in despair.

"No, my friend, I shall live," replied Consuelo; "I shall fulfil all my duties towards him and towards you; but not for one instant shall I leave his side this night."

When morning came all was still. An overpowering drowsiness had deadened all sense of suffering. The physician, exhausted by fatigue, had retired to rest. Porpora slumbered in his chair, his head supported on Count Christian's bed. Consuelo alone felt no desire to abandon her post. The count was unable to leave his bed, but Baron Frederick, his sister, and the chaplain, proceeded almost mechanically to offer up their prayers before the altar; after which they began to speak of the interment. The canoness, regaining strength when necessity required her services, summoned her woman and old Hans to aid her in the necessary duties. Porpora and the doctor then insisted on Consuelo taking some repose, and she yielded to their entreaties, after first paying a visit to Count Christian, who apparently did not recognise her. It was hard to say whether he waked or slept, for his eyes were open, his respiration calm, and his face without expression.

When Consuelo awoke, after a few hours' repose, she returned to the saloon, but was struck with dismay to find it empty. Albert had been laid upon a bier, and carried to the chapel. His arm-chair was empty, and in the same position where Consuelo had formerly seen it. It was all that remained to remind her of him in this place, where every hope and aspiration of the family had been centred for so many bitter days. Even his dog had vanished. The summer sun lighted up the sombre wainscoting of the apartment, while the merry call of the blackbirds sounded from the garden with insolent gaiety. Consuelo passed on to the adjoining apartment, the door of which was half opened. Count Christian, who still kept his couch, lay apparently insensible to the loss he had just sustained, and his sister watched over him with the same vigilant attention that she had for

merly shown to Albert. The baron gazed at the burning logs with a stupefied air; but the silent tears which trickled down his aged cheeks showed that bitter memory was still busy with his heart.

Consuelo approached the canoness to kiss her hand, but the old lady drew it back from her with evident marks of aversion. Poor Wenceslawa only beheld in her the destroyer of her nephew. At first she had held the marriage in detestation, and had opposed it with all her might; but when she had seen that time and absence alike failed to induce Albert to renounce his engagement, and that his reason, life, and health depended on it, she had come to desire it, as much as she had before hated and repelled it. Porpora's refusal, the exclusive passion for the theatre which he ascribed to Consuelo, and, in short, all the officious and fatal falsehoods which he had despatched in succession to Count Christian, without ever adverting to the letters which Consuelo had written, but which he had suppressed—had occasioned the old man infinite suffering, and aroused in the canoness's breast the bitterest indignation. She felt nothing but hate and contempt for Consuelo. She could pardon her, she said, for having perverted Albert's reason through this fatal attachment, but she could not forgive her for having so basely betrayed him. Every look of the poor aunt, who knew not that the real enemy of Albert's peace was Porpora, seemed to say, "You have destroyed our child; you could not restore him again; and now the disgrace of your alliance is all that remains to us."

This silent declaration of war hastened Consuelo's resolve to comfort, so far as might be, the canoness for this last misfortune. "May I request," said she, "that your ladyship will favor me with a private interview? I must leave this to-morrow ere daybreak; but before setting out I would fain make known my respectful intentions."

"Your intentions? Oh, I can easily guess them," replied the canoness, bitterly. "Do not be uneasy, mademoiselle, all shall be as it ought to be, and the rights which the law yields you shall be strictly respected."

"I perceive you do not comprehend me, madam," replied Consuelo. "I therefore long—"

"Well," since I must drain the bitter cup to the dregs," said the canoness, rising, "let it be now, while I have still courage to endure it. Follow me, signora. My eldest brother appears to slumber, and Supperville, who has consented to remain another day, will take my place for half an hour."

She rang, and desired the doctor to be sent for, then turning to the baron—

"Brother," said she, "your cares are useless, since Christian is still unconscious of his misfortune. He may never be otherwise—happily for him, but most unhappily for us! Perhaps insensibility is but the forerunner of death. I have now only you in the world, my brother; take care of your health, which this dreary inaction has only too much affected already. You were always accustomed to air and exercise. Go out, take your gun, the huntsman will follow with the dogs. Do, I entreat you for my sake; it is the doctor's orders, as well as your sister's prayer. Do not refuse me; it is the greatest consolation you can bestow on my unhappy old age."

The baron hesitated, but at last yielded the point. The servants led him out, and he followed them like a child. The doctor examined Count Christian, who still seemed hardly conscious, though he an

swered any questions which were put to him with gentle indifference, and appeared to recognise those around him. "After all," said Superville, "he is not so ill; and if he pass a good night, all may turn out well."

Wenceslawa, a little consoled, left her brother in the doctor's care, and conducted Consuelo to a large apartment, richly decorated in an antique fashion, where she had never been before. It contained a large state-bed, the curtains of which had not been stirred for more than twenty years. It was that in which Wanda Prachalitz, the mother of Count Albert had breathed her last sigh, for this had been her apartment. "It was here," said the canoness, with a solemn air, after having closed the door, "that we found Albert—it is now two and thirty days since—after an absence of thirteen. From that day to this he never entered it again; nor did he once quit the arm-chair where yesterday he expired."

The dry, cold manner with which the canoness uttered this funeral announcement struck a dagger to Consuelo's heart. She then took from her girdle her inseparable bunch of keys, walked towards a large cabinet of sculptured oak, and opened both its doors. Consuelo saw that it contained a perfect mountain of jewels, tarnished by age, of a strange fashion, the larger portion antique, and enriched by diamonds and precious stones of considerable value. "These," said the canoness to her, "are the family jewels, which were the property of my sister-in-law, Count Christian's wife, before her marriage; here, in this partition, are my grandmother's, which my brothers and myself made her a present of; and lastly, here are those which her husband bought for her. All these descended to her son Albert, and henceforth belong to you, as his widow. Take them, and do not fear that any one here will dispute with you these riches, to which we attach no importance, and with which we have nothing more to do. The title-deeds of my nephew's maternal inheritance will be placed in your hands within an hour. All is in order, as I told you; and as to those of his paternal inheritance, you will not, alas! have probably long to wait for them. Such was Albert's last wishes. My promise to act in conformity with them had, in his eyes, all the force of a will."

"Madam," replied Consuelo, closing the cabinet with a movement of disgust, "I should have torn the will had there been one, and I pray you now to take back your word. I have no more need than you for all these riches. It seems to me that my life would be forever stained by the possession of them. If Albert bequeathed them to me, it was doubtless with the idea that conformably to his feelings and habits, I would distribute them to the poor. But I should be a bad dispenser of these noble charities; I have neither the talents nor the knowledge necessary to make a useful disposition of them. It is to you, madam, who unite to those qualities a Christian spirit as generous as that of Albert, it belongs to employ this inheritance in works of charity. I relinquish to you my rights, (if indeed I can be said to have any,) of which I am ignorant, and wish always to remain so. I claim from your goodness only one favor, viz., that you will never wound my feelings by renewing such offers."

The canoness changed her expression, but could not condescend to admire her. She asked—

"But what do you intend to do" looking fixedly at her. "You have no fortune."

"I beg your pardon, I am rich enough. My tastes are simple, and I am fond of art."

"Then you expect to resume what you call your business?"

"I am forced to do so, madam, from reasons which do not permit me to hesitate, notwithstanding my present distress."

"And you are unwilling to sustain your new rank in society in any other manner?"

"What rank?"

"That of Albert's widow."

"I never will forget that I am the widow of the noble-hearted Albert, and my conduct shall be worthy of the husband I have lost."

"But the Countess of Rudolstadt expects to return to the stage!"

"There is no Countess Rudolstadt, nor will there be, after you, except your niece, Amelia."

"Do you scoff at me by mentioning her name?" said the canoness, who started as if she had been touched with a heated iron.

"Why, madam?" said Consuelo, and her candor was too apparent to permit it to be mistaken, "Tell me, for heaven's sake, why the young baroness is not here? Can she be dead, too?"

"No," said the canoness, bitterly, "would she were. Let us not, however, talk of her."

"I must, madam, remind you of something I had not before thought of. She is the only and lawful heiress of your family titles. This must put your mind at rest in relation to Albert's depositions. The laws do not permit you to make any appropriation in my favor."

"Nothing can deprive you of your rights as a dowager, and of a title the last will of Albert placed at your disposal."

"Nothing can prevent me from renouncing them. Albert was aware that I wished to be neither rich nor a countess."

"The world will not permit you to renounce them."

"The world! ah! that is precisely the point I wished to get at. The world will not comprehend Albert's love nor his family's kindness to such a poor girl as I am. It would be a reproach to his memory, a stain to your life—it would make me ridiculous, perhaps disgrace me. I repeat, the world will understand nothing that has passed between us. The world must always be ignorant of this, madam, as your servants are. Porpora and the doctor are now the only confidants in this secret marriage—and neither have, nor will divulge it. I will answer for the first, and you can assure yourself of the discretion of the other. Be at ease then, madam—for you can bury this secret with you, and the Baroness Amelia never will know that I have the honor of being her cousin. Forget, then, the scenes of the last hour of Count Albert's life, and let me only bless him and be silent. You have tears enough to shed, without my adding to your sorrow and mortification, by reciting my existence to you as the widow of your child."

"Consuelo," said the Canoness sobbing, "remain with us. You have a noble heart and strong mind. Do not leave us."

"That would be the wish of my heart, which is devoted to you," said Consuelo, receiving Wenceslawa's caresses with great emotion. "I cannot do so, without our secret being known, or guessed at, and that amounts to the same. The honor of your family is dearer to me than life. Let me wrest myself from your arms without any delay or hesitation, and thus do you the only service in my power."

The tears the canoness shed at the conclusion of this scene,

relieved her from the burden which oppressed her. They were the first she had shed since her nephew's death. She consented to the sacrifices of Consuelo, and by her confidence proved that she appreciated her noble resolution. She left her to tell the chaplain of it, and to induce Supperville and Porpora to be silent about the marriage.

CONCLUSION.

CONSUELO, finding herself at perfect liberty, passed the day in wandering about the chateau, the garden, and the environs, in order to revisit all the places that recalled to her Albert's love. She even allowed her pious fervor to carry her as far as the Schreckenstein, and seated herself upon the stone, in that frightful solitude which Albert had so long filled with his grief. But she soon retired, feeling her courage fail her, and almost imagining that she heard a hollow groan issuing from the bowels of the rock. She dare not admit even to herself that she heard it distinctly: Albert and Zdenko were no more, and the allusion, therefore, for it was plainly such, could not prove otherwise than hurtful and enervating. Consuelo hurriedly left the spot.

On returning to the chateau towards evening, she saw the Baron Frederick, who had by degrees strengthened himself on his legs, and had regained some animation in the pursuit of his favorite amusement. The huntsmen who accompanied him started the game, and the baron, whose skill had not deserted him, picked up his victims with a deep sigh.

"He, at least, will live and be consoled," thought the young widow. The canoness supped, or affected to do so, in her brother's room. The chaplain, who had been praying by the side of the deceased in the chapel, made an attempt to join them. He had a fever, however, and at the first mouthful felt sick.—This offended Supperville, who was hungry and had to let his soup grow cold while he went with him to his room; he could not refrain from saying—"Those people have no nerve! There are but two men here—the canoness and the signora!" He soon returned, resolved not to torment himself a great deal about the poor priest, and like the baron played a good part at supper. Porpora was much affected, though he did not seem to be, and could neither eat nor speak. Consuelo thought of the last meal she had eaten at the table between Anzoleto and Albert.

After supper she proceeded along with her master to make the necessary preparations for her departure. The horses were ordered to be in readiness at four in the morning. Before separating for the night, she repaired to Count Christian's apartment. He slept tranquilly, and Supperville, who wished to quit the dreary abode, asserted that he had no longer any remains of fever.

"Is that perfectly certain, sir?" said Consuelo, who was shocked at his precipitation.

"I assure you," said he, "it is so. He is saved for the present, but I must warn you that it will not be long. At his time of life, grief is not so deeply felt at the crisis, but the enemy merely gives way to return with greater force afterwards. So be on the watch, for you are not surely serious in determining to surrender your rights."

"I am perfectly serious," said Consuelo, "and I am astonished that you do not believe in so simple a matter."

"Permit me to doubt, madam, until the death of your father-in-law. Meantime, you have made a great mistake in not taking possession of the jewels and title-deeds. No matter; you have doubtless your reasons, which I do not seek to know; for a person so calm as you are does not act without motives. I have given my word of honor not to disclose this family secret, and I shall keep my promise till you release me from it. My testimony may be of service to you when the proper time comes, and you may rely on my zeal and friendship. You will always find me at Bareith, if alive; and in this hope, countess, I kiss your hand."

Supperville took leave of the canoness, after having assured her of his patient's safety, written a prescription, and received a large fee—small, however, he trusted, in comparison with that which he was to receive from Consuelo—and quitted the castle at ten o'clock, leaving the latter indignant at his sordidness.

The baron retired to rest, better than he had been the night before; as for the canoness, she had a bed prepared for herself beside Count Christian's. Consuelo waited till all was still; then when twelve o'clock struck she lighted a lamp and repaired to the chapel. At the end of the cloister she found two of the servants, who at first were frightened at her approach, but afterwards confessed why they were there. Their duty was to watch a part of the night beside the young count's remains, but they were afraid, and preferred watching and praying outside the door.

"And why afraid?" asked Consuelo, mortified to find that so generous a master inspired only such sentiments in the breast of his attendants.

"What would you have, signora?" replied one of these men, unaware that he was addressing Count Albert's widow; "our young lord had mysterious relations and strange acquaintances among the world of spirits. He conversed with the dead, he found out hidden things, never went to the church, ate and drank with the gipsies—in short, no one could say what might happen to any one who would pass the night in this chapel. It would be as much as our lives were worth. Look at Cynabre there! They would not let him into the chapel, and he has lain all day long before the door without moving, without eating, without making the least noise. He knows very well that his master is dead, for he has never called him once, but since midnight was struck, see how restless he is, how he smells and whines, as if he was aware his master was no longer alone."

"You are weak fools!" replied the indignant Consuelo. "If your hearts were warmer your minds would not be so feeble;" and she entered the chapel, to the surprise and consternation of the timid domestics.

Albert lay on a couch covered with brocade with the family escutcheons embroidered at the corners. His head reposed on a black velvet cushion, sprinkled with silver tears, while a velvet pall fell in sable folds around him. A triple row of waxen tapers lit up his pale face, which was so calm, so pure, so manly, that a spectator would have said he slept peacefully. The last of the Rudolstadt's was clothed, according to family custom, in the ancient costume of his fathers. The cornet of a count was on his head, a sword was by his side, a buckler at his feet, and a crucifix on his breast. With his long black hair and beard, he seemed one of the ancient warriors whose effigies lay thick