into a waste. We must wage against Germany a war of destruction, whose fearful consequences will be felt there for a century to come."

"Oh, sire," exclaimed De Maintenon, such a war is contrary to the laws of God and man! Shall France, the most refined country on the globe, set to civilized Europe an example of barbarity only to be equalled by the atrocities of the Huns and Vandals?"

"My dear marquise," cried Louis, fretfully, "do be silent. —Go on, Louvois, and let me hear your plans."

"Sire, they are very simple. We have only to march on the German towns, sack and burn them, and put to the sword all those that presume to defy the power of France. We must spread consternation throughout all Germany, that your majesty's name may cause every cheek to pale, and every heart to sink with fear. The enemy shall provision our army, and forage our horses. We will take possession of their magazines, stores, and shambles; and to every house that refuses us gold, we will apply the devouring torch. Thus we will make it impossible for the emperor to advance to Lorraine; and the wide desert that intervenes between us will become French territory."

"I approve your mode of warfare, Louvois; it is good. If the emperor had ratified my choice of an Elector of Cologne, and had sustained my claims to Lorraine and Alsatia, I would have conceded him as many triumphs as he chose in Transylvania. As he opposes me, let him take the consequence—war with all its horrors!"

"Your majesty empowers me, then, to dispatch my couriers?" said Louvois.

"I do, my dear marquis," was the gracious reply, while the royal hand was held out to be kissed.

Louvois pressed it to his lips, as a lover does the rosy fingers of his mistress, and, hastening away with the agility of a young man, sprang into his carriage, and drove off. "'My dear marquis,'" murmured he, with a smile of complacency. "He called me his dear marquis, and the storm of his displeasure has passed away. I came very near being struck by its lightning, nevertheless. That De Maintenon is a shrewd woman, and found me out at once. Yes!—yes, your majesty! Had you admired my window at Trianon, I should not have been obliged to involve you in a war with Germany."

CHAPTER V.

THE IMPERIAL DIET AT REGENSBURG.

In 1687 the imperial Diet assembled at Regensburg, to examine the claims of the King of France to Alsatia, Lorraine, the Palatinate, and other possessions, which his majesty longed to appropriate out of the domains of his neighbors.

On the 2d of October, 1689, a travelling-carriage might have been seen standing in front of the large, antiquated building occupied by Count Spaur, the envoy of the Emperor Leopold.

The postilion sounded his horn, and cracked his whip with such vehemence, that here and there an inquiring and angry face might be seen at the neighboring windows, peering out upon the untimely intruders, who were making dawn hideous by their clattering arrival. The footman sprang from his board, and thundered with all his might at the door, while, between each interval of knocking, the postilion accompanied him by a fanfare that stirred up the sleeping echoes of that dull old town in a manner that was astonishing to hear.

Finally, their zeal was rewarded by the appearance of a man's head at the window on the ground floor, and the sound of his voice inquiring who it was that was making all this uproar.

"Who we are?" echoed the footman. "We are individuals entitled to make an uproar, and shall continue to make it until we obtain admission to the presence of Count Spaur for his excellency Count von Crenneville, who comes on important business from his imperial majesty the emperor."

This pompous announcement had the desired effect; it awed the porter into civility, and he hastened to inform the footman of his excellency, that Count Spaur being in bed, he

would inform the valet, and have the Austrian ambassador apprised of the visit of Count von Crenneville.

"Open your door before you go, and admit his excellency into the house," cried the footman, imperiously.

"I dare not," replied the porter, shaking his head. "I am not at liberty to admit anybody, until I have orders to do so from the valet of Count Spaur."

"Not admit the emperor's envoy?" exclaimed the indignant lackey. "That is an affront to his excellency."

"I do not know the person of his excellency," persisted the porter, "and how do I know but some petty ducal envoy may not be playing a trick on me, and so obtain fraudulent entrance to the house of the Austrian ambassador?"

"You presume to apply such language to Count von Crenneville!" cried the footman. "I shall—"

"Peace, Caspar!" said a voice from the carriage; "the honest fellow is quite right, and deserves no blame for his prudence. Nevertheless, as we are no impostors, hasten, my good friend, to the valet, and let me have entrance, for I am very tired."

At this moment the porter was put aside, and a man in rich livery came forward.

"Count Spaur has risen, and will be happy to receive his excellency Count von Crenneville," said he. At these magical words the heavy doors were opened, and the envoy sprang lightly from his carriage, and entered the house. At the head of the staircase he was met by Count Spaur, who apologized for being compelled to receive his guest in a dressing-gown.

"It would not be the first time that I have seen you in a deshabille, my dear comrade," replied Von Crenneville, "for you cannot have forgotten the old days when we were quartered together in Hungary. As I presume you have not breakfasted, I will take the liberty of inviting myself to breakfast, for I am hungry and exhausted by travelling all night."

Count Spaur offered his arm, and conducted his guest to the dining-room, where breakfast was about to be served.

Count von Crenneville threw aside his military cloak, unfastened a few buttons of his uniform, and took his seat at the table.

"I am delighted to see you," said Count Spaur, handing a cup of chocolate. "Your arrival is a delicious interruption to the stupid life I had in Regensburg."

When they had breakfasted, Count Spaur led the way to his cabinet, and the conference began by Count von Crenneville handing a packet to his friend from the emperor.

The latter received it with a profound inclination, and carefully cutting it, so as to avoid breaking the seal, he opened it, and prepared to make himself master of its contents.

He shook his head dolefully. "His majesty asks impossibilities of me," sighed he. "Do you know what this letter contains?"

"Be so kind as to read it to me."

So Count Spaur began: "My dear Count,—It is time this imperial Diet end their petty quarrels, and go seriously to work; for these are no days wherein important interests may be neglected for the sake of etiquette. Announce to the Diet that I require of them to be serious, and to come to the assistance of their fatherland. Count von Crenneville, who will deliver this to you, is empowered to declare the same to the assembled representatives of the Germanic Confederation.

(Signed) "LEOPOLD, Emperor."

"It seems to me that the demand is a reasonable one," remarked Count von Crenneville.

"But impossible of compliance. Do you know how long the Diet has been sitting at Regensburg?"

"Two years, I believe."

"Well: do you know what they have been doing for these two years?"

"No, count; it is precisely to learn this that his majesty has sent me here," said Von Crenneville.

"I will tell you then. They have been profoundly engaged in settling questions of diplomatic etiquette. You may laugh, if you like; but for one that has been obliged to hear it all, it is wearisome beyond expression. The first trouble arose from the etiquette of visiting. As imperial envoy, I received the first visit from them all, I returned my calls, and so far all was well. But when the other envoys were to visit among themselves, the dissensions began. Each man wrote to his sover-

eign, and each sovereign upheld his man; couriers came and went, and for a time Regensburg was alive with arrivals and departures."

"And meanwhile the King of France was allowed to build his bridges across the Rhine," observed Count von Crenneville.

"My dear friend, the King of France might have dethroned the emperor, meanwhile, without a protest. Nothing under heaven could be attended to, while this visiting question was on the tapis."

"Is it decided?"

"After three months of daily conferences, during which I exhausted more statesmanship than would overturn an empire, it was decided that the envoys of the princes would call on the envoys of the electors, provided the latter would come half way down the staircase to meet the former."

"God be thanked! They could then proceed to business!"

Count Spaur replied by a melancholy shake of the head.

"You are not aware that, before the Diet assemble, a banquet is given, at which all are expected to be present. You are furthermore not cognizant of the fact that every concomitant of this banquet has been made a subject of strife, from the day on which the visiting question was arranged, until the present time."

"My dear count, I pity you."

"You may well do so. The electoral envoys claimed the right of using gold knives and forks, while they exacted that the ducal representatives should be content with silver. These latter resented the indignity, and of course the banquet had to be postponed."

"This is pitiful indeed; but go on."

"Then came the question of the color of the arm-chairs around the table. The electoral envoys claimed the right of having their seats covered in red; and contended that the others were obliged by etiquette to cover theirs with green. The others would not accept the green, and so arose the third point of discussion. The fourth disagreement was about the carpets. The electorals would have the *four* legs of their chairs on the carpet (which is narrow), and the others should

have but the *fore*-legs of theirs. The fifth regarded the May-bougns. On May-day, the electorals exacted that the superintendent of public festivities should put six boughs over their front doors, while the others must content themselves with five. Now, my dear count, you are made acquainted with the subjects of discussion which for two years have detained the imperial Diet in Regensburg; which have imbittered my days, and made sleepless my nights; which have nigh lost the cause of German nationality, and have made us the laughing-stock of all Europe."

"My friend, I sympathize with you.—But are these five questions not decided?"

"No, they are not. The ducal envoys indignantly refused to yield to the pretensions of their colleagues, and no banquet could be given. After much exertion on my part to bring about an understanding, the banquet was set aside, and a compromise was effected. *All* the arm-chairs were covered with green—this was a concession to the ducal envoys; while they, on their part, consented that the hind-legs of their chairs should rest on the bare floor!"*

"What a victory! I congratulate you from my heart; for I would much rather have charged a regiment of Janizaries."

"And at least have earned some glory thereby," returned Spaur, grimly. "But the only reward I shall ever reap will be the unpleasant notoriety I shall have acquired as a member of this stultified assembly."

"My dear friend, be under no uneasiness as to that. The King of France has crossed our frontiers, and you are about to throw aside diplomacy and take up the sword. This is the message with which the emperor has charged me, both to yourself and to the imperial Diet."

"I am happy to tell you that to-day the Diet opens its sitting. Hark! the bells are ringing! This announces to Regensburg that the envoys are about to proceed to the hall of conference. Excuse me while I retire to change my dress."

"I will betake myself to the nearest hotel to follow your example," replied Von Crenneville.

* Pütter, "Historical Notes on the Constitution of the German Empire."

"By no means. Your room is prepared, and I will conduct you thither at once, if you wish."

Fifteen or twenty minutes elapsed, when the two imperial envoys met again, and drove, in the state-carriage of Count Spaur, to the hall of conference. The other envoys were all assembled, and, scattered in groups, seemed to be earnestly engaged in discussing some weighty matter.

Count Spaur remarked this, and whispered to his colleague: "I am afraid there is trouble brewing; the electoral envoys are all on one side of the hall—the ducal on the other."

"The electorals are those with the red cloaks—are they not?"

"Yes, they are; and I fear that these red cloaks signify war."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean war with—but, pardon me, I see that they are waiting for me to open the council."

With an inclination of the head, Count Spaur passed down the hall, and took his seat under the red canopy appropriated to the imperial ambassador. A deep silence reigned throughout the assembly, broken by the sweet chime of the bells that still continued to convey far and wide the intelligence of the opening of the conference.

Count Spaur took off his Spanish hat, and, bowing right and left, addressed the envoys:

"My lords ambassadors of the electors, princes, and imperial cities of the German empire, in the name of his majesty Leopold I greet you, and announce that the imperial Diet is opened. Long live the emperor!"

"Long live the emperor!" echoed the ambassadors.

"The Diet is opened," resumed he, "and I have the honor to introduce an envoy of his imperial majesty, who has this day arrived from Vienna."

At this, Count von Crenneville advanced, and the master of ceremonies placed an arm-chair for him under the canopy, at the side of Count Spaur.

At a signal from the latter, the other envoys took their seats, and Count von Crenneville addressed the assembly:

"My lords ambassadors of the electors, princes, and imperial cities of the German empire, his majesty greets you all. But he is deeply wounded at the indifference manifested by the Diet to the dearest interests of Germany, and he implores you, as you value your nationality and liberty, to lay aside your petty dissensions, and to unite with him in defence of your fatherland. The King of France has marched his armies into Germany—and disunion to Germans is defeat and ruin."

This prelude appeared to cause considerable emotion. There was visible agitation throughout the assembly.

Count von Crenneville felt encouraged, and was about to continue his appeal, when one of the electorals started from his seat and spoke:

"I beg pardon of the imperial envoy; but I must ask permission of the imperial representative-resident to make a personal remark."

"The permission is granted," replied Count Spaur, solemnly.

The envoy then continued, in loud and agitated tones: "I must, then, call the attention of this august assembly to a flagrant violation of the compact agreed between the first and second class of these ambassadors, by the latter. They have advanced their arm-chairs until the four legs of the same are now resting upon the carpet."

"We merely advanced our seats, to hear what his excellency had to say," remarked the envoy from Bremen.

"Nevertheless," replied Count Spaur, "I must request these gentlemen to recede. The understanding was, that their chairs were to rest partly on the carpet, partly on the floor."

Back went all the chairs, but their occupants looked daggers at the envoy from Mentz.

Count von Crenneville then resumed the broken thread of his discourse: "I earnestly request the assembly to come to a decision this very day. The country is in imminent danger, and can only be saved by unanimity and promptitude of action."

Here he was interrupted by the envoy from Bremen, who rose and begged to be allowed to make *his* personal remark.

Count Spaur gave the required permission, and Bremen began to protest against Mentz & Co.

"I beg to remark, that the electoral envoys have spread out their red cloaks over the backs of the chairs, in such a way as to conceal the green covering entirely from view."

"It is exceedingly warm in the hall," replied electoral Cologne; "we were compelled to throw off our cloaks."

"Why, then, did the electoral envoys wear their cloaks?" was the inquiry of the other side.

"Because we had a right to wear them hither, and violate no compact by throwing them over our chairs."

"But the electoral envoys had no right to use them as upholstery," objected Bremen, in tragic tones. "They have now the appearance of being seated on red arm-chairs."

"So much the better," replied Cologne. "If accident has re-established our rights of precedence, nobody has any business to complain." *

This declaration was received with a burst of indignation, and the princely envoys rose simultaneously from their seats. A noisy and angry debate ensued, at the conclusion of which the offended party declared that they would rest every leg of their chairs upon the carpet; and, as if at the word of command, every man dragged his arm-chair most unequivocally forward, and surveyed the enemy with dogged defiance.

There was now a commotion on the side of the electorals, in the midst of which Count Spaur, in perfect despair, cried out at the top of his voice:

"In the name of the emperor, I demand, on both sides, the literal fulfilment of your conditions. The electoral ambassadors must withdraw their red cloaks from the backs of their chairs, and throw them over the arms, and the other envoys must draw back their chairs until the hind-legs thereof are on the floor."

"My lords," added Count von Crenneville, "I demand also, in the name of the emperor, that all personalities be cast aside, and that we give our hearts to our country's cause. France is upon us. She knows how disunited are the princes of Germany, and their discord is her sheet-anchor. She knows that

* Historical.—See Pütter.

you are unprepared to meet her, and the emperor, being at present too far to come to your rescue, she will attack you before you have time to defend yourselves. Is it possible that you have sunk all patriotism in contemptible jealousies of one another? I cannot believe it! Away with petty rivalry and family dissensions: clasp hands and make ready to defend our fatherland!"

At this moment there was a knock at the main entrance of the hall, and two masters of ceremonies appeared.

"I announce to the imperial commissaries, and the envoys of the German empire here assembled, that a messenger, with important tidings, requests admission to this illustrious company."

"Whence comes he?" asked Count Spaur.

"He announces himself as Count de Crecy, ambassador extraordinary of the King of France to the imperial Diet."

This communication was received in profound silence. Dismay was pictured on many a face, and every eye was turned upon the presiding envoy, the representative of the emperor.

"I lay it before the imperial Diet," said he, at last, "whether the French ambassador shall be allowed entrance into the hall during the sitting of its members."

"Ay, ay, let him enter," was the reply—the first instance of unanimity among the envoys since the day they had arrived at Regensburg two years before!

The masters of ceremonies retired, and Count Spaur, putting on his hat, said: "I declare this sitting suspended. My lords, cover your heads!"

The French ambassador, followed by a numerous retinue, now entered the hall. He advanced to the canopy where the imperial envoys were seated, and inclined his head. Not a word was spoken in return for his salutation; and, after a short pause, he raised his voice, and delivered his message:

"In the name of his most Christian majesty, Louis XIV., King of France, I announce to the Diet of the German empire that he has taken possession of Bonn, Kaiserswerth, and other strongholds of the archbishopric of Cologne; that Mentz has opened her doors to his victorious armies, and that war is de-

clared between France and Germany. The sword is drawn, nor shall it return to its scabbard until the inheritance of the Duchess of Orleans is given up to France, and the King of France is recognized as lord and sovereign of Lorraine, Alsatia, and the Netherlands! War is declared!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE JUDITH OF ESSLINGEN.

It was a clear, bright morning in March. The snow had long since melted from the mountain-tops, flowers had begun to peep out of the earth's bosom, and the trees that grew upon the heights around Esslingen were decked with buds of tender green.

But the inhabitants of Esslingen had no pleasure in contemplating those verdant hills; for the castle that crowned their summit was in possession of the French. Within its walls the enemy were feasting and drinking, while the owners of the soil, plundered of all they possessed, had naught left to them on earth save the cold, bare boards of their homes, wherein, a few weeks before, peace and plenty had reigned.

On the 2d of March, 1689, the French reduced the castle of Heidelberg to a heap of ashes, and for more than a century its bleak ruins kept alive the hatred of Germany toward their relentless enemies.

God had permitted them to spread desolation over the land. He had withdrawn His help from the innocent, and had suffered the wicked to triumph. After plundering their houses of every necessary of life, General Melac now required of them tribute in the shape of twenty thousand florins. To raise one-fourth of the sum was an impossibility in Esslingen; and the burghers of the town had gone in a body to the castle to beg for mercy.

Two hours had elapsed since they had departed on their dangerous mission, and the people, with throbbing hearts, awaited their return. Up to this day, they had mourned and

wept in the solitude of their plundered homes; but in this hour of mortal suspense, they had instinctively sought companionship; and now the market-place, in whose centre was the ancient town-hall, was thronged with men, women, and children, of every degree. Misfortune had levelled all distinctions of rank, and the common danger had cemented thousands of human beings into one stricken and terrified family.

They stood, their anxious looks fixed upon the winding path which led to the castle, while all around at the open windows pale-faced women hoped and feared by turns, as they saw light or shadow upon the faces of the multitude below.

Just opposite the council-hall was a house of dark-gray stone, with a bow-window and a richly-fretted gable. At the window stood two persons; one a woman whose head was enveloped in a black veil which set off the extreme paleness of her face, and fell in long folds around her person. Near her stood a young girl similarly attired; but, instead of the hair just tinged with gray, which lay in smooth bands across the forehead of her companion, her golden curls, stirred by the breeze, encircled her young head like a halo, and the veil that fluttered lightly around her graceful person lay like a misty cloud about a face as beautiful in color as it was in feature. Spite of suffering and privation, the brow was smooth and fair, the cheeks were tinged with rose, and the lips were scarlet as autumn berries. She, like the rest, had endured hunger and cold; but youth is warmed and nourished by Hope, and the tears that dim a maiden's eyes are but dew-drops glittering upon a beautiful rose.

Her face was serious and anxious, but her large black eyes flashed with expectation, and the parted lips showed that hope was stronger than fear in her young heart. Marie was the only child of the chief burgomaster of Esslingen, and the lady at her side was his honored wife.

"Do you see nothing, my child?" said the mother. "Great God! this suspense is worse than death! Your father expected to be back within an hour, and more than two hours have gone by!"

The young girl strained her eyes, and looked up the castle-

road, which was just opposite the house. "Mother," said she, "I see something dark issuing from the gates."

"Oh, look again! Is it they?"

"Yes; I think so, dear mother. I see them advancing: it must be father and the deputies. Now I begin to distinguish one from the other. There are one—two—three. Great God, mother! were there not seven? I see but six!"

"Yes—seven. Your father, two burgomasters, and four senators. Are you sure? Look—count once more."

"I see them distinctly now: there are six. They will be hidden presently by the winding of the road; but I see them each one as he turns aside."

"And there are but six! One of them is missing! Oh, merciful Father, which of them can it be?"

"I see them no longer. Alas! they are too far for recognition, and we must wait. Oh, mother, how my heart pains me!"

"Let us pray, my darling," returned the mother, clasping her daughter's trembling hands.

"Dear mother, I cannot! I am too miserable to pray. If Caspar were but here, I should feel less wretched."

"And yet, as a soldier of the imperial army, he is in less danger than he would be, as a civilian of Esslingen. I thank Heaven, dear Marie, that your betrothed is not here. At least he fights face to face, with arms in hand; while we—oh, what weapon can avail against midnight murder and incendiarism?"

"And yet," sighed Marie, "I would he were here to protect me!"

"He would not be allowed to protect you, for, had he seen the familiarity of that despot yesterday, he would in all probability have lost his life in your defence."

"I had not thought of that. I had only yearned for his protecting arm. Yes, mother, he would have done some desperate deed had he seen the blood-stained hand of that accursed Frenchman when it touched my cheek, and heard his insolent tones as he asked whether its roses were colored by nature or art. Oh, mother, what a misfortune for us that we were on the street when he arrived!"

Mother and daughter now relapsed into silence, for the

deputies, their heads despondingly held down, were to be seen making their way through the crowd. Frau Wengelin could not articulate the words she longed to speak; but Marie, clasping her hands in agony, cried out:

"He is not there! My father is missing!"

With one faint shriek, her mother fell senseless to the floor, while Marie, darting out of the house, made her way through the throng to the market-place, and overtook the deputies as they were ascending the steps that led to the hall of council. Grasping the arm of the first she encountered, she looked wildly into his eyes, while her quivering lips vainly tried to murmur, "Where is my father?"

The old man understood those pleading looks, and answered them with tears.

"Where is my father?" cried Marie, with the strength of her growing agony; and, as the deputy was still silent, the multitude around took up the young girl's words and shouted: "Where is her father? Tell us where is the Burgomaster Wengelin?"

"Is he dead?" murmured Marie, her teeth chattering with fear.

"No, Marie," replied the senator, "he is not dead, but if no help is vouchsafed from above, he will die to-day, and we must all die with him."

The people broke into a long wail, and Marie fell upon her knees to pray. She could frame no words wherewith to cry for mercy, but her soul was with God; and for a few moments she was rapt in an ecstasy that bore her far, far away from the weeping multitude around. She was recalled from her pious transport by the voice of her uncle, one of the deputies, who was addressing the people.

General Melac had mocked at their petition. They had humbled themselves on their knees for the sake of their suffering fellow-citizens, but the heartless Frenchman had laughed, and, laughing, reiterated his command.

If before sunset the five hundred thousand francs were not forthcoming, the French soldiery would be there with fire and sword. The inhabitants should be exterminated, and Esslingen laid in ashes.

This horrible disclosure was received with another burst of woe, except from the unfortunate Marie, who stood like a pale and rigid Niobe—her grief too deep for tears or sighs.

When the tumult had somewhat subsided, the senator resumed his sad recital. At sound of the Frenchman's cruel mandate, the Burgomaster Wengelin had risen from his knees, and raising his head proudly, had cried out: "Give us back that of which you have robbed us, and we can pay you ten times the sum you ask. We were a peaceful and prosperous community until your plundering hordes reduced us to beggary. Be content with the booty you have already; and be not twice a barbarian, first stealing our property, and then, like a fiend, requiring us to reproduce and lay it at your feet."

The noble indignation of the burgomaster excited nothing but mirth on the part of the Frenchman. He laughed.

"Well, it makes no great difference, after all. Your lives will do quite as well as the ransom you cannot afford to pay for them. My soldiery like fire and blood and pretty women almost as well as they do gold, and I shall enjoy the spectacle from the castle-walls. As for you, burgomaster, you have something that I covet for my own use—your beautiful daughter."

"My daughter!" shrieked Wengelin, defiantly, "before she should be delivered to you, monster! I would take her life as Virginius took that of his well-beloved child!"

The general said not a word. For a time the two men eyed each other like two enraged tigers; but General Melac wasted no time in vain indignation. He signed to his guards, and ordered them to take away the prisoner, and retain him as a hostage until sunset.

"When our well-beloved citizens of Esslingen shall hear the report of the musketry that ends *his* life, they will know that the signal for pillage has been given. The execution will take place at sunset."

Then, addressing himself to the six remaining deputies: "Go," said he, "and relate what you have seen and heard to your fellow-citizens; and tell them that my Frenchmen are skilful both with sabre and torch; they have been practising

for several weeks past in Heidelberg, Mannheim, and other German cities. Do not forget to communicate all this to the fair daughter of the burgomaster."

This time there was no outburst of grief from the people; they felt that all hope was vain, and they were nerving themselves for martyrdom. Presently there was a sound of voices, and the fugitives from Wurtemberg and the Palatinate were heard relating their frightful experience of the warfare of a monarch who styled himself "Most Christian King."

One of them mounted the steps of the council-hall, and described the entrance of the French into his native town. The people were driven with bayonets from their beds into the snow, children were tossed into the flames; old men were butchered like cattle; maidens were torn from the arms of their parents, and given over to the soldiery; and the narrator, who had escaped, had been for days without food—for weeks without covering or shelter!

As the man concluded this frightful picture of carnage, a voice from among the crowd was heard in clear, loud, ringing tones:

"There is rescue at hand—we must make use of it!"

At the same moment, Marie felt a grasp upon her arm, and turning beheld herself in the custody of a tall, pale man, who continued to cry out:

"She can rescue us! I saw the French general stroke her cheeks yesterday, and look at her with eyes of love. Did he not demand her of her father? And were his last words not a message to her? I hint that she might ransom us if she would!"

"Ay, ay," responded one of the crowd. "Ay!" echoed another and another; and now the chorus gathered strength, and swelled into a shout that penetrated the walls of Esslingen Castle, and reached the ears of Marie's unconscious father.

Marie covered her face with her hands, and sank upon her knees. "Oh, Caspar!" was the unspoken thought of her affectionate soul.

"Friends!" exclaimed her uncle, "you are drunk with

cowardly fright. Know ye that ye ask of this maiden her own ruin for your lives?"

"But if Melac's soldiery are set upon us," replied a young woman in the throng; "we shall all be ruined—mothers, wives, and maidens. And is it not better," continued she, raising her voice, and addressing the mob, "is it not better that one woman should suffer dishonor than a thousand?"

"Marie Wengelin will have her father's life to answer for, as well as the lives of her fellow-citizens," cried another voice. "It is her duty to sacrifice herself."

At this moment the loud, shrill tones of an affrighted voice were heard calling out, "Marie! Marie! my child!" and the figure of Frau Wengelin, with outstretched arms, was now seen at the window, whence the mother and daughter had watched the return of the deputies.

Marie would have responded to that pathetic appeal, but as she rose from her knees, and attempted to move, she was forced and held back by the crowd. They were lost to all sense of humanity for the one segregated being by whose immolation the safety of the aggregate might be effected.

"Have pity! have pity!" cried the poor girl. "Do you not hear my mother calling me? Think of your own children, and hinder me not, I implore ye!"

"We think of our children, and therefore you shall not go! You shall sacrifice yourself for the suffering many!"

And they lifted her back to the peristyle, where she stood alone, confronting the pitiless crowd that demanded her honor wherewith to buy their lives. What was the fate of the daughter of Jephthah, compared to that which threatened poor Marie of Esslingen?

Suddenly a cloud seemed to pass over the sky, and the faces of her enemies were no longer distinct. Marie raise her arms wildly over her head, and screamed, for too well she understood the shadow that rested upon the market-place. The sun had sunk behind the heights of Esslingen, and one half hour remained ere her father lost his life.

The crowd renewed their cries, entreaties, and threats. Some appealed to her patriotism, some to her filial love, some called her a murderess,—the meanest among the multitude attempted to terrify her—as if any doom could equal the horror of the one they were forcing upon an innocent, pure-hearted, and loving girl!

She raised her hand to obtain a hearing.

"You shall not perish if my prayers can save you! I will go to our oppressor, and try to move his heart to pity."

She heard neither their shouts of joy nor their thanks. She was hardly conscious of the blessings that were being poured on her head, the kisses that were imprinted on her rigid, clammy hands. She stood for a while, her teeth clinched, her eyes distended, her figure dilated to its utmost; then suddenly she shivered, thrust away the women that were clustering about her, and began her *via crucis*.

At the gate of the city she encountered the pastor that had baptized and received her into the church. He had placed himself there that he might pour what consolation he could into that bruised and bleeding heart. The old man laid his hand upon her golden curls, and she fell at his feet. The multitude that had followed their victim simultaneously bent the knee and bowed their heads; for, although they were too far to overhear his words, they knew that the pastor was blessing her.

"As Abraham blessed Isaac, and as the Israelites blessed Judith, so do I bless thee, thou deliverer of thy people! May God inspire thy tongue, and so soften the heart of the tyrant, that he may hearken to thy prayers, and, looking upon thy pure and virgin brow, he may respect that honor which is dearer to woman than life. God bless thee, Marie! God bless thee!" He bowed his head close to her ear. "Marie you are a Christian. Swear to me that you will not stain your hands with blood."

Marie's eyes flashed fire. "Did not the Israelite kill Holofernes?"

"Yes, my child; but Israel's heroine was called Judith, and ours bears the blessed name of Mary! 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord; I will repay.'"

Marie's eye was still unsubdued, and she looked more like Judith than like Mary. The old pastor was agitated and alarmed.

"Marie, Marie, you are in the hands of God. Come weal, come wo, can you not trust yourself to Him? See, the sun goes lower and lower; but before I release your hand you must swear that it shall shed no blood."

Alas! Yes—the sun was rapidly sinking, and she must hasten, or her father's life would be lost. "I promise," said she, "and now, father, pray—pray for—"

She could say no more; but rising she went alone up the steps that led to Esslingen Castle. The people, still on their knees, followed her lithe figure till it was hidden for a time by the fir-trees that grew along the heights; then, as she emerged again and appeared at the hill-top, the multitude gave vent to their feelings in prayer.

Higher and higher she mounted, until they saw that she had reached the gates, and disappeared.

CHAPTER VII.

HER RETURN.

HOURS went by and darkness set in. It was a cold night in March; the wind howled in fitful gusts along the streets, but the people could not disperse. They sat shivering together in the market-place; for how was it possible for sleep to visit their eyes, when every moment might hurl destruction upon their heads. The old priest went from one to another, encouraging the desponding, and comforting the afflicted; praying with the mothers, and covering their shivering children, who, stretched at the feet of their parents, or resting within their arms, were the only ones there to whom sleep brought oblivion of sorrow.

At last that fearful night of suspense went by. A rosy flush tinged the eastern sky, it deepened to gold, and the sun rose. The people raised a hymn of thanksgiving, and, as they were rising from their devotions, the roll of a drum was heard, and a file of soldiers were seen issuing from the castle-gates. They came nearer and nearer, until they reached the city;

but by the time they had neared the market-place, not a human being was there to confront them: the people had all fled to their houses.

They stopped before the residence of the burgomaster, and from an opening made in the ranks there issued two persons; the one a man, the other a woman. The latter was veiled, and her head rested languidly upon the shoulders of her companion.

A group of French officers escorted them to the door, where they took off their hats, and, bowing low, retired. The father and daughter were lost to view, the drum beat anew, and the men, without exchanging a word with the inhabitants, returned to their quarters at Esslingen Castle.

The people were no sooner reassured as to the intentions of the soldiers, than they poured in streams from their homes, and took their way to the burgomaster's house. Congratulations were exchanged between friends, parents embraced their children, husbands pressed their wives to their bosoms; every heart overflowed with gratitude to Marie, every voice was lifted in her praise.

But she! Scarcely enduring her mother's caresses, she had torn herself from that mother's embrace, and, hastening away to the solitude of her own room, had bolted herself within.

Two hours went by, and the house of the burgomaster could scarcely contain the friends that flocked thither to welcome his daughter. Without, a band of music was playing martial airs, while within, halls, parlors, and staircases, were crowded with magistrates in their robes of office, churchmen in their clerical gowns, and women and maidens in gay and festive apparel.

A deputation of citizens now requested to be permitted to pay homage to the heroine that had rescued her townsmen from death; and Frau Wengelin ventured to knock at the door of her daughter's chamber. She was so earnest in her pleadings, that at last the bolt was withdrawn, and Marie, with bloodshot eyes, and mouth convulsed, appeared upon the threshold.

"Come, my child," said the poor mother, "the citizens will