BOOK VII.

CHAPTER I.

THE ISLAND OF BLISS.

THEY were together in the little pavilion of the garden at Schönbrunn. With clasped hands, and eyes that sparkled with happiness, they sat in that sweet silence which to lovers is more eloquent than words. The door that led to the park was open, and the balmy breath of May wafted toward them the perfume of the flowers and trees without.

The park, too, was undisturbed by a sound. The laborers had gone to their mid-day meal, and the birds had hidden themselves away from the sunbeams. The great heart of Nature was pulsating with a joy like that of the lovers, too great for utterance. There was something in the appearance of this youthful pair which would have convinced a looker-on that there was a mystery of some sort surrounding the romance of their love. For the one was in the garb of a nun, her head concealed by a coif, and her person enveloped in a long white veil; while the other was attired in a splendid Spanish dress. Over it hung a heavy gold chain, to which was attached the order of the Golden Fleece. His soft black hair lay on a forehead white as snow, and made a pleasant contrast with a face which was pale, not with sickness or suffering, but with that suppressed sensibility which leaves the cheek colorless because its fires are concentrated within the heart. No! It was not for sorrow that Eugene of Savoy was pale; it was from excess of joy; for *she* was at his side, and the world had nothing more to bestow!

So thought he, as, with caressing hand, he lifted her long veil from her shoulders and threw it behind, in imitation of the drapery that hangs around Raphael's Madonnas.

"Oh, how I love you, Sister Angelica!" murmured he; "and, in my feverish visions, how often I have mistaken that white veil for the snowy sail of a ship of which I used to dream in my delirium—a ship that was bearing me onward to an island of bliss, where my Laura stood with outstretched arms, and welcomed me home! But what were imagination's brightest picturings to the reality of the deep joy that flooded my being, when the veil was flung back, and my love stood revealed! Oh, Laura—my life will be all too short to reward you for your fidelity."

"You love me, Eugene, and therein is my unspeakable reward."

"And will you never leave me, dearest?"

She laid her small hand upon his head, smoothed his hair fondly, and gazed passionately into his eyes. You ask, as if you required an answer," said she, in tones that were tremulous with love.

"I do require an answer, for I am continually fearing that this is a blissful dream; and that some morn I shall awake to find thee flown, and Angelica the nun all that is left of thee! When thou art absent from my sight, I shiver with dread lest I should see thee never more."

She laughed, and oh, how musical was her laugh! "Is this the hero of Belgrade, that talks of shivering with dread?"

"Yes; and when he thinks that he might lose you, he is no hero, but a poor coward. And in truth, my Laura, I am tired of a soldier's life—it is too exciting for my health; and I am tired of the world and its frivolities, too. If you love me as I do you, you will be happy in our mutual love, without other companionship than mine."

"Over castle-roof, and through the dangerous descent of that castle-chimney, came I to meet you, Eugene; how then should I pine for other companionship?"

"When I think how mysterious was your escape, I dread lest you should disappear from me as mysteriously. The very thought presses on my brain like the first horrid symptoms of madness; then my body begins to suffer, my wounds seem to open, and bleed anew. Laura, prove to me your love by going

with me into solitude. I am tired of being a courtier, and have asked the emperor for my discharge."

"Did he grant it, Eugene?" asked she, fixing her large, penetrating eyes upon his, with an earnestness that forbade him to avoid her glance.

"He will grant it to-morrow. To-morrow for the last time, I go to the imperial palace as a field-marshal; I shall return thence nobody but Eugene of Savoy, your lover, who lives but to serve you, and repay if he can all that he owes to your courageous and heroic affection."

"The emperor has refused," replied Laura. "He gave you time for reflection," added she, looking intently again into her lover's eyes.

"Perhaps he may have wished me to reflect," replied he, smiling, and trying to endure her scrutiny. "But my resolve is not to be shaken. I shall retire to the estate presented me by the emperor in Hungary, there to live with my darling on an island of bliss, upheaved so far above the tempestuous ocean of the world's vicissitudes, that no lashing of its waves will ever reach our home. Will you go with me into this island, where you shall not fear the world's censorious comments on our reunion—where you may throw aside that false vestal garb, and be my own untrammelled bride?"

Laura said nothing; a deep glow suffused her cheeks, and her eyes filled with tears. Gliding from her seat to her knees, she took her lover's hand and covered it with kisses.

"Laura!" exclaimed he, "what can this signify?"

Laura wept on for a time in silence; then, when she had recovered herself sufficiently to speak, she replied:

"It signifies that I bow down before the magnanimity of him who, to shield me from the world's contumely, would relinquish that which he holds most dear on earth, his hopes of glory."

"Laura, give me an answer to my prayer. Will you go with me to my estates in Hungary?"

Laura smiled, but said nothing.

"Answer me, Laura, answer me, my own love."

"The emperor gave you a day to reflect upon your sudden

desire for retirement. Give me but one hour for my decision."

"You hesitate!"

"Only *one* hour, Eugene; but during that hour I must be alone with my Maker. Await me here."

Drawing the veil over her face, Laura bounded lightly down the pavilion steps, and walked hurriedly toward the palace. Eugene looked after her with eyes that beamed with love ineffable, sighing as he did so: "She is worthy of the sacrifice; I owe it to her."

The hour seemed interminable. At first, he fixed his eyes upon the walk by which she must return; then he turned away, that he might wait until he heard her dear voice.

At last a light step approached the pavilion; he heard it coming up the steps, and a beloved voice spoke:

"The Marchioness de Bonaletta."

Eugene turned, and there, instead of Sister Angelica, stood his beautiful Laura in rich attire—so beautiful that he thought he had never sufficiently admired her before.

He started forward, and, dropping on one knee, took her little hand, and covered it with kisses. Then, rising, he flung his arm around her waist, and drew her to a seat.

"Now read me the riddle," said he.

"My beloved, do you think me so blind as not to have comprehended the immeasurable sacrifice you would have made to my womanly pride? Oh, how I thank you, my own, peerless Eugene! But I will not accept it. I may not bear your name, but God knows that I am your wife, as Eve was the spouse of Adam; and it is for me to show that our bond is holy, by enduring courageously the stigma of being considered as your mistress. Enough for me to feel that to you I shall be an honored and beloved wife, incapable of sharing your fame, but oh, how proud of my hero! Gird on your sword, my Eugene, and fulfil your glorious destiny. Go once more into the world, and let me share your fate."

"Let her share my fate! She asks me to let her share my fate," cried Eugene, pressing her to his heart. And God and Nature blessed the union that man refused to acknowledge.

CHAPTER II.

THE FRENCH IN SPEIER.

GENERAL MELAC and his murderous hordes were in the old city of Speier, squandering the goods and money of which they had robbed the unfortunate inhabitants. Scarcely two months had elapsed since the departure of the French from Esslingen, and in that short interval they had laid more than one hundred towns in ashes.

But Melac was insatiable; his eyes feasted on the scarlet hue of German blood, his ears were ravished with the sounds of German groans and sighs; and oftentimes, when the poor hunted fugitives were flying from his presence, he made a pastime of their misery for himself, by aiming at them with his own musket, to see how many he could bring down before they passed out of sight.

He was holding a council of war with his generals; but, while he made merry over his cruelties of the day before, and projected others for the morrow, his officers frowned and averted their eyes.

His thick, sensual lips expanded with a hideous smile. "It would seem that my orders are not agreeable," said he. "Pray, gentlemen, am I so unlucky as to have earned your disapproval?"

There was no answer to this inquiry, but neither was there any change in the aspect of the officers.

"General Feuquière," cried Melac, "you are not usually reticent; pray, let us hear your opinion of my mode of warfare."

"I cannot approve of cruelty," replied Feuquière, bluntly. "Our men act much less like the brave soldiers of a Christian king, than like demons that have been let loose from hell."

"You do not flatter us," replied Melac. "And I am curious to know whether anybody else here present shares your opinion."

"We are all of one mind," was the unanimous reply.

"We are assassins and incendiaries, but we have never yet fought a battle like men," resumed De Feuquiere.

"No," added Montclas. "We have longed in vain for honorable warfare; for a fair combat before the light of heaven, face to face with men armed like ourselves; and we are sick at heart of midnight torches and midnight murders."

"No doubt; you are a sentimental personage, I hear: one who shed tears when the order was given to sack Mannheim."

"I am not ashamed of those tears," returned Montclas. "For three months these much enduring people have exerted themselves to do our bidding, treating us like guests who had come to them as foes. And when, in return for their kindness, our soldiery were ordered to sack their beautiful city, I wept while I was forced to obey the inhuman command of my superior officer. May Almighty God not hold me responsible as a creature for what I have been forced to do as a soldier!"

"You can justify yourself by referring the Almighty to me, as I shall certainly justify myself by referring Him to Monsieur Louvois. It is true that I do not weep when I carry out his orders; but you may judge for yourselves whether I transcend them.—General Montclas, be so good as to read aloud this dispatch."

General Montclas took the paper, and read in an audible voice:

"'It is now two weeks since I have seen a courier from the army. What are you about that I receive no more accounts of the destruction of German cities wherewith to entertain the idle hours of his majesty? You have been ordered to devastate the entire German frontier. You began bravely, but you are not keeping the promise of your opening. The Germans are full of sentiment, and you must wound them through their affections and associations. Burn their houses, sack their fine churches, deface and destroy their monuments and public buildings. When next you write, let me hear that Speier with its magnificent cathedral is a thing of the past; and be expeditious, that Worms and Trier may share the same fate.

'LOUVOIS.'"

"You see, then," observed Melac, "that I do but obey orders.

"That may be," sighed De Feuquière, "but all Europe will rise in one indignant protest against our inhumanity."

"Let them protest; we will have raised such a barrier of desolation between themselves and France, that we can afford to laugh at their indignation. I for my part approve of the method of warfare traced out for us by the minister of war, and I shall carry it out from Basle to Coblentz. The time we allowed to the people of Speier for reflection, expires to-day. To horse, then! The burgomasters are waiting for us in the market-place by the cathedral."

Yes! The burghers, the clergy, the women, and the children, were on their knees in the market-place, crying for mercy. Melac, laughing at their wretchedness, spurred his horse onward, and plunged into their midst, scattering them right and left like a flock of frightened sheep; and the clang of his horse's hoofs on the stone pavement sounded to his unhappy victims like the riveting of nails in the great coffin wherein their beautiful city was shortly to be buried.

But they were not noisy in their grief. Here and there might be heard a slight sob, and, with this exception, there was silence in that thronged market-place.

Suddenly the great bell of the cathedral began to toll, and after it all the bells in Speier. General Melac slackened his pace, and rode deliberately along the market-place, as if to give that weeping multitude the opportunity of looking upon his cruel face, and reading there that from him no mercy was to be expected.

The bells ceased, and their tones were yet trembling on the air, when the women and children lifted up their voices and began to chant: "In my trouble I called on the Lord!"

The strain was taken up by the musicians who stood at the open windows of the council-hall, and now the burghers, the magistrates, and the clergy, joined in the holy song. The French uncovered their heads and listened reverentially, while many an eye was dimmed with tears, and many a heart bled for the fate of those whom they could not rescue.

Every man there felt the influence of the blessed words,

except one. General Melac was neither awed nor touched; his pale eye was as cold, his sardonic mouth as cruel as ever.

"He is perfectly hardened," murmured a monk, who was leaning against one of the columns of the cathedral. This monk was a young man, of tall, muscular build. His wide shoulders and fine, erect figure, seemed much more suitable to a soldier than to a brother of the order of mercy. Even his sun-burnt face had a proud, martial look; and as his dark, glowing eyes rested on Melac, they kindled with a glance that was not very expressive of brotherly love.

"He is without pity," thought he, "and perhaps 'tis well; for I might have been touched to grant him a death more merciful."

He moved away that he might distinguish the words that were now being poured forth from the quivering lips of the white-haired prebendary of the cathedral; but the poor old priest's voice was tremulous with tears, and the monk could not hear. He then made a passage for himself through the crowd and approached General Melac. The prebendary had ceased to speak, and there was a solemn stillness in the market-place, for every sigh was hushed to catch the words that were to follow.

Melac looked around that he might see how many thousand human beings were acknowledging his power, then he drew in his rein and smiled—that deadly smile!

"My orders must be carried out," said he, in a loud and distinct voice. "Speier must be razed to the ground, and I am sorry that its inhabitants were unwilling to profit by the permission I gave them to emigrate to France. They would have been kindly received there."

"We hope for mercy," was the reply of the prebendary. "Oh, general, let us not hope in vain!"

"No mercy shall be given you," said Melac, who, turning to General Montclas, remarked, "What an advantage I have over you! I know their language, and can understand all their expressions of grief! It is a comic litany!"

"Demon, I will repay thee!" muttered the monk. And, coming close to the general's horse, he laid his hand upon the rein.

"What do you mean, sirrah?" cried Melac. "Withdraw your hand."

"Your excellency," replied the man in pure French, "allow me to station myself at your horse's head, for you may need my help to-day."

"Your help? Wherefore?"

"The work in which you are engaged is apt to provoke personal hostility. I dreamed last night that I saw you weltering in your blood, enveloped in flames. I am superstitious —very; particularly as regards dreams, and I left the hospital where I was engaged in nursing the sick, on purpose to protect your excellency from secret foes."

"Protect *me!* Who do you suppose would be so bold as to attack me? Not this whining multitude around us."

"Nobody knows to what acts despair may drive the meekest of men," was the monk's reply.

"Very well; I believe you are right," said Melac, a little disturbed. "Station yourself at my rein, then."

At that moment there was a general wail, and many a voice was lifted up in one last effort to soften the heart of their persecutor.

"Speier must be destroyed," was his answer, "but to show you the extent of my clemency, I will now announce to you that without the gates are four hundred forage-wagons, which I have provided for the removal of your valuables (if you have any) to any point you may select within the boundaries of France. Those who prefer to remain, are allowed to deposit their effects in the cathedral, and to guard them in person. The temple of Almighty God is sacred, and the hand of man shall not profane its sanctity by deeds of violence. Take your choice of the cathedral or the army-wagons: I give you four hours' grace. If, after that time, I find a German on the streets, man, woman, or child, the offender shall be scourged or put to the sword."

In a few moments the market-place was empty, and the people, exhausted and cowed though they were, by two months of oppression, had flown to take advantage of this last act of grace.

"Now, my excellent brother," said Melac to the monk,

"you see that I am quite safe, and can dispense with your protection."

"The day is not yet at an end," said the monk, solemnly.

"You are right," cried the butcher, "it has scarcely begun; but by-and-by we shall see a comedy that will raise your spirits for a month to come. The actors thereof are to be the people of Speier, and the entertainment will close with an exhibition of fireworks on a magnificent scale. Send me two ordnance officers!" cried he to his staff.

Two lancers approached and saluted their commander.

"Let two companies of infantry occupy the market-place," said Melac. "Let four cannon be stationed at the entrances of the four streets leading to the cathedral. For four hours the people shall be allowed to enter with their chattels. At the end of this truce, two more companies of infantry shall be ordered hither, one of which shall surround the cathedral, the other march inside. A detachment of miners must encompass the columns and cornice of the roof with combustibles; but use no powder, for that might endanger ourselves. There are straw, hemp, pitch, tar, and sulphur enough in the town to make the grandest show since Rome was burned. The infantry that enter the church, will massacre the people, and if they are dexterous the booty is theirs; but they must do their work swiftly, or there will be no time to save anything, for I intend that the entire building shall be fired at once.

The monk started, grasped the mane of the horse with a movement that caused him to shy, and his rider to cry out in great irritation:

"What are you doing, fool?"

"Pardon, your excellency, my foot was under your horse's hoof, and I could not help catching at his mane."

"Keep farther away, then; I do not believe in dreams.—Away!" cried he, to the lancers, who, horror-stricken but powerless to refuse, went on their diabolical mission.

"And now," continued Melac, "we will ride to the gates to see what sort of entertainment our hospitable hosts of Speier are preparing for us there."

He galloped off with such swiftness that his guardian-angel was left behind. But he followed as fast as he could; when-

ever he met a man hastening with his goods to the cathedral, bidding him "Beware!" and passing on. Some heeded the warning, others did not. They were so paralyzed by despair that the monk's words conveyed no meaning to their minds, and they went humbly on to their destruction.

He meanwhile hurried to the gates through which the weeping crowds were bearing, each one, what he valued most on earth. There were women, scarcely able to totter, whose dearest burdens were their own helpless children; there were men carrying sickly wives or decrepit mothers; there were others so loaded down with the few worldly goods that the odious Frenchman had left them, that their backs were almost bent in two, and they were scarcely able to drag themselves along! The nearer the gates, the denser the throng, many of whom were fainting with misery and exhaustion; but many also to whom despair lent strength.

Melac was there, enjoying the scene; sometimes glancing toward the gates, sometimes toward the wagons which, for miles around, covered the extensive plain outside of the city. The poor fainting wretches that reached them let their burdens drop, and would have made an effort to follow them, but they were told that no one would be allowed to enter the wagons until all had been filled with their wares.

CHAPTER III.

THE TREASURE.

For three hours the monk strove in vain to reach the gate; but the time of grace was fast approaching its close, and now, the press becoming less, he sped along as if he had been flying for life, until he came panting, almost breathless, to the spot where the French general, surrounded by his staff, was sitting on his horse, enjoying himself immensely.

"Ah!" said he, "our pious brother here! Well—you see that I am alive."

"Yes, and I am glad to know it," replied the monk, resuming his place at the bridle.

Melac turned to one of his adjutants: "Give orders to the drivers to go on, and let the soldiers cut down every man that attempts to mount the wagons or withdraw his effects. To get the honey, we must kill the bees. When they are all dead, the men can divide the spoils." *

"As soon as the sport is over," continued he, to another adjutant, "I will repair, with my staff, to the council-hall, there to see the illumination. Ride on, and tell the superintendent that, when he sees my handkerchief waving from the great window in the second story, he must apply his matches."

So saying, Melac put spurs to his horse, and, followed by his staff, approached the wagons, and gave a signal with his sword.

The whole train was set in motion, and the horses were urged to the top of their speed.

The unhappy victims of this demoniac stratagem gave one simultaneous shout of indignation. Those nearest the wagons strove to clutch at them with their hands. Some held on even to the wheels, some mounted the horses, some snatched the reins. But sharp swords were near; and, at the word of command, every outstretched arm was hacked off, and fell, severed, to the ground.

A struggle now began between the soldiery and the companions of those who had been so cruelly mutilated. They were unarmed, but they had the strength of brutes at bay; and by-and-by many a sword had been snatched from their assassins, and many a Frenchman had bitten the dust. General Melac was so interested in a fight between two soldiers and two women whose children had been driven off in the wagons, that, before he was aware of his danger, a sword was uplifted over his head, and a frenzied face was almost thrust into his own. At this moment his reins were seized, his horse was forced back, and the stout arm of the monk had wrested the sabre from the enraged German, who fell, pierced by a bullet from the holster of an officer close by.

"Was it you, pious brother, that so opportunely backed my steed?" inquired Melac.

* Historical.—See Zimmermann, "History of Wurtemberg," vol. ii.

The monk bowed, and the general saw that his forehead was bloody.

"Are you wounded?"

"Yes, general; I received the stroke that was intended for you, but parried it, and the blow was slight."

"I am a thousand times indebted to you for the service you have rendered me, and hope that you will not leave me a second time without your sheltering presence.—Ho! a horse there for the Bernardine monk!"

No sooner were Melac's commands uttered than they were obeyed, for he that tarried when the tyrant spoke was sure to come to grief. The monk swung himself into the saddle with the agility of a trooper, and, although the horse reared and plunged, he never swerved from his seat.

"Verily you are a curious specimen of a monk," laughed Melac. "I never saw a brother so much to my taste before. Come, follow me to the market-place, and you shall see my skill in pyrotechnics. If I had but Nero's field of operations, I could rival his burning of Rome. Happy Nero, that could destroy a Rome!"

"Do you, also, envy Nero his sudden death?" asked the monk.

"Why, yes; though I would like to put off the evil day as far as may be, I hope to die a sudden and painless death."

"Sudden and painless death," muttered the monk, between his teeth. "You allude to death on the field of battle?"

"Ay, that do I; it is the only end befitting a soldier. See—we are at the gates. The way is obstructed by corpses," continued he, urging his horse over a heap of dead that lay in the streets. "Luckily, they will not have to be buried; they shall have a funeral pile, like that of the ancients."

"Is the entire city to be destroyed?" asked the monk.

"Yes, the whole city, from one end to the other; and these tottering old buildings will make a brave blaze."

"A brave blaze," echoed the monk, raising his mournful eyes to the long rows of houses that so lately were the abodes of many a happy family, were as empty as open graves. They continued their way along the silent streets—silent even around the cathedral, where, early in the morning, so many

thousand supplicants had knelt before God and man for mercy, but knelt in vain.

Some few were within the cathedral walls, some were lying, their ghastly faces upturned to heaven, and those who had survived were wandering across their blasted fields, bereft of kindred and home, houseless, hungry, and almost naked.

General Melac glanced at the cathedral porch. That, too, was empty and still.

"I wonder whether our men have done their work over there?" said he. "I must go and see."

Then dismounting, and flinging his bridle to his equerry, he called upon the monk to follow him. The staff also dismounted, and an officer advanced to receive orders.

"Gentlemen, betake yourselves to the hall of council, and await my return at the great window there, opposite."

The staff obeyed, and the general, followed by his preserver, ascended the steps that led to the cathedral.

"Your excellency," whispered the monk, coming very close, "before we enter, will you allow me to say a word to you?"

"I should think you had had opportunity enough to-day to say what you wish."

"Not in private, general. Until now we have had listeners."

"Well, is it anything of moment you desire to communicate?"

"Something of great importance."

"Speak on, and be quick, for time presses."

"Your excellency is resolved to burn down the cathedral?"

"Have I not told you that I would?" replied Melac, with a frown. "Nothing in heaven or on earth shall save it."

"Then," said the monk with a deep sigh, "for the sake of our brotherhood, I must violate the sanctity of the confessional. But you must swear to preserve my secret, otherwise you shall not hear it."

"A secret of the confessional! How can it concern me?"

"You shall hear. It relates to the concealment of two millions' worth of gold and precious stones."

The covetous eyes of Melac glittered, and the blood mounted to his brow. "Two millions!" gasped he.

"One for you and one for our brotherhood. Do you swear to keep the secret?"

"Most unquestionably."

"And also swear that no one but ourselves shall know the place of its concealment?"

"I swear, most willingly, for I do not intend to divide my share of the booty with anybody living. How soon do you expect to come in possession of it?"

"Now—at this very hour."

Melac drew back, and eyed the monk suspiciously. "How! These lying wretches had two millions of treasure, and not one of them would yield it up?"

"General, the people of Speier have nothing—nothing. Nobody knew of it save the bishop, who died day before yesterday, and the sacristan, who died to-day. You remember that I was absent from your side during two hours to-day?"

Melac nodded, and the monk went on: "Those two hours I spent by the dying-bed of this sacristan, the only depositary of the secret. He was wounded among the rest, was conveyed to a neighboring house, and there I received his last confessions. All the treasures of the cathedral—its gold, silver, and jewels—were, at the approach of the French army, conveyed to a place in the tower, which place the sacristan designated so plainly, that I can find it without difficulty."

"But what has induced you to share it with me?" asked Melac, with a glance of mistrust.

"Imperative necessity, general. I cannot obtain it without your protection. You have given orders that no man shall be suffered to escape from the cathedral to-day, and, unless you go with me, the treasure must be given up to the flames. Certainly, if I could have gotten it without assistance, it would have been my duty to give it over entire into the hands of the brotherhood. But if you help me, I will divide it with you. It lies in the tower of the cathedral, close by the belfry."

"Come, then, come; show me the way."

They entered the massive doors. The sentry saluted the general, and they passed on.

"Let nothing more be done until I return," said Melac to the sentry. "I wish to go over the old building before we consign it to the flames."

CHAPTER IV.

CASPAR'S VENGEANCE.

DEEP silence reigned within the walls of the holy temple, broken occasionally by an expiring sigh, or the faint sound of the death-rattle. For the French soldiery had done their work. The poor wretches that had been ensnared into seeking refuge there, had all been murdered, and their possessions removed to a place of safety. One hour earlier, the vaults of the house of God had rung with shrieks and groans, but the victims were now dying or dead.

General Melac went among the prostrate bodies, looking here and there behind the pillars, to see whether any thing of value had been overlooked by his subordinates. The monk meanwhile bent over the prostrate forms that lay in hundreds upon the marble pavement, and so absorbed was he in soothing their last moments, that he almost started as the rough voice of General Melac reached him from the opposite end of the nave.

"Come, come," cried he, in thundering tones. "Enough of useless sentimentality!"

Without a word the monk rose, and, pointing to the grand altar, the general entered the chancel, and followed his conductor to a small door cut in the wall. This the monk opened, and, stepping back, signed to Melac to advance.

"Does this winding-stair lead to the tower?" asked the latter.

"Yes, general, and as there is but one way to reach it, I resume my proper place, and follow you, as in duty bound."

Melac began to ascend the stairs, the monk coming behind

him, with an aspect the very opposite of that he had endeavored to maintain all day. His stooping shoulders were flung back, his head was erect, and in his eyes there sat a threatening devil, which, if Melac could have seen it, would have made his heart grow chill with apprehension. But Melac, too, was no longer the same. Up to this moment he had assumed an appearance of friendliness toward his companion. But now his eye flashed, and his hand clutched his sword, while deep in his heart flowed a current of treachery, which, translated into words ran thus :

"I do not see why he should have any part in this treasure. As soon as he has pointed out the spot, I will catch him in my arms and hurl him down into the body of the church. By Heaven ! the life of one miserable monk never was worth a million of treasure ! "

Did the monk suspect what was passing within the mind of the general ? Perhaps he did ; for well he knew that he was capable of any amount of atrocity.

On they went, sometimes stumbling in the dark, sometimes emerging into the light, until at last they reached the topmost step where Melac halted to breathe.

"Are we almost there ? " asked he.

"Almost there," echoed the monk, while with a swift movement of his hand he drew from under his cassock two long, stout thongs of hide.

"What are you doing there ? " asked Melac.

"I am making ready my lasso," replied he, throwing one of the thongs over the head of the general ; and, before the latter had time to recover from his surprise, it was passed around his body, and his hands were pinioned fast behind.

Melac comprehended that he was betrayed, and making desperate efforts to free himself, he lost his footing, and fell at full length on the granite pavement of the tower. The monk now sprang upon his body, and drawing from his bosom a long handkerchief, he tied it fast over his victim's mouth.

"Your cries might be heard, and some fool might come to the rescue," said he. "You shall die without being allowed to give utterance to your despair."

CASPAR'S VENGEANCE ON GENERAL MELAC.

Melac's eyeballs almost started from their sockets, but the monk looked on without pity. He dragged him to that part of the tower whence the gilded weathercock could be seen toying with the free air of heaven. The sky shone blue and bright; never had it seemed so fair to the wretch that was looking his last upon its azure dome. He felt himself raised in the arms of the monk, firmly fastened with a second thong, and then tossed outside the tower, where he hung, a small, dark speck in the eyes of the officers that were awaiting his return to the hall of council.

And now the monk cast himself down upon his knees. "O God, I thank Thee that Thou hast granted my prayer, and delivered this monster to my hands! 'Tis Thy will that I should be his executioner, and may Thy holy will be done forever and forever!"

He rose and approached Melac, whose face was ghastly pale, and whose eyes were overflowing with tears. "Now," said he, "know why I have delivered you unto a cruel and agonizing death. For months I have tracked your path, with power to have stricken you every hour of the day. But sudden death was too merciful for such a brute as you! The Hyena of Esslingen shall have the horror and apprehension of a slow, torturing, and solitary death. Without sympathy and without witnesses shall he die, and in his last moments, when his flesh quivers with agony, and the devouring flames shall consume his odious body, let him think on Marie Wengelin, and on me, her lover and betrothed husband—Caspar!"

Without another word, he drew from Melac's finger his signet-ring, and began to descend the winding-stair. The eye of his victim followed his tall, manly figure until it disappeared forever from his sight; and then he listened to his retreating footsteps until they grew faint and more faint, and all hope was lost! An hour of mortal agony went by; the sun sank slowly to rest, and a few stars brightened the sapphire vault above him. Suddenly a red glow brightened the heavens, and gilded the dark waters of the Rhine—that Rhine which he had so incarnadined with blood! Avenging God! It was the fire himself had kindled! It leaped up from every