

CHAPTER V.

THE BRAVE FATHERS AND THE COWARDLY SONS.

THE clear bell of the village church was sounding for mass, calling the pious inhabitants of Brünen to worship in the temple of God. All the hut-doors were opening, and men and women in Sunday attire wending their way in solemn stillness to church. They were followed by their children—the maidens with downcast, modest eyes, the boys with bright and joyous faces, proud of the thought that they were old enough to go to church.

From the distant farm came the servants, two and two, up the broad chestnut alley, greeting here and there the church-goers, and walking on with them, chatting softly. They all remained standing a short time under the great linden, waiting until the bell ceased, until the church-door was opened and the minister appeared with the sacristan and the four choir-boys. Not until then were they allowed to enter the church.

A bright-looking crowd was assembled under the linden; it seemed as if all the inhabitants of the village were there. All felt the necessity of visiting God's house to-day to thank Him for the safe return of their sons, brothers, and lovers. The twelve boys who had returned were under the linden in their handsomest Sunday attire. But why did they stand alone? Why was such a wide space left between them and the other villagers? Why did the men avoid looking at them? Why did the maidens step timidly back and remain silent when they approached and tried to speak with them? Why were they all whispering together, pointing at the boys and turning their backs upon them when they drew near?

"Leave them alone," whispered one of the boys to the others; "they will be more friendly this afternoon when the music is playing and the wine and cake is handed."

"There is my father, and I must go and meet him," said Charles Henry, as he hastened toward the old man who was approaching the square.

All drew back from Charles Henry, and as he stood opposite his father, like actors upon the stage they found themselves alone amongst the spectators, who were gazing at them with breathless expectation.

"Good-morning, father," said Charles Henry, with forced gayety, as he offered his hand to his father. "You slept so late to-day, and went to bed so early yesterday, that I have not been able to speak to you since our first greeting. So I bid you good-morrow now."

The old man looked quietly at him, but he did not take the proffered hand, and tried to pass him.

"Father," continued Charles Henry, "you must be tired; our hut lies at the other end of the village, and that is a long walk for your old legs. Rest yourself on me, father, and allow your son to lead you to church." He stretched forth his hand to take the old man's arm, but Buschman pushed it back, and passed him, without looking, without even speaking to him.

Charles Henry sprang after him. "Father," he cried, "do you not hear me? Can you—"

The old man did not really appear to hear him, for he walked toward the village justice with a quiet, unmoved face, as the latter advanced to meet him.

"Friend," said Buschman, in a loud, firm voice, "I am fatigued with my walk; will you lend me your arm?"

He leaned heavily upon the offered arm, and walked quickly onward. All heard these words, but only the justice saw the tears which rolled down his pale, sunken cheeks.

"You were very harsh, father," murmured the justice, as they walked on.

"Were you more forgiving?" said the old man, with a trembling voice. "Was not your son amongst the twelve, and did you speak to him, or look at him?"

"He did not pass the night in my house; I drove him away!" said the justice gloomily.

"Oh, oh!" sighed the old man; "how bitter is our grief! We love our children most when they give us most sorrow; but it must be so, friend, we cannot act otherwise. Let us enter the church, and pray God to give us strength to do what is right."

Supported by the justice, he entered the churchyard, while from the other side the minister, followed by the sacristan and the choir-boys, was just appearing.

"See," murmured the justice, "our good old minister has not come to-day to preach to us; but has sent his assistant. There is certainly some disagreeable order of the archbishop to read to us, and our pastor is not willing to read it; he is a good Prussian, and loves the great king."

The young minister advanced smilingly to meet the two old men.

"Well," said he, with sanctimonious friendliness, as he offered both of them a hand, "allow me to congratulate you."

"For what?" asked both of them, astonished.

"For the happiness of yesterday. Can there be a greater joy for fathers than to receive their sons safe and sound from the tumult of battle? Your sons have returned home, faithfully fulfilling their

duty to their new master, his Catholic majesty of France. They abandoned the flag of the heretic king, laid aside his uniform, and are again simple peasants, ready to assist their fathers in the field. Come, my young friends, that I may give you the blessing of the Church, for so resolutely fulfilling your duty."

He held out his hand to the young men, who were just entering the churchyard. They obeyed his call the more readily, as it was the first welcome they had received—the first kind word they had heard since their return. As they approached the minister, the other men drew back, and entered the church hastily, followed by their wives and children.

"You will see, father," murmured the justice, as they seated themselves together in the pew, "that there is an order to-day. Whenever the assistant is so delighted and friendly, there is something wrong. They are certainly meditating some villanous trick against Frederick, and therefore our good pastor is not here."

The justice had prophesied aright. When the services were over, and the congregation about to leave the church, the assistant again mounted the pulpit, and desired them to remain for a while, and hear what he had to communicate, in the name of the archbishop, Sir Clement Augustus of Bavaria.

"His eminence, the most honorable archbishop, sends his dear and faithful children the holy blessing and salutation of the Church. These are his words: 'We, Clement Augustus, archbishop of Bavaria, entreat and command our children in Christ to be faithful to their new government and their new king, Louis XV. of France, whose apostolic majesty has taken the sword of the Lord into his blessed hand, to fight the enemies of the Church, and to chastise and punish the rebellious heretic prince who has arbitrarily named himself King of Prussia. God's anger is against him, and He will crush and destroy the presumptuous mockers of the Lord. Woe unto them who will not listen to God's voice, who in their mad blindness cling to this heretic! Woe unto you if, in the delusion of your hearts, you still offer him love and faith! You are released from all duty to him as subjects, and you now have the blessing of the Church. I, as your shepherd, made so by the holy Pope of Rome, command you, therefore, to be faithful to your new master—pray that God may bless his arms, and grant him victory over his ungodly enemy. My anger and dire punishment shall reach any one who refuses to obey this command. He who dares to stand by the heretic king, is himself a heretic, and a rebellious subject of the Church. Be on your guard; heavy punishment shall meet those who dare to rejoice over the fame of the so-called great Frederick. Such rejoicing will be regarded as blasphemy against the holy

Mother Church. To conclude, we remain your loving father, and send our dear children in Christ our most gracious love and greeting."

The men listened to the message of the fanatic archbishop with gloomy faces and downcast eyes; but the twelve boys, who at first stood alone in the aisle, not daring to seat themselves with the others, now gazed boldly and triumphantly around, seeming to ask if the villagers did not now acknowledge that they had acted wisely in returning.

With renewed courage, and somewhat proudly, they were the first to leave the church, and placed themselves in two rows at the door. While the congregation was passing by they invited their dear friends and relations to meet them that afternoon under the great linden, where they would hold a little festival to celebrate their safe return.

"We shall come," said the men, with earnest, solemn voices. "We will be there," said the mothers, gazing with tearful eyes at the triumphant faces of their sons. The young maidens whom the boys invited to dance, passed them in silence.

Old Buschman, alone, did not answer his son's invitation, nor did he follow the rest to the village, but turned to the side of the churchyard where his wife was buried. He seated himself upon her grave, and murmured a few words with trembling lips, raising his face toward heaven. A sob escaped him every now and then, and the tears rolled slowly from his eyes. From time to time he wrung his hands, as if bewailing his sorrow to God and beseeching His mercy, then brushed away his tears—angry with himself for being so moved.

He sat there a long, long time, struggling with his grief—alone with God and his shame. Approaching steps aroused him; he looked up. The village justice stood before him, and gazed at him with a melancholy smile.

"I knew I would find you here, Father Buschman, and I came for you. The time is come; we are all assembled on the square awaiting you."

"I come!" said the old man, as he stood up resolutely, giving a last loving farewell glance at his wife's grave.

The old man no longer needed his friend's arm to support him, his steps were firm; his form manly and erect, his venerable countenance glowed with energy.

By the side of the village justice he walked to the square, under the great linden. There every thing looked bright and gay. The boys had taken advantage of the dinner hour to make worthy preparations for their festival. They had brought fresh evergreens from the woods, and had made wreaths and festooned them from tree to

tree around the square. The ground was covered prettily with flowers and leaves, and the bench under the tree was decorated with a wreath of field-flowers.

On one side of the square stood several tables covered with bottles of wine and beer and cake and bread; not far from the tables was a throne adorned with flowers, where sat the fiddler, gazing proudly around him, like a king who knows he is the crowning point of the feast.

It certainly had been a long time since the merry sound of the fiddle had been heard in the village of Brünen. The throne was surrounded by little boys and girls listening with wondering delight at the gay music. But the grown girls stood afar off and did not look even once at the enticing fiddler, but hid themselves timidly behind the mothers, who were standing with stern faces gazing at the groups of men waiting anxiously on the other side of the square.

The stillness and universal silence began at last to make the boys uneasy. They had tried in vain to engage the men in conversation. They received no answer to their questions, and when they turned to the women and the maidens, they also remained dumb. The returned soldiers then went to the other side of the square to talk to the fiddler and the children; but when they began to fondle and play with the little ones, they were called by their fathers and mothers and bade to remain at their side.

The boys gazed questioningly at one another.

"I am curious to know what this means; are we to remain standing here all night?" muttered one of them.

"It appears to me that they are waiting for some one," murmured another.

"They are expecting my father," said Charles Henry; "and see, there he comes from the churchyard. The justice went for him."

When the old man arrived at the square the men advanced to meet him, conducted him gravely to the bench under the great linden, and assisted him to stand upon it. There he towered above them, and his pale, venerable face, his silver hairs were visible to all. Every eye was directed to him, and breathless silence ensued. The old man raised his arm and pointed toward the side where the twelve boys stood.

"Come to me, Charles Henry Buschman," he said, solemnly; and as his son advanced rapidly to him, he continued: "I ask you in the name of God, if what you told me yesterday is true? Have you secretly left the flag of your king, our sovereign—the great King Frederick of Prussia? Is it true that you have forsaken your regiment and the flag to which you swore to be faithful?"

"It is true," said Charles Henry, with assumed daring, "but we

were not only justified in doing so—our duty compelled us. We are no longer Prussian subjects, but subjects of the King of France. You all heard to-day what the minister read to us in church—how the archbishop commanded us to be faithful to our new sovereign. We could no longer wear the Prussian uniform or be Prussian soldiers, therefore we returned to our village."

"You returned as dishonored, faithless soldiers!" cried the old man, looking angrily at his son—"you returned covered with shame—miserable deserters—to the disgrace of your fathers, mothers, your brothers, sisters, sweethearts, and your friends. You have deserted the flag of your rightful king, to whom you swore the oath of allegiance—an oath which God received, and which no man can annul. Men of Brünen! shall we stand this shame that our sons bring upon us? Shall the world point their fingers at us and say: 'These are the fathers of soldiers who deserted their regiment, and were false to their king?'"

"No!" cried they all, as with one voice—"no, we will not stand this—we will have no deserters as sons!"

The old man bowed his head in silence; then turned slowly to the side where the women stood.

"Women and maidens of Brünen! Will you allow your sons and brothers who are covered with shame, to stay amongst you? Will you receive the deserters in your houses and at your tables? Will you open your arms to them and call them sons and brothers?"

"No, no!" cried the women and maidens, simultaneously; "we will not receive them in our houses, or at our tables. We will have no deserters for sons or brothers!"

The old man stood erect, and, as if inspired with a mighty enthusiasm, raised his arm toward heaven, and his countenance beamed with holy light.

"They must return to their flag," he cried, in a commanding voice. "With your blood you must wash the shame from your brows, and from ours. If God preserves your lives, and you redeem your honor as brave soldiers of the King of Prussia, then and then only we will receive you as our sons and welcome you to our arms."

"So shall it be!" cried the men and the women, and the maidens murmured their acquiescence.

The old man stepped from the bench and walked forward slowly to the other side of the square where the twelve young men were standing gazing at him with terrified faces.

"Return!" cried the old man, stretching his arm toward them—"return to the flag of your king; we want no deserters amongst us; away with you!"

"Away with you!" cried the men—"away from our village!"

The children, influenced by their parents, cried out with shrill voices: "Away from our village—away!"

The youths were at first stunned, and gazed with staring eyes at the crowd of angry faces and flashing eyes which menaced them, then seized with terror, they fled.

"Away with you! away with the deserters!" was thundered after them. "Away with you!" cried their mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, and friends.

This fearful cry sounded to them like the peal of the last judgment. With trembling knees, and faces pale as death, they rushed down the principal street of the village. The crowd started after them, and like the howling of a storm, shouted behind them: "Away with you!—away with the deserters!"

On they ran, as if pursued by furies, farther, farther down the street, but the villagers still chased them. Once only Charles Henry dared to look around at the pursuers. It was a fearful sight. At the head of the rest he saw his old father, with his pale face, his white hair flying in the wind; raising his arms threateningly toward him, he cried out in a thundering voice: "Away with you!—away with the deserters!"

Charles Henry rushed onward—a cry of terror escaped his lips, and he fled like a madman.

They had passed the borders of the village—it was quiet behind them—they dared to look back—they were alone. But on the boundary-line the villagers stood—their faces turned toward the fugitives—and like the distant croakings of a raven there sounded in the air: "Away with you!—away with the deserters!"

Breathless, with tottering knees, the boys sank down—with hollow eyes, speechless with terror, sorrow, and humility, they gazed at each other.

They did not dare return to the village. Perhaps to appease the anger of their relations, perhaps because they repented of their cowardice, they returned to their regiment, acknowledged their crime, and prayed for forgiveness.

Thus the brave fathers of the village of Brünen punished their cowardly sons, and drove the dishonored and faithless boys to their duty, perhaps to their death.*

*This account is historical.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TRAITOR'S BETRAYAL.

COUNT RANUZI was alone in his apartments. He sat at his writing-table reading over the two letters he had just written; a triumphant smile was upon his lip as he finished. "It will succeed," murmured he, softly; "we will take Magdeburg without a blow, and thus deprive the King of Prussia of his most valuable fortress. The plan cannot miscarry; and then I have only to convince the empress that I was the soul of this undertaking—that I led the intrigue. Ah, I shall succeed at last—I shall occupy a position worthy of me—and as general of our order I shall rule the world. I shall earn this title at Magdeburg—there I will build my throne—there I will reign! But I must consider it all once more, to see if no error, no mistake, has escaped me. I first formed a connection with the officer Von Kinsky, an Austrian prisoner, because through him I could make connections between the town and the citadel. Kinsky, at my wish, made some of his town friends acquainted with the officers of the citadel. It was then necessary to give these new friends some clew, some aim that would appear innocent to them, and conceal the real plan. I chose Trenck as the protecting shield for my undertaking. To inspire him with confidence in my agents, I obtained a sort of credential letter from Princess Amelia, and interested her in my cause. She provided me with money, and gave me, besides the one to Trenck, a letter of recommendation to a sure, trustworthy friend in Magdeburg. I was now much nearer my design. On the pretence of working for Trenck, I worked for myself, for my position of general of the Jesuits, and for a fortress for my empress. And thus far all my plans have succeeded. Trenck has formed a connection with three Prussian officers of the citadel. These, touched with sympathy for his pitiful condition, have determined to do all in their power to release him, and are, therefore, in constant companionship with those whom Trenck calls his friends. These, in the mean time, are my agents and subordinates; they act for me while acting for Trenck; the Prussian officers do not anticipate that, in helping Trenck to his freedom, they are helping the Empress of Austria to a new fortress. But so it is. There is no error in my plan, it will succeed. I can rely on Trenck; he is a subject of Maria Theresa, and his thirst for revenge is mighty. He will gain a fortress for his empress. The avenger, through whom God has chosen to punish this arrogant, heretical king, will arise from the depths of a subterranean prison. All that

is now left to be done is to acquaint Vienna with the information of this undertaking, so that we may be assured that an Austrian regiment will be in the vicinity of Magdeburg at the proper time, and storm the citadel at a sign from us, and not have that, which we had taken by strategy, torn from us by the King of Prussia's superior force. Now is a favorable time for this. For Frederick, the humiliated, defeated king, is many miles from Magdeburg; he has been compelled to raise the siege of Dresden, and the Austrian troops are lying there like the Russians at Frankfort. Nor are the French far off. All these armies will be prepared to hasten to our aid. All that now remains to be done is to get this news safely to Vienna. But how to accomplish this is a hard question. It were well could I go myself. But I am a prisoner of war, and, until Magdeburg is in our power, this chain will clog me. Another must be sent—a messenger full of courage, determination, and hardihood. I have said this in my letter to Captain von Kinsky; he must seek such a man amongst our sworn friends of the citadel, and give him the sheet of paper I send in my letter. How harmless, how insignificant this sheet of paper seems! and still, were it to fall in the King of Prussia's hands, it would save him a strong fortress and several millions of thalers, for all the money of the Dresden treasury was brought to Magdeburg for safe-keeping. Ah! ah! how much would Frederick give for these two lines of writing, and how richly would he reward him who gave him the key to it! I will send the key by a different messenger, and therefore this second letter. But even if both my messengers were intercepted, all is not lost. I have notified Trenck also to write to Vienna for money and help. He must continue to be the shield behind which we intrench ourselves. Should the undertaking miscarry, we will lay it upon Trenck; should it succeed, it will be through me, and I will not be tardy in claiming my reward. The general of our order is old; should he, however, persist in living, his tenacious nature must—" He did not dare to finish the sentence; but a wild, demoniac smile supplied the words his lips dared not utter. He arose and walked several times up and down his chamber, completely lost in ambitious dreams of the future, for whose realization, as a true Jesuit, he shunned no means, mindful of the motto of their order: "The end sanctifies the means."

He saw a ring upon his hand—that ring, full of significance, before which kings had often bowed, which was to the Jesuits what the crown is to the king—the sacred sign of power and glory—the indisputable sign of invisible but supreme power. He saw himself, this ring upon his hand, subjugating nations, rewarding his friends, punishing his enemies. He suddenly awoke from his dreams, and remembered the present with a weary smile.

"I must not forget, in dreams of the future, the necessity for action. I have many important things to do this day. I must take these letters to Marietta, see her address and post them; then I must seek La Trouffle and receive from her leave of absence, on the plea of visiting a sick friend at Magdeburg. This will be a tedious undertaking, for she will not agree willingly to a separation without great persuasion. I have much influence over her, and a woman in love cannot refuse a request to the object of her tenderness. I will obtain, through Madame du Trouffle, a near and influential relative of the commandant of Berlin, permission to visit Magdeburg, and through Marietta Taliazuchi I will post my two important letters." He laughed aloud as he thought of these two women, so tenderly devoted to him, both so willing to be deceived by him.

"They love me in very different ways," said he, as he finished his toilet preparatory to going out. "Marietta Taliazuchi with the humility of a slave, Louise du Trouffle with the grateful passion of an elderly coquette. It would be a problem for a good arithmetician to solve, which of these two loves would weigh most. Marietta's love is certainly the more pleasant and comfortable, because the more humble. Like a faithful dog she lies at my feet; if I push her from me, she comes back, lies humbly down, and licks the foot that kicked her. Away, then, to her, to my tender Marietta."

Hiding his letters in his breast, he took his hat and hastened in the direction of Marietta's dwelling. She received him in her usual impassioned manner; she told him how she had suffered in their long separation; how the thought that he might be untrue to her, that he loved another had filled her with anguish.

Ranuzi laughed. "Still the same old song, Marietta; always full of doubt and distrust? Does the lioness still thirst after my blood? would she lacerate my faithless heart?"

Kneeling, as she often did, at his feet, she rested her arms on his knees; then dropping her head on her folded hands, she looked up at him.

"Can you swear that you are true to me?" said she, in a strange, sharp tone. "Can you swear that you love no other woman but me?"

"Yes, I can swear it!" said he, laughing.

"Then do so," cried she, earnestly.

"Tell me an oath and I will repeat it after you."

She looked at him firmly for several moments, and strange shadows crossed her emotional countenance.

Ranuzi did not perceive them; he was too inattentive, too confident of success, to entertain doubt or distrust.

"Hear the oath!" said she, after a pause. "I, Count Carlo

Ranuzi, swear that I love no other woman but Marietta Taliazuchi; I swear that, since I have loved her, I have not nor ever shall kiss or breathe words of love to any other woman. May God's anger reach me, if my oath is false!"

The words fell slowly, singly from her lips, and she gazed with unflinching eyes up at him.

Not a muscle in his countenance moved. Laughing gayly, he repeated her words; then bent and kissed her black, shiny hair. "Are you satisfied now, you silly child?"

"I am satisfied, for you have sworn," said she, rising from her knees.

"Will this quiet you now, Marietta?"

"Yes, forever."

"Well, then, now a moment to business. There are two important letters, my beautiful darling. You see how boundless my love for you is—I confide these letters to your care, and entreat you to post them as usual. My heart and my secrets are in your lovely hands."

He kissed the hands, and gave her the letters.

Marietta took and looked at them in a timid, fearful manner.

"Do they contain dangerous secrets?" said she.

"Dangerous in the extreme, my lovely one."

"Were they intercepted and opened, would you be liable to death?" said she, in a low, trembling voice.

He saw in these words only her solicitude and love for him.

"Certainly, I would be lost—I would have to die were these letters opened. But fear not, my beautiful Marietta—they will not be opened; no one would dream of intercepting the harmless letters you direct to your friends at Magdeburg. Apart from that, no one is aware of our close connection. We have carefully guarded the holy secret of our love; when your husband returns from Italy, this bad world will have no evil rumors to tell of us, and you will be enclosed in his arms as his faithful wife. When does he come?"

"I expect him in three weeks."

"Many glorious, quiet evenings will we enjoy together before his return. And now, farewell—I must leave you."

"You must leave me?"

"I must, Marietta."

"And where are you going?" said she, looking at him earnestly.

"Jealous again," said he, laughing. "Calm yourself, Marietta, I go to no woman. Besides this, have you not my oath?"

"Where are you going?" said she, with a sharp questioning look.

"I have an engagement to meet some friends—the meeting takes place in the house of a Catholic priest. Are you satisfied, Marietta?"

or do you still fear that some dangerous rendezvous calls me from you?"

"I fear nothing," said she, smiling; "you have reassured me."

"Then, my beloved, I entreat you to command me to go, for if you do not, though I know I ought, I cannot leave you. But, no—first I will see you direct these letters."

"You shall," said she, taking a pen and directing them.

Ranuzi took the letters and examined them.

"This simple feminine address is the talisman that protects me and my secret. And this I owe to you, my darling, to you alone. But will you finish your work of mercy? Will you post these letters at once?"

"I will do so, Carlo."

"Will you swear it?" said he, laughing; "swear it to me by our love."

"I swear it—swear it by my love."

"And now, farewell, Marietta!—farewell for to-day. To-morrow I hope to see you again."

He took her in his arms and whispered words of love and tenderness in her ear. He did not notice, in his impatience to leave, how cold and quiet she was. He took his hat, and bowing gayly left the room.

She stood where he had left her, her arms hanging listlessly at her side, her head bowed upon her breast. She listened intently to his every movement. Now he was on the last stair, now in the hall—when he had crossed it he would be at the street door. With a wild shriek she fled from the room, and hastened down the steps.

"Carlo! Carlo! wait a moment!"

His hand was on the door-knob; he stood still and looked back. She was by his side—pale, with burning eyes and trembling lips, she threw her arms around him and kissed him passionately.

"Farewell, my Carlo!—farewell, thou lover of my soul, thou light of my eyes!"

She kissed his mouth, his eyes, his hands; she pressed him to her heart, and then she pushed him from her, saying, in cold, rough tones, "Go! go, I say!"

Without again looking at him she hurried up the stairs. Ranuzi, laughing and shaking his head at her foolishness, left the house with a contented and assured heart.