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THE FRERES.

A Novel.

BY

MRS. ALEXANDER,

AUTHOR OF

'THE WOOING O'T,' 'HER DEAREST FOR,' 'WHICH
SHALL IT BE?' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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THE FRERES.



CHAPTER I.

FOR reasons best known to himself, General Costello was eager to leave London, and would not delay his departure for a day. The preparations for his grand-niece's departure were consequently performed at a gallop, and no one had time for fears, hopes, or doubts.

To Grace, the change brought fresh life. She was going into a new world. She would leave disappointment and mortification—ay, and obscurity—behind. For should she not have her mother's powerful and noble relatives to back her up? and did not money go twice as far in Germany as in England?

And to Germany she was determined to remove mother, Mab, and their belongings. The only draw-

back to her anticipations was the necessity of leaving Randal behind.

Randal alone in London represented an unknown quantity of extravagance, folly, and scrapes. Not wild or wicked extravagance, but errors of judgment, carelessness of money, yielding to petty temptations. Ought she not to stay and watch over him? On the other hand, if Randal was ever to gather strength sufficient for self-governance and self-guidance, it was high time he should begin. And Mab deserved consideration, and the dear mother, too; something ought to be sacrificed to give her life a little brightness—a little society of the class to which she had been accustomed. For was not foreign society easier, gayer, more cultivated, and in every way more desirable than English? While, for herself, on what regions of romantic adventure might she not be entering!

So ran the currents of thought and imagination, while her quick eyes and nimble fingers were busy about the many-sided arrangements requisite, not only for her own journey, but for the comfort of those she left behind.

How often she explained to Mrs. Frere the system of 'supply and demand' by which the weekly expenditure must be regulated! with what tender tact she confided the care of mother, Mab, and the housekeeping to Miss Timbs, who accepted the charge with grim acquiescence! But the rock of her security was Jimmy Byrne; and Jimmy promised all things—to examine the housekeeping accounts, to visit Mrs. Frere at least once a

week, to have an eye on Randal, to write to herself full private reports of how everything was going on, and to negotiate terms with Miss Timbs, should Grace find quarters cheap enough and tempting enough to make emigration desirable.

The intervening days were at once too short and too long. She rose early and went to rest late, yet could scarce accomplish all she wished; while the evening on which Uncle Costello proposed their journey seemed gone away ages back.

But the moment of starting came at last, and then, in spite of her bright anticipations, her keen pleasure at the notion of travel and variety, Grace's heart sank within her, and she could have given up all, rather than say good-bye. It was not that she feared for herself; she would hardly have done so had she to travel alone, and her complete sympathy with the count made his companionship one of the best ingredients in the visions of enjoyment which flitted across her brain. But the idea of her mother alone, and fretted, and comfortless, was almost more than she could bear. The thought that supported her was the hope of furthering the family welfare. For her own pleasure, she could not have left her dear helpless charges.

It was a dull, damp evening when they set out, and both Randal and Jimmy Byrne were at the station to see them off.

'Dear Randal! you will be very careful while I am away? You know we must save all we can, or we shall not be able to leave London.'

'Why, Grace! you talk to me as if I was a

baby! Yes, of course I will take care. And now give us a kiss! You would be a first-rate girl, Grace, if you were not so given to preaching.'

'And you will write, Randal?'

'To be sure——'

'Come along, my dear! take your place,' cried the count, who was got up in a most correct travelling suit, and carried a roll of wraps properly bound up, with 'Baedeker' thrust under one of the straps. 'Stand back, Randal.'

'Oh, uncle, I must shake hands with Jimmy!' then, in a half whisper, 'Jimmy, I trust everything to you; you have been my only help all these dreadful months. Write to me often, and—and—mind Randal for me.'

'Faith I will, Miss Grace dear! God bless you! Keep a good heart. Sure, the place will not be the same without you!'

A hearty hand-shake—a hasty adieu from the general: 'You have been a good friend to my niece and her family, and I thank you, sir—thank you sincerely. Accept this snuff-box as a slight remembrance. It once belonged to Radetzky, and ought to be only in the hands of an honest fellow.'

In another moment the doors were banged-to—the guard whistled shrilly, the train moved off, and the familiar faces were lost to sight.

The family who had thus opened their doors to receive their unknown kinswoman were Saxon on the father's side. Frau Alvsleben was the eldest daughter of Count Costello, and had married early a gentleman farmer (*Gutsbesitzer*) of good, though

not noble, family. Losing her husband after a dozen years of matrimony, she had devoted herself to her children and the management of her son's estate.

Dalbersdorf, the family residence, was a 'gut' or farm of seven or eight hundred acres, lying between the Riesen and Erzgebirge, within two hours' march of the Bohemian frontier, and on the edge of a hilly forest district, remarkable for the weird beauty of its curious water-worn rocks and winding, wooded gorges.

The Alvsleben family consisted of a son, about the age of Grace; a daughter Friede, nearly two years older; and an elder daughter, the first-born and most important, who had been left a large fortune (according to the Saxon standard) by her godmother—a scion of the noble house of von Walwitz.

Ulrich Alvsleben was already an officer in the Saxon hussars, and rarely at home; but the young ladies, after the usual course of governesses, and a school at Dresden till the period of confirmation, resided with their mother, sharing the many duties and simple pleasures of Saxon country life.

The advent of this unknown English cousin was looked forward to with great excitement and a little discomfort, as it was supposed that the niece of 'Herr Graf'—of whose greatness and nobility at home they had heard so much—would, like all English grandees, be accustomed to the luxury and splendour of a magnificent home, and consider the life of Dalbersdorf mean and dull. Still it

would be a charming variety to have a girl visitor of her own age to lionise, and 'perhaps make a friend of,' said Friede.

'And to improve our English,' said Gertrud.

'And to teach our management,' said the mother; 'for the English are thriftless, and have no womanly ways.'

It was a fair September afternoon when the travellers reached Zittau, the nearest railway station to Dalbersdorf; and Grace, who was somewhat exhausted by a rapid journey and bewildering succession of new objects, roused herself to look with interest at the neighbourhood of her temporary home. The station was large, new, and neat; and the red-capped stationmaster himself came to assist Count Costello and his companion to alight, with evidently a hearty and respectful welcome, though Grace could not understand a word he said. On the platform, among a crowd of substantially-dressed peasants, small shopkeepers, soldiers, and ragged, jaunty, dark-eyed Bohemian reapers, Grace clung closely to her uncle's arm, feeling awfully strange and desolate, even for a moment asking herself why she ventured into this unknown land—a bit of cowardice of which she was heartily ashamed.

Count Costello pressed her hand encouragingly to his side and passed on, scattering bows and greetings right and left—receiving reverential salutations in return—taking off his hat every other minute. Indeed, Grace thought she witnessed more bowing and hat-lifting, in the short transit through

the station, than she had seen in all her life before.

They found a motley gathering of country waggons, droschkies (open public vehicles), and two or three unwashed, old-fashioned landaus, gathered before the entrance. The station stood on high ground, and beyond lay a wide plain, dotted with small villages, and chequered green and pale yellow where the stubble still remained, sloping gently up to a range of abrupt hills, covered with pine-wood, and broken here and there by ravines or gorges; while far away on the left the blue outlines of bigger mountains rose against the sky, and showed where the giant range approached its humbler brethren—a fair scene, smiling in the rich sunlight, while the shadows of a few slow-sailing clouds crept gently over its varied surface.

‘Oh, uncle, this *is* beautiful! I did not think it would be so beautiful.’

‘Ay, it is fine country; but come along, here’s the carriage. Ah, Fritz! How goes it?’ This to a stout, square man, in plain blue livery, much buttoned, a round cap with silver band, and white cotton gloves, whose broad, sunburnt face was puckered up with a grin of unmistakable pleasure, as he pulled off his cap and bowed in reply to the count’s greeting.

‘Good, Herr Graf!’ and a short conversation ensued, in which the coachman’s part seemed to consist in the repetition of deep-chested, guttural ‘Ja wohls.’

A roomy landau, not in the highest condition of

cleanliness or polish, drawn by a pair of strong, but rough-looking, brown horses, stood near the entrance; and into it the count handed Grace, while the coachman assisted in placing the luggage—an operation inspected by the droschky-drivers with lazy, placid interest. A few more liftings of the hat, and, with a huge crack of the whip, they were off at a tolerable pace.

After driving for some minutes up a street bordered by handsome villas and their gardens, the carriage turned sharp to the right, and descended a steep road, on one side of which were rows of trees, and behind them a large architectural building; while on the other were irregular quaint houses with arbours and balconies, evidently of early date.

‘We are only skirting the town,’ said Count Costello; ‘it is a nice old place, as you will think when you see it. We have a drive of four or five miles before we reach home. You’ll be quite tired out, my dear.’

‘No, no,’ returned Grace. ‘I am so pleased with the look of the country, and the air is so fresh and reviving, that I seem to have shaken off my fatigue.’

The carriage rolled on; at the foot of the hill they crossed a small river by a steep narrow bridge, and continuing their route through a long straggling suburb, struck away to the right by a rougher road, which led always uphill across an open country, where the various fields were only discernible by the difference of colour—no trace of hedge-row or

fence being perceptible, nor scarce a tree—the wide plain lying unsheltered in the blazing sunlight up to where the hills and dark pine-woods rose a sudden mass of shadow.

A few exclamations, explanatory or otherwise, from her grand-uncle, a few replies from Grace, was all that passed between them, till, after nearly an hour's drive, they reached the brow of an unexpected hill. The ground fell away in a gentle declivity, rising again like an arrested billow, at the other side of a wide hollow, not deep enough to be styled a valley; so that, looking from the side by which our travellers approached, the eye was carried on without perceiving the inequality of surface. In this hollow, which led in a slowly ascending slope to the hills now very near them, nestled a diminutive village, clustered round a little church with a bulbous steeple, and a large, square, grey house, with a steep roof, full of the queer, shy-looking, eye-like windows peculiar to this part of Saxony; a clump of lindens at one side, a short avenue of fine walnut-trees in front, and a patch of pine-wood behind, which seemed to be an arm out-stretched from the forest, gave a comfortable look of shelter to the mansion.

'Ha!' cried the count, pointing to the village, while the coachman screwed on the *mécanique* hard, and sent his horses down the hill at a rapid trot, 'there is Dalbersdorf.'

Grace's heart beat a little faster at this near approach to her unknown relatives. She stood up

and gazed with great interest at the scene before her ; a few minutes more, and they had passed the little church—passed *the* shop, where rolls of flannel and coloured stuffs stood right and left of the door—passed the ‘German Empire Post-office,’ with its bright blue letter-box—passed a small deserted platz—passed a long, low restauration, with a gravelled space in front for chairs and tables, and a vine-covered arbour at each corner, where several people were drinking beer. As soon as they had cleared the village, they turned into the avenue of walnut-trees, which had no gate or fence, and the next moment were rattling over the pavement of a small court, enclosed on three sides by the centre and projecting wings of an old solid stone house ; narrow flower-beds ran along the walls, and at the end of the east wing was a large arbour covered with luxuriant greenery.

The large front-door, which was ornamented by a heavy pediment and much incoherent carving of the renaissance order, stood open ; and just within it were three ladies, while a rosy-cheeked maid-servant—a marvellous conglomeration of towy-looking plaits twined round her head, and a grin of delight on her broad face—occupied an advanced post on the steps. Grace observed, too, that the door was framed in a thick green wreath, studded with bright blossoms ; and above it was the word ‘Wilkommen’ in white letters on a red ground. It was written in the Latin character, and near enough to English to suggest pleasant ideas. A great whity-brown rough dog sat with almost

judicial gravity on the lowest step ; but no sooner had Count Costello alighted, than ladies, 'Dienst-mädchen,' and dog flew upon him, and vociferous tongues hailed him.

'Ach Gott! thou art welcome, thou best of fathers !'

'Welcome ! thou beloved grandfather !' cried the ladies, clinging round him in a bunch.

'God be thanked, you have returned to us safe, Herr graf !' exclaimed the servant, kissing his hand ; while the dog added a hoarse jubilant bark to the general chorus.

The taller of the two young ladies was the first to disengage herself and approach Grace, who had descended from the carriage, and stood back a little, contemplating the scene with sympathetic eyes.

'But, mother,' she said, 'we are forgetting the cousin ;' and taking Grace's hand with a smile, first dropping a curtsy, and then kissing her brow kindly.

'I am very pleased to receive you, my dear, and hope to make you happy while you are our guest. You are indeed welcome !' said Frau Alvsleben in very fair French, and embracing her young kinswoman.

'Here is your eldest cousin, Gertrud ; and this is my little Friede. Come in—come in, my good father ; come, my child ! You must want rest and refreshment after your long journey.'

So saying, she took Grace's hand and led her into the house, followed by the count, on whose

arms both his granddaughters hung; the rear brought up by the red-cheeked servant, loaded with bags, parcels, and the minor etceteras of travel.

Crossing a wide flagged hall, decorated by a couple of deers' heads and antlers, hung with wreaths of wild flowers, and at one side of which was a broad oaken stair, Frau Alvsleben conducted her guest into a large dining-room.

The un-English aspect of this apartment struck Grace on entering. True, there were tables, chairs, curtains, and a side-board, which sounds like any dining-room from the Land's-end to 'John o' Groat's house.' But the absence of small ornamental articles, the carpetless parquet, gave a look of bareness and heaviness almost depressing.

The walls were painted in panels, grey shading off to white, with pale blue centres above the dado, which was of oak; the furniture was of oak also, but darker, and shining with the vigorous rubbing of years. In two corners were *étagères*, on which were scattered books, papers, mineralogical specimens, the miscellany which collect in a general living-room. The sofa and easy-chairs were covered in red leather, much dimmed and rubbed by time and use; other chairs were cane-bottomed, with high backs of rough open carving in nearly black wood.

A tall circular stove of white tiles, fixed on a block of stone and surmounted by a vase or urn, was at one side of the room, and three windows at the other; from the centre one of which was suspended a bird-cage with a canary, over a wicker-work stand of plants.

The large windows and lace curtains did not do much to counterbalance the sombre effect of the dark furniture and a huge buffet with shelves, drawers and cupboards which faced the door, and was decorated with numerous green and white silver-topped beer-beakers, and a wire basket of flowers.

A tall elderly woman, with a strong weather-beaten face, stood just within the threshold. She wore a dark stuff dress, a white bib-apron, and a *haube*, or species of muslin mob-cap, with a lace-edged border standing up round it.

She greeted the new-comers with loud exclamations, and kissed the count's hand. He spoke kindly with her before placing himself at table, which was spread with various small dishes of sliced cold meat, cold partridge, green and potato salad, with fruit-*compote*, black bread and *brödchen*, equivalent to *petit pains*, all set out in china of unfamiliar shape.

Frau Alvsleben and her daughters pressed the travellers to eat with hospitable warmth ; while the elderly female above-mentioned, who seemed to be a housekeeper and was called Mamsell, after a short disappearance, returned with two large cups of *bouillon*, which, notwithstanding their hot drive, was very acceptable to the new-comers.

Count Costello and his daughter conversed eagerly and noisily in German, with much gesticulation on his part, both evidently engrossed in the topics under discussion.

Friede meantime did the honours of the table to Grace, and Gertrud went to and fro between the

table and the buffet, fetching spoons or forks, or passing round the Rhein wine, in which, with much clinking of glasses and hand-shaking, Frau Alvsleben drank everyone's health.

'And you have never left England before—no?' asked Friede in English, as she handed the *compote* to her new cousin.

'Never! that is, since I grew up. We lived in France when I was a child.'

'So! then you can talk with the mother; she never learned English,' said Gertrud, 'and we speak very little; but you will help us, "nicht wahr"?'

'Ach! can you not speak a word—not one word German?' asked Friede, opening her eyes.

'Not a word; but I intend to work very diligently—and *you* will help me, will you not?'

'Yes, yes, with my whole heart! I will make you quite German in three—four weeks. We will speak German all morning, and English all the afternoon.'

'I think you speak wonderfully already, considering you have never been in the country.'

'You flatter me. I shall do better now you are come. Eat a little more—pray take some cheese—a little cake! Ach gott! you eat not at all.'

'Grace, my child,' broke in the count, 'how are you getting on? Maybe you'd like to see your room, if you will not take anything more.'

Grace rose, and with her Frau Alvsleben.

'Oh, the mother can stay—stay, dear mother. We will conduct you, my cousin,' said Fraulein Alvsleben.

'Yes, you young things go together!' cried the

count, and then addressed his daughter, who resumed her seat.

'Pray call me Grace; I shall feel a stranger if you do not,' said our heroine, smiling.

'Natürlich, yes; you must not be strange—you who are of our race!' cried Gertrud, drawing her cousin's arm through her own, and walking with her down the room and past the centre window. Grace had sat with her back to it at table, so now perceived, for the first time, that it commanded a view of a large yard, surrounded by irregular buildings of various heights, and occupied in the centre by a huge oblong heap, enclosed by stout posts and rails, and of a rich brown colour, diversified by the straw, green branchlets, and big whitish cabbage-leaves strewn upon it. Looking back, too, at the table, she first noted distinctly the aspect of her newly-found relations.

Frau Alvsleben was a large woman, who looked as if she was superior to the restraints of stays and whalebone. She was in black, with a large black silk flounced apron and bib, to defend her dress against all exigencies. She had fine eyes, but a somewhat coarse mouth, deficient teeth, grey hair, and a skin prematurely wrinkled for her years. Her head was covered by a three-cornered handkerchief of black lace, one point of which was raised at the back by a high comb, while the other two were tied loosely under her chin; large hands, which looked as if they did good service, and an eager, anxious expression, completed the picture impressed on Grace's mind's eye.

The two young ladies were not like each other. The eldest was rather square-shouldered and short-necked, with a huge pile of plaits and curls on her head ; a broad face, with a dull, thick complexion, and light blue watchful eyes. Friede was taller, slighter, and more graceful. She, too, wore her hair in a profusion of coils, curls, and plaits ; but the hair itself was of a pretty, bright brown tinge, closely resembling her English cousin's : she had also fine dark eyes, like her grandfather's, a very fair skin and delicate colour, and a mouth rather like her sister's, only softer and kindlier. Both girls wore dresses of a nondescript, pale grey-blue and brown check, very tight-fitting, and many flounced ; linen collars, the corners turned over, widely open at the throat, and fastened by large bows of blue ribbon.

Grace was gratified by the frank cordiality with which both sisters received her, but she was especially attracted by something congenial in Friede.

The three girls ascended the stair, and crossing a large landing or '*Vorsaal*,' entered a light and cheerful bedroom—the chocolate-brown floor, pale grey walls, and crisp, fresh white muslin curtains, making a pleasant combination. A small bedstead in a corner (which, as is usual in foreign bed-chambers, seemed an accidental intruder, instead of the chief occupant), a sofa, and a writing-table, with a tolerable square of carpet under it ; handsome wardrobes or presses of dark wood, a dressing-table and small looking-glass almost buried in chintz drapery, a large oval glass between

the windows; a high, iron stove, of a greenish-brownish tint; some cane chairs, and a few fearfully hard oil-paintings, composed the furniture and decorations. But on the table were two flower-pots, decorated with cut gold and silver paper one containing a white azalea, the other a foreign heath—little tokens of welcome, according to the gracious German fashion, with which Grace expressed her delight, and then ran to the window, which looked towards the hills and dark pine-woods; for the room was in the eastern wing, and so escaped the farm-yard and the dung-heap.

‘What a charming room! and how good you are to welcome me so kindly!’ cried Grace, taking a hand of each. ‘You cannot think how delightful it is to look out on hills and woods again, after being shut up in London.’

Friede embraced her on the spot, but Gertrud, smiling, said:

‘I only fear it will all seem very poor and—mean to you, after the *pracht*—that is, the splendour you are accustomed to in England.’

‘But I have not been accustomed to splendour,’ cried Grace, laughing; ‘do not imagine it! I shall enjoy myself immensely here.’

‘I hope so,’ said Friede.

‘And now it is the hour of repose; let us leave the dear new cousin to rest. You will be quite refreshed by the time coffee is ready, and then we will help you to unpack.’

She cast a longing look at Grace’s large box and small valise, which had already been brought

upstairs ; then, kissing her hand to her guest, left the room.

Fraulein Alvsleben lingered for a few minutes, to point out the convenient hanging-press, the *Schreib-schrank* (bureau), and *Commode* (chest of drawers), all of which were empty and ready for her use.

At last Grace was alone, and free to think her own thoughts. First she opened the door-like windows wide, and stood there drinking in the delicious air, the (to her) home-like look of hills and woods. Yet even nature, in a foreign landscape, has in it something unfamiliar. Something in the colouring, something indefinable in the pleasant odour of the warm air, kept up the sense of strangeness, but a strangeness she no longer dreaded. The simple kindness of her reception, the absence of all pretension, set her at ease. Here was nothing formidable, no harsh, contemptuous criticism to be dreaded. She longed to describe it all to the dear mother, and make her share the agreeable impression she had received.

After another scrutinising look round her room, and a fruitless search for a bell, she set forth her writing materials, and placing herself on the sofa beside the writing-table, began her letter ; but soon she paused, and leant back to think and select, out of the abundant stores of incident which her travels supplied, what was most worthy of record. The sofa was comfortable, the evening warm, and a monotonous clack, clack, from some machine in the farm-yard, lulled her off to sleep, and she slept profoundly.

The light was beginning to lose its golden tinge, when she was roused by the entrance of Friede, who carried a small tray, on which was a coffee-service of beautifully painted china.

'Ah, you have had a good sleep! I knocked twice on the door, and then I peeped in, and you were deeply asleep. So I left you. And now I bring your coffee; we have already drunk ours, though the dear grandpapa slept long also. Will you, please, take sugar and milk?'

'Oh, thank you!' exclaimed Grace, sitting up, and rubbing her eyes. 'How good you are! Have I slept long? What o'clock is it?'

'It is nearly five o'clock, and we have our *Abend-brod* (supper) at half seven. How do you call it?—half after six? Still, we shall have time to arrange all your *Sachen*—your things first. You will let me help you? Ach, Gott in Himmel! you have slept with both your windows open!' flying to shut them. 'Meine liebe! you will kill yourself.'

'Oh no! I often sleep all night with the window open,' said Grace, smiling, and sipping her coffee, which was hot and fresh, if not very strong, while Friede had already unstrapped the cover of the box, and Gertrud came in to assist, so Grace drew forth her keys unresistingly.

In truth, she would have preferred unpacking alone. Her wardrobe, though in fair condition, was scarcely abundant or *recherché* enough to bear the inspection of strange eyes: but hers was no distrustful, sullen spirit; and she accepted the offered aid without demur, although curiosity had evidently

no small share in her kinswomen's readiness to save her trouble.

Many were the exclamations of surprise, and some of admiration, at the treasures disclosed, at the difference of cut and the beauty of some materials, while the pointed shape of the boots and the absence of aprons excited strong disapprobation.

At length, with a vast amount of chatter and contention of a mild order, Grace's box was emptied, and its contents arranged in drawers and wardrobe. During the performance she instinctively noticed a difference—a very slight difference—in the manner of the sisters. Friede admired or found fault with equal frankness; Gertrud was less outspoken; but there was an expression of keen criticism in her look—a silent feeling of a texture here—a holding up of a trinket to the light—a slightly contemptuous turn of the lip or toss of the head, indicative of undervaluing what was not familiar.

The shades of evening were closing when the empty box, its cover carefully stowed inside, was carried away by a stout-armed, not neat-handed 'Phyllis,' and Grace was informed she had better make her toilette for the *Abend-brod*.

'Must I change my dress?'

'Gott bewahr!' cried Friede, who still stayed (Gertrud had bustled away with her key-basket); 'only arrange your hair, and—what you like. There is no one coming, only Herr Sturm.'

'And who is Herr Sturm?' asked Grace, as she

shook down her long hair previous to replaiting it.

‘Heinrich Sturm is the *Verwalter*—the—oh! what you may call the farmer, manager or inspector: in all *Ritterguts* there is a *Verwalter*. But I must put on another ribbon, and then I will return for you.’

The large dining-room looked dim as the two girls entered arm-in-arm. It was lighted by a single bronze lamp of good design hung over the table, now set for supper, and shone upon the white cloth, old-fashioned silver, and high metal-covered beer-glasses or beakers, glinting on the curves and angles of the quaint highly-polished side-board, the *étagères* gleaming occasionally as they caught the light here and there, in the gloom of their distant corners, while the tall sepulchral white stove loomed like a ghost in the semi-darkness.

The maid who had welcomed them was placing the supper on the table—dishes of sliced cold meat and sausages, hot potatoes served in their skins, cheese, bread and butter, sour cucumber (*i.e.*, cucumber preserved with salt, and not to be despised), a large centre-dish piled with pears, and sundry small ones filled with diverse *compotes*, made a goodly array. Frau Alvsleben had already taken her place at one end of the table, knitting in hand; Gertrud was placing the finger-napkins; and Count Costello was standing in one of the windows talking with a slight young man, whose abundant fair hair was brushed back behind his ears, round which were secured a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles. He wore a morning-coat of a dark grey mixture

with remarkably tight trousers of the same colour. Though above middle height, he was dwarfed by the count's stately stature, and stood with an awkwardly respectful air, one huge red hand grasping a chair-back, the other stroking a rather feeble whity-brown moustache, as if he was coaxing it to 'come on.'

'Come, meine Herren!' said Frau Alvsleben, in German; 'all is ready—come to table. Here is the dear cousin.' Then changing to French: 'Are you rested, my dear, and ready to eat your supper? Let me introduce our good friend Herr Sturm—Herr Sturm, my kinswoman Fraulein von Frere.'

Frau Alvsleben did not imagine that any relative of her father's *could* be less than *von*.

Whereupon Herr Sturm, colouring deeply, made a half turn, 'looked full to his front,' and performed a bow which presented the crown of his head exactly on a level with Grace Frere's eyes. She felt inclined to laugh, and from an irresistible sense of fun made him a deep, solemn curtsey, which appeared to her Saxon relatives all that it ought to be. But the count held out his hand, and she sprang to his side; it was quite delightful to meet him after all these hours.

'And are you as fresh as a rose, my darling! Begad! we have both slept it out, and you look all the better! Come and sit here between Theresia and myself; we'll let Sturm have a sight of you from over the way; it's not every day he sees an English Fraulein.'

So saying, the count placed her between his

daughter and himself, while Gertrud took the foot of the table, and Friede a seat to her left.

‘Mr. Sturm, he speak very good English—yes,’ said Gertrud, as she began to distribute the potatoes.

‘I spik a leetle, var leetle,’ returned Herr Sturm, with profound solemnity; ‘but shall be var glad to exercise myself.’

‘It is quite wonderful,’ exclaimed Grace, with genuine surprise, ‘that you all speak so well, when you can only have learned from books. I suppose you seldom speak with my uncle?’

‘Not often, indeed,’ said Friede, laughing; ‘the dear grandfather does not like my English.’

‘Faith! I cannot stand hearing my own tongue mangled,’ he returned.

‘Now you have come,’ resumed Friede, addressing Grace, ‘we shall do well.’

‘But I am most eager to learn German, and I hope you will help me.’

‘Ya, gewiss—certainly,’ cried Frieda; ‘we will begin to-morrow. Herr Sturm has a quantity of books—lesson-books to learn English with, and—and we can turn them round, you know. Is it not so, Herr Sturm? you will give us your English lesson-books for the Fraulein?’

Herr Sturm, whose mouth was full of sausage and potato, nearly choked himself in his haste to assure the young ladies that all he possessed was at their service, an effort from which he did not recover till after copious draughts of beer.

The count, though Germanised in most things,

preferred grape-juice to beer; and a bottle of Hungarian wine was usually placed beside him. He was very liberal of the beverage, and insisted on everyone taking a glass, whereupon there was much clinking of glasses. Then the young *Verwalter* rose up and made a speech in an odd singing accent, and with a guttural fluency which surprised Grace, as she thought him too shy for such an undertaking. She longed to understand what he said, for there was a good deal of it, and the count nodded approbation at intervals. At the end, Frau Alvsleben, the speaker, and the daughters of the house cried 'Hoch!' with much energy, and everyone jumped up and ran round to clink their glasses against the count's, the young ladies and their mother kissing him at the same time, and uttering exclamations of evident endearment.

After this excitement, the evening meal progressed serenely; all were most kindly attentive to their young guest, who, after refusing *wurst*, uncooked ham, and herring salad, supped well on excellent cold roast-pork, sour gherkin, and hot mealy potatoes.

'I see you have already begun to sow the *Winter Saat*,' said the old general, after looking round as if in search of something, which something was supplied by Friede, who handed him his cigar-case and matches.

'Yes,' returned his daughter, 'the harvest has been fine and early. Herr Sturm has had his hands full.'

'Good!' said the old man, taking the cigar from his lips.

‘We [have narrowly escaped a misfortune, however,’ remarked Sturm. ‘The young brown horse, which you considered so valuable, got into the clover field one day, when all were busy reaping, and we thought he would have burst. We had the *Thier Arzt* (veterinary surgeon) from Zittau, and he did nothing; but an old shepherd from Hain cured him.’

‘I don’t believe in old shepherds,’ said the count, puffing argumentatively. ‘A veterinary surgeon must know more.’

‘I only know——,’ began Herr Sturm, when Frau Alvsleben interrupted :

‘It matters not; but I have still better news. Vaterchen. My nephew, Falkenberg, has exchanged into the Zittauer regiment, and by his help we have got the “Lieferungs Contract” (supply), for oats and potatoes to the garrison—it will be some three or four hundred thalers in our pocket. Wolff is a love-worthy being after all—he is quite steady now. He has paid most of his debts. I have asked him to come here to hunt.’

‘I wonder where he found any money to pay with,’ growled the count. ‘He has been a wild fellow, but pleasant enough—too pleasant!’

‘Hans Schuman, by Schwarze Mulle, has taken two-thirds of the corn this season, and has fetched it himself, which, if I be allowed to say so, is the best bargain we have made for years.’

‘Indeed, my young friend has been tireless in his energies,’ chimed in Frau Alvsleben.

After listening intently to this conversation,

hoping she might here and there catch the meaning of some word from its likeness to French or English, but in vain, Grace turned to Gertrud, and asked :

‘Do you ride much? You must have a charming country for riding here.’

‘Yes, sometimes Friede rides with the grandfather, but I not. It is rather too bold. I like best to stay at home; I can walk well, and go far enough in the garden and fields.’

‘But *you* are fond of riding, I hope,’ continued Grace to Friede.

‘Yes, yes, I like it immensely, and I am very brave; but the grandfather, he does not ride so often now, and Ullrich has taken away my pretty horse for himself, he liked it so much when he came last; so I have only a very young one, and it goes not nicely. But Wolff—my cousin Wolff—has promised to—to—what do you say?—make it go right.’

‘Break it for you. That will be delightful! Then, perhaps, we can ride together. I don’t much care what sort of a mount I have, so long as it can go. I do long for a gallop!’

‘And you shall have it! Potztausend, you shall!’ cried Count Costello, who caught the last words. ‘We must see about horses, mein lieber Sturm! My niece here can ride, I’ll go bail.’

‘I doubt not, Herr Graf, but it is a difficult time; the——’

‘Oh, we’ll manage it,’ interrupted the count; ‘and I have a saddle for you, my darling—an English saddle, with three pommels, faith! I

picked it up at poor Von Dahlheim's sale, the last time I was at Vienna ; and you wouldn't believe it, but my little Friede prefers the old two crutch concern she learned to ride on.'

'Ach Gott !' cried Friede, 'three are so uncomfortable.'

'While Grace was wondering why Friede, the taller of the two sisters, was always called 'little,' Frau Alvsleben rose, and making her young cousin a curtsey, murmured something like 'Te' and 'Kite ;' whereupon the count, also rising, took her hand in both of his, and said slowly, 'Gesegnete Mahlzeit !—blessed meal—that is our grace after meat.'

'Is the light in the *Garten Saal*?' asked Frau Alvsleben.

Gertrud answered in the affirmative, and they all followed the lady of the house into a smaller room on the right of the *salle à manger*. It opened on the garden, and had the same aspect as the one above which had been assigned to Grace.

The walls of this apartment were painted to represent a trellis covered with vine-leaves. The furniture was extremely simple, and painted white—tables and side cabinets, or rather small presses, and rush-bottomed chairs, all were white. The curtains were of lace and old-fashioned chintz ; and through the centre window Grace could see the moonlight sleeping on a terrace walk, raised a couple of steps above the garden, and furnished with sundry rustic seats. It led to the arbour at the end of the east wing, which she had noticed on her

arrival that afternoon. Moreover, she perceived a piano and well-filled music-stand at one side of the room ; of course, her cousins were musicians—art and music are the birthright of Germans.

Frau Alvsleben had placed herself on a large sofa, behind an oval table draped with a dull grey-brown cloth of some canvas-like material, the border of which was curiously worked, and over the centre a large napkin—rather what we should call a tray cloth—of choicest damask, like brocaded white satin, was spread diamond-wise, a finely-shaped bronze vase standing in the middle.

While Grace was taking in these details, Herr Sturm was favouring her with queries and observations in his best English, having followed her to the window.

‘You have had a var long journey, miss. I wonder you can stand upright!’

‘Oh! we had a nice rest at Dresden. We slept there last night, but we were too late to see the gallery. The train from Cologne does not come in till twelve, and by the time we had had breakfast and dressed, it was nearly two.’

‘Ach so!’ returned Herr Sturm, with an air of deep interest. He had scarcely understood a word she said, and took refuge in that invaluable exclamation which means everything and anything in the mouth of a German.

‘You will find it not—not var animated—lively—at Dalbersdorf. No ball, or theatre, or concert,’ continued Herr Sturm ; ‘nothing but meadows, and rocks, and trees!’

‘That is what I like best. I have been shut up in London for four months, and it is quite charming to get into the country again.’

‘Ya, gewiss—that is, certainly.’

‘Bravo! bravo, Sturm! you are getting on with the language,’ cried the count; but Herr Sturm, with an elaborate bow, told Grace that he had ‘many businesses to do before he slept;’ and with another obeisance to Frau Alvsleben, he left the room.

‘You play the piano?’ asked Grace of her eldest cousin.

‘Yes; but Friede is the musician. And you?’

‘Oh, I can play but little, although I like to hear it.’

After a little intermittent conversation, and the exhibition of some photographs, Count Costello bid them good-night.

‘I am more tired than I thought,’ he said. ‘But to-morrow I’ll be all right, and open my treasures to show you what fine things I have brought you from London.’

‘Ach! mein liebe, liebe Grace!’ cried Friede, as soon as he was out of hearing. ‘I burn to know what the dear grandfather has brought us *You* know, for he wrote that you and your good mamma helped him to choose. Will you not say?’

‘I think you had better wait and have the pleasure of surprise,’ returned Grace in French, as Frau Alvsleben had asked in that language what Friede said. Whereupon she remarked to her eldest daughter that the *Gross-vater* must have

bought waggon-loads, as he had brought very little money back with him. And then she said it was late—past nine o'clock; so Grace rose and bid them good-night.

Friede escorted her to her room—ran to find her matches and a night-light, which Grace declined to use; finally, kissing her and bidding her sleep well, departed.

After a short examination of a mysterious arrangement by which the upper sheet was buttoned over the edge of a quilted silk counterpane—a few minutes' listening to the profound and solemn silence—a slight shudder at the notion of her remoteness from all she had ever known—a loving prayer to God for the dear mother and Mab—a last longing thought of them, and the unconsciousness of deep sleep crept over her.



CHAPTER II.



WEEK had made itself wings and fled away with rapidity incredible. No traction-engine can get up so much steam as Time does every now and then, dragging his helpless living train along at lightning speed, hurrying them over precipices or into paradises, up to heavens of joy and security, or down into hells of doubt, difficulty and lost opportunity.

He wore a smiling and boyish aspect at Dalbersdorf, however ; occupation and amusement were equally innocent, peaceful, and yet, it seemed to Grace, satisfying.

The life was as different as possible to all she had expected. The idea suggested by Count Costello's description of his daughter's home as 'an old family place,' and the incidental mention of horses, carriages, and shooting, was of a fine country-seat, of gay parties staying in the house, a retinue of servants, of riding and dancing—all

gayer and more amusing than in England, if not so costly and fine, as the old man had told her that everything was simpler and more homely in Saxony; whereas the reality was in many ways like the routine of a mere farm-house.

A cook *Mädchen*, and a *Haus-mädchen* did the whole work, with some slight assistance from the *Wirthschafterin* (housekeeper or female steward), and a good deal from the young ladies. The man who had the chief care of the horses and draught oxen, and who drove the diurnal milk-cart to and fro the town, would occasionally scrub his face and hands, don a many-buttoned blue livery, and drive the ladies in the big landau to shop in Zittau, or to visit some neighbours of their own class.

The household and its requirements were secondary considerations compared to the operation of working the farm, on which depended the family fortunes. After the exigencies of the 'business' had been provided for, then what crumbs of thought, what morsels of produce, what gleanings of profit could be best spared, were cast into the domestic treasury.

Yet among the homely details of the simple existence led by her Saxon relatives, Grace perceived unmistakable marks of gentle birth—of real good breeding. The courtesy of each to each—the genuine respect of high and low to the '*gnadige Frau*' (gracious lady) and her daughters—a respect which in no way diminished the fearless frankness with which they spoke to the *Herrschaft*

gentry—the absence of all pretension and its consequent unrest. And then the family relics : boots and spurs, swords and steel caps, the rigid portraits of departed Herren and Frauen—broad-browed, thoughtful-looking men, and women of coarse and forbidding aspect, who owed little to the skill of the limner ; besides old brocade garments and curious thick yellow-white lace, all indicated the social status of the family.

All this charmed Grace, who found it difficult to understand the exact position of a family whose actual occupations and surroundings were at variance with the traditions of good blood and squirarchal standing, and so widely different from her own experience of country life. A day at Dalbersdorf resembled in nothing a day at Dungar ; nevertheless it was full of interest. At six, Friede—her hair gathered loosely into a muslin cap, and clad in the simplest of morning-gowns—brought her coffee, an indulgence Grace soon dispensed with. Then, when dressed, she usually found her friend Friede dusting the dining-room or *Garten-saal*, while Gertrud was busy with Mamsell (the invariable title of the housekeeper) in the storeroom, giving out the daily portions of the *Gesinde* (work-people) for household use. Friede would subsequently feed the fowls and look to the flowers, in which Grace was delighted to assist ; as also to prepare the coffee and lay the cloth for the second breakfast between eight and nine, the *Haus-mädchen* bringing in the various articles required.

At this meal the count made his first appearance,

also the young *Verwalter*, Herr Sturm ; the letters, too, generally arrived with the returning Fritz and his empty cans. After this meal were housekeeping matters to be attended to, plain work or mending to be done, lace or fine things to be washed and ironed, and sundry small undertakings which may be generally classed in the delightfully indefinite category of 'odd jobs' to be carried through.

It was not often that Friede could snatch an hour's practice or study before the midday meal, or, as Germans term it, 'eating.' But after came two hours' freedom and repose, which Friede always spent in her cousin's room, and devoted to hearing her lessons ; for though Grace entered heartily into the life about her, and shared her kinswomen's tasks so far as she could, she had time enough to study and prepare for Friede's instruction. Then came a ramble through the woods, and even as far as the rocks of the *Pferdeberg*, the hill that lay nearest ; and often it was a scramble to get home in time for the *Abend-brod* at half-past seven.

This over, Herr Sturm would frequently play cards with Herr Graf, or with Frau *Alvsleben* and Gertrud made a party at whist ; while Friede played long-pieces that sounded to her cousin's untrained ear very like scales and exercises.

The freedom and fresh air—the total change—the hope that among people so frugal and unpretending, her mother's small income would not be dwarfed into painful poverty as it was in London, gave Grace new life. All things seemed good and pleasant to her ; she was more like her old self in

her old home than she had been since the blight of change and disappointment had touched her. She was up at cockcrow, busy about whatever task Gertrud or Mamsell would entrust to her inexperienced English hands—always anxious to learn—exercising her small stock of German words—joining merrily in the laughter at her own mistakes, and daring to attempt conversation in a new tongue, even when obliged to ask Friede for every third or fourth word—milking the cows when she could get leave—feeding the calves—following Gertrud into the kitchen—Mamsell into the *Gesinde Stube* (a large room in a side building, half of which was occupied by cows, and where the farm-servants (*Gesinde*) cooked and eat their food); and, above all, following Fritz into the stable.

She threw herself heartily into the life of those around her, and soon became a prime favourite; her frank, fearless trust in herself and everyone else, her bright face and ready intelligence, soon made her a welcome helpmate to Mamsell, while she was a charming play-fellow to Friede, though they often quarrelled over the comparative merits of Irish and German 'ways.'

Then the count greatly enjoyed her reading aloud to him an occasional English newspaper, sent by Mrs. Frere or Jimmy Byrne, and also in discussing with her the subjects therein treated; for Grace took a great interest in politics, albeit in a crude girlish fashion.

Herr Sturm, too, was always profoundly polite and deferential, but had 'crops and cattle' too

severely on the brain to be available for ordinary conversation. With all these, Grace felt perfectly at home and safe. But she was dimly conscious that Gertrud was not so friendly as Friede, and that she was not always in Frau Alvsleben's good graces.

Before the end of her first week at Dalbersdorf, she had delightful welcome letters from home. Oh, the sweet pain of reading the tender longings for her presence—the deep interest of the minute details—the joy to find that Randal had been going on well, that her own scribblings were considered the perfection of letter-writing! There was no mention of Max in her mother's epistle, and this suggested the thought of him for the first time since she had reached Germany; she reflected on this emancipation with delight. If she had indeed got rid of that haunting image, she had escaped from what was a perpetual degradation.

But all this did not make her forget the main object of her visit to Saxony.

'When may we go into Zittau?' she asked Frau Alvsleben one evening, as they all sat together in the *Garten-saal* after supper. 'You know, dear cousin, I want to tell my mother about it; I want her so much to come and live here.'

'Certainly, my child! Herr Sturm, I think we might have the horses to-morrow after dinner. There is not so much to be done now.'

'Yes, certainly,' returned the *Verwalter* from the game of *Scat* he was playing with the count; 'and there are many things the *gnädige Frau* might attend to at the same time.'

Whereupon the *gnädige Frau* and her *employé* plunged into an animated, not to say noisy, conversation, in which Gertrud and Friede occasionally joined almost in a scream at intervals.

‘And, thou best of mothers!’ cried Friede, ‘thou wilt go to Wolff, and find when he will come? we know not when to prepare for him.’

‘Who is Wolff?’ asked Grace, in a low tone.

‘He is my mother’s nephew—that is, my papa’s nephew—my aunt’s son. He is the Baron Falkenberg. He was wounded at St. Privat, and is now in the regiment of Zittau. He is very nice and agreeable. He will bring his horses, and take us out to ride. I long to ride with you, dear Grace!’

‘What is the name?’

‘Wolff von Falkenberg.’

‘What an unchristian Christian name!’ said Grace, laughing.

‘It is a family name,’ returned Friede. And after a little more talk, it was arranged that they should start at two next day. Whereupon Gertrud produced pencil and paper, and, with Herr Sturm’s help, made out a formidable list of commissions to be executed.

The count declared his intention to be of the party, and Friede suggested that she should stay at home, as Gertrud must assist her mother in various matters; and so it was arranged.

The next day, as it often happens when an expedition is decided on, was wet; at least, there were sudden thunder showers in the morning. But

the chance of having the horses was not to be lost ; and the rain abating after dinner, the landau—closed in consequence of the weather—was brought to the door. The *partie carrée* started for Zittau, Frau Alvsleben and her eldest daughter full of business ; the former voluble in her instructions to her father, where he was to take Grace in order to seek for an abode.

‘ You must look at many, *chère enfant*,’ she said ; ‘ but if you see any you like, leave the final bargain to me ; I shall do my best for Mrs. Frere and you. Prices are much higher than before the war, yet I do not see that anyone is better off. These accursed Prussians spoil everything !’ she spoke in French, as she usually did to Grace.

On reaching the market-place the party dispersed ; Count Costello escorting Grace, and promising to meet his daughter and Gertrud at the ‘ Goldene Sonne,’ the principal hotel, in a couple of hours.

The search for a dwelling is always dispiriting. The least imaginative form ideals of a home very unlike the realities presented, as is also too often the difference between the price contemplated and that demanded.

Poor Grace had a notion that she could get what she required for two or three hundred thalers yearly, and, as far as rooms went, she saw several *étages* that would suit very well for that price ; but then ‘ they were empty, swept, and garnished,’ and where was the money to come from to furnish them ?

‘And won’t that please you either?’ asked the count, as they turned away from the fourth house they had examined—a pleasant mansion, in an open place where two or three streets met, and quaintly decorated in bygone style.

‘Yes, dear uncle; nearly all we have seen would do very well, but there is no furniture. What can we do without furniture?’

‘Ay, to be sure! I did not think of mentioning that you can scarce ever find a furnished *étage* in these small towns.’

‘What is to be done, then?’

‘Oh, well, you must buy some.’

‘But, uncle, I fear that is impossible; my mother could never buy furniture out of her little money.’

‘That’s bad, my child; remember it costs but little to furnish here—wonderfully little.’

‘Still, when we have not that little——’

‘I am afraid,’ said the count, musingly, ‘I threw away a heap of money in London. I am afraid I cannot help you just now, but later on, perhaps. And there is Theresia, she has a lot of chairs and tables, and such things, stowed away; she might lend them to you.’

‘No, no, no, uncle!’ cried Grace, with energetic rejection; ‘I do not want to begin our sojourn here with a load of obligations; we must try and find some other way. I will write to my mother, and I will gladly ask my cousin Alvsleben’s advice; she seems so wise and prudent.’

‘Good; you can do no better, my darlin’. Now

we are too soon for our tryst : let us have a ramble round the town.' So saying, he offered his arm to his grand-niece, and they strolled away among some pleasant rows of trees, beneath which were flower-beds and grass, and which was called 'Am Park,' as far as an inoffensive-looking round tower, the last remnant of the fortifications which had been peppered by Prussian bullets in the Seven Years' War, and had some balls still visibly stuck into it.

Then they wandered up and down queer little old-world-looking, sloping streets of pale yellowish stone houses, past a large, barn-like building, with a steep, red roof, full of the eye-like windows before described, which seemed to wink at passers-by an intimation that they had seen a great deal in their day. 'This had been a corn exchange in old times,' said Count Costello. So on, by good-looking shops, and beer-houses innumerable, to a picturesque little Lutheran church, surrounded by linden and accacia trees ; and on still, by other quaint, rugged old churches, to a lofty, grey edifice—the Johannes Kirche—which formed one corner of the market-place. Behind this stood the town library, an irregular building, of mellow, pinky-grey sandstone, with a clock tower, and pointed gables, and old, worn, nail-studded, oaken doors, with beautifully-wrought iron hinges and handles, with projections catching the evening sunlight, and receding angles full of solemn shadow.

'If it were not too late,' said Uncle Costello, 'I would take you in to see the missals ; they have

some rare beauties there—just what you would like.’

‘I hope to be familiar with the librarian, if we live here, and perhaps read some of the books,’ said Grace, gazing delighted at the old pile, and feeling that she must have read something about it somewhere, it seemed so oddly familiar to her imagination.

‘Now, come along to the ‘Conditorei’ (confectioner), said the count ; ‘we have half an hour left.’

A few minutes brought them to a cool, dark confectioner’s shop, which occupied what seemed to have been a vault or cloister, from its groined arches and thick walls. Here the count was warmly welcomed, and quickly served with ice. After a cheerful conversation with the shopwoman, a few words of which Grace, to her great satisfaction, understood, Uncle Costello made the young lady behind the counter a profound bow, resumed his hat, and once more offered his arm to his grand-niece.

When they reached the ‘Goldene Sonne,’ the rusty landau was in waiting ; but there was no sign of Frau Alvsleben and Gertrud.

A gentleman was walking slowly to and fro before the hotel — a gentleman slightly above middle height, fairly well-dressed, and not provincial in aspect. He had very light red hair, thin about the temples, though his moustaches were full and long. His eyes, too, were light, but remarkably clear and intelligent ; his face, though pale and plain, was unusually sweet in expression,

and, albeit without a good feature, singularly attractive. Grace had time to remark all this, for, on perceiving them, the stranger hastened to greet her uncle. A prolonged hand-shaking took place, and a rapid interchange of question and answer. Then the count introduced him to Grace as 'Herr Dr. Sturm, brother of our friend at Dalbersdorf; and you may talk to him in any language you like—gad, he is at home in six or seven!'

Disclaiming this, with a good-humoured smile, Dr. Sturm addressed Grace in very good English, showing by his remarks that he knew of her coming, and relationship to the Dalbersdorf family.

While they spoke together, Frau Alvsleben and her daughter came up laden with small packages, in addition to the capacious basket carried by Gertrud. Very polite and formal salutations were exchanged, and Grace gathered that the doctor inquired for Fraulein Friede, and that Frau Alvsleben asked him to come and spend the following Sunday at Dalbersdorf, in which opinion she was confirmed by his observing, as he handed her into the carriage, 'that he should have the pleasure of seeing her soon.'

Grace smiled an assurance that she should be glad, for she felt strongly attracted by his countenance and manner.

'Is he really a very learned man?' she asked, as they drove away, leaving Dr. Sturm, hat in hand, bowing after them.'

'Learned! yes, certainly. They say he is the most learned man in Zittau; and he may before

long be a professor, and he is not yet nine and twenty,' said Gertrud.

'And what does he profess?' persisted Grace.

'Philology,' replied Frau Alvsleben; hearing which tremendous word Grace asked no more.

'But it is said,' continued Frau Alvsleben, impressively, 'that he is tinged with evil opinions—quite unorthodox views. However, the best have enemies; we will hope it is not true. And now, Gracechen' (the affectionate diminutive), 'what have you seen and done, mein Liebling?'

'Not much, my cousin! I am in despair; none of the places we have seen have any furniture.'

'Why, certainly not! You must buy your furniture. But what were you asked for the *étage* of five or six rooms?'

'Two hundred and fifty to three hundred and fifty thalers,' returned the count.

'Ach Gott bewahr!' almost screamed his daughter. 'I am mad to have let you two children go about by yourselves. Not a *Hausewirth* (house-keeper), in Zittau would dare to impose thus on me! Our good cousin may be made of money for all I know, but that is no reason why she should be cheated. Gracechen, my child, I will come with you myself next week.'

'Many, many thanks,' cried Grace, anxious not to commit herself; 'but I will first write to my mother, and tell her about the rooms being unfurnished. She may not wish to stay long, and then it would not be worth while to buy furniture.'

'If you must have a furnished *étage*, you ought

to go to Dresden. It is quite a stranger's town—you can get everything in the world in Dresden,' remarked Gertrud ; and the conversation flowed on with much warmth on this topic. The count and Frau Alvsleben argued as if their lives depended on settling the matter in question, with raised voices and much gesticulation. At length Gertrud changed the subject by exclaiming :

'We did not see Wolff after all. He had gone to Löbau, but his servant said he had sent a letter to the mamma this morning. The whole regiment is back again, since Tuesday ; the manœuvres have not lasted more than ten days.'

'I suppose he will say when we may expect him in the letter,' said Frau Alvsleben ; and then she began to discuss sundry domestic arrangements with her daughter, who was a great authority.

The thunder-showers of the morning had cleared the air, it was a glorious golden evening when they reached home. Friede ran out to meet them with a letter in her hand.

'See, dear mother ! it is from Wolff von Falkenberg,' she exclaimed, and I have been tempted to open it.'

'Naughty child !' said Frau Alvsleben, with an indulgent smile, as she alighted and read the letter in the hall. 'Yes, he comes on the day after tomorrow to *Abend-brod*.'

'Gott in Himmel !' cried Gertrud, 'his room is yet shut up ; we shall have a world to do tomorrow !'

'He will bring all the news of the manœuvres

with him,' said the count. 'My children, I am a trifle weary; I will take a cup of coffee, and repose myself;' and he slowly ascended the stairs to his own apartments.

'Friede,' said Grace, 'can you come with me a little way into the wood? It is too delightful to stay indoors.'

'Yes, certainly, I have done all my work, and everyone's work, while you were away. I will fetch my hat.'

In a few minutes the two girls had crossed the space of open stubble field which lay basking in the sunshine, and reached the fragrant shelter of the pine-wood.

They walked almost silently along the soft brown pathway, all thickly strewn with pine needles, till they reached a small opening where a spring bubbled up under a big black wet stone; the water, trickling away into a small, marshy hollow, cushioned with delicate mosses of vivid green, and studded with dark boulders covered with many-coloured lichens, spread freshness and verdure along its edge.

The twisted roots of a large fir-tree, which lent itself with pertinacious flexibility to the exigencies of rocky obstruction, made here a pleasant resting-place.

Grace took off her hat, and sitting down close to the spring, leant over, and dipping her fingers into the water, sprinkled it upon the broad leaves of some moisture-loving plants which grew by the margin.

‘What a delicious spot! How much obliged I am to you all for asking me here! and how I wish my dear mother and Mab could come before the fine days are quite gone!’ cried Grace, looking round her with a deep sense of enjoyment.

‘And how charming it is to *have* you, my best of cousins,’ returned Friede, warmly; ‘you are so—so different from what I expected.’

‘What did you expect?’ asked Grace, laughing.

‘Oh! a tall, proud English Fraulein! who would say “horrid” to everything. We had an English teacher at our Dresden school, and she was always saying ‘*horrid*.’ Now you seem to be the same flesh and blood as ourselves.’

‘And so I am! at least, on my uncle’s side.’

‘Ah! you are so love-worthy because you are of the dear *Gross-vater’s* race;’ and Friede passed her arm lovingly round her companion’s shoulder. There was a pause.

‘When will our cousin, your mother, come?’ asked Friede.

‘I cannot tell. I must write and describe the *étages* we saw to-day.’

‘Oh! make her come soon, my sweetest Grace! I cannot live without you now! Gertrud is not sympathetic to me; she is slightly hard, and too “practical,” what you call “matter-of-fact,” and—and so terribly good.’

‘Do you know, Friede,’ exclaimed Grace, avoiding this tempting subject, ‘I am here just a fortnight and we have not once ridden on horseback.’

‘Yes, it is very bad; but my cousin Falkenberg

will bring his horses, and then we shall ride ; and Ulrich, he comes next week and brings two more. It is the time they all get leave.'

Another pause, listening to the delicious trickling of the spring—inhaling the fragrance of the pines—absorbing the spirit of the place.

'What sort of a person is this Falkenberg cousin of yours ?' asked Grace, at length.

'Oh ! he is considered very fascinating ; he is a distinguished officer, too. He took a French eagle at St. Privat with his own hand, and he is very accomplished.'

'Poor France !' said Grace. 'I am always so grieved for France ; but, Friede, we met such an interesting man in Zittau to-day. I only spoke half-a-dozen sentences to him, yet I took a great fancy to him—the inspector's brother, Dr. Sturm.'

'Dr. Sturm !' cried Friede, her colour rising ; 'did you meet him ? What did he say ? Did he ask for me ?'

'I think he did, if I understood right ; and I think your mother asked him to come on Sunday.'

'Did she ? Well, he and Wolff never agree ; still I am glad. We cannot sacrifice everyone to Wolff.'

'What a Moloch Wolff must be !' said Grace, smiling ; 'but tell me about Dr. Sturm—he ought to be very good, with that face.'

'He is—he is !' cried Frieda, warmly ; 'he has been a father to his young brother and sisters, and so *liebenswertig* (loveable). My mother knew his

when they were young. The father was a painter—an artist—just gaining a name when he died. Otto was only eighteen then; he was obliged to serve his year as a *frei Williger*.'

'What! has he been a soldier? A common soldier?'

'Common?' returned Friede, uncertainly. '*Gemein*? we never call our soldiers so! but he was at Königgrätz, and badly wounded there; since then he has made wonderful examinations, and he reads poetry like an angel. You must hear him when you can understand a little more.'

'Then do you like him better than Herr von Falkenberg?'


'Yes—no. You see he is not so brilliant and fashionable as Wolff. He is more homely, and—I do not know what it is—he is not so striking, but I think he is more love-worthy.'

'I shall like him best, I imagine. Now tell me about your brother.'

This was a favourite topic; and once Friede was launched upon it, Grace was free to follow the current of her own thoughts, and to enjoy the sounds, sights, and scents which surrounded her.



CHAPTER III.

 HE whole of the following day was devoted to intense preparation. A 'guest-chamber,' in the same wing as Grace's room, was opened, swept, and garnished. Grace heard Gertrud's rather high-pitched voice exhorting and entreating at peep of day, while the *Schloßmädchen* (chambermaid), was banging the wicker chairs powerfully with a curious wicker instrument, after the German method of extracting dirt. Mamsell was to be met carrying bundles of clean muslin curtains, while Friederike was to take the week's household rubbish into the back-ground, and a light and delicate hand was to be seen with dishes and cakes, and the kitchen. The whole household was glad to escape for a grand-uncle.

The next morning she was made happy by a long letter from her mother, and a short but welcome epistle from dear Jimmy Byrne. How she longed to see their faces again! For a few moments she felt desolate and alone; but then she consoled herself by answering both, and particularly pouring out her fears and doubts respecting Zittau as a residence. This, with an hour's reading aloud to the count of some English papers which had come by the same post, had occupied most of the morning; so Grace prepared for dinner, changing her dress as usual for a pale lilac grenadine, with black ribbons and waistband, some delicate old lace lying softly against her throat and wrists. Having twisted her hair into a loose coil low down on her neck, according to the fashion ridiculed by her cousins as 'English simplicity,' she went downstairs; and on the way encountered Friede, looking very warm, her hair still in a dozen plaits thrust away under a large muslin morning-cap.

'Are you ready for dinner so soon?' she cried.

'It is more than half-past twelve!'

'That is not possible! Oh, my best of Grace-chens! go to the ironing-room and make Gertrud go to dress. She has been ironing every collar and cuff she possesses, because next week she will be too busy!'

'Very well,' said Grace; and turning to the left, went down a passage that led to the portion of the house specially presided over by Mämsell.

Here was the linen, ironing, and store-rooms. These occupied the ground-floor of the western

wing ; a large central hall dividing the house, the principal entrance at one end and the exit into the farm-yard at the other.

Grace found Gertrud in the same guise as her sister, only looking much worse : a small pile of collars and cuffs at either side of the ironing-board—one finished, the other yet to be done.

‘Dinner will soon be ready ; you had better dress,’ said Grace, as she entered.

‘So!’ returned her cousin, crossly. ‘But I must not leave these ; I know not when I can make them—do them again ! And Mamsell is too busy and angry to help me. She has found that wicked Jette, the *Mittel Magd* (second farm-maid), selling her own bread and *die Klein’s* (the little ones), also!—then they grumble that they have not enough to eat. It is too bad ! they have no conscience !’

‘Selling their bread !’ repeated Grace.

‘Yes ; they have each their daily portion, and they sell it for very little money to the *Haüslers** and poor people, so they want twice as much *Gemuse* (vegetables) and *Suppe*.’

‘Could I not help you ?’ asked Grace, pitying the heated, worried look of her cousin. ‘Could you trust me ?’

‘Thousand thanks ! I think if you are careful with the *Stalle* (iron), not to use it too hot, you can manage !’

‘Give me your *Schurzen* then.’

Gertrud untied her white apron and assisted to

* Cottagers.

fasten it on her cousin, bestowing some further warnings as she did so; and had just gathered up the things already completed, when the sound of horses' feet clattering rapidly up the approach caught her ear. She looked eagerly to the window towards which Grace's back was at the moment turned, and the next instant crying in accents of horror and surprise, 'Ach, du lieber Gott! it is Wolff; it is the Hauptmann!' fled at speed away upstairs.

Grace looked after her with some amusement, and naturally tried to catch a glimpse of this important visitor without being herself seen; but only succeeded in obtaining a momentary view of a booted leg dismounting. She therefore applied herself diligently to her work, sincerely ambitious of proving herself worthy the trust reposed in her.

'It is so much more independent to do everything for one's self, only it makes the hands red and swollen looking, I am afraid! I wonder if this Wolff von Falkenberg will be really nice—an ideal soldier! Perhaps he is in love with Friede. She is charming; and how charming it is to have some one in love with you—when it is not Mr. Darnell! How glad I should be to see Mr. Darnell now! Ah, heavens! have I scorched it?'

A moment's agonised doubt cut short the tangled skein of her reflections; but finding she had escaped the danger, she applied herself with redoubled attention to her task, till a quick firm step and clank, as of a sword, came down the passage; the door was noisily opened, and a tall, deep-chested man in uniform burst into the room, exclaiming,

'My sweet cousin!' then stopping short, drew up, and saluted by raising his right hand to the side of his cap.

Grace paused in her work, instinctively removing the iron from the collar under operation, and gazed at him out of her large serious eyes, for a moment gravely; then they lit up with the smile already dimpling round her lips, which quickly parted in a laugh of hearty uncontrollable mirth, showing her brilliantly white teeth. The intruder smiled too, but guardedly, and removing his cap, bowed low as he murmured, 'Pardon me!'

'Monsieur de Falkenberg?' asked Grace, at last, knowing that he spoke French.

'A thousand pardons!' he returned, in a deep but not unpleasant voice. 'I could find no one; and Marie, telling me that Fraulein Gertrud was in the ironing-room, I presumed upon my privilege as one of the family to come here.'

He spoke correctly, but slowly, with a somewhat thick accent.

'My cousins are in their rooms; they are not quite ready for dinner,' returned Grace, waiting to resume her work till he had gone; but he was not going.

'Pray do not let me interrupt you,' he said, advancing a step nearer, and laying his cap on the broad window-ledge.

There was something she could not define of condescending patronage or conscious superiority in his tone that nettled Grace.

'You do not interrupt me,' she said, coolly examining her iron and proceeding with her work.

Falkenberg stood an instant gazing at her with a look of quiet, critical scrutiny, and then said :

‘ I have the pleasure of speaking to Mees Frere ?’

‘ Yes,’ carefully looking at a collar to ascertain the right side. Then flashing a quick glance up at him : ‘ How do you know ?’

‘ Do you not think I have heard volumes of conjectures respecting you from the dear Friede ?’ He drew a rush-bottomed arm-chair near the table, and sat down. ‘ I assure you, your coming was looked to with mingled delight and dread.’

‘ Well,’ returned Grace, pressing her iron carefully on the edge of the collar, and not looking at the speaker, ‘ now I have come, it is all delight.’

‘ That I quite believe. But, mademoiselle, how is it that I see a great English princess, as you were represented to me, condescending to such homely ways ?’ he pointed to the irons and her work.

‘ Oh, princesses may play *Aschenbrudel* (Cinderella), without loss of dignity, if the dignity is real.’

‘ Ganz gewiss ! und sprechen Sie Deutsch, mein Fräulein ?’

‘ Not yet.’

‘ I shall try and teach you.’

‘ Thanks, I have an admirable teacher in Friede already.’

‘ Ah, indeed ! but, mademoiselle, ladies always learn best from a master.’

‘ Do they ?’ questioned Grace.

‘ Are you and Friede devoted friends—absorbed in each other ?’

‘Yes, when we agree.’

‘What, quarrel already!’

‘Too much sweetness sickens.’

Another pause.

‘I hope mademoiselle is pleased so far with her visit to Germany?’

‘Yes, very much pleased; everyone is kind, and I like the life. But, Monsieur de Falkenberg, I am quite sure you will find my uncle in the dining-room; he always goes there about a quarter of an hour before dinner, and Frau Alvsleben will be looking for you.’

‘She does not know I am here.’

‘She must have seen your horse by this time.’

‘Do you wish me to go away, mademoiselle?’ a half smile, as he pulled his long, fair moustache.

‘Who? me—not at all. I am going away myself.’ Collecting the collars and cuffs she had finished, and laying them in a neat little basket, she took off and folded up her apron; then, basket in hand, went to the door, which he, starting up, opened for her, and with a sweet, quick smile and little nod, she passed him, saying: ‘*Au revoir*, Monsieur de Falkenberg.’

He looked after her a moment, and turning back for his cap, murmured: ‘Ach so! the stranger cousin is no milk-and-water English mees,’ and strolled away into the hall, where he met his aunt coming from the kitchen, and accompanied her into the dining-room.

Meantime, Grace ran upstairs to give Gertrud her belongings, passing Wolff von Falkenberg

under a mental review as she went. His looks had impressed her favourably. He was quite as tall as Max, and much broader; his sunburnt face a deep red-brown to where the band of the cap pressed on his brow; wavy, abundant fair hair; light blue-grey, quick, perhaps fierce eyes, set somewhat wide apart, under a broad brow; and a straight nose, with a fine soldierly carriage, entitled him to be called a handsome man, a fact of which he was quite aware. Yet Grace, comparing him in her mind with Dr. Sturm's plain countenance, thought how charm of expression outweighed regularity of features.

'Here are your things, Gertrud. May I come in?'

'Certainly! thousand thanks, dear Grace! I am not nearly ready yet. Will you sew a hook on my waistband, and tell me is my head right?'

'I suppose it is,' said Grace, gazing at the edifice. 'It is the size of two.'

'Well,' returned Gertrud, sharply, 'it is better than going as if to a bath.'

'There is no accounting for taste,' remarked Grace, philosophically, as she threaded a needle.

'Do you know is dinner served yet?' cried Gertrud, who was in a state of excited hurry. 'I sent word to my mother, who must add something to the meal. And where—where is Friede?'

'I do not know; perhaps downstairs.'

'Ah, yes! I doubt not, full dressed to receive the company,' said Gertrud, sharply. 'She is ever quick when Herr Hauptmann comes!'

'Well, it is I who have received him to-day. I left him in the ironing-room.'

'In the ironing-room!' repeated Gertrud, in great astonishment. 'Wie—how—how came he there?'

'He was looking for you.'

'Gott in Himmel! I am glad I escaped. And did you speak to him, my Gracechen?—you were not shy?'

'Shy!' repeated Grace, contemptuously; 'why should I be shy with a young man not much older or wiser than myself?'

'Yes, yes, I know; you are no "*Backfischchen*" (shy school-girl)—you are bold.'

'I hope I am not unmaidenly, if that is what being no *Backfischchen* means,' returned Grace, 'coolly. But I am not shy, certainly.'

'Please, will the *gnädigen Fräulein* come to table?' said one of the servants, outside the door.

The whole party were assembled when Grace and Gertrud entered the dining-room.

Herr von Falkenberg stood talking with the count in one of the windows, and Friede was assisting Marie to place the dishes on the table, while Frau Alvsleben and the *Verwalter* were standing by their respective chairs.

'Ah!' cried the count, perceiving his grand-niece; 'come here, *ma belle*. Here, Monsieur de Falkenberg, is a specimen of an Irish girl. Let me present Monsieur le Baron de Falkenberg to you, *chérie*.'

'I have already presented myself,' returned that gentleman, bowing low, 'and hope mademoiselle will pardon the presumption.'

'Dinner is quite ready,' said Gertrud.

'Ah, my fair cousin, I hoped to have found *you* the first,' said Falkenberg, with a kind of careless gallantry kissing her hand, though he hardly looked at her; 'but I found a stranger in your place!'

Gertrud's rather heavy countenance assumed an expression of serene content as he spoke; and with a loud scraping, as they drew in their chairs over the bare floor, they sat down to table.

The first half of dinner was too serious to permit of more than a dropping fire of question and answer; but the pangs of hunger assuaged, everyone began to talk. The strings of their tongues indeed seemed loosed, so rapidly did they go.

But it was all in German, though Grace caught a word here and there from which she gathered some idea of the subjects.

Hay, oats, and *Winter Saat* (seed), from Herr Sturm; the *unverschamtes betragen* (scandalous conduct) of the *Mittel Magd*, and all the *Magds*, from Frau Alvsleben; some inquiries as to the health of Herr Hauptmann Muller, from the young ladies; and a discussion of the most animated nature between the general and Falkenberg, in which the words 'horse,' 'Hauptmann,' 'three thousand thalers,' occurring frequently, suggested to Grace the purchase of a horse by her grand-uncle.

In this conversation Frau Alvsleben joined, evidently as a dissentient. She very often differed from her father, and not unfrequently over-ruled the old man's wishes; but on the present occasion he seemed to have the all-powerful Falkenberg on his side.

'N'est-ce pas, mademoiselle?' said Falkenberg,

catching Grace's eye as she strove to gather the sense of the talk about her, and addressing her suddenly in French; 'monsieur your uncle ought to buy a horse which I can procure for him—sound, steady, only five years old, and fit to carry a lady. Then Friede would have the benefit of it.'

'I doubt it,' cried Friede, 'for I must ever ride with my grandfather.'

'Ah! M. de Falkenberg,' cried Grace, 'do take us out riding with you. This must be a charming country for riding.'

'Ah! you are an enthusiastic horsewoman,' he returned, looking at her with a cool deliberate stare. 'English ladies generally are. I believe I have a nice little horse here that will suit you—a little wild, but you do not mind that?'

'Yes, I do,' said Grace, laughing. 'I do not want to risk my neck.'

'And I should be indeed grieved to do so,' replied Falkenberg, lowering his voice a little, as he leant forward to touch her glass with his. Then addressing his aunt: 'What do you say, madam? Shall we fix a *partie* for to-morrow? I will take care of Friede and mademoiselle.'

'Oh! my dear uncle must come, too. Will you not, uncle?'

'With all the pleasure in life, dear; only, I have nothing to ride.'

'My horse is at your service, Herr General,' said the inspector.

'But Friede—what can Friede ride?' said the mother.

Whereupon a noisy argument ensued, in which everyone took part, and Grace could not follow; which ended, as Friede explained, by von Falkenberg proposing to send into Zittau for his friend Hauptman Muller's horse, to be tried by the general on the following day with a view to purchase, a suggestion opposed by Frau Alvsleben, but carried by a large majority of votes.

Whereupon Falkenberg, draining a last beaker of beer, rose and went to a side-table to write a note, which his servant was to take to the owner of the horse when he returned to Zittau.

'That is quite delightful—a thousand thanks, M. de Falkenberg! I have always longed for a ride with the count; now we shall be a nice little *partie carré*.'

'Charmed to fulfil your wishes, mademoiselle!'

'But you forget,' said Gertrud, in a loud aside voice to Friede—'you forget that Herr Dr. Sturm comes to-morrow!'

Friede's face fell a little, and Falkenberg said sharply:

'Sturm! is *he* coming here?'

'Yes,' returned Frau Alvsleben. 'The father has not seen him since he came home, and he is a love-worthy creature.'

Falkenberg folded his note in silence, and Friede said:

'Well, you and the mother will be here to keep him company; and then he will like some talk with his brother.'

'Now, ladies, what shall we do?' said Falken-

berg, rising, note in hand. 'Has Mees Frere ascended the Oybin yet?'

'No,' said everyone.

'And has been your guest for a fortnight! Ah, mademoiselle, you wanted my guidance. Let us go this afternoon; there is shade nearly all the way. It will be,—let me see,—an hour to the foot of the rock, half an hour to ascend, half an hour to drink coffee, another half hour to examine the ruins, and an hour and a quarter to return—three hours and three quarters, and it is now two. Let us start at three, and we shall be back for supper. What do you say?'

'Yes,' and 'Yes,' from Grace and the sister.

'And the Herr General?'

'Yes, too.'

'Ach Gott, Vaterchen! it is too much for you.'

'If you would not be too tired,' cried Grace, eagerly.

'We would certainly find some carriage to return in at the restauration, if the Herr General needs it.'

'Not I!' exclaimed the old gentleman, stoutly; 'I shall walk as well as the best of you.'

The object of the proposed excursion was a huge mass of rock at the entrance of an oval valley, like the basin of an evaporated lake, about four miles distant, and surrounded by hills of more or less altitude; amid which wound wooded gorges, full of picturesque and strange rocks, formed by Nature in her most fantastic mood, worn into hollows and moulded into peaks and angles and ridges, eaten

away here and rounded off there by the action of prehistoric tides.

The Oybin* itself is of bee-hive shape, covered with pine-trees, and a rich growth of ferns, mosses, brambles, heather, and cranberries, save at one side, where a sheer precipice, of some three hundred feet, beetles over the village; the smooth grey sandstone, water-worn apparently, into the shape of a cyclopean ship's side. A higher portion of the rock or hill rears itself above,—its broken surface sparsely dotted with pine-trees. A little beyond this mighty mass of stone, the ground on which the village stands rises steeply to a pine-covered isthmus, which connects the promontory of the Oybin with the next hill; on this side stands a little white-washed church, with a wooden belfry, built upon the rock, and following its slope. Here begins the long stair, chiefly hewn out of the stone, which, with sundry turns, leads through a couple of crumbling gateway-towers to the top.

The remains of a monastery crown the summit; through the still lovely lancet windows of the ruined church graceful branches of oak and sycamore have thrust themselves; and through the pillared openings of the roofless cloisters you look down over the billowy tree-tops to a mere or tyke, once the convent fish-pond, hundreds of feet beneath, or away to loftier wooded mountains opposite; and then pass through a low arch into the most picturesque of grave-yards, 'where the rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep,' many steps

* Pronounce 'oy' as in 'boy,' 'bin' as 'been.'

nearer heaven than they lived. Beyond is the inevitable restauration, and on the highest point stands the last remnant of the original Robber Castle—an unpromising origin, yet from such rude beginnings German Church and State seem everywhere to have sprung.

The Oybin presents, in fact, an epitome of the national history : robber stronghold, cloistered cell, Lutheran Church, and modern beer-house.

The walk to this celebrated locality was very pleasant ; every step revealed new beauties, while the interchange of chaff and jest between von Falkenberg, his cousins, and the kindly, genial count, made the way short. Grace listened amused, though not able to join in the fun. She added her quota, however, by her attempts to speak German, in which von Falkenberg took a great interest and no small amusement. He was, however, careful to distribute his attentions equally.

Grace kept close to her uncle. In this strange land he seemed the one thing belonging to her—the only one who knew her mother, Randal, Mab, and poor dear Jimmy Byrne ! She felt—as all must do—that isolation, that sense of groping in the dark, when those around you speak an unknown tongue ; yet the marvellous adaptability of youth was already familiarising her with the *achs* and *ichs*, the terrible topsy-turvy sentences, the fearful composite words, which fell so glibly from the lips of her companions.

How she longed for a fairy wand to transplant mother and Mab to this fair land and sweet air,

laden with the indescribable aromatic perfume of the pine-woods. Should she be able to find a shelter for them in this pleasant homely place, where wealth was not indispensable to happiness or social standing, and the dear patient mother would enjoy something of that consideration and distinction so precious to her simple heart? and Mab—if anything could mould Mab, it would be the admirable system of German education.

When arrived at the restauration, Gertrud and Friede avowed themselves dead beat, and the count, though not owning himself fatigued, seemed ready enough to sit down and enjoy a huge glass of iced beer, while his granddaughters waited for their coffee. Falkenberg also called loudly for beer. So the party sat down before the little inn, which commands a charming view of the road winding through the wooded ravine beneath; the village of Olbersdorf, at a little distance, trickling down to Zittau, with its green accompaniment of poplars and lindens, like a living stream along the hollow, which, with often a turn, leads gently to the plain, stretching in many-tinted patches far away into the dim blue distance, where the outline of the Prussian *Landkrone* is faintly discernible against the sky. Grace strolled forward, and leaning over the rail which defended the kind of terrace on which they sat, drank in the beauty of the scene alone for a few moments, lost in thought and memory—so lost that she did not heed an approaching foot-fall, though she presently was conscious that eyes were fixed upon her, and that her own were wet.

‘May I venture to break upon your thoughts?’ said Falkenberg, with a slight smile—not an unkindly smile. ‘The count and my cousins are tired; and as you do not appear to require rest, I will, if you permit, guide you round the rock and ruins.’

‘Oh, thank you, I do not want to rest! I am so charmed with this place. It is extraordinary, and beautiful, and different from everything I have seen before!’

‘Allons donc!—permit me!’ he held out his hand to assist her up one or two rugged steps, and then through a fissure in the rock so narrow that the Hauptmann’s shoulders could only pass edgeways; so out upon a giddy path, from which a variety of wooded hills were pointed out and named by her companion, till Grace was fairly puzzled with the strange nomenclature—Töpfer and Scharfenstein, Pferdeberg, Johnsberg, Hausberg, and, towering over all, the Riesengebirge. Then through more dark and rocky passages, and up steep wooden stairs to the topmost portion of the hill, where a sort of oblong trough, cut out of the rock on the edge of a huge precipice, is shown as the ‘Emperor’s Bed.’

Here was the widest view of all, and they paused silently for a few minutes—Grace straining her eyes into the distance, and comparing the scene before her to the outlook from Dungar, with inexpressible tender longing.

‘It is curious,’ she said, at last. ‘I find myself

looking unconsciously for the sea. I feel imprisoned without the sea.'

'I should imagine the sea would *give* a feeling of imprisonment,' replied Falkenberg, looking observantly at his companion, who was quite a new specimen of the genus 'young lady' to him.

'No, it gives a feeling of freedom. On the sea you can go everywhere, and escape from everyone. I do not know which I like best—a free gallop on a good horse, or to dash over the waves in a fast sailing-boat, lying over on her side, and going like the wind! To be sure, a horse is a living thing; you can love it best!'

'But you could not have enjoyed all this in London?' said Falkenberg, smiling at her warmth, which yet moved his own pulses.

'I did not always live in London, thank God!' cried Grace. 'We lived with grandpapa—the count's brother-in-law, you know—away in the west of Ireland.'

'Ah, indeed! why did you leave it?' he asked, with the unhesitating curiosity of a German.

'Grandpapa died, and then it was no more our home. The next heir took it.'

'I understand! Then mademoiselle has had something of a boy's training?'

'I wish I had!' returned Grace, candidly. 'I should be considerably better educated than I am. I ran about with Randal, with my brother, certainly, and so had much more pleasure, I believe, than the generality of girls. People who have never ridden on horseback, or sailed in boats when

the waves run high, have only known half a life; and whatever comes, I have had a whole one so far. Don't you agree with me?'

'I do, certainly; but I imagine this sense of physical enjoyment must be rare among young ladies. Even American girls, who are very different from ours, do not speak like you.'

'No?' returned Grace, dreamily, her eyes fixed and looking far away. 'I certainly have had great advantages'—she spoke with simple sincerity—'but that is all over now.'

'Why? If you come here to stay, as the General says you think of doing, you can get very good horses.'

'No doubt, but then my mother is not rich enough to buy or keep any.'

'Ach so! I am sure mine are quite at your service.'

'Thank you, thank you very much, M. de Falkenberg. You are very good to say so, but I dare say they will give me a mount at Dalbersdorf sometimes, and I must cultivate Friede's love of riding!'

'I think Friede will do much for you. She is an angel, the gentle Friede!'

'I am sure she is,' said Grace, earnestly; 'I like her the best. Gertrud is very nice, but—'

'Not a word against Gertrud,' interrupted Falkenberg, with a laugh that sounded unpleasant and mocking to Grace; 'I am her avowed admirer!'

'Are you?' she returned, with such honest sur-

prise that her companion laughed again, this time more naturally.

‘You see what magic you exercise, when I am growing confidential with you on—how many?—four or five hours’ acquaintance.’

He spoke jestingly, but something in his bold eyes made Grace suddenly, though vaguely, conscious that they were alone. Yet, with instinctive tact, she asked the names of some distant villages, and for some account of the ruins, of whose history he confessed himself ignorant, before she suggested that it was time to return to Count Costello.

The walk back was very pleasant, though less noisy than their going forth. Grace told Friede she must often come to the Oybin with her, as she wanted to examine every part of the ruins, and even try to sketch them.

‘Dr. Sturm will tell you all about everything,’ said Friede, who walked at one side of the count and Grace at the other, while Gertrud brought up the rear under Falkenberg’s care; ‘there is nothing Dr. Sturm cannot explain.’

‘Faith, there is no end to his learning!’ remarked the general; ‘and, what’s better, he has not an ounce of conceit. He is like a child in some ways.’

“Wise as a serpent, as harmless as a dove,” sneered Falkenberg.

‘Why are serpents always considered wise?’ asked Grace. ‘Is it because they are crawly and venomous?’

‘Mademoiselle is philosophical too?’

'The dear Gracechen is too clever for you, *mon cher* cousin,' cried Friede.

'Would that I might sit at her feet and gather honied wisdom from her lips!' said Falkenberg.

The count made some retort in German, which set them all laughing; and a few minutes' more quick walking brought them to the house, where they found Frau Alvsleben knitting in the dining-room, waiting for them with characteristic patience.



CHAPTER IV.



UNDAY at Dalbersdorf, though very unlike an English Sabbath, was nevertheless a day of rest to the employed, and of social enjoyment to the employers.

The day began a little later than during the rest of the week, and the members of the household took it in turn to make an appearance in the family *loge*, or pew—a sort of square apartment in the gallery of the village church, where service began at nine in the morning. This edifice was of the ordinary Saxon type, and in some respects resembled the earlier Protestant parish-churches in England. High narrow pews disfigured the body of the building; a gallery ran round it, wherein were the seats of the more distinguished members of the congregation. Over the entrance was a gaudily-coloured, exceedingly wheezy organ, and facing it was the pulpit—a curious shapeless erection, covered with illogical wavy ornamentation,

much gilded, with a large round opening in the middle, out of which the clergyman looked and gesticulated while preaching—a grey dove, with a pink and gold collar, surmounting all; while beneath was a Communion-table adorned with a high black cross, on which hung a bronze Christ.

The Dalbersdorf pew was lined with memorial tablets of deceased *Alvslebens*—some of pyramidal shape and large size, all more or less hideous. The whole interior was profusely decorated with heaps of coarse paint; the front of the gallery was divided into panel pictures of Bible scenes, infinitely inferior to the gaily-coloured sheets which hang on the walls of an English infant-school, the artist not shrinking even from the awful difficulties of 'The Last Judgment.' The very walls and roof were covered with endless many-tinted scrolls and lines. The effect was tawdry and disagreeable, while the damp earthy atmosphere suggested the unpleasantness of decay rather than the dignity of age. Nor was the scanty congregation more agreeable to the eye. It was composed of a curious variety of wonderfully wrinkled old women, all clean and neat, it is true, but painfully unpicturesque in their comfortable attire; young ones in broad-brimmed hats, with long streaming ribbons and strictly modern dresses of the most glaring and decided hues; a few withered, tottering old men, and a large sprinkling of rosy-cheeked boys.

The service, too, was wearisome, even to those who understood it (judging from Friede's face), while to Grace it was of course neither satisfactory

nor sanctifying to hear long prayers in an unknown tongue, and sermons equally incomprehensible, to say nothing of the howling of endless monotonous hymns at the highest pitch of their voices, which certainly did not show the musical perception supposed to be indigenous in Germans.

Finding that no one objected to her staying at home, as the church-going appeared to be an avowed sacrifice to the exigencies of position, Grace availed herself of the liberty allowed her, and enjoyed her Sunday morning in her own room, writing to the dear mother—reading the liturgy of her church, feeling always refreshed after half an hour of hearty prayer and earnest thought.

The rest of the family generally took Sunday morning also as a specially personal possession, and occupied it as seemed best to them. Friede often utilised it for a long practice on the grand piano in the "*Oben Stube*" (upper chamber), or finished some elaborate bit of china-painting, or shut herself up with a thrilling novel; while Gertrud devoted it to especial bits of darning, or mending of things too precious for every-day work.

When Grace first heard the sound of scales and exercises on the sacred day, and saw her cousins needle in hand; or worse, the *Haus-mädchen*, radiant in red ribbons, depart, avowedly to dance at a ball at the village restoration, she felt as if the sleepy little place had suddenly developed into a modern Sodom or Gomorrah. But soon the immense power which is exercised by the habits and opinions of those we live with began to influence her, and she

acknowledged that the simple, kindly people around were not less true or honest or Christian in the essentials of conduct, for all the difference between their Sabbath and ours ; yet, to the last, she missed the peaceful holiness that, in spite of many flaws in the conduct of its observers, must always endear the memory of an English Sunday.

This particular Sunday, however, was a busy day. Before the second breakfast was served, Grace heard the trampling of horses' feet as she sat writing to her mother (her usual Sunday occupation) in her own room, and concluded that the steed her grand-uncle was to try had arrived. On descending to the dining-room, she found Dr. Sturm making his bow to Frau Alvsleben. Grace therefore addressed him in French, in order to include that lady in the conversation ; but the doctor, though understanding her perfectly, was not so fluent in that language as in English, into which, on the lady of the house leaving the room, they soon glided.

Grace had begun to inquire the history of the ruins they had visited the evening before, when the door opened and Friede came in. Friede looking very fresh and pretty, in a blue muslin dress and ribbons, a blue velvet band fastening a large silver locket round her throat. Dr. Sturm was facing Grace, with his back to the door. Yet so soon as Friede's foot passed the threshold, he hesitated, paused, and 'lost the thread of his discourse,' while a faint colour came into his pale cheek—symptoms not lost upon Grace. 'Here is

Friede,' she exclaimed, and Dr. Sturm, turning quickly, went to greet her with a certain amount of shyness surprising in so distinguished a *savant*. Friede, in spite of a sweet smile and becoming blush, received him coldly; and there was an awkward silence of a few moments, broken by Grace, who telling Friede the subject of their conversation, resumed it, and learned how in the second half of the fourteenth century the Emperor Charles IV. invited some Celestine monks from Avignon, and established them on the Oybin, where for nearly two hundred years they and their successors led 'blameless and useful lives' until the Reformation, which dried up their sources of revenue and found converts among the monks themselves. Then a fearful storm rent the rocks, partly destroying their house; a fire succeeded, after which the community removed to Zittau and gradually died out, while their church and dwelling were left to neglect and decay.

Count Costello came in before the story was ended. Soon the whole party assembled—the *Verwalter* and his brother greeting each other with undisguised pleasure.

Frau Alvsleben was very kind, yet there was an indescribable something in her manner that to Grace's quick perception implied conscious superiority and condescension.

However, the morning passed very pleasantly. The young ladies, at least the Fräulein Alvsleben, took their knitting into the arbour, the count accompanying them; and Grace read to him a

leading article in the *Daily News* on the political prospects of Austria, during which Dr. Sturm and his brother added themselves to the group.

When she had finished, Dr. Sturm complimented her on her clear enunciation and expressive emphasis. Then they strolled in the garden, and Grace found Dr. Sturm's conversation fascinating. His words seemed to lift some thick curtain, and let in a clearer newer light on most of the topics they discussed. She continued to talk and listen, walking slowly to and fro in the shadow of the house, till she perceived all the rest had disappeared; and with a sudden fear that she had absorbed him selfishly, perhaps kept him from his brother, she apologised and went indoors.

At dinner Falkenberg appeared, to Grace's surprise, still in uniform.

He saluted Dr. Sturm with careless scant civility—the young ladies with fluent compliments; and then the serious work of dinner began.

'Müller has sent the horse,' said the Hauptmann, in the first pause of eating.

'Yes,' returned Count Costello, 'I have been looking at him. He seems a serviceable animal—not quite up to my weight, I fear.'

'We will see! You do not want to ride twenty miles every day?'

'True! but it makes a horse rather unsafe on his legs, if he is overweighted.'

'I am sure,' cried Frau Alvsleben, 'the dear Vaterchen would be better without a horse. He can ride one of ours now and again, but I shall

always be terrified at the idea of his going out on a wild, overfed beast that has scarce any work to do.'

'Ach! dearest daughter,' said the general, drily, 'I am not a bedridden helpless dotard yet; and, Donner-wetter! when my old friend and comrade leaves me the means to do it, I'll buy a horse if the devil himself said no!'

'Bravo, Herr Graf!' cried Falkenberg. He seemed highly amused at the old man's rebellion against Frau Alvsleben, who did not like any member of the family to spend money without her consent and approbation. 'And we will have a good gallop to-day—eh, mesdemoiselles?'

'I shall not,' said Gertrud, shortly.

'No, no, of course not. We all know you are the type of the home-staying, gracious German maiden, all feminine gentleness and devotion, leaving these rough sports to foreigners, and—and—what shall I say?—wilde-rosen, like Friede!'

Gertrud simpered and drew up, while Friede shook her head and laughed; and Grace thought there was as much mockery as compliment in the speech.

'When shall we start?' she asked.

'About three,' returned the count. 'We must smoke a cigar, and you have to dress.'

'And where shall we go?' asked Friede.

'By Oybin to Luckendorf,' returned the Hauptmann. 'It is not too far, and we must not fatigue the ladies.'

'My girl here is up to more than that,' exclaimed the count in German. 'She is of the old Costello

de Burgh race, and can keep the saddle longer than most women.'

He spoke in German, and Grace did not catch his meaning.

'Ach Gott!' cried Frau Alvsleben, pettishly, 'she is not nearer to you than your own grandchild! Friede is also of your race!'

'So she is, my dearest one!' said the old man, nodding to her with a kindly smile. 'But the *Gross-nichte*, she is *all* Irish; that is,' remembering her paternity, 'English and Irish.'

'The Herr General's patriotism has refreshed itself since his visit to London,' cried Falkenberg. 'Herr General, I drink to you! Miss Frere, you must let me fill your glass—it is to your uncle;' and he stretched over to put some red wine into her glass, as she sat opposite to him—first, as German good-breeding requires, pouring a spoonful or two into his own, to make sure that the wine was free from cork and wax.

'Your health, dear uncle!' said Grace, softly, giving him a loving look, and touching his glass; whereupon Falkenberg said, in French, in a low quick tone, unheard by the rest, amid a clatter of talk between Frau Alvsleben, Gertrud, and the *Verwalter*, who were with one accord describing the misdemeanours of some Bohemian reapers to Dr. Sturm:

'Give me also a kindly wish, fair stranger!' holding out his glass, with a sudden flash of admiration in his glance, that showed Grace light eyes could speak eloquently as well as dark ones, surprising

her into a blush, and sensation of pleasure, half fun, half coquetry, at the idea of a German admirer, of which the next moment she was ashamed; though she chinked her glass with his, giving him a frank smile and half bow as she did so, which implied more goodwill than the mere words, 'Your very good health.'

Falkenberg drained his, and put it down, prepared to attack a dish just set on the table. It contained what seemed to Grace something like an attenuated cat, with only the hind legs, done exceedingly brown, split open, and thickly stuck with elongated cubes of bacon.

'What is that?' she asked the count, next whom she was sitting.

'Hare!' he returned. 'Did you never see hare before?'

'Never like that; why, where are the shoulders?'

'Ay, to be sure,' cried the count; 'I had forgotten how they dress a hare at home.'

'Ach, mein Vater!' said Frau Alvsleben, 'is my house not your home? Have you learned to love England so much since you went back there?' she spoke in a wounded tone, but there was an angry sparkle in her eye.

'Gott bewahr, beloved daughter! I spoke of my boyhood's home. Here, send the little cousin some, and let her taste how good a Saxon hare is.'

Then Gertrud asked how they cooked hare in England; and Grace was surprised to find that the English *cuisine*, according to the ideas of her cousin, consisted of nearly raw meat, vegetables

barely cooked, and swimming in hot water, red pepper, plum-pudding, apple-pie, and mustard.

The discussion which arose was excessively noisy and very merry ; and Grace, attempting to explain matters in German, added to the hilarity, though her efforts to speak in their language were most kindly encouraged by her companions, and Falkenberg protested he would not utter a word of any other tongue during their expedition that afternoon.

Then the count stood up, and, in a short hearty speech, proposed the health of their honoured guest, Dr. Sturm, at which Friede coloured with pleasure, and everyone, even Falkenberg, was obliged to join cordially. Dr. Sturm replied briefly, and Grace thought his voice the sweetest and most pleasing she had heard since she crossed the sea.

Finally, Frau Alvsleben, with the dignity and graciousness she frequently assumed, drank to her good friend and 'with-worker Herr Heinrich Sturm, whose never-to-be-sufficiently-acknowledged help was so valuable.'

Then, amid a loud scraping of chairs and 'Gesegnete Mahlzeits,' they rose, and the gentlemen adjourned to a verandah or terrace, where, with much *empressement*, the young ladies waited on them, assisting Marie, the *Stuben-mädchen*, to set forth huge glasses of beer on a rustic table, bringing cigars, pipes, matches, somewhat to Grace's surprise ; she limited herself to providing for her uncle's wants, and then went away to her room.

It was a fine but grey afternoon when the party

assembled at the door leading into the farm-yard, where Friede preferred to mount, because the stone parapet which defended the steps afforded a convenient means of *ascending* on horseback. The horses were good enough—a dark brown mare and a bay horse, in fair condition, and well groomed, the property of Falkenberg (the latter had an English lady's saddle); an iron-grey, somewhat rough, but sober-looking, and serviceable, on which also a lady's saddle had been placed; and a roan, which Grace decided was the best of the lot, were waiting. This last was the horse sent for trial, and round him the gentlemen were gathered.

Grace noticed something different in the general look of the cattle from those at home. They were not so smart; their necks craned about as if the animal were not thoroughly broken; their limbs were less fine. The roan, indeed, looked like an English horse; and, at all events, Grace went joyfully amongst them, delighted to have horses to pat and give sugar to once more.

Her heart beat with pleasure at wearing, for the second or third time only, her new, well-fitting, dark blue habit: a narrow, white linen collar, with a small black tie at the throat; a cylinder hat, linen cuffs, wash-leather riding-gloves, and a plain, unornamented riding-whip slung to her wrist, completed a most gentlemanlike toilette, worn with the ease and grace of long custom, and suiting admirably a round, pliant figure, more rich than slight, yet girlish; her compact hair and simple dress looking thoroughly business-like.

‘What do you think of the roan, Grace?’ said her uncle, finding her near him.

Falkenberg turned as he spoke, and gazed at her with unconcealed criticism.

‘I like his looks,’ she replied. ‘His head is well set on, and he has honest eyes,’ patting his neck, and offering him some sugar she had begged from Friede, and which the horse ate greedily.

‘Where did Müller get him?’ asked the count, walking slowly round the animal.

‘I think he picked him up in France after the fighting was over—just before we were ordered back.’

‘He looks English-bred to me,’ returned the count.

‘I fancy he is a little puffy about the hocks,’ observed Grace, who took the deepest interest in the discussion, and, somewhat to the surprise of both her uncle and Falkenberg, after again patting his shoulder, drew her hand gently, but firmly, down the animal’s fore leg, with a dexterous accustomed touch, to which he yielded, and let her raise and turn his hoof to be examined. All this in utter unconsciousness of doing anything singular.

‘Oh, Grace, Grace! have care! do have care!’ cried Friede, from the door-step.

Smiling, Grace nodded to her, saying to her uncle:

‘I do not think there is much the matter; just you try.’

‘Ma chère! ma chère! come away!’ screamed

Frau Alvsleben ; 'you touch the beast as if you were a groom ! It is not *comme il faut*.'

Grace, colouring slightly at the rebuke, but anxious not to displease, obeyed, and returned to the door-step where Friede stood, looking very pretty. She had a green habit, made with a double breast, open to show an elaborate shirt-front, with a frill standing up round her throat, fastened with a large pink bow and brooch, and a hat with feathers and a veil in which she might have gone to church.

'Come, mesdemoiselles,' cried Falkenberg, 'who will mount first ?'

'Oh, Grace,' said Friede. 'But do take care, Wolff ! Are you *sure* your horse will not be too wild ? has he ever been ridden by a lady ?'

'Yes ; I was assured when I bought him that he would carry a lady. I got him from the Clam Gallas stables.'

Grace laid hold of the pommel, and lifting her skirt slightly, looked round for some one to mount her.

'You had better come up here—you can get on much better,' exclaimed Friede.

'Can you not put me up ?' said Grace to the count. 'Have you forgotten how to mount a lady, uncle ?'

'No, faith ! give me your pretty little foot.'

And the old man, seconding her spring, lifted her to the saddle before Friede could finish the remonstrance she had begun.

'Has he a very hard mouth, or is he given to

bolt?' she asked, as Falkenberg placed the reins in her hand, evidently intending her to ride on the curb.

'No, he is steady enough. Why do you ask?'

'Because you want me to use the curb. At home I always ride on the snaffle—often without any curb.'

'Here we always use the curb.'

'And when in Rome, do as Rome does,' added Count Costello, looking to his girths before swinging himself into the saddle.

Meantime Dr. Sturm had assisted Friede to mount; Falkenberg sprang on his horse, and with salutations from the group on the door-step, and some last cautions screamed after them by Frau Alvsleben, they started, walking quietly over the pavement of the yard and under the walnut-trees, beyond which they turned from the road, and enjoyed a pleasant canter across a wide stretch of stubble field, and so on to the Oybin road, near a little wayside inn of the humblest order.

How delightful it was to feel herself once more swaying to the motion of a horse! to enjoy the delicious sensation of double existence as she guided her steed with the motion of her wrist, albeit she found his mouth not too tender; above all, to enjoy the mingled surprise, admiration, and *disapprobation* which Falkenberg, with all his cool self-possession, could not quite conceal.

At first she rode beside her grand-uncle, whose pleasure in her company was great and undisguised, talking with him about the merits of his horse,

sometimes reining in her own to take a comprehensive view of the animal, turning and changing from side to side with the practised ease of one whose horsemanship was the result of early habit.

At first the bay had been restive and fidgety, evidently unaccustomed to the skirt; but a light hand, a gentle touch, and a firm seat, soon brought him into a better temper, and after a few screams and expostulations from Friede, all went tranquilly.

On the hard high-road they again rode slowly, and Falkenberg came up alongside as Grace was describing the last long ride she had taken with her grandfather.

‘It was round by the Benbola Hills, and you know that is ten miles,’ she was saying.

‘Ten miles!’ exclaimed Falkenberg; ‘how much German miles?’ To their surprise he spoke in English.

There was a general exclamation.

‘Where did you pick up English?’ cried the count.

‘Oh! I was in Dresden last spring, when I first returned from France, and knew some charming Americans; they taught me, and I had some lessons from a professor. Now, très chère Mademoiselle Frere, you must complete my education.’

This Grace readily promised; and so they rode on together when the road narrowed, under the odorous pine-woods and huge solemn rocks, across the open space of the little Oybin valley, and up the sandy way that led by the curious Kelchstein or Chalice-stone—where the soft road tempted to a trot, which soon became a gallop—on to the top of the hill, along

the edge of which the road now led, and from whence they looked over an immense tract, thickly studded with strange fantastically-shaped hills and partly covered by pine-forests, away to distant blue ranges, rising one above the other and mingling with the clouds, all clear, yet not sharply defined, in a tender grey Wouvermans-tinted atmosphere—a view that called forth rapturous admiration from Grace and expressions of pleasure from her companion. Then on again, speaking English and German, laughing heartily at each other's mistakes, and, it must be confessed, flirting as gaily and unrestrainedly as if Grace had never quivered under the bitter pain of feeling herself deliberately neglected and ignored by her first ideal, Max—never shed tears of mortified affection and bruised pride; but she was a very different creature from the Grace Frere who this time last year had accepted her cousin's kiss with such undoubting faith, such solemn confidence. Could she ever have the same trust again? Nevertheless, why should she not enjoy while she might? and why not amuse herself with the half-unwilling admiration of this saucy soldier?

But they feared to fatigue Friede, so turned towards home after passing the comfortable village of Luckendorf, though the count wished to extend their ride to Gabel—a small Bohemian town; and again crossing some stubble fields, where Grace kept by her uncle's side, they reached Dalbersdorf as evening was closing in.

'You must let me lift you down,' cried Falkenberg, throwing himself quickly from his horse.

'I only want your hands,' said Grace, disentangling herself from the pommel; and taking them, she sprang lightly to the ground. 'Thank you very much for the great pleasure you have given me,' she said, looking up in his eyes with a frank, sweet smile. 'I like your horse, now I am a little accustomed to him; and you don't ride badly yourself.' With a little approving nod, she gathered up her habit and ran indoors after Friede, who had already dismounted with the assistance of Dr. Sturm.

Falkenberg looked after her with a smile and slight elevation of the eyebrows; he was not accustomed to patronising approbation.

'Begad! I have not had such a ride for ever so long!' exclaimed the count. 'Faith! I must mind what I say since you understand English, Falkenberg! And now, isn't it a pleasure to ride beside a girl that can sit her horse like my jewel of a niece! By Jupiter! she is not a penny the worse for the English strain in her blood!'

Poor Friede was dreadfully tired, and Grace felt more fatigued than she expected; it was so long since she had mounted a horse. Both girls, however, had energy enough left to array themselves with due regard to the 'becoming' for supper. After it there was music: Friede sang with Dr. Sturm, and Falkenberg trolled forth some martial *Lieder*, to his own accompaniment, in a full, rich baritone, Dr. Sturm, his brother, and the young ladies joining in the refrain when there was one, even Grace catching up the air and adding her

voice ; whereupon Herr Doctor begged her to give them an English *Lied*, and Falkenberg added his entreaties, while the count crossed the room to pray for an Irish melody, and all joined in the request. Grace avowed her fear of giving pain rather than pleasure to so critical an audience, yet complied with unaffected readiness. Her fresh sympathetic voice and naturally dramatic expression, all untaught though she was, gave a certain charm to the sad sweetness of that lovely air, 'Has sorrow thy young days shaded ?' All applauded kindly except Falkenberg, while her uncle, taking her head between his hands, tenderly kissed her brow.

'You have brought back my boyhood to me, me darlin',' he said ; 'and now I will go to bed and dream of it.'

Dr. Sturm was seriously eager in his advice that Grace should take lessons, and devote herself to music ; he was sure she had great capabilities.

'I do not think I have,' she returned. 'I should prefer, if I could, to draw ; but when I look at Friede's beautiful china-painting, I despair of myself.'

'Ach, not so ! China-painting is very mechanical,' said the doctor ; 'you should try water-colours or oils.'

'Better take drawing-lessons from me!' cried Falkenberg, rousing himself from a fit of thought, in which he seemed lost after bidding Count Costello good-night. 'I draw nearly as well as I sing,' he added, and drawing a chair beside Gertrud,

began talking to her with some animation, though in a low tone.

‘I scarcely believe that,’ returned Grace. ‘But Friede has promised to help me, and I have great faith in Friede.’

She looked kindly at her cousin, whose countenance had changed when Dr. Sturm pronounced china-painting ‘merely mechanical.’

‘Not believe it!’ exclaimed Falkenberg; ‘why, you must believe in me when you pronounce my horsemanship not so bad.’

‘Horsemanship is not everything,’ said Grace; and, a little afraid that she might seem rude to foreigners, with the minutiae of whose manners she was not familiar, she added, ‘But if you really draw as well as you sing, you deserve a more advanced pupil than I am.’

After some more conversation with the doctor and Friede, the former took his leave, as he had to walk into Zittau. The inspector also said good-night, intending to accompany his brother part of the way. Frau Alvsleben and Gertrud went out with them on the moonlit terrace, exchanging last words respecting the occupations of to-morrow. Friede, protesting she could not keep her eyes open, went away; and Grace following, found Falkenberg at the door.

‘We must soon arrange another ride,’ he said, holding out his hand.

‘Yes, do,’ she answered, putting hers into it. ‘It was delightful to-day. Good-night, Herr von Falkenberg.’

‘ Good-night,’ with an earnest look into her eyes.
‘ I, too, shall dream of the song and the singer.’

‘ Better sleep sound, monsieur le capitaine !’
returned Grace, laughing as she left him, and ran
upstairs, a sense of gratified vanity soothing her
self-esteem, and restoring a little the faith in her-
self which had been so rudely shaken.



CHAPTER V.



COUPLE of days after, the post brought a welcome letter to Grace from her mother.

After the usual expressions of joy at hearing from her, and assurances of their welfare, Mrs. Frere continued :

‘I am very sorry you cannot find apartments for us in Zittau, and that you fear Dresden would be too expensive, for really it is *most depressing* to live in London under our circumstances. I never have a *creature* to speak to except poor dear Mab, and I do not think her quite so well as she might be. Randal is away all day, and Miss Timbs far from being as attentive as she should. The fact is, that since Mr. Byrne made some alteration in our agreement with her, about leaving before the end of a quarter, she has been quite different. Indeed, I do not know what we should do but for Mr. Byrne. He comes up twice a week to tea, and brings

me the papers, with the *Graphic* for Mab (you would be quite pleased to see how nicely she has coloured some of the pictures); and then I can talk to him of you, my dearest! which is my greatest pleasure, and he seems to interest himself in you as much as I do.

‘Randal, I am glad to say, is a great favourite among his companions, and is constantly asked out. But he is very steady; and we are all most prudent, for I know how anxious you are for economy. By the way, do you not want a little more money yourself? I might send you a five-pound note cut in two. I suppose you could change an English note even in Zittau? You see, I am growing quite a woman of business. Oh, how I wish we could furnish an apartment at Zittau. I feel I should be quite happy near my dear uncle and his daughter. Your description makes me long to know them all and enjoy their society, for it is a sad solitude here. I have been talking matters over with Mr. Byrne, and he thinks with me that it would be *perfectly legitimate* to ask your uncle Frere for assistance in our *peculiar circumstances*: indeed, we *must* do it if we are to move at all. Pray let me know your opinion by return. Apropos, Randal met Max a few days ago in Lombard Street, and nothing could exceed his astonishment to find you had flown—he did not seem able to believe it. I must not forget to tell you that some very charming verses of Randal’s have been published in the *Daily Bread*—a new journal, which is, they say, taking a very high position. So, you see

he has got an opening at last, and there is no knowing what it may lead to. Adieu, my own dear one! It is impossible to say how I long to see you once more. It is at night I feel your absence so cruelly! God bless and preserve you, is the constant prayer of

‘Your devoted mother,

‘C. M. FRERE.

‘P.S. Mab’s best love : she wants you back! I forgot to mention that as she is not very well and decidedly averse to practice, I have sent away the piano : it was a useless expense. *Do* answer about your uncle Frere. I am so anxious to join you. Do you think we could furnish for a hundred pounds?’

‘Dearest, dearest mother!’ murmured Grace, when she had made an end of reading; ‘I can fancy how miserable she is without me. I fear she is right; we can never manage the move if Uncle Frere does not help us. He will, I daresay, but how dreadful to ask him!’

She did not answer this letter at once, as Frau Alvsleben had promised to take her into Zittau with herself to seek for a dwelling, and ascertain what arrangement could be made as to furnishing.

Meantime life flowed on with a pleasant equable current at Dalbersdorf. Herr Hauptmann Falkenberg went out each morning early to shoot, and occasionally the old count accompanied him. The usual duties amply filled up the young ladies’ time from the first breakfast to dinner-hour; Grace

taking a fair share of it for study. In the afternoon there were excursions on foot, and sometimes on horseback ; for the count carried out his intention of buying the roan, and Falkenberg was their constant companion. He gave Grace hints about sketching ; he drew roughly but effectively himself. One or two of his brother-officers also joined them for a day, now and then, and Dr. Sturm, so that time did not hang heavily ; and sometimes, when they mustered sufficient gentlemen, they danced in the evening, even Frau Alvsleben joining.

Grace would have enjoyed it all immensely, but for a constant anxiety about the dear ones at home, who depended on her so utterly ; still they were pleasant days, and Falkenberg a very pleasant companion. Though universally attentive in his way, Grace found, she knew not how, that he had established a sort of tacit understanding with her—little phrases of special meaning, looks that no one caught but herself, certain airs of proprietorship arising from his character of instructor, all mixed with jest and laughter and playful mockery, kept her thoughts occupied with him, and half angry that he should treat her more as a child than a woman, while ever and anon would flash out a gleam of real admiration that startled her into deeper interest—and all unnoticed by anyone else. Yet her truest, best pleasure was in Dr. Sturm's conversation ; and she felt this in so sisterly a fashion, that she did not attempt to conceal her preference for his society.

'Do go away,' she sometimes exclaimed, when

Falkenberg or Friede would seek to interrupt their talk, 'or sit down and listen. Dr. Sturm is explaining all sorts of things to me, which I never had a chance of understanding before.'

And after such a speech Falkenberg was generally more tiger than lamb-like in his playfulness, and Friede still and silent.

Meantime, her familiarity with German increased rapidly, and she began to read with some ease.

Falkenberg's stay was drawing to a close. He intended to spend the remainder of his leave with some relations in Silesia, a visit which he maintained was compulsory, and respecting which he uttered many complaints, half jest, half earnest, all tending to show his regret at leaving Dalbersdorf.

'I wish, Friede, you would not idle here,' cried Gertrud one morning, coming into Grace's room, where Friede was finishing a group of flowers on a china vase, while hearing and correcting her cousin as she read aloud one of Andersen's fairy tales. 'I have so much to do, I know not where to begin; and the mother goes away immediately with grand-papa to Zittau. You like anything better than work.'

'I will come,' said Friede, submissively, beginning to put aside her painting materials. Friede had grown very quiet and subdued of late; not so Grace, who was always ready to resist oppression.

'I think Friede quite as diligent as you are; only you enjoy working in the kitchen and store-room; she is always ready to help you,' she said. 'But, Gertrud, will Cousin Alvsleben take me with

her?—she said she would—because I do so want to find some place for my mother.'

'I do not think she will; she is going on particular business with the *Gross-papa* to the *Gericht-amsmann* (judge of the district). But you can ask—she is here.'

Frau Alvsleben entered in bonnet and mantle as she spoke. 'No, my child,' she said, in reply to the request. 'I have some special private business with the father; but I shall find out everything for you—if you can hire furniture, or what it will cost—just as well as if you were with me.'

She spoke in a kindly tone, and patted Grace's shoulder, seeming to be in excellent temper and spirits. Nevertheless her young cousin was disappointed, she wished to see and judge for herself; but to Frau Alvsleben's decision there was *point de réplique*.

'Though Grace may think me a tyrannical sister,' resumed Gertrud, with a slight dilation of her nostril, as her mother left the room, 'I must ask your help to make the *Apfel Strudel*—you well know I cannot manage that alone. But knowing your superiority to these common cares,' she added, addressing Grace, 'we will not disturb *you*.'

'Do not talk such nonsense!' cried Grace; '*you* know I am always delighted to learn how to make a new dish, and *Apfel Strudel* is delicious.'

She jumped up, and seized one of the aprons which she had made for herself under Friede's directions, accompanying the sisters to the scene of action, where all were soon busy.

Apfel Strudel is a combination of many things, and requires a division of labour; so while Gertrud and Grace peeled and sliced the apples, and blanched and chopped the almonds, Friede pounded the spices, and prepared, with her fine and delicate touch, the thin pastry which was to envelop the goodly mixture.

The scene and occupation were homely, yet there was a charm about both. The large kitchen was not unpicturesque, with its ponderous centre-table; its sandstone floor; its many shelves, laden with bright copper vessels, more for show than use; its endless ranges of coffee-pots and pipkins, going down 'small by degrees and beautifully less;' the immense variety of long-handled wooden spoons and quirks, and utensils of different sorts, stuck like bouquets in wooden frames, hung against the wall; the ranges of wooden tubs, white with sand-scouring; the big, yellow-tiled cooking-stove—all had a character of their own, most unlike an English kitchen. Through the windows could be seen the farm-yard, with its rich colouring of brown, antiquated dirt, yellow straw, and green, freshly-cut grass, which a couple of red-and-white calves were chewing with an air of enjoyment. Sundry grey-and-black speckled fowls were clucking and pecking about; a *Knecht* (man who attends the farm-horses) walked to and fro, his wooden shoes making a monotonous clack, clack; while through a rugged archway of weather-worn stone, between the barns at the far end, a glimpse might be caught of the road leading to the wood under

the arching beech and chestnut trees, now deliciously tinted with autumnal hues.

‘I think,’ said Gertrud, with pardonable pride, ‘that the Dalbersdorf *Strudel* is quite celebrated; I know that at Ottenbain and Warndorf it is never so good. Wolff, too, who never praises anything, says he *can* eat it here, and that is a great deal for him.’

She was busily employed fastening a white cloth over a small table as she spoke.

‘Does he?’ cried Grace, collecting her last contribution of chopped almonds, and throwing them on the general mass, exclaiming as she did so, in a dramatic tone, ‘Another for Wolff!’

‘What is for me?’ said that gentleman, suddenly putting his head into the kitchen window, and leaning his arms on the sill.

‘Ach Gott!’ cried Gertrud, ‘you frighten one into fits.’

‘What has the *gnadiges Fräulein* for me?’ continued Falkenberg, in a tone of mock gallantry; ‘anything from her hands is precious.’

‘Sugar for a spoilt boy,’ returned Grace, smiling, and handing him a lump, which he, lifting his cap with profound deference, accepted, and eat with much gravity.

‘Is it permitted to an ignorant soldier to enter and witness the sacred mysteries?’ he asked.

‘Yes, come in,’ said Gertrud, whose countenance had grown perceptibly brighter; ‘but you would like the *Strudel* ever so much better if you did not see it made.’

'Nay, your work is so excellent it can bear inspection,' he returned. Disappearing for a moment, he came in through the open door, and, removing his cap, seated himself on a corner of the centre-table; his hunter's costume—a short loose tunic of grey faced with green, and girt by the hunting-belt, grey trousers with a green stripe, high boots, and '*Flinten-band*,' richly worked in many-coloured silks, across his broad chest—suited him well, he formed a very effective addition to the picture.

The critical moment had now arrived when the delicate pastry is stretched out over the cloth-covered table, till it looks like the ghost of a sheet of vellum, and they only waited for Gertrud to begin. She had gone to bring a glass of beer to her *Jager* cousin, who sat watching the *Strudel*-making process with great interest.

'Friede,' he said, holding out the beaker to her before touching it himself, 'drink, meine Liebe! thou art pale and sad! is it because I have not brought the fair-haired von Heldreich with me?' (a youthful lieutenant in his company, much laughed at for his conceit). 'But the *Verwalter* tells me his learned brother comes back with the Graf and the Frau Mutter to dinner; that should console thee—though Fräulein Grace will absorb him, alas! Comes not the great Sturm oftener than formerly?'

'Do mind what you are doing, Friede!' cried Gertrud; 'you have broken away that corner. And, ach du lieber Himmel! Grace, you drag as if it were sackcloth, whereas there is nothing so tender as *Strudel* pastry.'

'But Miss Frere is not tender,' said Falkenberg, in English, setting down his beer-glass nearly empty. 'She is what you call very harsh—strong—proud—what is it? She has not one kind word for me, for the good news I bring that Herr Doctor comes to-day.'

'What shall I say?' asked Grace, laughing, as she drew the dish containing the rich amalgam away from Falkenberg, who was trying with a spoon to pick out the morsels of almonds. 'Thanks, dear Herr Baron, for your pleasant news; I am very glad Dr. Sturm is coming.'

'She calls me "dear!"' exclaimed Falkenberg, stretching his arm after the dish; 'but only because I am the advanced guard of Sturm. I wish you would say "Dear Wolff."'

'Indeed I will not, Herr Hauptmann; I cannot imagine a Wolff dear.'

'Can you not?' cried Falkenberg, with a sudden dangerous gleam in his eye; 'poor Wolff! What do you say, Gertrud?'

'That you must eat no more *Strudel*, till dinner-time; but is Dr. Sturm really coming?'

'He is! Your mother met the *Verwalter*, and called to him to say she would bring his brother back; but to so excellent a *Hausfrau* as you, one or more unexpected guests can make no difference.'

'Of course not,' said Gertrud. 'Friede, do find me some string; it is nearly done.'

'Here is Hermann with my game-bag; open it and see, Gertrud, what sport I have had.'

The *Lauf-knabe* (errand-boy), who entered as he spoke, proceeded to empty the bag, covering the table with several brace of partridge, and some hares.

They lay there a confused pile of mellow colour—the soft brown plumage of the birds shaded off to speckled grey on the breasts, and the light yellowish-brown of the hares brightening almost to red, and again fading to white on the chest and underneath.

But Gertrud and Friede were now absorbed in laying the *Strudel* in the oven, and Grace approached to admire and stroke the plumage of the dead birds.

‘So,’ said Falkenberg, stooping a little forward from his seat to look into her eyes—‘So, you can imagine a *Gelehrte*’ (learned man) ‘dearer than a Wolff?’

‘Yes, of course,’ returned Grace, giving him back a smiling glance: ‘a learned man is something of a gentle shepherd; but lambs naturally fear being torn and devoured by a wolf.’

‘Fear!’ repeated Von Falkenberg; ‘is there anything *you* fear? I never before met a fearless girl like you! yet——’

He paused.

‘But I fear many things—too many things,’ returned Grace.

‘To offend Herr Doctor, for instance?’ asked the Hauptmann.

‘No; I should never offend *him*; we understand each other too well.’

'What do you see to like in him?' exclaimed Falkenberg, with an instant's earnestness.

'Goodness, truth, knowledge, generosity, tolerance; I cannot think of anything more now,' wiping her hands in a large duster.

'Gott in Himmel! it is enough!' cried Falkenberg, laughing. 'My sweetest Friede! I used to think *you* too favourable to the doctor; but ach! the cousin! she thinks him more than human. What hast thou, Friede? Come, unfasten this belt for me!'

'Oh, my head aches with the heat and with pounding the spice!'

'Come with me, dear Friede,' cried Grace, 'and leave Herr Falkenberg to arrange his toilet unassisted. Au revoir, monsieur; I go to put on my prettiest dress for the dear doctor!'

With a defiant smile and nod she slipped her arm into Friede's, and drew her away. But at the top of the stair Friede disengaged herself, and said with a sound as of tears in her voice:

'I must go to my own room; I must bathe my head, Grace; it aches so terribly.'

'Come in to mine, then, and let me bathe it with eau de Cologne and water,' returned Grace, affectionately. 'You do look pale and ill; come with me, dear Friede.'

'No, no; I would rather be alone,' cried Friede, escaping from her.

She spoke abruptly and in German, as she always did when moved or in earnest. Grace turned into her own chamber slowly, and lost in thought.

What was the matter with Friede? Had she (Grace) offended her in any way? She hoped not. With Friede she had first tasted the pleasures of companionship with a girl of her own age; and in the short period of their acquaintance, scarce a month, had learned to love her. There was just that amount of difference in their natures which gave piquancy to their intercourse; besides, Grace was flattered by the tacit admission of her superior force and strength implied by Friede's readiness to follow her lead. In truth, hers was far the broader and stronger character; yet something of her cousin's gentle prudence would have been a useful addition to her own frank daring. Now she seated herself on the seat of her open window, and thought eagerly what could ail Friede?

Suddenly it came to her vividly that her own openly-avowed preference for Dr. Sturm caused the mischief. 'How could Friede be so stupid as to think I would speak in that way if I cared for him!—cared for him, as I am afraid she does. Afraid!—why? I think he loves her better than he ventures to show, and though I never could fall in love with him, he is too good and true and noble to change. No! I never met anyone in whom I felt so much faith; at least, not for a long time.'

A long time! What a sliding-scale is our measurement of time! At eighteen,—seven or eight months is a vast period, which, like Milton's description of Satan, 'lies floating many a rood; at eight-and-twenty,—the same period is an interval between the day before yesterday and to-day; at

forty,—last even ; at three-score-and-ten, ' a watch in the night,' of that soft darkness which mercifully gathers round the weary traveller as he nears his rest.

Eight months ago would not Grace have staked her life on Max Frere's faithfulness, even to an implied attachment ?

Some such undefined consciousness checked her unbounded trust in Dr. Sturm. ' I will be more cautious,' was her next clear idea, rallying back from a confused cloud of images, dear yet sad, which came crowding like mist-wreaths out of the caverns of memory ; ' I will not yield to the pleasure of talking to him, and I will tell Friede this evening before I sleep—what ?—that I cared too much and too recently for—for some one far away to think about anyone else ; at least, not for a long time.' Then came the recollection of her mother's letter, and her description of Max Frere's astonishment at the news of Grace having left England. How she rejoiced at the notion of having escaped out of reach of his pity, his help, his advice ! even if her mother was obliged to accept aid from his father, it was quite a different matter from asking Max. At this season, too, he would probably be away shooting and amusing himself, as he did this time last year at Dungan, and would probably not even hear of the application for a long time ; and then, perhaps they might never meet again ! She hoped so, for Max was so associated in her mind with humiliation and weakness that she never wished to see him again.

The dinner was very lively, almost noisy, in the absence of the elders, who did not return till the *Apfel Strudel* appeared. Friede, from being too pale and silent, had become rosy, and nearly riotous. As anticipated, Frau Alvsleben and the count brought Dr. Sturm back with them.

The result of the visit to Zittau seemed to be perfect satisfaction to Frau Alvsleben, and contentment a trifle less radiant to Count Costello, while Dr. Sturm was as calm as ever. Dinner was more than half over when they returned; everyone rose, there was a general hubbub, and the soup was brought back.

‘Ach! du lieber Himmel! I am faint and hungry; a glass of beer, my girl, and then I shall be able to eat. God be thanked, it has been an altogether-fortunate journey! as thou wilt think, my Gracechen, when I can tell thee.’

‘What, Cousin Alvsleben! have you found something for *us*? Is it possible!’

‘Patience, patience, my child! let me eat, and I will tell thee all.’

‘Yes; you don’t know what a clever protector you have,’ said the count, nodding to her with an air of profound wisdom, as she busied herself attending to his wants, for she had grown very fond of the old man as she came to understand the simple childlike nature hidden away under his stern soldierly exterior. ‘This daughter of mine is a Talleyrand—a Metternich in petticoats. Your very good health, my child; and yours, Falkenberg! What sport, my boy?’

‘I think your Fräulein Cousin improves quickly,’ said Dr. Sturm to Friede. He had been speaking with Grace.

‘She does all things well,’ said Friede, sadly.

‘It is pleasant for you to have so sympathetic a friend, and for her!—How happy to find so sweet a companion!’

Friede smiled, and handed a dish of spinach to the speaker; while Grace, who never could bring herself to attend to the wants of any gentleman except her grand-uncle, carefully avoided the doctor, though she perceived that Falkenberg was watching her under cover of a conversation with the count.

‘I have been to see thy friend Herr Hauptmann Müller and his wife,’ said Frau Alvsleben to Falkenberg at length, having allayed the pangs of hunger. ‘He is terribly sick, poor man. The doctor says his only chance of life is a winter in Italy. He has already his leave. They start in about a fortnight.’

‘Indeed!’ returned Falkenberg, with some interest; ‘I am sorry for both him and his wife. They had just settled themselves, too.’

‘Müller had always more spirit than strength,’ said the count. ‘He was scarce fit to go through the campaign.’

‘He was wounded at Sedan, which did not invigorate him.’

‘And so short a time married when war was declared,’ added Frau Alvsleben. ‘The mother—Frau Müller’s mother—comes in two or three days to assist their preparations for departing.’

‘I have brought you the volume of Peschek’s history you wished to read, Miss Frere,’ said Dr. Sturm. ‘Perhaps after dinner you will permit me the pleasure to point out some passages I have marked for you.’

‘Oh, thank you very much,’ said Grace, blushing, and hesitating in an unusual and suspicious manner. ‘Yes, of course; but I want first—that is—if you show them to Friede, she will explain everything to me. Friede explains so well.’

Here the count called to Dr. Sturm, the conversation became general, and beyond the range of Grace’s German.

Frau Alysleben, however, rose as soon as she had finished her dinner.

‘Come with me, my little one,’ she said to Grace, who out-topped her. ‘I know you are dying to hear my news; come to the arbour, and enjoy these last bright hours of autumn while we may.’

Grace quickly followed.

Having found one of the knitting-pins she had dropped, and settled her feet on a footstool, she began:

‘My child, I have found the very thing for you; and here is the history: When I was condoling with poor Frau Müller to-day, she lamented to me that they had just taken their *Wag* for a year, and made many additions to their furniture, and now they should have all the cost of travel, besides their rent. So a bright thought struck me. “And what would you say, meine liebe Frau,” I said, “if I were to find you good tenants—tranquil, careful,

and regular to pay?" "Ach Gott!" cried the poor lady; "but where is such a thing to be found in our little town?" Whereupon I told her of my good cousin, your mother, and offered to write to her at once. And so do, my child; for it is a chance that seldom happens. Stay'—(for Grace had clasped her hands and opened her mouth to speak)—'tell the dear mother that she can have the *étage* for three hundred and fifty thalers—a little more than they pay for bare walls. And stay yet: it is a pretty apartment, of five—six pieces, and a kitchen; not richly furnished, but neat and pretty, and near the school at the upper end of the town, by the park. So now write, *meine Gracechen*.'

'You dear, delightful, thoughtful Cousin Alvsleben!' cried Grace, embracing her rapturously; 'you bring me joy and comfort. Oh, how delighted my mother will be! Agree for the apartment at once; there is no need to tell my mother first. I will only write to tell her to prepare. And when shall we be able to have these rooms?'

'In about a fortnight.'

After a few more explosions of exuberant satisfaction, Grace retired to her own room to write a long letter full of directions and suggestions to her mother, infinitely thankful to have found such a solution of her difficulties.



CHAPTER VI.



O, Friede! you shall not pass my door!
You must come in! Why do you
avoid me? I have quantities to talk
about to you.'

So spoke Grace as the two girls paused at the latter's door that night after their guest was gone, and Count Costello had retired triumphant, having won the conquering game out of three at backgammon with Grace.

'Not to-night, dear Grace! Indeed I cannot; I am too miserable.'

'All the more reason you should come and talk with me.'

After some further resistance Friede yielded.

'Come and sit by the window. The moonlight is lovely! I will not light my candle. Do you mind the open window, dear Friede?'

'No—not at all! but do not sit half out of the window—that cannot be good.'

'It does me no harm.'

There was a long pause. Grace did not know

how to approach her subject. It was delicate and difficult—how should she manage?’ A low, soft sigh from Friede, and Grace rushed into speech.

‘What is the matter with you, Friede? You are sad and silent. You do not speak to me as you used. Don’t you know I like you the best; indeed, I may say, love you the best of all I have met here.’

‘Love *me* the best!’ cried Friede, whose lip quivered. ‘Nay, my dear cousin, you deceive yourself. Your best love is for another. Nor do I blame you—it is but natural.’

‘Who is the other, then?’ asked Grace, quite pleased to think she had drawn Friede to the verge of an explanation. ‘My uncle? Well, I do love him heartily, but you are different—you, my companion and playfellow.’

‘Ah, Grace! Why wilt thou not be candid with me? Thinkest thou because I have never travelled and crossed the sea, that I am dull and blind and cannot understand the tokens of preference that love forces even so proud a spirit as thine to betray? No, no! I feel too deeply myself not to comprehend. Thy joy at exchanging the splendours of London for a little country town like Zittau—thy eagerness to acquaint thyself with everything German, even our domestic work—all tells the same tale. Thou lovest, — my poor cousin! May your love be happy!’ and covering her face with her hands, Friede burst into a flood of tears.

Grace got up, turned the key in the door, and coming back to her seat in the window, said quietly:

‘And with whom am I in love?’

‘Grace! it is not like yourself, this affectation of ignorance,’ said Friede, struggling to be composed, and speaking English. ‘Would you force me to speak the name of one dear to me. Yes, I do not blush to own it. I will open my heart, though false pride closes yours, and show you that a German maiden can immolate herself on the altar of love and friendship. For, Grace, I love Otto Sturm! I have loved him for years! that is, since I came from school. But I see that you are a nobler woman than I am—more worthy of him than I am. You have from the first recognised his great qualities. I was too *volage*—I was amused to flirt with Wolff von Falkenberg, and I fear that Otto felt himself slighted. Now I reap the bitter fruits of my own worthlessness! He turns from me—he seeks you; naturally, your souls are akin! And I—I must submit—I must rise superior to self, and offer it a burnt-sacrifice to the beloved lover and friend, who in their bliss will sometimes give me a thought.’

Here she broke down, nearly choked with sobs.

‘Friede,’ exclaimed Grace, astonished at the self-abandonment of this outburst, ‘you are a dear, generous thing; but you are talking nonsense! I am not in love with Dr. Sturm, and I am perfectly certain he is not in love with me! I like him beyond everything in the way of a teacher I have ever met, for to talk with him is a valuable lesson; but as to being in love—good heavens!’ she added indignantly, ‘if I was, do you think I could say

right out that I liked him, that I did not want anyone to interrupt our conversations, that he was the most interesting man I had ever met! Why, even that conceited cousin of yours, Falkenberg, would understand such praises of himself to be a sign that I was *not* in love with him. And as to Dr. Sturm, you are so cold and strange, it is no wonder he turns from you! Do not be a goose, Friede; use your sense, and you will see we are such friends that we never could be anything more. To show you I can be frank too, I will say what I never said to mortal before—that once, not so very long ago, I was very fond of some one, and it will be long before I shall care for anyone else. There! I could not prove my love for you more than by confessing so much.'

'And, my liebe liebe Grace!' cried Friede, all tears and blushes, kneeling beside her and clasping her arms round her waist, 'is it then true that Otto is nothing to you save a friend?'

'Nothing whatever!'

'Ah! you were defended by another attachment. But tell me all! My beloved, you are unhappy; pour forth your heart to me!'

'I would much rather not,' returned Grace, kissing her brow; 'it was all mortifying and foolish, and I want to forget as soon as possible. I should be quite glad to fall in love with somebody else, just to change the current of my ideas.'

'But, Grace,' cried Friede, shocked at such a declaration, 'faithfulness is one of woman's noblest qualities.'

‘I daresay it is ; but what is the sense of being faithful to one who does not want your faith, and who makes you miserable—I mean uncomfortable ? There ! *never* remind me of this confession, or we shall quarrel, Friede. Now talk of Dr. Sturm.’

‘Ah, sweetest cousin ! how little I thought that a creature so bright as you are, had this load of grief upon your heart !’

‘But it is *not* such a load, Friede ; I have been ever so much better since I came here, and would much rather you did not pity me. Talk of yourself.’

Whereupon Friede poured forth a history of her acquaintance with Dr. Sturm, from their first meeting to the present time, with minute details of how he looked and what she felt ; of how the divine attraction of mutual sympathy and comprehension had drawn them together ; of the marvel that so great a soul as Otto’s should condescend to the simplicity of hers ; of a thousand and one presentiments and heavenly glimpses, hidden away in her heart ; of the weak vanity which had been flattered by the attentions of Wolff, whom she knew made love to every girl as a matter of course, a mere *politesse*, and had drawn her from that steady devotion which Otto deserved ; of her fears that he did not, could not really love her—a rapidly flowing torrent of talk that Grace at length thought would never end.

‘Speak lower, Friede,’ she said, when the excited girl paused for breath. ‘If your mother hears, she will scold us for sitting up.’

‘No ; she will not mind, as we are not burning the candle. But tell me, sweetest cousin, do you think it possible that Otto loves me? Ah! if he does not, what is to become of me?’

‘It is very hard to say,’ returned the sage counsellor, with an air of reflection. ‘I have seen and known so few people that my opinion is not worth much ; I have only instinct to guide me : but I have always somehow felt that he was fond of you. When we are talking, no matter how deeply interested, if you come into the room he invariably breaks off, and seems for a moment unable to command his attention—only for a moment ; then his face lights up when he speaks to you, till it looks absolutely handsome.’

‘Absolutely handsome!’ repeated Friede, surprised. ‘Why, he is always beautiful.’

‘He is always nice,’ said Grace ; ‘and I do think he is very fond of you.’

‘Ach! du lieber Gott! what hope and joy you give me, dearest Gracechen! How wise and calm you are, and cheerful, though you have suffered! Do, sweetest cousin, relieve your heart by confiding everything to me, as I have done to thee ; it will relieve it indeed.’

‘It will do nothing of the kind,’ returned Grace, rather brusquely ; ‘follies are better forgotten. Nothing would have tempted me to say as much as I did, except to satisfy you ; and if you mention the subject again, I will never let you talk to me of Dr. Sturm.’

‘Is the wound so deep, then?’ said Friede, looking

with tenderest compassion at her cousin, endeavouring to find some traces of heart-searing sorrow on her fair face ; ' I will never touch it again.'

' Very well ; take care you do not ! Now tell me, Friede, if Dr. Sturm is really in love with you, and you with him, what is to be the end of it ? How would Cousin Alvsleben and the dear grandfather and Gertrud like you to marry him ? He is poor, and is too good a son to desert his mother.'

' Gott bewahr ! Oh ! marriage is very far off, if it ever comes—for no one would be content save myself ; but that need not prevent a complete understanding—the deep delight of mutual sympathy and intercourse ! Ach ! it would be too much joy for this life !' As if overpowered with the beatific vision, Friede became silent.

Grace shivered slightly, and closed the window, resuming her seat, and leaning her head against the wooden frame-work.

' Yes,' she said softly ; ' I think it would be very nice to go on like that. It must be an awful trial to see a lover turn into a husband like those one reads of—not a brute, I mean—but troublesome about dinner and fidgety about buttons.'

' Ah,' cried Friede, ' what a charm would there not be in providing for all these little needs, in smoothing the path of one you love !'

' Yes,' returned Grace, shortly but heartily. ' Friede, do not think me heartless, but it is eleven o'clock !'

' No ! is it possible ? Well, I must go to bed. Dearest Grace, I go with a happy heart. I thank

God for so sweet and wise a friend as you are; and—and—on Saturday, when Otto comes, will you mind talking to Wolff, and amusing him? he will not hate Herr Doctor so much if you are gracious.'

'Indeed!' cried Grace, smiling; 'well, I will do my best, but I think he will want your attention, and Gertrud's, and everyone's. 'How is it that a real soldier, long past boyhood, who has been in battle and faced death, can be so miserably conceited?'

'I do not think he is so bad,' returned Friede, who was disposed to take a charitable view of everyone.

'I should be sorry to meet anything worse,' said Grace, beginning to take off her dress; 'but he is very nice and amusing, and helps my German. Do go to bed, like a dear!'

'Ach, meine Liebe! you are too *praktisch*, but you have a noble heart. Good-night, my dearest! sleep well.'

After an effusive embrace, Friede opened the door with extreme caution, and stole away. Grace, closing it carefully behind her, returned to the window, and stood there in the moonlight, brushing her long brown hair—sometimes pausing to gaze out upon the dim masses of the nearer hills, and the silver streak of moonlight across the darkness of the pine-woods, while she thought with much satisfaction that the explanation was over, and Friede happy. 'What a wonderful memory she has!' mused Grace; 'what a multitude of small

details she repeated, Yet could I not recall nearly every hour of August and September last ! but I could not speak of them to anyone—I hate myself for remembering them ! Should I do so if——’ even in thought she would not complete the sentence. ‘ It seems strange her avowing her love so openly, when she is not quite sure of him ; or even if she were. But how hard it is to judge another justly, and Friede is so good and transparent. I am a wretch even to think her strange. I am not simple ; I think too much of myself. But no, whatever I may lose or suffer, I will never let any other man know I care for him until I am sure he is true—if I ever can be sure ! Oh, what a glorious possession, the whole of a good, brave, noble heart. And if I never win it ! well, there are other good things in life, and Cousin Alvsleben has found one for me in this delightful *étage*. I wonder if Friede or Gertrud would come with me to see it to-morrow ;’ and her thoughts wandered pleasantly into a new channel, imagination depicting the minutest circumstance which might, could, or would attend her mother’s departure, journey, and arrival. Nevertheless, before sleep closed her eyes, she had lived over again that last ride with Max—the Max of Dungar, not of London—finally resolving never again to let the vision return to her mind. That it would present itself she felt sure ; but she would say to it, ‘ Pass on ; there is no more room for you !’

The next day was wet, and Wolff von Falkenberg went into the town to prepare for his departure on the following Monday.

He did not return till the evening meal ; and then he rejoiced all hearts by announcing that in a letter received by a brother officer from Ulrich Alvsleben, the young gentleman stated his intention of visiting his home, and would arrive on the following Saturday by an evening train.

A storm of questions, conjectures, and observations ensued.

‘Du lieber Himmel! what a boy it is,’ shrieked Frau Alvsleben, ‘to let me hear this by accident, when we have been expecting him these ten days, and I have been writing to beseech an answer!’

‘He is a careless young animal,’ said the count, in his deep hoarse voice. ‘He should show more respect to his family; but it is just what I should have done myself. He is a regular Costello, that boy.’

‘And to think of his having two letters from me, and two from Friede, unanswered! and I sent him a pattern of blue “*Eis Wolle*” to match, of which I am in great need.’

‘Nor did he notice a lovely cigar-case I enclosed in my last; he is *too* negligent.’

‘He is an ingrate; nevertheless I must urge that he has been away for a week at Homburg, with Hamerstein of the Garde Reiters, and——’

‘At Homburg!’ cried his mother, in dismay; ‘why what madness to go there, and what an expense!’

‘What an unpardonable whim!’ cried Gertrud.

‘But he must have been longer than a week?’ suggested Friede.

‘I think he returns by Berlin,’ replied Wolff.

Chorus of astonishment—'Berlin!'

'A very amusing place to visit,' remarked Falkenberg, raising his eyebrows, and evidently enjoying the general consternation.

'Bah!' said the count. 'If you had known Vienna thirty years ago!'

'Well, at present, one feels as though in a den of thieves there,' returned Falkenberg. 'Yet I grant one can be amused.'

'Ach! in my time your northern towns were mere hives of dull workers, compared to the life and lightness, the airy elegance of the Austrian capital; but everything is changed now—everything tends to utility and economy. I remember when the Prater was indeed a sight—when Vienna was the winter abode of the Hungarian nobility. What fine fellows they were! It always annoyed me to have to serve against them; and I do not see that they are much better off for their half independence.'

'It must be fearfully difficult to manage these mixed nationalities,' said Grace, anxious to draw her uncle on to talk of his experiences.

'The best means to fuse all together is the steady pressure of a just despotism,' observed Wolff von Falkenberg, with the air of one who utters a truism.

'Despotism can never be just!' cried Grace.

'What! have we a little Social Democrat here?' he asked.

'Little! I am not little—I am nearly as tall as you are.'

‘Nearly—not quite, meine Fräulein,’ said Falkenberg, smiling ; after which the conversation passed to political subjects, and into German, too complicated for Grace to follow readily.

The couple of days which intervened before the arrival of Ulrich were busily employed dusting, sweeping, decorating, fastening up drapery, and beating cushions ; everyone seemed pleased, and Count Costello gave Grace a good deal of desultory information respecting the character, disposition, habits, and history of his grandson, who was evidently the old man’s favourite.

On Saturday morning, Frau Alvsleben announced her intention of driving into Zittau that afternoon to transact sundry business, and then await her son’s arrival by a train which arrived at half-past six. The count said he would accompany her, and Falkenberg proposed that the two young ladies should accompany him in a ride to Gabel, as the roan had proved sufficiently tractable to win Friede’s confidence.

‘That will be charming !’ cried Grace, who never could get enough of riding. ‘You will like to come, Friede, will you not ? it will pass away the time until your brother arrives.’

‘Yes, it will be very nice,’ Friede said ; but something in her voice and her change of colour suggested to Grace’s quick perception that she had unwittingly crossed some plan of her friend’s, for, since the outpouring of heart on the subject of Dr. Sturm, Friede had evinced a *fureur* of friendship for her cousin almost overpowering in its effusive-

ness. Grace, however, prudently kept silence, hoping that Friede would express any wish she might have as to their equestrian expedition.

Soon after dinner, with much running to and fro after small, forgotten articles—keys which were left in locks, wools to be changed or matched, gloves to be cleaned, or pinless brooches to be repaired, Frau Alvsleben and the count started for Zittau, and Grace went to her room to put on her habit.

Before she had finished her toilette the door was slowly opened by Friede, who came in, still in her indoor costume, and sat down suddenly by the dressing-table.

‘Why, Friede, you are not ready! and we are to start at three.’

‘Meine liebe, liebe Grace! do you mind going without me? I feel not quite well—averse to ride. In short, I want to stay at home.’

‘Oh!’ returned Grace—a long ‘Oh,’ as it came to her mind that Dr. Sturm was expected that afternoon. ‘No; if you prefer staying at home really, I do not mind at all.’

She would not even allow herself to smile, lest she should seem to see Friede’s transparent *ruse*; but Friede desired no such forbearance. She sprang up and threw her arms round her friend.

‘Oh, thou kindest and best of Gracechens!’ she cried, ‘you understand me! I know I ought not to desert thee, but it is so—so long since I have had a quiet talk with Otto! And Gertrud is busy with Mamsell—she would not, at any rate, heed us. Oh, Grace, dost thou despise me?’

'Despise you?—no, of course not; I am delighted to see you happy. Just hook this last hook for me, and tell me, is my collar straight?'

'Quite—quite right, thou sweetest cousin! But I do not like your toilette—you look like a boy.'

'So I ought for riding—I only wish I was one.'

'Ach, meine Liebe! that is because you are unhappy,' said Friede, tenderly. 'Perhaps,' smiling roguishly, 'perhaps Ulrich may interest and console you. How charming to have you for a sister!'

'Nonsense, Friede!' cried Grace, laughing; 'I do not want consolation. And as to Ulrich, he is a mere boy. Why, he cannot be twenty yet!'

'Not till December. Are you quite ready? Will your mind going down alone? for if I go, Wolff will tease me.'

'Very well; I shall say you have a bad headache.'

'Indeed, I do feel strange and headachy,' said Friede, putting her hand to her brow with an air of suffering.

Grace laughed, and shook her whip at her.

'Ah, little actress! but I hear the horses. *Lebe wohl!*' and gathering up her habit, she went downstairs, and through the hall to the door at the back, where the three horses were waiting, and Falkenberg was tightening the girths of her saddle. She stood a moment, her whip under her arm, drawing on her gloves, till he looked up, and exclaimed:

'Isn't Friede ready yet? She is always late!'

'She is not coming,' returned Grace; 'she has a headache.'

'Ah!' said Falkenberg, just as Grace had said 'Oh!' a few minutes before, looking at her so significantly that Grace blushed for her friend.

'Tant mieux!' cried Falkenberg gaily, in French; 'I shall have you all to myself. And as you and I can go faster and farther than Friede, I shall take you round by a beautiful road.'

'Thank you, that will be delightful,' she returned, frankly; and coming down the steps, put her foot in his hand, and sprang lightly to the saddle. 'You are improving,' she said, looking down at him with a smile, as she gathered up the reins. 'You mount me nearly as well as Randal now.'

'Who is Randal?' with an eager look and tone.

'My brother. Perhaps you will see him one day, if we all come here.'

'Where is Friede?' asked Gertrud, looking out of one of the kitchen windows, which projected a little to the left of the door.

'She is not coming; she has a headache,' cried Falkenberg.

'And are you going without her?' added Gertrud.

'Yes, of course,' he returned. 'Come on, Miss Frere!' and they set forth, Grace bowing to Gertrud as they passed. The tone with which she had asked, 'Are you going *without* her?' rang in her ear, however. It was sharp and full of reproof; and so soon as they were off the pavement, and on the soft cart-track which led across the fields to the high-road, Grace exclaimed:

'Do you think Gertrud was vexed with me for leaving Friede? It was not wrong, was it?'

'Heaven knows what her ideas may be!' rejoined Falkenberg, who was struggling with his horse, and trying to reduce it to quietness and a walking pace, but in vain. 'You would not lose your ride for her pruderies?'

'Pruderies!' repeated Grace, a little struck by the word; 'no, certainly not! What is the matter with your horse, Monsieur de Falkenberg? he seems very fidgety, and his eyes look wicked!'

'He is unusually devilish, which is peculiarly annoying. I wanted to enjoy this delightful ride to the full.'

'Oh, his jumping about will only give a little excitement,' said Grace, laughing.

'Ah! I suppose it would give zest to our excursion if I were to break my neck!'

'You are too good a horseman to permit such an anticipation.'

'That is a compliment from you!' returned Falkenberg, raising his hat, while his horse reared; after which performance he went along a little more tranquilly, though with a dancing sidling movement which disturbed the equanimity of the bay on which Grace was mounted.

'These detestable animals are determined to give us all the trouble possible,' said Falkenberg.

'They are only fresh at starting,' returned Grace; 'they are quieted already.'

'So you left Friede undisputed possession of the all-accomplished Sturm?' said Falkenberg, as soon as he had reduced his steed to obedience.

'Yes; it is as well to give up what you cannot hold.'

‘Ha! I imagine you could hold fast what you wish to keep, Mademoiselle Grace; and, ma foix! you are well-named. I never thought boldness could be graceful in a young lady till I met you.’

‘But, Monsieur de Falkenberg, I am not bold!’ cried Grace, shrinking from the word.

‘Yes, on horseback you are; I imagine riding must be a great pleasure to you.’

‘More delight than I can express, and now more than ever.’

‘Why?’ asked Falkenberg, looking at her.

She coloured quickly with vexation, thinking he had put some interpretation on her words flattering to his self-pride, and was beginning, ‘Because——’ when he interrupted her, smiling as he spoke:

‘No, no! I understand that indignant look! I am not quite so senseless a coxcomb as to suppose riding with your present companion adds any charm to your favourite exercise. You have taught me too many lessons of humility——’

‘Which you are slow to learn!’ interrupted Grace in her turn, giving him a sunny laugh.

They had now left the fields, and turning towards Oybin, followed the high road, which was excessively hard, and possibly objectionable to Falkenberg’s horse, which began to plunge and rear.

‘I will give him his head for a little way, and turn again to meet you,’ called Falkenberg, at length, ‘if you will follow slowly.’

Grace nodded her assent, and Falkenberg quickly disappeared. She followed, holding in her horse,

who struggled for a few minutes to go in pursuit of its companion, but as the sounds of the hoofs died away, settled down into a quiet pace.

‘He is really very nice,’ thought Grace, ‘this Monsieur de Falkenberg, and good-looking too ; I like him, yet I never feel quite safe with him, though I do not know what I fear. I hope I am not growing suspicious and distrustful ! He means to be cousinly, as we are connected ; but—I wonder he is not coming back ! I don’t like that brown horse—I never did.’

She rode for perhaps half a mile lazily, expecting to see Falkenberg coming to meet her, when a sudden turn of the road, which here rose abruptly, brought her close to a little wayside inn they had often passed in their expeditions on foot and horseback, and where her uncle and Falkenberg had sometimes taken a glass of beer. In front of this house was a group of two men and a woman, while a third man held a horse by the bridle—a brown horse, all flecked with foam, and one side torn and bleeding. As she looked, the men and woman between them raised a helpless figure from the ground, which they slowly carried into the house. For a moment Grace felt sick and giddy ; the next, without knowing how, she was standing by the sofa or couch on which the figure had been laid.

Never could she forget the agony of not being able to speak or understand fully in such an emergency ! With an effort she mustered enough German to ask—‘Is he dead ?’

'I hope not—God forbid!' said those standing round.

Falkenberg was an awful sight: one side of his head and face covered with blood, the other ghastly pale; his smart riding-dress torn and soiled. Almost fearing to touch him Grace took his hand—it was cold and clammy. As she did so, he opened his eyes and set his teeth for an instant as if in great pain. Meeting the look of distress and compassion bent upon him, he said rapidly in German:

'The brute fell with me—on me. My leg is broken. Get off my boot! quick—cut it to pieces!'

'Oh, you are suffering fearfully!'

'Yes; but I fear for my leg—and so far from the doctor.'

'Where is he to be found? I will go for him!' cried Grace to the bystanders. 'Tell me, where does the doctor live?'

'The military doctor lives in the Berg Strasse,' replied the *Wirth* (host).


'Not alone! you cannot go alone!' murmured Falkenberg.

'Why not? I know the road, and I can do nothing else,' said Grace, turning away quickly to leave the room.

Have a care, liebe Grace,' said Falkenberg, brokenly; 'do not go too quickly over the Zittau pavement.'



CHAPTER VII.

RACE was soon again in the saddle, and when clear of the hill, quickened her pace to a gallop, to the bewilderment of the drivers of such vehicles as she encountered. Keenly and intensely alive to everything, she rode with daring and judgment.

In an incredibly short time she was clattering over the little bridge at the entrance of the town; after a short tussle with her steed, which tried to turn in the direction of his stables, she urged him along the park—past women laden with baskets, past men in uniform, past schoolboys and workmen, all of whom turned and looked at her open-mouthed. A lady alone! and riding at headlong speed! She had no very distinct idea where Berg Strasse was; but catching sight of a tolerably fresh pair of horses in a small open-carriage, (*Droschky*), she managed to ask her way.

‘Straight on to the top of the park, then to the left,’ replied the astonished coachman.

‘Follow me, quickly,’ she added ; ‘ I shall want you.’

Pressing on again and turning to the left, she drew up at a house from which two officers were coming out, rightly imagining it was the surgeon’s residence. Both gentlemen stopped, startled by the apparition; and the elder answered her question with a polite—‘ Yes, Herr Dr. Niedner is within.’

‘ Then will you find some one to hold my horse ?’ said Grace, slipping quickly to the ground. ‘ Does Dr. Niedner speak French ?’

‘ Oui, mademoiselle,’ was the reply, as a proof of the speaker’s acquaintance with the language.

Whereupon Grace volubly uttered a request that the gentlemen would detain a carriage which was coming after, and which she had endeavoured to engage, adding that ‘ a gentleman has had a bad fall,’ without stopping to remember that these were probably Falkenberg’s brother-officers. The one who had not spoken had meantime turned back and rang for admittance at the entrance of the parterre, so Grace was at once ushered into a dingy little den furnished with red rep-covered oak chairs and sofa, smelling vehemently of smoke, and having its centre-table decorated with three huge empty beer-glasses. A very short, very stout, very fresh-looking man in uniform, with a bald head, spectacles and surprised eyes, came forward, gazing mutely at the erect form instinct with eagerness—the face and eyes all glowing with haste and excitement, which confronted him.

‘ Herr von Falkenberg’s horse fell with him

about half an hour ago,' she said, instinctively condensing her information; 'his left leg is broken, and he lies at the Wittigschenke on the Oybin road. How soon can you be with him?'

'Gott in Himmel!' cried the doctor; then, mastering his surprise, added in French, 'Less than half an hour, if I had but a carriage and two good horses.'

'I hope one is at the door now,' cried Grace, looking through the window. 'Yes, it waits! hasten, my dear sir! He was in horrible pain when I left him.'

'I shall be ready in five minutes,' returned the doctor, unlocking a cupboard, and taking out sundry articles of surgical aspect.

'Can I carry back any message? I shall be there before you.'

The little doctor gave her a quick look over his spectacles.

'They must have a board or something to carry him on, and six or eight men. Then, mademoiselle (if it be not too much), ride on to Dalbersdorf—he must go to Dalbersdorf—and tell them to prepare a room on the parterre for him—not to go upstairs.'

'Good,' said Grace. 'Have you any eau de Cologne? I can put it in the pocket of my saddle.'

'Right! well thought of!' exclaimed the doctor, rushing from the room; he quickly returned with a bottle half full, which Grace took, and with a reiterated injunction to come quickly, went out to

look for her horse. One of the officers was holding the animal, and the other lingered on the steps.

‘Will you be so good,’ said Grace to him, ‘as to promise the driver for me double money if he brings the doctor within half an hour to the Wittigschenke?’

‘Certainly, mademoiselle,’ and he proceeded to speak with an air of great authority to the coachman; while Grace looked to her girths, a movement which the elder officer understood and seconded.

Then, grasping the pommel, she raised her foot, with an expressive look; the officer instinctively put his hand under it, and she was once more in the saddle. Leaning forward a moment, she said, with sweet earnestness :

‘Thank you, thank you very much!’ and then away she went at a sharp trot.

‘Potz Tausend! what can the matter be?’ cried the younger man, looking after her. ‘What a strange maiden! she is English!’

‘Of course. But she has wonderful eyes! She must be the old general’s English niece; and she rides Falkenberg’s bay.’

‘And Falkenberg lies with his leg broken,’ said the doctor, coming out.

‘Falkenberg has ever luck,’ cried the taller of the two officers. ‘Imagine what devotion, for a young lady to ride all this way alone to seek a doctor!’

‘It would take a great deal of devotion to atone for a broken leg, so I cannot see the luck,’ returned the doctor, as he stepped into the carriage; and

the coachman, at a nod from the elder officer, drove off rapidly.

When Grace reached the Gasthaus, she was beginning to feel the effect of her fright, and was trembling all over, to her own great disgust. She found Falkenberg in great pain, but perfectly cool and collected. The good woman of the house had applied ice to the broken limb, and bathed his face; he looked therefore much less ghastly.

'Courage!' said Grace, sitting down beside him, and taking his hand with sisterly kindness; 'the doctor will be here in a few minutes, and I trust all will go well.'

She poured some eau de Cologne on her handkerchief as she spoke, and laid it on his brow.

'Thank God!' he muttered; 'and thank *you!* I believe your promptness has saved my career—a lame man could not serve; but you must be exhausted!' pressing her hand feebly. 'You tremble!'

'Of course I was startled,' returned Grace, trying to speak in a matter-of-fact tone; 'I thought you were killed. But the doctor desired me to go on to Dalbersdorf to tell them what to do. I will put my handkerchief and the eau de Cologne beside you.'

'Must you go? your touch is so soothing!'

'I must indeed. I dare not disobey orders.'

After a few more words of comfort, she managed to express the doctor's directions to the host, and proceeded towards home as fast as her blown horse would permit. A few hundred yards from the

Gasthaus she met the carriage, and saw that, besides the doctor, a man in uniform sat with his back to the horses. As the doctor only bowed, Grace still pressed on.

Friede and Dr. Sturm were sitting in the arbour when Grace drew up suddenly beside it.

Both came forth startled at seeing her alone ; her horse covered with foam ; herself pale, with a strained, distressed look in her large eyes.

‘What—what has happened?’ cried Friede, as Grace took Dr. Sturm’s hands, and sprang to the ground.

‘Poor Wolff has had a bad accident ; his horse has fallen on him and broken his leg. He——’

‘Gott in Himmel!’ cried Sturm ; ‘he must have the surgeon instantly. I will go for him,’ and was about to rush away.

‘Stop, stop!’ cried Grace ; ‘he is already with him.’

A rapid explanation ensued ; then Gertrud appeared, and amid a torrent of exclamations, tears, and indeed outcries, for Mamsell, for Marie, for Fritz, the whole party hastened to carry down bed, bedding, and various pieces of furniture to a room near the Inspector’s bureau, where the sufferer would be away from the noise of the living-rooms, and in Mamsell’s own particular domain.

Having largely assisted in these arrangements, Grace at last escaped to change her dress, to rest and think.

By-and-by she heard a carriage drive up—she supposed the doctor ; and later, she saw a pro-

cession come across the fields which were visible from her window—four men carried a recumbent figure, and three others, one a soldier, walked beside them.

A sound of much running about and calling from below reached Grace's ears; but she kept quiet in her chamber, reflecting that there were hands enough without her, and that her ignorance of the language and the requirements of such an emergency would render her help of little value.

Gradually her excitement calmed down. She was very pleased with Falkenberg. His quiet endurance of pain—his natural and unexaggerated gratitude for her small service—his present helplessness, deepened the interest with which she had always regarded him. In the gathering twilight she sat and mused, vaguely speculating on the possibility of Falkenberg having more heart, more sensibility than he deigned to show. Then she told herself it was folly to waste her thoughts upon him, when she had nearer and better subjects of reflection. On Monday at furthest she would have her mother's reply, and then to see and agree for the abode which such a happy accident offered to her hand! So she would begin a new life, and those dear to her should bloom in a new atmosphere. Who could tell if—

'Grace!' cried Friede, entering unperceived, 'are you sitting here in the dark? The doctor is having a slice of bread and butter and a glass of wine. He would like to see the bold horsewoman

before he goes. How is it, dearest, that you can sit here—ach Gott! with a book in your hand, when he for whom you have shown so much devotion lies beneath?’

‘Devotion!’ repeated Grace. ‘It was common humanity! I kept in my room because I knew I should be in the way.’

‘You English maidens are incomprehensible! but you will come with me?’

‘Yes, certainly.’

The doctor had departed, and night closed in, when Frau Alvsleben, the count, and the expected guest arrived.

The girls, Dr. Sturm and the Inspector were all together in the *salle à manger*; Gertrud having just come in, looking pale and weary.

‘Ach, du lieber Gott!’ cried Frau Alvsleben, as she rushed into the room almost in a run; ‘what misfortune is this?’

‘Then you know?’ cried everyone.

‘Ja, gewiss! we met the doctor half-way from the town.’

‘Donner und Blitzen!’ exclaimed Count Costello, ‘here is a catastrophe!’

In the excitement he forgot to remove his hat. After him came a tall, slender young man in a blue and silver hussar uniform, with very fair—almost flaxen—hair, dark eyes, and a strong resemblance to the count.

‘But how goes it with the dear Falkenberg? I trust his leg will be all right, or——’ catching sight of

Grace, he interrupted himself. 'Pray present me to our new cousin.'

'No longer new,' said Friede, kindly putting her arm round her—'now quite one of ourselves.'

'Most happy to consider you so, dear lady,' said the young hussar, taking her hand and kissing it with a chivalrous air.

He spoke English with a good accent, and looked straight at her with a pleasant smile, which reminded her of Randal, and her heart warmed to him at once; but she thought, 'He looks quite a boy—he cannot be twenty!'

'I am glad to know you,' returned Grace, simply; and then everyone began to talk at once. Frau Alvsleben, the count, and Ulrich asking a torrent of questions, and all the rest giving details considerably varied by the imagination of the speaker. At last it occurred to Count Costello that as Grace had been present at the accident, she could give the best account of it. There was therefore a few moments' silence while she described, as shortly as she could, the whole occurrence.

'Bravo!' said the count, as she ceased to speak. 'There was the Costello spirit and pluck. Kiss me, my darling!'

'But where—where was Friede all this time?' asked Frau Alvsleben, her usually restless eyes growing still more eager, and a displeased expression darkening her face.

'Friede,' repeated Grace; 'oh, Friede did not come—she had a headache. Herr von Falkenberg and I went together.'

‘And then you made this wild ride for the doctor?’ cried Frau Alvsleben, in a crescendo tone. ‘Ach Gott! what a tale for the Zittau wives and daughters!’

‘Why, Cousin Alvsleben,’ exclaimed Grace, opening her eyes, ‘would you have had me stand still and see the poor fellow suffer?’

‘Gott bewahr!’ said Ulrich, ‘your promptness has probably saved his leg.’

‘No, no,’ returned his mother; ‘I would not have her stand still; but you know what gossips are, and——’

‘They may gossip for me!’ cried Grace, with the utmost scorn. ‘What could anyone say of a mere act of humanity?’

‘Then, see you,’ replied Frau Alvsleben, a little severely, ‘had you stayed at home with Friede, Wolff would not have gone out to ride, and then all this would have been spared.’

Grace felt for an instant deeply indignant at this attempt to throw the blame upon her.

‘Was it wrong to go out alone with Herr Baron Falkenberg?’ in an ominously quiet voice.

‘In Germany it is scarce maidenly to do such things.’

Grace’s quick temper was roused.

‘What!’ she exclaimed, an expression of scorn curling her lip; ‘are German gentlemen then wild beasts, who will devour you if one dares to be alone with them?’

‘My child, you are talking nonsense!’ returned Frau Alvsleben, more amused than angered by this

outburst, while the count smiled, but shook his head. Gertrud looked volumes of disapprobation, and Ulrich laughed outright. Grace felt she had spoken too hastily, and kept silence, while Frau Alvsleben went on: 'And now I must see Wolff, poor dear boy! It is indeed unlucky for him!'

'No, dear mother,' cried Gertrud, 'Herr Doctor says he must not be disturbed, or even spoken to, lest he grow feverish. All is arranged. Mamsell is with him now, and I will take part of the night-watch. The Lazareth Guard returns at six to-morrow morning, and all will go well if we can but keep him free from fever. Alas, it is a bad splintered break!'

The next two or three days were quite occupied by the invalid, and the hundred minutix which appertain to a sick-room. Friede, Gertrud, Frau Alvsleben and Mamsell had but one central idea—how best to minister to the comfort of their precious charge, who was at first very feverish.

The doctor came every day, generally about the time of the second breakfast. He took an evident interest in Grace, always insisting on her speaking German with him. Doctors, more than any other men, know the value of that incomparable quality, presence of mind, an instant's loss of which may sometimes mar a life.

The count and Ulrich fell to Grace's care, and she did her best for them—enjoying long expositions of the old soldier's views on matters political, social, and military, and perhaps equally enjoying her battles with Ulrich, whose greatest amusement

was to attack everything English, and rouse his cousin to indignant animation ; a process which soon made them fast friends, though Ulrich was nettled in his turn by being treated and talked to as a mere boy.

Meantime the anxiously-expected letters from home arrived. Mrs. Frere's was full of contradictions. The chance of finding such an abode as that described by Grace was distinctly providential, yet she was by no means to commit herself to take it till Mrs. Frere could be sure of funds wherewith to travel, and the dreaded question of leaving before the end of the quarter was settled with Miss Timbs. Then she feared Randal would feel being left behind cruelly. Did not Grace think that if he came abroad and studied German for some months it would be a great advantage to him ? indeed, he might write a work on Germany—though it would perhaps be unwise to quit his present employment. Still, Grace must remember that he could not possibly live in London on such a miserable pittance as twenty shillings a week ; they must make him a fair allowance, etc., etc. Finally, ' I shall write without fail to your uncle this evening, after seeing our good friend, Mr. Byrne. I am sorry to say that Max has gone to the Pyrenees, Randal hears, for the autumn ; for I am sure he would be our advocate with his father.'

Somewhat chilled by the uncertainties of this missive, Grace opened another, directed in Jimmy Byrne's well-known hand. After duly acknowledging hers, he went on : ' I am truly rejoiced, my dear

young lady, that you have at last found a place suited to your respected mamma, for—not to make you uneasy, but to speak truth—she is just wasting away for want of you, and Miss Mab would be the better for a change and a trifle of teaching. You take the house, Miss Grace; Mrs. Frere and me will make it all right about cash. I will try and get them off next week; and—mark my words!—if Mr. Randal gets over your dear mamma to take him with her, it will be the worst day's work she ever did. He's an elegant young man, and ought to have a fortune; but as he has *not*, he must try and make one. Whereas, it's not by rolling about in foreign parts that's to be done. You set your face against his leaving London. I am in great hopes I shall be able to get a room for him where I lodge. It isn't what you might call a fashionable situation, but it is high and airy, in one of the best parts of Camden Town; and I need not say what a pleasure and comfort it would be to me to have one of the family with me, to say nothing of Mr. Randal's being the height of good company; besides, we might share and share alike, and that would be a saving to both!

'Dear, dear Jimmy!' murmured Grace, when she came to this passage, 'there would be small saving to you.'

'So,' continued the letter, 'you take the place; but be sure you have a clear agreement on paper, and don't be taken in about extras—they are the devil!—you'll excuse the word, for I can't abide scratching out.'

Grace immediately decided to act on Jimmy's advice, and so informed Frau Alvsleben that she would agree for Herr Hauptmann Müller's *étage*.

'I am well pleased to hear it, my dear. The poor lady has been asking anxiously what you intended to do. Let us go in to Zittau to-morrow morning, when Herr Doctor returns, and you shall see the rooms, and settle everything.'

'Oh, thank you, Cousin Alvsleben! I want so much to have the dear mother and Mab established before the cold sets in.'

'Yes, it would be well. We will go without fail to-morrow, and then we will ascertain how your heavy luggage can be forwarded; and perhaps your good mother would bring me one or two things from London which I still want,' etc., etc.

It was with a sense of hope and renewed pleasure in life that Grace examined the apartment which was to be her home, perhaps for years. Herr Hauptmann Müller had established himself within a few doors of Dr. Niedner, in one of the older houses which yet remained in the neighbourhood of the park. It overlooked the road, which led down a gentle hill, under beech and linden trees, and had a side view of the round tower, now the park-keeper's residence, which had been so plentifully peppered with Frederic the Great's bullets.

The house was but three stories high—the lower half covered with a trellised vine, now beginning to be skeleton-like and bare—with a steep red roof, mellowed by age, and pierced by many windows. The first *étage* consisted of a moderately large *salon*,

with three windows, the centre opening on a balcony, from which the hills were visible to the left; next it a small dining-room, and two or three bed-rooms; at the back, a kitchen, a servant's room, and several closets, light and dark, offering any amount of stowage-room for china, glass, boxes, and lumber of all descriptions. The furniture was very scanty in all the rooms except the *salon*; but it was of good quality and form. Grace examined it with delight, and planned in her own mind how she would arrange everything; which should be mother's, and which her own room, while a storm of discussion, perfectly amicable, though very loud, raged between Frau Alvsleben and Frau Hauptmann's mother. The lady of the house herself was a quiet, careworn little woman, evidently depressed by her husband's state of health. The carpets (very few and far between), the curtains, the kitchen utensils, the question of incidental repairs, the share of keeping the strip of garden in order, the amount of bed-covering—each and all were the source of much volubility, in which Grace took no part, and, indeed, but very partially understood. At last her attention was attracted by the words 'clavier' and 'so lately bought,' gently uttered by Frau Müller; and she found that Cousin Alvsleben was stoutly maintaining that the piano was part of the ordinary furniture of an *étage*, while the owner simply contended that it ought to be hired extra.

'Pray allow it to be so,' whispered Grace to Frau Alvsleben. 'We always expected to hire a piano.'

‘Well, if you wish to bestow your money on strangers,’ she returned rapidly in French, ‘why, do so.’

She was absolutely cross at having the bargain wrenched out of her grasp, and that from no unfriendly feeling to the timid young wife, but from an innate principle of extracting the last farthing’s-worth of value from whatever outlay she agreed to. A friendly explanation followed, and Frau Müller seemed quite relieved by the success of her small demand, and disposed to be most accommodating in return, especially as Grace readily agreed to leave her in possession of a large closet, in which to store the many articles she wished to leave behind.

‘I imagine it must be cold here in winter,’ said Frau Alvsleben, stepping out on the balcony.

‘That I do not know,’ returned Frau Müller; ‘we have scarce been here four months. It is very pleasant in summer.’

‘The walls are thick, and double windows make it comfortable,’ added the mother.

After a little more talk, it was agreed that Grace was to have possession of the *étage* in ten days; and well pleased with each other, the high contracting parties separated, Frau Alvsleben and Grace walking away to make inquiries respecting the conveyance of the heavy luggage, which the count recommended should be sent by Hamburg.

‘How much obliged to you I am, dear cousin,’ cried Grace, ‘for all the help you have given me! Think of getting how many rooms?—six—seven

—and furnished, for barely twenty shillings a week! It is almost incredible!

‘Yes, it is not dear; nevertheless it is a great chance for the Müllers. See! you pay their rent, and I dare say six or seven hundred thalers more; and you keep their rooms aired, and will wear their furniture very little. English people are careful, and what is injured you will pay for. Oh, they ought to be obliged to me too. But that “clavier,” my child; you spoiled my plan! in two minutes more, the little woman would have yielded.’

‘I am quite pleased she should have some advantage,’ said Grace, smiling, ‘and so will my mother be also.’

To this Frau Alvsleben made no reply, beyond an inarticulate grunt; and they continued their progress, stopped every five or ten minutes by some acquaintance, to ask after Herr Baron, to be introduced to Grace, to utter a dozen questions in a breath as to the particulars of the accident, as to the wonderful ride of the Fräulein, all alone, for help. ‘Ach Gott!’ it was ‘wunderschön’ and ‘wunderbar,’ not to say ‘shrecklich’ and ‘unerhört.’ Then all the men, especially those in uniform, stared at her so undisguisedly that Grace felt rather uncomfortable.

‘Yes!’ said Frau Alvsleben, in reply to some wish expressed by Grace that people would not make such a fuss about a trifle, ‘it was no doubt necessary that you should have fetched the doctor, but it is unfortunate when a young lady becomes notorious. It is all the result of the first error: you

should never have gone out with Wolff alone—that is the worst part of the affair.’

‘Really, Cousin Alvsleben, I have scarcely patience to hear you!’ cried Grace, with her usual impetuosity. ‘Would it be wrong to go out with Ulrich alone?’

‘It would be better not,’ said Frau Alvsleben sententiously, whereupon Grace burst into such hearty laughter that her severe kinswoman could not resist the contagion, and laughed too.

Then Dr. Sturm overtook them, and accompanied them to the house of the *Burgomeister*, a wealthy fabricant, who most kindly and fully gave all the required information. An hour’s hurried shopping, and their time was expended, as Frau Alvsleben wished to be at home for dinner.



CHAPTER VIII.

‘**T** SHALL meet you at Cologne,’ wrote Grace, at the end of a long letter full of minute directions, which occupied the whole of the restful period between dinner and coffee, and in which she detailed that morning’s successful agreement.

‘Till Cologne, you can make your way with French, and then, dearest mother, I shall once more be near to help you.’

She finished the epistle with a few more loving words.

‘I suppose Cousin Alvsleben will be shocked at the idea of my travelling alone,’ thought Grace, as she closed her envelope, ‘but I cannot help it; it is impossible my mother can come all that way without me.’

She put up her writing things, and changed her dress for a black merino, open at the throat, with foamy white tulle frillings; tying a jet cross (one of Lady Elton’s many small gifts) round her neck,

with a sigh at the thought of the giver, she took her letter and went downstairs.

The family were assembled, and taking their afternoon coffee. Ulrich sprang up to bring her a chair.

‘You are going into Zittau?’ she asked.

‘Yes; I dine at the Casino.’

‘Then will you post this letter for me? Take great care of it!’

‘Certainly!’ taking the letter. ‘I hope you entreat the good mother to come soon! But you had much better come to Dresden; it is gay, with much dancing, and you will have *me* there!’

‘That would be an enormous advantage! But I think Zittau will be best for us.’

‘Ach! you will only have Dr. Sturm and Wolff von Falkenberg there, and that is nothing!’

‘Oh, Grace!’ cried Friede, catching the name; ‘Wolff asks if you are never coming to see him. The doctor would not allow him to see you at first. He said it would be too exciting.’

‘That I believe!’ whispered Ulrich, mischievously, and Grace was provoked to feel her cheeks grow hot.

‘Will you come, then?’ continued Friede.

‘Yes, of course, if he wishes it,’ said Grace, readily; and when she had finished her coffee, Friede rose, observing:

‘Let us go now; it is the dull time of the day for him. He gets tired reading, and the light fades;’ she led the way across the hall, and down a narrow panelled passage to the large comfortable room

that had been given to Falkenberg. Grace was a little startled to see a kind of wooden frame, rather suggestive of a gallows, consisting of two uprights and a bar extending the length of the bed, at some height above the patient, from which a sort of cradle for the wounded limb was suspended, and a cord by which he could assist himself to shift his position.

Falkenberg himself looked pale and grim enough, with five days' growth of light brown beard and moustache. A large blue and white Austrian blanket was thrown over him, and the effect of the whole was rather picturesque, as the room was furnished with sundry quaintly-shaped, highly-polished, brass-handled, walnut-wood bureaus and commodes.

Falkenberg's soldier-servant was taking away the cup from which his master had been drinking.

'Gracechen comes to see you, Wolff,' said Friede, placing a chair for her cousin.

'Why did you not come before?' said he, taking her hand and looking up at her with a soft expression in his usually hard, bold eyes—a wistful, half-reproachful look.

'You did not want any more nurses,' returned Grace, drawing her hand gently from his, and sitting down; 'I should have been in the way.'

'In the way!' repeated Falkenberg, dreamily; 'that could not be. I have burned to say how deeply I feel my obligation to you! I have lived over *that* day a dozen times, and thought of your lonely ride as I lay here.'

‘Pray do not say any more about it! too much has been said already.’

‘Well, I may *think*—that you cannot forbid. Friede!’

‘Friede is not there.’

‘Then hear me!’ said Falkenberg quickly, and in a low voice: ‘I shall soon be myself again, and hard and careless as ever; but remember that to me thou wilt always be different from other women. And however I may speak or act, there is an inner cell of my heart or mind sacred to thee.’

He held out his hand for hers; she gave it, and he kissed it gently. Something unusually earnest, and quite unlike himself, in his voice and manner moved Grace more than she would have cared to acknowledge. Falkenberg had spoken in German, and used the expressive *Du*, which has so much tenderness on German lips.

‘I have not deserved this from you,’ she said, a little embarrassed, and leaving her hand a moment in his; it would be harsh to take it away too suddenly from a helpless invalid. ‘You could say no more had I saved your life!’

Falkenberg again kissed her hand, and let her draw it away.

‘I shall feel *what* I feel, in spite of your logic,’ he said, with more of his natural self-assertion.

‘And how goes it this evening?’ said the count, coming in at the right moment, Grace thought, as it was somewhat difficult to make conversation when Falkenberg’s eyes were fixed upon her with that curious, questioning, wistful expression.

‘Oh, I am a giant refreshed!’ returned Falkenberg, in his old tone. ‘The visit of Mees Frere is a reviving draught — a tonic without bitterness.’

‘Herr von Falkenberg looks better than I hoped to see him,’ said Grace, giving her seat to her uncle, and taking one a little further off, at which move Falkenberg frowned.

‘He will be quite well, and in the saddle, in five weeks at furthest,’ said the count, cheerfully. ‘I remember at Novara, my horse was shot, and fell on my leg; it was broken—a cleaner break than Falkenberg’s, certainly—but I was able to mount in four weeks. And I had not three charming young ladies, and two amiable old ones, to nurse me.’

‘But I have only had two young ladies,’ cried Falkenberg; ‘your *Fräulein Nichte* has never come near me till this evening.’

Grace let this pass without remark, and Count Costello proceeded to describe very minutely the treatment he had received, and how rugged his surroundings had been, from which he wandered into reminiscences of the war under Radetzky, and abused the Italians with the prejudice of an old Austrian trooper.

Grace listened impatiently, feeling too conscious of her own ignorance to venture on argument; but occasionally asking questions which drove the count into corners, and drew smiles from Falkenberg.

‘It was an infamous shame of the French to

force the Pope back upon the people of Rome!' she exclaimed at length.

'Bah!' cried the count; 'the dogs did not know what they wanted. How could ignorant boors guide themselves, or resist regular troops?'

'Troops or no troops, the day of emancipation was only postponed,' returned Grace. 'I remember reading about Garibaldi's descent upon Sicily, in some one's memoirs, to grandpapa, and longing to be a man that I might have fought with him.'

'Mademoiselle is evidently a sentimental politician,' said Falkenberg, languidly.

'I suppose so. Indeed, I do not see how a woman can be much more; we can never correct our dreams by action.'

'You are a little rebel,' said Count Costello, good-humouredly. 'But for heaven's sake don't parade a taste for politics! It is not charming in a young lady.'

'No, I shall not parade it; but I must always feel it. Lady Elton used to say politics would be the religion of the future.'

'Bah!' said the count again. 'She is a *bas bleu*.'

'She is delightful!' cried Grace, with such emphatic decision that Falkenberg laughed outright, and then asked when madame her mother was coming.

Whereupon Grace, brimful of the subject, launched into a glowing description of Herr Hauptmann Müller's residence; of her anticipated delight in arranging it for her mother's reception, and of her plan of meeting the travellers at Cologne.

‘And you must help me in that scheme, dear uncle,’ she said, laying her hand on his arm caressingly; ‘for Cousin Alvsleben has such strange ideas, she would not like me to travel by myself. Why, she was vexed because I went out alone with Herr von Falkenberg!’

The words were out before she could stop herself, and the next moment she would have given anything to recall them.

Falkenberg did not speak, and the count said indulgently:

‘Was she? Well, it seems over-strict, but not according to German ideas; and you know, dear child, that when in Rome, etc., etc.’

‘It is utterly stupid,’ cried Grace; ‘but there is no use in breaking one’s head against the prison-bars within which your neighbours inclose themselves!’

‘That’s a sensible girl!’ returned the count.

‘Ach! Bitte, mein Herr!’ said Mamsell, who had entered unperceived with the lamp, in her felt slippers; ‘it is long enough! Herr Baron must not have too much company. See! he is flushed; he must repose himself before the evening meal, and to-morrow he shall see the Fräulein again;’ as if she were soothing a sick child.

‘You will come again, will you not?’ said Falkenberg, quickly. ‘Come and read aloud some German book. It will improve you, and do me great good. It wearies me holding a book for a length of time.’

‘Very well,’ returned Grace, ‘I will come when

you send for me.' She nodded and smiled, but did not give him her hand again.

'Schlafen Sie Wohl, Falkenberg! You'll have pleasant dreams,' said the count, smiling, as he pressed his hand.

'That doubt I,' he murmured, as the old man left the room; and Mamsell, busying herself setting forth the invalid's table in readiness for supper, talked away volubly:

'The Englische Fräulein was indeed love-worthy—so free and kindly and clever, too! Gott in Himmel! she already could make *Apfel Strudel* and *Rühreir* as well as Fräulein Gertrud herself. And to hear her try to speak German! it is too charming! If she but had a German up-bringing just to correct that slight boldness, she would be without fault—a right noble Fräulein.'

'It is the better for me she is bold,' replied Falkenberg.

'Ja gewiss! but for a wife, no one would like it.'

'Perhaps so; I should have no objection, only I do not want a wife—not for these ten years to come.'

'Don't say that, Herr Baron,' returned Mamsell, coming to the bedside, and standing solid and square in her brown stuff dress and white *Schurzen* (apron), with her broad strong knuckles resting on her hips. 'It's time you thought of choosing a *Frau Baronin*, and I am sure you need not go beyond Dalbersdorf. Where would you find a more love-worthy, everything-to-do-experienced maiden than Fräulein Gertrud—so regular and orderly?'

‘Certainly,’ said Falkenberg, lazily amused with her talk, ‘But Friede is fairer, and—more graceful.’

‘Ach, bewahre!’ cried Mamsell. ‘What matters grace and beauty for the house? beauty will not make the eating better, and grace won’t save the Groschen! Not but that Fräulein Gertrud is pretty enough, with her golden locks and blue eyes. What more would you have, when a maiden has thirty thousand thalers for her dowry? The kleine Friede is very young—she can wait; and perhaps the gnädig Grossvater will give her a dowry too.’

‘Gertrud has not thirty thousand thalers, meine liebe Mamsell.’

‘Ja gewiss! I know it! The gnädige Frau has no secrets from me. Ach! the liebe Gertrud will be a double treasure to the man who gets her.’

‘That I well believe,’ said Falkenberg, with polite acquiescence. ‘Pray give me a glass of water, my good friend.’

‘Here, Herr Baron. Ach, Gott! your hand burns, and—let me feel your pulse. No! then I shall mix a *browse Pulver*—it will calm your—’

‘No, Mamsell, I will not take it. Set the lamp behind me, and I will try to sleep till supper.’

Grace made a bold stand in the matter of meeting her mother at Cologne, but everyone was against her; so being blessed with a little common-sense, she gave up. Uncle Costello suggested going himself to meet his niece, but this was negatived peremptorily by Frau Alvsleben, from whose decision there was no appeal. Her influence over the

old man was very great ; and though well disposed herself towards her new-found relatives, she was not a little jealous of her father's affection for them.

However, Dr. Sturm brought a solution of the difficulty a few days before the expected arrival of Mrs. Frere and Mab.

Frau Müller's mother, who was to take charge of her two little grandchildren until their parents found a southern abode, lived at Bonn, and would therefore travel thither by Cologne.

Grace might accompany her, and so meet the inexperienced travellers more than half-way. There was yet time to write to England and arrange the route, and Grace was in ecstasies.

All went well, her mother wrote. Uncle Frere had behaved most handsomely ; he had not only sent a hundred pounds almost by return of post in reply to her request for aid, but inclosed it in a friendly letter, setting the seal of his august approbation on their scheme of life in Germany, and wishing them all success. ('He is delighted to get rid of us,' thought Grace.) Miss Timbs had been slightly extortionate, but that was no matter, as they had the money to pay her ; and Jimmy had assisted to cord up and despatch their heavy boxes. Jimmy had found a nice airy, tolerably-furnished bedroom for Randal in the house with himself, which in some degree mitigated the agony of parting with that dear boy, who was far from strong, and even now, at the beginning of winter, had taken cold, and had a bad cough. Jimmy, however, had

solemnly promised to telegraph at once should any serious symptoms display themselves.

It was with the purest and most unselfish joy that Grace recognised the dear well-known faces as the train from Rotterdam stopped at the platform. Home, and childhood, and tenderness, and the security of having her own, all seemed suddenly restored to her, as she felt the clasp of her mother's arms, and heard her exclamations of delight, broken by sobs.

'It has been so dreadful without you, darling! I do not think I ever *was* so miserable.'

'Why, Grace, you are looking quite fat!' from Mab
'Do you know I was not a bit sick in the steamer, and I helped mother to dress this morning.'

'Dear, dear Mab! how pale you are! You will soon get back the roses in your cheeks when you are in Zittau, and you will be quite delighted with Dalbersdorf.'

'I am *so* hungry, Grace!'

'And I have not yet recovered the parting with Randal. Poor boy! he kept up wonderfully well, although he felt it bitterly. I sometimes doubt if we ought to have left him alone in London.'

'Well, you know he has Jimmy Byrne to keep him company; and now you must come and have some luncheon or dinner; you must be so hungry! Our train does not start for four hours, so we can rest and look at the cathedral.'

It was a new triumph to display her command of German; and Grace found that, being on her own resources, she knew more than she thought,

while Mrs. Frere's wonder and admiration at her daughter's acquirements were great and ever increasing. The simple, tender woman was looking pale and anxious: evidently the separation from Grace, the awfulness of a journey so far alone, had been almost too much for her. It was touching to see the look of perfect content with which her eyes rested on her eldest daughter. Their positions seemed reversed—Grace's was the part of protectress, while her mother relied on her with undoubting faith.

But despite the happiness of reunion, the little party were tired out before they reached Zittau on the evening of the third day of their journey; and Grace felt dizzy from the double night journey. She greeted almost with a cry of joy the welcome sight of Count Costello, who was awaiting their arrival, and opened the carriage-door.

'Welcome, my dear niece!' he exclaimed; 'welcome, my little Mab! Ah, Grace, my darlin'!—come along. Here, give me the ticket for your luggage, and go away to the carriage; it waits outside.'

He assisted to collect the wraps and small packages; he lifted out and affectionately kissed the weary Mab. And then they followed the polite porter to where the broad-faced, grinning Fritz stood in the lamp-light, ready to help them into the comfortable, capacious landau. Oh! the rest and delight of being able to leave the worry of luggage, porters, and tickets to another—to feel one was coming among friends!

‘This is really a very nice carriage, Grace! How kind of my uncle to come and meet us!’

‘Yes, they are all very kind; and you will find Friede at our house. She promised she would have everything quite ready for us; she is such a dear girl!’

Here the count came up, and gave the word to drive on.

‘How did you leave the youngster?’ asked the old man. ‘Far better he should be left to himself; it will make a man of him. Had you a tolerable passage?—the sea is the devil. Grace, my dear, we have missed you more than I can tell. Falkenberg has been quite melancholy, and the good mother listens for your foot; and Gertrud, she is at a loss for some one to give lessons to. I fear you are sadly tired, my dear!’—this to Mrs. Frere, who was almost too weary to speak. ‘Ulrich was at a birthday-dinner given by their good friend the *Burgomeister*, but he would join them presently; and Friede had arranged to stay the night.’

‘How delightful!’ cried Grace; ‘the very thing I wished, only I feared Cousin Alvsleben would not consent.’

‘How very kind you all are!’ exclaimed Mrs. Frere.

A few more words from the count, and the carriage stopped at their new abode. Lights shone in the windows, and gleamed on the still green foliage of the nearer trees. The door was open, and in the lighted entrance stood a stout man in a blue linen tunic, girt to his waist with a belt, and a

flat cap which he doffed with much courtesy, and bid them 'Willkommen' as he opened the carriage-door, and assisted them to alight ; and behind him came quickly, as if he had just run downstairs, the tall, slight, well-set-up figure of Ulrich, who, even in that moment of supreme fatigue and disorganisation, was presented by Count Costello with much formality to his cousin, Mrs. Frere, whose hand he kissed with chivalrous courtesy ; and then they ascended the stair. There, under the doorway, stood Friede, all smiles and blushes of pleasure, and over the door, enclosed in a wreath of flowers, the word 'Willkommen' in blue and white. More introductions and attempts at hand-kissing, which Mrs. Frere turned into a real embrace ; so on through a narrow corridor to the *salon*, where was a beautiful bouquet from Frau Alvsleben—a plant of mignonette from Gertrud, another bouquet with Ulrich's card, and a third with Wolff von Falkenberg's.

The *salon*, with its fresh white curtains, bright lamp, chintz furniture, and abundance of flowers, looked quite festive. Double doors open at one side showed the little dining-room ; the table set for supper, with the beautiful snowy table-linen lent by Frau Alvsleben until Mrs. Frere's should arrive.

'Come!' cried the count, 'I have brought no flowers ; but you will find a couple of bottles of Lafitte in there,' pointing to the supper-table, 'with a bouquet not to be despised.'

The contrast between her doubts and half-fearful anticipations, and this delightful reality was

almost too much for poor Mrs. Frere. She could only exclaim, 'Why, this is like coming home!' and breaking down, covered her face with her handkerchief, while Grace, putting her arm through hers, led her into her own room.

The half-hour of supper, which followed as soon as Mrs. Frere was refreshed and composed enough to return to the dining-room, was very bright and pleasant. Everyone was charmed with Friede's housekeeping, and everyone talked very fast a mixture of German, French, and English, which quite surprised and subdued Mab, with whom Friede at once fell in love, and waited upon as though she were a baby.

The smiling little servant engaged by Mamsell for the new-comers was presented, and after dropping a deferential curtsey, presented her hand, somewhat to Mrs. Frere's surprise; and Mab could not sufficiently gaze at her white bib apron and complicated arrangement of hair.

The claret was pronounced excellent, and healths were duly drunk. At last the Count and Ulrich took their leave; Mab was put to bed in a little room off Mrs. Frere's, and Grace was alone with her mother.

Oh, how sweet was the sensation of safety and repose: the profound stillness, the fresh cleanliness of the room, the sweet country air that stole in when Grace opened the window to cool her mother's aching head! How thankful she was that the great effort was over, and the dear ones with her once more!

‘It is too, too delightful!’ murmured Mrs. Frere. ‘Far beyond what I expected. Oh, if Randal were only here!’

‘He is far, far better off where he is, mother dear. There is really nothing for a young man to do here but to be a soldier.’

‘Well, at all events, it is very different from our arrival in London.’

‘Yes, indeed! And now, dearest mother, sleep sound. I will bring your breakfast in the morning, and, if you are not too tired, in the afternoon we will drive out to Dalbersdorf, and take Friede back.’

‘Oh yes! I feel as if I were at rest, thank God!’

‘My Friede!’ cried Grace, coming into the room which the cousins had arranged with two beds, that Friede might always have a *pied à terre* in their abode. ‘How good and kind you are—what trouble you have taken, and how admirably you have managed! Sweetest cousin! what a delightful welcome you have given my mother; how can I thank you enough!’

A hearty embrace, and Grace, overdone with fatigue, could not suppress a few semi-hysterical tears, somewhat to Friede’s satisfaction, as she had begun to fear that her *praktisch* English cousin had no human weaknesses.



CHAPTER IX.



HE beginning of home life at Zittau was very delightful. The change from the 'on sufferance' feeling inseparable from English furnished lodgings to a house, or rather *étage*, of their own was most agreeable.

The right to range through the kitchen and rummage the larder, to exercise one's culinary skill, be it ever so slight, without the necessity of conciliating cook by abject politeness; the possibility of washing up one's own breakfast things without consequent loss of caste in the estimation of servant or visitors—these are precious privileges which not even a home of one's own in England always confers; and they were deeply valued by Grace and Mabel.

The latter found an outlet for her restlessness in manual labour—an absolute necessity to some natures, which almost sicken for want of it. Then, during the period of settling, of finding a school and music teacher, and sundry other prelimi-

naries, Frau Alvsleben very kindly invited Mab to stay at Dalbersdorf—a rapturous interval, from which she returned with rosier cheeks and brighter eyes than she had possessed since she left Dungar; and moreover, with high repute for every childish virtue. Feeding the pigs and fowls, assisting to milk, inspecting the various processes of the farm, and such like congenial occupations, had made her supremely happy, and consequently good—unhappiness, that is dissonance, being at the root of two-thirds the misconduct of life. Moreover, as she could not speak French like her mother and Grace, she picked up an astonishing amount of German, with the true Saxon sing-song, and came back admirably braced for her winter studies.

At first Mrs. Frere somewhat objected to her going to a school where the class distinctions were solely scholastic, or, indeed, to school at all; but Grace persuaded her to overcome these old-world prejudices, pointing out the advantage to Mab of learning with other children, and to the family fund, of a good education for something under twelve pounds a year.

In other branches of expenditure, the new settlers did not find the great difference in price which they anticipated; nevertheless, the general style was inexpensive, and the temptations to extra and unnecessary outlay, in which so large a share of income goes, few and far between.

The peace and happiness of such an existence would have been perhaps too delicious, but for the small, inevitable drawbacks which must arise from

the inequalities and imperfections of human nature and material things. The little *Dienst-mädchen*, though bright and obliging (looking on her young mistress's amateur work as a serious help, and being disposed to reproach her when she remitted her labours), was yet not competent to manage the tall, white-tiled stove, so the *salon* was either like a conservatory for tropical plants, or a cold vault. Then she was disposed to consider herself free after the half-past six o'clock *Abend-brod*, or supper, and constantly went out to see her friends or walk with her *Schatz* ('treasure,' German for lover); she was also addicted to invite the said treasure (there was a good deal of him) to smoke his cigar in the kitchen, to the disgust, not to say terror, of Mrs. Frere, who once met the intruder face to face in the passage, and stopping, appalled, at the sight of a tall soldier—sword, epaulettes, and all—received a polite and well-assured salute, as if he were certain of being a favoured guest.

Then on cleaning days Paulina (pronounce 'au' as the 'ow' in fowl) was addicted to spend precious half-hours stretched bodily out of the window of whatever room was under operation, conversing merrily with any passing acquaintance. Moreover, the cleaning itself was a matter of dispute, as Paulina's idea of that undertaking was a total and complete *boulversement* of every room on the same day—if possible at the same moment; so that the wretched inhabitants had not a resting-place, and chance visitors must be turned away, or sit in the corridor. The matter of Paulina's meals, too,

was a source of disturbance both to Mrs. Frere and Grace. They never could persuade her to spread a cloth and sit down regularly to dinner. 'Gott bewahr!' said that young person, 'she would not so waste time.' Nevertheless she did not starve. She seemed for ever munching something. Mab frequently saw her take toll from the frying-pan (frying was her forte) or the soup pot—not furtively or with any sense of infringing the limits of duty, but openly, often offering a tit-bit to Mab from the same fork or spoon with which she had helped herself.

Then the cooking was a vexed question. Grease, vinegar, fat, fish, salad and uncooked hams were Paulina's notion of the *ne plus ultra* in goodies, and Mrs. Frere's tastes were fastidious! So Grace's general experience grew and multiplied.

However, a month's struggle, backed by Frau Alvsleben's authority and much good counsel from Mamsell, who took the deepest, kindest interest in the foreign household, brought everything into working order, though Grace soon discovered that no German servant can dispense with supervision; and before December brought frost, snow, and real winter, they were as much, nay more, at home in their Zittau *étage* as they had been after five or six months in their London lodgings.

Meantime frequent visits to Dalbersdorf varied their life. Mrs. Frere and Frau Alvsleben became excellent friends—the former's unaffected admiration for her German cousin's activity and capability was most flattering to the latter's self-love,

and in return the Dalbersdorf party heartily appreciated the *beaux restes* of good looks, once far beyond the average, and a certain high-bred, indolent grace not to be seen every day in Zittau, which distinguished Mrs. Frere.

Wolff von Falkenberg had recovered in due time, and gone for change of air and the remainder of his prolonged leave to his Silesian relatives. He had been quite charming and almost boyish in his playfulness, on the three or four occasions when Grace saw him previous to his departure. Mab was his devoted ally, and Mrs. Frere pronounced him a remarkably well-bred, accomplished young man, though Ulrich's vague likeness to Randal soon promoted *him* to the rank of first-favourite. He too, however, had returned to his regimental duties long before this stage of our history.

Finally, under Frau Alvsleben's auspices, Mrs. Frere and Grace had paid a round of first visits necessary for introduction to German society, as residents in that country never take the initiative. It was a most solemn ceremony. The curtseying and complimenting—the stereotyped question and answer—the struggle to prevent the hostess seeing them to the door—the polite insistence of that lady—had to be gone through with all from the Frau Oberst down to the Ober-zoll Inspectorin. This once accomplished, a tide of 'returns' set in.

Thus the Freres were launched into the best circles of Zittau, backed as they were by the influence of a family so respected as that of Dalbersdorf, and soon the difficulty was to avoid too much company.

create fear, but for the kind heart and right noble principles which direct them.'

To this Frau Alvsleben replied suitably, but with a tinge of weariness—at least Grace thought she detected some such indications. But to herself the eulogy was interesting, and her heart warmed with sympathetic appreciation of her friend the doctor. This was in truth a jewel of a man, worthy any woman's faith and love.

Then, on the part of her mother, Grace expressed a hope that Cecilia would sometimes be permitted to visit Mabel; and so the ceremony ended, with smiles and curtseys and expressions of mutual esteem.

It was before the first snow fell; the weather was already clear, cold, and wintry, necessitating a careful wrapping up of Mabel each morning on sending her forth to school at eight o'clock. The *Mädchen* had begun to understand the stove, so that Mrs. Frere found an agreeable temperature when she left her room for breakfast, and the visits of the *Schatz* had been limited to once a week; everything, in short, was fairly *en règle*, when one morning, returning from a short shopping expedition, Grace, on entering the *salon*, found Baron Falkenberg installed in an easy-chair, with Mab on his knee: Falkenberg in his best uniform, his helmet glittering on the parquet beside him, and with gloves of such an exquisite fit and delicate spotless white that Grace felt ashamed to put her black one into the hand he offered.

His face lit up with a look of real pleasure as he poured forth a hearty greeting in German—for in spite of its gutturals and many syllables, no tongue can express glowing yet delicate warmth more vividly.

‘I see you again, my Fräulein,’ he exclaimed, ‘and feel that it is to you I owe my standing here still fit for service. I have longed to return and renew my acquaintance—may I say friendship?—with you and your Frau Mutter!’

‘I am very glad to see you,’ said Grace, simply, but blushing a little, partly from pleasure, partly from admiration for the fine soldierly figure before her.

‘And you will stay in our little Zittau all the winter?’ said Von Falkenberg, resuming his seat, and speaking French to Mrs. Frere.

‘For a year, certainly,’ she replied.

‘That is charming, is it not, my dear little Mabel?’ holding out his hand to her, whereupon she gladly perched herself on the arm of his chair. ‘You will be a true German maiden by that time, and will not allow the mamma and sister to go away again. Eh, Miss Grace? You do not know what friends Mabel and I became at Dalbersdorf.’

‘Oh, we heard a great deal about you, Monsieur de Falkenberg!’ returned Mrs. Frere, smiling upon him, delighted by his notice of Mab. ‘You are quite Mab’s hero.’

‘Mab, Mab!’ repeated Falkenberg; ‘but it is a delicious name: it makes one think of your great poet, Shakespearc. It is a fairy’s name.’

'Mab is no fairy!' said Mrs. Frere, laughing. 'I am surprised to find you so familiar with Shakespeare.'

'But it is quite natural, madame. May I be permitted to say that we Germans understand Shakespeare better than his own countrymen!'

'No; it is not permitted,' said Grace, always ready to lift the gauntlet. 'You fancy you know Shakespeare best, and I grant he is very Saxon; but we too appreciate him.'

'Scarce so much as we do, Miss Grace.'

'How do you know? You only echo what your critics say.'

'True; yet there must be truth in their assertions.'

'Wolff,' broke in Mab, 'will you let me ride your bayhorse—the one Grace used to ride?'

'My dear Mab,' remonstrated Mrs. Frere, 'you are very familiar.'

'I pray you, madame,' cried Falkenberg, 'do not forbid her; I only know myself as Wolff with her. Would I might hope for such a mark of adoption from mademoiselle and yourself!'

'You would not have me say Herr Baron!' exclaimed Mab.

'Certainly not, my little friend—my dear little friend!'

'Herr von Falkenberg speaks English very well, mother,' said Grace.

'Not very well—very badly,' said he, in English. 'Suppose, madame, we constitute—no, create—ourselves into a mutual improvement *Verein*—society—'

to read English and German for an hour of an evening, when your day is over, and I can escape from my Casino dinner?’

‘It would be very nice indeed,’ returned Mrs. Frere, cordially.

‘I thank you much, madame. What a delight for me to be received into an English family!—although I am a relation, you know.’

‘How?’ asked Grace, laughing. She understood his tactics better than her mother.

‘Well, my mother was sister to the late Herr Alvsleben of Dalbersdorf; consequently my aunt, Frau Alvsleben, being your near kinswoman——’

‘Makes us cousins-german many times removed,’ returned Grace, still laughing.

‘Yet near in spirit, if not in heart!’ said Falkenberg quickly, in a low tone and in German.

‘Grace is quite a country girl,’ said Mrs. Frere, apologetically; ‘you must excuse her ruggedness of speech.’

‘Imagine *your* being excused to me!’ remarked Falkenberg to Grace. ‘Does not your pride revolt? But you have transformed this room,’ he continued. ‘It looks graceful and what you call “comfortable,”’ looking round.

It had been beautified and added to. A remnant of Uncle Frere’s hundred pounds had enabled Grace to buy a couple more easy-chairs, a writing-table, and a long mirror, which, together with some small ornaments and plenty of flowers, had improved it amazingly.

‘Yes; it is quite a pleasant room,’ returned

Grace. 'I have been trying to find some large-leaved plants to fill up this stand with green, and there is nothing but small things in the market.'

'No!' cried Falkenberg, with much animation; 'but I can guide you to a garden a little way out of the town, where you can find as many as you want.'

'Indeed!—where?'

'Mademoiselle has her hat on,' he returned; 'if you will permit me, I will escort you there.'

'Thank you,' hesitated Grace.

'Oh yes; do go, and take me,' cried Mabel.

'Can we go and return in half an hour?' asked her sister.

'Yes, certainly.'

'Then we will be very much obliged for your guidance,' said Grace, frankly. 'Get your hat and jacket, Mab.'

It was a delightful, brisk, enjoyable walk, and though Falkenberg was strictly matter-of-fact and uncomplimentary, Grace had a pleasant instinctive conviction that he deeply enjoyed being her companion. He was kindly and playful with Mab, as Germans are with children, and a great help in bargaining with the gardener, who was of course most obsequious to a uniform. Finally the young ladies went back to dinner, exhilarated by their expedition—the effect of that innocent, yet magnetic, action and counteraction which Nature predestined when 'male and female created He them.'



CHAPTER X.



HE adaptability of human nature is wonderful. By the time Mrs. Frere and her daughters had been two months resident in the little Saxon town, they had become quite acclimatised, and Mrs. Frere had acquired a few German words, though she was approaching the period of life when it is even more difficult to assimilate new mental than new material food.

Both Falkenberg and Dr. Sturm were frequent visitors, and already the small society of the place was distracted by an unsuccessful attempt to decide which was the favoured wooer of the so-called wealthy English girl—for, in spite of the modesty of their *ménage*, Mrs. Frere shared the usual English reputation for riches.


The Frau Gerichts-director and Frau Oberst von Ahlefeld had invited them to a couple of rather stiff entertainments, where the elders played cards, and the juniors made music—very excellent instru-

mental music, though the singing seemed to the English guests shrill and screamy. These diversions were succeeded by a solemn supper at the *Burgomeister's*, consisting of soup, fish, *entrées*, roasts, sweets, cheese. At these parties it always seemed to the onlookers as if Dr. Sturm was Grace Frere's admirer ; while, on the whole, Falkenberg was more attentive to Gertrud than to anyone else ; and Friede, though never at a loss for gallant cavaliers, had no especial devotee. A state of things which rather surprised Falkenberg's brother officers, by whom Grace was at first credited with a consuming passion for the man whose life she had saved. Extraordinary reports were current as to the dangers from which she had rescued him and exposed herself to in her headlong ride, which was represented as being utterly reckless, instead of being simply a sharp gallop along a good road.

As Grace came gradually to perceive something of this, she instinctively avoided Falkenberg in society, and observed, rather to her surprise, that he seconded these attempts ; and however frank, friendly, sympathetic, and agreeable in his frequent visits, was most guarded in his conduct when in public.

One of her greatest pleasures were Friede's visits, though she was also pleased to welcome Gertrud, who was more agreeable as a guest than a hostess.

Both girls occasionally spent the night with their English relatives when a concert or a party brought them to town, and Count Costello often rode in



—being now independent of the farm horses—shared his niece's simple dinner, and told old stories of his campaigning days to a fresh audience.

It was a cold, still night, in the first week of December. Mrs. Frere was sitting near the table which held the lamp, endeavouring to master the art of knitting; Grace and Mab were opposite—the latter endeavouring, with her sister's help, to prepare her *Rechnung* (arithmetic lesson), always a supreme effort, for the next day, and grumbling against her teacher all the time. The rules had not been rightly explained to her; *she* could not understand! How was she to do things when no one showed her how? etc., etc.; Mrs. Frere occasionally throwing in a mild remonstrance, which only increased Mab's irritation.

The room, with its pale grey walls, bright chintz curtains, and well-filled *jardinières*, which Grace contrived to keep green always when the blossoms failed, looked cheerful and attractive with its home-like aspect, as did the occupants. A certain air of being carefully dressed gave refinement to their very simple toilettes—Mrs. Frere was always in black, and Grace still wore second mourning.

'Do attend, Mab,' said Grace; 'you could soon do it if you would only think. And if you make haste I will read you some more of that story before you go to bed.'

'Well, I cannot think, Grace! everything seems to go round in my head. I only seem——'

The sound of the bell, and Paulina speaking to some one, made her stop and listen eagerly, with

parted lips, a picture of curiosity. The clank of a sword followed—a moment's pause, and the door opened to admit Falkenberg, who entered with all the ease of an *habitué*.

After a deep bow and respectful greeting to Mrs. Frere, he drew a chair beside Mab.

'I have good news for you, Miss Grace. There are two degrees of frost to-night; if this continues, with a slight increase, we shall skate the day after to-morrow, and then I shall teach you.'

'That will be delightful! Mother, I must buy skates to-morrow.'

'Very well, dear.'

'And I must have a pair too!' cried Mab.

'Not if you leave your lessons undone,' said Grace.

'Bewahre!' exclaimed Falkenberg; 'you must do your work, my dear, dear little Mab! Shall I help you?'

'Oh yes, thou dear Wolff!'

Whereupon Falkenberg drew the much-smear'd slate to him, and set to work explaining everything in German, which Mab seemed to understand, to her mother's intense admiration. And Mab, perched on the arm of his chair, resting one elbow on his shoulder, became suddenly content, alert, attentive. In half an hour the lessons were accomplished, including a few verses which Falkenberg insisted on his pupil repeating in the most dramatic fashion.

'How very good of you, Monsieur de Falkenberg, to take so much trouble! Mab ought to be very grateful!' exclaimed Mrs. Frere.

‘And so ought I,’ said Grace, smiling. ‘I do not know when Mab would have finished with me.’

‘That is wrong. But, madame, I love children; it seems quite natural to do everything for them.’

‘It shows a good heart to be kind to children and animals,’ said Mrs. Frere.

‘I am not so sure,’ returned Grace, with a quick upward glance at Falkenberg. ‘Some of the monsters of the French Revolution were very fond of animals.’

‘Mademoiselle loves animals and children also?’ said Falkenberg, quietly.

‘Yes, you are a dear!’ exclaimed Mab, smoothing his cheek with a hand somewhat begrimed from frequent rubbing on the slate. ‘You are nicer than Mr. Darnell, and far cleverer. I don’t think *he* could do *Rechnung*.’

‘Who was Mr. Darnell?’ asked Falkenberg, indolently, leaning back in his chair, while Mab put her books together.

‘Oh, a gentleman in London. He had such lovely horses, and a great high carriage; I had a drive in it once. He had very red hair, too; but he was very kind, and,’ lowering her voice, ‘I don’t know why he went away, but I believe it was because Grace would not marry him.’

This revelation absolutely paralysed mother and daughter; both thought they had effectually concealed this tragical history from the keen perception of Mab.

‘Poor Mr. Darnell!’ said Falkenberg, laughing, and enjoying their confusion. ‘Was he very

broken-hearted? But need I ask—of course he was.'

'I don't know; he never came again,' said Mab, gravely.

'Your path, no doubt, has been strewn with victims—an evidence in support of your theory that the love of animals is no indication of a kind heart. I remember you used to caress the horses at Dalbersdorf, till one wished to be a quadruped.'

This was said rapidly in German to Grace, with an expressive glance, unseen by Mrs. Frere.

'I do not know that I have a good heart,' returned Grace in English, trying hard not to blush, and feeling vexed that Falkenberg's eyes should have such power; 'a really good true heart is rare, I imagine.'

'Grace is disagreeable sometimes,' said Mab, with an air of justice and discrimination; 'but she is not regularly ill-natured.'

'You are very ungrateful, Mab,' said Mrs. Frere, seriously. 'I am sure Grace does everything for you.'

'Well, I am going to be ill-natured now,' added Grace, 'and take you to bed.'

'I shall not go! You promised to read to me, and now you break your word; that is very bad, is it not, Wolff?'

'But you have had Herr Hauptmann to help you with your lessons; is not that pleasure enough for one evening?'

'But Grace, do—do read just one little bit!'

'I will read to you, my dear, dear Mab,' said Falkenberg, drawing the child to him in his caress-

ing way; '*you* shall give me my reading-lesson to-night.'

'Oh, thank you, thank you!' cried Mab. 'Where is the book?'

'Here,' returned Grace, putting 'The Stokesley Secret' into Falkenberg's hand. 'Let me see which you like best, Miss Young or Scott.' (They had been reading 'Quentin Durward.')

So Falkenberg began with much seriousness; and Grace, fetching her work, listened, greatly amused by Mab's corrections and the explanations demanded by her pupil.

'It is half-past eight!' said Mrs. Frere, at last. 'Mab, you must really go to bed.'

'Yes,' said Falkenberg, closing the book. 'Die liebe Mutter says so, and you must.'

After some refusals and writhings, Mab consented, saying:

'You will come and read to me again?'

'Oh, Mab! you must not trouble Monsieur de Falkenberg.'

'It is no trouble, madame, and the story is most interesting. I am quite anxious to know if they succeeded in buying the pig. Good-night, thou sweetest little friend.'

When Grace returned from putting Mabel to bed, she found her mother describing the genius and beauty of Randal to her guest, who was listening with polite attention.

'The schools are so early here,' said Grace, to change the subject, as she drew forth her work—an apron of the German pattern—for her little sister,

‘that we must send Mab to bed in good time, or she would get no rest.’

‘Eight o’clock is not so early,’ returned Falkenberg.

‘In winter it is—too early. Our schools never begin till nine.’

‘Then you never work hard in England,’ said Falkenberg, smiling. ‘You are rich and lazy.’

‘We must have worked at some time, or we should not be what we are.’

‘Circumstances have favoured you so much, mademoiselle. I used to know some Englishmen in Dresden before the war—I was in another regiment then—and they only amused themselves, except one, and he certainly worked immensely; but he amused himself too. Ach! what energy he had under a quiet, almost sleepy, exterior!’

‘And what has become of him?’

‘He went to Spain, I think. He wrote to me also from South America; but that is nearly two years ago. Yes; Moritz was what you call a fine fellow: we were dear friends. I wish he had been in our army.’

‘That would not do for an Englishman,’ said Mrs. Frere.

‘And he was very English; though I remember his telling me he was half Irish—partly your compatriot, madame.’

They were speaking French for Mrs. Frere’s benefit, though Falkenberg often lapsed into German when addressing Grace.

‘Indeed!’ cried Grace, with interest; ‘yet Moritz—you called him Moritz?—is not an Irish name.’

‘That is my fashion of calling him. His name is Maurice—Maurice Belfor.’

‘Maurice Belfor!’ repeated Grace. ‘That sounds familiar. How do you spell the name?—the second name, I mean.’

‘B-a-l,’ said Falkenberg, after a moment’s thought, ‘f-o-u-r.’

Grace dropped her work and clasped her hands together, her face lighting up with a look of surprise and pleasure.

‘He must be the Maurice Balfour we know,’ she exclaimed. ‘What is his profession—calling?’

‘He is an engineer.’

‘It is our friend, then,’ said Mrs. Frere. ‘We have lost sight of him for some time, but we have known him almost all his life.’

‘And how delighted I should be to see him again!’ cried Grace, her eyes dilating and growing moist as she gazed far away into the soft distance of bygone happy years, when life was one long holiday, till she forgot Zittau and Falkenberg, and once again saw her old home.

‘Is Balfour then so dear?’ asked Falkenberg, after watching her for a moment in silence. ‘You forget everything to think of him.’

‘I am thinking of much besides Maurice Balfour,’ returned Grace, rousing herself, yet still speaking a little out of her thoughts. ‘And what was he like when you knew him?’

‘Is it long since you have seen him?’ was the counter question.

'Nearly five years. His grandfather was the rector, our clergyman, you know.'

'Yes, he has told me the grandfather was a pastor.'

'I never expected poor Maurice to do much!' said Mrs. Frere. 'He was so shy, and Randal thought him rather dull.'

'Far from being dull; I thought him much above the other young Englishmen I have met—I mean in intelligence. He was rather good-looking, not tall—at least, not so tall as I am.'

'No? Then he was not drilled like you, Monsieur de Falkenberg; that makes a difference. Where did you say he was?'

'In South America. He was engaged on a railway there, but he talked of returning to Europe and paying me a visit.'

'I wish he would come while we are here.'

'It is curious that you should have known him,' added Mrs. Frere, and the subject dropped.

Falkenberg was somewhat absent for a few minutes, and then, rousing himself, asked Grace if she would not read part of 'Hermann und Dorothea' to him. She obeyed very readily, but now and then broke off to ask questions about Maurice, till Falkenberg shut up the book with some impatience.

'The next time I come to give you a lesson, mademoiselle,' he said, smiling, 'I will not mention my friend Balfour till it is over.'

'I am very naughty,' returned Grace, looking penitently up into his eyes, 'and you are really too good; but if you only knew how charming it is to hear of my old friend.'

‘Was he then your *rêve de quinze ans*?’

‘Oh, I never dreamed about him! He was too matter-of-fact even to suggest dreams.’

‘Nevertheless,’ said Falkenberg, rising to take leave, ‘should he come here, you will have no eyes for anyone else.’

‘No,’ returned Grace, with a little nod and a smile full of mischief; ‘not for some time!’

‘Good! I shall ask three weeks’ leave when he comes,’ said Falkenberg, laughing, and taking her hand as he bid her good-night, he pressed it hard, apparently unconscious that he did so.

‘If it is good ice, then, the day after to-morrow, Mrs. Frere, you will come down to the Weinau Teich. But I shall see you in the morning; perhaps Miss Grace will have a skating lesson early if I can get away. Adieu, mademoiselle; do not dream of our friend!’

‘Indeed, I hope I shall!’ cried Grace. ‘It is delightful to revisit the past—in good company.’

‘Is it possible,’ said Falkenberg, in a low voice, in German, ‘that you are a coquette?’

‘Why should it be impossible?’ asked Grace; but no! I do not think I am.’

‘Adieu, madame! sleep well, mademoiselle!’ said Falkenberg, as he bowed himself out.

The next day’s post brought letters from Randal and Jimmy Byrne. The latter wrote shortly, and said little of his charge. Randal, after enlarging on the enormous success which had attended his small contribution to the ‘Weekly Visitor,’ went on to say that it was quite amazing how quickly money went

in London. 'Having received so much hospitality from our fellows,' he continued, 'while staying with you, I feel bound, now that I am living *en garçon*, to return it; and as Jimmy (this is quite *entre nous*) seemed somewhat put out at the idea of our having supper in his room, I thought it better to invite my friends to sup at the Park Hotel—a very good place, and not expensive. It was, I think, a little disobliging of Jimmy, for, of course, I pay my share of the rooms, and I should have invited him to the supper. The affair was a great success, and Egerton (a very nice fellow, who has lately come into the office) said it was the pleasantest party he had been at for a long time. He and I have become great chums. He is quite a man of fashion; only, I am puzzled why a man like him chooses to sit at a desk—at all events, he writes a worse hand than I did. Now as I have told you this, you will not be surprised to hear that I am a little behindhand in my payments to Jimmy—two months, in short—and I don't like to let it run any longer; so if you could spare me ten pounds it would put me all square, and I would keep right till after Christmas, when I hope "my wages will be riz," as Egerton says—you can't think what a contempt he seems to have for the shop!

'I daresay Grace will blow up about this, for she has the biggest share of the Frere blood; but don't you mind: send me the money, or write to the Dungan agent to forward it, like a darling mother as you are, and gratify

'Your loving son,

'RANDAL FRERE.'

‘It is too bad!’ cried Grace, when she finished reading this letter over her mother’s shoulder. ‘Such thoughtless extravagance! I hope you will not send him the money, mother; send it to Jimmy direct. Jimmy is evidently trying to restrain him. And as to his paying his share—it is but a small one; where else, save with such a friend, would he find food and lodgings for twenty shillings a week?’

‘True, my love. To be sure, he pays for his dinner in the city every day besides.’

‘Even so, it is shameful of him to be in arrears. And as to that ridiculous supper—it is worse than wrong to incur such uncalled-for expense. Indeed, dear mother, you must write to him very sharply.’

‘Yes, Grace, it was no doubt very wrong; but after all, it is not so easy for us to judge what are the temptations of a young man. It may be very hard for him to——’

‘Oh, mother, he knows quite well what is right, and that he has no business to waste your money in that senseless way. Just send the money to Jimmy.’

‘No doubt it would be the best plan, but I fear Randal would be terribly wounded by such want of confidence; don’t you think so yourself?’

‘Perhaps it would be rather harsh,’ returned Grace, reflectively; it cut her to the heart to be unkind even in thought to Randal. ‘Suppose we send him the money, but say that you write to apologise to Jimmy. And what a cruel pull it will be, when I have tried so hard to save the few pounds

and generally by the work of their own hands, the wonder is that anyone is ever ready in time. Indeed, with months of preparation there is in nearly all families a scramble at the last, especially as each gift is to be a matter of surprise to the recipient, and must be worked at in odd corners and inconvenient times—out of sight.

Grace grew quite impatient at the constant refusal of Fräulein Niedner, of Frau this and Baronin the other, to go with her to the ice. 'Ach Gott, liebe Miss Frere! it is not possible. I have still some Christmas work not quite done;' or, 'To-day Miss Grace! no—no! the good father's cigar-case, or slippers, or watch-stand, is still many hours short of being finished. I cannot leave the house.'

Themselves strangers, Grace and Mrs. Frere had less to do than their neighbours. A few gifts for their Dalbersdorf relatives and Mab's playfellow, Cecilia Sturm, was all their care. So as Christmas drew nearer, they had the Teich or mere very much to themselves. It was a new delight to fly across the ice, her hands firmly held by Falkenberg, who, as in most other exercises, excelled in skating—bending from side to side, her blood warmed by the rapid motion, her spirits exhilarated by the dry, keen air—so clear and still; conscious too that her fur cap and thick fur-trimmed jacket were most becoming—her bright colour, beaming eyes and ready tongue attracting only too much notice.

It rather annoyed her to observe that not many of the other officers and gentlemen, who, unen-

cumbered with Christmas cares, frequented the ice, attempted to skate with her, or interfere with the sort of proprietorship which Falkenberg exercised not certainly in any lover-like way, for they constantly argued and quarrelled, and he seemed always on the *qui vive* not to show her too much subservience, carefully measuring his attentions by the amount of notice she vouchsafed him, and ever ready to find fault.

‘Are you not tired of always skating with me?’ she asked one afternoon, as they paused after a rapid flight (it was little less) round the mere.

‘Well, no!’ returned Falkenberg, looking at her gravely. ‘You see, you are my pupil. I am proud of our progress, and I fear your falling into less skilful hands than my own.’

‘And you think I do pretty well?’

‘Marvellously! though I do not like to praise you. You think so very much of yourself, Miss Grace.’

‘I do not think I do,’ she returned with perfect frank good-humour. ‘I should not be so eager for praise if I was—and I am too fond of it. You are far more conceited than I am, Herr Baron.’

‘Not so. I only try to believe my own merits, because no one praises me.’

‘I am sure my mother thinks you perfection.’

‘Madame your mother is a most charming and discriminating lady.’

‘Still I do not think I can skate as well as you say; or some one else would wish to skate with me.’

‘ Ah, I see! *You* are tired of skating with me.’

‘ No! but variety is charming.’

‘ My Fräulein! I have the honour to leave you,’
—a profound bow.

‘ Stay, stay, Herr von Falkenberg! I have no one to go on with. Well, go. I shall ask the Herr Oberst myself! and show you how I can skate alone. So saying, she glided away to where Falkenberg’s colonel, a stout jolly veteran with daughters older than herself, stood talking with Mrs. Frere.

‘ Wenn ich Bitten darf! may I venture to ask for your escort, Herr Oberst?’

‘ Ach Gott! with the greatest pleasure, my Fräulein; allow me to put on my skates.’

In a few minutes he was by her side; certainly a less accomplished cavalier than Falkenberg, but wonderfully efficient, considering his weight and age.

Seeing the redoubtable baron engaged with one of the colonel’s daughters, several of his brother officers asked permission to take tours with Miss Frere; and she, delighted to have emancipated herself from Falkenberg, bestowed her brightest smiles and best German on her new partners.

At length, after Mrs. Frere had twice mentioned that it was time to return home, Grace descried Dr. Sturm standing on the bank with his skates in his hand. She directed her course to him, and greeted him with much pleasure.

‘ How is it that we see you so seldom, Herr Doctor?’

'My time is not my own, dear lady; and when I am free, it is already too dark. To-day I have a note for you enclosed in one from my brother. I called at your house, and found you were on the ice.'

'Oh, thank you!' cried Grace, extending her hand for the billet. 'It is from Friede, and in German,' she added; 'you must help me, Dr. Sturm.'

He drew near, and with his assistance Grace deciphered the missive. She found it requested hospitality for Gertrud and Friede, who were coming to Zittau early the following day, in order to shop and attend a 'coffee-party' at the Frau Oberst's, to which their mother would not accompany them; but would send the carriage to fetch the young ladies about nine or ten.'

'A messenger will call for your answer in about two hours,' said the doctor, when they had deciphered the note.

'Then come round to my mother, and I will show her the note. Of course we shall be delighted to put them up.'

Mrs. Frere, always glad to exercise hospitality, proposed having a very early dinner, that the young ladies might enjoy some skating.'

'And can you not manage to skate with us?' asked Grace.

'And come to supper,' added Mrs. Frere.

Herr Doctor would like to do both, but could only manage supper.

'In the meantime, put on your skates and take

a turn with me now,' said Grace, who had dismissed her last attendant (the fascinating von Heldreich).

The doctor was again complaisant, and they were soon in deep animated conversation, passing Falkenberg, who was standing on the bank with the colonel and his daughters, once without noticing him, once with a smile and nod, positively insulting in its gay indifference.

'Ah! the pretty English girl is slightly coquette,' said the colonel, looking after her admiringly.

'She is *wunderschön*,' remarked one of his daughters; 'but Hélène von Chersky, who knows many foreigners in Dresden, say they are all terribly bold—quite shameless.'

'Mees Frere is not exactly coquette,' returned Falkenberg, who had taken off his skates and was in readiness to attend the colonel's party off the ground; 'at least I have not found it out: but she is very different from a German Fräulein.'

'She is a sweet maiden, nevertheless,' returned the colonel (old men were always greatly attracted by Grace); 'I do not dislike her frankness.'

'The papa is ever indulgent to beauty,' said his daughter, laughing, and they went away together towards the town.

Grace, without seeming to notice it, perceived that, for the first time since the skating commenced, Falkenberg had deserted her, and she felt a sudden thrill of resentment and mortification. It is always vexatious to have a morsel of property you have grown to consider your own taken from you; yet the next moment she laughed at her own folly,

and walked home with her mother and Dr. Sturm, talking and smiling as gaily as if no Falkenberg were in the world.

The next morning was delightfully busy. Grace, anxious to show her own and her mother's housewifely accomplishments to the best advantage, worked eagerly to set everything in order; and Paulina required a great deal of help and supervision. Then Paulina must be tidy, arrayed in a fresh white *Schurzen* (apron), her hair dressed (a tremendous undertaking), by half-past twelve.

With the best will in the world, Grace found it impossible to manage all this without the help of the *Hausfrau*—a most important functionary in a German house. She is a sort of perpetual charwoman on the premises. It is her right and duty to sweep and keep the common stair clean, to carry down the coal and wood to the cellar, after the coal has been tumbled in a heap on the street, and to take out and put in the double windows in their season, for which services she receives a stipulated tax from the dwellers within the threshold. Sometimes she is the dear friend of the *Dienst-mädchen*, and then meat, bread, coffee, coals, and sugar pay somewhat heavy toll, especially in a stranger's establishment. German housewives are not so confiding. Sometimes she is an object of the *Dienst-mädchen's* bitterest hate, and suspected of every possible villainy; she is, according to the maiden's report, a thief, a liar, an evil tongue, a deadly temper, capable of waylaying departing guests at the house-door, and intercepting the flow of *Groschen* which ought to

find its way into the maiden's own pocket. But no matter how appalling the character of the *Hausfrau*, the most consistent and virtuous maidens never hesitate to leave her in possession of the kitchen, with all the chances of appropriating scraps, on those high days and holidays when, arrayed in her best, with a Tower of Babel in false plaits, puffs, and curls on her head, and yards of ribbon floating from her hat, the *Mädchen* goes forth to meet her *Schatz*. On Friday they may have stormed at each other on the stair, till you think nothing short of your interference could have saved bloodshed, and on Saturday you will be startled to hear Paulina or Augusta addressing her in honied accents as she is scrubbing the landing; and a few minutes after you are smilingly assured that if you can permit P. or A. to go out to-morrow early—say at six in the morning—the *Hausfrau*, who when not in her tempers is a very friendly woman and not stupid, has kindly consented to be *locum-tenens*—you, the mistress, of course paying for the friendliness and bearing the possible losses.

Now our Paulina was at deadly feud with the *Hausfrau*, consequently met her mistress's proposal to have that excellent woman's assistance with an emphatic 'Gott bewahr! She (Paulina) would do double work with delight, rather than allow so ugly and dishonest a Frau to disgrace the Herrschaft's kitchen.' On which Mrs. Frere retreated on her reserves (Grace), who came gallantly to the front, and insisted on the introduction of an auxiliary force, especially to go of messages, as a

note must be despatched to Herr Hauptmann von Falkenberg immediately. 'For,' thought Grace, 'we must not omit to ask him to supper this evening.'

In spite of various difficulties and much tacit opposition from Paulina, everything was ready when the Dalbersdorf party arrived. Both Gertrud and Friede first flew into Grace's arms, and then proceeded to embrace Mrs. Frere.

The cousins had not met for nearly a fortnight, so they were almost breathlessly eager to detail the small events that had occurred in the interim.

'Ach Gott!' cried Friede, 'but it is long since we have seen each other. The black horse was lame, and something was wrong with the other, so we have been prisoners.'

'And imagine, that stupid old man Hans, the *Nachtwächter*, fell asleep the other night, and some Bohemian thieves from over the border came in and stole three geese—cut the poor things' throats, and carried them away.'

'Yes,' added Friede, 'Mamsell heard a voice, and got up to look what was the matter; but it was so dark she could not make out anything.'

'So she thought it was only a rat had frightened the geese,' continued Gertrud; 'and in the morning the three were gone, and blood spilt all about; but they took a pair of Hans' boots too, and that punished him. If he were a younger man, I would ask the mother to send him away; but one cannot be hard on an old servant.'

'No, certainly not,' said Grace, with entire approval.

‘And the dear *Gross-vater* told poor old Hans that they both had borne the burden and heat of the day, and ought to rest now ; so he gave him money to buy a new pair of boots,’ said Friede.

‘Just like my dear uncle !’ cried Mrs. Frere.

‘Yes, he is very good,’ returned Gertrud. ‘But it was scarcely right to reward Hans for his negligence.’

‘And how is the Graf?’ asked Grace. ‘He has not been in Zittau for an age.’

‘He has not been so well,’ said Friede, ‘and has stayed in-doors till he is melancholy.’

‘Ach, du lieber Himmel!’ exclaimed Gertrud ; ‘we have quantities to do and to buy. I am sadly backward fallen with my Christmas work. At what hour do you dine, dear cousin? I must to the shops at once.’

‘We will dine at one punctually,’ said Mrs. Frere. ‘I thought you would like to skate after——’

‘It would be charming!’ cried Friede, ‘but——’

‘It is not possible,’ interrupted Gertrud. ‘We have no time. Was Cousin Falkenberg to come with us?’

‘I wrote to ask him this morning, but he had already gone out to ride, and his servant did not know when he would return.’

‘Did he not know?’ began Gertrud, when Friede, who had been turning over the various packages and wraps which Paulina had brought in from the carriage, uttered a shriek of dismay.

‘Gott in Himmel ! it is lost it is forgotten !—the parcel with the wool and silk, and my grounding

stuff!—all the patterns we were to match! Ach, thou best of Paulinas! quick—quick! run, fly, catch Fritz—stop the carriage!

‘Why, Friede,’ cried Grace, ‘if he was to return at once, Fritz must be half-way to Dalbersdorf by this time.’

‘Yes, he was to go back; he was wanted in the yard; and is to fetch us at half ten. Oh, thou thoughtless Friede! all our journey is for nothing.’

‘Why did you not think of it yourself, Gertrud?’ said Friede, petulantly.

Meantime Paulina might be seen flying down the road, holding on her plaits of hair with one hand, and gathering up her dress away from the snow with the other, while Gertrud and Friede turned over every article of the many which had been taken from the capacious landau, with reckless haste and utter disregard of their equilibrium, while with shrill voices they called heaven and earth to witness their despair and ruin. In the midst of the confusion enter Mab, *Sack* (satchel) in hand, bright, rosy, and amused.

‘You are stupid things!’ she said. ‘Now if I did that!’ So saying, she proceeded to deposit her *Sack* in a dark corner of the corridor, and lo! it touched something soft. ‘What is this?’ cried Mabel, fishing up a loose, untidy-looking bundle, much tied round with worsted *Garn* (thread).

Shrieks of delight on recognition; loud thanksgiving to the unseen powers.

Tableau—Gertrud holding up the parcel in triumph.



CHAPTER XI.



HE coffee-party was to be at four, and at three Gertrud and Friede began to dress, somewhat to the surprise of Grace, whose only experience of such entertainments was in London during her brief period of favour with Lady Elton, and there ladies came in their ordinary afternoon toilettes.

This was a much more serious undertaking. First, a careful *demi-toilette* must be provided; then the hair must be elaborately dressed, for no hat or bonnet can with propriety be worn at a *Kaffee*.

Mrs. Frere had hoped to be saved the trouble of changing her headgear, but both Gertrud and Friede assured her it was impossible to appear save in a highly decorative cap.

'But, liebe Cousine! you can put on a head-handkerchief (*Kopf-tuch*); it is warmer than a bonnet,' said Gertrud, as they stood ready to depart.

‘I am afraid it will crush my feathers,’ returned Mrs. Frere, who, if she had a vanity left, preserved a weakness for caps.

‘I will carry your cap!’ cried Friede; ‘and you can put it on when you go in. But let us start, or we shall be late.’

The colonel’s house was just outside the town, and stood in a large garden, duly guarded by a sentinel. Here was gathered all the female rank and fashion of Zittau, for no masculine element is permitted to disturb the exclusiveness of the institution,

On reaching the first-floor, the door was opened by a military-looking man-servant, and the ladies disrobed in a wide vestibule, furnished with several stands bristling with pegs, and thickly hung with jackets, head-*tuchs*, wraps of all descriptions—a looking-glass against the wall affording means of rectification.

Two handsome rooms, solidly and somewhat gloomily furnished, were thrown open, but the absence of graceful litter, the small elegances indicative of the inhabitants’ tastes and occupations, gave them a barren aspect, the usual characteristic of German drawing-rooms. They were already full when Mrs. Frere and her three young ladies entered, and the Frau Oberst came forward with a polite and profound curtsy to receive them.

‘Pray, madame, be seated!’

She waved Mrs. Frere to the seat of honour on the sofa, addressing her in French.

‘You know the Frau Burgomeisterin and Frau

Gerichtsamtmann Reinhardt, and these ladies, but allow me to introduce you to Frau Ober Förster Werner, and the Frau Ober Zoll Inspectorin, who have not had the pleasure of meeting you ; also Frau Richter, my good friend,' etc. etc.

All these ladies rose and curtsayed with much respect and formality. Most of them were exceedingly stout, with vast waists, round which they wore chains of silver, or thick silk cords, to hold their fans or hook up their dresses, and had broad, good-natured faces, wonderfully pale and puckered. Preaching and tax-collecting seemed the least flourishing occupations, as their female representatives were long, lean, and bony to an excessive degree. Black silk and embroidered cashmere dresses predominated, with a good deal of fine Saxon lace.

Meantime, while Mrs. Frere was exchanging smiles and compliments with those ladies who spoke French, or possessed a smattering of English, Fräulein Berta and Fräulein Marie von Ahlefeld, the colonel's daughters, took possession of Grace and her cousins.

Leading them across the first *salon*, Grace curtsaying at nearly every other step, on being presented to 'gracious' lady representatives of nearly every branch of civil and military service in Zittau. till they reached the inner room, where all the Fräulein were assembled, and a great clatter of many tongues moved the air. More introductions, curtseys, smiles, and compliments.

Gertrud and Friede went among the groups,

talking to their acquaintances, and soon were seated in the neighbourhoods most agreeable to them—Fräulein von Ahlefeld finding a place for her English guest close to the curtain which draped the doorway, beside a pretty, blue-eyed, fair-haired girl of the ideal Saxon type, whom she introduced as her dearest friend, Fräulein Lisabeth Gütcher, who spoke English like an angel—a description which called forth many smiling disclaimers and remonstrances. The fair Saxon, however, with the readiness to seize an opportunity of speaking a foreign tongue usual to Germans, addressed Grace in English; and with the help of mistakes and corrections, they were soon at home with each other.

The company being assembled, both men-servants and maid-servants brought in large trays laden with cups of coffee, each crowned with a snowy lump of whipped cream and great round thin cakes, each on a china stand, which just fitted it—deadly sweet, though light and rich, each supplied with a sort of silver perforated knife, like a small fish-slice, wherewith to serve the cake; and besides those, there were silver baskets full of every description of sweet biscuit. From this moment till they left, a succession of cakes, coffee, ice, wafers, mixed sweetbread, red and white wine, chocolate, bonbons, goodies of every description, were perpetually being handed round, till Grace felt positively sick with the mere attempt to taste a tithe of the dainties pressed upon her. The conversation meantime hung fire lamentably, and scarce rose above the level of question and answer. Presently

a plump damsel, in a green barège dress and red bows, sat down by Grace's new acquaintance, who, according to the excellent rule of German good manners, immediately introduced the stranger; but the influence of common topics and interests was too strong—both girls were soon absorbed in chatter so rapid that Grace could only understand an occasional word. As she sat thus somewhat isolated, her ear was caught by the name of Falkenberg, pronounced very distinctly by a strong elderly voice (there are periods for the voice) at the other side of the curtain beside her, and feeling it impossible to change her seat in that crowd of strangers, when there was no vacant place near either Gertrud or Friede, she was almost compelled to hear the greater part of what followed.

'Ach, meine Liebe! he is quite good and steady now. His debts are paid. All he has to do is to choose a rich wife, and they say that Gräfin Schönberg will——' said another speaker.

'Ach, Gott! not so,' interrupted the first. 'He has paid some portion of his gambling debts; and in consequence of his remarkable conduct in the war, the king pardoned that dreadful affair with the Frau Baronin von Putska, and allowed him to change his regiment.'

'It was in truth an unfortunate affair. Her religion, too, was a sad obstacle. Had they been Protestants, Herr von Putska and she might have arranged a divorce, and she might have married Falkenberg; but the Catholics are such bigots.'

'Ach! can you believe such a *Geschichte* (history)?

Think you Falkenberg would have married a woman without money, and lose his career? It would have been impossible.'

'I suppose so. But, lieber Gott! the woman pays dear for her folly. They say she is in a convent near Warsaw, separated from her children—for Catholics will sacrifice anything to avoid a scandal.'

'Ach, Himmel! and he is as much sought as ever—as much with the excellent family at Dalbersdorf.'

'But' (a long-drawn *Aber*) 'what can a family of that kind know, away from the talk of towns? (And, meine Liebe, what fearful gossips the Zittauers are—fearful! too—too dreadful!) They are near kinsfolk too; no one will speak to *them*. And the eldest, Fräulein Gertrud—they say he will marry her.'

'Ach, mein Liebe, by no means. This stranger family, the good Graf's cousins or nieces—*there* will he find his *Braut* (bride). It is a distinguished family and wealthy, but compelled through political offences to leave their country. So a marriage with a well-born German will be excellent for the Fräulein Tochter.'

'No, no, dear lady; a thousand times no. The young Fräulein favours the *Gelehrten*. She is half a man, like these English *Mädchen*; and they say she has eyes and ears only for Herr Dr. Sturm.'

Here a third person evidently added herself to the speakers, and from the confusion of tongues which ensued, Grace could gather nothing distinct. Then, to her relief, Gertrud came across the room to introduce her to some other young lady friends,

and she escaped from her corner, the terrible revelations of the unseen speakers still ringing in her ears.

Mrs. Frere, during this time, found herself the object of much interest, not to say curiosity.

'You will find it dull in our little Zittau,' said the Frau Burgomeisterin, as she stirred up the cream into her coffee. 'After the splendours of a great city, our simple life must seem too homely.'

'By no means, madame. Zittau appears a charming residence to me. I was only a short time in London.'

'And madame has only the one charming daughter and the little maiden? My young cousin has the pleasure to go to the same school with her.'

'Yes, I have no other daughters; but I have a son in England.'

'Indeed! And is he at school?' asked the Frau Gerichtsdirector.

'Or in the army?' added Frau Ober Försterin.

'Or is he a learned professor?' pursued Frau Ober Zoll Inspectorin.

'Ach, bewahr!' cried Frau Burgomeisterin, 'madame is far too young to have a professor son. What are you thinking of?'

'My boy is not yet twenty,' said Mrs. Frere.

'Certainly, gewiss!' cried the Frau Burgomeisterin. 'Then what will you make of him, madame, when he has finished his course?'

'I think he will adopt a literary career. At present he is in a great house of business.'

‘Maison de Commerce,’ repeated the ladies to each other. Then rapidly adding in German: ‘Impossible!’ ‘Strange!’ ‘It cannot be—a Kaufmann!’ (literally ‘a seller’—it may be of bales, boxes, and ships’ cargoes; it may be of metres, litres, or kilogrammes). ‘The son of so elegant a lady—a lady of quite a courtly appearance,’ etc.

‘But, meine Damen,’ said the Frau Postmeisterin, ‘a Kaufmann in England is not the same as here. There they rank according to their wealth—the richest is a duke. The English merchants are like those of Hamburg.’

‘Ach, du lieber Himmel!’ shrieked the Frau Burgomeisterin, ‘what matters it? A merchant can never rank with the military, or the *Spitzenbehörde*, or the *Gutsbesitzer*. I thought Herr Graf Costello was of a great English family. Indeed, he has a princely appearance,’ she added, with the aristocratic prejudice natural to a lady whose father, from a very humble beginning, had developed into a wealthy *Fabricant*.

‘Hush!’ whispered the Frau Gerichtsamtdirector. ‘The lady will wonder what we are speaking of! And how old is mademoiselle your daughter?’ she asked politely, addressing Mrs. Frere.

Mrs. Frere replied, and then they proceeded to inquire more or less minutely into her exact relationship to Count Costello and the Dalbersdorf family, the object of her residence in Zittau, its probable duration, and finally her opinion of Falkenberg and Dr. Sturm. However, in social tactics and the shibboleth of company conversation,

Mrs. Frere was no tyro; she gave very ample and courteous replies which conveyed—nothing, elegantly; thereby earning the respect of the inquisitors, who nevertheless felt themselves a little slighted because she did not in her turn cross-examine them as to the number of their children, their various professions and acquirements, the rank and standing of their respective husbands, etc.

This conversation was of course varied by flying visits from the hostess, whenever the cakes, and coffee, and ices, and 'Nusstorte,' and wine were being handed round. 'Bitte, bitte, meine Damen!' she would cry; 'you eat nothing. Take another morsel of cake—a cup of coffee—a glass of *bowle*. I fear there is nothing to tempt you.'

But even gossip garnished with sweets cannot last for ever; and about six, symptoms of separation began to show themselves.

The Frau Baronin von Heidenreich lived at some distance, and with three very tall, gaunt daughters, was the first to take leave, the young ladies curtsying low and kissing Frau Oberst's hand. Others soon followed, and Mrs. Frere, availing herself of the movement, approached Friede and asked if they might leave.

Then Gertrud and Grace had to be disentangled from the room full of Fräuleins; but at last, much to Grace's relief, all was over, and they were once more in the keen, still air.

'Well, my Gracechen, and what do you think of a "Kaffee Klatch?"' asked Friede, slipping her arm into Grace's, and leaving Mrs. Frere to Gertrud.

‘Klatch!’ repeated Grace.

‘Yes; it means “coffee gossip.”’

‘It is quite original, and not very amusing.’

Grace was not disposed to talk, so she let Friede run on unchecked with a rapid sketch of nearly all the people they had just left, while she revolved in her own mind the history she had overheard. Those words, ‘The woman pays dear for her folly,’ seemed still to sound in her ears. Her quick fancy sketched a vivid picture of a beautiful woman wearing out the remainder of a ruined life in silence and solitude, forsaken, forgotten—having forfeited a mother’s right to the presence, the love, the knowledge of her own children! The idea was too terrible. Could any woman live under such a ban, and keep her senses? and would not death be merciful, compared to such a lot? Could it be possible that Falkenberg—so bright and pleasant—so almost innocently playful with Mabel—so like a son and a brother in their simple home—had played a guilty part in such a tragedy as this? She had always been dimly conscious of a certain distrust—a vague uneasiness when with him; but of late it had nearly died away. Now——

But probably those horrid old women had exaggerated. How could she find out the truth? She could not ask—she could never repeat what she had heard; it was such a horrible story! True, her large experience in novel-reading supplied many parallel cases, but then they were in books; and young readers rarely realise that such things occur now and then in life. Grace felt strangely moved;

her heart sank within her. What was Max Frere's fickleness and neglect compared to such faithlessness as Falkenberg's to a woman, who, whatever she might be, had forfeited all for him!

'So you see, my Gracechen, the Burgomeister is sure to give a ball in January; he always does; and their parties are capital!' Friede was saying, when Grace, with an effort, forced herself back to every-day topics.

'Yes; I am sure they are charming!' returned Grace, mechanically. 'And my uncle, will he go?'

'No; he rarely goes out in the evening. But Grace, have you seen Otto Sturm lately?'

'Yes; he was skating with me yesterday, and he sups with us to-night. I wish you had seen how he brightened up when my mother asked him!'

'Did he know I—I mean we—were coming, thou sweetest one?'

'Yes, of course; that was why we asked him. We scarce ever ask anyone.'

'Well, your little Paulina has lit up every room! How tempting and homelike the old house looks!' cried Friede, as they approached under the snow-laden trees.

'I only hope she has done as I desired her about laying the table,' said Grace; 'between my bad German and my inexperience, I fear I am an indifferent *Hausfrau*.'

'Come, then,' exclaimed Friede, who seemed in high spirits, 'let us run on, and make all right before anyone arrives.'

The *salon*, with its bright lamp and gay table-

covers, its books, photograph-stands, open piano, and Mrs. Frere's work-basket overflowing with many-coloured wools, seemed to welcome them cheerily. Mab, too, had donned a pretty, grey summer frock and coaxed Paulina to do her fair hair in two long plaits, after which friendly assistance they quarrelled—quarrelled bitterly, I regret to say—over the task of setting the table, as Paulina refused to permit Mabel any share of the work.

'She is an odious, disagreeable thing,' said Mab, with her usual candour and decision. 'And just you look, Grace, what a muddle she has made of it!—a pile of spoons here, a heap of forks there. No room for the plates, she has put the dishes so near the edge. She knows nothing!'

'It looks rather funny,' said Grace, glad to turn her thoughts to domestic matters; 'but I am afraid you speak rudely to Paulina, and that makes her cross. Come, you may help Friede and me.'

So saying, she began to array the supper-table in English fashion, Friede and Mab assisting—all three enjoying their work—while Paulina was free to concentrate her energies on the preparation of *Backhuhn* (fried fowl with mushrooms—a Bohemian dish of decided merit).

When all was ready, they left the double-doors open that the warmth of the *salon* might penetrate into the dining-room, thus permitting a pleasant peep of the supper-table, with its snow-white cloth, shining glass and silver, and centre-group of plants.

'Do you not think Grace has learned much

management since she came to us?' asked Gertrud, who had rearranged her toilette with some care. Both sisters were arrayed in ruby French merino, much trimmed with velvet of the same colour, and bows of pale blue at the throat and in their hair.

'Yes, she really does wonders; and she knew little or nothing when she left England,' replied Mrs. Frere, to whom the question had been addressed.

'And can she manage, as she intended, on sixteen thalers a week? It is really quite enough, only your ways are so different.'

'I imagine she does. She has not mentioned the house accounts to me for some time.'

'It is no doubt a help to have the good Dalbersdorf milk and butter at market price; and Mamsell desired me to tell you that we kill a pig next week, and will you please say what *Schwein fleisch* or *wurst* you would like?'

'My dear, you had better speak to Grace; I leave everything to her. But I am exceedingly obliged to you, Gertrud.'

'And is it in truth so much more costly in London?'

Mrs. Frere's answer was stopped by the entrance of Dr. Sturm, whom they had previously heard taking off his coat in the corridor. He had made a careful toilette; his neat tie, and hair brushed back behind his ears, all showed an unusual amount of attention to personal appearance.

'I fear I am somewhat early,' he said, bowing low over the hand Mrs. Frere extended to him,

while his pale cheek flushed a little. 'But it is always agreeable to be with Mrs. Frere; and I have, moreover, to make the excuses of my mother, who is too much overwhelmed with her Christmas preparations to leave the house.'

'I am very sorry,' said Mrs. Frere. 'She ought to have come, were it only to rest for a couple of hours.'

'Why did you not bring Cecilia?' asked Mab.

'Fräulein Gertrud, Fräulein Friede,' continued the doctor, 'you are, I hope, well? It seems a long age since I have seen you.' And after greeting Grace cordially, he took a seat between Friede and Mrs. Frere, turning occasionally when speaking to her to look at the former with such an expression of serene complete happiness, that Grace thought everyone who observed him for a moment must perceive the secret of his joy; while Friede blushed and smiled and grew radiant under his honest loving glance, till her cousin felt absolutely indignant at this display of feeling without the smallest attempt at concealment or self-control.

The conversation turned on the coffee party of that afternoon, and Grace asked if Friede knew who the two ladies were who sat near her (Grace) by the doorway.

'While you were talking with Fräulein Gutcher?'

'Yes.'

'I am not quite sure. One was, I think, Frau Walter; the other is a stranger from Dresden, who is, I think, staying with the Frau Oberst.'

'Oh, that Frau Walter is too dreadful; she is

the greatest gossip in Zittau, and always has the worst stories of everyone,' cried Gertrud.

This was a crumb of comfort to Grace, and it had hardly been caught when little Paulina opened with a beaming aspect, and said :

'Herr Graf, meine gnädige Frau, and Herr Baron,' when, to the amazement of everyone, Count Costello's tall stately figure appeared in the doorway—for everyone knew he seldom left Dalbersdorf of an evening in winter—and close behind came Falkenberg.

'My dear uncle!' cried Mrs. Frere and Grace together.

'Ach Gott, der Gross-vater!' exclaimed his granddaughters, with one voice.

'This is indeed a pleasure,' said Grace, embracing him warmly, while Mrs. Frere drew forward her own arm-chair, and all crowded round him.

'Why, it is a treat to come among such a bevy of beauties,' said the gallant veteran, having kissed them all round and settled himself in his chair. 'And your *salon*, niece, has borrowed something of your own charm.'

'But to what do we owe the pleasure of seeing you, dear uncle?'

'Yes,' echoed Friede, 'how is it you are here, *Gross-papa* ?'

'Ah, you have to thank me,' said Falkenberg, who had kept in the background, furtively watching Grace ; 'and nobody takes any notice of me. Miss Grace has not even spoken one word.'

'I beg your pardon,' said Grace, laughing to hide

the change in her tone, which was perceptible to herself; 'I was too much surprised to notice anyone. Thank you very much for bringing the count to us.' She spoke without moving from her place, and Falkenberg consequently did not offer his hand.

'After you started this morning,' said the count, 'Falkenberg made his appearance, and insisted on my riding over with him to Burchardtswald; then I went to dine at the Casino—so I am here, and shall return with the girls. My *Frau Tochter* was quite alarmed at such an outbreak on the old soldier's part. Ha! ha! ha!' the count laughed triumphantly at the notion of his daughter's discomfiture. 'However, I have enjoyed my day.'

'Ah, Wolff!' cried Friede, 'you are always ready to stir up insurrection.'

'Have I not done well, and given everyone pleasure?' he returned.

'Please come to table,' said Paulina.

The count offered his arm to Mrs. Frere, Falkenberg to Gertrud, and Sturm brought up the rear with Friede and Grace.

'Ah,' said the count, as he glanced approvingly at the chief dish, '*Backhuhn*! that is good. I have not tasted *Backhuhn* for some time—and mushrooms—good!'

'And here, uncle, is a bottle of Mislauer. I know you like it—at least, I hope so,' said Mrs. Frere.

The supper proceeded merrily, Grace and Friede doing a good deal of the waiting, Sturm and Falkenberg occasionally assisting.

'Thank you, me darling,' said the count, as Grace bent over him to place a fresh roll by his plate. 'Faith! it transports me back nearly fifty years to look at you to-night, though you are pale. What's the matter, Grace?'

'Nothing, dear uncle,' she returned, blushing vividly, for every eye turned upon her at this observation, and she hastened back to her place, which was between Sturm and Falkenberg, at the foot of the table. The latter, glancing up at her round pliant figure, in its simple dress of close-fitting black silk, buttoned from throat to feet, with a frill and cravat of rich old lace, said, smiling :

'Miss Grace is a very deceptive young lady. The roses come and go so quickly in her cheeks that a stranger might think her very shy—timid—bashful—which is it? But no! she is firm, and self-reliant, and proud—very proud. Is it not so, Herr General?'

'I tell you what it is, Falkenberg, my boy; you have a very fair general idea of the sex—you have made the most of your opportunities, I daresay—but I don't think you understand an Irish girl like my Grace.'

'Do I not?' said Falkenberg, turning a significant look on Grace. 'I think I ought.'

'And I think, Wolff, you are very rude to insinuate that my cousin is bold,' said Gertrud, with a simper of superiority.

'But I said no such thing. What I *do* say is, that for all the sweet home-staying virtues of a real German maiden, there is no better type than my fair cousin Gertrud.'

‘And am not I home-staying, too?’ asked Friede, in an injured tone.

‘To be sure; dare anyone deny it?’ said Falkenberg, soothingly.

‘Fräulein Friede is formed to be the light and joy of the home she stays in,’ murmured Herr Doctor, in a low tone, unnoticed by anyone save Friede and Grace, while Falkenberg rather noisily drank Gertrud’s health.

‘Well said,’ thought Grace to herself. ‘How well he says most things!’ and she silently wondered that intellectual refinement could co-exist with manners somewhat primitive in some directions, for even as he spoke, he unhesitatingly rested his knife, all dripping with gravy, on the table-cloth while sending his plate for a supply of *Backluhn*, and then thrust the gastronomic weapon into the salt previous to renewing his attack; nor did any doubt seem to cross his mind at a later period as to the propriety of using his toothpick: unimportant trifles, perhaps, yet Grace thought how intolerable in a husband! When she again attended to what was going on, the count was concluding a panegyric on the beauty and virtue of his countrywomen.

‘Not but there are angels by the dozen to be found in Saxony and Austria; but, for dash and fun, and the salt of pleasant devilry to keep the blood warm in your veins while all goes well, and love and tenderness to heal your wounds and soothe your bruises when you’ve been battered in the battle of life, there are few can equal an Irish

girl. Your health, my dear niece ; and yours too, my jewel !

‘I am quite sure of the devilry,’ said Falkenberg, laughing and glancing at Grace, as she held out her glass to touch her grand-uncle’s ; ‘and of course, that carries conviction as to the rest of the assertion !’ but Grace did not meet his eyes.

‘I should have thought, my dear uncle,’ said Mrs. Frere, ‘that you knew little or nothing of your countrywomen, you left home so early.’

‘Fifty-four years ago, last November,’ returned the veteran. ‘But, my dear, I have known Irish women *out* of Ireland ! To be sure, fifty years ago every woman was sweeter and fairer, the sun shone brighter, the thunder rolled more grandly ; ach, Himmel ! joy was more joyous, and grief more keen.’

‘Is it, then, so long, Herr Graf, since you left your country ?’ asked Dr. Sturm.

‘Ay ! I have seen the map of Europe twice changed during the time, and not much good come of it.’

‘You should dictate your memoirs to Friede and to me,’ said Grace ; ‘I long to write, and your recollections would be historical.’

‘I have seen a good deal, one way or the other, certainly,’ returned the count, with some pride, while Mrs. Frere filled his glass ; ‘but I tell you that, while most things seem to grow smaller and feebler in my sight, the enormous size of modern armies fills me with astonishment.’

‘And sorrow,’ put in Sturm : ‘such cruel waste

of the most precious material the world holds—human life.’

‘It is not wasted,’ said Falkenberg, sharply; ‘wars do not often occur, and the military death-rate is not higher than civil.’

‘Ah, Herr Baron, you wilfully misunderstand me,’ cried Sturm. ‘It is not of the waste of physical life I speak, but careers interrupted, studies broken off at their most critical period, families deprived of their most effectual helpers; of the country turned into a vast barrack, of industry paralysed.’

‘Liebe, Herr Doctor!’ returned Falkenberg, and there was a touch of scorn in his tone. ‘The men who come into our ranks are too young to have family duties, or ought not to have them; and as the obligation is universal, the breaking-off of studies, or careers, puts them at no disadvantage, while the discipline of the soldier teaches them order, punctuality, obedience, self-respect——’

‘Not self-respect! A system that reduces them to machines, and stamps out individuality, cannot develop self-respect.’

‘Faith, every man is the better of being drilled,’ said the count; whereupon Falkenberg remarked on the philanthropic enthusiasm of uninstructed civilians with a thinly veiled sneer.

Dr. Sturm replied with perfect temper, but much earnestness, and the argument raged for some minutes in German, though the conversation had begun in English. Grace gathered enough to understand that Otto Sturm was an advanced

Liberal, and was of opinion that the peace of Europe would be safer in the hands of strictly representative governments, than in those of autocrats or nominally constitutional kings, who could put the terrible machinery of war in motion from insufficient motives, or reasons apart from the real interests of the people. Moreover, she observed that he was always calm with the strength of deep unselfish conviction, whereas Falkenberg spoke with repressed irritation and angry contempt, as if he would fain crush all opposition, all assertion of right, by his inferiors under his military heel. The count's views did not come out very clearly, his old-soldier prejudices inclining to universal enrolment—his kindly nature to give all a chance of improving their condition.

Friede looked a little anxious as Falkenberg's face assumed a harder and more sneering expression, noticing which, Grace, presuming on her supposed ignorance of the turn the conversation had taken, suggested that, as everyone seemed to have finished supper, they might go into the next room, and perhaps Friede would play to them; whereupon they all rose from table and adjourned to the *salon*. Friede sat down willingly enough to the piano and began a long fantasia, while Dr. Sturm, listening attentively, stood beside her to turn over the leaves; and the count occasionally whispered morsels of argument to Mrs. Frere and Gertrud, which were, unfortunately, too late for the interrupted discussion. Grace, meantime, drew a low seat between the piano and the sofa, which stood

somewhat back from where Gertrud had placed herself. After looking first at a few photographs, and then over Friede's shoulder at her music, Falkenberg threw himself in a half-reclining posture on the sofa, his head coming very close to Grace's ear. Presently, as the music grew louder, he said, very quietly :

'Something has displeased or distressed you to-day: you have hardly spoken, you have hardly eaten; and I imagine, perhaps groundlessly, that I am out of favour.'

'Oh no! nothing has gone wrong, and you have done nothing to displease me,' returned Grace.

There was a pause, and then Falkenberg, again subduing his tone, said :

'You have a most expressive voice; did no one ever tell you so? Whatever words your lips may form, your voice tells the truth; and you have had some shock, some mental blow to-day. I have learned to know you well, since the day you risked so much to bring me help.'

'De grace, Herr von Falkenberg! You know quite well that I risked nothing; do not mention it any more.'

'And will you not tell me what has distressed you?' said Falkenberg, after an instant's pause, as if he waited for her to speak.

'I have felt home-sick of late,' returned Grace, quickly; 'the season brings with it memories, and though I like Zittau, and my cousins, and—everyone, there are hours when I long—oh, unspeakably!—for my old home—my old life.'

Her voice trembled slightly, her lip quivered as she spoke with pathetic earnestness, for her heart swelled with the thought of that far-away time, nearly a year ago, when the world was unknown and unfeared; and treachery, falsehood, harshness, were mere stage effects, conjured up by clever writers to give force and interest to their dramatic pictures. Something in her voice and downcast look stirred Falkenberg's heart, or circulating system; and lowering his voice to a whisper, full of almost passionate tenderness, he whispered:

'Meine liebe Grace! you will tell me to-morrow, when we skate together?'

'I shall not,' said Grace, shortly, suddenly throwing off the softness and depression which had crept over her; 'you are the last man I should tell anything to.'

'Ach, so!' exclaimed Falkenberg, greatly startled, a long-drawn 'so;' 'then I *am* in disgrace!'

When the little party broke up, Friede, on pretence of looking at Mab asleep, stole first into Mrs. Frere's and then into Grace's room.

'Ach, du Liebling!' she said, twining her arm round her cousin's waist, 'was it not *wunderschön* (admirable)?'

'What?' asked Grace.

'Oh, the argument at supper: Otto's eloquence, his logic, his infinite superiority. Wolff is not at all equal to him. He loses his temper, he cannot reason; he is not noble!'

'Herr von Falkenberg is no *savant*,' said Grace, coldly; 'he is just a fighting-man with a few ac-

complishments. But, Friede, do you know anything of his history? Why did he change into this regiment?’

‘I scarcely know. He was unsteady, and gambled, and got into debt, and then he was mixed up in some unpleasant affair in Dresden; I never was told exactly what, but there was a lady in it. Why do you ask, dear Grace? Do you interest yourself in Wolff?’


‘No; certainly not as you mean. Yet he does interest me, though he is ever so far below your Otto.’

‘My Otto, beloved Grace! Why do you call him thus?’

‘Because I am sure he *is*.’



CHAPTER XII.

HRISTMAS, which at Dungar had been principally a time of religious observance—of charitable and family gifts, and some extra eating—was the most important festival of the year at Dalbersdorf; nay, more, the crowning-point, to which months of preparation were devoted. *Herrschaft, gesinde Leute, Dienst-mädchen*, high and low, looked to its rewards as the ultimate end and aim of service and good conduct. Then professors from remote cities and soldiers from distant barracks rush home for even a couple of days, to taste once more the old family life—some with relish and enjoyment, some with weariness and disgust, according to their several natures.

Mab had been for days wild with anticipation respecting the Christmas-tree, which, although familiar enough in England nowadays, was unknown in the 'wild West.' Mamsell had favoured her with many descriptions, and hinted at

a dazzling array of gifts spread on tables which was beyond the power of childish imagination to picture. But she little knew the fertility of Mab's fancy.

Grace often warned her not to expect too much, though she was quite aware of the fruitlessness of her words.

To Mrs. Frere and Grace the season brought sad and tender thoughts of their old home and its beloved master. This frame of mind drew them more together than ever—Mrs. Frere drooping like a plant deprived of sunshine whenever her daughter was away; and Grace, out of the treasure of a boundlessly generous nature, always finding patience, tenderness, sympathy enough to satisfy her mother's needs—no shadow of selfishness ever suggesting that she gave too much, or received too little. Nor did Mrs. Frere often transgress reasonable limits. If of slight build, her character was true, sweet, and childlike: a creature that could die for one she loved, but could neither endure silently nor dare to look danger in the face. Her spirits invariably flagged as the end of the quarter drew near, and rose again so soon as the fresh though expected supply of cash replenished the exhausted exchequer. She was rather reluctant to share the Dalbersdorf festivities; but neither the count nor Frau Alvsleben would hear of an excuse, and Grace was equally urgent: 'You cannot be left alone, you know, mother dear; if you do not go, neither can I,'—an argument which settled the matter.

Christmas-eve was fine—that is, still and grey, but less cold than the days which had immediately preceded it; and Falkenberg, of whom they had not seen much since the visit of Gertrud and Friede had come in the previous evening, to offer his sleigh for the accommodation of Mrs. Frere and her daughters. Mrs. Frere accepted very readily, for Falkenberg stood high in her good graces.

‘We shall take Ulrich with us, also,’ he said. ‘I had a letter from him; he starts to-night, and will beat up my quarters about five or six in the morning. There is an American entertainment at which he wishes to be present, and he will go from it to the train.’

‘I am glad of that!’ cried Grace; ‘Ulrich is such a nice boy.’

‘Boy!’ repeated Falkenberg, laughing; ‘he would not be much obliged to you for such an epithet.’

‘Well, I always feel as if he were a boy; I cannot believe he is nearly a year and a half older than I am.’

‘Is he? I suppose it is ungallant to say so, but I always imagine you older than I suppose you are. May I ask?’

‘Oh yes, certainly; I shall be nineteen the 23rd of January.’

‘The 23rd of January,’ repeated Falkenberg, thoughtfully; ‘you look——.’ He paused.

‘Pray say no more,’ returned Grace, laughing.

The day then was grey and still, but Dalbersdorf had put on its brightest aspect. Everything capable of being scrubbed or polished had been rubbed up to the last degree. The smiling Marie, who seemed to have subjected her face to the same process, had on a snowy apron and cap, and came to greet them with effusion and many 'Achs!' 'Gnädige Fraus,' and hand-kissing.

Behind her Mamsell, also in her best: lace on her head-gear and apron, her Sunday black merino dress, and a lace handkerchief. The whole family following after from the dining-room to greet their guests.

'Many happy Christmases to you, my dear,' cried the count, as Mab sprang into his arms, and was passed on from one to another, to receive a succession of embraces.

'Ach! but you are welcome, my good cousin and friend,' said Frau Alvsleben, presenting both hands to Mrs. Frere kindly; 'and you too, meine liebe—liebe Grace!'

'Welcome to a Saxon Christmas,' said Gertrud.

'Dearest and best! I have been looking for you this hour,' cried Friede.

And amid the general kissing which ensued, Ulrich, who had done his first greeting in Zittau, quietly took his place among the household, presenting himself for his share with such an easy, natural air, that Grace found herself bestowing a similar salute upon him unconsciously, to the amusement of all, and the triumph of the young hussar.

‘Ach !’ he exclaimed ; ‘ it is the sweetest ! and all the sweeter for being almost stolen—eh, meine liebe Cousine ! Falkenberg, you are no cousin. You must keep afar off—poor Wolff !’

Grace laughed good-humouredly.

‘ I am glad you are pleased,’ she said. ‘ But I should say given kisses were sweeter.’

‘ I too,’ said Falkenberg, carelessly ; ‘ nor can you deny me a nephew and cousin’s claim here.’

So saying, he offered a polite kiss to Frau Alvsleben and her daughters.

‘ Faith, Ulrich shows a touch of his Irish blood now and then,’ cried the count.

‘ But come—come into the dining-room,’ said Frau Alvsleben ; ‘ you must be cold after your drive.’

‘ Ah ! we shall have a heavy fall of snow soon,’ remarked the count. ‘ I hope it will not come down till you are safe back to-night.’

‘ Come with me,’ whispered Friede to Grace, ‘ and take off your wraps in my room.’

‘ Yes, come with us,’ said Gertrud, who was gay and gracious.

Friede made a little furtive grimace to her cousin, for she did not particularly covet Gertrud’s company. She was always greedy of opportunities to pour out her doubts, hopes, and fears to the one confidante in whom she dared to trust.

However, the three girls went upstairs together ; Mab preferring Mamsell’s company and a visit to the pigs and poultry.

‘ What shall I do with these ?’ asked Grace ;

'these' being sundry brown-paper parcels of various sizes.

'Oh,' from Gertrud, 'you must leave Friede's things with me, and mother's, and Wolff's; and the rest with Friede.'

'Wolff's!' repeated Grace, dismayed; 'I never thought of him. Mab has worked him a note-book, but I—I did nothing.'

'That is too bad!' cried Friede. 'I am sure he will be disappointed.'

'I do not think he will mind,' said Grace.

'I have worked him a new *Jagd-gürtel* (hunting-belt), wonderfully beautiful (*wunderschön*),' returned Gertrud, with an air of importance; 'and I have knit him three pairs of silk socks, and a *Decke* (cover) for his table.'

'Why, Gertrud, you have been diligent! But Herr Hauptmann has a splendid hunting-belt already.'

'Yes,' said Gertrud, with a slight frown and much decision; 'but I do not wish him to wear it any more.'

'Do you think he will leave it off?'

'We shall see,' returned Gertrud, closing her mouth tightly.

Grace looked at her in slight surprise.

'Well, Gertrud,' she said, selecting several of her parcels, 'I will give these to your care; and these, Friede, to yours. I have put names on them all.'

'I will take them at once to the *salon* (we use the *Oben-stube* always at Christmas),' said Gertrud, gathering up those committed to her charge.

‘After dinner Friede and I will set all in order. I would ask you to help, only as it is your first German Christmas, we want you to see the tables when all is ready.’

‘Next Christmas, dearest, you shall help us,’ said Friede, caressingly, as if it was an honour and pleasure of which she reluctantly deprived her friend.

While Grace found herself thinking: ‘Next Christmas! Shall I be here next Christmas? I am content and happy enough; but I should like to spend next Christmas in England.’ A sudden, unusual yearning sprang up in her heart for Randal, for Jimmy Byrne, for her old nurse, for dear, pleasant Lady Elton, for all and everyone whom she had known and loved.

Meantime Friede was speaking, and Gertrud had left the room.

‘It was so difficult to think of anything for Otto—Dr. Sturm.’

‘What have you decided on?’ asked Grace, finding some words were expected of her.

‘A large blotting-book, with his initials surrounded by a wreath of bay-leaves. It is really charming; and a *Decke* for Frau Sturm.’

‘And how do you conceal your gifts from each other when you both arrange them?’

‘Oh, Gertrud decks my table, and I deck hers; then we lay a cover over; and when we all go in, each uncovers her own table: yours—’

Here a knock at the door interrupted them.

‘Herein,’ called Friede, whereupon enter Ulrich

and Falkenberg, quite naturally and unconcernedly.

‘Ach! meine liebe Friede, Wolff and I have been seeking thee; and where is Gertrud?’ said Ulrich.

‘We have important secrets to commit to thy keeping,’ added Falkenberg. ‘Call Gertrud, and come down to the *Arbeitszimmer* (study); the Fräulein Cousin is not in our confidence!’

They left Grace and went away together. She was going to seek Mab and Mamsell, when Frau Sturm, her son and daughter—the usual Christmas guests at Dalbersdorf—arrived. And the scene of hearty welcome and general hubbub was re-enacted, such as Grace had already shared: Friede embracing the kindly simple widow with warmth and effusion, taking her up to the guest chamber herself, and loading her with affectionate attention; while to Grace’s care Cecilia was confided, and they set out together to find Mab, and bring her in to dinner, which, in honour of the company, was fixed at the late hour of half-past two.

After a prolonged symposium, from which the children soon escaped, Friede and Gertrud went away to their task of decoration; and the table being cleared, Grace undertook to amuse Mab and Cecilia. The count went to take a nap, Frau Alvsleben to attend to sundry matters connected with the festival, and Ulrich, Herr Doctor, Falkenberg, and the *Verwalter* to the stables; while Mrs. Frere and Frau Sturm strove to keep up a conversation in mixed French and German.

‘Don’t you think we might go upstairs and help

Gertrud and Friede?' asked Mab, whose thoughts were with them already.

'No, indeed ; you must not ! Come, here is Uncle Costello's old backgammon-board. You can play Mab, and I will teach Cecilia.'

To this Mab demurred ; but finding her sister resolved not to let her out of the room, and further impressed with her little companion's ready obedience, she applied herself to the game and was soon interested.

Presently the gentlemen returned. Ulrich and Falkenberg were instantly attracted to the backgammon-players, and Dr. Sturm devoting himself to entertain Mrs. Frere, till Friede put in her head to ask Ulrich's assistance, but rejecting with a blush and smile that of Sturm, who immediately offered his services.

This movement was too much for Mab's self-control. She would take no further interest in the game ; and Grace did not know what to do with her till Dr. Sturm, with the kindly consideration for children so usual in Germany, offered to tell the little friends stories about the old arms and head-pieces which hung in the hall, whither they joyfully accompanied him.

'Will you give me a lesson ?' asked Falkenberg, arranging the pieces ; 'it will pass the time. The tree will not be lit up for an hour yet.'

'Very well,' returned Grace, sitting down and beginning to show him the moves of the simple game, which yet resembles life in its mixture of chance and skill.

Falkenberg was quick and attentive. He was evidently well informed as to the nature of games ; and at the end of the first, he began throwing the dice in an absent unconscious way.

‘How neatly and deftly you handle the dice,’ said Grace, as she watched him.

‘Yes,’ he returned, rousing himself ; ‘they come a little too familiarly to my hand.’ And he was silent for a moment ; then, speaking abruptly, as if out of his thoughts, he went on, still mechanically throwing the dice, ‘It is more than three months since that day.’

‘What day?’ asked Grace.

‘When you bent over me, as I lay in mortal fear lest help delayed would be no help at all. Your face comes back to me often with the expression it wore then—so tender, yet so firm. I have had a feeling of comradeship with you ever since. You gave me an idea of what a woman might be who was strong and self-reliant as well as soft and loving.’

He paused ; and Grace did not know what to say, for he scarce seemed to speak to her.

‘It is strange,’ he went on, in a low musing tone, ‘that so great a service rendered has not drawn us nearer to each other ; but it has not, and now we drift apart. There is some secret influence closing your heart against me, turning you from friendship with me ; there is something in you I never quite understand. I wish you were less fair and young, and good, meine liebe Schöne. No!’ checking himself, ‘not mine.’ He cast the dice three times very

deliberately ; then, throwing down the box angrily, he shut up the board, exclaiming : ' Luck is against me, and fate too, Grace !' She looked at him, greatly surprised by the fierce impatient expression of his eyes ; but before either could speak, enter Mab and Cecilia at express speed.

' You are to come upstairs. Ulrich and Herr Verwalter are lighting up the tree. Cecilia and I have run out in the front *Hof*, and the windows look all ablaze,' cried Mab.

' But the door is still locked,' added Cecilia.

' And Fräulein Friede has told me through the key-hole that you are not to approach till Mamsell summons you,' added Dr. Sturm, following his young listeners into the room.

' Well, we shall go upstairs and wait, at any rate,' cried Mab. Ach, du lieber Wolff! has Grace taught you backgammon ?'

' She has taught me much,' said Falkenberg, drawing the child to him.

' Will the Herrschaft come up ? all is ready,' said Mamsell.

On reaching the landing there was yet a moment of waiting in the dark until the doors should be opened, and Grace could not help repeating in thought Wolff von Falkenberg's words—words he seemed to utter involuntarily. Was it possible that this rather spoiled man of the world was really attracted to her ? She felt a little frightened, a little offended at having the remnants of a heart thus partially offered, partially withheld ! and yet gratified vanity predominated over all. There was

a certain soldier-like hardihood, a careless audacity about Falkenberg, flecked here and there with gleams of kindness, of sympathetic penetration and resisted sentiment, which made him very attractive to women. But from some occult cause he had not touched Grace's deeper feelings, and that wretched piece of gossip—though no doubt exaggerated, possibly untrue—had woke up a vague sense of repulsion. Still his admiration was pleasant—irresistibly pleasant; only she wished he would not show it too openly. She felt rather than knew it would offend—

But at this point of her reflections the double doors of the sacred *Oben-stube* were thrown wide open, and a flood of light streamed forth.

This precious apartment was handsomely furnished with carved cabinets, tables, and *étagères* of black polished wood; the chairs and sofa-covers and curtains of gold-coloured brocade; the floor in the highest order of slipperiness, and sundry landscapes, in rich frames, hung upon the walls. A lofty, heavy mantelpiece was surmounted by a large looking-glass, and divers specimens of delicate china stood upon the shelf.

The *Oben-stube* was only used on occasions of state and ceremony, or high festivals such as the present; and Grace had only entered it on a cleaning-day during her six weeks' visit. Now it was displayed in all its glory. All along the sides, across the ends, in the corners, wherever they could be placed, stood little tables loaded with a variety of articles, each lit by a couple of wax candles; and

against the centre window towered a superb tree, glittering and shimmering with dozens of tiny tapers, hung with filmy gold, silver, and coloured web-like chains of cut paper ; and thickly decked with gold and silver nuts and pine-cones, sparkling imitation icicles, and metal butterflies ; a gorgeous confusion of light and magnificence, calling forth shouts of delight from Mab and her friend.

Grace and Mrs. Frere also were somewhat dazzled, although the latter had seen something of the same kind before ; and exclamations of 'How beautiful!' 'How brilliant!' 'So well arranged!' etc., rewarded the decorators. But the thrilling moment was when the tables were examined. On Mab's were picture and story books, a lovely doll-child (Mab, though in her tenth year, still dearly loved dolls) from Uncle Costello ; a velvet belt and bag from Cousin Alvsleben ; a sash from Gertrud ; a beautiful knitted jacket from Friede, to put under her cloak when she went to school of a cold morning ; a splendid photograph-album from Von Falkenberg, with his own portrait in the front, etc., down to a work-bag, containing a large packet of sweets, from Mamsell ; and a bouquet from the *Verwalter*.

These treasures were hailed with positive shrieks of exultation : and Cecilia, whose table was quite as richly furnished, was almost as vociferous.

But Grace and Mrs. Frere had many useful and pretty gifts, and their contributions of English neckties and Irish lace, together with sundry

productions of Grace's needle, were much admired and prized.

Uncle Costello, too, came out very strong on the occasion. To Grace he gave a handsome *porte-monnaie*; and not being able to wait until she asked the name of the donor, he jogged her arm:

'Take it, dear,' he said, 'with your old uncle's blessing;' then in a hasty whisper, with a wink which seemed sadly out of place on such a dignified countenance: 'Don't look into it till you are alone by yourself, my darling!' an injunction which Grace, knowing his wholesome awe of his daughter, rigidly obeyed.

But the joy of the rest was as nothing compared to that of the servants and Mamsell, whose tables were most substantially set forth. Pieces of cloth and stuffs for dresses, sheeting and bed-coverings, warm jackets, caps, ribbons, cloaks, little ornamental boxes containing the customary Christmas gifts of money; besides which good things were trifles in the shape of collars, cuffs, ties, and pincushions. While every table had a certain allowance of long *Stollen*, a bread-like cake, with a ridge all along the centre, as essential to a German Christmas as plum-pudding in England; a small pile of apples and another of walnuts, without which, however handsomely furnished, no servants' table would be considered complete.

When the first excitement of running about from table to table and kissing and thanking everyone had partially subsided, Grace began to examine her

own possessions more thoroughly, and trace the givers of each article, till she came to a charming little riding-whip, with a silver handle encrusted with Saxon crystals. Her cousins, the count, Frau Alvsleben, all had acknowledged their presents, and she felt stupidly reluctant to inquire as to this one. She took it up and cut an imaginary horse with it sharply; then 'covering her confusion by rushing into words, exclaimed:

'Who is the giver of this lovely, delightful whip? I never saw anything so pretty.'

There was a moment's silence.

'Aha!' cried Ulrich; 'I could a tale unfold! Some one beat up my quarters a month ago at Dresden, and dragged me from shop to shop to choose pretty things. It was hard enough to please him with the *châtelaine* yonder; but the whip was worst of all, for the people did not quite understand his needs,' and he looked smilingly at Falkenberg as he spoke.

The *châtelaine* was on Gertrud's table, and had been greatly admired; she now thanked him with evident gratification. Grace felt more embarrassed than she cared to admit. The whip was too handsome; but Gertrud's and Friede's gifts were equal in cost. So clearing her difficulty at a bound, Grace went straight to him and held out her hand.

'Thank you,' she said, simply and heartily; 'I admire your present; it is quite beautiful, and I shall prize it always.'

Falkenberg bowed low, and lifted her hand for

an instant to his lips—an unimportant courtesy in Germany ; but he uttered no word.

After nearly an hour of intense admiration, exclamation, and general utterance of everyone's opinion in complete disregard of what their neighbours were saying, the tapers began to burn low, and had to be extinguished by blowing through a long tube, whereby those furthest aloft could be reached. Then the children gathered and packed up their belongings, and the visitors did the same. Soon it was time for supper, which was a long affair, for many healths were drunk and speeches made : after which the table was cleared, and all joined in a waltz and polka, Grace distinguishing herself by playing with spirit and precision ; for Friede, like many other excellent performers, was unequal to dance-music. Mrs. Frere, too, was quite happy to assist, and all wound up with the *Grossvater*, a sort of Saxon 'Sir Roger de Coverley,' begun with some six or eight steps of solemn stateliness, and then breaking into a wild gallop down the whole length of the room. In this even the count joined.

At last Christmas morn was on them ; once more they were packed into the sleigh, thickly wrapped in furs and wraps of all descriptions ; and taking with them, in Ulrich's place, the *Verwalter*, as he was to pass Christmas Day with his mother. Falkenberg was in high spirits, and laughed and talked very agreeably all the moonlit way home ; but Grace observed that, after he had shut up the

backgammon-board, he had never addressed a separate word to her.

This, however, in no way ruffled the self-love to which his peculiar, half-reluctant admiration had offered such pleasant incense ; and Grace's first Christmas Eve in Germany always dwelt in her memory as a bright and happy reminiscence.



CHAPTER XIII.



THE brightness of this pleasant season was made infinitely more enjoyable by the satisfactory tone of Randal's letters, and still more so by Jimmy Byrne's. Both were excited almost to eloquence by their admiration of some small Christmas gifts, the work of Grace's and Mabel's own fingers. Randal represented himself as the most careful and regular of young men, and requested his mother to send him no present of money, as, thanks to her previous liberality, he was still quite flush of cash. Moreover, further contributions from him had been accepted by the *Daily Bread*, and *Cornfield*, another new weekly publication of surpassing merit; he would post the numbers for his mother so soon as his lucubrations were printed. As yet the remuneration was trifling, but when better established the pay would improve; and perhaps, after all, he might before long be able to subsist by his pen.

The office had changed greatly for the worse ; old Cartwright and the manager had been downright rude and unreasonable of late. 'Uncle Frere,' he went on, 'has, I fancy, heard of my small literary successes—or Max has, for Uncle F. is an ignorant old duffer—and they asked me to dine, both on Christmas and New Year's Day. I refused the first, for I thought it right to keep Christmas with Jimmy, who really has been uncommonly good to me of late ; but when the second invitation came, I thought it better to go. It was not half as bad as I expected, for who do you think was there ? Lady Elton and Darnell ! *She* was looking uncommonly well, and made no end of inquiries for you. I gave a great account of all your doings—trust me for frothing up twopenny beer till it looks like Bass or Allsopp ! Darnell was sulky, scarce spoke to me, and went away early. They say he is going to marry an earl's daughter—a widow and a great beauty. Lady Elton asked for your address ; she was on her way to some grand house in the North. Max was most agreeable, and asked a great deal about you and the mother,' etc., etc., etc.

Jimmy confirmed much that Randal said, especially as to his being more prudent about money—certainly holding it longer ; but he feared the young gentleman was still a little too fond of going out into society.

These letters filled both Mrs. Frere and Grace with pleasure and thankfulness.

'If,' thought the latter, 'Randal can avoid drawing on my mother, I can make both ends meet, and

get better music lessons for Mab; she begins to practise quite nicely.'

It was, therefore, a very bright face that greeted Falkenberg, in the afternoon of the day these letters had been received, as he met Grace and her little sister in the market-place on their way to ask Cecilia Sturm to tea.

'Ah, mein gnädiges Fräulein! how goes it? I was going to your house, on the part of the Frau Oberst, to ask if the Frau Mutter and yourself will join her sleighing-party the day after to-morrow? See, here is her note.'

'Thank you; I think it will be delightful. You will find my mother at home.'

'But she will decide nothing without you—you are the supreme ruler; so, if you permit, I will turn with you and make my visit after—eh, Mab, my dear little friend?'

'Yes, come with us, du lieber Wolff!' cried Mab, delighted; and taking her hand, Falkenberg walked on beside Grace with the air of quite belonging to her, or she to him.

'See,' said one of his brother officers to another, as they saluted in passing, 'Herr Hauptmann is already assuming the rights of proprietorship. The little one clings to his hand as though he were her brother.'

'And the fair Englishwoman (*schöne Engländerin*) has a large fortune—all these English girls have.'

'I am not so sure.'

'We have just met Falkenberg with Fräulein

Frere,' exclaimed Frau Major Schönfeld and her daughter, with one voice, to the Frau Burgomeister, 'and alone—that is, only with the little sister; and, ach, Gott! they were laughing and talking so fast and free.'

'Theirs is the age for joy and laughter,' returned the Burgomeisterin, who, in spite of her aristocratic airs, had a kindly heart.

Meantime Grace and her companions walked gaily on, little thinking or caring for the comments of those they encountered.

'You are more lively than usual, Miss Grace,' said Falkenberg, as they neared Frau Sturm's house; 'gayer than I have seen you since that evening, now a month ago, when a sudden mysterious shadow seemed to have fallen upon you. I remember it well, and I have racked my brain to account for it, especially as you always avoid the subject.'

'Then I would give it up if I were you, Herr Falkenberg,' she replied, smiling and colouring a little, as she always did when the topic was alluded to; for though the sharpness of the impression she had received had somewhat worn off, the feeling of distressed doubt had never quite left her, and she would have given much to have the question, 'Guilty or not guilty?' answered anyhow. 'To-day,' she continued, 'I ought to look bright, for we have good news from my brother—very pleasant letters altogether.'

'Letters,' repeated Falkenberg; 'ah, and you might have had *unpleasant* letters *that* day. Tell

me, dear Miss Grace, did the pleasant letters contain any tidings of Moritz—of our friend Balfour?’

‘No, indeed,’ said she, laughing at the eagerness with which he pounced upon this inference; ‘none of us have heard anything of Maurice Balfour since we left Dungar. But some time ago we heard of our dear old rector’s death. He was Maurice’s grandfather, you know; and now, possibly, we may never meet again.’

‘Oh yes; he will return to Europe—he will come to see me; and then—he will see you.’

The last four words, spoken after a pause, implied so much, that Grace frowned slightly; then forcing a smile, remarked:

‘I should have thought you superior to the vulgarity of thinking a girl cannot have a man friend—a real frank friend.’

‘But I am!’ cried Falkenberg, with unusual earnestness. ‘I do believe there is nothing so charming as a friendship—a real tender friendship, between a man and a girl of soul and noble sentiment.’

‘But you are *my* friend, Wolff—you ought not to have another,’ said Mab, clasping his hand in both of hers; ‘and Grace does not love you half as well as I do.’

‘That I believe,’ returned Falkenberg, emphatically.

‘At least, I do not express my affection so openly,’ replied Grace, with careless self-possession, which elicited an angry sparkle from her companion’s naturally angry-looking eyes. ‘But here

is Frau Sturm's abode,' added Grace, pausing before the door; 'you had better go and see my mother, and settle with her. I must see Frau Sturm.'

'She may not be at home,' said Falkenberg; 'I will wait for a few minutes, in hopes of returning with you.'

Fortune favoured him. Frau Sturm was not at home, but her old servant was sure 'the Cecilia might accompany the *kleine Fräulein*;' whereupon, to Grace's amusement, but more to her annoyance, Mab rushed out on the balcony, and screamed to Falkenberg, who was walking to and fro beneath:

'We come, dear Wolff! we come!'

On reaching Mrs. Frere's residence, they found that lady, as usual, in a very becoming cap, conversing in the corridor with a short, broad, bony old woman, in thick woollen garments, a closely-knitted head-covering, tied under her chin, and a huge *Korb*, or kind of square basket, strapped over her back. Her skin was a marvellous network of wrinkles, and her kindly pale blue eyes were sunk and faded with age. This was the well-known *Bote Frau*, (messenger-woman) who every day, in storm or shine, trudged into Zittau and back from a village two or three miles beyond Dalbersdorf, calling there for parcels or messages.

She was now the bearer of a note from Friede, enclosing a pattern of wool to be matched, and despatched the next day.

Grace kept the old woman till she had ascertained the proposed arrangements.

Need it be said that Mrs. Frere readily assented.

to join the sleighing-party. She had grown quite fond of society since she settled in Zittau. The rigid politeness, the distinct social laws of German society, forbade the sometimes mortifying, sometimes too flattering, variations of courtesy and observance which result from our freer and more republican institutions. Moreover, as well-born, well-bred, and connected with a Saxon family of good standing, the new-comers were considered valuable additions to the best circles of the little border town.

‘I suppose Frau Alvsleben and the girls are coming?’ said Grace.

‘Oh yes; we are to drive to Friedland, Wallenstein’s place; dine at the restauration there, and return by torchlight.’

‘Then, mother, had we not better write to Cousin Alvsleben, and ask if any of them would like to come in and sleep here to-morrow?’

‘Yes, dear; and send the note by the *Bote Frau*.’

The preliminaries were quickly arranged; and Grace sat down to write her note, while Mrs. Frere went to give the old messenger-woman a glass of beer.

‘One point I have left unsettled, Miss Grace,’ said Falkenberg, drawing a chair beside her writing-table, ‘you must promise to be my partner. In these sleighing-parties, you know, men choose partners as in a ball; and I have a capital horse. I will keep you ahead of the party.’ He looked eagerly at her while she hesitated. ‘Thank you; if such is the custom, I shall be very happy,’ she returned slowly, vexed to feel that her cheeks

would flush under his bold eyes ; ‘ but where is my mother to go ? ’

‘ Mrs. Frere is invited to take a seat in the Oberst von Ahlafeld’s sleigh. The married ladies and chaperons all go in the *zwei-spanner* (two-horse) sleighs. And in talking over the matter with the Frau Oberst, I bespoke you——’

‘ Ah ! ’ interrupted Grace, ‘ was I to have no choice in the matter ? ’

‘ Whom would you choose ? Sturm is not invited ; such trifles are beneath the dignity of so great a philosopher ! ’

‘ But the doctor is as bright and agreeable as the most trifling amongst you. ’

‘ Do you then refuse to be my companion ? ’

‘ No ; I am sure you drive well, and——’

‘ If we are overturned, *I* shall be sure of help if *you* are with me, ’ interrupted Falkenberg, smiling. ‘ The days lengthen already ; in a few weeks we shall be able to ride again. ’

The day fixed for the sleighing-party was an ideal winter’s day. A bright sun, clear cold blue sky, crisp dry frosty air, the trees jewelled with sparkling frozen snow. The holidays were over ; and everyone going about his and her business, gave renewed cheerfulness to the picturesque streets. Mab growled a good deal because she was obliged to go to school, but was consoled by an invitation from Frau von Sturm to dine and spend the day with Cecilia.

Of the Dalbersdorf party, only Friede appeared.

She brought the somewhat startling news that Frau Alvsleben and Gertrud had gone that morning by an early train to Dresden, where they generally paid an annual winter-visit to a relative of the late Alvsleben.

The party assembled at Frau von Ahlafeld's house, where seven one, and six two-horse sleighs were assembled, besides an extra large one, which contained several of the best musicians from the regimental band.

Falkenberg was among a group on the door-step, laughing and talking with some of the younger ladies, when Mrs. Frere, with Grace and Friede, came up. He did not immediately join them ; but on a movement being caused by the Frau Oberst coming out to assign places to those who were to occupy the larger sleighs, he turned to Friede, and exclaimed :

‘ So my aunt and Gertrud have gone to Dresden.’

‘ How do you know ?’

‘ Ah ! everything becomes known as soon as it is done.’

‘ Ach, Wolff ! but Ulrich wrote to thee. He knew of the invitation before we did.’

Falkenberg only smiled, and proceeded to pay his respects to Mrs. Frere with the air of profound deference he always assumed towards her, and which helped to make him so great a favourite.

‘ Now, Miss Grace,’ he said, ‘ you have greeted the gracious lady our directress, let me put you in my sleigh ; you must be well wrapped up.’

Falkenberg's was the smartest of the *ein-spanners*,

glittering with brass ornaments, and gay with coloured tufts of horse-hair, the arch which surmounted the horse's head thickly hung with tiny bells, the sleigh itself furnished with great wrappers of dark fur, *Fuss-sacks* (fur-lined bags to put the feet in), and all appliances for comfort. A large iron-grey horse, already pawing the ground and trying to free his head from the man who held him, promised some exercise of Falkenberg's skill.

'This is a charming turn-out,' said Grace, looking at it admiringly.

'Have you anything to put over your head?' asked Falkenberg. 'You will need it.'

'Yes; Friede made me take this'—a white, fluffy-looking, fringed scarf, which she threw over her sealskin cap, and tied loosely.

Falkenberg, having wrapped her up with the greatest care, took his seat beside her.

'Go,' he said to his servant; 'there is a place for you in the musicians' sleigh.'

It had already begun to move off, and the man had a short sharp run after it.

The grey pawed still more impatiently, and tossed his head, but no one moved till the band had gone ahead, and, having left a proper interval between itself and the rest of the party, struck up a stirring gallop. Then away they went, bells jangling, metal flashing, tassels swinging, little boys shouting, and all, young and old, within hearing of the music running to see the sight—away, smoothly, swiftly, noiselessly, over the beaten snow. Nothing is more exhilarating than a sleigh-drive: the delightful

motion—the sense of ease and lightness—the dry frosty air which is almost always its accompaniment—the consciousness of extracting pleasure from the stern, dreary death-grapple of Winter's rule—all help to quicken the pulses, and give joyous excitement to the spirits.

For the first few minutes Falkenberg was silent, apparently occupied with his horse ; but as they cleared the town he turned and looked steadily, critically at his companion for a moment.

'I do not know which suits you best,' he said abruptly, as if speaking to himself, 'the glow of autumn or the snow of winter ;' and his eyes dwelt yet another moment on the face beside him, its rich yet transparent colour heightened by the keen air, making the dark-grey eyes more brilliant ; while the smiling lips grew still and grave, as they always became whenever Falkenberg allowed any expression of admiration to escape him, which he seldom did, albeit not a variation of the changeful countenance was unnoticed by him, —the eyes, that could be so frank, almost defiant, and then so shy and soft, or earnest and questioning, or mischievous and mocking ; the smile, which was tender or scornful, or proud, or simply mirthful—he knew every mood, yet did not quite fathom the nature in which they had their source.

Grace was provoked to feel how much his words and look moved her. Distrust him as she would, her vanity was infinitely gratified by his admiration ; and yet a dim instinct seemed to inform her

that there was in it some element from which she shrank as not quite right, not worthy of her, and that her heart ought not to beat, nor her eyes to sink under his, as they did.

‘Everyone looks well on a fine, clear day,’ said Grace, turning away her head, ‘and everyone ought to put on their best aspect for so delightful a *fête*. This seems a good horse of yours, Herr Falkenberg; have you had him long?’

‘A couple of months. I got him in exchange for the brown, the one which fell with me.’

‘He holds his head well,’ said she, critically. ‘I should like to take the reins myself, were it not so cold.’

‘Better not. When spring comes you shall drive him as much as you like.’

They talked on easily of horses and the various small events of the Christmas festivities at Dalbersdorf, when, suddenly turning to her, Falkenberg exclaimed :

‘But it is unwise of you, my Fräulein, to encourage Friede in her folly.’

‘What folly?’ asked Grace, looking straight into his eyes.

‘Well-acted innocence!’ said Falkenberg, laughing. ‘Is it possible you think I do not see her whim for Sturm, and his presumptuous regard for her?’

‘I see nothing to remark,’ she returned, really thinking the lovers prudent.

‘Ah, Miss Grace, you would not allow yourself to be found out so readily! But the dear Friede is simpler and softer; I shall be so sorry for her when

the inevitable break-up comes. It is a trying affair this falling in love with the wrong person; and yet we seldom take to the right one—eh, my fair friend?’

‘So it seems, according to books,’ was the guarded reply.

‘My aunt and Gertrud would be furious if they had an idea that these excellent young people were preparing a cup of bitterness for themselves. Even the count, with all his kindness, would not like his grand-daughter to make a *mésalliance*.’

‘But, without admitting that your surmises are right,’ said Grace, her affection for Friede keeping her unusually on her guard, ‘would marriage with Dr. Sturm be a *mésalliance*? He will be a distinguished professor, and the Alvslebens are not noble—they do not boast the magic “von.”’

‘No, but Friede is far better born than Sturm; and the Alvslebens have been *Gutbesitzers* for—oh, for half a hundred years. Then she is very pretty, so soft and fair and graceful—like a white dove. I was rather in love with her once myself; now I have transferred my affections to’—an instant’s pause—‘Gertrud, and Friede has bestowed hers on Sturm.’

‘In despair at your faithlessness, I suppose,’ said Grace, drily.

‘Exactly,’ returned Falkenberg, looking down at her with laughing eyes. ‘I see you are very discreet. Well, I shall be very sorry if Friede makes trouble for herself. She will have but little fortune and should marry some rich landholder.’

‘If she likes him.’

‘Well, we must all make some sacrifice for our social position. Would you, my Fräulein, marry Dr. Sturm?’

‘Yes,’ said Grace, boldly, ‘if I really cared for him, and he was my countryman. He is admirable, and so clever.’

‘What!’ exclaimed Falkenberg, looking sharply at her, ‘a proud girl of your wealth and standing, marry a poor doctor in an obscure German school!’

‘I am obscure enough myself,’ returned Grace, not heeding that he listened eagerly for her answer; ‘and as to wealth—I suspect Friede has more than I have.’

‘Ladies do not want money,’ said Falkenberg, in a complimentary tone. ‘But it is an awful business for a man to be poor.’

‘I imagine it is much worse for women, who have so few ways of making money,’ replied Grace.

But Falkenberg did not seem to hear her, and kept silence for some time, urging on his horse, as if he himself were hunted by unpleasant thoughts.

They had passed the sleigh with the band, but what little breeze there was brought the strains of a favourite waltz at intervals to their ears. The country was open, and undulating with distant pine-woods, and a range of high mountains to the left. And as mile after mile was passed with scarce a sign of human life, Grace began to feel a slight sense of depression, as if all nature lay in its winding-sheet. After a prolonged silence, Falkenberg roused himself with an effort, and began to speak of

Wallenstein and the Thirty Years' War, and soon was launched into an argument, Grace and he always taking opposite sides. However, the subject, with a few changes, lasted till they reached the *Gasthaus*, where Falkenberg, now quite himself, jumped out, and proceeded to unroll and disentangle his companion from her voluminous wraps.

The landlord and a brace of smiling damsels ushered them into a large, low, well-warmed room, where a couple of large tables were evidently prepared for dinner.

'We are in capital time,' said Falkenberg, looking at the clock. 'It's not bad to do four German miles in an hour and three-quarters. We shall be able to go over the castle before dinner. *Kellnerin*, bring me *Schnaps*! Suppose you and I go on and have the first look.'

'No, no; I must wait for my mother.'

'Here they all come,' said Falkenberg, looking out of the window. 'Herr Oberst with Mrs. Frere—they are great allies! the Frau Mutter and Herr Oberst! and, Miss Grace, poor Friede has fallen to the lot of little Heldreich!'

After the sleighs had been unloaded, and driven off to the stables, and the party had enjoyed the warmth for a few minutes, it was suggested by Falkenberg to inspect the castle before dinner, while the light was clear, and they started accordingly.

The snow was beaten hard on the roadway; the slight air that had added to the cold at the outset had fallen, and the perfect stillness made the short walk pleasant.

The colonel offered his arm to Mrs. Frere ; and most of the older officers paired off in a similar manner with the chaperons and married ladies—but the young people walked free and separately.

‘Come, Friede,’ said Falkenberg, ‘let us see if the German Mädchen can outstrip the English one. Which of you will reach the castle-gates first?’

‘Oh, I will back Fräulein Friede!’ said Lieutenant Volmar, an admirer of hers, who had come late to the rendezvous, and having missed his chance of securing a partner, had been reduced to take a young cadet, son of the colonel, on leave for a family birthday festival, for his companion. He was now determined to cut out von Heldreich if possible, and attached himself pertinaciously to the fair Saxon. Friede looked pretty enough to excuse such an attempt. Her warm winter-dress of dark cloth, and hat edged with sable, were peculiarly becoming to her.

‘I ought to win,’ said Grace ; ‘I am taller. Keep back for a moment, Friede ; we must start fair.’

They were well matched ; but Friede was a more practised pedestrian, and to Grace’s surprise won by a few yards ; the result of the match being that they reached the gateway nearly a quarter of an hour before the rest of the party. Falkenberg, who knew the place well, acted as guide ; and they proceeded through the newer portion of the edifice, the stately residence of the great Glam Gallas family, whose ancestor acquired a large portion of the murdered Wallenstein’s estate. Then came

remains of the ancient edifice, the armour worn by the great chief, curious collection of arms, and especially of saddles of various ages, both for male and female equestrians. But Grace sought in vain for some traces of the fair, unfortunate Theckla, that typical German maiden : still there was much to interest her in this the first specimen of an old castle she had ever seen.

In the course of this inspection, the friends separated. All, save Grace, had visited the castle before. So Falkenberg naturally devoted himself to her service, in pointing out the various objects of interest ; and when they again reached the great hall, none of the rest were to be seen.

‘He was an extraordinary historical figure,’ said Falkenberg, speaking of the original owner, ‘and must have had a strain of insanity in his character. His belief in planetary influence, his faith in the good luck of certain friendships, like Piccolomini’s, showed insufficient reason.’

‘But he is always interesting,’ said Grace. ‘I hope soon to be able to read Schiller’s “Wallenstein.”’

‘You will be charmed with it,’ he returned. Then after glancing right and left, in his quick, resolute way, he opened the door of a small room, where there was a stove, and which seemed to be occupied by some official, as there was a high desk, with books and papers on it, opposite the door. ‘Come in here, meine schöne Fräulein,’ he said ; ‘it is warmer here ; the rest will soon join us.’

Grace walked to the stove, and tried to warm her feet against it.

‘But reason or no reason,’ Falkenberg went on, after bringing her a seat, and then leaning his arms on the back of a high chair opposite, ‘some friendships are lucky—must be lucky. You spoke the other day of friendship between men and women. I have thought of your words ever since, meine liebe Grace—I mean Fräulein. Will you laugh at me if I say I want a friend?’

‘Laugh!—no, certainly not; but I should have thought you had many friends.’

‘Acquaintances, comrades, pleasant fellows—yes; but a friend to whom I can speak my thoughts and reveal my inner self.’ There was a pause. Grace did not know exactly what to say. She sat silent, her eyes raised to his with questioning expression. ‘Do not look at me!’ he exclaimed hastily, ‘but hear! Will you be my friend—a real friend, to rejoice in my success (if I ever have any), to feel for my disappointment? I think you are strong and true! and we soldiers are very unlucky fellows in some ways,’ he went on rapidly. ‘We have small chances of making marriages of affection; our very laws compel us to be guided by sordid motives. If one is in debt—and we all are—there is no means of extrication save in a wealthy marriage, unless, indeed, one has a wealthy father, which few possess. To a man in this position—and it is mine—what a priceless boon is the friendship and sympathy of a high-minded, tender woman! It would be salvation, sweetest, fairest cousin! (You *are* a sort of cousin,) have you the courage to undertake this friendship—friendship pure and simple?’

‘The courage!’ repeated Grace, smiling—‘why courage? Is there anything so terrible in your life, Herr von Falkenberg, that friendship with you requires courage?’

It was an unlucky word he had selected. When first he began to speak, Grace, with the mingled conceit and generosity of youth, was thrilled with a desire to befriend and reform him; but with the expression ‘courage,’ came the recollection of the gossip she had overheard at the coffee *Klatsch* which, though the sharpness of the original impression had been somewhat blurred, still dwelt in her mind.

Falkenberg in his turn was greatly surprised. He had fully expected a warm, nay, tender acceptance of the proffered friendship, and a gushing agreement to unalterable Platonic fidelity. The unexpected answer sent his mental thermometer down many degrees.

‘Ah! there spoke the *practisch* Englishwoman,’ he said, with a slightly cynical smile; and drawing himself up: ‘No, liebe Fräulein! my life is neither better nor worse than my neighbours. The courage I thought of was required for a very different reason, and required far more by myself than by you.’

‘Oh!’ said Grace, catching a glimpse of his meaning.

‘But, I must admit, I did not think you would have received a confession of my soul’s need, which you alone could have drawn forth, with such cold unsympathising caution. Nevertheless, ‘ma belle,’

I shall ever cherish a tender friendship for you, however indifferent *you* may be.'

This was kindly and frankly said; and at the end he held out his hand. Grace felt dreadfully ashamed of herself. Falkenberg had never spoken in such a tone before, and she ought not to have nipped any good feeling in the bud; she put her hand in his readily, and said, in a softer voice and with downcast eyes:

'I am not cold and unsympathising. I like you; I always did, and I will be friends with you with all my heart; only'—a sudden upward laughing glance—'take care of your own courage, and I will take care of mine!'

'Good!' returned Falkenberg, pressing her hand tightly; 'I had need do so. And now we will trust each other, and thou wilt tell me thy griefs and joys; and when alone thou wilt say *Du*, wilt thou not?'

'No!' replied Grace, sturdily. 'If I do, I shall forget, and call you so always. Let us leave *Du* alone.'

'Ah, prudent one, you will be strong as well as kind; you will give me good counsel. It will be a new delight to think that you will care for me and feel with me till some more favoured and fortunate fellow comes, and then——' He stopped, and added, almost in a whisper, 'How I shall hate him!'

'And when you meet that well-dowered wife who is to share your existence,' said Grace, smiling pleasantly, and succeeding with an effort in with-

drawing her hand, 'I hope *she* will not hate me !'

'No, no ; you do not understand the nature of our German women. She will love and reverence you as the helper, the purifier, of her husband's otherwise lonely life.'

'I wonder,' said Grace, half to herself, while a very mischievous smile quivered in the dimples which lurked about her mouth ; 'I wonder if my future "spouse" is undergoing a preliminary course of ennobling friendship at present ; because, somehow, I would rather not.'

'You are mistaken,' said Falkenberg, with unusual earnestness ; 'true friendship with a high-minded woman makes a man more worthy of love.'

'No doubt you are right !' exclaimed Grace. 'I am at times too much inclined to see the ridiculous sides of things ; forgive my levity, and let us be fast friends. I like you so much when you are in earnest, and I am sure you could not be heartless or false !'

'Ha !' cried Falkenberg, struck by her tone, 'some one has been traducing me to you !'

'No, no one, I assure you,' returned Grace quickly.

There was no time for more ; the sound of voices and feet approaching echoed through the vaulted hall, and Falkenberg, going to the door, met Friede and Vollmar, who were laughing merrily at having given von Heldreich the slip in the long passages. He soon appeared, however, and when the remainder of the party joined them they found the

pioneers of the expedition comfortably gathered round the stove.

The dinner was a scene of joyous confusion, hearty honest laughter, noisy good-humoured talk, as is usual on such occasions in Germany, Falkenberg being the gayest among the guests. The Oberst von Ahlefeld, the leader of the party, was a gallant veteran well versed in such duties. He was a Hanoverian who, like many of his countrymen, entered the Saxon army after the fatal victory of Langensalze, that they might fight for Germany and yet avoid direct service with the hated Prussians. Speaking French and English well, and, as Hanoverians usually are, more a man of the world than the generality of Germans, he always showed marked attention to Mrs. Frere, who soon discovered they had had many mutual acquaintances in those past happy times when, wandering with her husband from one pleasant Continental town to another, life had been a long holiday. The Frau Oberst, too, had been much at the court when Hanover had one, and had there known many English, some of whom she had visited in their own country; she was, consequently, always pleased to meet English people, though her knowledge of English was very limited, and an intimacy was rapidly growing up between the families.

Mrs. Frere's gentle vanity was comforted by these attentions, and Grace marked with heartfelt pleasure her mother's brightened looks, and listened to her low, well-bred laugh. Yes; it was well that they had made this bold step, and ventured into the un-

known land ; yet, even while she thought so, her heart yearned even for London, to see Randal and dear, kind, wise Jimmy Byrne. The tears absolutely stood in her eyes as she conjured up their faces ; for just then they had risen from table, and Falkenberg having begun a fine stirring *Soldaten Lied*, the rest joined the chorus, and the strain, full of a proud melancholy, touched her almost to melting as she gazed through the window of the large, low room across the wide stretch of snow, through the softly deepening night shadows, far away to the places and people she had loved and left. It was curious how clearly she seemed to see Max—Max of whom she had not thought for months. His dark, well-cut face and deep eyes, which had first taught her that she was a woman, came back to her vividly ; for an instant she felt an intense pang of longing to see him again—not the Max of London, but the grave, observant, sympathetic Max of Dungeness.

‘Meine Liebe, thou art thinking sad thoughts,’ whispered Falkenberg, suddenly startling her into consciousness. She saw the tables were being cleared and carried away, and that the bandsmen were coming in.

‘The sleighs will not be ready for another hour,’ said Colonel von Ahlefeld, coming up to Grace, ‘and we propose to occupy the time by dancing. May I have the honour, mein gnädiges Fräulein ?’

Falkenberg stepped back with a smile, slightly raising his eyebrows ; and Grace, her thoughts directed to a new channel, was soon among the dancers.

‘Do not let us have torches,’ said Falkenberg, as they all stood ready to depart ; ‘they are only an incumbrance. Let us keep near the music, and we shall have the light of theirs. Friede, you go with Vollmar ; let us start together.’

The four friends slipped away, Grace first telling her mother that they were going, and so secured their place at the head of the procession. The start and homeward progress was very effective. The horses were eager, the music inspiriting, the various lights and shadows thrown by the torches weird and fairy-like ; the smooth snow made the gliding motion positively luxurious, and a splendid moon turned all beneath her beams into silver.

‘It is a sin to sully so pure a light with the glare and smoke of these torches,’ exclaimed Falkenberg, looking up into the blue blackness of the sky. ‘We will pass the foremost sleigh, and get away into the moonlight.’ So saying, he turned and called to his lieutenant : ‘Vollmar, we go on in front ; follow straight to Bergstrasse.’

A touch of the whip, and they spun on at a swinging pace, past the musicians’ sleigh, and soon nearly out of hearing of the occasional louder swell of the music.

‘Is it not delicious—the stillness and lovely light?’ said Grace.

‘Yes ; and still more delightful to be alone with thee, sweet friend !’ cried Falkenberg, who was in the highest spirits. ‘Now, tell me the secret of these sudden shadows, which sometimes fall upon thee. I have ever noticed them. That first walk

with thee—how well I remember it!—when we stood on the Oybin, and those great soft eyes of thine gazed dreamily away into a distance of which I knew nothing; then my soul was drawn to thine, and I felt I had found such a friend as I had always sought. Now, this evening I watched thee, and saw those eyes fill up, and felt that in spirit thou wert far away. What is thy heart's secret, meine Liebe? Tell me, and then I will tell thee some of my troubles.'

He spoke in German, as he almost always did of late, even when she replied in English, and the tender *Du* fell caressingly from his lips.

'I really have nothing to tell,' returned Grace, simply. 'I am away from my old home, and my brother, and all that was dear and familiar to me, so it is natural that I sometimes, nay, often, feel a vague sadness—an indefinable sensation; but I have only to think resolutely for a few minutes, and it disperses. We are really very happy here.'

'Ah, your confidence may be won—I see it is not to be had for asking,' said Falkenberg, looking kindly into her eyes. 'Tell me about your brother.'

But soon he contrived to turn the talk upon himself, his early days, his first military experiences, confessed many boyish follies of a pardonable and even lovable type. Indeed, a novelist need not desire a more interesting, piquant, and attractive opening sketch of his hero's beginning than Falkenberg's reminiscences supplied. They were given, too, with the most charmingly frank unstudied manner,

and in a tone of brotherly confidence which set Grace quite at ease.

Altogether the homeward drive was very delightful, and when they reached Mrs. Frere's house they were far in advance of the rest of the party.

'No,' said Falkenberg, as Grace turned to say good-night; 'I wait to say adieu to Mrs. Frere.'

He sprang upstairs after her, and hanging his great fur-lined coat in the corridor, came into the warm, well-lighted *salon*, and assisted Grace to remove her wraps.

'And are the pretty little hands terribly cold?' he asked, taking them both in his.

'Not so cold as yours,' said she, not liking to seem prudish by withdrawing them too soon.

'And now,' he went on, impressively, 'we have entered into a solemn compact of friendship. See, I have told you much of my life; will you not also confide in me? You will, in your own good time; and I will be discreet. Only you must let me say *Du* when we are alone—alas! that is seldom. Yes, I will let your hands go so soon as you again promise to be my true and faithful friend.'

'I will! I do!' cried Grace, disturbed and puzzled by this curiously un-English proceeding. Something in Falkenberg's voice and touch affected her strangely—vexatiously.

'You will understand me better ere long,' continued Falkenberg, still holding her hands. 'Now, let me explain the laws of our sleighing-parties. On the return from these expeditions, each cavalier

is entitled to a kiss from the lady he escorted. But *this* is all friendship dares to take,' and he kissed the hands he held more than once with very friendly warmth indeed, and then let them go.

'I hear the sleigh-bells,' said Grace, turning away hastily, and removing her fur cap to hide the quick bright colour that would spring to her cheek.

'And our little hour is over!' cried Falkenberg, as he left the room to receive the fresh arrivals.



CHAPTER XIV.



THE period which succeeded this somewhat memorable *Schlitten-partie* was tranquil and agreeable.

Falkenberg had, with much tact, kept up the tone of tender friendship he had established. Scarce a day passed without a visit from him on one pretext or another; and as he was also frequently at Dalbersdorf, his intercourse with each family helped to draw the links closer with the other.

He carried notes and messages from the young ladies to Grace, and *vice versâ*, and gradually became part of Mrs. Frere's daily life. Meantime, the variation of his moods puzzled and interested Grace. He was useful, too, in many ways; and under a certain soldier-like pride and finery, was a homeliness that helped to make their intercourse easy.

The chief event of this quiet time was a letter from Lady Elton, written in a kindly tone, as if

nothing had ever happened to interrupt their first warm friendship.

‘Though our intercourse lasted but for a brief season,’ she wrote, ‘I am surprised, now that I am once more settled in London, to find how closely you had linked yourself with my life. I quite miss you; and though I still think you acted unwisely, I pardon you. I wish you would come over and pay me a visit, if Mrs Frere could spare you. It would be far more to your advantage than vegetating in a miserable little Saxon town, the very name of which is unknown twenty miles beyond its own walls. Come and comfort me, for I have had a great sorrow since we met. The son of my oldest and dearest friend, who was as a son of my own, who had given me infinite trouble, yet who was my one link with the present, my one hope in the future, has been carried off by cholera at the other side of the world; and I feel as if everything, save the merest mechanism of life, had ceased for me. I think I could still take an interest in you. Hitherto I have infinitely preferred boys and men to girls and women. We are weak and false and scratchy, dear; and they are strong and selfish and true, because they can do very much what they like without being obliged to put too fine a point upon it; but I like and sympathise with *you* more than with any woman I have before known.

‘I met your brother, at a painfully dull dinner at the Freres’, some weeks ago. He was not looking well, though in some ways he is improved, and

more a man of the world. I told him he might come and see me, but he has not availed himself of the invitation or permission. Do you know who he lives with in town—I mean, what set? Max knows nothing of him. Talk to your mother, dear Grace, about coming to me for two or three months. Of course your journey to and fro would be my affair. Think of it, child; and believe me, your company would be a boon to your friend,

‘H. ELTON.’

‘I am sure, dear Grace,’ said Mrs. Frere, when she had finished perusing this letter, ‘I would not for the world keep you back from what might be an advantage or a pleasure; so if you would like to go——’

An expressive break in the sentence, which was a little tremulous.

‘Why, mother dear, how could you possibly do without me?’ cried Grace, bending over her mother’s arm-chair, and kissing her brow; ‘and what sort of pleasure should I have all that way off, imagining you struggling with Mab and Paulina, and the Schatz who would live in the kitchen if I was not here to frighten him; and—no! it is not to be thought of. I assure you, I am quite content to stay here. I do not care to go to London, though I should like to see Lady Elton.’

‘Are you quite happy here, dearest?’ asked Mrs. Frere, fondly—‘quite satisfied? I think it is really very nice, and the society far from dull. I am sure we have changed for the better in coming. And

oh! indeed, my darling, what should I do without you? Only I suppose I must let you go some day. Ah! what will become of me if you marry a man who does not like me?

'Oh, we must take care of that!' said Grace, laughing; 'and at present it seems a very remote contingency.'

'I am not so sure,' returned Mrs. Frere, with an air of prophetic wisdom and a knowing nod which sent the colour to Grace's cheek and a thrill of annoyance to her heart.

Surely her mother did not dream of a German son-in-law? any fancy in that direction must be nipped in the bud. But after a moment's pause Grace had self-control sufficient to turn the subject by exclaiming:

'What! have you commissioned dear old Jimmy to find an "illegant" young man of the best pattern? Never mind the future, dear; let us enjoy the present. I must answer this letter. Suppose we ask Lady Elton to come here?'

'Grace!' in a tone of horror and astonishment.

'Why not? We could not give her luxuries, but our best is not bad, and for a little while the change would amuse her; and then there is the "Goldene Sonne," a right royal hostellerie, and a beautiful country. She would be delighted with the count and the Hauptmann. Oh yes! I will beg her to come to Zittau.'

'Oh, as to Lady Elton, I should not mind her so much; but just think of her maid and Luigi here! it is too terrible.'

‘Yes, it would be terrible,’ said Grace, reflectively. ‘Yet I will suggest her coming here ; she seems so unhappy.’

Here the sound of voices and the clatter of a sword without made her pause ; and before she could resume, the door opened to admit Falkenberg, who came in quickly.

‘Ah ! good-morning, Mrs. Frere. Good-morning, Miss Grace. I come for a moment to say that I must renounce the pleasure of driving you to Dalbersdorf this afternoon. I am suddenly called to Dresden on business.’

‘I am very sorry ; shall you be long away ?’

‘No ; I have two days’ leave, and when I return we must have a ride together—must we not, my sweetest friend ?’

‘We will talk about it,’ returned Grace, who had not yet spoken.

‘Ach, Gott !’ exclaimed Falkenberg, turning to her, and speaking rapidly in German. ‘When I return I shall have a secret, which yet will not be long a secret, to tell thee. Ah, Grace ! wilt thou yet care for thy friend, whose fate has ever been one of disappointment ?’

‘You have no fresh trouble ?’ asked Grace, kindly.

‘No, nothing fresh ! Come, dear Fräulein ; step out on the balcony and give me a look and a kind wish as I ride away.’

He took her hand and pressed it tightly. His eyes were alight with a sombre fire, and a strain of suppressed excitement underlay his manner which affected gaiety.

'You ought to come and pay Dresden a visit, Mrs. Frere ; make up your mind and come with me. I am a capital cicerone, and I could get a few more days' leave if you and Miss Grace would accompany me. Miss Grace, join your prayers to mine. *Gott*, it would be *himmlisch*, a week's freedom in a strange place !'

'Very charming, Herr Hauptmann, but quite impossible,' said Mrs. Frere, smiling. 'Curious enough, this is the second invitation we, at least Grace, has had this morning.

'Ha ! how—where ?' cried Falkenberg, turning quickly to her.

'To Lady Elton's in London,' returned Mrs. Frere, who could not bear to hide even a farthing rushlight under a bushel.

'And you will go ?—of course you will, and better so,' said Falkenberg, looking down in an instant's deep thought.

'I am not going,' returned Grace, quietly.

'Then I shall find you here ? We shall meet again !' he exclaimed. 'Now I must away.'

With a hasty good-bye to Mrs. Frere, and repeating 'The balcony' in a low tone of entreaty to Grace, he left the room.

Grace, struck by his unusual manner, stepped through the window, and looked down as he mounted his horse. He had evidently ridden over from the morning parade. Having swung himself into the saddle, Falkenberg raised his eyes to Grace and exclaimed in English, 'Farewell, fairest and best of friends—farewell !' Touching his horse with the

spur, he still looked back and waved his hand, though the animal started forward with a bound, and horse and rider passed quickly out of sight.

'He is handsome—he is certainly handsome, and nice,' thought Grace, looking after him with a slight sigh. 'I am sure he is in some trouble, too;' and she still gazed dreamily down the road by which he had vanished, half vexed to think how much she liked him, and how much he influenced her, yet half wondering that both liking and influence were not greater and deeper. 'He is a very fair hero,' she thought, 'and if I only believed him quite real and earnest I should be as fond of him as my mother is; but—— He always puts my vanity on the *qui vive*; I feel so different after talking with Dr. Sturm—happier and better.'

'Poor von Falkenberg!' exclaimed Mrs. Frere, in a tone of tender commiseration, when Grace returned to the *salon*. 'Did it strike you, dear, that he seemed very agitated?'

'Yes, he was different. Perhaps he has been sent for to receive some high appointment. I believe he is rather a favourite at court, or——'

'I am afraid it is nothing so good that calls him away; I hope it is nothing unpleasant,' continued Mrs. Frere, taking up her knitting; while Grace settled herself to a daily task of translating, from which she had a faint hope of deriving some small emolument hereafter. 'I must say I have a high opinion of the Hauptmann. He is quite as well-bred as Max Frere, and yet free from that indescribable hauteur that made Max at times almost repellent.'

‘They are both very nice in their way,’ said Grace, with a slight sigh, as she drew her dictionary to her, and, having found the desired word, began to think in an unaccountable way of her friendship with Wolff von Falkenberg, colouring over the innocent page as a variety of speeches and trifling incidents recalled themselves, which suggested speculations as to what Falkenberg’s love-making would be, if these were only marks of friendship. And then how cleverly he always retreated behind his outworks whenever she made any show of checking or rebuking him! Certainly she would miss him greatly if he were to leave Zittau; nevertheless, with all his attention and sympathy and devotion or friendship, though he had managed to occupy her thoughts a good deal, he never failed to add daily minute pebbles to the cairn of distrust that gradually reared itself in her imagination, despite a certain quickening of the pulse which looks and words of his always had the power to create.

‘I wonder would anyone—any publisher, I mean—ever give me any money for this story when it is finished?’

‘I am sure they ought,’ returned her mother. ‘You are doing it beautifully; no one would think it was a translation.’

‘I only fear I have lost the spirit of the original.’ Then, after a pause, ‘Is it not nearly a fortnight since we had a letter from Randal?’

‘Let me see,’ said Mrs. Frere, looking over her

knitting into the events of last week ; 'yes, it was a fortnight yesterday.'

'I will write a line to Jimmy Byrne !' exclaimed Grace ; 'I should like to know what they are about. It will be in time for the post to-day ;' and she hastily put aside her manuscript.

'Grace, my child ! you frighten me.'

'No, dear mother, there is nothing to frighten you ; only——'

'I know Lady Elton's letter has made you uneasy, and I do not wonder at it. God grant my dear boy is not seriously ill !'

'Pray do not fancy such a thing, mother. Now here comes Mab ; give her some bread-and-butter while I finish my note, and then I will take her with me for a nice quick walk—it will do us both good.'

Grace's letter to Jimmy Byrne did not elicit the usual prompt reply, and, although she was careful to hide it from her mother, an undefined anxiety, for which she could not account even to herself, grew upon her—one of those vague presentiments which all have experienced, and the *raison d'être* of which none can explain.

Meantime the ordinary tranquil current of life rolled smoothly on in Bergstrasse. Grace was always busy, and Mab, with frequent relapses into contradictory wilfulness, was on the whole improved.

Falkenberg's absence was prolonged to a week, and then, strange to say, he did not come first to his English friends to announce his return.

It was almost dinner-time one bright keen day at the close of February, and Grace was endeavouring, with a mixture of command and entreaty, to induce Mab to wash her hands before the mid-day meal.

‘I am sure, Grace, your eyes must be dirty! I cannot see that my hands want washing. Look at them, mother.’

‘My dear, it is perfectly amazing that you do not wish to wash your hands! it is so much more comfortable.’

‘Not to me,’ said Mab, decidedly. ‘Listen—there is the count.’

In fact, the veteran’s voice was heard interrogating Paulina :

‘Die gnädige Frau, ist zu sprechen?’

‘Ja wohl, Herr Graf.’

Mab rushed forth to greet him, and help him off with the huge fur-coat still necessary in that elevated district.

‘My dear uncle, so very glad to see you. It is an age since any of you have been here. Are all well at Dalbersdorf?’ cried Grace, embracing the kind old man.

‘Well, yes—all but Friede, who has a headache or a cold, or a something that would not let her come in with us. The *Verwalter* drove me into Zittau this morning. He came to see his brother, who is, I believe, going to Leipzig. There is a talk of his becoming professor of history there, in consequence of his “Essay on the Development of the Holy Roman Empire,” or some such thing.’

‘That will be good for him—I am very glad!’ exclaimed Grace, connecting this piece of news in her own mind with Friede’s stay-at-home malady.

‘I am very pleased also. He is really a most deserving person,’ cried Mrs. Frere. ‘But, my dear uncle, you will stay and share our homely dinner.’

‘It is roast goose!’ cried Mab, with a triumphant sniff; ‘I smell it.’

‘Yes, dear uncle,’ added Grace, ‘and a boiled batter-pudding of my own mixing.’

‘Faith, mee darlings, I would be delighted to eat a potato and salt in your charming society,’ said the gallant veteran; ‘but, *Potstausend!* the goose and the pudding are not to be despised. I shall not return till six; and as I want to perform some commissions for my Frau Tochter, perhaps you will come and help, dear niece?’

‘Certainly,’ returned Mrs. Frere; and the count proceeded to ask for news from England, while Grace went to inspect the setting forth of the dinner.

‘Well,’ said the count, unfolding his napkin and looking round him, as he placed himself at table; ‘you are a couple of excellent *Hausfrauen, meine Damen!* and a mighty pretty trick you have of decking out the food. One always finds you prepared, formed square, and ready to receive cavalry! Here’s your health, madame; and yours, my Grace. It’s a lucky fellow that will be able to put you at the head of his table. Gad! I wish Ulrich was a few years older, and more worthy of you. I would

like a Grace Costello in the family—and Grace Costello you always are to me.'

'Thank you, a thousand times!' returned his grand-niece, laughing; 'but you know I must have a British husband.'

'Faith, that's just prejudice! There are good fellows everywhere, specially in Austria and Saxony.'

'No doubt; but they are better appreciated by their own countrywomen.'

'I should like a German husband,' said Mab, pausing, with a succulent bone upraised and half way to her mouth.

'Very well, I'll make a note of it,' returned the count, gravely. 'Have you seen Falkenberg since he returned?' he continued.

'No! I did not know he had come back,' said Mrs. Frere.

'He came out to Dalbersdorf late last evening, and did not seem much the brighter for his visit to Dresden. As his leave had not quite expired, we put him up for the night; and I left him there this morning. He is a fine fellow, Wolff von Falkenberg. They may say what they like about his wild doings before the war—*dy*, and after too—but he is a gentleman, and a right pleasant comrade too. He'll settle down into a first-rate officer yet; and I hope to see him at the head of his regiment before I die.'

'I agree with you, uncle; he is a charming person, and I am sure refined and domestic in his tastes.'

'Humph!' said the count, filling his glass; 'he

is not exactly a home-bird, but I believe him to be a man of honour.'

He is always very nice and kind to us,' observed Grace, helping her granduncle to walnuts.

'And small blame to him. He always says he never knew how good and gracious Englishwomen could be, before.'

Then the talk meandered to London and Randal. The count had a fixed idea that Richard Frere was bound to take his dead brother's son into partnership. To give him 'a share in the concern,' according to his loose notions and phraseology, was no more than placing an additional knife and fork on a plentiful table, and making a member of the family welcome—a view in which Mrs. Frere quite coincided. People in the city just sat on high stools, and wrote cabalistic formulas in big books, which produced money in some occult manner, but at the same time produced meanness and avarice in a truly despicable degree ; such was Mrs. Frere's vague impression of 'business.'

Grace, though tolerably convinced of the vanity of reasoning with either uncle or mother, could not help uttering a protest on the side of justice.

'Faith, it's very queer' (he said 'quare') 'to hear a young lady upholding commerce against soldiering,' said the count, looking at the speaker with a smile.

'I am sure I like soldiers very much indeed. I feel quite soldierly myself when I hear a band, and the jingle of sword and spur has a music of its own for me ; but I cannot help seeing that commerce has done much more for the world than war.'

‘How do you make that out? Half the wars we have had have sprung from the quarrels of merchants and priests,’ returned the count.

‘And the rest from kings and emperors and ambitious prime ministers,’ added Grace, smiling, ‘and from anyone but the soldiers themselves. I wonder if we shall never be wise enough to leave off fighting?’

‘Not till the sky falls, and we catch larks,’ said Count Costello, rising. ‘And now, dear niece, will you come with me while there is yet plenty of daylight, to help my ignorance in shopping?’

‘May I come too?’ asked Mab.

‘Yes, if the count permits; and you, Grace.’

‘Oh, I shall stay at home; I have not done any of my work to-day. And you will return here, uncle, before you go back?’

‘Yes, dear; I will come and say good-bye.’

When the well-assorted trio set out, Grace proceeded to her usual self-imposed task of translating—partly as an exercise, partly in the vague hope of producing something marketable. With the example of Randal’s overweening estimate of himself before her eyes, she shrank from confiding to anyone the secret desire she had to commit her imaginings and observations to paper. There were thoughts and speculations suggested by that keen sympathy with nature, animate and inanimate, which is a royal road to knowledge; vivid fancies, guided by the strain of common sense with which she was blessed. These haunted her, and made a large part of her happiness—for at this time she

was very happy, very tranquil ; and in the shape of notes on what she read, abstracts and commonplace books, she filled many a blue-covered *cahier* of the kind so well known in German schools. But these labours of love were for herself alone ; the dear mother's unhesitating and undistinguishing praise was as unsatisfactory as indiscriminating blame. Indeed, had Mab been a shade more womanly, she would have confided in her. Friede's admiration and want of comprehension destroyed the interest she might have had in communicating her lucubrations to that tender friend. Had they been sentimental outpourings indeed, agonies of the heart, passionate reminiscences of her old home and its dethroned hero, Friede would have appreciated her cousin's performances most keenly. But this was not Grace Frere's line.

This sharp bright February afternoon she sat at her writing-table, holding her pen, but lost in thought ; her eyes dilated, and gazing far away. It was of course quite natural that Falkenberg should go first to his relations at Dalbersdorf, and yet she felt it augured some change. A month—a week ago, his first visit would have been to her mother and herself. There was nothing to complain of, yet she felt somehow wounded and 'contraried.' An uneasy sensation, like the breath of a moral east wind, rippled over the current of her thoughts ; and while she mused, the object of her reflections opened the door quietly, and walked up to her writing-table.

'Oh, Wolff, you startled me!' she exclaimed, to

her own infinite annoyance, using the appellation she was so accustomed to hear.

Falkenberg held out his hand without speaking. He was in his *Jäger* clothes, and looked very gloomy and colourless.

‘My dear Grace! my sweet friend! I have been watching for a chance to find you alone. I have so much to tell you, so much need of your sympathy; and it is a good omen that you greet me by my name—I like to hear you say Wolff.’

He threw himself on the sofa as he spoke, and Grace, resuming her seat, moved it slightly to face him.

‘What is the matter?’ she asked kindly, and looking straight at him. ‘You do not look as if you had enjoyed your visit to Dresden.’

‘Ach, Gott! no; I am doomed to execution.’

‘What!’ cried Grace, alarmed at his tone and looks, ‘you have not got into serious trouble? You are not going’—she was about to add, ‘to leave your regiment,’ but stopped the words, knowing their terrible significance.

‘Going to run away?’ cried Falkenberg, laughing, to the confusion of his listener. ‘No, I am not quite so far gone. I am going to pay my debts after the old Roman fashion, by selling myself.’

‘Oh!’ said Grace, on whom the true state of affairs began to dawn.

‘Yes, dear friend,’ he continued; ‘I have arranged my affairs, and my cousin Gertrude is

good enough to give me the wherewithal to satisfy my creditors—and herself into the bargain.’

He looked keenly at Grace as he spoke, as if to see how she took the intelligence. She was not so astonished as he expected her to be, but looked very grave.

‘She *is* very good, Herr Hauptmann, and I do hope you will be grateful and kind to her always.’

‘And is it, then, so great a sacrifice to marry me?’ exclaimed Falkenberg, starting up and beginning to pace the room. ‘Do you not think there are items in the bargain that suit Gertrud as well as her fortune suits me? I will fulfil my part honestly enough: I will make her Baroness Falkenberg, give her the *entrée* of the court circle, give her all the respect and observance due to my wife. It is all she needs; her household cares will fill up any vacuum, and——’

‘No! you ought not to talk like that,’ interrupted Grace. ‘Gertrud is very fond of you; if she was not, she could find plenty of barons besides you to make a bargain with. She will give you all her heart—will you give her all yours?’

‘Suppose I have none to give,’ said Falkenberg, stopping suddenly opposite her, and gazing into her eyes.

‘Does Gertrud give herself and all she has to you, knowing that you have no heart to bestow?’ asked Grace, bluntly.

‘She knows she has no romantic, impassioned lover in me,’ returned Falkenberg, resuming his walk to and fro. ‘She knows that mine has been

no saintly life, and she is satisfied to take what is left of it. If she is content, that is enough.'

'True,' said Grace, thoughtfully; 'you understand your own lives and their necessities better than anyone else, and I heartily wish you may both be happy.'

'Is that all?' cried Falkenberg, again pausing for a moment. 'Have you no warmer, kinder word for your friend in this hour of—of hopeless defeat?'

Grace was silent, and dreadfully embarrassed.

'You must see and understand all I dare not say. Will you promise still to be my friend—my sympathising, devoted friend?—that you will give me a chance, when you can, of opening my heart to you, of taking counsel with you? I ask nothing that need wound or offend my wife. Ach, du lieber Himmel! must I say my wife to her?'

And again throwing himself upon the sofa, Falkenberg hid his face in his hands, and uttered a low groan.

'Pray, pray, Wolff, do not marry if you feel like this,' urged Grace, half frightened and wholly horrified at the idea of the destiny preparing for poor Gertrud. 'Surely you might persuade your creditors to give you time; and my uncle would help you, and you might go away somewhere and make some money, or—— Perhaps I ought not to talk to you like this, but——'

'Yes, yes; talk to me—say anything. I like to hear your voice,' said Falkenberg, sitting up and taking her hand in his. 'But you make me feel myself a poltroon; I have no right to disturb and

distress you. And you little know how much time my creditors have already given me, nor how impossible for me, a Saxon soldier, to learn how to make money. No, sweetest friend!—let me have your hand a little moment—marriage with Gertrud is the only solution of my difficulties; and but for one—one great heart-longing, it would be no great sacrifice on my part—(‘Ah!’ thought Grace, ‘the Polish countess’)—‘a longing I must not explain to you. I ask but one consolation, which you only can give me: promise—promise solemnly that nothing shall alter the terms on which we are—that marriage shall make no difference in our friendship—that I shall still be your beloved brother—for you love me, my sweetest sister, do you not?’

‘I am indeed your friend,’ returned Grace, her heart beating quickly, and absolutely alarmed at his vehemence, ‘and I do not change to my friends; but, Herr von Falkenberg, I think you are not quite like yourself. I wish you would go away and think quietly over things; and,’ resolutely, ‘you must and shall let go my hand!’

‘Gott!’ cried Falkenberg, releasing it, ‘you are colder and harder than I thought. But remember, you will make things better and happier for me, for Gertrud, for yourself, if you continue my friend, and let me confide in you. Throw me some crumbs of comfort, some words and looks of kindness, and on my honour, on my soul, I swear I will always be master of myself! To-day I am overstrained, overtaxed—even now your strength and composure

have restored me ! I *will* leave you, but will come again in the evening to see your kind lady mother. Let us meet as usual.' He seized her hand, and, kissing it, exclaimed, ' Farewell, my beloved, most beloved sister !'

The next instant he had shut the outer door violently behind him.

When he was clean gone Grace sat down again at her writing-table, resting her elbow upon it and her cheek on her hand ; she thought long and painfully of the conversation, if it can be so called, which had just passed, while the quick beating of her heart gradually slackened, and her pulse resumed its ordinary measure.

First she was very, very sorry for Falkenberg, but even still more vexed with him ; his conduct was selfish and unprincipled ; he had no right to drag Gertrud into the misery of a loveless marriage for the sake of paying his debts, though she admitted his position was a difficult one. He was somehow degraded in her estimation, and she was vexed with herself for the sort of regret she could not help feeling, as she thought that the pleasant piquant friendship so flattering to her vanity must come to an end, for her unsentimental rectitude and common sense told her it would be impossible, or ought to be with a married man ; and then, though alone, the colour came slowly back to her cheek as the true meaning of Falkenberg's passionate promise, ' to be always master of himself,' flashed across her mind. Did he then presume to imply that his feelings for her would need mastery ? He had

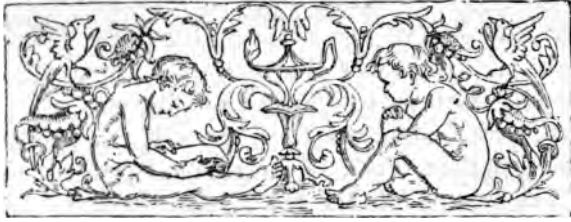
dared to adopt an almost threatening tone, when he assured her it would be better, 'for Gertrud, for herself,' if she continued the friendship which she knew and now confessed to herself was love thinly veiled. To what double-faced treachery did he wish to commit her? She would have none of it. Falkenberg was a charming companion, a most attractive man; but he had displayed the ugliness of his moral mechanism, and she was revolted; though she felt keenly what a loss he would be to the every-day pleasantness of her life, and how difficult, too, to disengage herself from the sort of mesh he had contrived to weave round her. If she drew back too suddenly, with what cutting though veiled scorn he would suggest that her friendship was only for the unmarried and unengaged, insinuating that English sentiment required stronger and coarser aliment than Teutonic. If she ventured to check the warmth of his manner and language, how sneeringly he would assure her that she was crying out before she was hurt, that only the matter-of-fact British nature would so mistake the pure glow of German brotherliness. Trifles, no doubt, in the estimation of the gentle but mature reader, yet exceedingly formidable to proud sensitive nineteen, even when nineteen has a more than an ordinary supply of common sense.

'Still,' thought Grace, 'however disagreeable he may make himself, I will not let him worry me with nonsense. I know I should not like a husband of mine to have this sort of friendship with another girl, and Falkenberg must give it up.'

But she sighed as she murmured the words to herself. Here was disillusion number two.

‘After all,’ she mused on, ‘Max is more honest and real than Wolff. I suppose all sensible, ambitious men consider mere love-marriages folly and weakness; yet how dreary marriage must be without love. Max was fond of me once. Yes, I feel—I know that.’ A faintly triumphant smile played round her lips at the memories his name evoked. ‘But it was only the pastime of an idle hour. Nor do I see how I was to avoid believing it a great lasting reality. How contemptible such credulity must seem to men like Max! Yet there have been women who attracted to themselves lifelong devotion and tenderness; I wonder how—by some quality in themselves? If so, what a gift! To be truly, fondly, deeply loved—to dare to love with one’s whole heart utterly, trustfully in return! Heigho! there is no use thinking of such things; it is too great conceit to fancy anyone would ever sacrifice anything for me. I am evidently not one of the soul-subduing order of women; but I hope, for all that, there are stronger, braver, truer men to be found than Max Frere and Wolff von Falkenberg! What fine eyes Max has! he is much—much better looking than Wolff.’

And then she resolutely turned to her writing, and worked more or less diligently till her mother, the count, and Mab returned.



CHAPTER XV.



THE betrothal of a daughter was an event of the deepest importance, the wildest excitement, at Dalbersdorf.

The day following the interview just described, the great rusty landau, with its strong, depressed-looking horses, made its appearance at Mrs. Frere's door as soon after the mid-day meal as the exigencies of time and space permitted.

Within might be descried the heads of Cousin Alvsleben, Gertrud, and Friede, all arrayed in their very best bonnets, all nodding and smiling radiantly to Grace, who, as well as Mab, was attracted to the balcony by the sound of the carriage stopping.

'Oh, mother!' cried Mab, 'here is Cousin Alvsleben and Friede and Gertrud; and Fritz has a pair of new gloves!'

'Come to announce the news, I suppose,' observed Mrs. Frere, who had received Falkenberg's intelligence with cold displeasure, and had since

preserved a dignified silence on the subject, which partly amused, partly annoyed her daughter.

'*Ach, meine liebe Cousine!*' cried Frau Alvsleben, rushing into the room at double her usual speed; 'ach, what have I not to tell thee!—what is at once a joy and sorrow to a mother's true heart. Here is Gertrud, my beloved child, a *Braut*—the *Braut* of my noble, gallant nephew, Wolff von Falkenberg.' An effusive embrace.

'I congratulate you, dear Gertrud,' said Mrs. Frere, kindly, to the *Braut* (or bride, as a betrothed girl is called in Germany); and Gertrud accepted and returned the offered kiss warmly.

She looked years younger than when last Grace had seen her; there was a colour in her usually pallid cheek, the light of joy in her usually dull blue eyes, that made her positively good-looking, and this evidence of her feelings touched Grace deeply.

'I do wish you all possible happiness, dear cousin,' she said, kissing her so heartily that Gertrud, moved to an unusual display, put her arms round her.

'We all rejoice in dear Gertrud's happiness,' said Friede, rather tearfully.

'And you too, *meine Liebling*,' said Grace, passing on to Friede, 'I am delighted to see you again; it is so very long since you have been here.'

'I have had a cold—I have not been well,' returned Friede, whose bright looks seemed to her friend's keen eye somewhat forced. 'But,' she added hastily, in a low tone, 'I have much to tell thee.'

Grace pressed her hand, and sat down between her and the *Braut*, while Frau Alvsleben poured forth a torrent of particulars.

‘Wolff was always fond of coming to Dalbersdorf, but I never could make out which of the girls he liked best ; certainly, Friede always said it was not her. At all events, he hung about a long time ; and now it seems he was afraid of his debts, and was very unhappy. But he has managed to pay a good many ; and for the rest, neither my father nor I would permit them to stand in the way of Gertrud’s happy settlement. So it is all arranged ; and as Falkenberg is anxious the engagement should be made public as soon as possible, I am even now on my way to the *Zittauer Zeitung* to have the announcement inserted.’

‘It will also appear in the *Dresdner Journal*,’ added Gertrud, with a triumphant little smile. ‘It is so strange to think that my next visit to Dresden will be to choose my trousseau !’

‘Yes,’ continued the mother, ‘dear Wolff is most pressing that the marriage may take place at once. But I do not think it can be managed before the end of April—that is, in about two months.’

‘Do you know,’ resumed Gertrud, smiling supreme from the altitude of her assured position, ‘that I was so silly as to think Wolff was quite fond of you, Grace, at that time when you rode so daringly to bring the doctor to him ? But he must have known that, had you really loved him, you could never have done so.’

‘My dear Gertrud,’ cried Mrs. Frere, colouring

slightly, 'your *fiancé* must be quite aware that Grace would not marry a foreigner !'

'And to do Baron Falkenberg justice,' said Grace, laughing, 'he never made any attempt to induce me ; for my part, I was not much surprised to hear of your betrothal, Gertrud.'

'Thou art a keen observer, my cousin,' said the *Braut*, admiringly.

Friede said nothing, but she looked curiously at Grace.

'I am sure it is all most satisfactory,' said Mrs. Frere, with polite interest ; 'what does my uncle say ? He was here yesterday, and never mentioned the matter.'

'Oh, he is quite pleased — quite charmed !' returned Frau Alvsleben, emphatically. 'You see, he left home yesterday before Wolff explained himself to me, so knew nothing for certain ; though he too, like others, had his suspicions. But I must not stay any longer. I have quantities to do. If you will allow me, I will leave the girls here, and go on to the newspaper office and the shops.'

'Of course we are but too glad to have them,' cried Mrs. Frere and Grace together ; 'and will you not return to an early *Abendbrod* ?'

'No, meine Liebe ; I must return to Dalbersdorf. There are letters to be written, and a thousand things. The girls will enjoy a long talk with you ; and Wolff will probably join them here, and return with us to Dalbersdorf.'

So saying, she rose to depart ; but stood a good half hour longer, saying last words. When at last

she was gone, of course the young ladies retired into Grace's room to take off their bonnets, when, equally of course, fresh confidences respecting various minutiae, which had hitherto been omitted from the abundant details of the late event, were poured into Grace's sympathetic ear.

Through them all, however, Friede was unusually quiet and silent; and Grace grew anxious to hear what was the matter, for she was very fond of her gentle, kindly cousin. Mab had been, with much difficulty, chased away from the revel of listening and conjecture in which she had been absorbed, to afternoon-school, whither she went with a very grave countenance, Falkenberg's engagement by no means meeting her approbation. At last Gertrud, with an air as though she were now more naturally inclined to grave society, exclaimed:

'But I must go and talk with *meine Frau Cousine*,' and walked away to Mrs. Frere; and then Grace, putting her arms round Friede, said:

'Now tell me, dearest friend, what have you?—what is the matter?'

'Ah!' replied Friede, with a quiver in her voice, 'have you not heard the change, fatal for me, that is about to take place? Otto—Dr. Sturm—is to be professor, and leaves for Leipzig.'

'Yes, the count told us yesterday. But, dear Friede, the promotion will be good for him—ultimately for you.'

'For me?—alas! no. I begin to fear I am of little value in his eyes. He came—oh! quite three days ago—and told us the great news before

supper. Afterwards (it was my turn to keep the house) and I was putting away the table-napkins in their drawer—he returned to the *salle à manger* to look for the grandfather's *allumettes*: so he came to me, and said, "My Fräulein, there is a reverse to every picture, and this sudden success has a very black side to me. It is that I must bid thee farewell." Yes! he said "Du," Grace; and never before have I heard that sweet sound from his lips. I was overcome; and could not restrain my tears. In my agitation, I dropped the mother's napkin-ring: he raised it, and in giving it back, caught my hand. The dear heaven only knows what he was going to say, when in bustled Mamsell, who was ever more Gertrud's friend than mine, crying, "Ach, Gott! who is tumbling the napkin-rings about? I am sure it is you, Fräulein Friede—you never think!" And so—and so—he went; and though he came again to see his brother, he avoided speaking to me or approaching me. Now he leaves next week, and all will be over; and he looks so haggard and miserable!—what shall I do? I know he loves me. Ought I to tell him I know it, and respond to his tenderness? Perhaps, through silence, I may lose him. Tell me, dear Grace—shall I?

'No—for heaven's sake!' exclaimed Grace, earnestly: 'you would be much more likely to lose him through speaking; certainly you would if he were an Englishman!'

'But if he goes away, and forgets me! I do not suppose that we can marry for years; but we might

be engaged—we might really belong to each other. I wonder Otto does not see that! Can it be that he is changed?’

‘No, no. I really believe in Dr. Sturm’s truth and fidelity; but just think of his position, dear Friede! His mother and sister to maintain, and scarcely yet a firm foothold on the upward ladder. It would not be right of him to commit himself or to hamper you with an engagement. You must have faith and patience, my Friede; help him to hold his tongue. You can surely show an interest in his career, which he will understand. You, neither of you, need absolute outspoken words; and in time things will come round. It is hard, dear; but it is only right.’

‘It is very, very hard,’ sighed Friede; ‘it leaves everything so uncertain, and then we cannot send letters—or anything.’ A pause; during which Grace sought for some crumbs of comfort to offer the disconsolate one. ‘We should be in no way bound to each other; and I shall be tormented to marry other people. If Otto would only speak——’

‘Dearest Friede, there is nothing for it but patience; and after all, some other piece of good fortune may happen, and shorten your time of probation.’

‘It seems so strange,’ said Friede, with a slight sob, ‘that Gertrud, who was always so miserable, and doubtful about Wolff, should now be serene and secure; while I——’

Here Friede broke down utterly; and it took

several minutes of soothing, of praises of Otto Sturm, of assertions that he was worthy of all trust, etc., before Grace could restore her friend to composure sufficient to return to the *salon*.

There they found Gertrud deep in an exposition of her views and intentions; of the particular residence on which she had already decided, the servants she intended to keep, the system of management she intended to pursue, the particular directions in which she expected to make economies, etc., etc. Grace listened in wonder. 'She must have been planning all this for months,' she thought; 'it could never have sprung into life in one day's thinking.'

'And, my best of cousins,' continued Gertrud, with affectionate earnestness, 'tell me, what is the dish of which dear Wolff has often spoken, and which he has eaten here? something sweet, with almonds and—and cream. I like to consult his taste.'

'I am sure I cannot think what it is,' said Mrs. Frere, with an air of deep thought.

'I imagine it must be "tipsy-cake,"' said Grace, smiling.

'Tipsy-cake,' repeated Gertrud—'what a strange name! But you will teach me, dear cousin, will you not? There is yet another *Plat*, but I will ask him about it.'

'I wonder he is not here,' said Friede, walking to the window.

'Oh, he is probably detained at the Caserne!' suggested Grace, who felt, in some odd way, that Falkenberg would not appear.

'True,' returned Gertrud ; 'and after an absence there is always more to do. Did my grandfather say to you that he hopes Wolff will have quick promotion? It will be very nice to be the Frau Oberst—*nicht wahr*, Grace? Then I must find some charming *hoch wohlgeborn Hauptmann* for Friede,' continued Gertrud, with unwonted benevolence.

'Thank you. I want no *Hauptmann*,' said Friede, mournfully.

The minutes flew past and accumulated to hours, and still no Falkenberg. Grace had persuaded Friede to try some duets with her as a variation upon the perpetual reiteration of Gertrud's schemes and hopes, but the performance was a lame one. At last Frau Alvsleben returned, still radiant. She had met Falkenberg, she said, who was obliged to see his colonel at the Caserne ; so if he was not at Bergstrasse before her, they were not to wait for him. He would go on to Dalbersdorf direct from his own quarters.

Accordingly the Dalbersdorf party gathered up their various belongings, largely augmented by Frau Alvsleben's purchases; and with many embracings, last words, and promises to meet soon again, they departed.

'Really,' said Mrs. Frere, after the sound of the carriage-wheels had died away, 'Gertrud is an extraordinary young woman ; her castle-building is most prosaic. I wonder what she talks about to Wolff, who is a man of culture and imagination. How they will get on together I cannot imagine.'

'They will do very well,' said Grace, smiling.

Herr von Falkenberg will respect a wife that can give him a good dinner ; and depend upon it he will never allow himself to be too much bored.'

'Well, you modern young ladies are quite beyond my comprehension,' observed Mrs. Frere, a little peevishly. 'I always thought *you* had a tinge of romance, Grace ; but the cold-blooded way in which you talk of people is rather disappointing.'

'Oh, dear mother, I will never disappoint you if I can help it.'

She took up some needlework to seem busy, while her thoughts were far away. After a few moments given to Falkenberg and Gertrud, they turned to Randal and Jimmy ; their long puzzling silence now extending to more than a fortnight. Something must be wrong ; and though unacknowledged, even in the secret depths of her own consciousness, Grace was always prepared to hear that Randal was in a scrape—in a serious scrape. And while she mused, enter Paulina with the long-wished-for answer from Jimmy. It was short and unsatisfactory. A great press of business had prevented a speedier reply. There was nothing to cause his dear Miss Grace uneasiness that he knew of, but indeed he did not know much. Mr. Randal had had a bad cold, and was a trifle feverish ; and it was little Jimmy saw of him. As was natural, he was always in company, out every night ; and though he, Jimmy, couldn't bear to trouble his respected friends, still if Miss Grace would drop a hint that no house would stand a clerk coming late, day after day, it might do good. 'And you

can't be up late and early—human nature couldn't stand it. I think Mr. Randal is better friends with Mr. Maxwell Frere than he used to be. He went to dine with him twice in the last fortnight ; but he will likely tell you himself, for he promised me he would write to you to-day.'

This letter filled up the measure of Grace's uneasiness, especially as Randal had evidently not performed his promise, or she would have had both letters together ; perhaps it might come to-morrow morning. On the whole, Jimmy's report was not so bad ; not by any means so bad as much that she had anticipated—not certainly bad enough to account for the strange dread and looking forward to evil which had seized supremely upon her. She gave the letter, with some trepidation, to her mother, dreading lest it might produce the same effect on Mrs. Frere as it had done on herself ; but evidently it did not.'

'It is almost a pity,' she remarked, folding up the epistle and putting it back in its cover—'it is almost a pity that Randal's social success is so great, though it is only natural he should be immensely popular. Of course it is a temptation to late hours and all that—a temptation few young men could resist ; but I hope he may make useful friends among the people he associates with ; and you must admit he has not asked for any extra money for a long time. Still I will write to him myself, and tell him he must be more regular in his attendance at that horrid office. I think, after all, I have more influence over Randal than anyone else.'

'I am sure you ought, dearest mother,' said Grace, and relapsed into her troubled thoughts.

The only comfort in Jimmy's letter was contained in the paragraph respecting Maxwell Frere ; and that was so incredible as to be more startling than consoling. She could as soon imagine fire and water fusing as Randal and Max enjoying each other's society; and then his unusual reticence about money matters, it was a sign for good or evil ?

She was altogether unhinged and depressed, and sat on thinking—thinking, all the time her mother was composing a very pretty ladylike letter to Randal, which she read aloud to Grace with some pride, and long after—till Mab had returned and dragged her mother away to look for sundry bits of lace and ribbon required to compose a doll's costume—till evening closed in, and she was obliged to put away the needlework with which she had striven to occupy herself ; and then she asked her mother if they might not have tea at once, as she felt quite feverishly eager for a cup. So tea was served ; and somewhat cheered by the lights and the refreshing beverage, Grace proposed they should play a game of whist with dummy. Mab greatly enjoyed cards, and proceeded with delight to set forth the table. They were scarcely advanced beyond the second deal, when a sharp ring announced a visitor. To their infinite surprise, that visitor was Falkenberg.

'I thought you were at Dalbersdorf!' exclaimed Mrs. Frere.

'You were certainly expected there,' added Grace.

‘Oh, I have been detained so late by the colonel that it would be stupid to go there at this time of night, so I thought you would let me come in and have a chat. What is the game—whist? Well, I am better than a dummy. Will you have me for a partner, my dear little Mab?’

‘Were I Gertrud, Herr Hauptmann, I should think you a tardy lover, to be content to lose so much of my company,’ said Mrs. Frere, smiling graciously upon him as he unbuckled and laid aside his sword.

‘Don’t you think we shall see enough of each other by-and-by?’ he returned, smiling and taking a seat at the card-table.

Grace was quite silent. The expression of profound, complete happiness on Gertrud’s face that morning came back to her memory, and roused her anger against Falkenberg, who, taking up the cards, began to deal them, talking easily and pleasantly the while. The game proceeded with many exclamations from Mab, till Falkenberg, who had frequently glanced at Grace, said rapidly in German:

‘What! have I sinned too far to be spoken to? I wish I had not come.’

‘So do I,’ she returned, without looking at him.

‘You say so openly. What have I done?’

‘You are due elsewhere, and you have neglected your *devoir*.’

‘Ah, so you are afraid I am not a *preux chevalier*! Be assured I shall fail in no proper respect to my *Braut*. She is not so *exigeante* as you would be.’

Then, returning to French, 'I have a sort of right to the *entrée*, dear madame,' he said to Mrs. Frere, besides your kind permission. I shall soon be your cousin—*n'est-ce-pas?*—by marriage, and I hope adoption; and as I cannot pass the evening with my *fiancée*, the next best thing is to spend it with you. You see, my sweet friend and cousin, you have no right to be angry with me.'

'And it does no good if I am,' said Grace, smiling; 'so, Monsieur de Falkenberg, go your own way!'

'I shall, *ma belle*; I always do.'

And recognising the wisdom of non-interference, Grace attended to her cards, while Falkenberg was more than usually frank, bright, and agreeable. Yet she could not help deploring Gertrud's destiny, so much she feared that Falkenberg's present good-humoured indifference might later change into dislike.

'I think,' said Mrs. Frere, in reply to some side-hint of Falkenberg's, 'that Fräulein Grace is unusually cold and distrait,—I think she is worrying herself about her brother. We had some accounts of him to-day, which shows that he is immensely sought in London society; and Grace, who is absolutely puritanical in her strictness, fears he is neglecting his work and falling into wild ways.'

'Ah!' returned Falkenberg—a long-drawn 'Ah' and look at Grace—'but there is not much to fear if only he does not gamble; that is *the* hopeless side of a young man's follies.'

‘I am sure Randal does not gamble,’ said Mrs. Frere.

‘We do not know what he does,’ said Grace, with a sigh. Whereupon Falkenberg looked at his cards again ; but as soon as Mab had been sent off to bed, he began to speak so kindly and sensibly about Randal and his sister’s anxiety for him, that Grace’s heart warmed to the speaker, and she was soon deep in a confidential conversation, while Falkenberg’s shortcomings faded temporarily from her sight.

Three — four days slipped by. There was a family-dinner at Dalbersdorf, whereat the Frau Baronin Falkenberg was made acquainted with the English relatives of her son’s *Braut*. It was rather a ceremonious affair. The Frau Baronin being born an Alvsleben, and acquiring courtly ways by grace rather than by nature, had taken in a double dose.

She was kindly and simple under it all, and evidently pleased by her son’s engagement.

Grace was amused at the tremendous parade made of the *Braut* and *Brautigam* ; they were placed next each other at table ; and if Falkenberg came unexpectedly into a room where they were assembled, whoever was next Gertrud immediately vacated his or her seat in his favour. Everyone had sly allusions to make, or jests to crack. The engaged couple were despatched to walk together in the most conspicuous manner, and almost always accompanied by friends, who avoided interrupting them with oppressive distinctness. All this was evidently a source of grave enjoyment to Gertrud,

while Falkenberg endured it all with a degree of good-humoured patience that astonished Grace. Once, and only once, she caught a glimpse of the deeper polar current which flowed counter to the placid surface-stream of his seeming. She had been sitting next to Gertrud, and listening to her anticipations of a visit to Dresden which was projected for the following week, when Falkenberg came in from a visit to the stable, in company with the count. Grace naturally never thought of stirring, till Friede said, laughing :

‘You are reluctant then, *meine Liebe*, to give up your friendly rights to Wolff’s higher claims?’

‘How?’ asked Grace, puzzled for a moment; then noticing a general smile, started up, exclaiming : ‘Oh, excuse me ; I quite forgot!’

A sudden bitter scowl passed over Falkenberg’s face, like the outward and visible sign of an inward and hearty curse.

‘You conduct these matters differently in England, do you not?’ he asked, recovering himself with an effort, while he drew forward another chair for Grace, and stood beside her for a few seconds.

‘I believe so ; but I do not think I was ever in the company of an engaged couple before.’

‘And I should think you never wish to be again.’

Notwithstanding this momentary glimpse of a substratum very different from the upper-crust, Grace returned with more comfortable anticipations for Gertrud than she had yet ventured to

entertain. The whole affair was evidently conducted on national principles, which suited the contracting parties ; and though Falkenberg might vapour and talk sentiment, he would settle down into an average German husband, enjoy the good things provided for him by his *Frau*, and not bestow any more of his society upon her than the customs of his country warranted.

Nearly a week had elapsed since the announcement of Gertrud's engagement. It was a dull, rainy morning, and Grace had fastened Mab's waterproof, and seen her set forth, umbrella in hand, when the postman, a warlike-looking functionary, much medalled, approached ; and bestowing a letter and a smile on the *schönes Fräulein*, gave a military salute and departed.

Grace's heart stood still a moment, with a nameless unreasonable fear. Why should she so much dread a letter directed in Randal's graceful, indistinct caligraphy ? She retired into her own room, very thankful that Mrs. Frere had not yet left hers, and, opening the missive, read :

'I have been too ill to write for a week past ; and though I am certainly better, the doctor says I require the most careful nursing to bring me round ; so I entreat you, dear Grace, to come to me at once—no one can make me well but you. There is a room for you here, and Jimmy could look after us both. Tell the mother that, if you come, all will go well ; but if not, I know I'll die.

The journey is not so expensive ; and after a while, I might return with you to Germany. Come by the first train after you get this. You see I can hardly write. Come, I implore of you, to

‘ Your loving brother,
‘ R. FRERE.’

This was startling ; but within was a piece of paper, folded separately, containing these words :

‘ Grace ! you—you only can save me. If you are not here by the 28th, I shall be ruined and disgraced for ever. No one but you must know what I have done—no one but you can help me. Start at once ; get the money anyhow ; but a day’s delay will destroy me. Show the letter only to my mother—burn this ! Oh ! how shall I live through the time that must pass before you come ? By all our old days, and all you hope for, do not fail me !’

‘ What can he ‘have’ done ?—what awful trouble has fallen on us ?’ murmured Grace, with white lips, reading over again this terrible appendix. ‘ How shall I tell my mother even of the letter ? My poor Randal, I will not fail you !’

She gathered herself up, and having torn the postscript into minute pieces, thrust them into the lighted stove.

‘ Shall you soon be ready, dear mother ?’

‘ Yes, love ; in ten minutes. Am I not a lazy mother ?’

‘ I will let her finish in peace ; and then——’ thought Grace, standing quite still, the open letter

in her hand, a dozen ideas crowding in her mind. What possible crime could Randal have committed?—might he not exaggerate? What an awfully long, lonely journey lay before her! and costly too; it would take more than a hundred marks. And what would mother and Mab do without her? But where was the use of thinking of difficulties when, whatever their nature, she *must* plunge into them? At any rate she would write to Friede; if Friede would only come and stay with the dear mother, it would be an infinite relief.'

But she felt dazed and bewildered. To travel alone presented little to frighten her brave spirit; but to be alone with Randal in London, left to her own judgment in matters of critical importance, this was appalling—'and that poor boy, how he must suffer!'

'Well, dear Grace, you have had a letter?' said Mrs. Frere, coming into the room.

'Yes, mother, from Randal; and, dearest mother, he has been very ill, but is better, thank God; and he wants me to go and nurse him until he is quite well. Here, read yourself.'

'Oh, my boy, my precious darling boy!' cried Mrs. Frere, beginning to weep and tremble. 'I felt some terrible blow was coming; you know how miserably anxious I have been. Ah, the unerring instinct of a mother's heart! I cannot see the words; read—read for me, Grace!' When she had done so, poor Mrs. Frere dropped into the nearest chair. 'I will go myself. He only refrains from asking me, because he fears I would

not be equal to the terror and fatigue,' she said ; ' I must go to him, Grace. Don't you think I must—I ought ?'

' No,' returned Grace, taking her hand and tenderly stroking it. ' I should have to go too ; and how could we leave Mab ? No, my mother, let me go, and I will bring Randal to you ; you see he is better already,' and so on. She strove resolutely, lovingly, to dissuade Mrs. Frere from going in person, which was evidently what Randal most wished to avoid.

Of course she succeeded. Then she had to persuade Mrs. Frere to take a cup of coffee and a morsel of bread, to plan her route, to combat her mother's doubts and fears.

' What will the Count and Frau Alvsleben say to your going all that way alone ? You know they will blame me ; and yet what can I do—eh, Grace ?'

' What indeed ! If all Dalbersdorf went into fits, it would not affect my going ; we have something more real to think of. There is a train to Dresden at eleven something ; and though it is frightfully slow, still I shall be able to catch the six o'clock train to Cologne, and so on to Rotterdam ; and I shall be with Randal, please God, on Thursday morning. We must send to the bank and get some money ; and Paulina can call at the station and ascertain about the train as she comes back.'

' And let us ask Wolff von Falkenberg to see you off : I am sure he will help us.'

‘No, no, no!’ cried Grace, with some vehemence. ‘No one can help us. Let me get away without being tormented by anyone. Come, dear mother, write a cheque, and I will send a line to Cousin Alvsleben, asking for Friede. You would like to have Friede while I am away, if they can spare her?’

‘Well, yes; though she, or anyone, would be a poor substitute for you, my Grace. But do you not fear the long journey alone?’

‘No—not one bit. Come and help me to pack; it is past nine, and we have plenty to do once you have sent off your cheque. I should like to be quite away before Mab comes back—poor dear Mab! Tell her I hope she will be very good, and take care of you while I am away.’

Grace said truly she did not fear the journey one bit. The greater had utterly swallowed up the lesser dread. What was the journey compared to what might await her at its end! and this fearful looking for of evil she must not breathe to anyone. The hasty, tearful preparations of that morning stamped their impress indelibly on her memory. The quick selection of necessaries for her journey—her poor mother’s prayerful ejaculations—the ceaseless repetition in her own heart, ‘What can it be? what can it be?’—the hasty glances at the clock—the startled exclamations, ‘It is ten o’clock,’ ‘It is eleven;’ ‘You will scarce have time to eat a mouthful; you must take some sandwiches with you, dearest,’ etc., etc.—and then she was in the droschky, and at the station. She was taking her

ticket—she was kissing her trembling, weeping mother—she was feverishly begging Dr. Niedner, whom she fortunately encountered, to see Mrs. Frere home ; and that kindly, burly man was helping her into the carriage. The inspector snipped her ticket with a click, the door was slammed, a last glimpse of her mother leaning on Dr. Niedner's arm—and she was off on her lonely, anxious journey, the perpetual question still going on unanswered :

'What can it be? what can it be?'

END OF VOL. II.

