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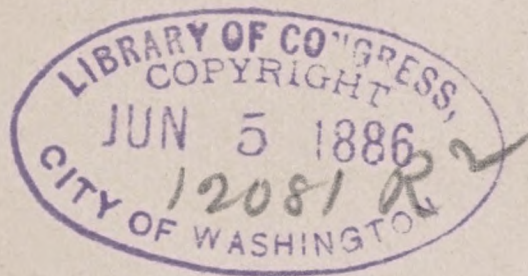
TRANSLATED AND ADAPTED FROM THE GERMAN

OF

WILHELM HERCHENBACH

BY

AGNES SADLIER



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ANGEL HILDA.



"Do noble deeds; not dream them all day long."



*"And blessed is he who can divine
Where real right doth lie,
And dares to take the side that seems
Wrong to man's blindfold eye."*

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ANGEL HILDA.

CHAPTER I.

THE GRAVE-DIGGER.

BALTHASAR KRAFT, the grave-digger of Breslau, was seated in his house, in a small room through whose window he had a perfect view of the great iron-barred door of St. Christopher's Church. It was in the year 1630, and Balthasar had just returned to his home, after performing his melancholy office in behalf of an old and respected inhabitant of Breslau. After spending a short time in meditation, perhaps on the uncertainty of life, he arose and took down from the high chimney-piece, of which it formed the principal ornament, a ponderous volume, bound in pig-skin, laid it on the window-seat, and as he

undid its heavy iron clasps, murmured to himself, "My great-grandfather, my grandfather, and my father have held my office before me, and if the magistrate and the trustees of the church know how to value my services, my son Caspar will hold it after me." Then he seated himself in his arm-chair, placed his spectacles on his nose, and plunging the pen into the ink, wrote in large black letters, whose lines were almost as thick as his fore-finger, the following: "To-day I have buried the esteemed Thomas Breilkopp. Besides the fee usual upon such an occasion, his relatives have bestowed upon me three cumocks of grain."

Such entries as this were so common in the huge volume, that if Kraft had but placed all the grain and wheat which had been bestowed upon him in a heap, it would have risen to a height that would have dwarfed the steeple of the Church of St. Christopher. As for sausages, he could have encircled the good city of Breslau with a three-fold cable of them, so generous had been the offerings in that line.

To write, and above all to write in a manner befitting the dignity of a record intended for posterity, was no easy work for the grave-digger, and quite a space of time went by before it was completed to his satisfaction. He was so deeply absorbed in it that he failed to hear the voices of a large and increasing crowd in the street, just before his door. Finally, just as he was rising from a last look, and was about to close the volume, the door opened, a young girl appeared on the threshold. She was a lovely vision, in the low dark room; her face, whose chief beauty lay in its pure, calm expression, was without the faintest tinge of color, and her fair hair, too pale to be called golden, and too deep to be termed flaxen, fell from beneath her cap in two thick braids far below her waist. Her blue eyes matched the sky in color, and they often had an appearance of beholding some distant glorious thing, whose beauty they reflected. It was for this reason, as well as for the stainless purity and self-sacrificing spirit of her life, that the name of "angel" had

been bestowed upon her by the people of Breslau.

Wherever she went she aroused gentle, kindly feelings, and wrung smiles from lips that naught else on earth could have caused to part for that purpose. So now, when she opened the door of her father's room and smiled at him, he beamed upon her with a smile that caused his great round face to become a mass of wrinkles, and said, "Well, Hilda?"

"There is a noise in the street just without our door, father, and I think it would be well for you to go out and see what is the cause of it."

True enough, now that the grave-digger's attention was no longer absorbed in his difficult task, he heard the voices of a great number, who seemed to be disputing. He rose and was about to open the door, when a loud knocking sounded upon it, and several voices cried, "Come forth, Balthasar Kraft, and read the notice which has been posted up before the church. Anthony Dorn, the grocer, has been striving to do so for the last

half hour by the clock of St. Christopher's, and has not been able to make it out yet."

Balthasar, thus adjured, opened the heavy house door and stepped into the midst of an excited group of his fellow-townsmen, who eagerly made a passage for him to the church, before which hung the notice which was to them as the mysterious handwriting upon the wall which terrified the Assyrian king, and for which, like him, they eagerly sought an interpreter. When he reached it, he found the worthy grocer still staring at it through his spectacles, while great drops, the result of effort and mortification combined, stood upon his brow.

"Stand aside, Anthony," cried a number of voices, "and let Balthasar read it to us."

And Anthony, whose pangs amounted to perfect agony when he saw himself obliged to yield his place to his next-door neighbor, did as he was bidden, and the grave-digger, having leisurely drawn his spectacles from their case and adjusted them, proceeded to solve the problem.

But he had no sooner fixed his eyes upon the paper than he was seen to turn quite pale. Instantly the interest mounted to frenzy; the crowd pressed around Balthasar, until he was almost too close to the notice to be able to read it. "Good friends," he cried, raising his arms to try and push them away, "stand back! It is very important that you should hear the whole of the notice, for it tells that the plague is on its way to Breslau."

A ghastly silence fell on the stricken throng at these terrible words. Taking advantage of this, the grave-digger proceeded to read aloud that the plague, which the people all knew was raging in Russia and Poland, was now to be dreaded in Breslau, and that to render its visitation as light as possible, the people were ordered to obey implicitly the orders of the learned physicians, Dr. David Evertz and Dr. George Runtz, to whom had been assigned the duty of preparing Breslau to meet the plague, and saving its inhabitants. The notice concluded with a warning that any one who failed to comply with the orders of these

two learned men, would be punished severely by the magistrates of the city.

When Balthasar had finished, a perfect Babel ensued. Everybody told what he thought of the plague, of the physicians, and of the notice, and no one listened, and indeed could not have heard, even though he had. Balthasar alone remained silent, and took his spectacles from his nose and placed them in their case with the same slowness and gravity with which he had drawn them forth. At length, when every one had become exhausted by his efforts to make himself heard, and ceased, Balthasar spoke. "I am quite sure," he said, "that these two worthy men will do their best to save our city; but what can they do, my friends? I remember reading in the great book in which my great-grandfather, my grandfather, and my father wrote down all the things that had any bearing on their office, that Dr. Mathias Austus, in the year 1542, declared he had discovered a sure means to save those that were sick of the plague and keep those who were well from getting it.

But after six thousand burghers of Breslau had died, he himself perished of the plague. My grandfather wrote that with his own hand, and it is true. Again, in the year 1552, the learned and celebrated John Erata, of Kraftheim, the king's own physician, says that if the people will only follow his directions, he will cure them. They do so, and what happens? The learned doctor dies himself of the plague, along with twenty thousand of the towns-people. Whether these doctors, that the magistrates have now chosen, will do any better I don't pretend to judge; but I have not much hope. I don't see how any one can fight death."

"Very true, my good friend," called out a mocking voice, at the close of the grave-digger's somewhat labored speech; "you have spoken words of wisdom, and it were well that all should take heed of them."

The people had all turned at this sound, and now shrank back and left the space clear around the speaker. He was a man who, when

looked at from behind, seemed young; his figure being both slight and supple. But his face, with its keen, bright eyes, was deeply lined; and his beard, which was cut short, and worn pointed, was silver-gray, and formed a startling contrast to his black wig. This strange personage had quietly taken up his abode in Breslau some time before, but who he was, or whence he came, were facts still unknown to the worthy burghers and their families. He dwelt in a gloomy house in a retired part of the town, and any provisions that he required, were purchased by himself or his servant, and carried home, so that no one ever penetrated into the house; and, in fact, no one was anxious to do so, as he was soon accused of being learned in the black art.

In those days, a belief in astrology existed among all classes, high and low. Anne of Austria, the mother of Louis the Fourteenth, sent back from some distance beyond Paris, to know what the fact of one of the mules by which her litter was borne, having fallen, betokened. A

faith in sorcery, magic, and witchcraft existed even among those whose station should have elevated them above such nonsensical belief; in fact, it was only the truly pious and enlightened among the clergy, who really did not put faith in them.

Many of the people of Breslau, who knew something of the great world beyond the gates of their city, thought the man was an Italian astrologer, who had been driven from the French Court because some of his predictions had proved false.

Alchemy, the ancient science which professed to transmute metals into gold, and which led the way to the great modern science of chemistry, had also many believers, among them the great Richelieu, who threw a poor wretch into the Bastille for deceiving him in regard to his powers as an alchemist. Some in Breslau believed this man to be that unhappy alchemist, escaped from the great French minister's clutches, and hiding himself in this distant city.

The result of these conflicting opinions was to

deepen the cloud of mystery which already hung over the stranger; and when he appeared in the streets, which was not often, he was pretty sure to have no one dispute the passage with him; and silence fell on any merry group when the shadow of his presence fell upon them. Far from these things troubling him, however, he seemed to consider them much as a ruler, beloved of his subjects, might the joyful greetings which filled the air upon his appearance. The first proceeded from fear, as the last would from love; but love and fear are the two great forces which control mankind; and the strange man knew this well, and was better satisfied that his power should have its root in fear than in love. All he craved, was to possess it.

After he had spoken, he rested his hands upon the stick which he carried, and stood still, eying the group with so strong and piercing a gaze from beneath his huge bushy eyebrows, that every one stood silent and terrified.

Balthasar alone, who, perhaps because he had

seen so much of the dead, felt less terror of the living, mustered courage, after a moment or two, to address him.

“Have you seen many plagues, sir, that you caution the people to take to heart my poor words, and look to God alone for help?”

The astrologer, as we shall henceforth call him, burst into a low, long laugh, indescribably unpleasant to hear, and which had no more mirth in it than is in the sweep of dry leaves before an autumn gale, and nodded his head repeatedly as he answered, “Ay, I have seen many plagues—plagues of all kinds—and they have always done their work, and destroyed those that they were sent to destroy.”

These words, the manner of uttering which, gave them a certain weird effect, were not, as we may imagine, calculated to have a very inspiring effect upon the by-standers, and many of them felt convinced, as they felt, as well as saw, those cold, glittering eyes fixed upon them, that they were the chosen victims of the swiftly advancing

scourge, and that this mysterious man's ability to read the future enabled him to know it.

Inspired by fear, some of them were about to put some further questions to him, but the astrologer was far too clever to cheapen himself by being too communicative. Drawing his cloak around him, he passed on, and was soon lost sight of in the distance.

Every one drew a long breath of relief, and all were just about to begin to discuss what he had said, when attention was diverted from it by the grocer, Anthony Dorn, who had slipped away quietly when the dire news was first read, and now reappeared with all of his household effects which he could carry.

“Whither are you going?” cried Balthasar.

“Away from this foul air,” answered the grocer. “I will not stop till I have placed twenty miles between myself and the city of Breslau. Farewell!” And, without waiting for further questioning, the valiant grocer rushed on his way.

But he did not go far. When he reached the nearest gate, he found it closed and guarded. "It is the order of the magistrates," returned the sentinel to all Anthony's pleading, "that no one shall leave Breslau. It is too late now to think of the forest and pure air. In Breslau you are, and in Breslau you must stay, till I have leave to let you pass."

The wretched grocer retraced his steps, and informed the numerous groups who were following his example that none might go forth, and all went sadly back to the rallying-place before St. Christopher's. Presently, a troop of the city militia came marching through the city, preceded by a herald, who commanded that every one betake himself to his house at once, in order to receive the commands of the physicians in regard to what measures each should take to preserve his household from the plague. The burghers at once dispersed, and in a short time the streets of the gay, bustling city of Breslau were empty, and as still as death.

Darkness fell, and the terrified people heard no sound through the long night, save the heavy stroke of the clock in the tower of St. Christopher's, which, to their excited minds, seemed like the voice of the death-angel, brooding over their devoted city.



CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST DEATH, AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

ON the following morning, the peasants came trooping towards the city with the country produce, lightening the way with jest and merry snatches of song, as was their custom. But what was their dismay to find the gates closed, as if the city were besieged. Their provisions were conveyed over the wall by means of ropes, and taken to the market-place.

The only household in Breslau which seemed free from the general alarm was that of the Krafts. Balthasar went about his daily mournful duty, in which he was assisted by his son Caspar, with undaunted mien; and Hilda, when not engaged in domestic duties, went about freely among the poor and the afflicted, dispensing alms and gentle sympathy. She never gave a thought to the

plague, save when she found time to glide into the great deserted Church of St. Christopher, and there, before the Blessed Sacrament, beseech Our Lord to be merciful in His visitations upon the doomed city. One evening, as she passed out of the church into the quiet, peaceful street, she was met by her brother, who told her that the first case of the plague had been discovered.

Hilda trembled for a moment, but she was most anxious not to alarm her brother, well knowing to dread the plague is to invite its attack. So she simply asked, "Where?"

"In the house of Nicholas Ord," returned her brother. "They say both he and his old servant, Elspeth, are dead of it."

"Elspeth!" cried Hilda in dismay. "Why, 'tis but yesterday, just before sunset, that I saw her at the window, as I passed homeward. It cannot be!"

"Yes," returned the boy, in a low voice, which his utmost effort could not keep from trembling, "it kills in a few hours."

“It,” of course, meant the plague; and as Hilda looked at the ashy paleness of the boy’s face, she felt her heart sink with fear, for Caspar, her only brother, was as dear to her as her own life.

“Come, Caspar,” she said, slipping her arm within his; “come home. You have been working too hard. Let us talk of something else, and try to forget all about the plague.”

While they were walking homeward, their father was seated in his little room at home, writing. Suddenly he heard a knock upon the door, and in answer to his summons to enter, the beadle of St. Christopher’s, in full regalia, appeared before him; and with majestic manner announced that he bore an order from the worshipful magistrates for Balthasar Kraft to repair at once to the house of Nicholas Ord, the brewer, who, together with his servant, Elspeth Stumpe, was supposed to lie dead of the plague, and convey the bodies of both to the churchyard upon the hand-cart which the beadle would provide for that purpose, and give them Christian burial.

Balthasar listened with his usual calm face to the message of the authorities, but made no reply ; whereupon the beadle relapsed from the official into the jolly neighbor ; and, leaving the doorway, from which point of vantage he had delivered his message, approached the opposite side of the little table at which Balthasar was seated, and said : “ Pretty hard thing this, neighbor, they have set you to do.”

“ It is,” replied Balthasar, thoughtfully ; thinking, not of himself, but of Caspar.

“ It may turn the neighbors against you,” resumed his friend. “ If they know you have been burying the first victim, they will be afraid to have anything to do with you, or with your family, even with Hilda !”

“ I know it,” returned Balthasar sorrowfully ; “ still, I, as my fathers before me, have earned my bread by digging the graves in St. Christopher’s, and I must expect to do it during the time of the plague, as well as when there is none. As for my family,” he continued, more cheerfully, “ I

trust to God to protect them, as I am sure He will me, when I am performing my duty."

"Yes, and to keep the neighbors from knowing anything about it"—here the simple old beadle glanced around to see that he was not overheard, and placing his hand before his mouth, leaned toward the grave-digger, and said in a low tone—"I have not brought the hand-cart with me, as I was told to do. To-night, when St. Christopher's bell tolls midnight, you will find it at the corner of the street."

But Balthasar only met this kind offer with a rather sorrowful laugh. What mattered it, he said, if the first victim were buried by him in secret? Soon, if all that was said were true, ten grave-diggers instead of one would be needed, and people would have no more reason to fear him than many others. So saying, he rose, and directed the beadle to fetch the cart at once.

Presently, a small procession, composed of the beadle and the physicians, passed along the street to the house in which the rich brewer had dwelt

for many years with his old housekeeper Elspeth, a small, sad-faced woman, who was never seen to smile, or utter an unnecessary word during the brief excursions to market and to church, which constituted her only outings. The gloomy old house, out of which, indeed, it seemed as if nothing bright could possibly issue, stood next to the one occupied by the astrologer.

It was now after dusk, and so forbidding was the aspect of the tall, silent house, which seemed like the very home of darkness, that even the learned physicians were observed to shudder by the numerous crowd which had now gathered, though at some distance, as they stood before the portal, and one of their number raised the heavy knocker, and let it fall against the barred door. The noise resounded drearily through the silent house, but no answering step was heard; and after the summons to open had been repeated several times, all without came to the conclusion that Elspeth was indeed dead, along with her master.

They were preparing, in consequence, to force

an entrance for Balthasar, for every one else secretly resolved to avoid the pest-laden atmosphere ; when suddenly a voice proposed to burn the house with its fearful contents, and run no danger from having the latter conveyed through the streets.

This proposal was unanimously acceded to, and in a few moments more, the fire had been started, and the stout old house was soon in process of destruction.

Caspar and Hilda, on their way home, had been attracted by the crowds who were hurrying in the direction of the brewer's house, and had joined them. They reached the scene, and Hilda anxiously inquired if they had satisfied themselves that no one was within the house before they fired it. She was assured that both were dead, and she was just feeling relieved in consequence, when suddenly at one of the upper windows of the burning house a woman appeared, and looked down with the calmness of despair upon the surging throng in the street.

Poor Elspeth, worn out by attendance upon her gruff, miserly old master, had fallen asleep after she had seen him pass away, and had but just awakened. In reality, he had not died of the plague, and had not believed himself to be dying at all, so that when his half-imbecile old servant had proposed to fetch the priest, he had sternly forbidden her to do so, or even to mention to any one, when she went out for provisions, that he was sick. Neither had heard any rumors of the plague being on its way to Breslau; and so when Elspeth had evaded all efforts to question her about the absence of her master from his usual haunts, she never imagined the suspicions which her conduct was arousing. As for her master, he was a miser and knew but one fear, that of losing his gold; and if the fact of his illness were known at all, would have preferred to be thought sick of the plague rather than of any other disease, as it would form the best guard against his being robbed.

But, though it had not come in the shape of the plague, death stood beside the old miser's bed, and

he had to go and leave the gold, whose fruits he had never enjoyed, and which he had probably lost his soul in acquiring. He passed away so quietly that Elspeth was ignorant of the fact for some time after; and when she realized it her grief was heartrending, to think that he had not made his peace with God. She grieved for him, too, as the only human being whose society she had known for many years, and who had given her a peaceful, even though comfortless, home. The preference of such beings as Elspeth is for darkness, and she resolved, as soon as night fell, to take her savings from the little iron chest in which she kept them, buried beneath the bricks of the cellar floor, and effect her escape from Breslau, for she feared lest she might be in some way blamable for having let her master die without physician or priest, or acquainting any one with the fact that he was even ill.

But the poor exhausted creature slept through the night and all through the next day, and was not even awakened by the loud knocking at the door. It was only the roaring of the flames and

the volumes of smoke that rushed up through the house that aroused her to consciousness, and to find death in its most awful form about to seize her. Her first idea was that the house had caught fire through her carelessness; but when she ran to the window and perceived the throng of people in the street, she concluded that they were about to destroy her for concealing her master's illness and death. No cry escaped her lips; the poor creature dumbly awaited her awful fate.

A cry of horror went up from the throng as soon as she was perceived, and Hilda immediately urged the men to make an attempt to save her. But, notwithstanding the great influence which the young girl possessed, she could not prevail upon any of them to attempt it, or even to assist Caspar in the work. It was too late, they assured her; the house was now likely to fall at any moment.

Finally Hilda exclaimed, "If no one else will help Caspar to rescue poor Elspeth, I will!" and she rushed towards the burning mass, in the midst of which the figure of the poor woman was still

visible. A ladder was at hand and Caspar was about to ascend, when suddenly his father appeared and pulled him back, and a moment later the sturdy figure of Balthasar was seen ascending. He had almost reached Elspeth when, with a terrific crash, the front of the house fell in. There was a second of horrible suspense as to the whereabouts of both Balthasar and the poor woman; then the smoke cleared away, and she was seen to be still at the window. Suddenly a voice cried out, "She is a witch, that old Elspeth! The flames can not harm her!" And then a hundred voices took up that fearful cry, "She is a witch! Let her burn!"

Unmindful of this clamor, Balthasar persevered in his work of mercy, and presently stood by Elspeth's side. She was utterly passive, and he could with difficulty incite her to any effort to save herself. Finally he lifted her out through the window, and descended with her in his arms, and had hardly touched the ground when the walls fell, and nothing remained of the brewer's solid old house, save a heap of ruins.

But it was no throng of pitying, helpful Christians that awaited the homeless creature at the foot of the ladder. It was a mob which fear had rendered both silly and cruel. Hilda alone took her hand, and endeavored to rouse her from her trance-like state of terror. She was about to lead her home, when a voice cried out again, "The witch has brought the plague on Breslau. Let us drive her out of the city, and if she attempts to come in again we will stone her to death."

A word was sufficient to make the mob follow this guiding voice, which was none other than that of the astrologer's servant. It was in vain that Balthasar, Caspar, and Hilda formed a body-guard about the doomed Elspeth; she was torn from their grasp and hurried towards the city gate without the least resistance, or prayer for mercy. It was soon reached, and she was thrust forth, the gates were closed and the mob gradually dispersed, feeling that something effectual had been done to check the plague.

CHAPTER III.

THE WITCH

A DESTITUTE wanderer in the starless night, Elspeth paused, uncertain which way to direct her steps. She had by no means realized why she had been so rudely thrust forth from her native city; for if she could have been brought to express herself coherently on the subject, it would have been found that she thought herself neither better nor worse than her neighbors. However, the fact remained that she was now a beggar, and a hungry one at that. She walked on as fast as she was able, and finally reached a wood, and, utterly exhausted, lay down to sleep beneath an oak.

She dreamed that she was still in the burning house; that no one came to rescue her until the flames had reached her clothing. To save her

they plunged her into a barrel of water, and then she awoke, shivering, to find a heavy rain falling, and her garments wringing wet.

With dawn the rain ceased, and the sun appeared in all its brightness, and Elspeth walked on to try and procure some food.

But she could scarcely crawl; and one hour passed after another, and still brought her within sight of no human dwelling. The sun had sunk once more, and the gray dusk filled the forest when she at last beheld a glimmer of light, and with one supreme effort, hastened towards it, and found it to proceed from a small cottage. But before she could reach the door to knock for admittance, the watch-dog heard her and set up a furious barking.

“What is the matter with the dog?” asked a woman’s voice within the house, and then a man’s voice replied :

“He is after a cat, no doubt, that has taken refuge in a tree.”

“Open, in Heaven’s name,” cried Elspeth, with the strength of despair. But her weak voice

failed to reach the people within, and she would probably have lain where she was all night, had not the prolonged and furious barking of the watch-dog once more aroused the woman's curiosity.

"He is barking at something more than a cat," she declared; "we had better see what it is."

A moment later the house-door opened, and the man appeared with a lantern. After some effort, he succeeded in quieting the hound, and then looked around to see what had excited him, and found Elspeth stretched upon the ground.

He started back at sight of her, as, indeed, he well might, for a picture of more utter woe and misery would have been hard to find. The long, tangled hair; the pale face, with its hollow cheeks, and the bedraggled clothing, were all in keeping with the awful look of terror in her eyes.

"Gretchen," he called to his wife, "come hither. A woman is lying here, before the door."

His wife came at once, and was almost as much startled as himself at the sight of Elspeth, but quickly rallied from her fright, and said :

“ Who are you, and what do you want ? ”

“ I am a poor woman, and have not tasted food for two days,” answered Elspeth. “ For God’s sake, shelter me to-night ; to-morrow I will go away, and trouble you no more.”

“ Bertram,” said his wife, quickly, taking the lantern from his hand, “ carry the poor creature into the house. I dare not turn away a poor dying woman who pleads to me in God’s name.”

Bertram did as he was bidden, and bore the unexpected guest within the small dwelling, and placed her upon a bed. He then retired, and Gretchen removed the poor creature’s damp clothing ; and having made her as comfortable as possible, went away, to reappear after a short time with some food. Poor Elspeth murmured blessings upon her hosts, as she partook of it.

“ Do not try to talk, poor woman,” said Gretchen, “ but eat, and then try to sleep. You are

among Christians, who willingly give you a share of what God has given them."

Elsbeth did as she was bidden, and was soon sleeping soundly.

But many days passed before she was able to rise from her bed. The fatigue consequent upon constant attendance upon her old master, who had grudged her a sufficient amount of food, and her exposure in the forest, had weakened her to an alarming degree; and if it had not been for Gretchen's faithful nursing, she would have never risen from the bed on which Bertram had laid her. But at length she was well enough to sit up, and knew that it was time to think of taking her departure.

But in the meantime, Gretchen had become so much attached to the silent, patient woman, who bore her sorrow and pain with so much fortitude, that she resolved to give her a home beneath her roof. She had no children, and as her husband Bertram was a wood-cutter, and therefore absent from home all day, she often found her home in

the forest very lonesome. She consulted Bertram on the subject, and he agreed that it would be a very good thing for her to have a companion, and especially one whom Heaven had sent to their door. They were talking of it, one evening, while Gretchen was seated at her spinning-wheel, and Bertram cut pine chips before the fire, when a knock was heard at the door, and their nearest neighbors entered for a little friendly chat.

The talk soon turned to the plague, which was slowly investing Breslau.

“I wonder,” said Gretchen, “if nothing can be done to check it, when it has once taken hold of a person.”

“Plenty of things are done,” returned her neighbor, “but nothing seems to be of any use.”

“All people don’t die of it that get it, though,” said Bertram.

“But few escape, neighbor,” returned the visitor, who seemed determined to take the most doleful view.

“I wonder where it came from first,” queried Gretchen.

The doleful neighbor, who was a mason, at once began to give a long account of how it was brought from Smyrna; but while he was doing so, another neighbor, a cobbler, who had joined the group, rolled his eyes, and lifted his eyebrows, and seemed dying to speak. As soon as he possibly could, he tripped up the mason, who was obliged to stop, not for want of facts, but of breath, and said in a tone which made the blood of his hearers run cold, “This is not the only way plagues are brought amongst us.”

A dead silence ensued for a moment, broken only by the crackling of the pine logs blazing upon the hearth, and then some one asked faintly, “And how else, neighbor?”

“There are often those in the midst of us,” returned the cobbler, in a deep voice, “who can do anything they please by the help of you know who.” Here Gretchen started, and piously crossed herself.

“And such people, of course, always wish what is bad to their fellow-creatures,” went on the cobbler, delighted to have made a sensation. “Now I will read you something that will surprise you.” And he drew forth a tiny book from the depths of his pocket, and having announced that it was written by one Abraham Manfridus, a physician, began: “In the year 1540, two Frenchmen came to a woman in Switzerland, and asked for three drops of cow’s milk, and three hairs from the tail of a filly. She gave them to the men, and they put them in a glass bottle, and then told an idiot boy to ascend a tree and look through the glass and tell them what he saw. At first he cried, ‘I see nothing,’ whereupon they told him to look again. He did so, and cried out: ‘I see a field full of dead cattle.’

“With this glass they set out through Switzerland, and everywhere that they looked through the glass, straightway the pastures were filled with dead cattle, so that presently, throughout the land, there were hardly any cattle to be seen. Of

course, such conduct soon put the officers of justice on their track, and they were overtaken on the banks of a broad river. When they saw that they were pursued, one of them flung himself into the stream, and was drowned; but the other, who was not so quick, was taken. On his way to prison, he was asked if nothing could be done for the poor cows who had sickened, but were not yet dead, and he replied, 'Yes, that presently a small leaf would grow on each of their tongues; and this must be plucked forth by the root with silver pincers. This would leave a red spot, to which honey must be applied, and then the cattle would recover.' The same knave, on being questioned about the plague, of whose coming there were then rumors, replied that it was on its way, and moved two miles farther each day, and would arrive at Breslau in the year 1542, which it did accordingly, and thus proved that the knave deserved the death on the gallows which he had by that time suffered."

All present were deeply impressed with this

wonderful story, save Bertram, who shook his head and said: "Paper is patient; it lets men put down on it whatever comes into their heads, but a sensible man does not believe it for all that."

But Bertram was the only one who questioned the truth of the story. All the others believed it thoroughly. This incited the cobbler to fresh efforts, and he said to Bertram: "Ah! my friend, you doubt now, but you will not, in a short time! I tell you it is but a few days ago, that a witch was in Breslau, who stood in a burning house, and was not even singed by the flames. A friend of mine told me of it this evening."

"In Breslau!" shrieked the whole company in chorus; "and what became of her?"

"She waited until the house was just about to fall, and then sprang from the highest window in the house to the ground without being hurt in the least. Then she refused to speak a word, and was driven out of the city, and the people will put her to death if she attempts to enter again."

During this recital, Gretchen had turned as pale

as death. She now turned to her husband, and found that he was staring at her with all his might. The cobbler, pleased to have frightened the sceptical Bertram, went on, "They just put her out in time, too, else she would have brought the plague in earnest, for she had already given it to her master; and since she went, there has not been a single case in the city, and it is ten days ago now."

"It is she!" shrieked Gretchen. "Friends, we have the witch in our house at this moment. And no doubt she will give us the plague for our kindness as she gave it to her master. Oh! Lord, have mercy upon us!"

In an instant confusion reigned in the hitherto peaceful circle. Every one of the guests ran to the door, the cobbler foremost, and was about to leave the house, when Bertram sprang across the room and, pushing them aside, planted himself against the door, and cried, "Nay, my friends, you must not leave us alone to deal with the witch. You especially, who know so much of witch lore,

must tell us what to do," he added, turning to the cobbler.

Seeing that Bertram was resolute, the cobbler walked over to the hearth and took a heavy billet of wood. The others followed his example, and then the cobbler desired Gretchen to show him the room in which lay the witch. She opened the door, and they entered in solemn silence, to find poor old Elspeth wrapped in a deep, peaceful slumber.

"Awake, witch!" cried the cobbler in a voice which he endeavored in vain to keep from trembling, "and depart from this Christian house, else we will kill you."

The poor woman opened her eyes, and when she perceived a band of angry men about her bed, began to tremble with fear.

"Oh! spare me!" she cried; "I am no witch. I call God and His holy mother to witness. I am only a poor wretched woman, without home or any friends, save these kind people."

"Bah!" returned the cobbler, growing bolder

as his victim appeared timid. "You took care not to let these good people know that you sprang from a blazing house all the way to the ground without being hurt. How could you do that, if you were not a witch?"

"I never did it!" cried Elspeth. "It was Balthasar Kraft who came up to where I was on a ladder and carried me down in his arms."

At this the rage of the company waxed strong. "Hear her! Just hear her!" they cried. "She accuses the worthy Balthasar Kraft, one of the best men of Breslau, of having gone up to save her. As if he would go near a witch!"

"Enough!" cried Bertram, sternly. "Arise, woman, and go forth. You can not remain longer beneath the roof of an honest man, since you are accused of witchcraft."

"Where shall I go?" inquired the unhappy Elspeth. "Ah! have mercy upon me. At least wait until morning. Do not drive me forth at night."

"This very instant!" cried the cobbler, who was

now the bravest of the brave, and felt equal to encountering a score of witches.

They retired in order to permit Elspeth to clothe herself, and sat in the outer room in silence, with their eyes fixed upon the door, which alone permitted egress from her chamber, as if they expected her to pass through the keyhole. After a short time, Elspeth appeared, meek and pale from her illness, and sobbing in a way that would have touched any hearts that were not rendered stony by a foolish dread. One more appeal Elspeth made; she rushed over to Gretchen and attempted to seize her hand. But this woman, whom until now she had found in truth to be a good Samaritan, recoiled from her in horror. Then Elspeth saw that all was useless, and resigned herself to her fate. She went towards the door, but paused on the threshold, and turning towards Gretchen and Bertram, said: "May God in Heaven bless you for your goodness to a poor wanderer. I forgive you for driving me forth, for I know you do it through fear, and not through malice. Some time

you will learn that I am innocent, if not on earth, at least in heaven."

Gretchen burst into tears and made a half motion to go towards her. But a glance at the stony faces about her made her give up the idea; and an instant after, poor Elspeth had passed out into the cheerless night, and heard the heavy door barred between her and her late home.



CHAPTER IV.

SEEKING THE TREASURE.

AS soon as poor Elspeth had somewhat recovered from this last shock, she began to think of whither she should direct her steps. If she had but her little savings with her! There was another strong box in the cellar, her master's large, well-filled one; and this she knew, by right, belonged to his sister in Prague. If she could only secure its contents, she would walk all the way to Prague, and give this money to her, and then perhaps she might in return give her a home for the remainder of her life. It is doubtful if the poor creature really understood that she had been forbidden to enter the city again; the only fact she fully comprehended was that if she were seen she would be called a witch; and to be called a witch meant to be feared and hunted like a wild

beast. She passed the night in the wood, and next day walked in the direction of Breslau, which she reached at evening. Not daring to show herself at the city gate, she waited for some chance to favor her secret entrance. Hour after hour went by, and brought no opportunity, however, until at last, just about midnight, a heavy traveling carriage drove up and paused for a moment at the gates. In an instant Elspeth had caught on to it, and was whirled rapidly within the city, and through the streets to the door of the principal inn, where it stopped. Elspeth then let go and set out for the ruins of her home, keeping within the shadow of the tall houses, so as to escape observation. This was no difficult matter to do on a moonless night in the seventeenth century, for the oil lamps, which were placed at wide distances from one another to light the streets, did it so badly that it was quite possible for one to go from one end of the city to the other without being seen.

At last, just as St. Christopher's clock struck

one, Elspeth reached the heap of ruins. Arming herself with a half-burned piece of wood, she proceeded to scrape away the *débris*. It was a tedious and difficult task, but at last she succeeded in extricating both the strong boxes. The contents of her own she transferred to her pocket; but she had no key with which to open her master's, so she was drawing it from its resting-place to carry it off, when a hand was suddenly laid upon her head. With a suppressed scream, she sprang up, to find herself confronted with the servant of the astrologer, who lived next door. "Whither away, fair lady, with all this treasure?" he said, mockingly.

Elsbeth threw herself upon her knees. "It is not mine, I call God to witness," she cried. "O, do not betray me. I am only a poor servant whom some wicked person has denounced as a witch. I am going to walk to Prague to take this money to my dead master's sister, who dwells in that city."

"Betray you!" replied the man, with an injured air. "I pray you, mistress, tell me, what kind of

a man you take me for, to betray a poor hunted creature like yourself?"

"Forgive me," said Elspeth, humbly. "And now, farewell. Already dawn brightens the sky, and I should be far on my road by this time."

"And how are you going to pass the gate with this?" asked the man, tapping the strong box with his stick.

"I will trust to God to permit me to pass out unnoticed, as I entered," answered Elspeth.

The man could hardly control his laughter at this reply.

"My poor woman," he said, "I do not know how you managed to get in, but I do know that you had not this with you. Now, to attempt to go out with it, is perfect madness, and if you are arrested, there is an order from the magistrates to put you in prison, which you will never leave, except to suffer death at the stake."

Poor Elspeth shivered like an aspen leaf, upon hearing this dreadful sketch of her future, should she fall into the hands of the city authorities.

“What am I to do?” she gasped.

The man paused for a moment or two, as if to reflect, and then said, as if in obedience to a sudden impulse: “Come with me, poor creature. Neither my master nor myself believe any of these silly tales about witches or witchcraft. My master is far too learned a man for that. I will tell him your story, and ask him to shelter you in his house until he quits the city, which he is about to do in four weeks’ time. Perhaps he will even do more; he may give you a place in his carriage until you are far beyond the walls of Breslau.”

Elsbeth clasped her hands, and sobbed out her thanks. To have any one who really knew all the hideous tales that had been spread about her offer to befriend her, was a joy to her sad soul. She accepted his offer, and he picked up the strong box, and conducted her to his master’s dwelling. In response to his knock, the door was opened by the latter, in a dressing-gown and black velvet skull-cap. He made a slight motion of surprise on perceiving Elspeth, but received her kindly,

and listened to her sad story patiently. He granted all that his servant had promised; and assured her that she was safe within his house, which no stranger ever entered. He promised also to take her with him in his traveling-carriage, when he left Breslau; and, having directed his servant where to place the coffer, told him to conduct Elspeth to her apartment, and dismissed her with a few kind words, and a friendly smile.

He paced the room uneasily, until his servant returned, and then inquired: "Think you there is any more treasure in the ruins?"

"No," replied the servant, "for she would have known it, had there been more. I think we have all the old miser's gold here;" and he pointed to the strong box which lay in a corner of the room; "and, to judge by its weight, there is no mean sum inside."

"Strange," returned the astrologer, musingly, "that this woman should have returned on the very night we had chosen to search the ruins."

"It is well," answered the servant. "She went

at once to the spot, and saved us the trouble of searching all over the ruins. Now that we have the money, she is easily disposed of. Just let the people know that she is within the house, and they will soon have the witch out."

"Yes," returned his worthy master; "or we could leave her here, and escape during the night with the money. But we can talk of this later, when our plans are all made up. Only one thing must not be permitted, that the magistrates hear of the existence of this strong box. If they do, farewell to it, as far as we are concerned."

"No fear of that happening," replied the servant, and then retired to permit his master to take a few hours' rest.

In truth, poor Elspeth had fallen into the hands of a pair of thorough rogues. The master did, indeed, pretend to be an astrologer, but, as none of those remarkable coincidences which had favored other astrologers by rendering their predictions true, had ever occurred in his case, he gradually lost repute, and was driven to find a livelihood by

gaming. His luck was great for a time, during which he lived well; but when it forsook him, it did so completely, and he was obliged to leave city after city, on account of debts. Finally, they—for his servant was his faithful ally during his unfortunate as well as his fortunate days—came to Breslau, where, after a time, the astrologer intended to exercise his profession once more.

But the death of the miser who resided next door, had suddenly inspired him with the idea of sending his servant out to spread the report that both he and his servant had died of the plague, and thus, by keeping every one away from the house, rob it at his leisure. At this time both he and his servant really believed that Elspeth had died along with her master. The chagrin of the latter was great, when he saw that Balthasar Kraft was about to enter the house in spite of the plague. It was then that he conceived the idea of burning the house, and he raised the cry, accordingly, and soon had the satisfaction of perceiving it in flames. But then, Elspeth appeared

at the window to destroy all his plans, and the only way of getting rid of her that occurred to him was to denounce her as a witch; and we have seen how well he succeeded.

To have her appearing again was provoking, but he went off to bed revolving in his mind the best way to finally rid themselves of her, while poor Elspeth lay calmly sleeping, after having implored the blessing of Heaven upon her benefactors.



CHAPTER V.

THE PLAGUE.

AFTER the witch had been finally thrust out of the city, and the gate locked, the people of Breslau breathed more freely than they had done for some time back. But soon all their terrors returned; for the plague marked the hapless city for its own. Deaths began to occur by tens, then by fifties; and at length, it was no uncommon thing to see hundreds in one day of its dreadful reign. Balthasar Kraft, assisted by his son Caspar, and a few poor wretches whom they had succeeded in hiring to assist in their dreadful work, labored night and day to give Christian burial to the victims. Poor Balthasar had long since given up writing in his great book; indeed, he was hardly able to visit home at all. But at last, one day, he felt himself sickening;

and sickening with all the fearful symptoms which announced the plague. He tried to reach home without seeking Caspar's aid; but just as he reached his own door, and knocked, he fell in a swoon, and so Hilda found him when she opened the door. She summoned her mother, and together they lifted him up and carried him to his bed. Then they set to nurse him, and defeat, if possible, the grim foe who had smitten him.

But one day, Magdalene Kraft, the mother, suddenly tottered and fell, and Hilda henceforth had two patients on her hands. Still, she bravely kept to her post; and was just feeling rewarded by some hope of success, when Caspar fell sick with the same awful symptoms. Then Hilda went out to seek help in her task, but could find none able, though many were willing to assist her. She was returning home weeping, when she encountered the astrologer's servant, who inquired the cause of her grief. She told him, and instantly he conceived the thought of getting rid of the unwelcome guest at his master's house.

“Can I trust you to keep a secret which involves a person’s life?” he asked in a solemn tone.

“I would rather not know any such secret,” returned Hilda, simply. “Secrets are troublesome possessions, and I have care enough on my mind at present without taking more.”

“Nay,” returned the man, “but if I mistake not, you would be glad to learn the secret which I can tell you. It concerns Elspeth, who was lately reported to be a witch.”

“Elspeth!” returned Hilda, radiant with delight. “Ah, if I could but find her, I should need no better nor kinder nurse to assist me in bringing my poor sick ones back to health and strength. Is she still living?”

“She is,” returned the astrologer’s servant, “and not very far from here. In fact, my master has given her a shelter within his house. When I return home I will tell her that I have seen you, and if she consents to go and help you nurse your sick, I will conduct her to your house after night-fall.” So saying, he departed, and Hilda returned

home comforted with the prospect of soon having some one to assist her in her difficult work.

The astrologer's servant proved as good as his word; for, some time after nightfall, a knock was heard at the door, and Hilda opening it, discovered a well-muffled figure whom she could hardly recognize as Elspeth. She greeted her joyfully, and in a short time Elspeth, who had done much nursing in her life, became as familiar a figure in the sick rooms to Hilda, as if she had always dwelt beneath the grave-digger's roof. For a few days all went well, and then, just as Balthasar was slowly struggling back to life, Hilda sickened, and was soon the sickest of the patients. Everything that love could prompt Elspeth to do she did; and as Balthasar was soon able to give some aid in nursing the child who was as dear to him as the apple of his eye, she slowly returned to health and strength.

But all these events which we have described in a few words occupied many weary weeks, and it was two months from the time that Elspeth had

re-entered Breslau that the Krafts were once more gathered around the family table. To have their little circle unbroken after the visitation of the plague upon it, was indeed marvelous, and what perhaps no other household in Breslau could boast. Elspeth was an honored guest at this first meal; and after Balthasar had said grace, he turned to her and said, "Elspeth, neither I nor any of my family can ever forget what you have done for us—no, even though we were to grow to be as old as Methuselah. We are poor and have naught to give you in return, save the shelter of this poor home till the day of your death; but there is One above who in His own good time will reward you."

"Nay," replied Elspeth, "do not speak of it, I pray you. Who came to seek me when I stood at the topmost window of my master's burning house but you, Balthasar Kraft? And do I not owe you my life in return, if it would do you or yours any good?"

"But tell me, Elspeth," here interrupted Magdalene, "how came you to go to the astrologer's

house? I fear much that if the people were to learn you had chosen that man's house to hide in, it would greatly increase their anger against you."

"What could I do?" answered Elspeth; and then she told them, whom her instinct told her were truer friends to her than the crafty astrologer and his servant, the story of the strong box. They applauded her resolution of taking it to Prague and giving it to the dead man's sister; but the brow of honest Balthasar was deeply wrinkled in the effort to plan out some way of conducting Elspeth safely out of the city.

But when he mentioned this difficulty, Elspeth informed him that the astrologer had kindly consented to take her in his carriage to some distance without the walls of Breslau. But instead of appearing glad to hear this piece of news, Balthasar shook his head sorrowfully from side to side, and said, slowly and solemnly, "Elspeth, Heaven knows I love not to speak ill of my neighbor, least of all when the mercy of God has just raised me from a bed of sickness, but I feel that I must warn

you against that man. I do not accuse him of sorcery or magic"—here he lowered his voice—"but I do not think he is the kind of man who would put himself out to do an act of kindness for simply God's sake to any living creature. However, you have friends here who will do their best to save you from wrong."

"You have, indeed," here put in Magdalene, Caspar, and Hilda together.

"Therefore, my advice to you is, for the present to return to where your money is. Keep a watch on their movements without appearing to do so; and for that matter, they can not very well leave the city with your treasure for awhile, as all persons are forbidden to do so."

That evening, Elspeth returned to the astrologer's house, and the next morning Balthasar and Caspar began to exercise their sad office once more in behalf of those who had not been so fortunate as themselves.

So fiercely did the plague now rage that it required the utmost efforts of the devoted priests

to secure the last sacraments to the dying. There was no parting benediction, no tolling bell; no train of mourners accompanied the dead to their final resting-place, but they were hurriedly thrust beneath the earth, lest their presence poison the air for the living. All business had ceased; there was no sign of life within the empty streets, no sound broke the silence, save the rattle of the dead carts, and the fearful cry, "Bring out your dead!"



CHAPTER VI.

ANGEL HILDA.

ONE evening, Balthasar Kraft had returned to the house, feeling deathly tired. He sat down in his usual seat by his desk, and was thinking sadly of all his kinsfolk, neighbors, and friends whom he had helped to place in their graves within the last few months, when suddenly deep groans were heard from the other side of the wall which separated his house from Anthony Dorn's, the grocer. This singular individual, who it will be remembered, had made an effort to leave the city at the first mention of the plague, had hired a boy to wait upon the customers in the shop, and retired to his rooms behind it, where he dwelt without holding the slightest communication with any living being. He had hoped by this supreme selfishness to escape the plague, but

his precautions were of no avail, and the groans which Balthasar heard were proceeding from him as he lay on his bed in his lonely room, with all the marks of the dread plague upon him. The grave-digger went in to him, and found him in mortal terror. Balthasar made him as comfortable as was possible under the circumstances, and then went off to seek a priest. After Anthony had made his confession, he seemed a little easier; and Balthasar having promised to look in again before going to rest, went back to his own house.

When he related the fact of Anthony's sickness to his wife, he observed that while his wife and daughter were expressing their sympathy, they were also exchanging meaning glances. But he said nothing, for he well knew that he would be told everything in good time. After his supper he went back once more to his favorite seat, and presently his wife and daughter entered and seated themselves near him. After some brief talk upon the incidents of the day, his wife said, "Balthasar, the hand of the Lord has been

heavy upon us, but in His mercy He has spared us to one another, while thousands of other households are desolate. Therefore, Hilda and I have come to think that it is but just that we should do something to show our gratitude to the good God. So, if you are willing, we will go about and visit those who are sick and have none to tend them. Perhaps we shall be able to find some building that we could make into a hospital for these poor people."

Balthasar's eyes filled with tears. "Blessed be God!" cried the good man, "who has given me so noble a wife and so good and pious a daughter. Yes, go in the name of God, and do this good work, and He will reward you as you deserve."

"That is well," replied his wife; and then turning to her daughter, she said, "Since your father consents, I think it would be well to begin our work with a visit to this poor man who lies sick next door."

"One thing more," said Balthasar, as they were about to quit the room; "never interrupt your

good work to attend to me. I can make out excellently well with the help of Caspar."

Hilda ran back to him, and putting her arms about his neck, kissed him fondly. "You are a noble man, father," she whispered in his ear. And then she hastened from the room before he had time to reply, leaving him sad, indeed, as he thought that many days would go by before her presence brightened the house again.

They set to work at once to nurse Anthony, and were successful in restoring him to health. But long before that happy end was reached, they had a host of sick-beds to attend, for the good work which they had undertaken was soon noised through the whole city. At length one day, as Hilda was hastening past the empty barracks—for the city militia were disbanded—the idea occurred to her to get permission to remove the sick thither, and thus save the time which was lost in going from one house to another. She communicated this idea to her mother, who was extremely pleased with it, and

Hilda accordingly applied for permission to do so to the city authorities. But it was very difficult to get it, for the city official whose province it was to allow it, had shut himself up, no one knew where; and many thought he had fled from the city. But at last leave was obtained, and soon the guard-room of the barracks was lined with beds.

And now it was seen that the name of Angel Hilda was truly merited by the young girl. Like a true Sister of Charity, she glided from bed to bed, soothing the sick, and calming the dying. Even the physicians who had been appointed by the city, at times grew weary, but Hilda seemed supported by strength from Heaven, that never became exhausted.

At length several other women, inspired by their noble example, came to lend their aid to Magdalene and her daughter. This increase of their hospital staff enabled them to save many more lives; and at last, after many weary days and nights, the plague ceased to rage with extreme

violence, and the people of Breslau began to look for better days.

One afternoon, as these devoted women were all busy attending to their duties within the hospital, they heard terrible cries in the street, which grew louder and louder every instant. In the wildest terror, the sick clung to them, and implored to know the cause of the outcry. After trying for some time to calm them, but in vain, Hilda approached the window, and opening it, leaned out into the street. But she could perceive nothing, though the roars of an excited throng told that they were at no great distance.

“What can be the matter?” ejaculated Magdalene, who had by this time joined her daughter.

Hilda was about to reply, but the words died away on her lips without ever having been uttered; for at that instant a woman with streaming gray hair, face covered with blood, and garments in rags about her, came running with the speed which the dread of death alone can give. An instant later a throng of men and women came

into sight, armed with every conceivable kind of weapon that could be found at a moment's warning; the men with axes, spades, knives, and the women with their household implements. They were wild with rage, and a thirst for the blood of the unhappy Elspeth transformed their faces until they glared like so many demons. They were gaining on the object of their chase, too, as they rushed on with frantic shouts of "Death to the witch! Of course the plague came back to us, when that accursed witch came back into the city!" And in a few moments all would have been over with the poor woman, had not Hilda sprung to the door, and opening it, run quickly into the street. To Elspeth she seemed like an angel whom Heaven had sent to deliver her from those whose breath she seemed to feel upon her cheek, hot with thirst for her blood. She ran towards her with outstretched hands, one of which Hilda grasped, and with fleet steps almost carried her to where Magdalene waited by the heavy open door of the barracks, ready to close and bar it the

instant they should have attained its shelter. Poor Elspeth's heart bounded like a mad thing; the hope of safety but a few yards away, only made the danger of death seem more cruel by contrast. Hilda breathed wordless prayers as she bounded along; and the fierce roars of their pursuers grew deeper and more vindictive, as they comprehended her purpose. They gained upon them; Hilda felt it and she cried out, "O, God, do not forsake us!" and the prayer of the noble, resolute girl was answered. Another moment and they had passed within the barracks, and Elspeth had fallen in a heap at the feet of her preserver. The heavy door was barred just as the mob arrived before it. With thundering knocks, they demanded that the witch be given up to them.

When no answer was returned to this summons, comparative silence ensued for some time, and then a voice cried: "Give us the infamous creature who has brought the plague into our city; she has poisoned the wells, and enchanted our food with her black arts, and misery will not

depart from the city until she has been put to death.”

Such cries as these, resounding within the chamber where many were passing away, and others were trembling between life and death, had an indescribably awful effect. A panic ensued among the sick who were able to understand what was passing around them; and while some forbore, through shame of proposing such a thing to the noble women who had done so much for them, there were those who did not hesitate to beg Hilda and her mother to give up Elspeth to her pursuers. It required all Hilda's self-command not to rebuke these cowardly wretches with all the righteous anger which their horrible request excited; but her only answer was to point to the crucifix and say, “God will protect us if we do our duty. You ask me to commit an awful crime when you beg me to give up a human being, made in His image and likeness, to be torn to pieces by a furious mob.”

“But they may burn down the building over our

heads," was the answer of one more persistent than the rest had courage to be, in view of Hilda's resolute manner.

"I do not believe them capable of such a crime," replied Hilda. "Still, even if they commit so fearful a crime, we shall at least die innocent. At all events, I will never give up a poor, half-imbecile creature to their fury."

Just as the patient had supposed, in a few moments cries rang out of "Burn it down! Set fire to the hole in which the rat has taken refuge. We'll rid Breslau of her, even if we have to burn down the whole city."

Magdalene, who had thought that the presence of many of their relatives within the building would have deterred the mob from all idea of such a thing, was stricken with terror at the sound of these yells, and turned to her daughter with a face as pale as ashes, as if to ask her what she should do. Not that any thought of giving up poor Elspeth crossed her mind, it must in justice be said for her, but simply because, in her terror,

she looked to her daughter, as to the stronger spirit, for guidance.

Hilda's course was soon resolved upon. From the comparative silence which reigned without, she knew that the suggestion of firing the building was being acted upon, and that they were busy collecting materials for that purpose. With an injunction for them all to unite in prayer, she left the room, and ascending to an upper story, presently appeared on a small balcony, from which dignitaries frequently beheld processions.

The appearance of the young girl suspended the operations of the mob, and held them in silence for a few moments.

"In the name of God," cried Hilda, solemnly, "I order you to depart and leave those within this building at peace."

"Give us the witch," responded a voice, "and we will molest you no further."

"Yes, give us the witch," chorused the mob, "or we will not leave a stone upon a stone of the barracks."

“My good friends,” said Hilda, entreatingly; “my towns-people, among whom I have been brought up to womanhood, you know me well. I leave it to yourselves; would I try to save a criminal from his just punishment? Would I place my life in peril to save the life of one whom I knew had willingly wronged his neighbors? If you listen to your own hearts, you will, I know, agree that Hilda Kraft would not be guilty of such an act. But O, my friends, think what you are about, I beg of you. For no reason in the world, you turn upon a poor weak woman, as the cause of the affliction which God Himself has sent upon our city. Beware lest you only excite His wrath the more!

“Remember, too,” she continued, encouraged by a slight hesitation among the mob, “that within this building lie the parents, brothers, or sisters of many of you. They are filled with terror at your cries and threats. Will you not have mercy upon them?”

“As for myself, in days gone by, you have often

saluted me by a name which was far too good for me. To-day, I beg you, by the memory of it, as a recompense for any little good I may have done, and which you have often told me you could never repay, to depart and leave all those in this house at peace.

“I declare to you, my friends, that I would give my life to do you good, but I can not, I must not, I dare not help you to commit a crime that would cry to Heaven for vengeance. Go, and in happier days you will thank me for having kept you from an act that would bring remorse to your souls!”

A moment's pause succeeded, during which Hilda prayed with all her heart. Then the tumult was beginning again, when suddenly Magdalene appeared on the balcony beside her daughter, and put up her hand to implore silence.

“My good friends,” she said, “have you remembered that if you burn this building, the sick will have, henceforth, neither hospital nor nurses? The plague has been checked, simply because the

sick have been taken from their homes. Those who fall sick henceforth will be compelled to breathe the same air with the rest of the household, and so every home will become infected, and there will be safety for none."

"She is right, she is right!" cried several; "let us go. We can watch till the witch comes out."

"But there will be no plague if the witch is burned," cried another group, "and then we shall be really safe."

At this, the tumult redoubled, and a crowd rushed forward with armfuls of straw, while others, touched by Hilda's generous resolve, and remembering all the good she had done to the people who were even now willing to destroy her, in order to accomplish their wicked ends, exhorted her to give up Elspeth, and save her life, and the lives of so many others.

Meanwhile, Hilda was in sore perplexity. She had never counted upon their sacrificing their own flesh and blood, and even now, half believed that

all their preparations were but to frighten her into giving up their victim to them. Still, in case they were really resolved to even take the lives of their relatives, sooner than resign their prey, was it right for her to permit many other lives to be sacrificed, along with Elspeth's, which she was, in either case, powerless to save?

She threw herself on her knees, and prayed with all the strength of her soul to be directed by God in this fearful crisis. The dreadful preparations of the mob were almost completed, when far off, she heard the sound of a bell. Hope revived in her soul, for she recognized it as the sound which announced to all passers-by that the priest was on his way with the Viaticum to the dying. But, lately, there had been no bell, for the priest could find none, in the plague-ridden city, to accompany him, and Hilda started to her feet, convinced that it was her father who had chosen this way to come to her assistance. And true enough, in a moment after, her father turned the corner of the street which led from the great square to the bar-

racks, followed by the pastor of St. Christopher's, with the Blessed Sacrament.

A hush fell upon the throng, and they opened a passage as the sound of the silver bell that seemed like the still, small voice of conscience, came nearer. All fell upon their knees, as the white-haired old pastor followed, bearing the Friend who comes to all that seek Him, as well in the darkest as in the brightest hours.

As the priest reached the door, it opened to receive him, and from within there came through the deep silence, the faint sound of murmured prayer. Upon the threshold, he turned and said, in a voice which age had rendered tremulous:

“My children, as your pastor, I command you, in the name of the God whom I am bearing to those who are dying within this building, to desist from your wicked purpose.”

He turned, and passed through the portal, which was instantly closed. Some time went by, and still the worst of the mob lingered, though the greater part dispersed at the command of their pastor.

But the leaders whispered that, after a time, he would go back, and leave them their prey; for they felt quite certain that Hilda would yield, sooner than sacrifice all the inmates of the hospital, herself included. But they who said so, did not know Hilda, and knew Father Peter still less. As time went on, and he saw that the mob were still in front of the hospital, he ascended to the balcony, and stepping without, elevated the Sacred Host, and commanded them to depart instantly. This command they dared not disobey, and departed in silence, while those within the hospital thanked God with all their hearts, for having so wonderfully delivered them.

Father Peter remained with them for several hours, for the patients were in such a state of fear that it required his presence to calm them. As for poor Elspeth, she was more dead than alive; and as Hilda washed the blood from her face, and did up her long gray hair, and put garments of her own upon her, she felt her heart swell with

indignation at the folly and cruelty of her townspeople.

It had been settled that she should return home with Father Peter as soon as darkness fell, and remain secreted in his house until the plague should have ceased its ravages. But, while he is busy with the dying, let us relate how Elspeth had come to fall into the hands of the mob.

When the astrologer's servant had conducted her to the grave-digger's house, he hoped that he had seen the last of her. Both he and his master felt quite certain that she would never escape the disease when brought into such close contact with it. Week after week went by, and finally an opportunity presented itself for them to leave the city. Everything was arranged for them to set out the following morning; and the servant, in the excess of his delight at leaving Breslau, was capering about one night in the kitchen, when the door opened without any previous knocking, and Elspeth stood before his astonished eyes. If a dead woman had arisen out of the churchyard,

and stood before him, he could not have been more terrified. But he greeted her kindly, and assured her that his mirth arose from the fact that his master had received news that in a short time he would be able to quit Breslau. Elspeth seemed satisfied, and things went on as usual, though in secret the astrologer and his servant cursed her heartily for having returned to mar all their well-laid plans. They were at their wits' ends for some plan by which to rid themselves of her, and at last the servant hit upon one which they both thought would prove successful. For her to fall into the hands of the law was the last thing they desired, for if that occurred, they might say farewell to the gold; and they knew, besides, that the wrath of the populace would be turned against them for sheltering her. The servant's plan was this: to get Elspeth out of the house, into some place where the people could seize her, and then to raise the cry that the witch was once more among them.

So one afternoon, having heard Elspeth express

a longing to make a visit to the church, he told her that she could do so with perfect safety, for the streets were deserted. The simple old woman, utterly forgetting Balthasar's warning against the crafty pair, started accordingly, and reached the church safe. It was, indeed, silent and empty; and Elspeth crept up as close as she could get to the high altar, and prayed earnestly to God to protect and conduct her in safety out of the city. But dread sounds disturbed her prayer; and soon the poor hunted creature heard the terrible cry, "Death to the witch! How dare she go into the church! Drag her out!" She ran to the side door, where only a few of her persecutors, and those mostly boys, had gathered as yet. She succeeded in passing these, though with many a mark of their cruel usage, and then ran blindly through the streets until she saw Hilda advancing to meet her.

CHAPTER VII.

ELSPETH IS ARRESTED.

LATE that evening, when Elspeth was seated in the kitchen of the pastor's home, which she considered a safe refuge, a loud knocking was heard at the entrance door of the house. The pastor himself went to open it, for he feared it might have something to do with the poor creature to whom he had given shelter; and, indeed, it had, but not in the way he feared. Instead of a howling mob, he found two officers of justice, armed with a warrant for the arrest of Elspeth Stumpe. The pastor of course would not interfere with the law, but he resolved to go to the magistrates early in the morning, and try to appeal to their common sense. So he went to seek Elspeth, whom he found sitting peacefully in the kitchen, telling her beads. He told her of her

new misfortune as gently as he could, and encouraged her by saying that it was the best thing that could happen to her, for as soon as the magistrates spoke with her they would see at once that the silly accusation of witchcraft was without a particle of evidence to support it, and would set her free, after which the people would be satisfied and leave her in peace. But though he spoke so bravely, in his heart poor Father Peter was seriously troubled, and felt many misgivings as to the result. Elspeth herself seemed to feel dimly that she was in as great danger from the slower guardians of the law as from the hasty populace, for she sank on her knees and asked the priest's blessing, and besought him to pray for her, and then departed with her captors; while Father Peter stood at the door and gazed after her as long as he could see her.

Not a word was spoken by either the men or their prisoner. With each grasping one of her arms, she was hurried along through the narrow, silent streets, lined with tall houses which

just permitted a narrow strip of sky, thick with stars, to be seen ; across the bridge which spanned the river Oder, flowing swiftly to the Baltic Sea, and down the street which led to the great, black prison, with its narrow grated windows. Here she was delivered up to the jailer, who led her along a stone corridor, lined on both sides with low, heavy doors, one of which he unlocked, and having thrust the unfortunate creature into the pitchy darkness within, locked it again and went off.

Though Elspeth was not at all imaginative, she was terribly frightened at the position in which she found herself, and passed a night of agony. At last day dawned, after what appeared to her to be a century, and the dull glimmer which was all the light of day that ever struggled through the dusty, grated windows, showed her the heavy, damp, stone walls of her small cell.

Presently the jailer came and brought her the bread and water which made up the prison breakfast ; but in his presence Elspeth maintained the same strange silence, which no doubt had gone

far to strengthen the idea of her being a witch, and let him come and go without a word, though he stared at her curiously.

A couple of hours went by, and then she heard the great key turning in the lock once more, and the jailer's voice summoning her to go before the magistrates. She stepped out into the corridor, and followed her guide along dusky passages and up a flight of narrow steps, into a large apartment hung with black cloth, in the centre of which was a table bearing a crucifix, with a skull at its base. Round this table were grouped her judges, clothed in black robes, and wearing flowing wigs. As soon as she had taken her place before them, one of them arose and said solemnly, "Elsbeth Stumpe, you are accused of having entered into a compact with the evil one, and of having wrought with his help, much evil to the city of Breslau. Do you confess yourself guilty of this crime?"

Strengthened by the consciousness of her innocence, and by fear of the dreadful punishment which she knew to be the penalty of witchcraft,

Elspeth took a step forward, and answered clearly and fervently, "My lords, I am only a poor, ignorant, weak woman, and know but little of the arts of this world, and, I call God to witness, nothing at all of witchcraft. I have never sought to harm any human being. I do not know whether the devil gives power to do so, to men or not, but many far wiser than I, have said he does."

"It is a fact, not to be doubted, woman," answered the largest and sternest of the magistrates, severely. "And least of all by you, if report speaks truth."

But here another of her judges, a man with a wrinkled, cunning face, interposed, "Have you never prepared a powder which enabled you to pass up through the chimney and fly over the roofs of the houses?"

"Never!" cried poor Elspeth.

"Have you never uttered a charm over the wells, which rendered their waters poisonous?"

"Never, God forbid," answered Elspeth again.

"Do you deny ever having rubbed a poisonous

ointment on the doors of many houses and shops in Breslau?" continued her questioner, unmoved by her earnestness.

"I do, indeed, deny ever having done such wicked actions," cried the poor woman, with a passion that would have convinced any one, save those of whom prejudice had made complete fools. "I know well, to harm my neighbor in any way is a great sin."

But she might as well have declared her innocence to the thick, black-draped walls. All her judges felt as certain of her guilt as that they saw her before them; for depositions had been made and sworn to in their presence, by many of the most respectable inhabitants of the city, which contained a recital of actions performed by her, which only the evil one's aid could have enabled her to perform. Thus, one set forth that she had entered the shop of a man whose child was slightly ill. After she went out, a white ointment was found on the threshold, and the child grew worse and died at evening. Another man had sworn that he saw

her drinking at one of the wells, and talking to herself, and this in precisely that quarter of the city where the plague broke out, and raged with the greatest violence.

Accusations similar to these were numbered by the score. Then came those as to her conduct in the burning house. How could she, except through witchcraft, have preserved her footing at the window, when all the interior of the house had fallen about her?

It was in vain Elspeth told that the floor of the room in which she was standing had not given way at all; she was not believed.

Again, how had she managed to return into the city, after having been expelled from it, without any one having seen her do so? The watchmen at every one of the gates solemnly swore that she could not have passed them without being observed; consequently the same evil art which enabled her to mount up chimneys, and fly over the roofs of the houses, must have made it possible for her to scale the wall.

The unhappy, doomed woman replied to this accusation by relating the true story of how her entrance was accomplished. But it was received by her judges with the same look of stony unbelief that had met all her other explanations; and when she had finished, the oldest and sternest of her judges proceeded to address her once more, in measured, severe tones. "Elspeth," he said, "you would do better to speak the truth, and the truth only, and thus endeavor to obtain God's mercy upon your soul, and secure its safety, even though your body be doomed to punishment."

To this solemn exhortation Elspeth returned no answer. She kept silence, simply because she knew not what to say, that she had not said already.

She could see that the judges were far from satisfied with the result of the examination, but, on the contrary, were resolved to use all the means in their power to extort a confession of guilt from her. This, as may be readily imagined, made the prospect of further inquiry a very terrible one to

her. Still, when she had once comprehended this fact, she only became more resolute in her purpose to say nothing further, lest some of her words might only be construed into an admission of guilt.

After a few moments' dreadful silence, the judges arose, and retired to the farther end of the large apartment, where they conversed for some time in low tones. Then they returned to their places, and the same severe-looking one who had addressed her before, spoke as follows: "Elsbeth Stumpe, you have denied all knowledge of acts which many good and respectable citizens of Breslau have seen you commit. This proves that you are not only wicked, but hardened in wickedness to a terrible degree, and that the severest means will have to be used in order to wring the truth from you. Still, as you are a woman, we are loath to proceed to such extreme measures, and so do once more earnestly entreat you to have mercy on yourself and confess, and not persevere in a silence which will not save you from

the just punishment of death, but, on the contrary, only bring severe suffering upon you, along with it."

At this fearful threat, Elspeth's courage gave way. She fell on her knees before her cruel persecutors, and said: "From my childhood, I have been nothing but a poor, ignorant servant. How then, think you, could I have arrived at the fearful knowledge of how to commit the strange and evil deeds with which you charge me? O my lords, I pray you, for God's sake, to spare me, and let me depart in peace. It will bring but little honor to the city of Breslau for her judges to put to death a weak, ignorant servant, because the plague has come."

"Again, and for the last time, woman, I bid you confess, or take the consequences," answered the judge, utterly unmoved by her passionate appeal.

"I have nothing to confess," answered Elspeth. "To say what you wish me to, would be to tell a lie, and that is always a sin."

The judge took up the sword which, as a sym-

bol of his power of life or death, lay before him on the table, and struck the wall three times with its hilt. Immediately after, a door opened, and a stalwart figure appeared in the hall of justice, whose ferocious aspect was well calculated to strike terror into the heart of the boldest and most resolute criminal. It was that of a man over six feet in height, and clothed in a scarlet tunic, which left his muscular hirsute arms bare to the elbow, and his legs also from below the knee to his feet, which were inclosed in heavy shoes. His head, of coarse, shaggy hair, was surmounted by a high paper cap, upon which were represented all kinds of fantastic figures and scenes, in which the evil one seemed to play an important part.

Without a word, he advanced towards Elspeth with a cruel, hungry look upon his face such as a tiger might wear when about to spring upon its prey.

Elspeth was still upon her knees, with her hands held up in supplication to her judges; but seeing from the stony look upon their counte-

nances that nothing was to be expected from them, she submitted in silence to the rude grasp of the executioner, who drew her after him through the open doorway, and down a couple of steps, into a large room, whose darkness was only imperfectly relieved by lanterns, which hung from the ceiling. In this twilight Elspeth could perceive the outlines of fearful instruments which had forced the secrets of many a criminal from his pale, unwilling lips.

“Sit down there, old witch,” said the man, pointing to a chair, “while I make my preparations.”

Elspeth looked at the seat he pointed out to her, and her anxious gaze could find nought to indicate that it was anything more than a great iron chair. Exhausted from her long hours of standing before her judges, the poor creature sank upon it; but no sooner had the weight of her body pressed upon some unseen mechanism beneath, than two iron hoops ran out, and instantly closed about her ankles, and she found herself confined as securely as if she had been in the

stocks, a fact which she speedily found out when she tried, instinctively, to spring away.

“Nay, nay, worthy Elspeth,” cried the mocking voice of the executioner, “people do not get out of my grasp quite so easily as all that. I am going to place a pair of pretty shoes upon you, which will not yield at all to your feet, so that I hope, for your own sake, you have no corns.” With these words, the wretch turned a handle which was connected with the machinery inside the chair, and immediately her feet were inclosed in a pair of iron shoes.

Anticipation of the torture which she was about to undergo, wrung a loud cry of anguish from Elspeth’s lips, which resounded through the long, gloomy dungeon.

“Ah! yes, that is the way they all scream,” cried the executioner. “I am well used to it; I know exactly how they will act when they come under my hands. They are brave enough in there,” pointing to the hall of justice, “but here it is quite different. But shrieks do no good;

these thick walls hear them, but they can give no help. There is only one way to escape the torture, and that is to confess. You will scream louder when the shoes grow narrower."

As he spoke he kept turning the handle, and with every turn the metal shoes pressed more and more cruelly on Elspeth's feet. The torture became greater and greater, and finally reached such a degree, that she thought she must die of it.

"Have pity," she moaned; "release me, for God's sake. I am innocent of the crimes with which I am charged."

"I am as certain of that as I am that I live," answered the torturer. "Stupid, indeed, are the people who could believe that such a silly old creature as you, is a witch. A witch would be able to save herself from me and from them. Why, they might as well accuse me of having prevented rain from falling in Breslau for the last two months, as say that you brought the plague among them. Still, there is no hope for you; you will be made suffer torture to which this is

nothing ; and even if you should be able to bear it, you still will not save yourself from death at the stake. For they will say that the devil, whom you serve, has given you strength to endure, and not betray yourself. Why, then, are you silly enough to go through all this useless suffering? Confess to all that they accuse you of ; what difference can it make ? ”

But Elspeth returned no answer to his brutal counsel. She was praying, and only a slight moan which pain wrung from her pale lips every few moments, told of her fierce agony. At length she fell into a death-like swoon.

“ She stands it well, does the old witch ! ” cried the executioner, with a brutal laugh, as he rudely dashed water over her to restore her. “ I am pretty sure some of her bones must be crushed, and yet she never gave a howl, save that first one. ”

He unfastened the stocks, and released the still unconscious woman from the torture shoes. But even then her senses did not return, nor for some

time after, though he thrust burnt feathers under her nose, and tried various other devices.

At length she opened her eyes, and looked feebly about her with an air of bewilderment. Then, as she moved her feet, and tried to sit up, a remembrance of where she was, and what she had gone through, flashed upon her mind, and with a moan, she sank back. But the executioner ordered her to stand up, and when he saw the excruciating agony which every step cost her, he said : " Now, you old fool, you see what your obstinacy has brought on you. And this is only the first day. How do you expect to stand a greater torture than this, and stand it day after day ; and what will you gain by it ? Only to go to the stake a mangled wreck ! "

Elsbeth still maintained silence, for she saw that to speak was as useless here as it had been in the hall of justice. With infinite difficulty and pain she hobbled after her fierce guide to her dungeon, and there sank down exhausted on the little pile of straw that formed her bed.

During the long hours of the day, she pondered over what the executioner had said, and began to ask herself if it were better to do as he had advised, and face death at once, since they were determined upon her death, instead of after days of torture. She had thought in her simplicity, that if torture failed to wring a confession from her, they would recognize her innocence, and let her go. But since it was not so, why, indeed, defer death only by such agonizing pain?

But presently a ray of sunshine came to her in the visit of Father Peter, who had been with the magistrates pleading her cause, but vainly. Rooted in their prejudices and superstitious beliefs, they had turned a deaf ear to his words, and the good priest had left them with the words, "Woe to you and to the city that will shed innocent blood. Vain indeed are the prayers we offer day after day to God to shorten the days of our visitation, when we lift to Him hands stained with innocent blood."

When he entered the cell, and saw the state of the poor old creature, he could hardly restrain his

tears. But when Elspeth told him all, and asked him if she might not declare herself guilty of the crimes which they charged her with, he shook his head.

“ I cannot permit you to tell a lie, Elspeth ; and to say you have been guilty of the acts which they lay at your door, would be a most wicked falsehood, for it would only strengthen these foolish people in their silly belief that there are witches. The day will come, and come soon, when the world will laugh at the idea of any such thing as witchcraft, and wonder to think that people ever lived who could believe such silly nonsense. But our lot has not been cast in that time, Elspeth, as you have, indeed, reason to know. I know it seems an easy way out of your sufferings to say yes to the questions of your judges ; but is it not better to suffer a little here, and then meet your God with a clean soul, than to lose all the merit of your sufferings, and yet die ? ”

A long time did the good priest remain with the poor creature consoling and strengthening her

by his kind words. He was deeply touched by her simplicity and complete lack of malice against her persecutors. Before going, he besought her to pray for the plague-stricken city, for he felt that the prayers of the desolate woman must be very powerful with God. He left her with an injunction not to lose heart, for she knew not what God might do in her behalf. And poor, simple Elspeth did as he bade her, and spent the night—from which pain stole all sleep—in praying for the people who had caused it. The following morning, she was again conducted before the judges.

“Elspeth,” said the one who had addressed her the previous day, “you have been brought before us this morning, in order to give you an opportunity to confess, before you are again subjected to the torture. The pain of yesterday, which you found so severe, was nothing beside that which you will suffer to-day, if you persist in your obstinacy.”

But poor Elspeth could only sob and protest her innocence, and beg them to have mercy.

But mercy to a witch was the last thing any of that august assemblage would have been guilty of, and so Elspeth was consigned once more to the torturer, who appeared in response to the three raps upon the wall, just as he had done the day before. He greeted his victim with a fiendish grin, and led her into the gloomy chamber where his infamous office was exercised. There he placed her upon the rack, bound and helpless, and then she felt her joints dragged out of their sockets. Fearful screams came from her lips; all the fortitude which she had striven to acquire by prayer, seemed to forsake her.

“Well, witch, will you confess?” cried the executioner, pausing in his hideous task.

“I am innocent,” moaned Elspeth. “I cannot die with a lie on my lips. Oh! have pity! spare me!”

Her only answer was another turn of the rack, and then, as on the day previous, a swoon made her unconscious of her misery.

When she returned to herself, the executioner showed the huge fire-place, over which was an in-

strument somewhat resembling a gridiron, and said: "To-morrow, witch, that shall be your portion, and you may depend upon it, fire will make you confess."

Poor Elspeth shuddered through all her racked frame, as she heard these words. How could she ever bear this daily recurring agony? And all night long, in her narrow cell, she begged of God to save her from the pain which was so strong a temptation to her to utter a lie.

The same night, about nine o'clock, a woman so closely veiled and muffled as to make it impossible for her to be recognized, walked rapidly from the hospital to Father Peter's house, and gave a low, cautious knock, to which he himself responded. He did not seem at all surprised to see her, and she followed him into his study, where she removed her head-covering, and disclosed the pale, anxious face of Hilda Kraft.

"And so there is no hope, Father?" she said, sorrowfully.

“None, my child,” returned the priest, sadly. “I reasoned with the magistrates, and when that had no effect, implored them to consider, for their own sakes, the horrible thing they were doing. And when they still turned a deaf ear to me, I left them with a warning that God’s chastisement would be sure to follow upon the slaying of innocent blood.”

“If it only could be averted,” said Hilda, regarding the priest earnestly.

“Would that it might be, indeed,” returned the priest, with a heavy sigh. “But such a thing is impossible. After she leaves the prison, she is within reach of the populace, and so furious are they for her death, that they would tear her into pieces, were any attempt made to rescue her. No, it is not her life that I hope to save; but I desire to see her die without having strengthened the people’s belief in their foolish superstition, by confessing what is false.”

“And I seek to save her life,” cried Hilda, resolutely, “and my native city from the crime of

shedding innocent blood. I have a plan, and I am willing to risk my life upon its success. You know you have often told me, Father Peter, that when people have confidence in God, all things are easy to them."

Father Peter looked sorely troubled. To permit Hilda to put her plan into execution might be to have two lives lost instead of one; but again, Hilda was so different from all the rest of his flock, she was so fertile in resources, and so successful in the employment of them, and above all, she led so pure and holy and prayerful a life, that he felt she should not be checked without mature consideration.

So he bade Hilda tell him her plan, which she did, and when she had finished, the priest gazed at her, half in doubt and half in admiration of her courage.

"It may prove successful," he said, slowly; "if God aids thee by circumstances."

"I feel that He will," returned Hilda, reverently. "And now, Father, give me a letter to the

Countess Emily. I must hasten, for I have promised to be back at my post by daybreak."

The Countess Emily was a very wealthy and charitable woman, who dwelt some distance outside the gates of Breslau. Father Peter often had recourse to her generosity, and his confidence in her goodness was always justified by the event. He, therefore, approved of Hilda's resolve to seek the Countess' aid, and wrote the letter, which Hilda received with thanks; and then, after once more resuming her mufflings, knelt for the priest's blessing, and departed.

The following morning, Father Peter reappeared in Elspeth's cell with what was to her good news. Her judges had counted upon the priest's inducing her to confess, but when she remained as silent as ever, they concluded that her obstinacy was unconquerable; and yielding to the angry clamors of the people, who declared that so long as the witch remained above-ground there was no hope of the plague ceasing, they had decided that she should be burned at the stake

in the market-place of the city, at noon on the following day.

At first, the knowledge that she was no more to enter the dreadful torture-chamber, and suffer the fearful pain of the day previous, over again, filled her heart with joy, which, however, grew less, as the terrific prospect of the morrow grew more clear to her. "Thou shalt die by fire," is a sentence which may well appall those of the strongest will, of the greatest courage; so its effect upon a weak, simple creature like Elspeth, may be readily imagined.

"Courage, Elspeth," said the priest; "put your trust in God. He will not forsake you, He will do what is best for you. He has already interfered wonderfully on your behalf, in saving you from what you dreaded so much yesterday. And if He wishes to save you from the flames to-morrow, He will do so, though an army guarded you."

He left her, after a time, somewhat comforted and consoled, but returned in the evening, and heard her general confession, and then received

her last message for Hilda and Magdalene and Balthasar, her only friends in Breslau. And then, after having promised to return early in the morning, he bade her farewell. "And pray, Elspeth," he added, solemnly, "that God's will may be accomplished in regard to you."

He disappeared, and the heavy cell-door closed behind him. But Elspeth prayed for many hours that God's will would indeed be accomplished, whether it was that she should die in the cruel flames, or be saved in some way known only to Himself. And then she lay down and slept in calm and peace, as the night wore away to another dawn.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE ASTROLOGER'S CURE FOR THE PLAGUE.

THE day previous, the plague had broken out worse than ever, after the brief respite which Breslau had enjoyed, and the people persisted in ascribing this new misfortune to the fact of the witch having once more gained access to the city from which she had been driven out so ignominiously. The astrologer and his servant mingled among the angry populace, which, ever since their baffled attempt to secure the witch two days before, had been in a more or less riotous state, and disposed to commit any wild or evil act to which a cunning brain and persuasive tongue should tempt them. And presently the terrified magistrates heard their howls through the thick walls of the town-hall, as they clamored for the witch to be burnt at once, and so drive away the plague.

None of the magistrates were over-brave, and the appalling sounds of the furious mob might well have terrified stouter hearts than theirs.

They rapidly came to the decision to yield, and appearing upon the balcony, announced that the wicked woman who, by means of witchcraft, had brought the plague upon the city, should die at the stake on the day following. Slightly appeased, the mob retired; and the magistrates, breathing more freely, proceeded to make out Elspeth's death warrant.

The astrologer now proceeded to put in execution a plan by which he hoped to escape from the city with his gold. He began by haranguing the people in regard to the ease with which the plague conquered its victims, and which, he assured them, was because no resistance was offered to its attack. He recommended that it be met with joy, instead of sorrow, with resistance instead of terror, with laughter instead of tears, with dancing instead of prayer, and see if this altered manner of reception would not have effect upon their cruel foe.

His words were received with applause, for his hearers were in a state of excitement which welcomed any mode of giving vent to itself. Encouraged by his success, the tempter went on. "And so, my good friends, I recommend that tomorrow, whose noon shall see our common enemy, the witch, die at the stake in the market-place yonder, be spent as a fête-day, which in truth it is, as we have good reason to believe that when the witch's body is reduced to ashes, the plague will cease its ravages, and happiness once more return to the city."

Even wilder applause followed this speech than had greeted the first, and the people at once hastened in various directions to prepare for the feast.

The astrologer hastened homeward, along with the rest, but for the very different purpose of preparing for departure. The following evening, when the festivities should be at their height, it was his intention to escape through one of the gates which he felt tolerably certain would be unguarded, as his servant would endeavor to induce the watch-

man to leave his dreary post, and mingle in the dance.

As they dared not risk a carriage in which to carry the strong box, they broke it open, and were amazed at the great quantity of gold which they discovered within.

“Ha, ha!” grinned the servant, “luck has befriended us all through. It was worth while, our little visit to Breslau, to return to Paris with such a heap as this,” and he thrust his long, lean fingers through the mass of shining, yellow coin.

“Yes, all works well,” returned the astrologer; “fools slave to gather what the wise gain to enjoy. But we must be very cautious. We are by no means safe yet. Much depends on you.”

“I will not fail,” returned the servant; “but it strikes me, our principal danger is, that Elspeth may tell the priest that we have this strong box, and send him to demand it from us.”

“He will hardly do so before the day after her death,” returned the astrologer, “and by that time, if all goes well, we shall be far beyond his reach.

Go you now, and keep the people up to the mark, while I make ready all things for our departure.”

He placed as much of the gold as was possible in the belt which he wore, and then disposed of a good deal more in various other places upon his person. The residue he left to be carried by his servant; and then busied himself in packing up his few effects, burning papers, and other things which he did not wish to burden himself with, and when night came, lay down with the pleased reflection that it was his last night in Breslau.

Meanwhile, his trusty servant had exerted himself among the people to such good purpose, that before night, an immense platform for the dancers, with a space railed off for the musicians, stood in the market-place. As the sound of the hammers mingled with many a lively tune, reached the people of Breslau—of whom, after all, the rioters formed but a very small part—in their homes, they shuddered, and the more pious breathed a prayer to God, not to visit in His wrath, the afflicted city still more heavily. Espe-

cially to the patient watchers beside the beds of the sick and dying, had the untimely mirth a ghastly sound.

Meanwhile, at the other end of the square, another smaller, but much higher platform was building. This was the pile on which Elspeth was to die. By night, the two were finished, and stood fronting each other, emblems of widely opposite things. Gradually, the crowd which had surged about them since early morning, urging on the workmen, retired, and the great square was once more silent and deserted.

But the first flush of dawn had barely tinged the eastern sky, when the people began to pour into it again, for this was the place where the procession was to organize and march through the city; returning to the market-place by noon to behold the witch die, and then celebrate the festival which was not to end till midnight. Myriads of colored lanterns had been hung around the platform in anticipation of this. As the crowds arrived, they formed in procession, and

presently set out to the sound of music. It was a strange sight, that long line of fantastic shapes, moving through the deserted streets. First, came four and twenty coffins, followed by a band of mourners, clothed in trailing sable garments. Next, in horrible contrast to these, came a band of mounted harlequins in parti-colored raiment, each with cap and bells, belt and scabbard, and brandishing wooden swords, which they frequently employed in rapping smartly the mourners ahead, to the audibly expressed horror of the few spectators. Behind this brave company walked a crowd of men singing popular folk-songs in hoarse voices, and accompanying themselves upon lyres sadly out of tune. These were followed by a hideous figure made to represent the plague. Then came the body of the procession, which was composed, as we have said, of the scum of the city, with a small number from the upper classes, mostly young men, who had either been released from parental authority by the plague, or had evaded it on this occasion. Every kind of cos-

tume was represented among them ; and those, to whom ideas or means were lacking, had added some bits of finery to their usual dress. One small, stout man had chosen to represent Bacchus, and rode along in an open wagon astride of a beer-vat, from whose open cock the beer ran plentifully into the numerous cans that were held beneath. And the generous brown stream, as may be imagined, added wonderfully to the general hilarity of the motley crew.

After he had seen the procession fairly started, the astrologer rode up to take his place at its head. But it had not moved very far, when Father Peter appeared, advancing towards it.

His face looked stern and majestic, and his silvery hair flowing upon his shoulders, made him look like Wisdom coming to reprove Folly.

The astrologer, not in the least daunted, apparently, though in truth the vision was a most unwelcome one, rode easily up to him, and would have cantered by, were it not that the priest planted himself directly in his path.

“Impious man,” said Father Peter, with all the strength of a righteous wrath; “I command you in the name of God, whose unworthy servant I am, to disband this procession; and I order you, unhappy people, to return to your homes.”

“Reverend Father,” answered the astrologer, with a wily smile, “you credit me with too much power. The procession is none of my work. The good people of Breslau have merely chosen me to head it. It is true, I made the suggestion that it would be well for them to try and fight the plague with a little lively amusement, and so the feast of to-day was planned. It is called the *Festival of the Burial of the Plague*, as you may see,” pointing to a banner borne by a sturdy fellow, on which those words were inscribed in white letters on a black ground.

“Yes, and of the Burial of the Witch ought to be on there too,” cried a huge fellow; who, without washing the soot from his face, had attired himself as a mountebank. “We can bury the two together.”

“Amusement is good in itself, and good in its effects,” replied Father Peter, still regarding the astrologer sternly. “But it must be innocent amusement, and not riot and license like this. Such a scene as this is sure to excite God’s wrath instead of His mercy, of which our poor city stands so much in need.”

“You are very powerful, priest,” hissed the astrologer, bending from his horse towards Father Peter, “but you will be baffled here. You can no more make these people turn back and give up their purpose, than you can make a torrent ascend the mountain down which it is rushing.”

The look of fiendish hatred which appeared upon his face as he uttered these words, made Father Peter fairly start. But the next instant he had recovered himself, and in a loud voice besought the people to disband and give up the idea of the unhallowed festival.

“It is blasphemy,” he urged, “thus to mock God, and His solemn visitations. Death is too awful a thing to be thus turned into ridicule.

How know you that to-morrow you may be among the living? I entreat, I command you to forbear. If you turn a deaf ear to my words, I warn you to beware lest the vengeance of God descend upon you."

The throng hesitated, swayed in contrary directions by their hopes and by their fears.

But the astrologer was determined not to yield so easily.

"My good friends," he cried in a stentorian voice, "the hours are speeding by, and by this time we should be half-way through the city. Is it your good pleasure that I lead you on, or turn back? It is for you to decide. I am at your service."

"Lead us on," cried the voice of the astrologer's servant, who was busy doing his master's work in the rear. And the mob, who had already quaffed deep draughts of beer, took up the cry and repeated it with all the strength of their lungs, so that it reached even the cell in which Elspeth's last hours were passing, and made her think that they were too impatient for her to die, to even

wait until the fire should do its work, and were coming to tear her to pieces.

Their cry decided it. Father Peter saw that it was alike useless to implore, rebuke, or warn, and with a sad face stepped back, as the astrologer, with a parting glance of triumph, set spurs to his horse, and rode away through the narrow street, followed by his crew, among whom the devil, attired in scarlet and black, and chained to an open chariot, excited the wildest merriment by his grimaces.

If they had counted upon spectators, the rabble must have been sadly disappointed. Every street through which they passed was empty; and not a face was seen at the windows. This excited the ire of the mob; and were it not that the spectacle of the burning of the witch was awaiting them, it might have fared ill with some of these dwellings and their inhabitants. But the servant of the astrologer kept the great event before their minds, and represented to them that it would be better to wait till evening, anyhow, before attempting

anything of the kind, although he hinted that these people would be none the worse for a lesson to their pride, and false piety.

They wound slowly through the entire city, and, about eleven o'clock, neared the market-place once more. When they were within about a hundred yards of it, the procession came to a standstill, and one of the three and twenty harlequins who rode behind the coffins, sprang from his steed, and with many a jest besought the dead to rise, and mingle in the festival. Again and again he repeated it without obtaining an answer, but, finally, from within the coffin came the faint sound of a drum, which gradually grew louder and louder, until at length the lid of the coffin was flung aside, and a musician, dressed in gay garments, sprang out, and grasping the arm of the harlequin, skipped off to the platform, and took his place in the orchestra. From the next coffin came the faint sound of a violin; and then its occupant appeared, and taking the arm of the second harlequin, bounded off to take his place alongside

of his companion. And so it went on, until three and twenty of the coffins were empty, and the orchestra assembled, and then the latter began to play a dead march, to the sound of which the remaining coffin was borne upon the platform, and placed in the centre of it. Then the lid was removed, and it was found to be empty. The procession now advanced, and when the horrible figure of the plague arrived before the platform, it was taken down from its sorry steed, and placed within the coffin, and the lid fastened down securely.

“But it must be buried,” cried several voices, and then the entire crew took up the cry, “Yes, it must be buried. It must go six feet under the ground.”

Just at this juncture, it was Balthasar Kraft's ill fortune to cross the market-place on his way to the graveyard, and the instant that the mob caught sight of him, they decided that he should perform his office in behalf of the plague.

A few moments later, as he was digging busily,

he heard loud shouts of laughter close upon him, almost drowning the sound of slow music. He looked up and beheld a crowd of men bearing a coffin, and followed by the mob, all trying to press within the graveyard.

“Here, grave-digger,” cried one, with a loud laugh; “cease your efforts on those whom the plague has slain, and bury the plague itself. That will be much better.”

“Yes, much better,” echoed the crowd, while honest Balthasar stood staring as if he could not believe his senses. “Yes, my good friend,” cried the astrologer, who had by this time reached the scene; “perform your office, as these good people command you, and you shall be paid well for your trouble.”

“Is it a dead person you bring to bury—like this?” asked honest Balthasar, with his round eyes fixed on the laughing, gaudily attired crew.

“No, clown, but the cause of so many dead persons,” answered the astrologer’s servant. “It

is the Festival of the Burial of the Plague, that we are celebrating to-day."

"I will have nought to do with it," cried Balthasar, whose fear of the mob was swallowed up in his fear of offending God. And he thrust his spade in the earth, and folding his arms across his chest, eyed the crowd resolutely.

"And why not, fool?" asked the astrologer contemptuously.

"Because I know it is not right to do such a thing. This is no time for masques and mummeries, when not one of us knows if to-morrow's sun will find him living. It is a time for prayer and fasting."

"Away, then, fool! and fast and pray to your heart's content," cried the astrologer; "but seek not to preach to people who are of a different mind. Meanwhile, we will make bold to borrow your tools for a brief space." And so saying, he seized the grave-digger's spade, and set to work; an example which was immediately followed by a score of others.

Balthasar saw that it was useless to resist, and therefore did not attempt to do so, but made the best of his way out of the graveyard, and home.

Meanwhile, the mob proceeded with their work, and presently the coffin was interred, and the grave stamped upon by countless feet, while a song of triumph was sung.

When this ceremony was concluded, they returned to the platform in the square, and the festival began in earnest.

The orchestra began to play, and the sound of the bass-viol, the lively strains of the flute, the sweet music of the violin, and the blast of the horns mingled in the tune of a merry dance. It was many a day since the like festive strains had been heard in the unhappy city, and, for a moment, the people seemed awed by the contrast, and stood motionless. But the astrologer advanced, and gave his hand to a pretty, giddy young girl, who had been left an orphan by the plague, and had thoughtlessly yielded to the urgings of her companions, and joined the so-called

merry-makers. For a moment she had thought of quitting the strange weird scene, and hurrying to the empty church to ask pardon of God for having taken part therein ; but as she paused, irresolute, the astrologer, who perhaps had observed her hesitation, and was determined none should escape from the scene, approached and requested her to open the dance with him. Vanity was the poor young creature's ruling passion, and the honor of being selected to open the festival seemed too great a one for her to forego. She decided at all hazards to remain, and with a smile and courtesy placed her hand in his, and took her place.

This broke the spell, and couple after couple took their places likewise, and presently the dance was proceeding merrily. But the dancers failed to notice that the sunshine had faded out of the sky, and that heavy, gray clouds were sweeping up the horizon.

The dance grew wilder and faster, and the mirth of the dancers louder ; but there was something feverish in the mirth, and something weird

about the dance. Even the dread event which they were soon to witness was forgotten; and the morning wore away, and the hands of the great clock in the tower of St. Christopher's marked a quarter to noon, unheeded by the surging, motley crowd below.

But presently, across the plaintive strains of the violins, and the sweet, piercing music of the flutes, rolled the heavy sound of the great bell of St. Christopher's, which announced that the condemned was leaving the prison. It was the first time in many months that its voice had been heard, for the bell-ringer had been one of the first victims of the plague, and there had been found no one to take his place. Involuntarily, the dancers stood still, and the musicians held their hands. Then, for the first time, they observed that the heavens were black, and seemed to look down upon them with wrath. Presently a loud clap of thunder, which seemed directly above their heads, changed the glowing faces of the dancers to the hue of terror. They drew near one another, as if for

protection, and some crossed themselves. The astrologer, alone, seemed utterly unmoved, and urged them to greet the witch, on her arrival at the scaffold, with a merry mocking song, as they had planned to do. But for once, his eloquence proved useless; the frowning sky, and the awful sound of the tolling bell were more potent than he, and enforced a death-like silence, in the midst of which Elspeth came into sight, bound upon a hurdle. Her hair had been shorn, and her head was surmounted by the fantastic cap which the executioner had worn in the torture-chamber.

Slowly the hurdle advanced, and presently the condemned saw the huge pile on which she was to suffer her cruel death. But she did not seem to take any notice of it. Her lips were moving in prayer, and her eyes were upturned to the black heavens, which seemed to frown upon the wicked deed which men were about to commit.

But when she was but a few yards distant from the scaffold, a murmur of awe ran through the crowd, and many sank on their knees. For sud-

denly, from the opposite entrance into the square, came the long, silvery blast of a trumpet, and immediately after, appeared a startling vision—a knight, clothed from head to foot in snow-white armor, and with thick, golden hair floating loose upon his shoulders, mounted on a huge, snow-white steed, with silver trappings. With one hand he held the trumpet to his lips; the other raised a large silver crucifix. Onward through the hush, that was broken only by the tolling of the heavy bell, he rode, and reaching the scaffold just as Elspeth's bands had been loosed, stooped and lifted her upon his steed. The executioner stood motionless, but the astrologer, who believed in neither God nor angel, cried out: "Help, my friends; it is a last trick of the witch to escape."

And he rushed forward, followed by his servant. For a moment, a wild panic ensued. Some of the merry-makers, who believed that the end of the world was come, and that God was about to judge their souls, tried to tear off the gay rags of their

merry-making. Others fell on their knees, and beat their breasts, while a few rushed forward to recapture the witch. An instant later, a terrific flash of lightning lent a dazzling radiance to the scene; and the figure of the white-clad knight, on his snowy steed, seemed to shine with celestial brightness, as the astrologer rushed forward to seize the bridle, and the noble brute rose on his hind feet. A second, and still brighter flash revealed them in this position, as if they were drawn against the blackness beyond, and then a terrific peal of thunder was heard, followed by a crash so terrific, that involuntarily the terrified throng hid their faces in their hands. Some instants of death-like stillness followed, before they ventured to look up once more; and when they did, horse and rider, and Elspeth had disappeared, the astrologer and his servant both lay dead, killed by the same stroke of lightning, and the tower of St. Christopher's had vanished.

Horror seized upon the throng, and they fled to their homes in silence through the furious

storm. Father Peter, who had all this time remained motionless on the scaffold, descended, and with the help of Balthasar, removed the bodies to Father Peter's house. As Elspeth had told him of her master's gold, he had a shrewd suspicion that the astrologer might entertain the idea of carrying it out of the city on his person. He, accordingly, examined the corpses, and was rewarded by finding both laden with the yellow coin for whose possession they had planned and worked so hard.

"Accursed love of gold," mused Father Peter, sadly; "that could prompt human beings to hunt another of their kind to death!"

"Do you think they are safe, Father?" inquired Balthasar, as he stood at the window watching the furious rain-gusts, driven hither and thither by the strong wind.

"I have no doubt of it," returned the priest. "God will protect them. Hilda is a good, noble child!"

"And God is great," said Balthasar, reverently.

“If He had not sent the storm, she would never have been able to do what she did.”

“Aye,” returned the priest, “her confidence in Him was great, and it was rewarded.” And then silence fell between them. For some hours still, the storm raged. The wind tore down the gayly-colored lanterns, which were to have lit so different a scene, and swept fragments of flags and banners before it, as it rushed through the narrow streets. But, just before its setting, the sun became once more visible, the wind lulled, and the terrified people began to gather to discuss the wonderful events of the day.

“She was innocent,” they cried, “and it was St. Christopher whom God sent to save her.” And from that hour forth, such was the belief held by the people of Breslau. But never again was Elspeth's face seen in the quaint old city by the Oder; though, far off, in a conventual house at Prague, a gray-haired woman dwelt for many years after, whose life was passed in continual prayer, and the nuns called her Elspeth.

CHAPTER IX.

CONCLUSION.

FROM that day, the ravages of the plague grew less and less in Breslau, and finally, three months later, its last trace had disappeared.

Diligent inquiry on the part of Father Peter had elicited the fact that the sister of the dead brewer, Anthony Dorn, was dead, and had left no children. Not a single relation having been found to claim the gold, Father Peter submitted the case to the learned magistrates, who, in their hearts, felt thoroughly ashamed of the way in which a wicked man like the astrologer had succeeded in hoodwinking an entire city, and themselves, even more than the other inhabitants. Justice was done to Elspeth's memory; and it was decided that, as Hilda Kraft had proven herself the poor woman's protectress, and had succored the sick of

Breslau, she should be publicly presented with the gold, in order to carry out her cherished wish of founding an hospital. A day was chosen for the important event, and it dawned bright and beautiful, and the streets were filled at an early hour with the entire population of Breslau. A platform had been erected on which the magistrates were to be seated; and opposite were places provided for all those who had taken part in the great work of mercy.

But to Hilda the place of honor was accorded, for it was her noble heart that had originated the idea, and she had done by far the largest share of the work.

One of the magistrates made her a long address, in which he dwelt on the devotion, and spirit of self-sacrifice, which she had displayed during the recent terrible visitation, and thanked her, in the name of the city, for her great help in the hour of need. He then besought her to accept the gold which, up to this time, had been the occasion of nought but unhappiness, and expend it

in the erection of an hospital, which should be dedicated to her patron saint, St. Hilda.

Tears of joy sprang to Hilda's eyes as she accepted the gift. During the past months, it had become her most cherished wish to see an hospital erected in her native city, and now this wish was about to be realized, and it had come to pass through her kindness to poor old Elspeth. Truly, she felt that God had rewarded one hundred-fold her effort to be helpful to her forsaken fellow-creature. The magistrates then thanked Magdalene, and the other women of Breslau, who had assisted in the good work. When these dignitaries had finished, the maidens of Breslau advanced and crowned Hilda with a beautiful wreath of white roses, which the Countess Emily had sent from her conservatories for that purpose, and which became "Angel Hilda's" beauty well.

Then the festival began, oh! how different a one from the last! Father Peter looked upon the merry groups with a kindly smile, and the day went by without a single shadow upon its brightness.

A few days after, Hilda laid the corner-stone of St. Hilda's Hospital, upon the site of the brewer's burned house. It progressed rapidly, and by the following year Hilda was comfortably installed within its walls; and here she passed from youth to middle age, and from middle age to old age, doing good to her fellow-beings.

And when at length she passed away, full of years and good works, the Sisters of Charity, that noble order, which had just been founded by St. Vincent de Paul, took her place.

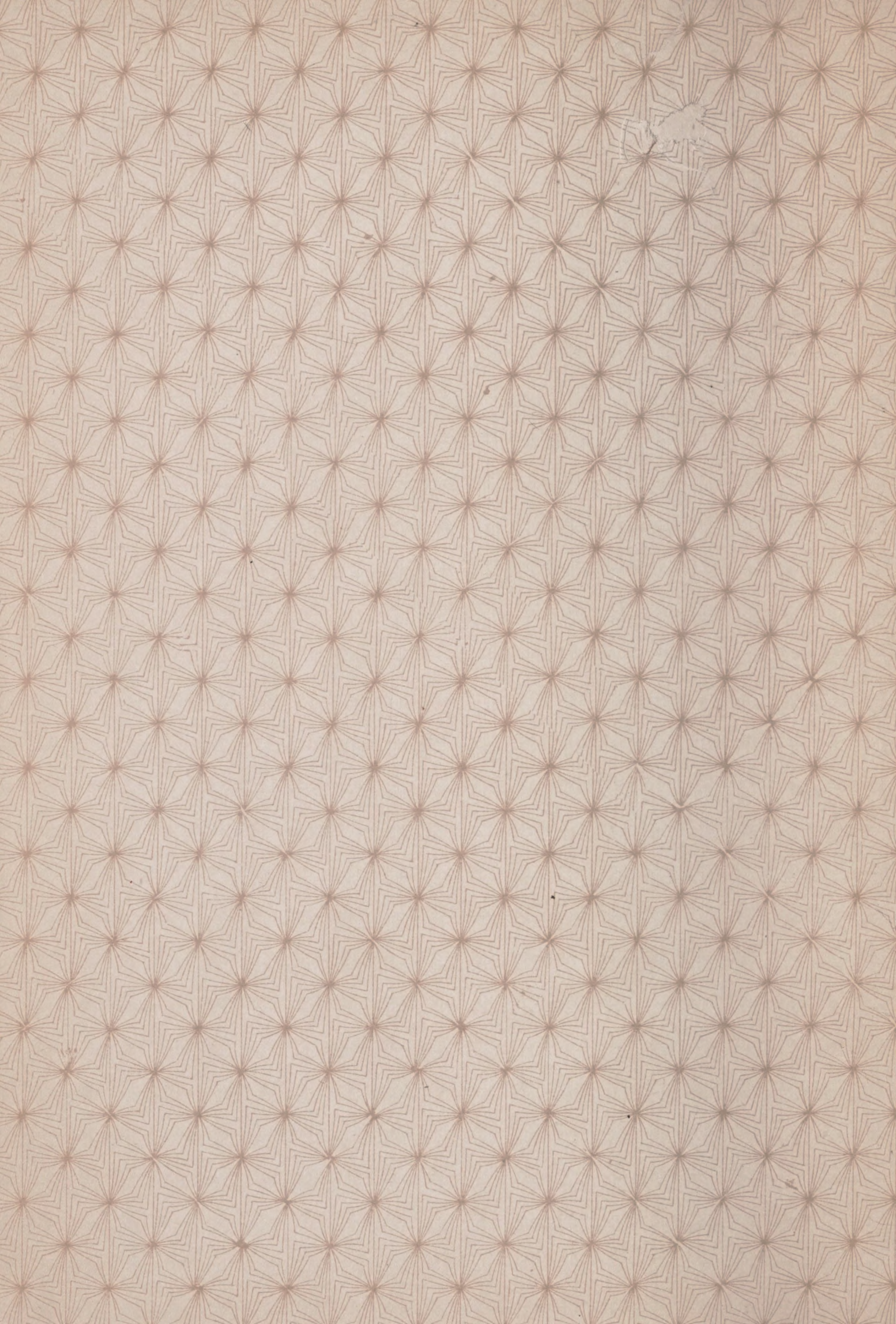
As for Magdalene, she lived to survive Balthasar, though he lived to a good old age, and to see Caspar, by that time the father of numerous rosy-cheeked children, succeed his father as gravedigger.

In time, the tower of St. Christopher's was rebuilt, but the wonderful story connected with its fall was never forgotten, but descended from generation to generation, so that even little children on their way to school would stare at the spot to which St. Christopher had once ridden on

his snow-white steed to save one who had been unjustly condemned to death.

Hilda never married, that she might the better and more fully consecrate her life to her chosen work; but all the children of Breslau loved her as well as if she had been their mother, and there dwelt not a man or woman worthy the name, within its walls, that would not have died to serve the woman who, as well when her hair was gray as when it had been golden, bore the name of "Angel Hilda."







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