The South.

THE ARMOURER OF MUNSTER.

A PAGE FROM THE

HISTORY OF FANATICISM.

(Continued.)

XIV.—THE WARNING.

Short as was the time occupied by this incident, a wild tumult seemed to have been raised in the city during the absence of the patrol. Bells tolled in the utmost disorder from the spires, the drums were beaten in all directions, and the streets were filled with masses of armed men. Franz and Hanslein ascended to the flat roof of the guard-house, from whence they had a view of the town. The wide-spread city was illuminated by a glare of fire from the market-place, the fire-baskets were blazing in in every street, and the beautiful front of the cathedral of St. Lambert was distinctly visible in the red light of the conflagration. At intervals, the yells of the populace rose upon the air, and increased the horror of the spectacle. At length the confusion subsided, but the scene was more terrible in its regular ebb and flow than in its wildest chaos. The deep howl of the ferocious mob was followed by a breathless silence, which was again broken up by a sharp, rattling volley of matchlock-fire. A silence as deep as before succeeded, and was again followed by the maddening yells of the people and the fire of the matchlocks. They counted twenty rounds of firing.

"What is the meaning of all this?" said Franz, in a low voice.

"Johannes, no doubt, is purifying his congregation," replied Hanslein; "he told me as much."

Even Hanslein, indifferent as he was, shivered as he spoke.

"Must it always be," said Franz, "that in every revolution men rise to authority who have neither human feeling nor religious faith, using their power only to destroy?"

"So it seems," said Hanslein. "The men who take the lead on such occasions are generally rascals who have nothing to lose in money, character, or conscience; and to whom the trifle of a few lives, more or less, is hardly worth thinking about. Men of good sense and honest natures like yourself avoid the responsibility of power under such circumstances."

Franz thought of Taiskoschirer's crown, and half repented his rejection of so favourable an opportunity to redeem his native city. With such thoughts, moulded into broken sentences, the night wore on into the grey dawn.

When the guard was relieved at daybreak, Franz crossed the market-place. The space in front of the Cathedral appeared like vast shambles, reeking with blood, and filled with dead bodies. One hundred miserable wretches had been picketed in lines at night, like the horses of a dragoon regiment, and shot by the orders of the prophet. Some lay stiff and cold, others yet writhed in their agony; and as Franz's men marched past, there were heart-rending cries for water, mixed up with blasphemous imprecations, and prayers to the soldiers to put an end to the lingering struggle of death. At the gate of the Cathedral, the maniac Knipperdolling stood by the block. He was attired in the emblematic scarlet jerkin of his office; his arms were bared to the shoulder, and, in common with the blade and handle of the axe, were dyed in blood. Surrounded by some of the fiercest of the prophet's followers, he was preparing to execute the vengeance of his master upon seven of the most respectable citizens of Munster.

Franz shuddered at the sight of the horrible paraphernalia, and, to avoid witnessing the consummation of the butchery, he made a *detour* through a narrow street that led out of the square. Here dismissing his men to their several quarters, he turned away, heart-sick, towards home.

In the angle formed by the transverse line of another little street which crossed that along which he was walking, there stood a rude stone fountain. As he approached the spot where it became necessary to pass close to the fountain, he imagined he saw the shadow of a figure sweeping rapidly behind it, and he was hardly abreast of it when his suspicion was realized into certainly. Stopping short, as a prudent man would do in seasons when secret dangers are to be apprehended at all hours and under all circumstances, he looked cautiously round, and then called aloud upon the unknown to come forth. There was no reply, but Franz, seeing plainly the corner of a cloak gathered up tightly, so that there was no longer any doubt that some person had sought concealment there, advanced with the intention of accosting the stranger. The person in the cloak, however, seemed equally desirous of the meeting, and, stepping forward, confronted Franz midway between the fountain and the houses. They were the only persons in the street—not even a distant footfall was within hearing.

"I have watched for an hour and more to see you," said the stranger, in a strong, bold voice; "I am fortunate in finding so good an opportunity of speaking with you."

"You know me, then?" inquired Franz.

"Yes: you are Franz Wagner, the armourer, lately returned from Wesfeldt," returned the other.

"And you?"

"It matters not; you do not know me," replied the stranger.

"Nay, it matters much. I find you here, stealthily hiding in a dark corner, and, upon your own confession, tracking and watching me.—Who are you? What is your business? Are you friend or foe?"

"Well, I am both. As to who I am, I tell you it matters nothing; my business you shall hear."

"What if I take you to the guard-house? Can I not extract your name and quality by a shorter process than standing to bait words with you here?" said Franz, whose temper had been already chafed by the events of the night and morning.

"What if a sparrow carry off an ox on his wings?' retorted the stranger, his body spreading out under his cloak as if he would crush Franz by a single blow.

The tone of quiet, surly confidence in which this ungracious comparison was uttered assured Franz that he had to deal with no common antagonist, and that it would not be so easy a matter as he imagined to convey the broad, stalworth personage, single handed to the guard-house.—His curiosity was roused, and he looked up scrutinizingly at the massive figure before him; but he was none the wiser for the inspection. The man had his cloak folded so thickly around him that not a vestige of his person was to be seen, and his face was shut up in the hanging ears of a huge fur cap, tied bulkily under his chin, nothing being fairly visible but two large eyes glittering under his bushy brows.

"We waste time," said Franz after a short pause, "and I have had work enough on my hands through the night. To your business, if it relate to me; but if it concern the State, I will accredit you to the headsman, who is just now performing his official duties in the market place, and will be ready to attend to your business at a moment's notice."

"Thanks for your courtesy," said the stranger, uttering a hoarse laugh; "but if you have any special regard for Brother Knipperdolling, advise him to keep out of my way. I have no great affection for him or his calling, and have a kind of misgiving that, if he attempted to perform his official duty upon me, I might be tempted to send his soul, without much preparation, before the judgment seat. But, as you say, we must not waste time; and I will be brief with you, as I have greater occasion than yourself to hurry back to the place from the place whence I came. You spared the life of Count Oberstein last night, and set him free to return to the camp of the enemy."

Franz, astounded at discovering that a total stranger was acquainted with a circumstance which he believed to be known only to himself and to Hanslein, and which involved such grave consequences, was too much taken by surprise to make any reply.

"In suffering one of the prince-bishop's generals, an aristocrat, and an enemy of your faith, to escape, you have committed treason to the cause you serve."

"If what you say be true," returned Franz, "the amount of criminality would still depend upon the nature of the circumstances. A soldier may spare an enemy without being a traitor to his cause. Humanity is not irreconcilable with Christianity."

"Christianity! Do you believe that Johannes Bockhold would try such an offence by the law of Christianity? If I were now to go to him, and to put him in possession of all I know, what do you think he would do? Hand you over to your well-beloved friend, Brother Knipperdolling, and have you executed on the spot as an example before the whole congregation."

"I fear neither you nor Johannes," returned Franz, kindling with anger. "Who are you that, thus skulking upon me from your hiding-place, dare to accuse me of treason?"

"Well, I will own you have a brave spirit," replied the stranger, with imperturbable calmness; "and although you did suffer the count to escape, I suppose I must try to believe that you are, nevertheless, firm in the cause?"

"Why doubt my fidelity? Let the accuser stand before the people, and I will meet him face to face," answered Franz.

"If you will answer it here," said the unknown, "it will suit the purpose better. It was for this I sought you. Listen to me. This city is becoming a den of wild beasts; all the ordinances of God are one by one trampled under foot; blasphemies are set up for divine truths; and, by and by, the vilest passions of the vilest wretches that ever wore the human form, will shape out a creed of atrocities for their own ends, which the blind, besotted people, as you flatteringly call them, will swallow as Gospel revelations. The light is growing fast in the sky, and I must not linger with you; but I have something to say that concerns you and must say it at all risks. You are not fit for the base work in which you are engaged. It will lower your manhood, blacken your name for ever, and endanger your immortal soul. Abandon this madness at once. Take courage and fly from this doomed city. The prince-bishop will receive you with open arms, and heap honors upon you. I speak authoritatively. I know of what materials you are made, and that at first you will spurn my proposal, but a little reflection will show you I am right."

There was no wavering in the mind of Franz as to what course he ought to take, but he felt notwithstanding, that there was some justice in the stranger's observations.

"I will answer you in a word," returned Franz; "you may be a spy or a tempter, spirit or devil; but whatever you are, I will answer you honestly. If the prince-bishop were to offer me the command of his whole army, I would not accept it. To purchase honors by an act of infamy! I will never abandon my native city. My heart is here, and here will I leave my ashes."

"Well had it been for you had your heart been elsewhere! You have cast your heart into a furnace where it will be consumed, if the events that are acting around you do not awaken you to the horrors of your sitution. I know it all, and I have come, as a friend, to warn you.—Elise!"

The name was pronounced in a voice so solemn, and so fraught with ominous significance, that Franz started back a pace or two when he heard it.

"Elise!" he mechanically repeated,—"Elise! What horrors do you speak of? Does any danger threaten Elise?"

"I warn you again to beware. You are surrounded by perils; you stand on the brink of a precipice, and a single false step will destroy you. There is but one means of safety—to go out of Munster."

"But you spoke of Elise," said Franz, impatiently; "her life is bound up in the cause, and you quietly advise me to fly from Munster—from Elise, whom no earthly considerations could tempt to forsake the prophet."

"If there were time I could give you reasons, but I will not harass you by hinting at what I cannot now explain. Think of my words,—think of them when you are alone, not when you are lapped in the blandishments of a fond passion. I warn, advise, implore you to fly from Munster. If you will not take to the camp outside the walls, go anywhere else. But fly—and save yourself from the ruin that fascinates you to your destruction in this accursed city."

The light was now becoming broader and fuller, revealing more distinctly the various objects in the street, and the stranger, casting an intense look of regret upon Franz, turned suddenly to depart.

"Stop!" said Franz; "you shall not leave me in this state of uncertainty. You must tell me all you know, and why it is you take so strange an interest in my concerns."

"We shall meet again," returned the other, when we may have leisure for explanation. At present, my time is expired."

"You shall not leave me thus," exclaimed Franz, stepping in advance of him, and placing himself in an attitude of resistance.

"As you are so intent upon an explanation," replied the stranger, "you shall have it on one condition."

"Name it," said Franz:

"That you accompany me to my destination," returned the other

"A mere evasion," replied Franz: "I will have it this instant on the spot!"

"Stand aside, boy, and let me pass!" exclaimed the stranger, in a voice of thunder suddenly throwing open his cloak, and drawing a pistol from his girdle.

The movement was like a flash of lightning.—The report of a pistol rang through the air; Franz felt his eyes filled with smoke; and when the stunning effect of the shot, which had been fired close to his ear, was over, the stranger disappeared.

XV.—KLARA.

It was broad daylight when Franz reached home. Even at that early hour the door was half open, and there were evident signs of movement in the house; but there was nothing surprising in that at a period of such general commotion and confusion.

Franz flung himself into a chair, his head dizzy with the recollection of the excitements through which he had passed within the last few hours; and began slowly to unbuckle his corslet, when Klara suddenly appeared in the room, her ashy-pale face betraying more terror than usual. Her eyes were red with weeping, her frame shook violently, and there was a fearful expression of agony and despair in her face.

"Klara—sister!" exclaimed Franz, springing towards her, "what is the matter? What new trouble has happened?"

Klara buried her head in her hands and sobbed aloud, but spoke not.

"Then something *has* happened," he continued; "and you are alone? I see it—Elise! Some calamity has befallen her. Why is she not with you? Speak, Klara! I cannot endure this suspense. I will see her in her room!" and disengaging himself from Klara, who was clinging to him in a convulsion of fear, he was about to rush out of the room, when Klara flung herself upon his arm to stay him.

"No, not that, Franz," she explained; "not that—Elise—she is safe, thank God! for your sake. Do not disturb her now, but let me have speech with you alone for a few minutes. I have watched for it all night. I dreaded lest you might not return this morning, and now you are come—I—I—cannot ——"

Franz, who had some little touches of conscience about the solitude to which poor Klara had been consigned, and the brooding melancholy it had so visibly wrought upon her, drew her to a seat, and, encouraging her in the kindest tones to confide every thing to him, succeeded at last in inspiring her with confidence.

"You are too noble, I think," said Klara, after a pause, "to condemn me for what I am going to say; above all things, you will not,—no,—no, you cannot,—God help me! my grief is heavy enough without that."

"Dear Klara," said Franz, "dear sister, you still hesitate to give me your confidence."

"No," answered Klara, "I give it to you freely. Call me sister, and you strengthen my heart, and fill me with courage. Sister! ah, that, at least, affords me the consolation of feeling that there is some one in the world who will protect me."

"Indeed you may be sure of my protection, in any way in which you need it," replied Franz.

"And I never needed it as I do now," returned Klara; "my life depends on your answer. You will not desert a wretch whose whole trust and hope is in your generosity."

"For Heaven's sake," cried Franz," do not speak so mysteriously. My life is at your service. Explain to me the terrible secret that oppresses you, and rely, even to the death, upon my honor and devotion."

At these words, Klara's face lighted up, and, looking earnestly at him, she arose, and placing her hand upon his arm led him silently towards the little garden behind the house. "We may be interrupted or overheard here," she said, "and what I have to say must be sacred from all ears but yours."

There was a little dark arbor in the garden, such as you constantly see in the small gardens of Germans, shut in with trees, whose gnarled trunks and interlaced boughs made a complete seclusion within. When they were seated here, Klara turned solemnly towards Franz, speaking slowly and tremulously, but with a fixed resolution to waver no longer in her communication.

"You are aware," she said, "of the new horror with which we are threatened by our rulers. If I speak harshly of them, you must forgive me; it is the heart of a weak woman that speaks to you, and you will know how to pardon the bitterness of her words. The prophet and the duodecimvirs have not only permitted polygamy, but have actually commanded it. They even enforce it upon us as a religious duty, declaring that those who do not not avail themselves of this Christian liberty are guilty of a sin against the Holy Ghost. Spies are abroad in the city, creeping from house to house, and dragging out the daughters of the citizens above twelve years of age, and compelling them to marry the wretches who choose to take them to wife. I had heard of this, but hardly thought of the possibility of becoming a victim to such profligacy. I hoped that I at least might escape, fancying that my insignificance would protect me against shame and disgrace. But I was mistaken, and am doomed. The hateful Taiskoschirer has selected me for his third wife; but sooner than yield to such an infamy, to ensure misery here and eternal punishment hereafter, I would cheerfully throw myself into the sea."

"Heaven protect us!" said Franz, who, instead of receiving the communication quite so solemnly as it was delivered, appeared disposed rather to treat it with a sort of indignant ridicule; "you shall neither throw yourself into the sea nor marry Taiskoschirer, which, I acknowledge, would be a still harder fate for my handsome Klara. Is the malignant dwarf mad," he continued, "that he should presume to aspire to a creation so good and beautiful!"

"I know not the moment when he may come to claim me," replied Klara.

"And when he comes —— said Franz, grinding his teeth, and clutching the clasped hands of Klara.

"Oh, it will be useless to resist him, brother!" replied Klara; "he has the power of the Government at his back."

"I will slay him on the threshold!" cried out Franz.

"To be slain yourself by his followers, who will then wreak a worse vengeance upon me," returned Klara.

"What, then, is to be done? If I am not to protect you from pollution by open means, how am I to protect you? I see no other way."

"There is a way," said Klara, "and you alone can save me."

"Be quick, then," said Franz, looking anxiously towards the open door of the house; "the people are already astir, and we may not have many minutes for consultation."

"You are the betrothed of my sister, Franz," replied Klara, her voice becoming more and more troubled; "in a few days you will be her husband. My own brother—Brother Franz, can you see no hope of rescue in this?"

"I confess it is still dark to me," said Franz.

"To save me from destruction—the purposes is holy, and will hallow the means—give me the name of wife,"—and as she spoke she shuddered and shrank from him,—"the name of wife, as a safeguard in this hour of peril. Understand me rightly, Franz. I ask only the name of wife, that you shall possess the right of protecting me—no wife otherwise. The union will impose no duties on either of us, and when peace is restored we shall both be free again."

"But, dearest Klara," replied Franz, not a little perplexed by the strange dilemma in which this strangest circumstances had placed him, "this mock marriage will be a very awkward business, at best. It will not be very easy to reconcile one's self to a position so incomprehensible. Is there nobody you love—we must not mince such matters now, you know—who could at once give you a legitimate protection?"

"No, no," returned Klara, her whole face bathed in a deep flush of emotion, "not one. The scenes I have witnessed here make me doubt and dread all men. Indeed, Franz, I have implored this of you because I am alone in the world, without ties or sympathies, and because, as you are my brother, I can bear your name and live in your house without danger."

"The wooing is not very flattering, my little Klara," replied Franz, making an effort to treat the affair pleasantly; "but rather than allow you to drown yourself I suppose I must give my consent. I shall be the best-envied man in Munster," he continued, while a disagreeable recollection of the licentious raillery of Hanslein suddenly crossed his mind. "But I must speak to Elise. I wonder how she will submit to the new law of the duodecimvirs."

"She must submit," said Klara, sadly; "it is to save the life of her sister—of a sister who will be her slave henceforward, as she has been heretofore, and who only begs, by way of alms, a name to save her from destruction."

'Alms!" said Franz; "tush, child, you must not talk so! You have a clear right to my protection. I swore to my old master I would protect you, and I will to the last. To be sure it will be an odd wedding, but more wonderful things are happening every day in this city of blasphemy."

"Ah!" exclaimed Klara, starting from her seat with a scream, and throwing herself upon Franz's breast, "here comes the monster to claim me!—Save me, my God!—save me, save me!"

As she spoke, the crooked figure of Taiskoschirer darkened the passage of the house; Elise was at his side. As they entered the garden they were followed by a squalid, armed mob.

"Do what thou wilt, my brother," squeaked the dwarf, with a gleam of demoniac triumph in his goblin eyes; "say what thou wilt, thou seest I cannot live without thee! Our names stand together in the book of the Spirit; and as thou hast rejected my offer, and cast away the golden link whereby I meant to bind thee unto me, behold I come to be united to thee by other bonds! I seek to form another tie with thee, to join us together in brotherly love. I woo the sister of thy bride, and even now I come to lead her to my house, that she may be my third helpmate in the faith."

"Klara is much beholden to thy grace," said Franz, with a well-dissembled mockery of tone; "but I fear that upon this occasion, as upon the last, your mission will be a failure. The fact is, brother, you have come too late. A man who woos a third bride ought to rise a little earlier in the morning. Obedient to the voice of the prophet, and emulous to follow so excellent an example, I have asked the maiden to become my second helpmate, and have even now obtained her consent. Klara," he added, turning round and and ceremoniously saluting her hand, "is, in short, my wife."

"Your wife," exclaimed Elise, with voice full of haughty anger, while she raised her stately form to its full height, and turned a look of withering disdain upon Franz and her sister.

"Thy wife!" stammered out Taiskoschirer, nearly speechless with rage.

"Honour to the prophet! to the great Taiskoschirer!—his wooing shall win!" cried one of his ragged bridesmen, springing forward, and rudely seizing Klara's hand to drag her towards her deformed lover. Franz looked at him for a second, coiled himself for a concentrated effort, and leaping on the ruffian, grasped him by the throat, then lifting him in his arms, with gigantic force flung him over the paling of the garden. The wretch, uttering a cry of agony, fell upon the pavement of the street beyond.

"Who comes on next?" demanded Franz, looking round for a fresh enemy. But the cowardly crowd quailed before his eye; and retreating instinctively, slunk out of the garden.

"You shall answer for this," muttered the dwarf, gnashing his teeth, and following his satellites.

"Sister and rival!" said Elise, bitterly, "at least my consent should have been asked;" and with a look of ineffable scorn she hastened into the house.

"Elise!" cried Franz, "dearest Elise, listen to me;" and he followed her hastily, with a lover's fear of her anger. It was their first quarrel.

Klara was once more alone. She sat in the arbour and wept.

[To be Continued.]

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