

The young carpenters of Freiberg: a tale of the Thirty Years' War

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CHAPTER III.

PRIVATE RIGHTS MUST GIVE PLACE TO PUBLIC NECESSITIES.

On the 9th of November 1642, the forest of Freiberg presented a scene of the busiest activity. Several hundred men were at work, and many a great pine and fir tree bowed its lofty head beneath the stroke of axe and saw, to fall at last crashing to earth. The wood-cutters from the mines vied with those from the city--joiners, carpenters, wheelwrights, and coopers--in thinning the dense masses of beautiful forest trees as rapidly as possible. Burghers and others, aided by the gaunt-looking mining people, with earth-stained clothes and red night-caps on their heads, were loading the long heavy trunks upon drays that stood in readiness, and driving them off with all speed towards the town. The wind blew sharp and cool, yet no one complained of the cold; on the contrary, the large drops that tell of honest toil stood out on many a swarthy brow. The household of Mistress Blüthgen, the carpenter's young widow, whose acquaintance we made in the last chapter, were all among the workers.

'All this looks as if the Swedes were before the gates of Freiberg now,' said Rudorf, the younger journeyman; 'whereas the fact is, there isn't a sign to be seen of them anywhere. There does not seem to me to be any such tremendous hurry, that we can't even stop to have our dinners.'

'"Make hay while the sun shines,"' said Hillner, the elder journeyman. 'I can tell you Burgomaster Richzenhayn could not have done a wiser and better thing than to have plenty of wood brought in. It is as needful for the town as bread--indeed it is almost more needful. If it is not all wanted for palisadoes, *_chevaux-de-frise_*, covered ways, and galleries, we can always find a use for it in the stoves, and comfort ourselves with the warmth it will give us.'

'Hallo, you boy!' cried Rudorf, suddenly turning to Conrad the apprentice; 'look yonder how your step-father is enjoying his bread and bacon. Only see, too, what a fat bottle of beer he has got standing by him! Step across to him and ask him to give you a share of his good things, and to lend us his bottle for a minute or two.'

Conrad, who was busy sharpening a saw, looked up and answered with a sigh: 'I am glad enough to be out of his sight. If I went to him I should only get a sound thrashing instead of bread and bacon.'

The two journeymen were both watching Conrad's step-father, the town servant Jüchziger. As the lad spoke they saw the man leave his table, the stump of a fallen tree, and go across to a little girl who was busy

picking up the scattered chips that lay about, and storing them in her long basket.

'You little thief!' he shouted angrily, 'I'll teach you to come here stealing wood.' He boxed the child's ears soundly, tore her basket off her back, emptied it, and crushed it under his foot.'

The little one began to cry, not so much on account of the blows she had received, as over her spoiled basket.

'What a burning shame!' said Conrad. 'It's our Dollie. Poor child, just look how she trembles!'

Without saying a word, Hillner, the senior journeyman, left his work. With his saw in his left hand, and his right fist tightly clenched, he strode up to the town servant, his angry face showing pretty plainly what was coming. As soon as he reached the offender, his hand unclenched to grasp Jüchziger by the collar. 'How dare you touch the child and destroy her basket?' he said, as he shook the astonished man roughly. 'Will you pay for that basket on the spot, hey?'

It must not be forgotten that a town servant often thinks himself a far greater man than even a town councillor. The bold and unexpected attack at first took Jüchziger by surprise, but when he had had time to take a good look at his assailant, and to see by his blue apron and general appearance that he was only a journeyman carpenter, all his rage came back at a bound, and he in his turn began to play the part of the offended person. He poured out a torrent of abuse on the journeyman, at the same time trying to collar the young man and pay him out in kind. By way of making up for the journeyman's superior strength, Jüchziger brought his official position into play, and called on the bystanders to come to his assistance. This step, however, only made matters worse for him. The deed he had been seen to do, the weeping child, the ruined basket, and the young carpenter's indignant story, all helped to rouse the popular anger against the offending town servant.

'What harm had the child done to you?' cried one. 'Are the sticks to lie here and rot, or be a welcome booty for the Swedes? Pray, how much could a child like that carry away? Does not the whole forest belong to us Freibergers, and shall not our own children pick up a basketful of sticks while we are slaving here without pay? Give the fellow a sound drubbing! Down with him, if he does not pay for the basket straight away!'

At these words fifty strong arms were raised threateningly, and Jüchziger saw that if he meant to save his skin it would be prudent to fetch out his purse and pay for the basket without loss of time.

'And a groschen[1] for each of the cuffs he gave her,' shouted a voice from the crowd, and stingy Jüchziger had to obey this order too, which he did with a very bad grace. Dollie's tears dried up with wonderful quickness when she saw the shining silver really lying on her little palm, and she skipped merrily away to the town without either basket or wood.

While Hillner and Rudorf went quietly back to their work, Jüchziger

kept a watchful eye on the former. As the tiger glares at his victim, but awaits impatiently the moment when he may safely spring upon it, so did the town servant promise himself to take a terrible revenge on the journeyman. As soon as the day's work was over, and the workers had reached the Peter Gate on their return home, he would have Hillner arrested by the guard and marched straight off to prison.

An unexpected incident hindered, for the time at all events, the execution of this promising scheme. The activity of the citizens in preparing to give the enemy a warm reception had by no means been confined to their day's work in the forest. Such buildings without the walls as had escaped in General Bannier's attack were now doomed to destruction. Thus it came about that the returning wood-cutters found a large number of people outside the Peter Gate, fetching the furniture out of their houses, and moving all their goods and chattels into the town as quickly as possible.

Two houses adjoining one another--one a handsome building and the other of humbler appearance--had already been stripped of windows, doors, roofing, and rafters, and busy hands were now at work tearing down the walls.

When Jüchziger so unmercifully destroyed Dollie's basket, he did not suspect that at that very moment the same fate was overtaking his wife's inheritance. For a moment the sight he now saw almost paralyzed him; then recovering his presence of mind, he hastened towards the scene of destruction, forgetful of all his plans for revenge.

But his angry protestations were of no avail; even his prayers were all in vain, which seemed to him very hard. The labourers went quietly and steadily on with their work, as though it were a thing that had to be done; and when Jüchziger laid his hand on one and another of them, with the idea of hindering them by force, he soon found himself repulsed in no very gentle fashion. While he stood in front of his little house wringing his hands, the very picture of misery and irresolution, a well-dressed man, of respectable appearance though he was covered with dust and bits, came out of the door of the larger mansion.

'Oh, my dear neighbour Löwe!' cried Jüchziger, 'advise me, stand by me, help me to send this rabble about their business! I only married the old blind woman because she owned this house, and now that there's no getting out of the bargain they are tearing my nest to pieces before my very eyes. Come, my dear neighbour, let us hasten at once to the burgomaster. You are a man of influence in the city, and your request added to mine will, even now, soon put a stop to this shocking business.'

'Our trouble would be all in vain,' replied Lowe quietly. 'These buildings are being pulled down by order of the burgomaster himself and of the town council; and quite right too, although I suffer a serious loss by it. "Private rights must always give place to public necessities." I was the first man to lay hands on my own house, and that makes it less hard for me to bear.'

In his heart Jüchziger cursed the good man for a fool, and turned away from him in a rage. 'If only Richzenhayn were not the acting burgomaster,' he said to himself. 'If **Herr Jonas Schönleben** were only

at the head of affairs, he would be certain to listen to me. The cowardly blockheads! There is not a single Swedish plume to be seen round the whole horizon, and yet they must needs begin pulling down houses. But I will have ample compensation, or the whole town shall smart for it.'

'My poor, poor mother,' thought Conrad sorrowfully, as he watched the destruction of her little property. 'Father will make her pay dearly for all this that he is muttering and grumbling about there. Oh, whatever will become of her?'

Jüchziger lived with his wife in the town, and the elder men gave Conrad leave to run on ahead, that he might have time to tell his mother about the destruction of her house, and prepare her for the outburst of passion she might expect when her husband reached home.

The citizens of Freiberg were preparing at all points for the expected siege. All the corn, hay, and straw stored at their farms in readiness for the coming winter was brought into the city, and every care was taken betimes that there should be no danger of famine; for experience teaches that more strongholds have been conquered by hunger than by hard fighting. The fear that the Swedes inspired in the city increased when it became known that Leipzig and Pleissenburg had fallen into their hands on November 28, and that Silberstadt was their next destination. It was a fortunate circumstance that armies in those days could not move so quickly as they can now. Thanks to this fact, Freiberg had time to make all due preparation for the enemy's reception. John George II., 'the father of his people,' was not remiss in caring for the mountain city. He sent Lieutenant-Colonel George Hermann von Schweinitz, a brave and experienced commander, with three companies of infantry and one of dragoons, to conduct the defence. These troops mustered only two hundred and ninety men all told; yet this little band, aided by the citizens, gloriously held at bay for two long months an entire Swedish army of eight brigades, with a hundred and nine pieces of artillery.

Hillner, the journeyman carpenter, was still a free man; for Jüchziger had determined to find some other way of satisfying his thirst for vengeance, and had therefore laid aside his schemes till a more convenient season. In spite of the dark and doubtful future, busy life reigned in the workshop of the carpenter's widow, as it re-echoed once again to the din of tools wielded by the two journeymen and the apprentice. One day--it was the 4th of December in the memorable year 1642--the hollow roll of drums was heard coming down the street, and the senior journeyman, laying his plane on the bench, crossed the workshop to look out at the window facing the street. Having done so, he at once left the workroom and went out to the street door, followed by his two comrades, to watch the entrance of the regular soldiers, who were just marching into the town.

There were, as has already been said, only two hundred and ninety men, yet the mere sight of them awakened joyful and reassuring feelings in the breasts of all who saw them. The roll of the drums in itself had an inspiring effect. As the townspeople gazed at the long, level lines, and heard the heavy, regular tramp beneath which the very pavement seemed to shake; as they saw each bronzed face with its look of stedfastness and assured courage, the open iron helmet on the head,

the breastplate covered by a military coat reaching to the knees and allowing the body free play from the hips, the halberd grasped in the strong right hand, and the shield in the left, bearing the Saxon coat-of-arms,--as these various points were noted and remarked on, each moment brought fresh courage to hearts that had been almost ready to despond. In all ages there have been jealousies and strife between the military and the respectable burgher class, and Freiberg was no exception to this rule. But to-day the soldiers were welcomed with loud and joyful shouts, which they, fully conscious of their own value, acknowledged by friendly nods as they passed along the streets.

Conrad Schmidt, standing beside the miner's little daughter Dollie, watched the warlike procession with the curious eyes of youth. From time to time he stole a glance at the senior journeyman, observing his movements with surprise and some amusement. The young man had taken off his blue apron, and held it rolled up in his left hand, while his right grasped the carpenter's square, exactly as the soldiers held their halberds. His whole bearing was changed; he had become positively warlike; his eyes flashed, and his feet rose and fell in measured time, as though he could hardly restrain himself from marching off at the sound of the drum. Conrad laughed and shook his head merrily, but kept back a speech he had been on the point of making when he saw the change in his old friend.

'I was right after all,' he said to himself. 'If he were just to let his beard grow, he would be exactly like'-- His sentence was left unfinished, for at this moment he heard his mistress' voice reproving them for neglecting their duty, and they all hastened back into the workshop.

The commandant made it his first business to inspect the condition of the fortifications, strengthening them wherever that was possible, and obstructing the approaches in every way that could offer impediments to an enemy's successful advance. The approach of the foe was plainly indicated by the number of country people who now poured steadily into the town, seeking shelter behind the city walls for their household goods, their wives, children, and cattle. Long trains of waggons and droves of animals, accompanied by men, and beasts of burden bearing heavy loads, were making their way towards the gates of Freiberg; and the city authorities thought themselves bound in honour not to repulse these suppliants for shelter, but rather to make their town what every such town ought to be in time of war, a true city of refuge for all needy ones. Moreover, many strong arms would be wanted to defend the widespreading ramparts; and the former siege by General Bannier had proved how well the country people could fight in defence of their liberties.

'Hallo! ho there!' shouted a powerful voice one afternoon late in December, beneath the window of Mistress Blüthgen, the carpenter's widow, and the brawny hand of a burly countryman knocked so vigorously on the window itself that the glass shivered under the blow. 'Can't you make room in your house for a small family? I have always been a regular customer of yours, and many is the gulden I have spent with you.'

At this abrupt demand, journeymen and apprentice hastened to the window. Six asses, each laden with a heavy sack of flour, stood before

the door of the house lazily turning their long ears backward and forward, as though they felt quite sure of finding comfortable quarters there. Farther down the street was a heavily-loaded waggon with two powerful brown horses. In the waggon, almost buried among beds and other household gear, sat a woman with a baby in her arms. Four cows, in charge of a servant-maid, were lowing behind the waggon, and a dozen sheep stood bleating round them. Mistress Blüthgen did not take many seconds to settle with her would-be lodger, whose calling in life was shown by the floury state of his clothes.

'That is the miller from Erbisdorf,' said Conrad, and at a sign from his mistress hastened to open the yard gates, that the fugitives might put their various possessions under cover. Willing hands were soon at work unloading and stowing away the goods, and before long the miller, leaving his wife established in her new home, set off with his waggon to return to Erbisdorf and fetch the rest of his possessions.

'Praise be to God!' cried Mistress Blüthgen joyfully. 'We shall not starve now, even if the Swedes do come. God grant they may neither take the town, nor set it on fire over our heads with their shells.'

'We must all do our best to prevent it,' said Hillner boldly. 'God gave us strong arms and brave hearts for that very purpose.'

[1] A small German coin.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ENEMY BEFORE THE TOWN.

The tower of St. Peter's Church rises high into the air above all the other buildings of Freiberg. In those early days church-towers were too often used for purposes with which religion had but little to do. Grim cannon sometimes stood there, not to fire harmless salutes on days of public rejoicing, but more often to be loaded with deadly missiles and fired at an enemy. Thus it happened that one of these instruments of death had been planted in the highest chamber of the St. Peter's Tower at Freiberg. Round this cannon, on December 27, 1642, stood Burgomaster **Jonas Schönleben** and several others, among whom were Hillner the journeyman, and the town servant Jüchziger. Winter had come in all its might, and the cold, particularly up here in the windy tower, was very severe, while snow lay deep over all the surrounding landscape. The eyes of those present were intently gazing beyond the town, to where, on the hill above the Hospital Church, many cavalry soldiers could be seen moving about and beginning to take up their positions. There had been a good deal of doubt expressed in the town as to whether the Swedish commander really meant to undertake a siege up there among the mountains at such an inclement season, with snow lying thickly on the frozen ground. The appearance of these horsemen and their business-like movements seemed to set such doubts at rest once for all.

'Respected Herr Burgomaster,' began Jüchziger, 'in my humble opinion those soldiers are not Swedes at all, but Imperialists who have reached us from Bohemia before the enemy had time to come up. I should think Marshal Piccolomini has sent them to frighten the Swedes into leaving the city alone.'

'What we ardently wish we soon believe,' and Jüchziger's speech found favour with the Burgomaster no less than with his other hearers. Hillner alone said respectfully but firmly, 'Herr Burgomaster, they are Swedes beyond the possibility of doubt. I know them well; they are Diedemann's dragoons.'

'And how may you happen to know that, young man?' asked **Schönleben** gloomily.

'Because--well, in fact, because I once served among the Swedes myself,' replied Hillner.

'What!' cried **Schönleben** in astonishment; 'you a Swede, and here in Freiberg!'

'I crave your pardon, Herr Burgomaster,' returned Hillner. 'By this time very few in the Swedish army are really Swedes at all; they are men gathered in from all nations--not a few of them from Saxony itself. Many a citizen and countryman too has been driven by starvation to take up the hard life of a soldier just to get the means of keeping body and soul together. Others have been dragged by force into the Swedish ranks, as I was. I only served one year, the year in which General Bannier laid siege to Freiberg. I was wounded in the course of that siege, taken prisoner, and brought into the city, and being recognised for a Saxon born and bred, I was allowed to return to my trade. I am just about to become a master carpenter, and have already applied to be enrolled among the citizens.'

'Your name?'

'John Hillner of Struppen, near Pirna. Might I entreat your worship's gracious influence on my behalf?'

'I am not yet acting-Burgomaster,' replied **Schönleben** rather shortly. 'You must make your application to my brother in office, Burgomaster Richzenhayn.'

'But your worship will be in office in two or three days,' persisted Hillner, in a tone of entreaty. 'And when you are so, let me beg you kindly to remember my request.'

'I'll take good care to see all about that,' muttered Jüchziger to himself. 'And thank you, Master Shavings, for giving me a handle to catch hold of you by.'

Hillner's practised eye had not deceived him. The cavalry, between seven and eight hundred in number, proved to belong to the enemy, and sharply attacking the Saxon dragoons sent out to observe them, compelled them to retire within the fortifications. Upon this the commandant at once made all necessary preparations for defending the town. Two companies of infantry, under Captain von Arnim, had charge

of the Peter Gate; Major Müffel, with his own men and some others, mounted guard at the Erbis and Donat Gates; Captain Badehorn, with the City Guard, garrisoned the Electoral Castle and the Kreuz Gate, together with the works and space that lay between. The remaining citizens were told off to defend the posterns and walls, in which task they were assisted by companies of country-people and journeymen of the various city guilds armed in all haste. Some of these auxiliaries also waited, drawn up in their ranks before the town hall, ready to march at a moment's notice to any specially threatened point. To the brave and faithful miners were assigned the most dangerous duties of all, such as extinguishing the fires caused by shells, repairing the defences wherever the enemy might destroy them, counter-working such mines as should be directed against the town, and making sorties to destroy the enemy's trenches and siege-works. When all the inhabitants capable of bearing arms had been thus told off to their several duties, the old men, women, and children were requested to observe the appointed hours for prayer, and ask help from the Almighty in the city's time of need.

Marshal Torstenson appeared before Freiberg on December 29. He at once took possession of the Hospital Church and a mansion near it, both of these buildings lying at some little distance outside the Peter Gate; here he planted a battery of artillery, the guns of which were levelled at the St. Peter's Tower. Before commencing hostilities, however, the Swedish marshal sent a trumpeter to the town to inquire whether the commandant intended to defend the place, what was his name, and whether he knew him, Torstenson. The intrepid commandant returned for answer that his name was George Hermann von Schweinitz, and that he hoped the marshal would spend no more time in asking questions, but set at once to work, when he trusted to find him a right valiant soldier.

On the same day an extraordinary surprise befell Conrad Schmidt. He was setting things straight in the workshop, which now stood silent and deserted, when he heard heavy footsteps approaching, and behold, in marched an armed man whom he seemed to know and yet not to know. The visitor wore a broad cocked hat with a little bunch of feathers at the side, and a short tunic of green cloth, the collar and edges of which were thickly laced with gold brocade wherever the broad sword-belt girt round his body permitted them to be seen. From left shoulder to right hip hung the bandolier or cartridge-belt, which was adorned with many golden tufts, and partly hid the lion of the Freiberg city arms embroidered on his breast. Tight breeches of green cloth reached to the ankles, where they were met by high shoes slashed on the inner side, and fitting much more neatly to the foot than do the shoes worn in the present day. A long gun with a large old-fashioned German lock, and a curved sabre, completed the equipment of the soldier, in whom Conrad recognised first a member of the city guard known as the 'Defensioners,' and then his old comrade, John Hillner.

[Illustration: Conrad recognised an old comrade, John Hillner.]

'Do I look better now,' asked the newly-fledged soldier, 'than in my blue apron and coloured jerkin, in the days when I handled the plane and square?'

'Whoever could have guessed,' cried Conrad, heedless of the question, 'that you would be made a Defensioner! But are you a citizen, and do you know your drill? The Defensioners never admit a man unless he is a

citizen and knows his exercises.'

'I know my drill all right enough,' replied John, 'and I daresay I shall get my certificate of citizenship. Your own eyes can tell you whether I am a Defensioner or not.'

'And you have got a beard coming too,' said Conrad, laughing. 'It's only a little one yet, but anybody can see that it is a beard. Hallo! Why, I declare you look uncommonly like that Swede who shot'--

Hillner's face darkened suddenly, as he interrupted Conrad with the abrupt question, 'Is the mistress in the house?'

'Here she comes,' said Conrad, pointing to the living-room door, through which the young widow was just entering the workshop. What wonders a uniform can work! Mistress Blüthgen coloured with pleasure when she saw her foreman in his new dress, asked how he was in very friendly tones, and sent the apprentice to fetch some refreshments for him.

On his way to the cellar Conrad said to himself: 'So at last he has let his beard grow, and he always used to shave it all off and hide every scrap of the hair. Bah! I knew long enough ago that it was as red as the beard of that ugly Swede who tried to shoot me. It's an uncommonly odd thing; coal-black hair and a red beard!'

When the lad reached the living-room again, he found the entire household, including the miller and his wife, with little Dollie and her father, gathered round the gaily dressed young guardsman.

'How do matters look as to the Swedes?' asked the miller.

'The marshal has sent a messenger to ask our commandant a question or two, and has had his answer.'

'And what were the questions and answers?'

The roar of cannon followed close on the words, and the women and children huddled together in alarm.

'You may give a pretty good guess by that what they were,' replied Hillner. 'That's Marshal Torstenson's way of telling us how he likes his answer.'

The thunder of the guns was heard again. While all were gazing in the direction whence the reports seemed to come, they saw a flash issue from the side of St. Peter's Tower, followed in a few seconds by a loud report.

'There you have question and answer again,' said Hillner. This exchange of shots had not gone on for very long, however, before the fire of the Swedes destroyed the topmost parapet of the tower. The gun planted there was silenced, and had to be moved down to a lower chamber. By way of covering this movement, the garrison opened a heavy fire with cannon and double arquebuses on the Swedes, who had ventured rather nearer to the town than was quite prudent.

'Now I must be off,' said John suddenly. 'The game has begun, and I must go and take my share in it. May God keep you all! Good-bye!'

As he hastened away the assembled household watched his retreating figure with very various feelings.

The next day, December 31, in spite of the snow and the heavy fire of the garrison, the Swedes opened their entrenchments before the Peter Gate, and planted three mortars there, which threw great stones, shells, and hundred-and-fifty pound shot into the town.

Thus closed the old year 1642, and the new year was not destined to open upon brighter or more joyful prospects.

CHAPTER V.

THE SOWER OF TARES.

The 1st of January, 1643, had hardly dawned, when the town servant Jüchziger presented himself before the new acting-Burgomaster, **Herr Jonas Schönleben**.

'Respected Herr Burgomaster,' he began humbly, 'permit the most unworthy of all your servants to be first in wishing you a happy new year, and congratulating you on the honour you have now attained. The new year promises to be a very hard one, and your new office will be harder still. I thank God that in these difficult times we are so happy as to have your worship for our Burgomaster.'

'I am obliged to you, Jüchziger,' replied **Schönleben** feelingly. 'I am obliged to you for all your kind wishes. Yes, these are indeed hard times in which I undertake the management of public business. The care of more than sixty thousand souls is laid on me at a time when even a Solomon would have had need of all his wisdom. This thought has been much in my mind, and last night I followed the wise king's example,--I commended myself earnestly to God, praying Him to teach me the right, and then to give me strength and courage to do it.'

'To maintain the right with strength and courage against all comers, against friends as well as foes,' said Jüchziger. 'For, alas! how many are there who would be only too glad to interfere with your worship's rights as Burgomaster, and put all your wise intentions aside to carry out their own selfish schemes,--men who would be only too glad, in a word, to leave you the mere name of acting-Burgomaster, and nothing more. I am quite sure it is your worship's kindly heart that has made you give ear to them until misfortune is hanging over the town, and the citizens and the rest are all bemoaning themselves, while your worship's false friends raise their heads like snakes, as they are, to sting you the moment your worship's back is turned.'

Schönleben stood silent, gazing thoughtfully on the ground.

'Did either your worship or any of our other worthy magistrates give orders for every armed journeyman to receive a gulden a week and two

pounds of bread a day?' continued Jüchziger in an injured tone; 'or that on this very New Year's Day, eight hundred Freiberg citizens should tear up the pavement in the streets of their own city to protect the houses from the Swedish cannon? Do you know, respected Herr Burgomaster, that that young Swedish turncoat who was so impudent to you in the St. Peter's Tower, and demanded to be made a citizen, has been admitted by the commandant into the City Guard, contrary to all custom and right? Who will guarantee that the pretended Saxon is not really a spy, plotting to betray the city into the hands of the Swedes the first chance he gets?'

'Is this really so?' asked **Schönleben** with displeasure.

'If you doubt my word, your worship can easily see for yourself,' replied Jüchziger. 'The fellow struts about the streets every day in his Defensioner's uniform, until he nearly runs himself off his legs.'

'Tell Badehorn, the captain of the City Guard, to meet me here in an hour's time,' said **Schönleben** angrily; 'and bid him be ready to explain why he has admitted a stranger among his men in this irregular way.'

'The soldier,' continued Jüchziger, 'risks nothing in war but just his life. The citizen risks a great deal more, for he has a wife and children, hearth and home. When a town is taken, the soldiers are either made prisoners of war or allowed to march out unhurt; it is into the citizen's house that the enemy comes, to ill-use his wife, children, and servants. These Swedes now are pressing the siege of our town so hard that we cannot possibly hold out for long. They say that even if Torstenson offers us fair terms, the commandant means to refuse them without even asking your worship anything about it, and so to give the town up to be stormed and pillaged. Now I, in my humble way, should have thought your worship's voice ought to count for something in this matter. Your worship knows what is for the good of the town a great deal better than a soldier of fortune that has only been here a few weeks.'

The Burgomaster made no reply. His thoughtful air, however, as he stood absently drumming on the window-pane, showed that the mischief-maker had not spoken in vain. By way of striking while the iron was hot, Jüchziger continued: 'As I was on my way to your worship's house this morning, I saw the Herr Burgomaster Richzenhayn going to call on the commandant, no doubt meaning to offer him a new year's greeting. Are you going to do the same, most noble sir, or don't you think a Burgomaster of the free city of Freiberg--which, with refugees, now counts over sixty thousand souls--is at least as good a man as the commander of two hundred and ninety soldiers?'

Schönleben clasped his hands behind his back, and paced slowly and thoughtfully up and down his room.

If any reader mentally charges the author with exaggeration here, he does him an injustice. The writer has had many opportunities of knowing officials, both of high and low degree, who were, quite unconsciously to themselves, tools in the hands of their servants, the latter being permitted a freedom of speech that would never have been tolerated in equals. Such servants have always had the knack of making themselves indispensable, while preserving an outward appearance of the

deepest humility; and thus it has often come to pass that a lord has been made to discharge a shaft aimed by his humble vassal.

When Jüchziger's crafty eye saw that the arrow he had thus been pointing was, so to speak, ready to be loosed from the bow, he adroitly changed the subject of conversation to something that lay much nearer his heart.

'You are aware, respected Herr Burgomaster,' he began again in a wheedling tone, 'that when I entered on my office I married the widow of Schmidt, my predecessor. I did it partly out of compassion for the poor woman, and partly to save the town the expense of keeping her and her son, who is now a boy of fourteen years old. My wife, a woman five years older than myself, all at once went stone blind, so that now I am forced to have a servant to wait on her. I had the good fortune to apprentice the boy to Mistress Blüthgen, the carpenter's widow, but his mother has petted and pampered him until he is a good-for-nothing, lazy young rascal. And now that the workshops are closed and the craftsmen and journeymen all take their turn at military duty, the boy's mistress threatens to send him home and put me to the expense of keeping him,--me that scarcely knows which way to turn for bread to feed my wife and her servant! The worst of it is that all my wife's little property, a small house outside the Peter Gate, has been levelled with the ground by order of Burgomaster Richzenhayn, and I have never had a single kreuzer[1] for my loss. The house was worth three hundred and fifty gulden.[2] Gracious Herr Burgomaster, take me and my small family under your powerful protection, help me to get proper compensation for my house, and I shall be your grateful servant all the days of my life.'

'My dear Jüchziger,' interposed **Schönleben**, 'be assured I will do all I can. The times are so bad that the town will want all its strength, and all its money, to defend itself against the Swedes, and we shall have to leave our private interests in the background for a while; but I will see that you suffer no actual want through this misfortune.'

Jüchziger concealed the disappointment he felt on hearing these words, thanked the Burgomaster for his kind intentions, and took his leave.

'Do not forget to send Badehorn here!' **Schönleben** called after him as he went out. In a comparatively short time he made his appearance again.

'Captain Badehorn presents his respectful compliments to the Herr Burgomaster, and begs to inform his worship that he cannot have the honour of waiting on him at the time mentioned.' Here Jüchziger discreetly paused.

'And why not?' asked **Schönleben**, starting up. 'Are the ties of obedience that bind citizen to magistrate broken already?'

'He cannot come,' continued Jüchziger, 'because the orders of Commandant von Schweinitz forbid it. They are every instant expecting an attack to be made by the Swedes, and the commandant has ordered every man to remain at his post.'

'Ah, of course! That is quite a different thing,' said **Schönleben**, as

his angry brow grew smooth again. 'Badehorn could not act otherwise, and it becomes my duty to go and see him if I want my question answered.'

When Burgomaster **Schönleben** left his house somewhat later in the day, the death-like stillness that reigned throughout the usually busy city weighed on his spirit. Not a clock was striking, not a bell rang out its joyful peal in welcome to the new year. Only at long intervals did he see a human being pass along the street, and then it was in fear and haste. On the other hand, as he went on his way, he saw at various points large bodies of men standing silent in their ranks, waiting the call of duty and the word of command. Here were the vigorous journeymen of the different trades, and the stalwart country-people; there the trusty miners, some with nondescript weapons, others armed with pick-axes, mattocks, and long guns, or provided with ladders and great buckets of water, in readiness for an alarm of fire. In the streets adjoining the Erbis and Kreuz Gates, bustling activity was the order of the day. Hundreds of tireless workers were tearing up the paving of the roadways, while women and children carried away the stones, and piled them against the houses. Not a creature complained of the cold, though it was by no means small.

As **Schönleben** drew near to the city wall and the Kreuz Gate, one helmeted head after another came into view, rising above the battlements, and there was a certain comfortable sense of security in the knowledge that they were the heads of the armed citizens mounting guard. Men standing still feel the cold severely, and accordingly huge fires had been built in some of the sheltered corners, round which the armed burghers stood chatting, each with his firelock ready to hand.

On inquiring for Captain Badehorn, **Schönleben** was told that the captain had been summoned by the commandant, and that the lieutenant of the City Guard, Peter Schmohl, had command of the Defensioners in the absence of his superior officer. **Schönleben** tried to make out the Swedish deserter among the Defensioners present, but was obliged to return home without having done so. Hardly had he turned his back on the fortifications, when the Swedish cannon opened fire on the Peter Gate and the neighbouring defensive works. After firing a score of shots, however, Torstenson sent to the commandant, demanding the surrender of the town. He had, he said, paraded his army and fired a salute in his honour; should any further resistance be offered, he would the next day attack the town more vigorously, and destroy it. The commandant sent a polite but firm refusal, and on the following day Torstenson fulfilled the first part of his threat by opening a terrible fire against the town. In six hours his artillery discharged over thirteen hundred shots, by which the Peter Gate, the adjoining tower, and a portion of the city wall were all severely injured, while many shells, and a perfect hailstorm of large stones, passed over the ramparts into the town itself. Then the enemy drew near with flying colours, bringing ladders, for the purpose of scaling the ramparts. By way of rendering their task easier, they exploded their first mines, which, however, did not accomplish all that was expected from them.

Meantime the besieged, on their part, were by no means idle. To prevent the storming of the breach at the Peter Gate, two cannon were planted in Peter Street, the gaps in the ramparts were hastily repaired, the bastions and inner defences of the gate itself were

strengthened, while large quantities of hand-grenades and other ammunition were laid in readiness. Thus prepared, the citizens confidently awaited the threatened attack, which, however, did not take place, partly, it was supposed, because of a violent snow-storm that came on, and partly through the failure of the mines. Scarcely had the Swedish troops withdrawn in the evening, when the besieged made a sortie, in which the miners cleared the moat of the rubbish that encumbered it, and picked up a considerable number of cannon-balls, which they carried into the town as valuable booty.

The Swedes maintained their fire throughout the whole of that evening, and far into the night, to prevent the Freibergers from rebuilding their fortifications; in the course of this firing a miner and a forester were killed in the city, and several others among the defenders severely wounded. On the next day, January 3d, the firing was renewed with heavy siege-guns in addition to the lighter pieces, and a second mine was sprung, making a breach seventy feet wide in the city wall. As soon as this result had been achieved, the Swedes, to the number of two hundred, delivered their first assault against the Peter Gate. The fighting, however, only lasted about a quarter of an hour, and ended in the complete repulse of the besiegers.

During the lull that followed, Jüchziger arrived at the house of Burgomaster Schönleben, to announce that Colonel von Schweinitz wished to speak with him, and requested his worship to come to him at once for that purpose.

Jüchziger's tone and look were carefully calculated to provoke the Burgomaster's pride, and Schönleben made a sign for the messenger to withdraw. 'Am I his slave?' he broke out angrily, as soon as the man was out of hearing. 'Have I not every bit as good a right to send for him as he has to send for me? I will soon let him know which of us has the best right to command here!'

But when the first heat of his anger had spent itself, quieter thoughts began to prevail.

Schönleben was at heart far too noble and conscientious a man to sacrifice the welfare of a great city, entrusted to his keeping, to a sense of his own offended dignity. 'One must not be too particular,' he said to himself, 'about an affront from a rough old soldier; after all, he may wish to speak about some matter of importance. At all events, I will just go and hear what he has to say.'

With thoughts like these working in his mind, Schönleben betook himself to the commandant, who laughed boisterously as he shook hands with his visitor, and began at once with: 'Torstenson has already sent a third time to demand the surrender of the city, as if he thought he had knocked us into a cocked hat by that assault we repulsed so easily. He has been kind enough, too, to remind me that Breisach, Regensburg, Gross-Glogau, and Leipzig have all been besieged and taken by the Swedes, and to add that it is quite out of the question for a badly fortified place like Freiberg to withstand his power. We are not to count on any assistance, and if I reject his present kind offers he will take the place by storm, and will not spare even the babe at its mother's breast.'

'And what answer do you propose to send to all this, Herr Colonel?' asked Schönleben. 'I suppose you sent for me to see what my opinion might be?'

'Not a bit of it, my dear Schönleben, I assure you,' replied von Schweinitz, laughing. 'The Swede has received his answer some time since, and there was not the smallest need to trouble you in any way about the matter. The enemy has received from me, take my word for it, the only possible answer a soldier could send to such a demand, and I now want to consult with you about pushing matters a little farther.'

'But,' said Schönleben in an offended tone, 'I should have thought that as acting-Burgomaster I ought at least to have had a word to say where the weal or woe of the thousands of families under my care was at stake. Pray, what is to happen when you and your soldiers are all killed, the citizens and other combatants worn out with their excessive duties in this bitter weather, the walls destroyed, the gates taken by storm, and the Swede bursts in at last to put his threats into execution?'

'What!' cried Schweinitz, astounded by this sudden outburst. 'Is it the Burgomaster of the loyal city of Freiberg I hear speaking such words as these?'

'Undoubtedly it is,' replied Schönleben; 'and when Leipzig chose of her own free will to open her gates to the Swedish forces, she was not branded as disloyal. I am not speaking now of surrender, but of my absolute right to have at least one word in all that concerns Freiberg.'

'Listen to me, Herr Schönleben,' said Schweinitz roughly, 'and hear my fixed determination. Our illustrious prince and lord, John George of Saxony, has entrusted to me, George Hermann von Schweinitz, the defence of this city of Freiberg, with orders to hold it to the last man. That being so, I stand in no need of advice from you, either now or at any other time. As commandant, I am here to give orders, and you are here to obey them. Whoever talks to me of surrender shall be considered a traitor to his country, and treated accordingly. Basta!'^[3] And Schweinitz emphasized the close of his speech by a thundering blow of his fist on the table before him, and turned his back on the Burgomaster in high dudgeon. Schönleben himself, as he took his departure and returned home, was quite as angry a man as the indignant warrior.

'God is my witness,' said the Burgomaster to himself, when, somewhat later, he was thinking the matter over more quietly, 'that neither cowardice nor disloyalty to my prince made me speak as I did. But when I think that the town may yet share the awful fate that befell Magdeburg, then indeed I set the well-being of my thousands of fellow-citizens far above my own reputation for valour. Alas! who can give my fearful heart any assurance about these things?'

[1] A small German copper coin.

[2] A gulden is now worth about two shillings English.

[3] Enough.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SECOND ASSAULT.

On the following day Burgomaster Schönleben took his way to the council-chamber, which now, indeed, fully deserved its name. Both before and after the commencement of the siege, the magistrates had enough to do in devising necessary plans, even had not their time been fully occupied in carrying their plans into execution. Among other duties, they had to arrange for the accommodation of the wounded, the burial of the dead, and the bodily needs both of those who were defending the city and their families; while not neglecting, on the other hand, to guard against a wasteful use of the provisions, to preserve the strictest order in the city, and to arrange for many other things beside.

Schönleben did not give his fellow councillors the slightest hint about his quarrel with the commandant, but took care quietly to make out their several opinions, and he did not find one man among them who, either from fear of the Swedes or from personal inclination, was disposed to support his views.

After quitting the council-chamber, he could not help noticing, as he passed along the ranks of the auxiliary troops in front of the town hall, what an eager and even restless desire was manifest among them to be led against the enemy. He betook himself to the cathedral, where the church-superintendent, Dr. Paul Glaser himself, was conducting the daily service, and heard this aged servant of the Lord encourage his great audience to a brave resistance against the foe, and patient endurance of such trouble as the siege might bring. 'Call to mind, my brethren,' the good man was saying, 'what was done by the children of Israel when the wicked King Antiochus and his soldiers troubled them, and each one had to take refuge in the caverns and rocky clefts of the mountains. My hearers, Antiochus and his fierce soldiery did not torture the Jews of old one whit more unmercifully than these Swedes have tortured our Saxon brothers and sisters. And it is vain for you to think that you, at least, will escape torture and death by resigning yourselves into their hands; for their hearts are like the nether mill-stone, and they find an evil pleasure in hearkening to the groans of those who perish under their torments. Therefore defend yourselves, as did the Jews in the days of the Maccabees! And let not strong men alone bear their share in the work, but do you aged men, you women and children, aid with all your feeble might. Think of the brave women of the ancient days! And while you think of them, do not forget that in our very midst there dwells to-day a brave woman who has had to defend hearth and home against a murderous foe; not less truly a woman because this hard task was assigned to her, or because she was found, in the hour of need, capable of discharging it. While we pray to God that such terrible work may never fall to our lot, we cannot but honour this our brave, and now, alas! our bereaved sister.'

As it happened, the miller's wife from Erbisdorf was herself present

among the worshippers, without the clergyman's knowledge. As the glances of those around turned naturally towards her where she sat, she endured their friendly scrutiny with blushing cheeks and downcast eyes.

The preacher's words had produced a deep effect in the mind of the worthy Burgomaster. 'If a Christian minister,' said he to himself, 'sees it his duty on this special occasion to encourage the weak, that they may make a valorous deface, surely I, who rule over strong men, should be the last to think of surrendering into an enemy's hands the city entrusted to my care.'

The thunder of the Swedish cannon, as it echoed and re-echoed through the lofty carved-work of the cathedral roof, made the Burgomaster too ill at ease to stay longer in the church. On reaching the open air, he found that the enemy had never yet poured in so heavy a fire as that of to-day. 'By it every building was shaken,' says the chronicle, 'and there was as great alarm in the town as if heaven and earth had been rolled together.'

This time the enemy did not content himself with merely letting his heavy guns play against the walls and gates, especially the Peter Gate, but used his mortars to pour large quantities of stones, balls, and shells directly into the town itself.

The sights and sounds that saluted Schönleben almost put his newly-formed resolutions to flight. He hastened back to the market-place.

'The enemy is pressing hard on the Meissen and Erbis Gates,' shouted a breathless messenger, sent in haste to summon assistance from the town hall, and immediately detachments of the auxiliaries drawn up there started at the double to strengthen the threatened points. As they went they uttered loud shouts of joy, and clashed their weapons till the market-place rang again.

The crash of bursting shells could now be distinctly heard above the thunder of the artillery, but happily most of these deadly missiles fell in the more open spaces and did but little harm. The miners were acquitting themselves of their dangerous duties courageously and well under the able leadership of their brave captain, George Frederick von Schomberg, and the master miner, Andreas Baumann. Whenever a column of smoke rose, or shells fell on a house, or the fearful cry of 'fire' was heard, their aid was speedily at hand. Beneath a continuous shower of stones and bullets they climbed upon roofs, handed buckets of water, and extinguished flames, heeding neither fire, choking vapour, nor falling rafters. Like boys playing at ball, they sprang on the smouldering shells the moment they touched the ground, and extinguishing the fusee, rendered them harmless before they had time to do their fatal work of death and destruction.

As Schönleben turned the corner by the butchers' stalls, some ponderous iron object fell with a heavy thud just in front of him, sank into the earth, and disappeared. At the same moment, two young people came out of a neighbouring house and ran across the street to the newly-made hole; they were Conrad Schmidt and Dollie. Close at their heels followed a man in a dusty coat, the miller of Erbisdorf.

'Out of the way directly!' he shouted to the thoughtless youngsters. 'Do you both want to be killed? This is no child's plaything.' So saying, he carefully poured into the hole a large bucketful of water he had brought with him, and then set about digging out the expected shell.

'Well, upon my word!' he cried, in a tone of such astonishment that the Burgomaster paused in curiosity. 'How long have they used bombs with iron rings to catch hold of them by? Why, as sure as I'm here, it is nothing in the world but a lumbering old iron hundred-weight, that the Swedes must have stolen out of some good Saxon's shop to batter our heads in Freiberg with.' While the worthy miller was still expressing his astonishment over this new kind of missile, Dollie's father, the miner Roller, appeared coming down the street, grasping some heavy object with both hands. When he recognised the Burgomaster, he let his burden drop on the ground, and proceeded respectfully to remove his hat.

'What have you got there?' cried the miller, who was near enough to hear Roller's salutation of the magistrate. 'A blacksmith's anvil?'

'The end of one, at all events,' replied Roller. Then, turning to Schönleben, he added, 'Only half a yard more, respected Herr Burgomaster, and my poor head would have been shattered by this same anvil. But it tells a welcome story too; for if the Swedes have to use things like these to feed their cannon with, they must be running pretty short of ammunition.'

'That seems to contradict you,' said Schönleben pleasantly, indicating the tremendous noise of the cannonade that filled the air on all sides.

'Ah, but it's beginning to slacken now, respected Herr Burgomaster,' shouted the miller joyfully the next minute. 'Don't you hear that the siege-guns have ceased firing?'

Roller looked thoughtfully up at St. Peter's Tower, from which a blood-red flag now floated in the air. In a moment, from all the hitherto silent towers and steeples, the bells clashed out an alarm.

'That is the signal of an attempt to storm,' said the Burgomaster; then concealing his own agitation as best he might, he hastened from the spot.

'A storm!' said Dollie wonderingly to Conrad. 'But there are no clouds, and no wind; how could there be a storm?' At this point the questioner was sent into the house by the miller, who followed her herself as soon as he had put the iron weight and the anvil away in a place of safety. Roller, although not on duty, hastened off to join his comrades at their work, and Conrad betook himself with all speed to the home where he knew his poor mother was left alone in her blindness.

The minister had just brought his service to a close, and was leaving the church; but on hearing the clang of the alarm-bells, he turned back into the sacred building with the women and children, who poured into it to beseech divine help in this new and pressing danger. Just as Schönleben was passing by the church door, such a frightful and furious shout arose at the Peter Gate as almost to curdle the Burgomaster's blood in his veins. This terrible shout was uttered by the Swedes, who, two brigades strong, with flying colours and rolling drums, were

now advancing with their storming-ladders towards the moat before the Peter Gate. The determined energy with which the advance was made was as great as the noise of the battle-cry. The besieged watched the enemy's approach with steadfast and unshaken courage. They tightened their belts, and each man prepared his weapons to give the foe a warm reception.

'Always bellowing, you Swedish oxen!' shouted a soldier jestingly. 'Do you expect to frighten us with your noise, or do you think the walls of Freiberg are going to fall down like those of Jericho?'

A well-aimed cross fire was now poured into the ranks of the besiegers, as, in dense masses, they filled the moat and struggled to mount the breach. A murderous fight then began, in which neither side would yield an inch. Although successive volleys of balls decimated the Swedish ranks, their losses did not in the least deter them from pursuing their object with the most supreme indifference to death. Fresh men continually took the place of those that fell, and the forces of the besieged being thus either divided or broken, the Erbis and Meissen Gates were both assaulted at once. The storming-ladders of the Swedes, a hundred times hurled back into the moat, were as often replanted against the walls; and although every man who had as yet succeeded in setting foot on the ramparts had paid for his success with his life, others were continually ready to follow the same example.

While the enemy kept up their furious battle-cry, the besieged, on their side, did not fail to encourage one another with joyful shouts. There were even some rash spirits, who, deserting the sheltering breastworks, sprang into the breach, and saluted the dense ranks of the enemy with 'morning-stars'[1] and heavy broadswords. During this attack, which lasted a full hour, the Swedish fire was steadily maintained against gates, walls, and towers, occasionally even against the breach itself, where it inflicted some loss on besiegers as well as besieged. The former, under the command of Generals Wrangel and Mortainne, were led by these officers in person to storm the breach. Field-Marshal Torstenson, a martyr to gout, could only sit at the window of his quarters in the hospital, directing the attack, and chafing inwardly at its continued want of success. While the battle still raged round the Peter, Meissen, and Erbis Gates, and the Swedes fancied the Freibergers a prey to anxiety and fear, the undismayed miners made a sortie through the Donat Gate, destroyed the Swedish siege-works that lay in that quarter, slew a number of the enemy, and returned into the city, bringing with them several prisoners.

The general fight was still raging; the shout of battle, the thunder of the guns, the confused din of the storming-parties, and the showers of great stones and shot still filled the air, as the Burgomaster, agitated by growing anxiety, and unable to find rest anywhere, turned his uneasy steps towards the Peter Gate, the most threatened point of all. It must be remembered that to a brave man like Schönleben it was a far harder task to stand by, a mere spectator of this important battle, than it would have been to take an active share in its turmoil and danger. To him the assault on the gates, which had perhaps lasted an hour, appeared to have been going on for ever, while those who were actually engaged in the strife would have sworn it had been an affair of a few minutes at the most.

In no small danger of his life, the Burgomaster forced his way, through a storm of bullets and falling masonry, into the strong tower that protected the Peter Gate. Having at last succeeded in ascending the narrow stone stairs and reaching the vaulted guard-room, he was able to make out indistinctly, through the smoke and dust that filled the room, the forms of a number of men who were keeping up an incessant and almost deafening fire on the enemy through the narrow loop-holes with which the thick walls were pierced.

'They fly!' shouted one of these marksmen in a stentorian voice. 'Hurrah! Now to give them something to help them on their way.' So saying, he lighted one hand-grenade after another, and hurled them with all his force through the loop-hole. 'Now, here with the double arquebuses! Dippolt, have you loaded them all?' As he spoke, he seized one of the pieces that stood in readiness, and fired it after the flying Swedes.

The face was so blackened with gunpowder and smoke as to be almost unrecognisable, but Schönleben knew the voice at once for that of the brave Commandant von Schweinitz, who thus both by word and action encouraged his men to do their utmost against the enemy.

Hastily turning round, and catching sight as he did so of the Burgomaster's face, the soldier frankly stepped up to the new-comer and shook him kindly by the hand, saying in a hearty tone:

'So you are here, Burgomaster! There,' and he pushed the visitor good-humouredly towards a loop-hole; 'have a look at the vagabonds showing us their heels. They'll not carry more than a third of their storming-ladders back with them. So, now you have come, you can help us make merry, Schönleben. I feel so pleased I scarcely know how to contain myself.'

A great shout of joy rose from the ranks of the besieged at sight of the flying Swedes.

'Right, my children!' cried their commander. 'Shout "Victory" to your heart's content. Schönleben, I am proud of commanding your Freibergers. They have behaved like veteran and brave soldiers. I must give the palm to your City Guard, who have held the most dangerous post, the one at the breach by the Kreuz Gate, with such calm determination that the Swedes never once set foot on the ramparts. Victory, victory!' he shouted, as the jubilant cry rose again from the ranks below.

Then Schönleben spoke out honestly and heartily. 'Colonel von Schweinitz,' he said, 'I trust you will pardon the speech I made to you not long since; it might well annoy you. Henceforth I say with you, "Welcome death rather than surrender to the Swedes!"'

'Why, what is all this about?' said Schweinitz heartily; 'I was every bit as much to blame as you were. I'm a rough soldier that doesn't stop to pick his words. You mustn't take too much notice of my speaking out a bit hastily now and then.'

While the two worthy men were making up their quarrel, Schönleben noticed that the skirt of the other's coat was smeared with blood.

'You are wounded,' cried the Burgomaster in alarm.

'I had not noticed it,' answered Schweinitz carelessly, looking down at the splash of blood on his coat. 'Possibly a chip of masonry or some ball that has glanced aside may have grazed my hip. The Swedes have paid for it dearly enough, anyhow.'

With a brightened and almost joyful heart Schönleben took leave of the commandant. As the former left the tower and gate, he saw the besieged clambering down into the city moat to make prisoners the wounded Swedes who lay there, and to bring in the firelocks, pikes, and scaling-ladders the enemy had left behind. At the same time, men were set busily to work to repair and rebuild the walls and other defensive works that had suffered injury. The bells were silent, and the glorious words of the Te Deum--'We praise Thee, O God! we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord'--could be plainly heard as they sounded solemnly forth from the various churches,--words in which the Burgomaster joined with a most devout and thankful heart.

[1] The mediaeval 'morning-star' was a heavy war-club thickly studded with short iron spikes.

CHAPTER VII.

CONRAD UNDER THE WINDOW-SEAT.

It was early in the afternoon, yet the long winter night already lay dark over the city of Freiberg. At intervals the gloom was lighted up for a few minutes by the lurid glare of some burning house set on fire by a hostile shell, and as quickly extinguished by the prompt watchfulness and energy of the fire-brigade, whose members had to struggle against a strong wind that by fanning the flames made them doubly dangerous. The streets were almost deserted. Only now and then might some wayfarer be dimly descried stealing along, keeping close in to the houses so as to gain some slight protection from the falling stones and cannon-balls. Among these wayfarers was Conrad Schmidt, hastening from his mistress' house to his mother's distant dwelling. When he had reached his destination, and made sure that his dreaded stepfather was away, he entered the living-room. To his great surprise it was dark and cheerless, and his blind mother sat alone in the midst of it shivering with cold. By way of warming herself, she had taken the sleek tabby cat into her lap and folded her chilled hands over pussy's warm fur. The whole scene sent a pang through the boy's warm and loving heart.

'But, my dearest mother!' he cried, 'has not Hannah got back yet from her parents'? Let me go and call her.'

The woman shook her head sorrowfully. 'Hannah is never coming back,' she said. 'Your stepfather has turned her off because she was no use now and ate so much.'

The boy clasped his hands. 'No use now!' he repeated. 'Now! when he is away himself all day and most of the night too,--when the lives even of people who have their eyesight are in danger,--when the blind need help more than ever! Oh, my poor, dear mother!'

'If it were not for the leaving you and dear old pussy here that Jüchziger has many a time threatened to kill,' sobbed the blind woman, 'I would rather die--die by some Swedish bullet! Why should I wish to live? When your father comes home he beats me if he finds the room cold, and do what I will I can't make the fire burn in the stove. The tinder will not light, though I have often struck the flint and steel together till I made my poor hands quite sore. No one lives in the house but ourselves, so I cannot get my lamp lighted, and if I take it across the street to a neighbour's, the wind blows it out again before I get back.'

Conrad set energetically to work, and very soon a brisk fire was crackling in the great stove that stood at one end of the room, gaily ornamented with its long rows of coloured Dutch tiles. He placed his mother carefully in a warm corner, sat down beside her, and then began: 'Rudorf the journeyman is in bed at our house with a broken leg. It's not at all dangerous, and he gets his gulden of pay and his allowance of bread regularly every week. I only wish I was a journeyman, then I could go and fight and earn some money for you. And Hillner the Defensioner has got on first-rate; the officers all like him, and the governor himself talks to him ever so often. Our mistress loves to see him come into the house, and I'm sure she will marry him as soon as the siege is over, and he is made a citizen and a master carpenter. But then we can't even begin to guess when the siege will be over, for these Swedes keep attacking the town worse than ever. You would think they might have been satisfied with knocking ever so many of our houses to pieces, but now, what with their new batteries, and their new trenches, and nobody knows how many fascines'--

'Alas, alas!' interrupted Mistress Jüchziger. 'What does a poor blind woman like me know about such dreadful things? Have you a morsel of bread in your pocket, my dear boy? Pussy and I have had nothing to eat since early this morning.'

'My poor mother,' cried her warm-hearted son, 'and has it come to this--that in our own Freiberg, where not even a beggar is allowed to starve, the good and honoured wife of the town servant himself cannot get enough to eat?'

'Your father locks everything up as if I was a thief,' said the woman, 'and he has been out ever since mid-day, so we couldn't get anything.'

'Here, dear mother,' cried Conrad, 'take this. I always take good care now-a-days to have a crust of bread in my pocket. I only wish I could give you something nice to eat with it, but that's all I have.'

The woman broke off a morsel for the expectant cat before beginning to satisfy her own hunger. 'Puss is only a dumb creature,' she said by way of excuse, 'but she is as faithful as many Christians, and a good deal kinder than your stepfather.'

'Yes, mother,' replied Conrad, 'so she is. All he wanted was your little house, and now that's gone he is just showing us what he really is.'

'It was for your sake I promised to be his wife,' said the woman, 'that there might be somebody to look after you when I am gone.'

'I know, I know!' said Conrad. 'And how very kind and sweet-spoken he always used to be to me while he was courting you!'

'He is coming!' said the woman in sudden terror. 'I can hear his step. Quick, hide yourself!'

There was let into the wall of the room, just below the window, a seat, from which, in order to conceal household articles laid there, a low curtain had been hung, thus making a sort of rude cupboard. Conrad crept behind this curtain with all speed, just as his mother succeeded in hiding her crust of bread in her pocket. Immediately afterwards Jüchziger entered the room without a word of greeting to his wife. He threw his hat on the seat beneath which his stepson was crouching, and said angrily: 'It's a dog's life now-a-days. On one's legs day and night, always in danger, and never a kreuzer[1] by way of reward. All for the fatherland, forsooth, say the patriots! I am my own fatherland, and I keep my patriotism in my purse. Ever since the fat citizens and journeymen took to cutting about the streets with their pop-guns, they are all grown such big men that if one of them happens to set eyes on you, you must jump out of his way like a bewitched frog. Wife! Wife, I say! Here's a batzen.[2] Run across to Seiler's and fetch me a herring. I begin to feel horribly hungry.'

The blind woman stood for some seconds like one astounded by such an unusual order. Conrad was on the point of creeping out from his hiding-place at all hazards, to go himself and fetch what was wanted. He was only restrained by the thought that if he did, he would be very likely to bring on his mother something a great deal worse than just having to go across the street for a herring.

'Well, what's the matter now?' shouted Jüchziger, bringing his fist down with a thundering crash on the table. 'Are you going, or am I to start you?'

The blind woman had hardly groped her way out at the door, before Jüchziger went on:

'Can't some Swedish bullet or falling stone rid me of this blind witch? Nothing turns out as I want it to. Here are Schweinitz and Schönleben the best of friends again, and all the trouble I've been at with them just so much labour lost. And then there's that brazen-faced journeyman I haven't paid off yet for his impudence in the forest; it seems as though I am not to get a hold on him. And never a kreuzer have I seen the colour of, to pay me for my house they pulled down. All right! It may turn out that what Freiberg won't pay for, the Swedes will. I have to look after the prisoners, so I shall stand a first-rate chance to kill two birds with one stone,--do the business of the conceited Defensioner, and help myself to my money at the same time. What, you ugly beast, are you there?'

This closing remark was addressed to the cat, which Jüchziger now spied sitting by the curtain, behind which Conrad was playing the part of an unwilling listener. His stepfather picked up the heavy boot-jack, and hurled it at the cat; it missed her, but struck Conrad so sharply on the shin, that though the thick curtain broke the full force of the blow, the lad could hardly suppress a cry of pain. When, a little later, he saw his stepfather go into the inner room to hang up his great-coat, the boy ventured out, and, creeping on tip-toe across the living-room, managed to escape unobserved into the street. Just outside the door he met his mother returning, carrying the herring in her left hand, while with the right she groped her way along by the houses.

'Oh, mother,' he said, in a low, earnest voice, 'don't stay a minute longer! My mistress' house has lots of visitors in it, but I'm sure they would find a corner for you somewhere. And you and puss wouldn't be nearly so hungry if you lived with us as you are here.'

'It cannot be, my son,' replied the blind woman. 'A true wife does not leave her husband. If I were to do so, the other women would point the finger of scorn at me and call me names; and quite right, too. If I can do nothing else, I will at least take my good name with me down to the grave, and God grant it may be soon.' So saying, she hastened into the house, lest she should anger her husband by keeping him waiting.

Conrad took his way homeward with a heart overflowing with respect for his mother. On his way he met Dollie, carefully carrying in her hand a bundle wrapped in a cloth.

'Wherever are you off to so late as this, Dollie?' he asked in astonishment. 'Are you not afraid to go along the dark streets with all the shot and shell flying about?'

'Oh, I've got used to them a long time ago!' said the little one very composedly. 'I always think it doesn't seem nice when the town is quiet now.'

Conrad had to confess that she was right, for people certainly do become accustomed to everything, even to the greatest danger.

'I am taking father some warm soup, because he is on duty to-night,' Dollie went on; 'then he won't feel the dark night so cold.'

'But why does not your mother take it?' asked Conrad.

'Oh, she isn't at home,' answered Dollie. 'She had to go with a great many more women to fetch water from the Münzbach,[3] and carry it right into the upper town. The Swedes have done something to the water-pipes there, and there is no more water. Only think! if a fire were to begin, and they couldn't put it out! And for fear the water should freeze in the buckets, the women have to carry it in the little brewers' coppers, and keep the fires burning under it too!'

'I will go with you,' said Conrad; and the little maiden, though professing to be so brave, seemed by no means sorry to have a companion.

At last the two succeeded in reaching the neighbourhood of the Peter

Gate, where a detachment of miners were acting as auxiliaries to the regular troops. Here, as at the other threatened points, soldiers, citizens, and journeymen were all actively engaged. Such parts of the fortifications as had been either injured or destroyed by the enemy's artillery-fire and mines, were now being hastily repaired. The Peter Gate and the barbican in front of it showed unmistakeable signs of the enemy's efforts to force an entrance into the town,--heaps of stones, and yawning holes and pits, alternated with covered galleries, chevaux-de-frise, uprooted palisades, and other works which the Freibergers were in hot haste trying to strengthen. The steady industry of so many hundred busy hands in the cold and darkness of that winter night must have struck an onlooker with surprise; but probably his surprise would have been even more excited by the unusual silence in which such heavy work was being done. That they might not attract the enemy's attention and so draw down an attack, the besieged were using the miners' dark lanterns, which open only on one side, instead of such torches or other lights as would generally be employed. From the top of the city wall and gate, these lanterns now shone down like the glimmering fires of innumerable glowworms, while, through the dusky twilight, lit up by their flickering rays, the soft white snowflakes fell steadily and quietly. The dim light and the falling snow combined to transform the brave defenders into so many ghost-like shapes. One such weird figure could be descried, leaning silent and motionless against the parapet at the top of the tower, his heavy double arquebuse by his side. No part of the man stirred save the restless eyes, and they wandered incessantly to and fro, striving to make out the movements of the enemy. The miners, busy constructing a new moat just within the battered Peter Gate, looked, as they glided about, more like mountain-gnomes than human beings. If one of these same human gnomes, with weather-beaten, swarthy face and wrinkled forehead framed in its snowy hood, had suddenly stepped out into the circle of light cast by one of the dark lanterns, people would have been strongly tempted to declare they had seen a ghost.

Up there on the Hospital Mountain, where the enemy's headquarters lay, great watch-fires were blazing through the thick, snow-laden air. Now and then the glare of a mortar shone suddenly out, followed after a few seconds by the thundering explosion. Then a fiery curve traced itself against the sky, the end of which advanced hissing towards the city, and at last burst somewhere among the houses. Such was the picture that presented itself to the eyes of the two children when they reached the Peter Gate on that dark winter's night.

[1] A small German coin worth about a farthing English.

[2] A small German coin equal to four kreuzers.

[3] The river that flows through Freiberg.

CHAPTER VIII.

ORDINARY INCIDENTS OF A SIEGE.

'Dear Wahle,' said Dollie to a miner, who, with the assistance of several others, was carrying a great palisade past the spot where the children stood, 'please have you seen anything of my father? I've brought him a can of warm soup.'

'Warm soup!' said the man jocosely; 'why, the enemy cook enough of that for us, only they warm us in rather a different way. Well, child, your father is down in the moat with a lot of other men, bringing in wood that the enemy had piled up ready to burn us out. When they found their cannon could not knock a hole through at the Peter Gate here, they thought they would have a try what fire could do.'

'It looks,' said another, 'very much as if the enemy read their Bibles. Wasn't that what Abimelech did when he couldn't get round the people of Sichem any other way?'

'Ah, but when he tried it again at another place,' laughed Wahle, 'a woman dropped a stone on his head from the top of the tower, and that finished him.'

'May the same fate soon overtake Torstenson!' said a third.

'Oh, he'll never venture up here,' said Wahle. 'Don't you know the gout has him in tight grips? why, he can't even stir out of his arm-chair. His people have to play cat's paw for him, and burn their fingers just when he bids them.'

'I just wish,' said the other, 'that Torstenson might go into such a rage at not taking the town, that the gout might rise into his body. Then he would die, and a good thing for us!'

'Come, come!' said Wahle more seriously; 'we ought not to wish even our enemies such evil as that.'

The words were hardly uttered when a dozen musket-shots rang out from without the wall that surrounded the moat. Several balls whistled over the heads of the two children, and the miner who had just been rebuked fell with a cry of, 'Oh, I am killed!'

His comrades laid down the palisade they were carrying, picked up the wounded man, and bore him into the nearest covered way, where they laid him for the time in a sheltered corner. The two children, more frightened at the sight of the man's fall than at their own danger, were quite at a loss which way to go next. In another moment, however, Dollie forgot all her trouble as she caught sight of her father coming towards her, his arquebuse in his hand.

'You here, little one!' he cried, and hastily drew the children with him into the gallery, behind the protecting walls of which the combatants found shelter from the enemy's fire. 'A queer kind of supper,' he said, as he hastily gulped down the contents of the can. 'One hardly has time even to say, "Grant, O Lord, what I partake!" And yet I ought to be thankful, too, that I am here to drink my soup at all. How many miners, citizens, peasants, soldiers, and even young children, has this siege cost us already! St. Peter's churchyard is getting too small to hold them all.'

'Yes, father,' said Dollie. 'And poor Hofmann the woodcutter will never be able to eat any more soup. He fell down quite close by us as if a thunderbolt had hit him.'

'Hofmann!' said Roller hastily; 'your god-father, child, and my old friend? But,' he went on, 'who is that lying in yon dark corner?'

He rose and went across in that direction. As he did so, he caught the sound of a groan, and a feeble voice murmured: 'Ah, merciful Father, do not let the arch-enemy prevail against me, or what will become of my three boys, all of them stampers at the Prince's Shaft. If I must die, do Thou take under Thy care my wife and my four poor girls. They are at the coppersmith's house in the Erbis Street.'

'What is it?' said Roller, turning his dark lantern so that its light fell for a moment on the dying man's pale face.

Hofmann lifted his failing eyes towards the approaching figure, and said in a broken voice, and with long pauses between: 'Comrade, there is a cold Swedish bullet rankling in my vitals. Promise me, old friend, that I shall have an honourable burial; not in this shabby miner's dress, but in my new uniform. And when they lay me in my last resting-place, let the lads say: "A good journey to thee, old comrade!"'

[Illustration: 'Promise me that I shall have an honourable burial; and let the lads say, "A good journey to thee, old comrade!"]

'A good journey to thee, old comrade,' responded Roller heartily, as Hofmann, putting his hand to his side, stopped abruptly.

Conrad and Dollie both followed Roller's example, as he folded his hands on his breast and began to repeat the simple words of the 'Our Father' over the dying man. The hollow roar of the Swedish siege-guns outside, and the constant dull thud of the cannon-balls striking the great earthwork that covered the gallery, formed a strange contrast to the solemn little service within, beside one whose spirit was taking its flight.

'You have come at a most unfortunate time, children,' said Roller, when all was over. 'You had better stay here till things are quieter outside, for the stones and bullets strike just anybody at random, and make no difference between big and little. I will tell you when it is safe for you to go; stay here till I come back.'

As Roller turned to go, he felt his leg suddenly clasped in Dollie's little arms. 'Oh, do stay here with us, dear father!' sobbed the child. 'Something might happen to you like what happened to poor Hofmann there. And then mother and I couldn't live any longer--indeed we couldn't; we should be quite sure to die.'

But Roller gently loosened the little maiden's hold, saying kindly as he did so; 'Dollie must be quiet and good, and God will take care of father. We do not know whether we are safer in here or out under the clear sky; but the great God, our heavenly Father, can take care of us wherever we are. Whether I am at work in the deep mine, or in front of the Swedish guns, or sitting quietly at home with you and dear mother,

death might come to me if it was God's will, and it will never come until it is His will. Dollie must try to remember this, and think that her dear father is doing his duty.'

When he was gone, Dollie said sadly: 'The hateful war! Why ever do the stupid soldiers make it? I am sure they would all rather sit by their stoves at home, or else stop in bed, than come to Freiberg and make us all so unhappy.'

Conrad thought for a minute or two, and then said: 'Yes, war is a very funny thing; the people who begin it never have any of the trouble. And then it soon gets so big they don't know what to do, because they can't stop it. My mistress says this war was begun because of religion, and they've been fighting for twenty-three years, longer than I can remember. I daresay they want to drive religion out of the world altogether, for I don't think anybody can ever expect to make people good by firing off cannons at them. Our schoolmaster says it's like cutting a man's head off to cure him of the toothache. But oh, Dollie, I sometimes feel so sad you can't think. You have a good father to love you and take care of you, and be very sorry when anything hurts you; but nothing in the world would make my stepfather happier than for some one to go and tell him I was dead. I always have to hide like a wicked thief when he comes, and I'm sure it is a great deal worse for poor mother than it is for me. Nobody but God knows how father uses her, and I daren't go and protect her.'

'Listen!' said Dollie anxiously. 'Hofmann is coming to life again down there in the corner. I can hear him breathing.'

Both children listened.

'That noise isn't Hofmann,' said Conrad. 'It comes out of the ground.' He laid himself down and listened again, with his ear close to the earth. 'I think it's the Swedes digging some more mines,' he said at last.

'What are they?' said Dollie. 'Like father's?'

'Oh dear, no!' replied the boy, proud to show off what he knew. 'Long passages they dig through the ground till they get underneath the city wall, or else one of the gates. Then the Swedes put a great box full of gunpowder in the end of the passage, and set light to it, and then--bang! they blow everything all up into the air together.'

'Oh, do come away directly,' said Dollie in a fright, 'or else we shall all be blown up.'

'Have you forgotten what your father told us?' asked the boy.

'Oh, no indeed!' said Dollie; 'but whatever shall we do? Oh, if father or mother would only come!'

Conrad ventured to one of the loop-holes to look out; it was but little, however, that he could discern in the thick darkness outside. Here and there he saw the gleam of a light or the flash of a weapon; at times some dark mass seemed to move before his eyes, or his ears were saluted by a mysterious sound, then all was silent again. Suddenly, on

the side that lay open towards the town, two men entered the covered gallery, which was just at that moment untenanted by soldiers.

'As I tell you, Schönleben,' said a deep bass voice, 'the lad is dearer to me than almost any other in the City Guard. Cool, steady, and brave, experienced too as an old soldier, I have chosen him for these reasons to report to me from time to time how things go at the Castle and the Kreuz Gate. But I thank you all the same for your information, though what the prisoners say, especially about an old comrade, is not always to be trusted. Still, I will have the lad closely watched, and if there's the least sign of anything amiss, put him where he can do no further mischief.'

The commandant, for it was he, followed by the Burgomaster, stepped to the loop-hole from which Conrad had hastily withdrawn.

'This is our weak point,' continued Schweinitz--'the point at which the enemy would like to strike; but they shall find it a hard nut to crack yet, though gate and tower are little better than ruins. Ah! my friend, give me the devotion and bravery of the Freibergers before any number of bastions, if I am to hold the foe at bay. As things stand, our hopes of a speedy raising of the siege grow side by side with the progress of the Swedes. I would willingly have more certain news. I say, Schönleben, couldn't you find me some trustworthy messenger that I could send to the imperial marshal?'

The entrance of a man into the gallery cut short the answer.

'Well, Hillner, what is it?' asked Schweinitz.

'Your excellency,' replied the Defensioner, saluting, 'it is thought advisable, in order to strike with greater effect at the enemy's works before the Peter Gate, to open new loop-holes in the lower part of the Wetter Tower, those in the upper storey having been rendered useless by the enemy's fire.'

'Good!' said Schweinitz; and then, turning away from the messenger, he spoke aside with the Burgomaster.

Meantime Conrad sidled up to his former fellow-workman. 'Do stop with us now you have come,' he said, catching hold of the Defensioner's coat. 'The Swedes are digging another mine; just listen at them hammering. I guess we and this old wooden box shall all go flying up into the air together pretty soon.'

As Hillner laid his ear to the ground to listen, Roller entered with several pieces of wood under his arm.

'Now you two can go,' he said to Dollie and Conrad; 'it's quieter now. And here are a few sticks I've brought in out of the moat; take them home; when I come I'll bring some more.'

'Roller,' called the Burgomaster, 'you are exactly the man I wanted. Come to me as soon as you go off duty, we have something to say to you.'

'Very good, respected Herr Burgomaster,' replied Roller, and then accompanied his little daughter out of the gallery to see her safely

started on her homeward way. 'Why, where is Conrad Schmidt loitering?' he asked in surprise.

The boy was standing by his friend the Defensioner, who now sprang up from the ground and hastened to his commanding officer. 'Your excellency!' he cried, 'down in that corner the Swedes can be distinctly heard tunnelling through the earth. They are almost under the gallery now.'

'Quick, then, to countermine them!' said Schweinitz, and immediately left the gallery to give the necessary orders. Then began a severe subterranean battle. Both sides made desperate exertions in the attempt to get the upper hand, and for very plain reasons the Freibergers did their utmost to steal a march on the enemy. Although the ground was frozen so hard that it had first to be thawed by the use of fire, two hours had not passed away before the untiring energy of the miners had driven a heading of tolerable length, the foremost man in which stood Roller.

'We too may yet find that this is our last day,' said Roller composedly to the man working behind him. 'Every man's day is coming, whether he likes it or not. And besides, if the Swedes can give up their lives for mere money, cannot we do as much for fatherland, and wife and child? Therefore to work with a will! So long as we can hear the Swedes tunnelling, there is no need to light the match.'

'Now the sounds have ceased,' he muttered to himself after a short interval. 'It will soon be all over with us.' And he picked and shovelled away with redoubled energy, lest his comrades should abate their efforts on noticing that the Swedes had ceased work.

'The earth gets loose and spongy,' he said a little later. 'We must be approaching the Swedish mine. Now then for water, and hot water first of all, so as to get through the earth the quicker!'

Some of the miners went above ground and passed a long trough through the heading. This they sloped and kept constantly filled with water, which rushed gurgling down at the lower end, for the purpose of drowning the Swedish mine. Among those busy bringing the water in firemen's buckets and other utensils, was the miller of Erbisdorf, who had harnessed a team of his donkeys into a large sledge, loaded with steaming hot water.

'Slow and steady wins the race,' was his greeting to Roller, as he pointed to his long-eared friends. 'Our wives are brewing away yonder as though they had their coppers full of good wort instead of water out of the Münzbach. Well, the Swedish tipplers are quite welcome to have it all in their mine.'

As Roller and the miller were just in the act of lifting the heavy cask from the sledge to the trough, a dull report was heard under the earth. The ground quivered, then opened, and a red stream of fire gushed forth, accompanied by clouds of smoke and stones. The Swedes had observed the presence of an unusual number of people at this point, and had exploded an already prepared mine. There was one loud, involuntary cry from those injured by the explosion, then all was still.

The dead might try to make their way out of the grave itself with as good hope of success as there was for the imprisoned Freibergers to force a passage through the mass of débris that covered them; indeed, they could never have done it had not many stout arms and willing hearts aided in their desperate toil.

'Thirteen men and four beasts of burden!' sorrowfully exclaimed Roller, who had himself escaped destruction as though by a miracle. 'And my brave old comrade, the miller of Erbisdorf, gone at last. We two were carrying the very same cask of water, yet here am I, while he is gone. Ah, it is indeed true, "The one shall be taken and the other left."'

'I say, neighbour Roller!' cried a muffled voice that seemed to come from the depths of the earth, 'help me on to my legs again, for mercy's sake. Here are clods, and stones, and bits of wood jamming me in on all sides; and here's a donkey's head, and I declare he's trying to prick his ears!'

With Roller's help the worthy miller was soon landed once more on terra firma. He found himself severely shaken and bruised, but not otherwise injured, and begged his comrade to see him safe home. Although his body was in pain, his spirit was by no means cast down. When he learned that besides killing three men and severely wounding five others, the exploded mine had cost the lives of two of his donkeys, he remarked: 'Ah, ha! Then they too have died for their fatherland, and will sleep in the temple of fame. I can tell you one thing, though; if the flour does choke us millers up a bit, I'd ten times rather have to do with that than with your Freiberg earth. There's something so big and massive about everything belonging to war, you very soon get enough of it. What will my Anna Maria say when she sees her husband brought home like a flattened pancake?'

As soon as Roller had seen his friend safely housed, and had made himself presentable, he hastened back to the Peter Gate, which seemed, as he approached it, to be all in flames. The wood and twigs the Swedes had piled against the defensive works before the bastion, had been set on fire. The rising flames cast a dreadful glare around, destroyed several of the works in question, and set fire to parts of the tower above the gate, which, falling into the covered gallery in rear of the bastion, threatened to set that too in a blaze. The besieged were able to avert this last calamity by the steady use of water, though the enemy pressed them hard all the time with artillery-fire and hand-grenades.

'The Swedes have set all the elements to work against us,' said Roller to himself. 'They have cut off our water supply, made war on us under the earth, tried to blow us up into the air, and now they turn against us the might of fire. And side by side with these great powers of nature stalks the pale phantom of death.'

CHAPTER IX.

DIVERSE HUMAN HEARTS.

'The miner Roller waits without, respected Herr Burgomaster!' announced Jüchziger, the town servant.

'Bid him come in,' said Schönleben. 'Yes, colonel,' he continued, turning to Schweinitz, who was with him; 'I assure you, if confidence may be put in any human being, you may trust this man. He is brave, faithful, and yet shrewd. He will come back as surely as a dove returns to its young. You may send him without hesitation.'

'Would you like to earn three ducats, my good fellow?' Schweinitz asked Roller as the latter entered the room.

'How, your excellency?' inquired the miner.

'You are to take despatches from us to Marshal Piccolomini in Bohemia, lay our condition before him in full, and get him to hasten to our assistance. The service is not without some danger, for you will have to make your way twice through the enemy's lines, and die rather than betray your secret.'

'So I should suppose,' replied Roller dryly.

'Well, what do you say? are you willing to do it, or not?' inquired Schönleben and Schweinitz together.

'This is no question of a reward,' said Roller. 'You command, and I obey.'

'You are a fine fellow,' said Schönleben heartily; 'and I will myself give you a couple of ducats extra if you do your business satisfactorily.'

'I crave your pardon, respected Herr Burgomaster!' replied Roller, 'I do not sell my life for silver or gold, for if so I should take sides with friend or foe, according to which would give me the highest pay. But it seems to me that we all make up, as it were, one body in what we have to do, to defend town, wife and child, from the enemy. Very well, then; you are the head, and I am one of the least members, that has to do just what the head bids it. That is what I believe, and I try to fight bravely and do my duty because I believe it.'

Schweinitz shook the brave miner heartily by the hand, saying: 'With men like you I can hold the mountain-city for a long time indeed, but we must not neglect means that may help rid us of the enemy. Come with me, my good fellow, while I make out your papers.'

The same day several children, with Roller's Dollie among them, were crouching round the air-holes of the cellar under the town hall. 'Oh, we do so want to see the Swedish prisoners!' said the child to Conrad, who happened to be passing on the way to his mother's house. 'One of them has such a dreadful great beard,' Dollie continued; 'I am sure he must be General Wrangel's bagpiper. Only think, if he had his pipes here, he could play to us! Just peep in there; sometimes one of them comes to the window and looks up at us.'

Conrad complied with the child's wish, kneeling down beside her. Suddenly a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder, and a voice he always

dreaded to hear said, this time, however, in very friendly tones:
'Hallo, Conrad, and what may you be doing here?'

It was into the face of his stepfather that the startled boy stared as he rose hastily to his feet.

'Come along, my son,' said Jüchziger very blandly. 'I have something to tell you.' So saying, he drew the boy aside into the passageway of the town hall. 'Listen to me,' he went on good-humouredly; 'I want you to do something for your mother.'

'For my mother!' said Conrad cheerfully. 'Oh yes; I shall be so glad to do it!'

'And for you and me at the same time,' said Jüchziger. 'I just want you to go out to our house beyond the Peter Gate.'

'But it's pulled down,' objected Conrad.

'Yes, of course, I know that; but the cellar is there still, and in one corner of that cellar your mother buried a little box with all sorts of precious things in it. I want you to go and dig it up, and bring it to me.'

'But the Swedes are all round out there. They will be sure to kill me, and take the box; they are most tremendous thieves.'

'You needn't trouble yourself about that. I take care of the Swedish prisoners, and one of them has given me a safe-conduct' (he pronounced this word very carefully),--'a safe-conduct that I shall give to you. You are only to get it out if you meet a Swede, and then they'll not only not hurt a hair of your head, but be very kind indeed to you. But you must be sure and not let another soul see the safe-conduct, or else it will all be of no use.'

'Why did mother never say anything about the box?' asked Conrad.

'H'm!' said Jüchziger; 'she--well--she--in fact, she didn't quite trust me, I'm sorry to say, and wanted to keep all the things in it for you. But now she sees how wrong that was, and she has confessed all about it to me. I don't want the box for myself; all I want is to see it out of danger.'

'But how can I get out?' asked Conrad again. 'Nobody may leave the town.'

'In about an hour's time there is to be a sortie from the Donat Gate, and you can manage to creep out with the men. Roller the miner is going out with them as well; he and Wahle are going all the way to General Piccolomini in Bohemia, but on no account show the safe-conduct to him.'

'I should like just to run home to mother,' said Conrad, 'to tell her about the box, and say good-bye to her.'

'Now would you really be so unkind to a poor, frightened, blind woman as that?' said his stepfather. 'Why, there's Roller; he has not even

told his wife, though he is going all the way to Bohemia, and you want to make your mother unhappy because you're going a few yards outside the city wall.'

'It is quite true, stepfather,' said Conrad with a sigh. 'So give me my safe-conduct, and tell me how I am to get into the town again.'

'You can easily do that. You will only have to creep up the bed of the Münzbach. No one will take any notice of a slight youth like you.'

Conrad then received from his stepfather a folded and sealed paper, on which was written in large letters the word 'Safe-Conduct.'

Underneath were several more words, but as they were all in Swedish the boy could make nothing out of them. When he had taken leave of Jüchziger, the latter muttered to himself: 'Either the Swedes will put an end to him, or else he will do my errand and never be a bit the wiser himself. It will be a good day's work for me whichever way it goes.'

According to his stepfather's orders, Conrad hid the safe-conduct in his breast. He did not understand exactly what the thing was, but this mystery only made him think all the more highly of it, and filled his mind with a sort of confidence that his dangerous errand rendered highly useful. When he found himself really outside the gate, and heard the tumult of battle all around him, his heart beat thick and fast. The men who made the sortie threw themselves at once on the enemy's advanced works, shot or cut down such Swedes as were in them, set fire to the wooden barricades and some detached houses that the Swedes had used against the town, and destroyed everything belonging to the enemy on which they could lay their hands. As soon as the foe showed signs of bringing up men in force, the Freibergers fell back fighting, and carried off their booty into the town.

Then Conrad found himself in a desperate fix. From the ramparts of the town a steady fire was being poured on the advancing Swedes, who returned it with interest, so that the lad, finding himself between two fires, did not know which way to turn, and at last, in his bewilderment, started to run straight across country. Suddenly, without any warning, he went head over heels into a cutting about six feet deep that crossed his line of march, and proved to be neither more nor less than one of the trenches by which the Swedish sharp-shooters got so close up to the town.

As soon as Conrad had somewhat recovered from his sudden plunge, he began to look about him with much astonishment. The pathway in which he stood was so narrow he could easily touch both its sides at once by simply stretching out his arms. As he started to hurry along it, he stumbled on the dead bodies of several soldiers, some of which looked so dreadful that he turned about and ran as hard as he could go in the opposite direction. As he rounded a sharp corner, he ran into an enemy, who seemed as much surprised as himself at the unexpected meeting, and uttered a sudden cry of alarm. This enemy, however, was armed, and heaved up his 'morning-star'[1] for a tremendous blow.

Conrad, in his terror, sprang back several steps, and drawing his paper from his breast, called out: 'Stop! I've got a safe-conduct.'

At these words the man let his weapon sink, and stood staring at the boy, who was again cautiously approaching him holding out the paper.

'Why, bless me!' said the man at last, 'isn't this Conrad Schmidt from the Erbis Street?'

'What! is it you, Master Prieme?' said Conrad joyfully.

'What are--at least, how came you here?' asked Prieme.

'I came out with the sortie,' said Conrad.

'So did I,' grumbled Prieme. 'In the heat of battle I struck too hard at a Swede, just on the edge of this abominable ditch, and then my foot slipped and down I came into it myself, and the detestable thing's so deep there is no getting out again. Perhaps, with your help, I can manage to climb out.'

The attempt was made and proved a failure, while the continuous firing above their heads hinted that it would be much safer to keep out of the upper world for a time.

'So it seems I only came out of the town to tumble into this ditch,' grumbled Prieme again. 'If the Swedes put in an appearance, things will pretty soon begin to look ugly for me.'

'Just you keep close to me,' said Conrad patronizingly. 'I've got a safe-conduct.'

'Where is it?' asked Prieme, looking at him in astonishment. 'I can't see one.'

'Here it is all right,' said Conrad producing it. 'Can you read?'

'What stupid rubbish!' muttered Prieme. 'Now, how can a scrap of paper like that be a safe-conduct? Why, a safe-conduct is a sort of thing that even the most savage enemy is forced to respect. Why, who told you such a pack of nonsense as that?'

Either because his tumble had muddled his brains, or for some other reason best known to himself, Conrad straightway cast all his stepfather's cautions to the winds, and told neighbour Prieme the whole story of the safe-conduct and why he was there.

'This seems to me rather serious,' said the worthy citizen, speaking half to himself. 'To be sure your stepfather is, in a manner of speaking, a bit of a magistrate; but then we all know how people we should never have expected--why, there was the Burgomaster of Bautzen was loaded into a cannon and fired off for trying to betray his native city to the enemy. At all events, Jüchziger can have no right to correspond with the Swedes without the commandant's knowledge. So give me that thing over here directly.'

Conrad protested against the abrupt demand, and, suddenly calling to mind his stepfather's forgotten orders, made a frantic attempt to hide the safe-conduct in his breast again. Master Prieme's strong arm would

soon have gained the day, however, and deprived the boy of his paper, had not the arrival of a troop of the enemy put a sudden [Transcriber's note: sudden?] stop to their altercation.

Master Prieme, taken with a weapon in his hand, was made a prisoner of war; and Conrad Schmidt, loudly calling attention to his safe-conduct, was at once marched off to the enemy's headquarters.

Here he had a first-rate opportunity to make nearer acquaintance with the dreaded Swedes. He was led about from one point to another. He saw the batteries, mortars, and siege-guns that were destroying his native town; he saw whole regiments of Swedes; but to his immense consolation he did not see any of those men who tortured people and slaughtered little children. In front of Marshal Torstenson's quarters a huge cask of wine was being unloaded, a task in which several peasants were forced to render unwilling aid. When their work was done, however, they got off with nothing worse than a few cuffs. He saw, indeed, plenty of great beards and many dark-looking faces of very scowling aspect, for the Swedes were encamped before Freiberg in no rose-garden; but after all he could not make out any very great difference between the Swedish and Saxon fighting-men.

'I can see one thing very plainly,' said Conrad to himself, 'soldiers are all as much alike as one egg is like another. One wears a grey coat, another a red one, and another a green one, and that's about all the difference between them.'

He was suddenly interrupted in the midst of his reflections by the approach of a trooper, who came towards him with some appearance of curiosity, and with a single glance of his piercing eyes threw the boy's whole soul into a state of panic fear.

'God be with me!' murmured Conrad. 'That's the fierce Swede with the red beard again. I am sure he is taking out a pistol now to make sure of getting a good aim at me this time!'

Happily, his fears were not of long duration, for a sudden call in good German of, 'Hillner, the major wants you,' relieved him of the Swede's presence. 'Hillner!' whispered Conrad to himself. 'I wonder whether everybody with black hair and a red beard is called Hillner.'

The lad was now summoned to appear before Field-Marshal Torstenson. This was worse than his worst expectations; for was not this man the cause of all the trouble, the scourge that with its thousand lashes was tormenting the Saxon land? Conrad stepped trembling into the hall of the Bergwald Hospital, where he found a group of superior officers gathered round their general, who sat by a window with Conrad's safe-conduct in his hand. This, then, was the man whose hand played with the lives and property of so many thousand people. From just inside the door where he had to stand, Conrad stared with beating heart at the dreadful man who had conquered great armies, plundered and wasted whole countries, taken strongholds by storm, and was now conquered himself. For a shaft was quivering in his flesh that he could by no means draw out; his foot was, so to speak, stung by a glowing needle that could never be cooled, and that no medicine could heal. In the olden times men were laid on the torture-bench that they might be forced to confess their evil deeds; and God Himself sometimes

uses pain to bring a sinner to repentance, when he has turned a deaf ear to all the voices of conscience and religion.

Torstenson, a man scarcely forty years of age, was seated in an arm-chair. He had no remedies to oppose to the grinding foe in his foot but patience and a bandage of coarse hemp. But such is mankind that this great general, who had at his disposal the lives of thousands of his fellow-creatures, could not control his own desires; for near him stood a table on which among other things was a bottle of wine and a large goblet partly filled, to which he betook himself from time to time. The contents of the 'safe-conduct' did not seem to afford him much consolation, for he threw it angrily on the table.

'That is my last weapon,' he said to one of the officers. 'The town must and shall be mine, this week, this very day, and without the help of a scoundrel, too!'

'Your excellency!' said the attendant physician warningly, as he saw the general's gaze turn again towards the goblet.

'Ah, doctor,' said the marshal peevishly; 'take my word for it, it was not the wine, but those six months in the damp dungeon at Ingolstadt that gave me the gout. Bring that youth forward.'

Conrad trembled as he was led before the general, though that officer looked, to his boyish eyes, more like a woman than a stalwart fighting-man. His tall body was enveloped in a great, shaggy fur coat right down to the feet, and a white nightcap covered his head. Nothing but the moustache on the pale face indicated the warlike calling of the man who now addressed Conrad.

[Illustration: Nothing but the mustache on the pale face indicated the warlike calling of the man who now addressed Conrad.]

'How many people have come to live in your town on account of the siege?'

'Oh, they might be somewhere in the sixties,' replied Conrad, carefully conformable to truth.

'Are you starving in Freiberg?'

'My mother and her cat sometimes, nobody else. And then that is all my stepfather's fault, because he will keep the bread cupboard locked up.'

'Do the citizens and soldiers hold together still? Are they not getting down-hearted?'

'Oh, well, at first there were a few squabbles. The Herr Burgomaster had a tiff with the Herr Commandant, but now they are just like brothers; all their quarrels are over, and they are in first-rate spirits.'

'Can you tell me how many men there are left in Freiberg capable of bearing arms?'

'Why, gracious sir,' said Conrad, 'it isn't only the men! Everybody

that's got arms and legs does a bit of fighting. And there are nearly sixty thousand of us. Why, only yesterday evening the miller's donkeys helped to spoil your mine.'

The smile which at this sally passed across Torstenson's pale and suffering face gave Conrad a sudden courage; he knelt before the general, and began in a pleading tone, that grew bolder as he warmed with his subject: 'Gracious Field-Marshal, I pray of you, for Christ's sake, to leave off firing at our dear old town. Why should we be the people you are so angry with, and why did you choose us out? The whole wide world lies open before you, and I am sure there are many strong cities in Germany you could easily take if you would just attack them. Do you expect to seize many lumps or bars of silver in Freiberg? They are all gone long ago in this never-ending war, and there's nothing left but rubbish and stones. And I can tell you another thing, noble sir, and that is that you will never conquer the town--no, not if you and all your soldiers were to stand on your heads!'

'Silence, boy!' cried an officer angrily.

'Let the lad chatter,' said Torstenson. 'His talk helps to pass away the time. And pray,' he continued, turning to Conrad, 'who is to blame for your trouble but yourselves? Have I not many times offered the town pardon on favourable terms?'

'Yes,' returned Conrad, hesitating; 'but--with permission--people know what your excellency's pardon is like. Inside the town there, they say they would rather die than accept your excellency's pardon.'

Perhaps it was a fresh twinge of the gout that distorted Torstenson's face. He made a hasty sign to the boy to withdraw, which he was nothing loth to do, although assisted on his way by a cuff or two from the indignant attendants.

The bad temper of great men seldom passes away without producing some effect on those who surround them. The tortures Torstenson suffered found an outlet in giving orders for a general assault on the works of the city, especially on the Peter Gate. The firing of the double and single arquebuses began again, the mortars joined in with their short, sharp roar, and soon the earth shook and the air vibrated with the frightful din.

Conrad had taken refuge in a corner of the hospital wall. When, towards evening, there came a lull in the firing, he could hear, from the breach by the Peter Gate, the jubilant tones of a hymn that touched him to the heart. 'Jesus, my Redeemer, lives,' sounded through the wintry air, chanted by the deep voices of earnest men, and Conrad, in his corner, joined in softly. And the Swedes, too, awed by the holy sounds, stood like statues, facing the singers; the sword rested in its sheath, the bullet in the arquebuse, and the shell in the mortar. In years that were gone, the Swedes themselves used to sing like that as they marched to battle, and now they stood and joined in spirit in the service that Dr. Bartholomew Sperling was holding with the defenders of the threatened breach. But when the prayer was ended, the furies of war raised their blood-red banners again, in mournful contrast to the scene that had just taken place, and the dreadful game that is played with human lives for the stakes began once more.

The whole night through did the firing continue. Early on February 4, 1643, at about six in the morning, the Swedes exploded two mines, one of which laid open the barbican, while the other hurled pieces of woodwork far over the roofs of the houses, shattering the gallery within the barbican, and destroying those who were defending it. In the confusion that arose, the Swedes, a reserve of whom had been held in readiness, immediately seized the barbican, mounted from it to the gate-tower, which was now commanded by their artillery, and placed sharpshooters in it, who at once opened a galling fire with double arquebuses, hand-grenades, and stones on the occupants of the nearest posts held by the defenders. By way of covering themselves from this fire, the besieged at once constructed a new battery on the upper cistern in the Peter Street. From this they were soon able to open fire upon the new Swedish breastwork on the tower at the Peter Gate, the result being the enemy's speedy and enforced retirement into one of the lower and less exposed rooms of the gate-tower. Yet the Swedes had this time undoubtedly gained an important advantage, and the position of the city was becoming every hour more critical. But, in spite of all, neither courage nor resolution had as yet begun to fail.

[1] See note on page 87.

CHAPTER X.

WAR OFTEN OPPOSES THE TEACHINGS OF CHRISTIANITY.

Conrad was detained for three days in the Swedish camp. It was on an overcast, rainy evening that he at length received permission to return. He hastened to reach the Münzbach, which flows into the town in two streams between the Erbis and Donat Gates. In the year 1297, an enemy had made treacherous use of this river to enter and plunder the town; and the points of its entrance and exit had from that time been guarded against surprise by strong towers, beneath the arched foundations of which the river now flowed. It was towards the tower of exit that Conrad made the best of his way.

The sentries either did not see the boy approaching through the gloom, or did not consider him dangerous, for he succeeded in creeping unhindered beneath the vaulted archway that spanned the river. All soon grew quite dark around him as he waded on, and he found himself obliged to make his hands do the work of eyes. He had not proceeded far in this fashion, when he suddenly found further progress barred by a strong iron grating reaching down into the bed of the river and up to the stonework above his head. How was he to pass this unexpected obstacle? He cautiously rapped and felt the bars one by one, until, to his great delight, he found that the last bar could be quite easily pushed aside, thus leaving an opening through which the slender lad found but little difficulty in forcing his body. As he came to each of the two similar gratings that barred his way farther up the tunnel, he found the same course practicable. He continued to follow the subterranean bed of the stream for some distance farther, until it

emerged into the open air again in a tanner's yard, and Conrad could leave the wet path he had followed so long. He did not let the grass grow under his feet, and very soon was listening cautiously at his mother's door. Hearing no sound, he stepped on tiptoe into the room. No one was to be seen, though a lamp was burning on the table. He crept across to the door of the bedroom, and thought he heard sounds of breathing. As he opened the door, a feeble ray of light streamed through the crevice, and he saw his mother lying in bed, with the faithful cat sitting beside her as her only companion. Puss, recognising the boy, began to purr and wave her tail, but the blind woman seemed to be stupefied by the burning heat of fever.

'Mother! mother!' cried Conrad, at first softly, then louder; at last he ventured to pull the sleeve of her night-dress.

The blind woman sat up suddenly. 'What is it?' she cried. 'Who is calling me?'

'It is I, mother,' said Conrad, with chattering teeth; for by this time the cold seemed to have spread from his wet feet all over his body.

'And have you come for me at last, my darling child?' said his mother, in tones of rapture. 'How often have I prayed that God would send you to take me home to the mansions of the blest! I come, my son; I come!'

'Why, how funny you talk, mother!' said Conrad. 'I only wanted to ask you for a pair of clean stockings, because mine have got so wet wading along the Münzbach. I have only just come in from the Swedish camp, and I've brought you the box you buried in our old cellar.'

'Swedish camp!--box!--cellar!' repeated the bewildered woman, as though she were still in a dream. 'Have you not been dead these three days? And is not this your spirit, that a poor blind woman cannot even see?'

'Why, mother, whatever are you thinking about?' cried Conrad, laughing in spite of his cold feet. 'Here, catch hold of me, feel me; I'm flesh and blood. Did not father tell you he had sent me off to the Swedes to get this box? They didn't do me one bit of harm; they didn't even starve me. But they would not let me go and dig in our cellar; they said that was not work for stupid boys. So they did all the digging, and brought me the box all right; and, considering what a lot of thieves they are, I think that was almost a miracle. I say, mother, whatever did you put in the box? It's all nailed up so tight I couldn't open it.'

He placed a case about fifteen inches long, by six inches broad and high, in his mother's hands. The blind woman felt it all over in wonder.

'I don't know anything about any box,' she said. 'And I'm sure I never had anything to bury.'

'Perhaps Master Prieme was right after all, then,' said Conrad.

'Who is this talking in here?' cried Jüchziger, coming suddenly into the room. 'Ha! is it you, you young good-for-nothing? Where have you sprung from? Quick now, confess, or I'll warm you soundly.'

'Well, I'm sure I'm cold enough, father,' said Conrad, with a feeble attempt at a joke; 'and it was on your business, too, that I got so cold. Is that all the thanks I am to have for bringing you the box all safe and sound?'

'What! is that true? You're a very fine fellow. Give it me here, quick!' cried Jüchziger in a tone full of joy.

'But,' said his wife, 'I never buried a box with treasure in it. What can we have to do with this?'

'Oh, I had a dream the other night,' answered Jüchziger, 'as life-like a dream as if I had really been standing in the cellar of our old house. And see here, my dream has come true, and no mistake about it. A little mountain-troll dressed, in grey stood before me in my dream, and said, "Let your son, Conrad Schmidt, dig here in this corner of the cellar. He is a Sunday's bairn and will have good luck."'

'But I didn't dig for it,' said Conrad. 'The Swedes did it for me.'

'It all comes to the same thing,' said Jüchziger, 'so long as we have the box. Do you know, my son, what there is inside it?'

'How should I? See how it's all nailed and screwed up!'

'Have you brought back the safe-conduct?'

'Oh yes; I forgot that. One of the Swedish officers tied the paper over my heart and under my left arm. I was not to let a soul see it, he said, except the one from whom I first had it, and that was you, you know, father. But I'm sure it's a different letter, and it's uncommonly heavy.'

'Give it me here this instant,' said Jüchziger, scarcely trying to conceal his joy. 'It will be nothing but right if the Swedes have sent their poor prisoners a ducat or two that they may get me to buy them a few things. But mind you, don't say a word about it to a living soul; for if you do, the money will all be taken from them, and I shall be punished for my kindness into the bargain.'

Conrad handed the paper over to his step-father, who put it straight into his pocket without stopping to examine it. 'You need not go back to your mistress now,' he said, when the packet was safely stowed away. 'Much better stay here and attend to your sick mother. The good woman is in sore need of all the care and help you can give her.'

Conrad was not too bewildered by all his adventures to suspect some hidden meaning in his step-father's very sudden kindness. As he thought about the story of the box and the safe-conduct, it seemed to him to grow more and more suspicious, and he longed for some friend with whom he could talk the whole thing over.

He could not relieve his mind to his sick mother, that was clear, for she was far more helpless than himself. Master Prieme was a prisoner of war; Roller was gone. Who was there left that he could trust, but his comrade the Defensioner? Yet how could he get at Hillner, with his

step-father watching him as a cat watches a mouse, scarcely permitting him even to cross the threshold of the house.

Meantime, the enemy had hauled a cannon up into the tower over the Peter Gate, which was soon scattering death among the defenders. The besieged also suffered severe loss from the fire of two heavy guns planted close beside the town moat, near the Peter Gate, and covering the next tower, that which guarded the Kreuz Gate. The Freibergers, on their part, were by no means backward in doing their utmost to harass the Swedes. Behind each defensive work as it was shot down, a new one arose. Trenches, palisadoes, covered ways, counter-mines, and batteries were all used as means of defence; the houses adjoining threatened spots were turned into strongholds, and pierced for sharp-shooters, who shot every Swede that showed himself within range. The commandant was at all points where fighting was going on, ordering and encouraging his men both by word and example.

On the second morning after the night of Conrad's return, Schweinitz approached the Defensioner Hillner where he stood at a loop-hole in the tower at the Kreuz Gate. Hillner respectfully made way for his superior officer, who wished to look out.

'Just see that impudent rascal!' cried the commandant, after a few moments' survey. 'He is riding his horse right up to the city moat in sheer bravado. Quick, Defensioner, and show the fellow that there are men in here. Put a bullet through his head.'

Alert and willing, Hillner at once placed the muzzle of his piece in the loop-hole. Just as he had covered the Swede, however, he lowered his weapon and turned pale.

'What's the matter?' cried Schweinitz. 'Why do you tremble? Are you hurt? Here, then, give me your weapon. I will chastise the insolent scoundrel myself.' As he spoke, Schweinitz grasped at the arquebuse, on which Hillner's hand closed like a vice.

'So please your excellency and my gracious commandant,' said the Defensioner in a tone of entreaty, 'do whatever you please with my life, but I cannot shoot the man out yonder; neither can I give you my weapon for you to do it.'

'What!' shouted Schweinitz. 'I, your general, command it. That weapon, instantly, or--you know the penalty that attaches to insubordination. Loose it, I tell you!'

'I know well,' replied the young man, 'what penalty belongs to insubordination; but ought I not to obey God rather than man?'

'No, a thousand times!' cried Schweinitz, his face aflame with rage. 'In war, God's command counts for nothing, and the general's for everything. What will happen next, if a soldier is to stand and argue instead of obeying the orders of his superior officer? The soldier is a mere machine at the absolute will and disposal of his officer, and must do whatever that officer commands--must kill father, son, or brother whenever he receives orders to do so. This is what war demands, and the morality of your catechisms has no place in it. War puts its trust in the strong arm, the sword, and the fire-lock alone.'

Speak, fellow! why would you not shoot that Swede?'

'Many of the enemy have already met their death by my hand during the past few weeks,' replied Hillner quietly; 'and only against one have I refused to raise my weapon, for that one was--my father;--an unnatural father, it is true, who deceived my poor mother, and shamefully deserted her, and made me fight against my fatherland,--but yet, in spite of all, my father. His blood flows in my veins; but for him I should never have existed. So I say again, let me die rather than kill him.'

'We can easily manage that,' said Schweinitz angrily. 'All such talk as this in war-time is so much rubbish. Bah! While I stand here debating with a traitor, the villain yonder has prudently taken himself out of range.' Defensioner, you will give me your weapons, both firelock and sabre. You are my prisoner. Ha! Schönleben doubtless had sound reasons for warning me against you.'

His step-father's absence and his mother's quiet slumber having given Conrad the opportunity he wanted, he was on the way to his mistress' house to find his friend Hillner, when he saw the Defensioner coming along the street, closely surrounded by the guard, and followed by a crowd of curious people. The boy stared in astonishment at hearing the ugly word 'traitor' applied to his old comrade, and did not fully recover himself until he caught sight of his step-father marching with a joyful face close beside the prisoner, on the way to lock him up in one of the strongest cells at the town hall.

When the news of Hillner's arrest reached Mistress Blüthgen's house, where it produced great excitement, the miller, who had not yet fully recovered, remarked dryly to the women:

'Seems to me as though our Defensioner must have acted rather like one of my donkeys. He could have obeyed the commandant's order, aimed his weapon, and fired over the Swede's head. He had it all in his own hands.'

'No,' said his wife, showing, what was very unlike her, the deepest emotion, 'Hillner was right not to lift his hand against his father, even in pretence. What marksman in the whole wide world can say where his bullet shall go, when it is once out of his gun and flying towards a mark that some mischievous sprite may shift at any moment. And to kill his father! Fie! I would rather see Hillner hanged, an innocent man, than do such a deed.'

These words of the miller's brave wife made deep and lasting impression on Conrad, who stood by and heard them. Though Jüchziger was a cruel stepfather, a hard struggle had been going on in the boy's mind as to whether it was his duty to bring a terrible suspicion on that father by telling all he knew. He now determined to let his secret remain locked up in his own heart.

HISTORICAL.

While the scene narrated in our last chapter was being enacted, another and more joyous one was taking place at the Donat Gate. Three men, two of them miners, suddenly appeared running towards the gate, and making eager signs to the sentries in the barbican with the view of obtaining speedy admission. This being at once granted, the little party turned out to consist of the two miners, Roller and Wahle, sent some days before on a special mission, together with Master Prieme, who had fortunately succeeded in making his escape. Roller and his comrade brought letters and advices from Marshal Piccolomini; these, addressed to the commandant and the town authorities, and written at Brix on February 5th, promised that within six, or at longest eight days, the imperial army should be seen on the mountain beyond the city, advancing to free Freiberg, by the blessing of God, from the presence of the foe. The marshal further announced that as he approached he would set fire to a house or two in the village of Leichtenberg on the Mulda, so that by midnight his advance should be known in the city; and that immediately on reaching the mountain, where the enemy would doubtless discover his presence, he would fire six guns morning and evening, and three more as he actually began his march down towards the city. Thus the garrison would have timely notice of the arrival of help.

Piccolomini's despatch to Schönleben ran as follows:--

'To our trusty, best, and right well-beloved Burgomaster, Herr Jonas Schönleben,--Be it known that I have kept the messengers by me, that their bodily eyes might see my army set forward on its march, and that thus they might take assured news thereof into the good city of Freiberg. And inasmuch as I shall in few days arrive before Freiberg with such army (whereof the enemy neither have knowledge nor can conceive aught aright), and so, with the help of Almighty God, shall relieve the city, I hereby beseech the said noble Burgomaster to do his utmost, with aid of all and sundry those brave and honourable burghers by whom he is at this present sustained, to maintain and defend the said post until my arrival; and to that end to encourage and hearten all men, as hitherto hath been so notably done by him, that they may not make surcease for so few days of that stedfast toil and bravery which they have heretofore shown. May God have all in his keeping!'

The receipt of these cheering messages revived the spirits of the besieged--a service the more necessary because the enemy, getting word that a hostile army was on the march, made strenuous efforts to gain possession of the town. The fortifications, many of which were now little more than heaps of rubbish, were still obstinately defended by the unconquerable bravery of the besieged. Pieces of both the outer and inner walls, twenty and thirty ells in length, had been destroyed by mines and artillery-fire, and their downfall had in many places choked up the moat. Some of the barbicans before the gates were in the enemy's possession, and even the Peter Gate itself. The towers that guarded the town resembled ancient ruins; and the defensive works were now chiefly represented by wooden galleries, palisadoes, piles of gabions, and the walls of half-destroyed houses, behind which, however, the besieged found shelter, from which they still kept up a vigorous fire. The underground war, too, was still hotly maintained; and when, as often happened, the hostile sappers heard the sounds of each other's voices, emulation still excited them to struggle as if for life and

death.

On February 14th the Swedes attempted to storm two of the defenders' positions, and advanced to the assault with loud shouts and in considerable force. A few bold soldiers, indeed, succeeded in making good their entrance into one of the towers; but the besieged, in expectation of this attack, had filled the inside of the tower with wood and other combustibles. Fire was set to these materials, and to the gallery adjoining the tower, and thus the enemy was compelled to withdraw. Meantime, behind the burning ruin, the citizens constructed a new defensive work, and both here and in the breach offered so brave a resistance, that the foe, after repeated attempts, was once more baffled and compelled to fall back.

In the evening of the same day Roller appeared at home with his head bound up.

'It is nothing!' he assured his alarmed family. 'A Swedish bullet glanced aside and grazed my temple; that is all. But you, my dear people--ah! you may lift up your heads to look whether your day of deliverance is coming; you may gaze towards the Liechtenberg, and try to make out the beacon fire our deliverers were to kindle. Not six or even eight, but nine whole days have gone by, and no helpers have made their appearance! "Put not your trust in man," was as true a word as was ever spoken!'

This was the first time Roller had ever given way to repining before the women. The next day, February 15th, the Friebergers, wishful to gain time, resolved on asking Marshal Torstenson for an armistice, hoping to use that opportunity of smuggling two or three persons unobserved out of the city, and so sending word to Dresden of Freiberg's desperate straits.

On pretence of discussing the proposed armistice, three Swedish colonels appeared by consent of the besieged on the top of the tower at the Peter Gate. They made good use of their eyes to learn all that could be learned about the condition of the defence, and found it still such as to inspire them with all due respect. When this result had been satisfactorily achieved, the armistice was formally refused, the battle being at once renewed; and at two o'clock in the afternoon of the same day, the city was once more summoned to surrender. The prompt refusal of this demand provoked renewed efforts on the part of the besiegers to gain possession of the hard-pressed city.

Matters stood at this desperate pass, when, on the evening of the same day, the shout of 'Fire!' sounded through the streets of Freiberg. It was no alarm, but a genuine cry of joy.

'Fire! fire!' exclaimed Mistress Blüthgen, as with a beaming face she came rushing into the living-room, where the disabled miller and his wife, Roller, with bandaged head, surrounded by his family, and the remaining members of the household were all assembled. 'Fire over the Liechtenberg at last!' she cried again, throwing her arms, as she spoke, round the neck of the miller's wife.

'Fire over the Liechtenberg!' rang along the narrow street outside. All who could, now climbed out on to the roof of the house to see the

long-desired sight for themselves. If, at the beginning of the siege, a magnificent rainbow had been hailed as an omen of good, the Freibergers now gazed at the red glow on the distant horizon as at a beacon-light that surely could not deceive them.

'It seems to me,' said Roller, pushing back the bandage that covered his ear, 'it seems to me as though I heard firing as well.'

The dull roar of cannon, several times repeated, was now plainly heard from the far-off height.

'It is they! it is our deliverers!' cried all, as their joy broke out afresh.

Confidence and hope work wonders. They nerved the courage of these distressed Freibergers, until the most faint-hearted among them rose into a hero. Let the Swedes renew their assault on the next day as fiercely as they pleased; let them summon the town three times over to surrender, and make all their preparations for a final attack; nothing could now take away the joyful assurance of immediate relief. On the previous day, a mine had torn down a large piece of the main city wall, twenty yards in length, near the Peter Gate, and so shattered the great flanking tower at that point that its downfall seemed every moment imminent. In spite of a heavy fire, the Freibergers made good use of the night in preparing trenches, thickly studded with palisadoes, close behind the main wall, in throwing up great piles of branches and trunks of trees in the new breach, and doubling the number of men at the points chiefly threatened. Having made these preparations, they confidently awaited the onset of the enemy, whose numerous forces were now steadily drawing nearer and nearer to the city.

Who would not have trembled for Freiberg at sight of that veteran army, trained in long and stormy years of battle, and led by a renowned general, bent on destroying the city and putting all its inhabitants--men and women, old and young--to the sword? Ambition and shame alike stimulated the Swedish general, as he thought how this insignificant country town had so long thwarted all his best efforts. His men, on the other hand, were inspired by thirst for plunder and a burning desire to avenge all the toils and troubles they had endured amid the severities of that bitter winter.

On the side of the Swedes were many thousand veteran men-at-arms, a commander well known to fame, over a hundred pieces of artillery, and free access to the whole country around, furnishing constant fresh supplies both of men and the necessaries of war. On the side of the Saxons was a little band of three hundred soldiers, a leader of whom renown as yet had scarcely heard, an untrained crowd of peaceful citizens and country-people, and last, though not least, the true-hearted miners. These, with the help of a few cannon and a limited supply of ammunition, were holding shattered heaps of ruins against an unwearied foe. But the Freibergers threw into the scale on their side, loyalty to their prince, love for fatherland, for hearth, and home, and liberty; and thus the balance weighed in their favour.

With thoughts like these present in many minds, passed away the daylight hours of that memorable 16th of February, and the night appointed for the general assault came down at last. Eight captains,

each with a hundred and twenty men, a company of seventy or eighty picked men with hand-grenades, and as many more with axes, were told off to make the first attack, their advance being supported by four thousand men of the main storming party. In the evening, Torstenson had, by a great effort, ridden quite round the town, marking out the points to be specially attacked, assigning his troops their respective places, and ordering several new batteries to be placed in position. As Wallenstein once before Stralsund, so now Torstenson before Freiberg, swore to take the city, even though it were under the special protection of Heaven itself.

The besieged were aware, both through their prisoners and by other means of information, that the most desperate of all their struggles awaited them to-night, and they did not attempt to conceal from themselves the terrible peril in which they stood. They spent a social hour at home with wife and children, took what might well prove a final farewell, and then each man went forth to his dangerous post with the stedfast determination to die rather than yield. And among those ranks of silent, resolute men in the deadly breach, was seen the reverend figure of good Master Spelling, in his preacher's robe, the book of the Holy Gospels in his hand.

'My beloved brethren in Christ!' he cried; 'if we live we live unto the Lord, and if we die we die unto the Lord; whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. Yea, the Lord is our strength and our shield; and though we wander through the valley of the shadow of death, we will fear no evil, for His right hand hath holden us up that we should not fall. The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon Him, to all that call upon Him in truth. He will hear their cry and will save them. "Call upon me," saith He, "in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." Put your trust in the Lord, not in the Imperialists, and not in your own might. Think who it was that broke the power of Sennacherib before Jerusalem, when a hundred and eighty thousand of Israel's foes perished in a single night! The Lord our God! And His power is not lessened since that day, neither is His glory dimmed. Three men once sang in the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Cannot we, too, lift our feeble voices to God where we stand in the deadly breach? Let "Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!" be our shout of victory when the foe comes on against us; and let us, ere we part, chant together the jubilant words, "Jesus lives; I shall live also. O Death! where is thy sting?"'

So they sang, and their voices sounded far out into the night; they knelt, and their pastor invoked God's blessing on them for the approaching battle,--for victory, if so it might be, or for a happy and joyous entrance into the better land.

CHAPTER XII.

TREACHERY AND DELIVERANCE.

With the exception of babes and very young children, no one in Freiberg slept that night. All were wakeful and astir. Men stood armed for battle in their places on the city walls; women and children prayed in

the churches; mothers watched with anxious hearts over slumbering little ones, not knowing when the dreaded Swedes might burst in to slaughter all alike.

'Stay with me, my son,' Mistress Jüchziger begged of Conrad. 'Do not let your poor blind mother be left to meet the Swedes alone. At least, let us die together.'

Conrad obeyed like a dutiful son, though staying in the house to-night was a task most irksome to his adventurous spirit, which urged him forth into the busy turmoil where the brave citizens were making ready to fight for all they held dear.

Jüchziger, too, seemed a stranger to peace and quietness of spirit, though for a very different reason. He was seen first in one place and then in another, in different parts of the city. At last he hastened through the streets towards his own house, but took special care to avoid the churches and the praying people. After entering the living-room of his home, he moved restlessly about the apartment, alternately taking up and laying down various trifling objects. At last, towards ten at night, he started forth with the Swedish treasure-box under his arm, and did not return.

'Whatever can there be in that box!' said Conrad after a time to his mother, who, though still an invalid, could not rest for anxiety, and had exchanged her bed for an easy-chair by the stove. 'It is nailed and screwed up still, as tight as ever, unless I am mistaken.'

Before the mother could reply, the door was suddenly opened from without, and Master Prieme, fully armed, entered the room.

'Where is Jüchziger?' he said instantly. 'He is to come at once to the Burgomaster.'

'He went out a little while ago,' replied Conrad, 'and did not leave word where he was going.'

'What! you here, boy!' cried Prieme, in evident surprise. 'Ha! And how did you get out of the Swedes' hands and into the town again? How about that safe-conduct and that precious buried box? The whole thing looked very suspicious, very suspicious indeed.'

Conrad found himself in a great difficulty. Should he make a clean breast of it, and perhaps get his step-father into dreadful trouble? He at first hesitated, and then stammered--

'Well--the--the Swedes--let me go in three days.'

'And the box? What about that?'

'Oh--well,' stammered Conrad, incapable of telling a lie, 'the box? I got that too.'

'Dug it out of the cellar?'

'No; not that. The Swedes dug it up, and gave it me; and then'--

'That's false!' cried Prieme. 'Sooner get blood out of a post than a box worth keeping out of the clutches of a Swede. What was in it?'

'I'm sure I don't know. It was nailed up so tight; and my step-father wouldn't let me even peep into it. I don't think it has ever been opened.'

'Just like Jüchziger! a regular downright skinflint! And how did you get into the town again? Who let you in across the moat and through the gate?'

Conrad was by this time nearer crying than laughing. He looked imploringly at his questioner, remained silent, and then, when further pressed, stammered out--

'Along the Münzbach--under the water-tower.'

'That's sheer nonsense!' cried Prieme again. 'Three gratings of the toughest hammered iron are firmly fixed across the way. Don't lie to me, boy, or I'll break every bone in your body.'

'But I did, indeed I did,' persisted Conrad. 'In all the gratings one bar was eaten away by rust or something, so that I could easily push them on one side and creep through.'

Prieme turned pale. 'Merciful heaven!' he cried; 'this means treachery. Quick to give the alarm! Perhaps we may even yet save the city.'

'Oh, please do be reasonable, Master Prieme!' pleaded Conrad, seizing the man by the arm as he was hastening away. 'It has been exactly like that for several days now, and no harm has come of it. Pray don't give an alarm, or the end of it will be you'll get my step-father into a mess, and then what is to become of me?'

'Such talk is all no use,' answered Prieme, 'no use at all; not even if Jüchziger were your real father, which he isn't.'

'But only think what all the people in the town would say if I got my step-father into trouble. Didn't everybody except the governor praise Hillner when he wouldn't shoot at his father?'

'That's a totally different thing,' said Prieme impatiently; 'then it was only one Swede, and it didn't much matter whether he lived or died. But, boy, if many thousand innocent people are about to perish through one man's knavish trick, ought we not to bring the traitor to justice, ay, though he be father, brother, or son? Look at that dear, good woman, your blind mother! Do you want the Swedes to get in and slaughter her? Are you going to let sixty thousand brave men and women perish, and all our toils and struggles be in vain, just to save one villain from the punishment he deserves?'

'Oh, dear me, whatever shall I do? No, indeed, neighbour Prieme,' said Conrad, in great distress. 'But I'm sure I don't know anything at all about my step-father, except that he'--

'Jüchziger is to come instantly to the Burgomaster,' cried a well-known

voice, as the door of the living-room opened, and Roller's bandaged head appeared.

'Yes,' said Prieme in a tone of vexation; 'but the bird has flown, and even now I am busy with his brood. Good woman, cannot you give us some information about your husband?'

'Nothing more,' said Mistress Jüchziger, 'than this, that about an hour ago, while Conrad was gone out of the room, my husband was burning something over the lamp. At first I thought it was only tinder, but there was a sudden noise at the room door, and I fancied I heard my husband hastily crumple up a piece of paper, and throw it either under the window-seat or the cupboard. No one entered as my husband seemed to expect; it was only the cat scratching to be let in.'

'You here!' cried Roller to his dog, which had followed him in, and which now went open-mouthed at the cat, she in her turn retiring under the cupboard, a safe refuge into which the dog could not follow her. 'You here!' said Roller again. 'Get out, Turk!'

Turk had planted himself in front of the cupboard, and was now scratching vigorously with his fore-paws at the unhappy cat's hiding-place. As he did so, he threw out a ball of paper rolled closely together, which the sharp-sighted Prieme instantly picked up and unfolded. It was a fragment of a written sheet, partly burned, and in several places quite illegible.

In a state of the highest excitement, Prieme brought the paper into the lamp-light, and with trembling lips read as follows:--

'To rouse the prisoners singly and without being observed . . . in conjunction with forty of our bravest soldiers under Captain . . . into the city . . . as soon as the petard sent herewith has done its work and the tower is destroyed, the corps held in readiness will make an attack on that point, which you will powerfully support with the men placed under your guidance. At the same time the storm on all the other positions . . . The fifty ducats required to make up the sum named shall'--

A loud report sounding at this moment through the air, and overpowering the noise of the artillery, cut short the further reading of the paper.

'There goes the water-tower!' groaned Prieme. 'The Swedish petard you brought in as such a precious treasure, boy, has indeed done its work. Can't you hear the shouts of the enemy's storming-party? But,' he went on with a sudden outburst of enthusiasm, 'do not let them think they will get into the town, for all that! I would drive them out headlong with the help of only women and children, though we had no weapons but stones and fire-brands.' So saying, he rushed forth into the night.

Mistress Jüchziger wrung her hands, and her son seemed almost stunned by all these untoward events. But prudent Roller said quietly,

'Would God have let this rascally trick be found out when it was too late? Let us at least do all we can; and first, to examine the town hall, find out about the prisoners, and see whether Jüchziger is there.'

'Mother, do let me go too,' pleaded Conrad; 'just to learn the truth, and bring you word back.'

He hastened away with Roller to the cellars under the town hall. They found the garrison was gone, every man being now needed to confront the enemy at the fortifications. As the two groped their way through the dark rooms, Conrad's foot struck against something that gave forth a metallic clink. It was the bunch of keys that Jüchziger had thrown away after liberating the Swedish prisoners. Just as they made this alarming discovery, they heard a loud knocking at one of the inner doors.

'The Swedish prisoners have fled!' shouted Hillner's voice. 'Look out for treachery!'

'Roller,' said Conrad, 'let Hillner out. He is quite innocent. Why, it was my step-father and no one else that made the Burgomaster and the governor suspect him. If any one can help to put a stop to this business, I am sure it is my old comrade. See, here are the keys all ready.'

'I will promise you faithfully,' said Hillner from within, 'to place myself under arrest again the instant the danger is over.'

'In the name of God, then, and may He guide us aright!' said Roller, opening the door. 'And now, to put all on the hazard of one bold stroke.'

The three friends immediately set off at a rapid pace for the lower town. Whatever persons they met on the way, whether men or women, were pressed into the service, and the little company armed itself as best it might in the hurry of the moment. The women, for the most part, could hit on nothing better than to fill their aprons as they went with stones from the street pavements. The men, with Conrad among them, threw the light of their torches from both sides at once under the vaulted arches that spanned the Münzbach, and were longer or shorter according as their position required. As soon as it was ascertained that the way was clear at one point, the little party went on instantly to the next. Roller and Conrad soon made out, to their great relief, that the water-tower was still standing. They were by this time approaching it, and just as they reached the last tunnel, the one through which the Münzbach leaves the city, at the point where it flows away under the street below the water-tower, a youth announced that he had descried the forms of several men creeping through the darkness of the archway.

Whilst two of their number went off at once to alarm the garrison of the water-tower and the men on the neighbouring fortifications, the rest of the courageous little band took post around the vaulted entrance of the tunnel, in readiness to give the enemy a warm reception. This arrangement was not completed without some noise; and, as a consequence, a head appeared from beneath the archway to see what was going on outside. It was the head of the treacherous town servant; and Roller promptly dealt it so severe a blow with a stout cudgel, that its owner instantly drew back with a yell of pain. Some minutes of ominous silence then passed, in which the enemy were doubtless busy taking counsel as to what should be done next. Then they suddenly

burst forth with loud shouts and wild uproar. Though one and another of their number dropped beneath the shower of stones with which they were greeted, they did not even pause, but pressed furiously forward against their antagonists.

'Light the petard!' shouted a terrible voice from beneath the archway, at the sound of which Hillner's arm seemed involuntarily to lose its power. Immediately afterwards a Swede made his appearance, whose murderous eyes and bushy red beard were plainly visible in the torchlight.

'Father!' cried Hillner sadly; and his strong right arm fell mechanically at his side, while the left was extended imploringly, as though to shield him from his father's uplifted sword.

A frightful oath was the answer, the one that Conrad heard on the Erbisdorf road, and, by his comrade's wish, wrote down on paper; and the oath was at once followed up by a desperate cut. The young man's wounded hand fell helpless; and a second blow his father levelled at him must undoubtedly have been at once fatal, had not a well-aimed stone struck the Swede in the face at the critical moment and made him stagger back. Before he could recover himself, a musket-ball struck him in the chest, and he fell to rise no more. This fortunate shot, with a volley of others that now greeted the Swedes, was fired by a party of men approaching at a rapid pace under the leadership of Master Prieme.

'We wanted to snatch a laurel from your wreath,' was his hasty greeting to Hillner, who, after his father's fall, was once more, with his uninjured hand, doing vigorous work against the enemy.

The foe, attacked in rear by the garrison of the water-tower, were gradually compelled to give way before the superior force of the Freibergers, and were at length driven back beneath the arched vault of the Münzbach, a retreat into which the Saxon bullets followed them, rapidly thinning their ranks.

'Yield, you dogs!' shouted Prieme, fearful, and not without good reason, that they might even now explode the petard.

Thereupon arose a short, sharp contest among the entrapped Swedes, in which the smaller and more courageous section wished to fire the petard already sunk in the foundations of the water-tower, and bury all in the ruins; while the other party did their utmost to prevent this design from being put into execution. The less bold majority gained the day, and announced their intention to yield themselves up as prisoners of war. Jüchziger had received his reward. His body, with a severe wound on the head, was found lying trampled down by the feet of the Swedish soldiers into the waters of the Münzbach; and the dangerous petard was discovered sunk into a hole prepared with much toil and secrecy by Jüchziger in the strong arch on which the tower stood.

The fight was hardly over when the commandant appeared, come to see what was going on.

'I trust,' said Hillner respectfully, 'that your excellency will pardon my being here, instead of under arrest where I was placed. I shall now

hasten to give myself up again. But that I am at least no traitor to my fatherland, this wounded hand may surely bear witness.'

'My dear Defensioner,' replied Schweinitz heartily, 'the enemy may commence their grand assault at any moment. There is no time now to examine into your affair. For the present you are liberated on parole. Be of good courage, and get your wound attended to the very first thing.'

With these words, the commandant, finding his presence no longer necessary, hastened away.

The firing on both sides continued till midnight. Then the Freibergers heard loud sounds of confusion and disturbance and much shouting in the Swedish camp; but the dreaded general assault was still unaccountably delayed.

Between two and three o'clock on the morning of February 17th, there arrived at the city moat an Imperialist soldier, who had been taken prisoner by the Swedes before Leipzig, and had now made his escape. On being admitted into the town, he announced that the enemy were making hasty preparations for departure, that the military stores were already loaded, and that he himself had been employed with others in removing the charges from the Swedish mines. This joyful and unexpected news passed rapidly from mouth to mouth, and put the whole city in a ferment. Hope turned to glad certainty, when, at break of day, the enemy's army, with its artillery and baggage-waggons, was seen marching away from the city, and taking the road towards Klein-Waltersdorf; although four or five hundred Swedish dragoons still held the Hospital Church, whence they fired on the town and on all who issued from it. The Freibergers, instead of abandoning themselves to the transports of an excessive joy, re-occupied the Peter Gate without delay, and made a sortie in which they set fire to the enemy's batteries and advanced works.

By about seven in the morning, when the Swedes had finally evacuated the Hospital Church itself, Imperialists began to arrive before the city, in small numbers at first, which, however, rapidly increased. Their officers were astounded at sight of the ramparts and fortifications, which in many places were almost level with the earth. Their colonel asked as a particular favour that he might be permitted to ride his horse into the city over the principal breach by the Peter Gate. This was readily granted by the commandant, and as easily accomplished by the gallant officer. Meantime the prudent Freibergers had not in the least relaxed their diligence in filling up the enemy's trenches and destroying their batteries, while repairing their own barbicans and moat, building the former up with gabions, and strengthening the latter with a stout wooden parapet.

On the 18th of February, Field-Marshal Piccolomini himself entered Freiberg, and highly commended the courageous and unexampled defence that had been made by a town so slightly fortified. The Emperor and the Elector did not fail to distribute weighty gold chains of office, patents of nobility, badges of honour, and similar acknowledgments to the commandant, the Burgomaster, and the city; and Freiberg's fame was heard far and wide through Europe. Its inhabitants attributed the glory of their successful defence to God alone; and just as on the 17th

of February 1643, there went up from all the churches of Freiberg, and from every lip, the devout and thankful song, 'Lord our God, to Thee our praises,' so has it been on each anniversary since, as each year has brought round afresh the mountain city's day of joy and thanksgiving.

It has never been fully known whether the approach of the Imperial army, or the failure of the treachery they had planned, or the brave and desperate resistance of the besieged citizens, caused the Swedes at last to abandon their idea of a general assault. But one thing is certain, that the brave Defensioner Hillner was fully cleared of blame by both Commandant von Schweinitz and Burgomaster Schönleben. Nor was it long before he was made a free citizen and a master-craftsman, and that without any cost to himself.

'My son,' said Schweinitz to the newly made master-carpenter, 'you may take my word for it, that in war a soldier must have a heart like a flint, and often say things very different from what he feels. You did quite right not to fire at your own father, and had I been in your place, I should very likely have done the same myself. Now that the enemy is safe out of the way, I may tell you so freely. God grant the foe may never return.'

Nor was it long before his young widowed mistress gave her hand in marriage to her quondam journeyman, and never had the smallest cause to repent the gift. She kept one secret, and one only, from her husband; she never told him that the hand he had asked and won was the hand that had, at exactly the right moment, thrown the stone which was the means of saving his life. The miller's family, after their return to Erbisdorf, kept up their friendship for the city home where they had received so hospitable a welcome. Conrad Schmidt, under Hillner's watchful care, grew up into a famous carpenter. When in later years he, too, became a master-craftsman, he rebuilt his mother's house outside the Peter Gate, making it more beautiful than it had ever been before. To this new home he brought his old playmate Dollie as his wife, and she lovingly and carefully tended her husband's blind mother so long as Mistress Jüchziger needed her ministrations. Roller and Prieme, and all those who have played their parts so bravely in our story, lived for many a year as well-to-do citizens; and in the long winter evenings they delighted to tell one another rousing stories of the events that happened during that memorable siege.

Freiberg has never been besieged again; yet what the artillery and mines of the warlike foe failed to accomplish, has been brought about long since by the genial beams of golden peace.

Freiberg's strong gates and barbicans, her towers, walls, and moats, have, for the most part, passed away. Where once the cannon thundered, roses and jessamines now fill lovely gardens with their rich perfume; where the blood of Saxon burgher and Swedish trooper was once shed in savage strife, the air now rings with the laughter of happy children; and no trace is ever seen of those who fought so bravely for their beloved city more than two hundred years ago. Yet their memory will never die; it lives on through the ages, and strong and pure, like Freiberg's native silver, shall endure the story of their faithfulness to prince and fatherland.

