

Maids may go hang,
Give me wine — good wine!"

Louder than before came the chorus, starting echoes in the depths of the wood; the workers, resting in the fields, turned their heads to listen; it reached even to the wayfarers drawing nearer upon the road.

Set back in this square enclosure, cut out of the wood long since, was the tavern of the Three Shields, emblematic of this good land of Podina, the smallest and most prosperous of those States which had watched with anxiety the Duchy of Brandenburg growing into the Kingdom of Prussia. But for the painted board set on a pole by the roadside — the work of some wandering Florentine whose art had come to the rescue of his pocket when payment was demanded for board and lodging — a stranger would have passed without knowing of the tavern's existence. Truth to tell, it did a sleepy trade year in and year out, and the fat landlord, somnolent like his house, was at his wits' end to-day with so much serving.

"There's truth in the song," said the bearded trooper. "More wine, landlord. It seems to me these flagons of yours hold short measure."

"I'm none so sure the song is true, Hans," said one.

"Ah, you're young and of that company of fools Gustav sings about. You'll grow older, that's certain, and maybe wiser — which is doubtful."

"I warrant there are maids in Metzburg capable of making fools of us all," was the sharp retort. "Maybe it's a pity, but God made them so, and there's the devil of it."

"Maids go hang," laughed Hans, "but I know of better wine than this in a Metzburg cellar, and I would I were there. There's dust inside me an inch thick with