



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XXIV.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, JUNE 19, 1874.

NO. 44.

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JUST PUBLISHED: FINE ENGRAVING OF FATHER MATHEW. We take great pleasure in announcing the publication of a beautiful portrait of the GREAT APOSTLE OF TEMPERANCE. It represents him as he appears giving the TEMPERANCE PLEDGE; and below the Engraving is a facsimile of his handwriting endorsing this likeness of himself as "A CORRECT ONE."

THE WITCH OF OAKDALE; OR, THE WAYS OF PROVIDENCE. (From the Catholic Telegraph.) CHAPTER I.—THE IRON FORGE.

In the early part of the twelfth century, at the foot of a wood-crowned hill, which looked out from the Black Forest upon the beautiful river Mindel, might be seen a solitary iron forge, belonging to the estate of the noble Count Walter of Rabenfels. The honest tenant, Hans Netter, with his good wife, Elsie, lived in peace and contentment, and always punctual in paying his yearly rent of ten guilders (a sum rather large for those days), he had obtained permission from his lord to call the place Nettershausen. Here sprang up a village which yet bears the name that was given it nearly seven hundred years ago.

It was a cool, beautiful evening in autumn, and Hans Netter and his wife were standing in the doorway of their forest home, listening to the sounds of the iron hammer, as they issued from the forge. Shades of sorrow flitted now and then over the face of honest Hans, and Elsie perceiving his dejection, threw her arm round his broad shoulder, looked up into his dark motionless eyes, and asked: "May not Elsie know what troubles the mind of her good husband?"

"Do you hear those powerful strokes of the hammer?" returned he, in a tone of sadness. "They remind me so often of the hard and unexpected blows of fate. Let the will of a man be ever so strong, his courage ever so firm, they will at last give way, crushed under the pressure of strange events, like iron under the sledge. Such may be the fate of our lord, the Count, if he stand not upon his guard."

"What do you mean?" asked the faithful spouse with mingled curiosity and surprise.—"Can aught of misfortune threaten the noble Count Walter? He is rich and respected, has troops and shield-bearers in abundance, a charming, good wife, and a lovely little boy. Feasts are given at the castle in honor of our beautiful lady, the Margravine of Austria, and even now, a noble young stranger is the favored guest at Rabenfels. The humorous master Jergen of Costnitz told me so much about this gracious guest, how he feeds the poor of the neighborhood, makes presents to the servants of the Count, and does so many other laudable things, that I was bold enough to ask his name."

"There it is again!" said Hans, with a tinge of vexation; "the curiosity of your weak sex is so great, and your heart so soft, and susceptible that you are dazzled by a false lustre and are unable to unravel the meshes of a well-planned subtlety. I fear that there is trouble in store for our good Count. This young and frivolous Sigismund Gassler, the guest of whom you speak, will most shamefully abuse the hospitality so generously offered him at Rabenfels. 'Is he not the son of Oscar Gassler, the commander of Ulm, who on account of his scandalous life, is in so bad repute throughout the land? I told you once before what awful reports are circulated among the people around Ulm, concerning this Sigismund Gassler; how unmercifully he treated his loving wife—cursing and whipping her—and how he locked her up for months in a dungeon, with nothing to eat but bread and water. And rumor says that he lately abandoned her

and cast her forth by night upon a cold and heartless world. The people of Ulm shrug their shoulders and say in their timidity—nothing. Well, we all know the reason. If Sir Sigismund were the son of some poor shepherd he would long ago have found his end on the gallows. For the last half year, while his unhappy wife has been asking alms from the hand of charity, he, the sensual villain, has been driving about to crush by wanton pleasures, the worm that gnaws at his conscience. As a bird of prey seeks the blood of an unprotected lamb, so he seeks to destroy the innocence of beautiful maidens; and under the appearance of giving alms to the suffering poor, he often ensures the heart of the unsuspecting female, and accomplishes his base design. I love my good and noble master too well, not to feel anxious at seeing how near his domestic happiness is to a calamity so deplorable. But no more about this, Elsie—no more! 'Tis better to pray than to weep. May Heaven protect them!"

Suddenly a long shrill blast of a bugle rang from the forest, and Netter, turning his searching gaze towards the woody heights, espied, as the bugle notes came nearer and clearer, a cavalcade of advancing troopers, led by a youth in yellow chamois hunting dress, with gold bound cap, over which waved plumes of green, and bearing a large-eyed falcon upon his shoulder. They were wending their way towards Netter's house.

Hardly had the honest Hans recognized the approaching knight with his train when, clenching his hands with a dark desponding look, he exclaimed: "We will be punished for our careless talk. True is the proverb: 'Do not call the hobgoblin, he is sure to plague thee.' And here he is—the guest of Rabenfels—the sensual knight Sigismund Gassler, of Ulm, seeking the hospitality of Netter's home. Hear their uncouth yells! The men of Rabenfels well know that their master is not present; for never does he allow such misdemeanors and disorder. Now they enter the court-yard."

His last words were scarcely uttered, when the air was filled with the lively strains of a song by the hunters, who had thrown a killed boar near to the entrance of the house, and were forming a circle around their bloody booty.

While the huntsmen were continuing their wild airs, the knight Sigismund had stepped into the tenant's house. Hans, standing before him with his cap under his arm, greeted him with well-concealed scorn: "God greet you, sir knight of Ulm! Verily, you confer a great honor on me by crossing the threshold of my humble home. It is, however, to be regretted that I cannot offer you as good a table as you are used to share in the halls of our hospitable lord and Count. But if it please you, my Elsie will not be slow to prepare a luncheon for you and your men."

When he ceased speaking, the knight cast his eyes towards the chimney where the bashful Elsie was standing, taking a sly glimpse now and then at the graceful gentleman from Ulm. He bowed to her and said with a winning voice:

"A piece of fresh cheese and a glass of good apple wine for Sigismund Gassler, and a loaf of fresh barley bread for the men of Rabenfels would suffice, but with your permission we shall roast a savory steak of the boar which we killed, and Hans Netter and his wife will be our guests."

Elsie bowed to the eloquent knight, but her husband turned his face towards the open window to conceal his displeasure at the unwelcome visit. The men came singing and laughing into the room. Some of them took possession of every available seat, while others ran up to the surprised Elsie to teach her how, after a hunter's fashion, to salt, spice and roast a palatable steak.

In the meantime the men of the forge had also entered, and were silently seated on a bench behind the heavy oak table, about to partake of the substantial meal which Elsie had prepared for them.

When they had satisfied their appetite, Hans approached, and giving each of them a three-pence as their day's wages, he told them in an undertone to keep their seats behind the table and be ready at any sign he might give them.

CHAPTER II.—THE MYSTERIOUS WOMAN. Scarcely had Netter reseated himself, when a loud rap on the window-glass called attention to the wrinkled features of an old woman, who, looking in, exclaimed in a screeching voice:

"Ye thoughtless revelers! Hear ye not the tones of the silvery vesper bell! Misfortune is the lot of him who bends not the knee in prayer. Ah! little did I think that Hans Netter, whom I know to be a good man, would make his house the scene of riotous carousals. Woe be to thee, Netter, if the Christian Count Walter but hear of thy folly! God be praised!" All were silent. Not a sound, not a whisper was to be heard; and Netter, muttering to himself these words: "Am I master over

these fellows?" arose from his chair, knelt down in the middle of the room, and as the dying echo of the vesper bell was borne away, closed the silent prayer of all with the following audible words: "Oh, Lord, God, give to my house and home peace and preserve us all from evil and misfortune!"

The old wrinkled face and the hideous voice had such an effect upon the hunting party, that feeling disinclined to be indulge in their hilarity or renew the conversation, for a long while they maintained an ominous silence. Even on the features of the knight Sigismund was depicted a certain uneasiness at this surprise by the unwelcome intruder. At last he said to his host: "Who is this old hag?"

Before Hans Netter had time to form a suitable answer, one of his assistants exclaimed:—"It is the Old Witch of Oakdale!"

If a thunderbolt had struck the house it could not have created a greater commotion among this crowd of smiths and hunters. All sprang from their seats in perfect consternation, while the old hunter who was preparing the steak, was so terrified that he forgot to turn the meat, thus allowing it to burn to a crisp. Hans Netter raised his finger in reproof to the hasty smith, and turning towards Sigismund, said:

"The woman is no witch, but if you wish I will relate the circumstances connected with her history."

Helping himself to a good glass of apple-wine, and bidding the others do the like, he thus continued to the evident interest of all:

"About half a year ago at early morn, I sent my men with a wagon into the deep forest to gather fuel for the forge. There, for the first time, they saw this woman as she lay sleeping in the hollow of an oak, and believing her to be a ghost or some spirit of the woods, they uttered a shriek which awoke the unknown from her slumber. A strange smile played upon her sun-burnt features, and raising herself, with the aid of a juniper staff, to a superhuman height (at least so spoke my men) she made a circle of a hundred yards in diameter, and with a terrific laugh exclaimed: 'I have ye now, workers of evil, and dream ye not of release until ye shall have built for me under this hollow oak, a hut of branches and moss. He who attempts to escape will meet certain death, for a poisonous scorpion shall bite him as soon as he oversteps the magic circle; and even if he reach home he shall burn to ashes in the glowing forge.' What could they do? They worked the whole day, while the old woman walked about, now praying, now crying, now sending forth a hideous laugh. As the sun sank in the west, the hut was pronounced complete; and the old woman, well satisfied, thrice struck with her crutch the hollow oak and four silver pieces appeared.—'Here, take this for your trouble,' she said with a grinning smile; 'labor deserves a reward. If ye pray, these small silver pieces may, perhaps, bring you a great fortune. Ye may return home now; and if your master should scold, tell him that ye have done a service to the poor, unfortunate Trude.' The men came home in breathless wonder, and related the whole circumstance in, of course, a very exaggerated manner. Since that time the woman has been called by the villagers: Trude, the Witch of Oakdale."

At this moment the door was opened. The hunters, terrified, sprang from their seats, thinking it to be the witch; but the fright was changed into a general whisper, together with a feigned laugh, as they found out that it was but the servant maid entering the room.—Walking up to Hans Netter, and pretending to whisper to him alone, but in reality speaking so loud that every one could easily understand, she said:

"Master Hans, Trude, the witch, is outside, and she sends word that she wishes to see you for a moment."

Although Hans knew his conscience to be clear, and therefore was not in the least afraid of the mysterious woman; yet his face lost a shade of its color when he was in the act of leaving the room. Elsie begged him not to expose himself to any unnecessary danger, but there was now no chance to escape, for Trude, reaching her bony hand through the open door, drew him from their midst.

A deep, grave-like silence reigned throughout the house, when, after a little while Netter returned with a large key in his hand. Giving it to one of the best smiths, he said: "My dear Hainz, I know that the hour of rest was struck long ago, and that a good master should never allow his men to work a minute too long, but to-night let there be an exception. This key must be repaired. Make as quickly as possible a new one, after the form of the old. It belongs to Gertrude of Oakdale. She will wait for it; I promised her that it would be ready in half an hour. You know we must keep on the good side of the old woman, for she has done us many favors. Think, now, of

the silver coin which you saw shining in the bark of the hollow oak.

Without saying a word, Hainz arose from his seat and left the room. A few minutes afterwards, and the strokes of the hammer rang clearly through the deep and silent night. At last the ominous silence in the room was broken by the host, who thus continued his story.

"As I have told you before, Sir Knight, there is an incomprehensible something about this Gertrude. Hardly had she so arranged the hut in the hollow oak, that she thought it would give her sufficient shelter during the winter, when she went about everywhere, visiting the unfortunate and the sick in the Mindel valley, in order to lend them a helping hand. To the poor she often gives a valuable silver piece, the coinage of which we have never seen before, for the sick she gathers healing herbs in abundance, upon the mountains, in forest and valley. She prepares health draughts; God knows where she learned the art. It is certain, everybody relates of her wonderful cures. If I remember right, that young fellow Kuno, sitting near the chimney, would perhaps, have been a child of death, had it not been for her helping hand. She is seen early in the morning and late at night walking up and down the bank of the Mindel, but the most of her time she spends under the old oak in the dale, opposite the beautiful castle of Rabenfels. There she gathers morels and mushrooms and other herbs, inspects them and dries them in the sun. Now most of the people have changed their expressions. They love and revere her, and her praise is in everybody's mouth. They lend her a helping hand, although she don't need it very often, and nearly everywhere they call her now, 'The Wonderful Woman of Oakdale.'"

Hans Netter had finished his narrative, and the clock in the church-steeple of the near monastery chimed the hour of nine. Hardly had the last stroke died away, when Gertrude, with a beautiful and melodious voice, that touched the very heart of every listener, intoned one of those simple yet so grand songs, in which Germany is so rich.

"Did you hear her, Sir Knight," continued his host with a tremulous voice, drying a tear in his eye, "I don't know how it is. Every time I hear her sing or pray my eyes become moist. Methinks that this woman had a good deal of sorrow in youth. And how she should be a witch? Oh! you should see, Sir Knight, when she prays. Then, hot scalding tears course down her pale cheeks, so that the very flag upon which she kneels, becomes moist, and at last, when she has emptied her heart of all its troubles before a loving and merciful God, she leaves the church consoled and with a cheerful countenance."

At these last words the door again opened, and with wavering steps and leaning upon her juniper staff, Gertrude moved into the room. Behind her the smith, having pressed through the open door, whispered into the ear of his surprised master:

"I could not help it, she told me to open the door, she wanted to pay you herself, and—"

Suddenly their attention was arrested by a strange noise at their side:

"Ah! alas!" exclaimed Elsie, and ran to the assistance of old Gertrude, who had fallen fainting to the floor.

"What means this?" lamented Hans Netter, thinking in his terror, that the last hour of the poor old woman should strike in his house.

But soon Gertrude came to again and leaned with security upon her strong staff. The former paleness of her face again gave way to its usual brown color, and a strange smile of sadness and woman's pride played around her lips. Her long black hair, that by the fall to the floor had come into disorder, she put back behind her shoulders with her trembling hands, and drawing a white handkerchief out of her pocket, she carefully wiped the cold perspiration from her brow. Then she commenced with a broken voice:

"Did I terrify you, my merry company?—Well, it is over now. But should any of you be hurt, I will gladly come to help him with the healing herbs I gathered a few hours ago, such attacks upon my weak system are not unfrequent, the more so, when I see a noble knight of Ulm."

At this moment every one present cast his gaze upon Sigismund Gassler, who sprang up from his seat, and reaching for the sword at his side, in his fury seemed inclined to attack the defenceless woman. But quickly Hans Netter stepped between him and his intended victim, staying the knight in a respectful and earnest manner, to keep off and avoid all trouble, and dispute, that could hardly end in his favor. Sigismund Gassler saw the folly of his action, and repenting only that he had rashly shown his weakness, tried to turn his behavior into a joke and commenced to jest. "Truly, you are right, Master Hans," he

exclaimed, with a wild laugh, "a person has always to keep on the good side of old women and witches. God knows to what they may lead a fellow. They are sometimes insolent enough to bring an honest soul to the gallows with their witchcraft, ha, ha, ha!"

All the hunters, with the exception of Kuno, joined in the wild laughter of the knight, and seemed to gather strength from his rudeness.

But Gertrude raised her hand reproachingly and said with a solemn expression:

"Sir Sigismund Gassler, it is not right to jest at a poor, unfortunate woman. You would do better and it would bring you more blessing, if your heart did show sympathy for your poor and unfortunate fellow creatures. It would also better become your knightly bearing to grasp the lance for the defence of the rights of your native city, instead of claiming for so long the hospitality of Rabenfels."

"What is that to you, old woman, if Rabenfels offers me its hospitality," muttered Sigismund through his teeth with ill-concealed rage.

"Do you know, Sir Knight, that King Lothar's troops are advancing towards the city of Ulm. He threatens its citizens, because they have formed an alliance with Frederick of Hohenstauffen, and he has sworn death and perdition to them. But your countrymen defend themselves bravely. You, alone, young and strong, are here with your hands in your lap. Gather soldiers around you, you are rich and can pay them, and at their head attack the enemy in the rear. By these means the men of Ulm will gain time, to strengthen their position, and the city will be saved. Then with peace in your manly breast, the sign of victory upon your helmet, praised by the whole knight-hood and joyously greeted by Swabia's beautiful ladies, you may triumphantly return home to your true wife, who loves you with all her heart. But, how? What ails you, knight, your face becomes ashy pale, like that of a corpse!"

"Your impertinent words, old Trude," returned Sigismund Gassler harshly, and he passed his hand over his forehead, as if to chase away the painful phantoms of times gone by, that haunted his burning memory.

"Excuse me, Sir Knight of Ulm," again resumed the mysterious woman, taking the liberty of approaching the embarrassed knight. "What effect could my words have upon you if they did not touch the strings of your heart, whose awful discords you are hardly able to withstand. Sigismund Gassler, when a few moments ago I spoke to you about returning to your wife, it was not without intention—you understand me well enough. The old Witch of Oakdale, as the forgermen at the table condescend to call me, knows everything. She knows that you can not find your wife at home. You have treated her badly, Knight of Ulm, your Edeltrudis is innocent, she is as pure as yonder evening star that pours its silvery light through this window. There is time yet to repent, Sigismund; take her back to your heart and home and she will forgive you all the wrong you have done her. See me here at your feet, Gassler, I supplicate for the unfortunate. Say one word of peace, and I will return her to you to a new and happy union. For should she be alive yet, it would not be hard to find her place of concealment. On this moment depends your fortune or perdition. You may choose, Sir Knight. Leave Rabenfels this instant, reunite yourself with your wife, go with brave men to the succor of your native city, and enjoy, as victor, the sweet peace of home! Or remain at Rabenfels, abusing the hospitality of the noble Count Walter; let the hellish fire of an unholy passion gain foothold in your heart, and you will rush at last into eternal perdition! Now, Sir Knight, is it clear to you that the old Witch is pretty well informed in regard to the secrets of your homo and soul? But I pray and beseech you to choose the first, so that you may not be ruined now and for all eternity!"

Gertrude stopped and gazed with a tearful and trembling look into the eye of the knight who stood there, crushed by her earnest words, not even daring to say a single word of wrath against the free language the old woman had used in alluding to his family secrets. At last he muttered in broken words:

"What is this to you, is it for you to meddle with my domestic affairs, old hag of Oakdale," and leaning against the window panes he commenced to whistle a hunter's air out into the silent night, to conceal his embarrassment and subdue the calling voice of his conscience.

But now Gertrude stood no more bent over her juniper staff. Her slender body stood straight and erect like a young alder tree.—Her eyes glittered with burning tears. "About her lips played a sorrowful smile, the trembling sign of utter despair." But her arms were crossed over her breast, indicating an heroic resignation. Then she said with a voice, which was not that of the old Witch: