

occasions. The young ladies showed themselves as thorough unbelievers—but it was only a pretended disbelief. Each thought to herself, “these young men have a good laugh, but it does not concern our heads only, but our families, and that is abominable.” The consequence of these thoughts was that every wedding was retarded, so as to not take place in Advent.

Whether the handsome Frederika shared the fears of her sister women, we cannot answer; but it is certain that her love for Waldrich was long concealed, and probably would never have been disclosed, had not her father forced her to take a certain bridegroom* in the person of Herr Von Hahn, a rich banker. The delicate health of Herr Von Hahn detained him from Herbesheim, and meanwhile, the cold and stormy weather personally affected the bride; and the Burgomaster daily shook the barometer to raise it—while Frederika as regularly shook it to make it sink, and thereby retard the unwelcome visit. The mother, who, like all good mothers, took the part of her daughter, urged her husband to delay the wedding till the *wine-night*, so that the Dead Guest might not again appear on his anniversary day, and her daughter undergo the penalty of his visit. The old man laughed at the story of the Dead Guest: nevertheless, the idea of his beloved daughter's neck being wrung, troubled his imagination incessantly; and he felt a degree of excitement he would have been ashamed to acknowledge.

Such was the state of things in the Burgomaster's family, at the time our tale opens.

CHAPTER I.

THE TRADITION OF THE DEAD GUEST.

In the house of Herr Bantes, on the following evening, was assembled the first accustomed *winter company*, as it was called in Herbesheim; but which, in other countries, would be called a *soirée* or evening party. It was a custom among the best families of the small town, to entertain themselves every winter week by giving in turn a friendly and unceremonious party to enliven the long evenings, with music, songs, conversation, plays and jokes. It is almost superfluous to remark, *en passant*; that among the sports, no card playing was understood, as there ordinarily is at the poorer entertainments of the people; and no middle way is known between

scandal and long talking, and a lively playing company. This evening, at Herr Bantes', neither music, nor songs, nor jokes, nor jokes were thought of. Some saw themselves in this circle for the first time; some had prepared themselves to say much to one another, and as it was within three days of Advent, we may suppose that the Dead Guest afforded a subject of entertainment. The young girls laughed incredulously at the stories told of the Dead Guest. Many were glad that they had no bridegrooms, whom they would not have disdained after Advent time. Many, too, carried poor frightened hearts, when they thought of somebody to whom those poor frightened hearts belonged. The old women unanimously agreed that the story of the Dead Guest might not have so airy a foundation as was generally supposed. The young men were all incredulous, without exception. Some wished the Dead Guest might come and try their heroisms. A couple of old gentlemen with warning fingers threatened the young boasters. Some young ladies joined the old gentlemen, and gave rise to a good deal of raillery, witticism and wag-gish laughter.

“But,” said Herr Bantes, half angrily, “what has all this to do with housekeeping? Where does he put the head—on the right, or the left? Is that an entertainment for my friendly guests? Away with it, I say! Living entertainment! No gossiping on the dead.”

“That is my opinion, also,” said the Collector of Taxes. “It is less agreeable than the commonest distraining pleasure. Herbesheim has much more to fear from living guests than from the centenary visit of the Dead Guest; so we may rest assured that the heads of our young ladies will not be distorted.”

“I would like to know how that simple story was spread abroad in the world,” said a young lawyer; “it is dry as a skeleton. I cannot perceive any other purpose for it, than that it has always furnished materials for romance and ballad,—and that is all it is fit for.”

“On the contrary,” rejoined Waldrich, “the story of the Dead Guest, as I once heard it related in my youth by an old huntsman, is too long and tedious to be well related in one day, therefore it has been forgotten.”

“Then you know the story?” said many hastily.

“I remember it but imperfectly,” replied Waldrich.

“Oh! you must relate it to us,” said the girls, and they crowded round him. “Please—please—now you must tell it.”

There was no resistance—no apology to be offered. The gentlemen joined their entreaties

* Before proceeding farther with our translation, it may be as well to observe that in Germany, betrothed, as well as newly married persons, are called indiscriminately Brides and Bridegrooms. As there is no single English word properly expressive of those words, we have retained them in our translation.—Translator's Note.