

THE CRUCIFIX OF BADEN.

A Legend of the Middle Ages.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH.

Will you follow me to Baden? Not to that elegant and wild and whirling Baden of painted faces and flashy toilettes, where gentlemen of the turf display their horsemanship on the plain of Iffezheim; where the majesty of old Germany elbows, in the Trinkhalle, the princes of Bohemia; but to the fresh, dark, silent, almost unknown nooks of that Baden which God has made and which man has yet left untouched; where the artist wanders for his picture, the poet for his inspiration, the dreamer for his vision, the Christian to murmur his prayer; for it is to a burial-ground that I am about to lead you. But fear not on that account; this burial-place of Baden has comparatively little of the mournful, in its appearance; it is truly, as its name declares, the *Fried Hof*—the Court of Peace. Under that green turf under those flower-clad hillocks, there lie bodies that suffer no more, but sleep in quiet; their souls may suffer, indeed, and be in pain, but there souls are no longer there; and can repose alone in the light. Look around, and, as far as the eye can reach, what beauty shines in the landscape. What a charm invests the distant meeting of earth and sky! Look up to the gray blue heaven, pale and transparent, as is ever that sky which stretches over the valley of the Rhine; to those pure white clouds floating like distant sails on a stormless sea; to those distant hills with outlines softening as they recede; to the green woods that fringe their sides; to those walls which time has breached; those crumbling towers; those ruined castles which seem to overhang the plain of the dead—man's work, and the hands that created it, becoming dust together. These sights may, indeed, be melancholy, but they are peace-giving too; for there in the midst hangs Christ bowing his weary head and stretching out his bruised arms in yonder great crucifix of stone.

In a churchyard, nothing is more frequent, nor so to speak, more natural, than to see a crucifix. It is there like the flag on the bastion, the mast on the vessel. Without it the place would be accursed and desolate for hope would be wanting there. All know and acknowledge this, but, nevertheless, few passers-by bestow a glance on the holy image. Some faithful ones may, when they see it, make the sign of the cross; others bend slightly before it; well-bred people uncover; free-thinkers, with proud look and step, with unbending knee and body erect, pass it by, they who would bow so low before the coronet of a prince or even the key of a chamberlain.

And certainly indifferent, timid, and free-thinking ones come to the Fried Hof of Baden; but there, few stop not and marvel, if by chance their eyes fall upon its crucifix. There is upon that rigid face—those features of stone—a look of life, of flesh and blood, which enchains you, moves the depths of your heart, speaks to you. To understand that gaze; it is not necessary to be a Christian; alas! it is enough to be a man. Those lips, half parted in a sigh, tremble in the stone; those half-closed eyes seem really to weep; agony sits upon every feature; bitterness of soul has worn every one of those furrows, the arch of the brows has been contracted, the pure lines of the profile broken, the calm of the forehead destroyed by sorrow, overwhelming, silent, inconsolable; and you would have before you the image of human misery the most complete, the deepest, the most horrible. If a ray from the Majesty on high did not come to elevate and illumine that petrification of grief.

When you have long studied those features and contemplated their agony, you involuntarily ask yourself: "Where did the sculptor find so suffering a face, so living an agony?" whence came his model? for you feel that those features once were the flesh of one to whom ordinary grief were as nothing. That look of life, that pain so real, came certainly from a human heart that once beat beneath them, and in them painted its wounds, its tortures, and its agony. They were seen, and not merely created in the artist's brain.

Yes; you are right. Those features are those of a suffering, repentant, and miserable man. If you approach the base of the crucifix, you will see graven in the once soft stone, in long Gothic letters, and in the Suedan dialect of the fifteenth century,

these short and simple words, which are the explanation and the ending of this story:

"Mina, Otho."

"May God receive you and pardon me."

Nothing more, no signature to the work, nor name added to the prayer. But young souls, simple hearts, poetic spirits, which still may be found at Baden, in spite of "sport" and "the turf," will relate to you the birth of the work and the fate of the artist; for, alas! the story of the crucifix is also the story of the sculptor.

CHAPTER I.

It was a populous, busy and bright city, Baden of old, as it flourished in the fifteenth century, in the days of the Margrave Bernard of Stachberg. Less noisy than to-day, it was more picturesque. Where great hotels, white villas, and regular edifices now rise, then only narrow crooked streets were seen; where Gothic houses, those of old German dwellings, of which a few still stand at Augsburg, at Ulm, and especially at Nuremberg, reared their sculptured gables and pointed roofs, wherein were set windows looking like half-opened eyes, while beams projected from the wall beneath and supported little balconies, and long, narrow windows with leaden sashes glistened in the glory of their little thick, green-hued and diamond-shaped panes.

Nevertheless, those streets in which the sun-rays rarely penetrated (caught as they were in their way by the projecting fronts of the houses,) were one day of the beautiful month of May, 1435, filled with people in holiday dress, bearing curious and smiling faces, with fluttering pennons, shining armor, and broad banners. It was the day of the tournament, and the gossips grouped themselves together to see pass the barons of the mountains and plains, and to relate to each other the high achievements of each doughty noble and the traditions of his family, while they awaited the return from the burg of the proud victors or humbled vanquished.

But of the general joy, the cries that rang through the town, only a few faint and expiring echoes reached a lonely and distant street, where the houses, lower and more scattered, no longer stood close together, but began to grow scattered through the fields. One of those houses, the largest and almost the last, was distinguished from its neighbors by two peculiarities. The front of the first story, instead of being cut by those narrow leaden-sashed openings joined one to the other, through which the light of day might scarcely enter, offered to the gaze a huge window with larger, neater, and more regular panes than any around. Through the openings on the ground floor a narrow spiral staircase might be seen winding its polished steps and balustrade of stone, carved like lace, beneath a roof of wood delicately cut in graceful flowers, branches, arabesques, and interlaced figures. Above all, in a little wooden niche, a little carved shrine, which surmounted the pointed gable, was the form of an angel with folded wings, chiselled in pure white marble. One might imagine that the heavenly messenger had stopped there to rest in the middle of some long journey; that he gazed calmly down and protected with his frail hands the high gray house which he seemed to bless; so that the gossips, who all knew the dwelling and held its master in high esteem, called his abode *The House of the Angel*.

And the good burgesses wondered

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not to see the white statue on that gray front, nor did they marvel at the graceful scrolls and arabesques of the pretty staircase, and that huge dazzling window, for they knew that the last served to light the studio of the sculptor Sebald Koerner, and that the two ornaments of the house, the marble angel and the carved roof, were his work.

Sebald Koerner was justly esteemed and even admired by the burgesses of Baden. It was not that he was very famous or very rich; that he earned much money or made much noise in the world. But it was because he was honest, patient, true; at once pious and dreamy, modest and intelligent. He lived only for his art, and scarcely partook at all of the passions, the aims, the entanglements of the crowd. He did not place himself above it, but without it, and men hold in high respect those who from a calm retreat behold the torrent of human life rush by. As an artist, he had rivals, but no enemies; as a man, he had his failings, but no vices; as a father, he had a treasure, a fair-haired daughter, named Mina, who had seen the flowers of seventeen springs bloom. Sebald Koerner might call himself a happy man.

But he was not only a happy man, he was a wise one, and what God had given him of strength, genius, calm and happiness he guarded carefully, lest he might lose it in the tumult of the life of men. Therefore the day of the tournament, which had so stirred the peaceful city of Baden with rumors of pleasure and joy, saw old Sebald shut himself up in his atelier. He had worked since dawn, while the swords of others were clashing and shields and breastplates resounding, while plumes and banners flashed through the air, and horns and clarions awoke the echoes; and he had first prayed, for such was his custom, and he imagined that prayer brightened his aspirations—men were so ignorant and barbarous in those "dark ages." Then with a skillful and pious hand he wielded hammer and chisel through long hours well employed, and now, although the sun was sinking behind the mountains, he still worked, standing before his great stone bas-relief, only interrupting himself from time to time to cast a glance full of parental love on his daughter Mina.

Upon Mina fell the last ray of the sun, which, after kissing the verdure of the mountain, shone through the panes and made her long silver-gray gown glitter like silver itself, and seemed to light a beam of dark light in the centre of each of her large black eyes. Those were splendid eyes and rarely seen in one so fair, for Mina was a blonde, and the golden threads of her purse were not brighter than those of her hair, but only less soft and close. Nothing could equal the perfect purity and grace of her forehead and cheeks, the whiteness of her skin, the delicacy of the lines of her face; she seemed a beautiful statue, to which God, in reward to its designer, had given life and motion, and a loving heart and golden hair.

The bas-relief which the old sculptor was finishing seemed indeed as if long and difficult labor had been spent upon it. It represented a religious subject, for any but religious subjects were scarcely known, in those times when minds were so simple, imagination so quiet, and intelligence so limited, according to our strong-minded ones of this age; in those times when pilgrims marvelled at the beauty of a Child Jesus, or the chaste grace of a Virgin Mary; when the Apollons, the Minervas, the Venuses and Adonises, forgotten or unknown, were yet hurried in the darkness of centuries and under the dust of ruins.

What Sebald Koerner wished to represent was the dawn of the resurrection day.

The cave of the sepulchre was there, rocky, vaulted, and low. At the entrance knelt Peter, with wide-open eyes and trembling lips, and Magdalene wept, stretching forth her arms. Yes, she wept, for the sepulchre was empty. The stone which closed the tomb moved to one side, allowed the scattered bands which wrapped the sacred body and the abandoned winding-sheet to be seen, and the angel seemed to announce to the two faithful followers the glad and great tidings—the tidings of triumph and of consolation—*Resurrexit; non est hic*; words graven on the banded which hung from his hand.

Old Sebald's angel was noble, radiant, and beautiful, as became a messenger of heaven. The sculptor, with something of artistic caprice, had placed a golden star upon his forehead, and with the fond pride of a father had given to his face the features of his beautiful Mina, so that, when he smiled upon his angel, it seemed to him that he smiled upon his daughter, and, when he turned to his daughter, he became grave, and moved as if he looked upon a celestial visitant.

"I am satisfied with thee, my

daughter," said he, "after silently comparing for some moments the two faces. 'I find nothing to change in thy pure brow, thy modest attitude or thy soft gaze. All that I cannot copy is thy smile. And thy smile is sweet my Mina, but it is too lively, too childish, too mocking; it is earthly, and not, I am sure, the smile of the bright ones above.'"

"Marvel not that it should be so, my father," replied Mina, while her eyes glistened: "Above, angels smile in ecstasy, love, and piety, while I here can only bear the smile of youth and hope."

"Thou art right my child; I would not blame thee. Hope is natural to the young. Long years are before them; they may expect to see their projects accomplished, their brightest dreams realized. Melancholy and weariness are the lot of old fathers, old dreamers, and old workers such as I."

"And why, father," returned Mina gayly, "shouldst thou be sad? Hast thou not an art which is better than a fortune? a name which is known throughout Baden as well as those of our oldest barons and bravest knights? Thou art never idle; thou lackest a companion never. Noble ladies and proud lords offer thee a respectful salute as they pass the door of the House of the Angel; and, when they are not here, thy little Mina remains; and thou thyself makest holy companions for thyself when carving some beautiful Virgin or sweet child Jesus."

"Tis that which often makes me tremble, my child. Hath my spirit enough of inspiration, are my hands pure enough to reproduce those holy features? to give to stone or marble, or wood the charm and majesty of those divine forms which from their golden halos call and smile on me? to express the sweetness of the Christ-child, the tenderness of Christ the Mediator, or the virginal motherhood of His holy mother? No, to inspiration must be added the heart of a Christian; and if I have dared too much and but ill succeeded; if to those sacred faces I have given too much of man's fall and misery, then am I guilty, and then have I failed in my aim—in more than my aim, for then my peace of conscience and repose of soul, too, are lost. These Mina are the fears that weaken and the questions that disquiet me, and so often render my hand unsteady, and mark care upon my brow."

"Thou art very wrong to be so troubled my father," said Mina, lifting her head with a little air of triumph. "From Strasburg to Nuremberg, from Constance to Augsburg, all who have hearts and eyes and frequent the churches say there is in this would no man like thee to carve angels and saints."

"Ay; so say men," replied Sebald. "But God hath not said it, he who sees and judges my works; and from him must come my courage and my strength, for I would destroy all the works of my hands if by them I knew that he was offended. Look, my child, this bas-relief is nearly completed, and until now I was satisfied with it, but a scruple comes and weighs heavily upon my mind. This angel is very beautiful, Mina, since he bears thy face, but have I not presumed too much in giving him thy features? As one of the host of heaven he is perfect, so far as aught beneath God himself can be perfect. But thou art but a child of earth; thou art good, thou art tender to thy old father; thou art his only treasure, and yet more beautiful than this angel, but wilt thou be always calm, pure, and radiant as he?"

"I will try, my father," answered Mina, with an air of half-rebellious resolution, mingled at the same time with deep tenderness.

"Promise me, Mina, that thou wilt ever seek to be angelic and joyous, and in the midst of the world to live retired from it, that the weaknesses

and the griefs of men may ever remain far from thee and never afflict thee. I am old, and, when I shall rest in the tomb, thou wilt be the heirless of my name and the guardian of my memory. Then learned men, princes, travellers, who may perchance have heard of my fame, may come. Thou wilt salute them at the threshold, and when they ask for old Sebald, thou, pointing to my deserted studio and empty seat, wilt reply: '*Resurrexit; non est hic*.' He hath succeeded; he hath finished his years of toil, and reposed in his fatherland." And I, my Saviour!" continued old Koerner, "I will then know whether I knew thee on earth. After thou hast done this, my daughter, dismiss the travellers and bid the princes farewell. Live in simplicity and retirement with a few old friends, my poor child, for thou hast no mother, or with some faithful companion whom thou mayest wed."

"Father, father!" cried the young girl, "why speak of sorrow and death in the beautiful spring, when the sun shines so brightly, and when thou art finishing the beautiful angel to whom thou hast given such radiance and youth? If thou couldst give him youth, my father, it is because thou yet possess youth and long wilt possess it. And thou art not that, if thou wert no longer on earth, many would give a thought to thy little Mina, who is young and ignorant, and who is not a lady? No, those to whom strangers would come to speak of thy fame, whom after thy departure, they would seek, are sure to be thy pupils Johann Muller, Franz Steinbach and even—and even—Sir Otho of Arneck, who carves so bravely, and wears such glistening arms."

"As to the two first, thou art perhaps right, my daughter," said Koerner, who had again begun to work, and was lightly polishing the tunic of the angel with the edge of his chisel. "Franz hath ardor and Johann almost genius. But for the knight, Sir Otho, he amuses himself with sculpture as with training his hawks or with the wrestling of his varieties."

"Art not too severe?" asked Mina, lowering her eyes and puckering her tiny lips into a little pout. "I thought the knight of Arneck had something of talent; that thou thyself saidst, so the day he modelled the great St. Michael."

"In good truth, he might have talent, were he more pious, more humble, and were he not a noble. Thinkest thou, Mina, that inspiration will come in the midst of the clamors of a passage-at-arms, the charms of a concert of lutes, or a circle of great ladies listening to the words of a handsome cavalier, or the lays of a minn-singer? No; who would consecrate his labors to the honor of God, and the saints must seek his inspiration, looking upward to heaven studying the mountains and the fields, or praying in the churches. Then let him return and work and adore, lest the holy vision fly or the sweet fervor grow cold."

"Nevertheless, my father, the cavalier Otho, is very assiduous, and I have more than once heard thee marvel at his zeal."

"Assuredly, he has been zealous. But can he really bear that zeal in his heart, wherein he bears the pride of his high lineage, the gallantry of a courteous knight, and all the cares of his seignior? No; his ardor is but the flame of burning straw, which quickly dies. I cannot even understand why the knight of Arneck should take up the chisel—he who should content himself with the sword."

"Yes, yes, father, he wields it marvelously!" cried Mina, in a burst of enthusiasm.

"And therefore should be content with it. But Sir Otho knows not what he wants. To-day he practices a new thrust, and to-morrow he cuts stone or models a statue. See, he has not finished the fine armor of his archangel, and yet he could not keep from the tournament. And nevertheless, he promised to be here before evening."

Mina did not reply to these last words, but threw a vague, sorrowful glance toward the sun, which yet shone, but was fast sinking.

Sebald, yet touching upon various parts of his bas-relief, did not turn his head, and for some moments silence reigned in the atelier.

Soon the fall of a light and vigorous step was heard on the little pointed black stones which formed the pavement of the street.

"It is perhaps Sir Otho," said Sebald, and continued his work.

"If it were he, he would come on horseback," replied Mina, whose cheeks, despite her, were covered with the blush of expectant happiness, and in a moment she had left her seat, opened a portion of the large window, and was leaning joyfully over the sculptured balcony.

But she soon returned, looking sad.

"No, father, it is not he; it is only Johann," said she, and she

seemed to awake from a dream. "Then let him come up quickly," replied the old man, well pleased with the news but still working on. A moment after he arose, as he heard the footfalls on the stair, and turned to greet the most beloved and studious of all his pupils: (To be Continued.)

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