

"I thought there was some woman mixed up with it," suggest some others.

"We don't want to read any more of this absurd story," exclaim half a dozen sour-faced spinsters, with charming unanimity.

But whether any of the above or other dissentients may be averse to reading this story, the writer thinks that among the great public there are many wise and sensible people, both men and women, or (as the latter-day speech puts it) ladies and gentlemen, who may wish to be told something about Miss Bertha Eberhard. Still here another objection arises, since, on the outset, when a writer is to speak of a lady, he should in the first place describe her appearance, in order to let his readers know what kind of a looking woman his heroine really is. This is the rule I know, but I also know equally well that there is no rule without an exception, and forsooth Bertha Eberhard must be the exception in this case. For the writer, is alas, unequal to the task of giving his readers a correct conception of the beauty of this flower of Cologne, who, the chronicle states, was possessed of long golden hair, blue laughing eyes, a beautiful countenance, pearly teeth and ruby lips, and had a demeanor so gentle and kind that more than one painter, when they wished to represent the Virgin Mary, came to her with the request that Fraulein Bertha would allow them to represent her face as the ideal picture of the Mother of God, the eager artists forgetting the fact that Mary of Nazareth was a Jewess, and that her beauty, if she had any, must have been of the pure Semitic order, and not of the Aryan-Saxon type which they admired in Bertha Eberhard.

II.

All this flattery, no doubt, would have turned most young women's heads, but on Bertha Eberhard, who was a most sensible and discreet damsel, it was a useless waste of words. Not that this maiden was cold and unsusceptible to those natural feelings which young women all over the world entertain toward other people, and more especially toward young men, for even this female paragon had a lover, of whom I shall have to speak much presently, but so old-fashioned were young maidens in the thirteenth century that flattery was at a greater discount than it is at present. At home they were brought up to speak the truth, and away from home they seldom went, because their mothers employed them to assist in the household duties, or to take a turn at the almost forgotten spinning-wheel.

Miss Bertha, of course, had parents, else, as the old chronicle sagely observes, she would never have come into the world, and as good fortune willed it, the father and mother of my heroine lived until after she was a heroine no longer, that is, until she had been given and accepted marriage; but of this hereafter. Ernest Eberhard, this maiden's father, as stout and true a man as ever laid stone in wall or arch, for he was a Master Mason, had come up from the Low Countries to Cologne, where he found both fortune and a wife. Of his workings as well as his other affairs not much is said in the old chronicle, save that he came to Cologne at the express bidding of the Archbishop, that he instructed the craftsmen in the mysteries of the guild, also that he built for the use of the craft a spacious Chapter-house, wherein, at stated periods, grave counsellings were held, and that even his great friend the Archbishop—high churchman though he was to the backbone—did not disdain to hold converse on many of these occasions with the handlers of the trowel.

It must not be supposed, however, that the presence of so mighty a prelate of the church at these Masonic counsellings ever gave rise to feelings of mistrust, or still worse, to fulsome exhibitions of flattery; for Ernest Eberhard, when first he had been chosen Master and Grand Master, had caused to be inscribed over the portals of the Chapterhouse, "Here all men are equal," and on the east side of the grand council hall, "Here all men are brothers." These two precepts, likewise, were the first lessons the Master taught the apprentice, whenever he deemed him worthy of entering the Chapterhouse, in order to be instructed in the higher mysteries of the craft. These two precepts were also the guiding line of the accepted Mason, and their violation was invariably followed by severe yet salutary punishment.

III.

The Chapterhouse counted its sons by thousands, for the building of the great church brought a multitude of craftsmen to Cologne, and Ernest Eberhard, as Master Mason, was a busy man, working without and working within. At first it was rather lonely for the young bride he had chosen, since all good wives naturally yearn for their husband's company, but after the first year of their marriage Frau Eberhard was lonely no longer, because of two notable additions to their household. On St. John's day, the red-letter day of the Masons, Bertha was born unto them, and—more than this, says the old chronicle—an hour after their precious and long expected treasure had come into the world, the servant brought a basket into the house, which she had