

Hildegarde

How She Decided Between Two Unruly Suitors.

By F. A. MITCHEL

The modern traveler steaming up the river Rhine will pass not far from its junction with the Moselle in quick succession the ruins of three castles, each perched on an eminence.

There is nothing so inviting to a dreamer as to picture in its prime what has belonged to a distant past. In gazing up at one of these piles of stone he sees its towers rising above the battlements, its ensign floating from the highest point. A drawbridge is lowered, and out pour a troop of armed men. Some merchant traveler has been seen in the valley, and these horsemen are going to extract from him the wherewithal for their suzerain to support this proud establishment, or perhaps a company of a different kind will emerge—

A glimmering, glittering cavalcade of knights and ladies, and every one in princely shien arrayed.

On what mission are they bent? Is it merely for exercise and pleasure, or do they carry some important message to a neighbor or the emperor?

This may now be fancy, but there was a time when it was not. That heap of stones was once what the imagination recalls. Time and again men at arms rode down upon the luckless merchant. As for the knights and ladies—

• • • They rode and rode, and the steeds they neighed
And pranced, and the sun on their glossy hides
Flickered and lightened and glanced and played
Like the moon on rippling tides.

These three castles were once occupied, one by Baron Hugemont, another by Count Herbert Ballenstein and the third by Baron Carl Steigler. Hugemont was an old man; the other two were young. Hugemont, having passed an age where a man is ready to fight for what concerns him, was in an unpleasant position. He possessed a daughter that each of his two neighbors wanted to wed. If he gave her to Ballenstein he feared to offend Steigler; if he gave her to Steigler he would incur the enmity of Ballenstein. And this is the burden of my story.

Hildegarde was kept at school in Cologne till she was seventeen years old. Till then she had seen neither Ballenstein nor Steigler, nor had they seen her. When she had finished her education her father, in order that she should make her debut in the social world of the region in which she lived, gave for her a hunting party, to which the neighboring nobles were invited. One bright morning a company of knights and ladies were gathered in the courtyards of the castle, each with a falcon on the wrist; the drawbridge was lowered, and the cavalcade emerged.

From the moment Count Herbert and Baron Carl saw Hildegarde each was attracted to her. As the company rode out from the castle it was led by her, with one of these young men on either hand. When they rode back again she was still thus flanked, for neither would give way to the other. "On the face of each man was a scowl flashed now and again at his rival, while between them, like an angel between two devils, rode the smiling maiden."

When her father heard of this rivalry he was sore distressed. He was a shrewd old man and foresaw that since he had the disposition of his daughter's hand the burden of a decision would fall upon him, and him alone. It would avail nothing for the rivals to fight each other for Hildegarde, because the victor could not claim the prize. The baron that same evening called her into his cabinet and said:

"My daughter, this rivalry that has sprung up between Count Herbert Ballenstein and Baron Carl Steigler may result disastrously for us. If I give you to the count the baron, incensed, will pick a quarrel with me, and I shall not be able to protect myself against him. If I give you to the baron I shall have the same to fear from the count. I am thinking of solving the problem by sending you away."

"Calm your fears, father. If these young men apply to you for my hand tell them that I alone will decide which I will take for a husband; that you have nothing to do with the matter. I will manage it so that neither will have cause to be wroth with you or even with me, and yet I will marry the one I want."

"Then you have a preference?"

"I have."

"Is it the baron or the count?"

"To tell you that, dear father, would not be wise. In fact, you must reveal to no one that I have already chosen."

"Very well, my daughter. I sincerely hope that you may succeed in averting a catastrophe."

With that he kissed his daughter and she returned to her apartments.

The very next morning Count Herbert rode into the castle courtyard and asked to see the baron. He was admitted to the old man's presence and made a formal application for Hildegarde's hand. He was evidently aware that his rival would make the same demand and showed a certain irritation. He did not say that he would not be refused, but his manner conveyed that impression. When he was informed that Hildegarde would

choose for herself in the matter of a husband he was surprised, for in those days girls were not consulted as to whom they would marry. However, he made a virtue of necessity and accepted the situation. Indeed, he could not very well do anything else.

As he rode over the drawbridge he met Baron Carl Steigler entering the castle. Steigler knew the reason for the count's having been there, and the count knew the reason of Steigler's coming. They saluted each other formally as they passed. Ballenstein riding homeward and Steigler passing into the courtyard. The latter made the same application as the former and received the same reply. Since his suit was left with the lady alone, there was nothing to do but accept the situation and leave his fate in her hands.

Both suitors were informed that Hildegarde would need some time in which to make up her mind, and in the interval she would treat them both as friends. A message was sent to them that they would be received on alternate weeks, and since Baron Herbert Ballenstein had been the first to offer himself he would be received first. He called at the castle nearly every day during the period and offered presents. But Hildegarde, though she received him affably, declined to accept gifts from him or his rival. Steigler was also received kindly, but neither of them was given any reason to believe that he was the favorite suitor.

To social gatherings which took place at the castle both men were invited, and Hildegarde met them at other affairs given by her neighbors. At these meetings she was careful to show no mark of favor to the one that she did not grant the other. Her father, whom she had told she had made choice between them, watched her often when she was with one or both of the rivals in order to discover which she would choose, but he was not able to detect the slightest difference.

Meanwhile the suitors, being held in suspense, were growing impatient, each averring that the condition was becoming unendurable and if the lady did not soon come to a decision he would vent his wrath on his rival. To this she responded that if they killed each other she would be relieved of the necessity of making a choice. This quieted them for a time, but not for long.

When Hildegarde was ready to give the advantage to the one or the other she informed them that they were equally attractive, equally wealthy, both noble, and it would be impossible for any maiden to choose between them; the matter must be left to chance. If they would agree to abide by fortune's decision instead of her own she would provide the means. They must pledge themselves to hold only fate accountable for the result and take no revenge upon any one.

Had not the suitors been worn out with waiting they could not have been brought to accept this method of decision. As it was, one of them gave in, which compelled the other to do the same. They were summoned to the castle on the same day and hour, where they found Hildegarde in an apartment in the center of which was a table, and on it stood two candlesticks. A servant brought in a candle mold and some melted tallow. Pouring the tallow into the mold, he permitted it to cool, then removed two candles, which he handed to his mistress.

"You see," she said to her suitors, "that these candles, having been made in the same mold, are exactly the same size. They should burn an equal length of time. Nevertheless there will be some difference, if only a few seconds."

She directed the servant to turn his back to her and handed him one of the candles, and he was to give it to either the baron or the count, as he liked. He handed it to the count. The other candle remained for the baron. Each man was asked to place his candle in one of the holders. Then Hildegarde put the wicks together and lighted them at the same time by the same flame. "Gentlemen," she said, "my reply to the honor you have done me is in these candles. I will marry him whose candle burns the longer."

Every provision had apparently been made to leave the decision in the hands of fate. It did not seem possible that either suitor could be favored above the other. The candles were of such length that they would burn about an hour. While they were burning the suitors were in an agony of suspense. They were free to go from the room and return to it at will. The baron walked back and forth most of the time in the courtyard, the count doing the same elsewhere. To them the life of the candles seemed interminable, but they burned so evenly that no eye could detect any difference. When only a quarter of an inch remained to each Baron Steigler's candle seemed to indicate that its combustion was a trifle less than Count Ballenstein's.

From this point the difference grew more and more perceptible, and when Ballenstein's candle was flaring in the socket the wick of Steigler's was still in its original position. Both men were now bending over the candles. Ballenstein's face white as marble. Presently, without waiting for his candle's last flicker, he rushed from the room and, mounting his horse, left the castle.

Then the baron advanced, took Hildegarde in his arms, and, looking up, she gave him the first expression of love he had ever seen in her eyes. When her father congratulated her he said to her: "It is fortunate, my child, that, though you left the decision to chance, you are to marry the man of your choice. That is evident."

"Tush, papa! It is now safe to tell you another secret. Will you keep it?"

"Of course."

"I put salt on the wick of Carl's candle. That made it burn more slowly."

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Normal Entrance
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R. Kendrick 88, C. Lillie 76, L. Gorman 74, L. Whitmore 72, L. Gamble 68, F. Rahmer 67, O. Jackson 66, L. Earl 65, M. Wilson 65, J. Donnelly 63, C. Fleming 62, C. Rowsome 60, L. Burchell 60, B. H. Hollingsworth 58, F. Moore 57, D. Johnston 56, H. Johnston 48, L. Derbyshire 41.

III Junior

M. Gibson 94, M. Poole 82, Leonard Howard 82, L. Pyne 81, V. Baker 77, A. Swayne 76, R. Halladay 75, A. Johnston 71, M. Brown 69, J. Claxton 67, A. Fleming 67, G. Vickery 65, G. Wiltse 65, V. Eaton 65, P. Halladay 63, M. Halladay 63, N. Young 62, E. London 62, Laura Howard 62, H. Percival 60, M. Murphy 57, G. Drummond 56, H. Brown 51, E. Guttridge 48, V. Hanna 47, V. Barrington 41.

Form II A

Hazel Yates 71, Geraldine Kelly 68, Charlotte Miller 62, Arthur Taber 59, A. Danby 57, Jennie York 57, Maggie McAvoys 55, Austin Putnam 53, Mary Alguire 51, Ella Russell 51, William Fleming 50, Hugh Fleming 48, Margherita Fleming 41, Travers Rooney 44, Raymond Rowsome 44, Georgie Robinson 42, Aurelia Connerty 36, Jackson Kilborne 35, Edna Henderson 35, Donald Hamblin 31.

Form IIB

H. Brown 90, P. Davis 84, T. Owens 79, B. Sweeney 78, E. Leeder 72, Margorie Hollingsworth 71, R. Burchell 68, I. Young 68, S. Singleton 66, E. Flood 66, G. Harte 65, M. Pryce 65, M. Taber 65, H. R. Huer 64, M. Godkin 63, E. Peterson 60, A. Beale 56, M. Hull 55, A. Richards 55, M. Wilson 55, A. Ferguson 51, A. Love 50, R. Hamblin 49, D. Layng 43, W. Young 42, W. Steacy A Price 39, May Hollingsworth 39.

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The Butter Stations

Plans for a system of producing and marketing butter by grades at an initial cost of \$75,000, are indicated by the Ontario Government in the Supplementary Estimates tabled in the House Thursday. It is said the scheme to be put into operation in Ontario will be similar to that adopted by Western Canada. A certain grading station, probably with cold-storage facilities, will be established and operated by the Department of Agriculture, and creameries will send samples of each day's churn to this station. The department's experts will test the butter and indicate the grade of the output for the day. The station will help to pay expenses by storing butter when prices are low and selling on a rise. Grading will not be compulsory from the commencement, but as the proposal has been endorsed by the Produce Association it is thought the creameries will be ready to co-operate. It is pointed out that graded butter will command better prices than that which does not bear the Government imprint.

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