

lie who exels in nonsense, slavery, and butchery, they cover with orders, titles, and lace. All that we have now above and below, is superstition. The first Advent Sunday in winter weather comes—see there! The fools crawl into the corners, cross and bless themselves, imagining that the Dead Guest makes the Sunday rain, and such nonsense.”

Mrs. Bantes laughed softly, as she said:

“ Papa, be not so angry—he is not so wicked—the thing is not worth your while.”

“ Not worth my while! You, even, have a touch of the belief. But, mamma, do not uphold your superstition to me—none of that nonsense! When I die, I will leave a legacy of ten thousand florins, merely for the salary of a teacher in a school where sound reason may be taught. He who can believe such stories of spectres, devils, apparitions of the dead, and Dead Guests, would suffer the whole world to become a bedlam, and every land a slave dungeon, where one half of the people are bound in serfage-service, and the other half are armed with muskets and cannon to enforce that service.”

“ But, papa! where *are* you wandering to?”

“ Curse all superstition! but I well knew that it would be so. Now, that is the true Englishman—the more stupid the people, the easier they deceive us. There will not be anything better till another *John* (!) Bonaparte comes with an iron rod to keep school for the fools.”

While Herr Bantes continued thundering on in full earnest, walking hastily through the room, and from time to time stopping still in the middle of his course, his book-keeper came in softly, saying:

“ It is all correct, Herr Bantes.”

“ What is correct?”

“ He has actually arrived, and lodges at the Black Cross.”

“ Who lodges at the Black Cross?”

“ The Dead Guest.”

“ Folly! must you, an intelligent man, believe all that is told you by old women?”

“ But my eyes are not old women. I went out of curiosity to the Black Cross. The clerk of the Count, so to speak, was my companion. We took a glass of gold water, merely for a pretence, so to speak, to see him. There he sat—”

“ Who?”

“ I knew him on the spot. The host also, seemed to know him. Then when we were going out of the door, the clerk turned his face sideways, glanced back, and elevated his eye-brows, as if he wished, so to speak, to intimate that he, who was sitting there, brought no good!”

“ Rigmorle!”

“ The tax collector, who knew him from the

door, left immediately to go after the police lieutenant. He told us so, as we were returning from the Black Cross.”

“ The tax-gatherer is a superstitious fool. He ought to be ashamed—on my soul he had.”

“ All’s well; but I beg leave to say, if this is not the Dead Guest it is his twin brother. An unearthly pale countenance—dressed entirely in black from head to foot—four or five ells in stature—a three-fold gold chain on his breast for his watch. On all his fingers he has shining diamond rings. A splendid equipage!”

Herr Bantes gazed long at the book-keeper, with a fixed look, in which unbelief and astonishment alternated—then finally laughing loud and outrageously, he said:

“ Then the devil exercises his sports, as if he had really come on the first Sunday in Advent.”

“ And just as church was out,” said the book-keeper; “and just as the people ran into the streets, wind and rain, so to speak, commenced blowing and pouring most dreadfully.”

“ How does the stranger call himself?”

“ I do not know,” answered the book-keeper; “but I have no doubt, he will assume a name in the end. Sometimes a Count of Grave-diggers,* sometimes a Count of the Olden Cross. He has put up at the Black Cross Inn—the name seems to please him.”

Herr Bantes was silent for a long time, musing seriously; finally, passing his hands quickly over his face, he said:

“ It is nothing but chance—strange freak of chance. Think not of the Dead Guest, and the like. Fudge! but it is a special accident, a mad story. Precisely in the time of Advent—in the most dreadful weather—tall, black, unearthly complexion—the finger rings—the equipage! I would not believe a word of it, Book-keeper, if you were not a sensible man. But excuse me; you heard the story of the Dead Guest—you saw a stranger—he had on black clothes,—and instantly an impious imagination made a ghost story, and supplied what was wanting thereto.”

There the matter rested. Herr Bantes would not allow himself to give it another thought.

CHAPTER IV.

THE APPEARANCE.

THE Dead Guest was the subject of conversation at the table, during the repast. They flattered themselves that they would soon learn more of the stranger, so as to give a correct description of him at the winter evening party

* “Graber,” the name of the first Dead Guest, as our readers will recollect, signifies Grave-digger; and “Altenkreuz” means “Olden Cross.”—Translator’s Note.