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BERTHA EBERHARD;

OR, THE MASONS OF COLOGNE.

I.

OVER six hundred years ago, or to be more definite in regard to the matter, in 1248, just four hundred years prior to the conclusion of the Thirty Years' War, the city of Cologne suffered what at the time of its occurrence was deemed by its inhabitants a most irreparable loss, namely, the destruction by fire of their beautiful cathedral. Only a few accounts have come down to us of the appearance of the old church, but the authorities generally agree that the building was one of the finest church structures then existing throughout Christendom, and that the Prince Archbishop deeply lamented the loss of his beautiful cathedral. But this pious churchman did not content himself with sitting down and bemoaning this grievous misfortune. Nay, on the contrary, he bestirred himself vigorously, went among his people, collected money, gathered material, brought on hosts of industrious and skilful workmen, and shortly after the fire laid the old church in ruins, he had the honor and felicity of laying the corner-stone of that famous structure whose completion was reserved for the nineteenth century.

It is certainly a long vista of years through which to look back, and were it not a musty chronicle whose leaves have been mellowed by age, and which an old book-worm has dug out from the pile of lumber stored up in an ancient garret, we of this day surely would not know what a hard work it was for this good old dead Archbishop—who has become a canonized saint, made after the most approved pontifical fashion—to rebuild his church. Now, building churches by popular subscription is an up-hill business. It is up-hill work even when they only cost a few thousand dollars, but it is proportionately up-hill work when their cost reaches up into the millions, as is the case with this famous Cologne pile, whose church spire reaches high up into the pure atmosphere above, where it is uncontaminated by the numerous nauseous vapors whose smell at one time so seriously offended poor Coleridge's nose.

In fact the real cost of that splendid dome will never be known, for during the six centuries the church has been in course of construction, the rats and the mice, if they could not eat the stones, easily enough found access to the numerous blotters, pay rolls, day books, ledgers and other account books, growing fat by eating thousands of pages covered with innumerable figures, and thus remorselessly denied the conscientious antiquarian the gratification of computing the groschen and kreutzers collected and expended into thalers and guilders, all given though they were for the glory of God and the maintenance of the Christian religion.

Yet of all this I would not say more, even if I could, but there are a few pages in the old chronicle of which mention has already been made, that deserve to be told over again. These old chronicles, let me remark by the way, are just for all the world like old gossips, and the one which I have reference to, instead of confining itself, as a staid, hide-bound old chronicle ought to do, strictly to church history, goes on to speak of the fortunes and misfortunes of Bertha Eberhard's courtship.

"Who is Bertha Eberhard?" not a few readers will straightway enquire.