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THE FIELD OF TERROR.

(From the German of Baron de la Motte Fouquet.)
CHAPTER I.

During the latter part of the war, which terminated with the peace of Westphalia, there assembled at the foot of the Riesenberg, in a beautiful part of the country of Silesia, a number of persons who were the relations, and had lately succeeded to the property, of an opulent deceased farmer. This man had died without children, and had left several farms and fields scattered about that fertile country; and his heirs were now met together to divide the inheritance.

For this purpose they assembled in the principal inn of one of the villages; and they found no difficulty among themselves as to the allotment of every part of the estate except one particular piece of ground, which was known by the name of the 'Haunted Field,' or 'Field of Terror,' on account of the wonderful stories which were told concerning it. This field was entirely overgrown with wild flowers, and an abundance of rank and luxuriant shrubs, which, while they bore ample testimony to the vigor and fertility of the soil, were equally indicative of the neglect and desolation to which it was abandoned. For a long series of years no plowshare had penetrated its surface, and no seed had been cast upon its furrows; or if at intervals the attempt was made, the cattle had been invariably seized with frenzy, had wildly broken from the yoke, and the plowman and his men had rushed wildly from the spot in fright and alarm, affirming that it was haunted by the most terrific phantoms, who followed the laborer in his occupation with the most fearful familiarity, looking over his shoulder with such hideous aspects, that no one could venture to continue his work.

The question now arose, to whom this field should be allotted. As is the common course in the world, every one felt that this spot, which would be useless and of no value in his own case, might yet be extremely applicable, and even advantageous, to his neighbor; and thus the contest for its right appropriation continued till a late hour of the evening. At length one of the party proposed a remedy, which, though not directly benefiting any one present, seemed to promise a settlement of the dispute.

'By a codicil in the will,' said he, 'we are enjoined to shew some mark of kindness, to a poor relation of the testator, who lives hard by in the village. It is true, the girl is very distantly related to us; and there can be no doubt that, portionless as she is, she will yet procure a good husband, for she is virtuous and frugal, and goes by the name of the pretty Sabine. Suppose we give up this 'Field of Terror' to her; we shall in this way discharge the injunction of our lamented relative; and to say the truth, it may yet prove a rich dowry for her, provided she can find a husband who will venture to cultivate it.'

The others immediately consented to this proposal, and one of the relatives was despatched to communicate the intelligence of their bounty.

In the meantime, as the twilight drew on, somebody tapped at Sabine's cottage-window; and to her question of 'Who's there?' a reply was given which had the instant effect of withdrawing the rustic bolt of her little window.—It was a voice long and anxiously expected—the voice of her brave Frederick; who, born poor as herself, had some years before set out for the wars, in the hope of gaining some little subsistence to enable him to marry his beloved Sabine, whose heart, filled with the purest affection, was entirely devoted to him.

It was a delightful picture to see Sabine leaning out of her wired-lattice, with tears of joy starting in her beautiful eyes, as the erect and youthful soldier gazed upon her in modest silent bliss, and extended towards her his faithful hand.

'Ah, Frederick!' she said in a low and bashful voice, 'God be praised, thou art returned safe; this has been my constant prayer morn and evening. And tell me, Frederick, have you made your fortune in the campaign?'

'Fortunes are not so soon won,' said Frederick, shaking his head, and smiling; 'and prizes do not fall to every one. However, I am better off than when I went away; and if you had but a courageous heart, I think we may marry, and get through the world pretty well.'

'Kind-hearted Frederick,' ejaculated Sabine, 'to take a poor orphan for better and worse?'

'Come,' said Frederick, 'give me but one friendly yes, and promise to be mine, and we shall be happy in each other, and thrive and live like princes.'

'And have you got your discharge, and are you really no longer a soldier?'

Frederick, looking into his knapsack, that held his treasures, brought out a silver medal, which he reached to Sabine, and she received it, to the light of the little lamp in her chamber fell on the piece. There was a burst drum figured in an

old-fashioned manner, and over it was written the words, 'God be praised, the war is ended!' 'Perhaps,' added Frederick, helping her to decipher the medal, 'it is not yet peace, but it is thought that we shall have no more fighting at present, and our colonel has therefore discharged his men.'

At this intelligence Sabine held out her hand as a pledge of her affection to her lover, and invited him to come into her little dwelling, where he seated himself by her side, and related how he had won his gold and silver in honorable battle, and open field, from a foreign officer of rank whom he made prisoner; having obtained the money as his ransom.

Sabine, as she turned her wheel, listened with deep attention to her lover's recital, bestowing, from time to time, a smile of fond approbation upon his conduct, and inwardly rejoicing that no reproach could hereafter be thrown upon their slender means, thus honorably acquired.

Their conversation was now interrupted by the appearance of the person who came to communicate the message entrusted to him. Sabine, with maidenly blushes, presented her intended husband to the stranger; and the latter replied, 'This is well—I have arrived very opportunely; for if your betrothed has not brought back a fortune from the wars, the gift which I am directed to present to you in the name of your relations, will be a welcome addition; indeed, it was the will of the testator that you should be remembered in a handsome way.'

Frederick was too much offended at the boasting manner in which this communication was made to testify any joy on the occasion. But the bumble Sabine, ignorant of the mode in which her relatives had evinced their generosity, received the communication as an interposition of Providence, with her head modestly bent down, while a smile of heartfelt grateful joy shone on her countenance. But as soon as she heard that the 'Field of Terror' was assigned to her as her portion and in liquidation of her just claims, the sordid behaviour of her relations pressed on her heart with a painful sickening coldness, and she felt it impossible to refrain from shedding tears of disappointed hope.

Her relation, with a smile of half-suppressed contempt, expressed his regret, that she should have allowed herself to expect more than her friends had thought it right to allot her. 'And indeed,' he observed, 'it is such a larger proportion of the inheritance than you could fairly hope to receive as a matter of right.' With this speech he was about to retire, when Frederick interrupted him; and with deliberate coolness which attends a mind conscious of its own superiority, he said, 'Sir, I perceive that you and your fellows have been pleased to convert the benevolent intentions of the deceased into a mere piece of mockery, and that it is your joint determination to withhold every shilling of his property from my bride. But we will nevertheless accept your offer, in full confidence that, under the guidance of God, this haunted field, in the hands of an honest and active soldier, will be a more productive bargain than a set of covetous, envious relations intend it to be.'

The messenger, who, felt rather uneasy at the tone and manner assumed by the young soldier, did not hazard a reply; and with an altered countenance hurried out of the cottage, and made the best of his way back.

Frederick now kissed away the tears from Sabine's cheeks, and hastened to the priest to fix an early day for their marriage.

CHAPTER II.

After the lapse of a few weeks, Frederick and Sabine were married, and entered upon their slender house-keeping. The gold and silver pieces he had brought from the wars, the young soldier chiefly expended in the purchase of a fine yoke of oxen; part was invested in seed and in the necessary implements of husbandry, and the articles of household furniture; the rest was reserved for daily expenditure, to be dealt out in the most frugal manner, till the harvest of the succeeding year should replenish their stores.—But as Frederick took his departure, with his cattle and plow, for the field of labor, he looked back and smiled to his good Sabine, saying that he was now going to invest his gold, which another year would restore to him two-fold. Sabine could only follow him with her anxious looks, and wish, in her heart, that he were once safely returned from the dreaded 'Field of Terror.'

And home, truly, he came, and that long before the vesper-bell had sounded; but far from being so cheerful, as, in the native confidence of his heart, he had promised himself in the morning, when he went forth singing to his work.—He dragged laboriously after him the fragments of his shattered plow; before him paced, with difficulty, one of his oxen sorely maimed, and marks of blood were seen on his own head and shoulder. But still his soldier-spirit did not fail him; and he bore up under his misfortune with a

courageous and even merry heart, consoling, at the same time, the grief of the weeping Sabine. 'Come,' said he, smilingly, 'get your pickling-tubs in order; for this goblin who reigns in the 'Field of Terror' has provided us with an abundance of beef. The beast I brought home with me has so injured himself in his frenzy, that he will not be fit for any farther work; and as for the other, he ran off into the mountains, and there I saw him plunge from a steep rock into the torrent below, where I fancy he now lies, and from whence, I dare say, he will never again make his appearance.'

'Oh, these relations—these wicked relations?' sobbed the disconsolate Sabine.

'My hurt is of no consequence,' said Frederick; it was but the oxen that crushed me between them when they ran mad, and I endeavored to stop them: but it matters not grieving, and in the morning, I will start afresh.'

Sabine was now so terrified at what had happened, that she used every means in her power to dissuade her husband from any farther attempt at cultivating the unlucky field; but he only replied, by saying, 'that so long as he could move an arm or a leg, the field should have no rest. Land which we cannot plow, we must delve;—and I am no timid beast of labor, but a good and steady soldier, over whom a goblin can have no power.'

He now slaughtered the wounded ox, and cut it up; and on the next morning, while Sabine was busied in preparing it for pickle, Frederick pursued his road to the haunted field with his pickaxe and spade, with almost as good a heart as on the day before, when he set out with his fine yoke of oxen and his handsome new plow.

This time he returned rather late in the evening, somewhat pale and exhausted, but in high spirits, and ready to tranquillize his anxious wife.

'This is rather hard work,' said he, laughing; 'for there comes a sort of goblin-fellow, who stands first on this side, and then on that, sometimes in one form, sometimes in another, and mocks me with his foolish talk and tricks; but he seems to feel no small surprise that I give so little heed to his pranks; and from this I begin to take fresh courage. Besides, why should an honest man, who goes straight forward, and mends his work, care for such beings?'

The same kind of thing continued for many days together. The brave Frederick pursued, without interruption, his daily labor of digging, sowing, and destroying the weeds and useless plants which had overspread the field. It is true, the slow process of the spade enabled him to cultivate only a small portion of the whole ground, but this served to make him all the more zealous and industrious in his labors; and he was at length rewarded by seeing a crop spring up, which promised, and eventually produced, a sufficient, if not an abundant harvest. Even the toil of reaping, and transporting it from the field to the barn, was thrown entirely upon his own shoulders; for the laborers in the vicinity would not have engaged, for any consideration, to spend a day upon the dreaded 'Field of Terror'; and he would, on no account permit Sabine to lend her assistance, more particularly as he was expecting her soon to present him with an infant.

The child was born, and in three years two more; and so things went on without any remarkable occurrence. By hard striving and industry Frederick compelled the 'Haunted Field' to yield him one crop after another; and thus like an honest man, redeemed his word to Sabine, that he would find sufficient to support her.

It happened one evening in autumn, as the shades of night began to draw on, and Frederick was still busied with his spade, that a tall robust man of unusual size of limb, black and sooty as a charcoal-burner, and holding a huge furnace-iron in his hand, appeared suddenly before him, and said, 'Are there no cattle to be had in this part of the country, that you thus labor away with your two hands? One would suppose, by the extent of your landmarks, that you were a wealthy farmer.'

Frederick was perfectly aware of who it was that addressed him, and treated him in the same cool way with which he usually received the goblin in the field. He held his tongue, endeavored to withdraw his attention from the figure before him to his work, and to labor on with redoubled ardor. But his swarthy visitor, instead of disappearing, as is the usual practice of these goblins, to present himself again in a more frightful and hideous form, remained where he stood, and in a friendly tone continued, 'My good fellow, you are doing yourself and me injustice by this conduct of yours. Give me now an honest and candid answer, and perhaps I may be able to find a remedy for your misfortunes.'

'Well, then,' rejoined Frederick, 'in God's name be it so. If you are but cajoling me with these friendly words, the fault be at your door,

and not at mine.'

With this he began to relate the whole story of his adventures since he had taken possession of the field. He gave an undisguised recital of his first distress, a faithful representation of his just and honest indignation against the goblin that haunted his property, and detailed the difficulty he found, under such continual interruption and provocation, of supporting his family by the mere application of his hoe and spade.

The stranger gave an attentive ear to the narrative, seemed lost in thought for a few minutes, and then broke forth in the following address:—

'It would seem, friend, that you know who I am; and I look upon it as a proof of your frank and manly disposition, that you have made no concealment, but that you have spoken out boldly of the displeasure you entertain towards me. To say the truth, you have certainly had sufficient cause; but in thus putting your courage to the test, I will make a proposal which will, I hope, indemnify you for a good deal of what is past. You must know, then, that I have had my fill of wild and fantastic tricks through wood and field, and mountain, and I begin to fancy I should like to attach myself to some quiet family, that I may live for some half a year or so a peaceful orderly life. What do you say to taking me for six months as your servant?'

'It is not right of people of your sort,' said Frederick, 'thus to pass your jokes upon an honest man, who reposes confidence in you.'

'No, no!' replied the other, 'there is no joke in it; I tell you it is my serious intention. You will find in me a sturdy, active servant; and as long as I live with you, not a single spirit or goblin will venture to show himself on the 'Field of Terror,' so that you may admit whole herds of cattle to browse upon it.'

'I should like the thing well enough,' rejoined Frederick, 'if I were but sure that you would keep your word, and moreover, that I were doing right in dealing with you at all.'

'That must be your own affair,' said the stranger; 'but I have never broken my word since these Riesenberg mountains have stood; and a mere creature of evil and malice I certainly am not. A little merry, and wild, and tricky sometimes, I own—but that is all!'

'Why, then,' said Frederick, 'I believe that you are the celebrated Rubezahl.'

'Harkee!' cried the stranger, interrupting him, with a frown, 'if that be your opinion, I would have you also to know, that the mighty spirit of the mountains will not permit that name, and that he chooses to call himself the Monarch of the Hill.'

'That would be an odd sort of a servant whom I must call the Monarch of the Hills,' said Frederick, in a tone of raillery.

'You may call me Waldmann, then,' rejoined his companion.

Frederick looked a while towards the ground, pondering upon the course he should adopt, and at length exclaimed, 'Well, so be it; I think I can hardly be amiss in accepting your services. I have often seen irrational animals drilled into domestic use—carrying parcels, turning spits, and other household duties—why not a goblin?'

His new servant burst into a hearty laugh at this observation, and said, 'I must acknowledge such an estimate was never made of any of my kind before. But that I heed not—is my humor, and so 'tis a bargain, my honored master!'

Frederick, however, made it a condition that his new servant should on no account whatever discover to Sabine or the children that he had lived in the Haunted Field, or in the old caverns of Riesenberg, nor any time play any goblin tricks about the house or farm. Waldmann pledged his word to all this; so the matter was concluded, and home they both went together in a very friendly mood.

CHAPTER III.

Sabine was not a little surprised at this addition to their household, and could scarcely look upon the swarthy gigantic servant without fear. The children were at first so much alarmed that they would not venture out of doors when he was at work in the garden or in the yard; but his quiet, and good-natured, and friendly behavior soon reconciled all the household to his presence; and if he now and then had a frolicsome fit, and chased the dog and the fowls, they thought it sportiveness and good humor, and a single look from the master was at any time sufficient to bring him within proper bounds.

In full reliance upon the promises of the Mountain Lord, Frederick applied the slender savings of many years to the purchase of a fresh yoke of oxen; and with his newly-mended plow drove to the field in the highest glee.—Sabine looked after him with an anxious, sorrowful countenance, and with an equally anxious mind awaiting his return in the evening, fearing a renewal of the same disasters and the same disappointed hopes, or that his personal injuries this time might be more dangerous and alarming than before. But with the sound of the vesper bell

Frederick came home singing through the village, driving his sleek, well-fed oxen before him, kissed his wife and children in the fullness of his joy, and shook his servant cordially by the hand.

Waldmann now frequently went to the field alone, while his master remained behind engaged about the yard or garden. A considerable portion of the Field of Terror was cleared and cultivated; and to the great astonishment of the village neighbors, and the equal discontent and envy of Sabine's selfish relations, everything assumed an air of prosperity and comfort. It is true, Frederick, when alone, often reflected that all this might be but of short duration; 'and I know not how I am to manage with the harvest,' he exclaimed, 'for Waldmann's time with them be out, and the goblins of the field may choose to appear with redoubled power.' But he considered that the gathering in of the crop was a labor which of itself gave additional vigor to the workman's arm and heart; and it was possible that Waldmann, for old acquaintance-sake, might keep the land free from such guests—as in fact, at times of cheerful relaxation, he almost seemed to intimate.

In the course of time the needful labors of the field were completed. Winter arrived, and Frederick daily drove to the forest for a stock of fuel and wood. On one of these days it so chanced that Sabine was entreated to visit a poor widow in the village who lay dangerously ill, and whom, as far as their increasing means admitted, Frederick and his wife had been accustomed to relieve. She was at a loss how to dispose of the children during her absence; but Waldmann offered his services, with whose stories the children were always delighted, and with whom they were ever pleased to remain; and she proceeded on her charitable errand without further hesitation.

About an hour after her departure Frederick returned from the forest; and having disposed of his wagon in the outhouse, and put up his cattle in the stall, he proceeded towards the house to revive his numbed and frozen limbs by the blaze of a cheerful fire. On approaching the door, a cry of painful distress from his children met his ear. He rushed into the house, and on entering the room found the children creeping behind the stove, and crying aloud for help, while Waldmann was wildly jumping about the shouts of violent laughter, making the most hideous faces, and with a crown of sparks and rays of flame playing about his head.

'What is all this?' said Frederick, in a tone of indignant anger; and the fiery decorations of Waldmann's head disappeared, his fantastic merriment instantly ceased, and standing in a humble posture, he began to excuse himself by saying that he was only trying to amuse the children. But the children ran towards their father, crying and complaining that Waldmann had first of all told them a number of most horrible stories, and that then he had assumed a variety of frightful disguises, sometimes appearing with the head of a ram, sometimes with that of a dog.

'Enough, enough!' exclaimed Frederick.—'Away, sirrah; you and I no longer remain under the same roof.'

With this he seized Waldmann by the arm, and pushed him violently out of the house, desiring the children to remain quietly in the room, and to dismiss their fears, as their father was now come, and they were safe.

Waldmann suffered all this without uttering a word of expostulation; but as soon as he found himself alone with Frederick in the open court, he said, with a smiling countenance:

'Hear, master; suppose we hush this matter up, and make a fresh bargain. I know I have done a very foolish thing; but, I assure you, it shall never happen again. Somehow or other my old humor came upon me, and I forgot myself for the time.'

'For that very reason, because you can forget yourself,' said Frederick, 'we part. You might terrify my children into a paroxysm of madness; and, as I have said, our contract is at an end.'

'My half-year has not expired,' said Waldmann, in a dogged tone; 'I'll go back into the house.'

'Not a step farther at your peril, you shall not again touch my threshold,' cried Frederick.—'You have broken the agreement by your accused goblin-pranks, and all that I can do is to pay you your full wages. Here, take it and be off with you.'

'My full wages?' said the Mountain-spirit, with a contemptuous sneer; 'have you never seen my stores of gold in the caverns of yonder hills?'

'I do this more on my own account than yours,' said Frederick, 'no man shall call me his debtor.' And with that he forced the money into Waldmann's pocket.

'And what is to be done with the Field of Terror?' inquired Waldmann, in a grave but almost angry tone.