

## UNDER THE EVENING LAMP

### THE STORY OF A POOR SCHOLAR.

BY D. ALCOCK, AUTHOR OF "THE SPANISH BROTHERS," ETC.

#### CHAPTER IV.

It was a bright, sunny morning. Everything breathed of spring, and even of the coming summer. The great farm kitchen was flooded with sunshine, and strewn with freshly gathered flowers and green branches—wreaths and strays remaining over from the bounteous heaps out of which willing hands had been making wreaths and garlands. Wenzel, who had slept little, and whose toilet, performed with his left hand, was necessarily an affair of time, came slowly in, with a weary, listless air. He sat down on the oak settle near the fire, and looked about him in surprise. No one else was in the room.

Presently, however, Father Fritz came in. Wenzel brightened a little at the sight of his friend.

"God save you, father," he said. "'Tis good of you to come."

"I thought every one would be out to day, and you might be lonely," said the old man, seating himself, and placing his staff beside him. Since the night of the fire he had not been so strong as before.

"Hast had food, boy?" he asked.

"Oh yes; they brought it to me ere I rose. They are good to me—very." He sighed a little, then glanced at the festive-looking litter, and asked, with some show of interest. "But where is every one? and what does all this mean? Is it a feast day in these parts?"

"It is indeed a day of joy and gladness, and of giving thanks to God," was the answer. "They are busy adorning the village with green branches and with flowers, and making arches of triumph along the road. Also, they have gathered heaps of flowers, for wreaths, and perchance for strewing in the way."

"But what is it all about?" asked Wenzel. "What is the cause of rejoicing?"

"Good cause, God be thanked. The Elector is coming home."

"The Elector?" Wenzel repeated, with a puzzled look. But he knew, of course, that this was the title the Saxons gave their sovereign, so he hazarded a guess. "I have heard it said the Elector was away fighting. Has he gained a great victory—taken some towns, perhaps, or a new province, that he is coming home in such joy and triumph?"

"Nay, my boy," said the old man, with a look of emotion. "He whom they are welcoming home so joyfully has not won a great victory; he has suffered a sore defeat. He has taken no cities or provinces; he has lost all, or almost all, he had, and has been for nigh up to six years a captive in the hands of his enemies."

"Then," said Wenzel, still more mystified, "this is the triumph of the vanquished?"

"Just so my boy, the triumph of the vanquished."

"Still I don't understand. Your Elector is called Duke Maurice, is he not? And I have heard Farmer Speyer say the Elector Maurice is a great soldier, and gains victories."

"Now, indeed, it is I who am to blame," Father Fritz returned penitently. "How couldst thou understand me, when I do not give the honorable Princes their proper titles? Thou, too, Master Wenzel, when thou art as old as I, will talk of things as they have been, not as they are. I had no right to call Duke John Frederick the Elector, since the electorate has been taken from him and given to his cousin, Duke Maurice, the Elector that now is."

"Then it is the Prince who has lost everything that comes home now? Where is his home?"

"They have left him the town of Gotha, and a little district around it. There the Electress Sybilla—the Duchess, I should call her—lives, with her household and her little court."

"Gotha is not very far from this. Are we, then, in that district?"

"No, though I would we were. We are in the Electorate, not the Duchy, as we say. Jonas Speyer is a good man, and a kind, but he never cared for these matters, that is why you have not heard them talked of here. Nor does he pray every day, as we do, for our

dear dispossessed lord, whom we love. And God, at last, has heard our prayers."

"But how did your Duke John Frederick lose everything?" Wenzel asked. "I suppose him to be—am I right?—the son of the great Elector, Frederick the Wise, who protected Dr. Luther, and shut him up in the Wartburg. I heard of him in Bohemia."

"He is his brother's son. But heard you nothing of the war between Kaiser Karl and the Protestant Princes, and of the sore defeat of Muhlberg?"

"I do remember, dimly, things I heard of it in my childhood. I know that we of the Unity were suspected of favoring the Protestant Princes, and wishing to have the Elector of Saxony for our king, instead of King Ferdinand."

"No blame to you, if you did. But is that all you know?"

"All. Since I came here has no one spoken in my hearing of Prince or Kaiser—save, indeed, to say, in a passing way, that the Elector Maurice was a great soldier, and to grumble now and then at the taxes."

"Then I will tell thee," said Father Fritz, settling himself to his task with the enjoyment of an old man who has a story to tell, and a willing listener to hear it. "Duke Frederick the Wise died childless, and his brother, Duke John, succeeded—an upright, God-fearing man, true and simple in all his doings. 'A straight line is the shortest way,' was his favorite saying."

"It is a true one," said Wenzel the scholar, who knew his Euclid.

"What Dr. Luther taught us of our Lord Jesus Christ sank deep, like living seed, into that honest and good heart," Father Fritz went on. "Duke John's hand was the first to sign the famous Protest of Spire, and one year afterwards, the Confession of Augsburg. When it came to signing the Confession, Dr. Philip Melancthon and others would have bidden the Elector pause. It was dangerous to be a friend of the Gospel, war might be made upon him, he might lose his dominions. But our Prince silenced all remonstrance with the word, 'My crown is not so precious to me as the cross of Christ.'"

"A noble word!" Wenzel said, his mournful eyes lighting up.

"And he held to it," Father Fritz went on. "True, when the peril drew near, and the air was full of threatenings, he had his hour of sadness, perhaps of fear. But God gave him the victory. 'It was God,' said he, 'who made me Elector—me, who was not worthy of it—I fling myself into His arms. Let Him do with me as seemeth good in His sight.'"

"That's a hard thing to say sometimes," said Wenzel, with a sigh.

"Ay, master; but those who say it honor God, and God honors them. Duke John died in peace, leaving his crown—his Hat and Ermine, as our phrase is—to his son, Duke John Frederick."

"I see: God delivered him from his enemies, as He did Daniel and David, and the three Hebrew youths in the fire."

"Dost mind, Master Wenzel, what those three Hebrews said to the king? 'Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us, and He will deliver us. But if not—' That 'if not,' meseemeth, was not given them to learn; 'twas too hard a lesson, before Christ came and showed us how to endure the cross, despising the shame. But 'tis the higher one." He paused, as if in thought.

"Please you, father, go on with the story," Wenzel said.

"That 'if not' is the story. God, who knew what was coming on His Church, took Dr. Luther gently home, just before the war began. It was called the War of Smalkalde, because it arose out of the League so named, which we Protestants made together for the defence of our liberties. With our Elector was the Landgrave of Hesse, and some other princes and Free Cities. God knows we did not want to fight; we were forced into it. What chance had we against the great Emperor, with Spain and the New World behind him, and himself the ablest general in New or Old? We were beaten at Muhlberg, disastrously, and the Elector wounded and made prisoner."

"That was hard."

"Kaiser Karl and his brother Ferdinand, your King, made it harder by reproaching him with bitter words, when he was led up to them, a captive, on the field of battle. Our Prince turned away in silence, and as he did so a sud-