



AND

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HEARTS RESOLVED AND HANDS PREPARED, THE BLESSINGS THEY ENJOY TO GUARD.—SMOLLET.

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GERTRUDE, OR THE CHAPEL OF WIN KELREID.

The sun of the 9th Sept., 1678, had risen mild and radiant upon the snow-capped mountains, which like a colossal Boulevard environs the little canton of Unterwald, one of the three forest states which effected the famous revolution of 1307. The beautiful meadows of the valley glittered with dew, a balmy breeze played among the old walnut trees, that overshadowed Stantz, the principal village of the canton, and to complete this smiling rural scene, on this day Maitre Kerne, one of the richest descendants of St. Nicholas de Fine, celebrated the marriage of his darling daughter, the young and lovely Gertrude.

From one of the handsomest houses of Stantz peals of joyous laughter were heard mingling with the distant noises from the mountains, and the first merry sound of the village bells. In an apartment hung with flowers, several young girls were gaily engaged in adorning the bride, and alternately sang, laughed, talked, and forcibly held the door, to prevent the entrance of the young villagers, who were seeking the fiancée, whose toilet at length completed, advanced from amongst her companions and opened the door. The first who presented himself, his countenance beaming with happiness, was George her intended, the most intrepid chamois hunter of the whole country. Gertrude gave him her hand, whilst her eyes sought those of her lover with an expression of anxious enquiry, but the latter wholly occupied in admiring the gay costume that so enhanced the beauty of his bride, did not perceive the singularity of Gertrude's manner, but drawing her aside, he expressed again and again the feelings of joy and happiness which animated him.—Gertrude appeared for some moments to lend an attentive ear, but the slight flush which from time to time suffused her pale cheek, betrayed a secret agitation.—Yielding suddenly to her increasing anxiety, as she listened breathlessly to a loud report, prolonged by the distant echoes, she interrupted her betrothed.

"George, George, what noise is this? One would think it a cannon shot. Is all quiet in the valley?"

These words recalled the youth to other and more sorrowful thoughts, his countenance became sad, as steadfastly regarding his lovely bride for a moment, he replied.

"Thou art pale, Gertrude, thou hast been weeping."

"O'er our unhappy country,"

sighed the young girl.

Switzerland was indeed undergoing a mournful change; the ancient Helvetic Confederation annihilated by force and intrigue, had given place to a new confederation, founded upon the model of the government then established in France. The armies of the French Directory called by some Republican cantons, had invaded all the western parts of Helvetia. Engagements had taken place at Berne, Lucerne, and in the central parts the borders of the smaller cantons, (who had hitherto obstinately refused to acknowledge the new constitution) were now the scene of faction. The French troops were sent by the Helvetic Directory, under the command of Gen. Schauenburg and had advanced towards Unterwald; three unsuccessful attacks had taken place, the enemy had retreated, and with the idea that they were finally repulsed, the mountaineers as we have already seen, had resumed their daily toils and pleasures, and in truth, no one who beheld the pure and serene, sky, and the unclouded loveliness of nature on this day, could anticipate that it could be aught than one of rejoicing and peace. The church was decked with flowers, the organ pealed forth a solemn strain, and the priest stood before the altar as the bridal train advanced gaily, the village fiddler leading the way to the spirit-stirring Ranz des vaches of Unterwald, and the happy George supporting the steps of his companion, and breathing into her ear words of hope and happiness. Gertrude listened, her eyes turned on with him an expression of melancholy and uneasiness, but she could no longer succeed in calming her inward agitation, as she reports continued, and appeared nearer. By this time the nuptial cortege had entered the church, the fiancée was already kneeling before the altar, when Gertrude with a look of alarm, exclaimed.

"Hark! hark! the enemy are upon us, we are lost!"

Alas! it was but too true, there could no longer be any doubt, and the 2,000 hunters of Unterwald would have to contend with 15,000 veteran troops, who had landed suddenly in the harbor of Stantzstadt. A peasant who, on the first alarm, had rushed to the steeple, increased their consternation by crying. "To arms! to arms! Stantzstadt is in flames! the enemy have forced the mountain passes, and are already in the town."

A sharp firing which just then commenced, almost under the windows of the church, most cruelly confirmed this information. The besiegers gained ground every

moment, the windows were shattered to pieces, and a shower of balls striking the marble altar, warned the females in the church to think of flight. Gertrude's companions were hurrying her away, when George entered, his clothes disordered, his face covered with blood, and a sabre in his hand; he threw himself before her, and led her back to the altar.

"This night," cried he, "the tomb will be our bridal couch. Let us quit this life united by a solemn tie, to be re-united before God to all eternity. Holy father, continue the work thou hast begun." But the priest answered not, he remained motionless, bowed down before the altar; George approached and raised his head, 'twas calm, but pale, and he bared the breast of the old man, and there was a large wound from which the life-blood flowed! a ball had pierced him, the priest had ceased to live! A mountaineer now rushed in with breathless haste, large drops bathed his forehead.

"Sarnem is attacked, he cried. "The chapel of St. Jacques still holds out, but that of Winkelreid though filled with ammunition, lacks men for its defence."

"We will defend it," said Gertrude, pointing to the young girls who had remained with her.—"Adieu!" added she, throwing herself on George's bosom, "adieu, my beloved, we shall meet again in heaven."

A dreadful explosion shook the walls of the church to their foundation, it was the discharge of artillery, Stantz was in the power of the conquerors!

Upon the road from Stantz to Sarnem, there stood formerly a small chapel, with grated loopholes in its white walls, and its red tiled roof surmounted by a shining cross. This chapel was held in great veneration by the whole country, as a memorial both of the victory achieved by old Strath de Winkelreid over a monstrous dragon, and the noble devotion which had signalised the name of Albert de Winkelreid, and it now recalls to every true Swiss, a third event which we are about to relate.

As the mountaineer had stated the chapel was provided with arms and ammunition, and moreover the precaution had been taken of making numerous stockades in the vicinity, and immense fragments of rock rolled into the road, so as to impede the approach. The post was therefore tenable, and Gertrude followed by seventeen young girls, resolved on selling their lives dearly, flattered herself with being able to resist the troops, who were advancing by the road

from Sarnem, till the inhabitants of the surrounding valleys could arrive to the assistance of their unhappy brethren of Unterwald. In the mean time the little female garrison completed their means of defence. The day advanced, the report of musketry was heard on all sides, and valleys, villages, houses, all were the scene of action between the free man and his oppressor. As the combat continued, Gertrude ceased to hope that her countrymen would again be victorious, but the fatal truth flashed upon her as she beheld a band of soldiers debouch suddenly from the bottom of the valley—drums beating and flags flying. Alas! nothing now remained for them but to die gloriously, since their country's freedom was lost. As the soldiers approached Gertrude quickly levelled a carbine loaded with a double charge, and aimed at an officer, who fell, whilst seventeen balls fired at the same moment from the chapel, marked each its victim. The soldiers were not men to allow themselves to be thus retarded in their victorious march, but they could only fire at random, whereas our heroines being in close ambuscade, each shot took effect; the skirmish however could not last for ever, the enemy having succeeded in opening a way among the rocks and trunks of trees. The doom of Gertrude and her companions was sealed. Several of them were wounded, but still continued to defend themselves, and when no longer able to handle their own arms, would re-load those of their companions, and then at the approach of death crawling upon their hands and knees up to the breach, and there making a rampart of their bodies, calmly await their inevitable fate.

Gertrude alone, amongst the eighteen maidens, was uninjured; not that she had shrunk from danger, on the contrary, constantly encouraging her little troop, she placed them in the most favourable positions, while she herself remained in the most exposed situations, and it was a miracle alone which had hitherto preserved her; she was no longer the gay and thoughtless young girl whose ideas never strayed beyond the domestic occupations of the chalet and its pastimes, but a heroine, defending both her country and her God. The attack of the soldiery was for a moment suspended, by the sound of confused noise coming from Stantz. Gertrude listened also—were her countrymen victorious? were they coming to her assistance? Alas! she clearly distinguished the enemy's colors! All was lost, and Unterwald had submitted to the Republic, use it indivisible. Parents, friends—all must have fallen—she had now only to follow their example. The last of her companions had expired in bidding her adieu, and the soldiers, bayonet in hand, were only a few paces from her.

"My God!" cried she, "into thy hands I commit my soul!" and plunging a loaded pistol into a barrel of gunpowder, she pulled the trigger—a sudden glare illuminated the sky, the earth trembled, and the distant mountains re-echoed the terrible explosion, caused by the blowing up of the chapel of Winkelreid. The foremost of the soldiers who beheld the inanimate forms stretched upon the pavement, exclaimed, as they drew back with horror, "they are women!" The smoke had hitherto prevented them from distinguishing the sex of their antagonists; their fury gave way to admiration, and gladly would they have given the rites of sepulture to their brave enemies, but the drums gave their signal to advance, and they hurried onwards, inwardly cursing their officers, who had caused the massacre of such devoted heroines.

Such is the heroic episode which the shepherd of Unterwalden relates to the