

and her hitherto tranquil slumbers were now too often broken by fears for Henry's safety, and thus she learned that "the course of true love never runs smooth."

V.

Casper Hass, if he had one virtue, it was perseverance. In spite of the discouragements he received, he stuck to his courtship, and he was the more encouraged to persevere since Frau Eberhard stoutly championed his cause. The mother had, with a woman's blind infatuation, set her heart upon this marriage, even though her daughter abhorred the eager suitor. Bertha would have, indeed, been powerless to resist, had she not found a stout ally in her father. The Master had seen enough of Casper Hass to discover that his wife's nephew would not make his daughter a good husband. The man, he said, was not only a bully, but he had also a bad heart. Such a man was not a fit guardian for his only child.

For two years this wrangling over Bertha's future continued after Henry's departure, till one day Casper mustered courage enough to ask the master for his daughter's hand. Earnest Eberhard was not a man to evade or delay. He met the crisis manfully and firmly.

"Nephew," he said, "for three years thou hast been suing for Bertha's hand, and for three years she has refused. I would have you to know that I will not force my child into a marriage most abhorrent to her. More than this, never mention marriage either to her or me, else this roof will no longer shelter thy miserable carcass."

This emphatic denial roused the worst passions of Casper's bad nature. He left the Master's presence perfectly furious, and, rushing into the market place, he swore upon the great stone cross, taking all the saints in heaven to witness, that he would be avenged upon the Master. Then he returned to the house seemingly satisfied, yet he never forgot the dreadful oath. Cloaking his feelings as best he could, he only waited for a fitting opportunity to wreak his vengeance upon the Master.

He waited long and patiently, but at last the hour of vengeance came. It was the time of the crusade of the French king against the Albigenses, when a fair land was laid waste by fanaticism; when thriving cities and prosperous villages were fired by the incendiary's torch; when men were slaughtered by thousands, and when the hangman even plied his bloody avocation upon the fairest women and innocent children. Great as the ecclesiastical power was in those days, the cry of horror made itself heard throughout Europe, and in Cologne, as everywhere else, the campaign against the French heretics was much talked about.

True, the majority of the people, benighted as they were throughout the middle ages, had no great sympathy for the misfortunes of men, whom to extirpate they were told by the clergy redoubled to the greater glory of God, but there were then already not a few men, more enlightened than the majority, who dared to protest against this sanguinary exhibition of religious intolerance. Among these pioneers of a dawning civilization Master Eberhard was most conspicuous in Cologne. When the matter came to be spoken of in the Chapterhouse of the Masons as well as at home, he openly expressed the opinion that "carrying of fire and sword among a defenceless people to force them to forego their religious convictions, was a sacrilegious act, and as such not acceptable in the eyes of the Almighty."

This bold speech, when made in the Chapterhouse, created the greatest possible sensation, and the Masons eyed with astonishment the man who dared to condemn the persecutions of heretics. A few kindred spirits looked upon the Master with admiration, but the majority believed that the man had lost his senses. Yet, as the proceedings in the Chapterhouse were held in secret, none others but craftsmen being admitted by the out-door sentinel, and each member besides being sworn to secrecy, the out-door world knew nothing of this matter, till one day the people of Cologne were astonished to learn that so great a man as Master Eberhard had been taken in the night time out of his bed, cast into the dungeon of the Dominican cloister, and was to be tried before the ecclesiastical court for the grievous offences of heresy and blasphemy.

None other but Casper Hass, intent upon revenge, had been the informant. He had found his opportunity, and had laid the accusation. Besides swearing himself to the charges, he gave a long long list of brothers of the Chapterhouse, and more than this, the wretch had the cruelty to point out the Master's daughter as a witness against her father.

VI.

Poor Bertha was dragged, more dead than alive, before the dread tribunal, in order that her testimony might condemn the beloved father to the stake, and unhappily it was her testimony only which could work this sad ruin, for the Masons, obedient to the mystic tie of the craft, would not, by their testimony, imperil the Master's life.