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The Pilgrims of the Rhine

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Chapter XX.

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CHAPTER XX.

GELNHAUSEN.—THE POWER OF LOVE IN SANCTIFIED PLACES.—A PORTRAIT OF FREDERIC BARBAROSSA.—THE AMBITION OF MEN FINDS NO ADEQUATE SYMPATHY IN WOMEN.

“You made me tremble for you more than once,” said Gertrude to the Student; “I feared you were about to touch upon ground really sacred, but your end redeemed all.”

“The false religion always tries to counterfeit the garb, the language, the aspect, of the true,” answered the German; “for that reason, I purposely suffered my tale to occasion that very fear and anxiety you speak of, conscious that the most scrupulous would be contented when the whole was finished.”

This German was one of a new school, of which England as yet knows nothing. We shall see, hereafter, what it will produce.

The Student left them at Freidberg, and our travellers proceeded to Gelnhausen; a spot interesting to lovers, for here Frederick the First was won by the beauty of Gela; and, in the midst of an island vale he built the Imperial Palace—in honour to the lady of his love. The spot

is, indeed, well chosen of itself: the mountains of the Rhinegeburg close it in, with the green gloom of woods, and the glancing waters of the Kinz.

“Still, wherever we go,” said Trevelyman, “we find all tradition is connected with love; and history, for that reason, hallows less than romance.”

“It is singular,” said Vane, moralising, “that love makes but a small part of our actual lives, but is yet the master-key to our sympathies. The hardest of us, who laugh at the passion when they see it palpably before them, are arrested by some dim tradition of its existence in the past. It is as if life had few opportunities of bringing out certain qualities within us, so that they always remain untold and dormant, susceptible to thought, but deaf to action!”

“You refine and mystify too much,” said Trevelyman, smiling; “none of us have any faculty, any passion, uncalled forth, if we have *really* loved, though but for a day.”

Gertrude smiled, and, drawing her arm within his, Trevelyman left Vane to philosophise on passion;—a fit occupation for one who had never felt it.

“Here let us pause,” said Trevelyman, afterwards, as they visited the remains of the ancient palace, and the sun glittered on the scene, “to recal the old chivalric day of the gallant Barbarossa;—let us suppose him commencing the last great action of his life; let us picture him as setting out for the Holy Land. Imagine him issuing from

those walls on his white charger; his fiery eye somewhat dimmed by years, and his hair blanched; but nobler from the impress of time itself;—the clang of arms; the tramp of steeds; banners on high; music pealing from hill to hill; the red cross and the nodding plume; the sun, as now glancing on yonder trees; and thence reflected from the burnished arms of the crusaders;—but, Gela,—”

“Ah,” said Gertrude, “*she* must be no more, for she would have outlived her beauty, and have found that glory had now no rival in his breast. Glory consoles men for the death of the loved; but glory is infidelity to the living.”

“Nay, not so, dearest Gertrude,” said Trevelyman, quickly, “for my darling dream of Fame is the hope of laying its honours at your feet! And if ever, in future years, I should rise above the herd, I should only ask if *your* step were proud, and *your* heart elated.”

“I was wrong,” said Gertrude, with tears in her eyes, “and, for your sake, I can be ambitious.”

Perhaps there, too, she was mistaken; for one of the common disappointments of the heart is, that women have so rarely a sympathy in our better and higher aspirations. Their ambition is not for great things; they cannot understand that desire “which scorns delight, and loves laborious days.” If they love us, they usually exact too much. They are jealous of the ambition to which we sacrifice so largely, and which divides us from them; and they leave the stern passion of great minds to the only solitude which affection cannot share. To aspire is to be alone!