

The Masque

From "Klosterheim"

By De Quincey



When the Thirty Years' War was ravaging Germany, Klosterheim was ruled by a Landgrave ostensibly on the side of the Imperialists, but secretly inclined to the Swedes. He was a harsh and gloomy tyrant, suspected of dark crimes. The town was packed with fugitives. Among these was the Lady Paulina, a relative of the Emperor, and affianced, with his consent, to his protégé, the young Maximilian. This was a youth of brilliant qualities and mysterious parentage, who was pursuing his studies at Klosterheim University. Plots and counter-plots were rife. The students were openly disaffected, and, by the Landgrave's orders, were imprisoned in large numbers. After some time an order came for their release. They were marched to the castle, headed by one of their ringleaders, the Count St Aldenheim, and conducted before the Prince and his minister.]

This Prince was now on the verge of fifty, strikingly handsome in his features, and of imposing presence, from the union of a fine person with manners unusually dignified. No man understood better the art of restraining his least governable impulses of anger or malignity within the decorums of his rank. And even his worst passions, throwing a gloomy rather than terrific air

upon his features, served less to alarm and revolt than to impress the sense of secret distrust. Of late indeed, from the too evident indications of the public hatred, his sallies of passion had become wilder and more ferocious, and his self-command less habitually conspicuous. But in general a gravity of insidious courtesy disguised from all but penetrating eyes the treacherous purpose of his heart.

The Landgrave bowed to the Count St Aldenheim; and, pointing to a chair, begged him to understand that he wished to do nothing inconsistent with his regard for the Palsgrave his brother, and would be content with his parole of honour to pursue no further any conspiracy against himself, in which he might too thoughtlessly have engaged, and with his retirement from the city of Klosterheim.

The Count St Aldenheim replied that he and all the other cavaliers present, according to his belief, stood upon the same footing: that they had harboured no thought of conspiracy, unless that name could attach to a purpose of open expostulation with his Highness on the outraged privileges of their corporation as a university: that he wished not for any distinction of treatment in a case when all were equal offenders, or none at all: and, finally, that he believed the sentence of exile from Klosterheim would be cheerfully accepted by all, or most, of those present.

Adorni, the minister, shook his head, and glanced significantly at the Landgrave during this answer. The Landgrave coldly replied that, if he could suppose the Count to speak sincerely, it was evident that he was little aware to what length his companions, or some of them, had pushed their plots. "Here are the proofs!" and he pointed to the papers.

"And now, gentlemen," said he, turning to the students, "I marvel that you, being cavaliers of family, and doubtless holding yourselves men of honour, should beguile these poor knaves into certain ruin, whilst yourselves could reap nothing but a brief mockery of the authority which you could not hope to evade."

Thus called upon, the students and the city-guard told their tale; in which no contradictions could be detected. The city prison was not particularly well secured against attacks from without. To prevent, therefore, any sudden attempt at a rescue, the guard kept watch by turns. One man watched two hours, traversing the different passages of the prison; and was then relieved. At three o'clock on the preceding night, pacing a winding lobby, brightly illuminated, the man who kept that watch was suddenly met by a person wearing a masque, and armed at all points. His surprise and consternation were great, and the more so as the steps of The Masque were soundless, though the floor was a stone one. The guard, but slightly prepared to meet an attack, would, however, have resisted or raised an alarm; but The Masque, instantly levelling a pistol at his head with one hand, with the other had thrown open the door of an empty cell, indicating to the man by signs that he must enter it. With this intimation he had necessarily complied; and The Masque had immediately turned the key upon him. Of what followed he knew nothing, until aroused by his comrades setting him at liberty, after some time had been wasted in searching for him.

The students had a pretty uniform tale to report. A Masque, armed cap-à-pié as described by the guard, had visited each of their cells in succession; had instructed them by signs to dress; and then, pointing to the door, by a series of directions all communicated in the same dumb show, had assembled them together, thrown open the prison door, and, pointing to their college, had motioned them thither. This motion they had seen no cause to disobey, presuming their dismissal to be according to the mode which best pleased his Highness, and not ill-pleased at finding so peaceful a termination to a summons which at first, from its mysterious shape and the solemn hour of night, they had understood as tending to some more formidable issue.

It was observed that neither the Landgrave nor his minister treated this report of so strange a transaction with the scorn which had been anticipated. Both listened attentively, and made minute inquiries as to every circumstance of the dress and appointments of the mysterious Masque. What was his height? By what road, or in what direction, had he disappeared? These questions answered, his Highness and his minister consulted a few minutes together, and then, turning to Von Aremburg, bade him for the present dismiss the prisoners to their homes,—an act of grace which seemed likely to do him service at the present crisis,—but at the same time to take sufficient security for their re-appearance. This done, the whole body were liberated.

All Klosterheim was confounded by the story of the mysterious Masque. For the story had been rapidly dispersed: and on the same day it was made known in another shape. A notice was affixed to the walls of several public places in these words:—

“Landgrave, beware! henceforth not you, but I, govern in Klosterheim.

(Signed) “The Masque.”

And this was no empty threat. Very soon it became apparent that some mysterious agency was really at work to counteract the Landgrave’s designs. Sentinels were carried off from solitary posts. Guards even of a dozen men were silently trepanned from their stations. By and by, other attacks were made, even more alarming, upon domestic security. Was there a burgomaster amongst the citizens who had made himself conspicuously a tool of the Landgrave, or had opposed the Imperial interest? He was carried off in the night-time from his house, and probably from the city. At first this was an easy task. Nobody apprehending any special danger to himself, no special preparations were made to meet it. But, as it soon became apparent in what cause The Masque was moving, every person who knew himself obnoxious to attack took means to face it. Guards were multiplied; arms were repaired in every house; alarm bells were hung. For a time the danger seemed to diminish. The attacks were no longer so frequent. Still, wherever they were attempted, they succeeded just as before. It seemed, in fact, that all the precautions taken had no other effect than to warn The Masque of his own danger, and to place him more vigilantly on his guard. Aware of new defences rising, it seemed that he waited to see the course they would take; once master of that, he was ready (as it appeared) to contend with them as successfully as before.

Nothing could exceed the consternation of the city. Those even who did not fall within the apparent rule which governed the attacks of The Masque felt a sense of indefinite terror hanging over them. Sleep was no longer safe; the seclusion of a man’s private hearth, the secrecy of bedrooms, was no longer a protection. Locks gave way, bars fell, doors flew open, as if by magic, before him. Arms seemed useless. In some instances a party of as many as ten or a dozen persons had been removed without rousing disturbance in the neighbourhood. Nor was this the only circumstance of mystery. Whither he could remove his victims was even more incomprehensible than the means by which he succeeded. All was darkness and fear; and the whole city was agitated with panic.

It began now to be suggested that a nightly guard should be established, having fixed stations or points of rendezvous, and at intervals parading the streets. This was cheerfully assented to; for, after the first week of the mysterious attacks, it began to be observed that the Imperial party were attacked indiscriminately with the Swedish. Many students publicly declared that they had been dogged through a street or two by an armed Masque; others had been suddenly confronted by him in unfrequented parts of the city in the dead of night, and were on the point of being attacked when some alarm, or the approach of distant footsteps, had caused him to disappear.

The students, indeed, more particularly, seemed objects of attack; and, as they were pretty generally attached to the Imperial interest, the motives of The Masque were no longer judged to be political. Hence it happened that the students came forward in a body, and volunteered as members of the nightly guard. Being young, military for the most part in their habits, and trained to support the hardships of night-watching, they seemed peculiarly fitted for the service; and, as the case was no longer of a nature to awaken the suspicions of the Landgrave, they were generally accepted and enrolled, and with the more readiness as the known friends of the Prince came forward at the same time.

A night-watch was thus established, which promised security to the city, and a respite from their mysterious alarms. It was distributed into eight or ten divisions, posted at different points, whilst a central one traversed the whole city at stated periods, and overlooked the local stations. Such an arrangement was wholly unknown at that time in every part of Germany, and was hailed with general applause.

To the astonishment, however, of everybody, it proved wholly ineffectual. Houses were entered as before; the college chambers proved no sanctuary; indeed, they were attacked with a peculiar obstinacy, which was understood to express a spirit of retaliation for the alacrity of the students in combining for the public protection. People were carried off as before. And continual notices affixed to the gates of the college, the convents, or the schloss, with the signature of The Masque, announced to the public his determination to resist, and his contempt of the measures organised against him.

The alarm of the citizens now became greater than ever. The danger was one which courage could not face, nor prudence make provision for, nor wiliness evade. All alike, who had once been marked out for attack, sooner or later fell victims to the obstinacy of this mysterious foe. To have received even an individual warning availed them not at all. Sometimes it happened that, having received notice of suspicious circumstances indicating that The Masque had turned his attention upon themselves, they would assemble round their dwellings, or in their very chambers, a band of armed men sufficient to set the danger at defiance. But no sooner had they relaxed in these costly and troublesome arrangements, no sooner was the sense of peril hilled, and an opening made for their unrelenting enemy, than he glided in with his customary success; and in a morning or two after it was announced to the city that they also were numbered with his victims.

Even yet it seemed that something remained in reserve to augment the terrors of the citizens, and push them to excess. Hitherto there had been no reason to think that any murderous violence had occurred in the mysterious rencontres between The Masque and his victims. But of late, in those houses or college chambers from which the occupiers had disappeared, traces of bloodshed were apparent in some instances, and of ferocious conflict in others. Sometimes a profusion of hair was scattered on the ground; sometimes fragments of dress or splinters of weapons. Everything marked that on both sides, as this mysterious agency advanced, the passions increased in intensity; determination and murderous malignity on the one side, and the fury of resistance on the other.

At length the last consummation was given to the public panic; for, as if expressly to put an end to all doubts upon the spirit in which he conducted his warfare, in one house where the bloodshed had been so great as to argue some considerable loss of life, a notice was left behind in the following terms:—"Thus it is that I punish resistance; mercy to a cheerful submission; but henceforth death to the obstinate!—The Masque."

What was to be done? Some counselled a public deprecation of his wrath, addressed to The Masque. But this, had it even offered any chance of succeeding, seemed too abject an act of

abasement to become a large city. Under any circumstances, it was too humiliating a confession that, in a struggle with one man (for no more had avowedly appeared upon the scene), they were left defeated and at his mercy. A second party counselled a treaty. Would it not be possible to learn the ultimate objects of The Masque; and, if such as seemed capable of being entertained with honour, to concede to him his demands, in exchange for security to the city, and immunity from future molestation? It was true that no man knew where to seek him: personally he was hidden from their reach; but everybody knew how to find him: he was amongst them; in their very centre; and whatever they might address to him in a public notice would be sure of speedily reaching his eye.

After some deliberation, a summons was addressed to The Masque, and exposed on the college gates, and demanding of him a declaration of his purposes, and the price which he expected for suspending them. The next day an answer appeared in the same situation, avowing the intention of The Masque to come forward with ample explanation of his motives at a proper crisis, till which "more blood must flow in Klosterheim."

Meantime the Landgrave was himself perplexed and alarmed. Hitherto he had believed himself possessed of all the intrigues, plots, or conspiracies which threatened his influence in the city. Among the students and among the citizens he had many spies, who communicated to him whatsoever they could learn, which was sometimes more than the truth, and sometimes a good deal less. But now he was met by a terrific antagonist, who moved in darkness, careless of his power, inaccessible to his threats, and apparently as reckless as himself of the quality of his means.

Adorni, with all his Venetian subtlety, was now as much at fault as everybody else. In vain had they deliberated together, day after day, upon his probable purposes; in vain had they schemed to intercept his person, or offered high rewards for tracing his retreats. Snares had been laid for him in vain; every wile had proved abortive, every plot had been counterplotted. And both involuntarily confessed that they had now met with their master.

Vexed and confounded, fears for the future struggling with mortification for the past, the Landgrave was sitting, late at night, in the long gallery where he usually held his councils. He was reflecting with anxiety on the peculiarly unpropitious moment at which his new enemy had come upon the stage—the very crisis of the struggle between the Swedish and Imperial interests at Klosterheim, which would ultimately determine his own place and value in the estimate of his new allies. He was not of a character to be easily duped by mystery. Yet he could not but acknowledge to himself that there was something calculated to impress awe, and the sort of fear which is connected with the supernatural, in the sudden appearances, and vanishings as sudden, of the Masque. He came no one could guess whence, retreated no one could guess whither; was intercepted, and yet eluded arrest; and, if half the stories in circulation could be credited, seemed inaudible in his steps, at pleasure to make himself invisible and impalpable to the very hands stretched out to detain him. Much of this, no doubt, was wilful exaggeration, or the fictions of fears self-deluded. But enough remained, after every allowance, to justify an extraordinary interest in so singular a being; and the Landgrave could not avoid wishing that chance might offer an opportunity to himself of observing him.

Profound silence had for some time reigned throughout the castle. A clock which stood in the room broke it for a moment by striking the quarters; and, raising his eyes, the Landgrave perceived that it was past two. He rose to retire for the night, and stood for a moment musing with one hand resting upon the table. A momentary feeling of awe came across him, as his eyes travelled through the gloom at the lower end of the room, on the sudden thought—that a being so

mysterious, and capable of piercing through so many impediments to the interior of every mansion in Klosterheim, was doubtless likely enough to visit the castle; nay, it would be no ways improbable that he should penetrate to this very room. What bars had yet been found sufficient to repel him? And who could pretend to calculate the hour of his visit? This night even might be the time which he would select. Thinking thus, the Landgrave was suddenly aware of a dusky figure entering the room by a door at the lower end. The room had the length and general proportions of a gallery, and the farther end was so remote from the candles which stood on the Landgrave's table that the deep gloom was but slightly penetrated by their rays. Light, however, there was, sufficient to display the outline of a figure slowly and inaudibly advancing up the room. It could not be said that the figure advanced stealthily; on the contrary, its motion, carriage, and bearing were in the highest degree dignified and solemn. But the feeling of a stealthy purpose was suggested by the perfect silence of its tread. The motion of a shadow could not be more noiseless. And this circumstance confirmed the Landgrave's first impression, that now he was on the point of accomplishing his recent wish, and meeting that mysterious being who was the object of so much awe, and the author of so far-spread a panic.

He was right; it was indeed The Masque, armed *cap-à-pié* as usual. He advanced with an equable and determined step in the direction of the Landgrave. Whether he saw His Highness, who stood a little in the shade of a large cabinet, could not be known; the Landgrave doubted not that he did. He was a prince of firm nerves by constitution, and of great intrepidity,—yet, as one who shared in the superstitions of his age, he could not be expected entirely to suppress an emotion of indefinite apprehension as he now beheld the solemn approach of a being who, by some unaccountable means, had trepanned so many different individuals from so many different houses, most of them prepared for self-defence, and fenced in by the protection of stone walls, locks, and bars.

The Landgrave, however, lost none of his presence of mind; and in the midst of his discomposure, as his eye fell upon the habiliments of this mysterious person, and the arms and military accoutrements which he bore, naturally his thoughts settled upon the more earthly means of annoyance which this martial apparition carried about him. The Landgrave was himself unarmed,—he had no arms even within reach,—nor was it possible for him in his present situation very speedily to summon assistance. With these thoughts passing rapidly through his mind, and sensible that, in any view of his nature and powers, the being now in his presence was a very formidable antagonist, the Landgrave could not but feel relieved from a burden of anxious tremors when he saw The Masque suddenly turn towards a door which opened about half-way up the room, and led into a picture-gallery at right angles with the room in which they both were.

Into the picture-gallery The Masque passed at the same solemn pace, without apparently looking at the Landgrave. This movement seemed to argue either that he purposely declined an interview with the Prince, and that might argue fear, or that he had not been aware of his presence;—either supposition, as implying something of human infirmity, seemed incompatible with supernatural faculties. Partly upon this consideration, and partly perhaps because he suddenly recollected that the road taken by The Masque would lead him directly past the apartments of the old seneschal, where assistance might be summoned, the Landgrave found his spirits at this moment revive. The consciousness of rank and birth also came to his aid, and that sort of disdain of the aggressor which possesses every man—brave or cowardly alike—within the walls of his own dwelling:—unarmed as he was, he determined to pursue, and perhaps to speak.

The restraints of high breeding, and the ceremonious decorum of his rank, involuntarily checked the Landgrave from pursuing with a hurried pace. He advanced with his habitual gravity of step, so that The Masque was half-way down the gallery before the Prince entered it. This gallery, furnished on each side with pictures, of which some were portraits, was of great length. The Masque and the Prince continued to advance, preserving a pretty equal distance. It did not appear by any sign or gesture that The Masque was aware of the Landgrave's pursuit. Suddenly, however, he paused—drew his sword—halted; the Landgrave also halted; then turning half round, and waving with his hand to the Prince so as to solicit his attention, slowly The Masque elevated the point of his sword to the level of a picture—it was the portrait of a young cavalier in a hunting dress, blooming with youth and youthful energy. The Landgrave turned pale, trembled, and was ruefully agitated. The Masque kept his sword in its position for half a minute; then dropping it, shook his head, and raised his hand with a peculiar solemnity of expression. The Landgrave recovered himself—his features swelled with passion—he quickened his step, and again followed in pursuit.

The Masque, however, had by this time turned out of the gallery into a passage which, after a single curve, terminated in the private room of the seneschal. Believing that his ignorance of the localities was thus leading him on to certain capture, the Landgrave pursued more leisurely. The passage was dimly lighted; every image floated in a cloudy obscurity; and, upon reaching the curve, it seemed to the Landgrave that The Masque was just on the point of entering the seneschal's room. No other door was heard to open; and he felt assured that he had seen the lofty figure of The Masque gliding into that apartment. He again quickened his steps; a light burned within, the door stood ajar; quietly the Prince pushed it open, and entered with the fullest assurance that he should here at length overtake the object of his pursuit.

Great was his consternation upon finding in a room which presented no outlet not a living creature except the elderly seneschal, who lay quietly sleeping in his arm-chair. The first impulse of the Prince was to awaken him roughly, that he might summon aid and co-operate in the search. One glance at a paper upon the table arrested his hand. He saw a name written there, interesting to his fears beyond all others in the world. His eye was rivetted as by fascination to the paper. He read one instant. That satisfied him that the old seneschal must be overcome by no counterfeit slumbers, when he could thus surrender a secret of capital importance to the gaze of that eye from which above all others he must desire to screen it. One moment he deliberated with himself; the old man stirred, and muttered in his dreams; the Landgrave seized the paper, and stood irresolute for an instant whether to await his wakening, and authoritatively to claim what so nearly concerned his own interest, or to retreat with it from the room before the old man should be aware of the Prince's visit, or his own loss.

But the seneschal, wearied perhaps with some unusual exertion, had but moved in his chair; again he composed himself to deep slumber, made deeper by the warmth of a hot fire. The raving of the wind, as it whistled round this angle of the schloss, drowned all sounds that could have disturbed him. The Landgrave secreted the paper; nor did any sense of his rank and character interpose to check him in an act so unworthy of an honourable cavalier. Whatever crimes he had hitherto committed or authorised, this was perhaps the first instance in which he had offended by an instance of petty knavery. He retired with the stealthy pace of a robber anxious to evade detection; and stole back to his own apartments with an overpowering interest in the discovery he had made so accidentally, and with an anxiety to investigate it further, which absorbed for the time all other cares, and banished from his thoughts even The Masque himself, whose sudden

appearance and retreat had in fact thrown into his hands the secret which now so exclusively disturbed him.

Meantime The Masque continued to harass the Landgrave, to baffle many of his wiles, and to neutralise his most politic schemes. In one of the many placards which he affixed to the castle gates, he described the Landgrave as ruling in Klosterheim by day, and himself by night. Sarcasms such as these, together with the practical insults which The Masque continually offered to the Landgrave by foiling his avowed designs, embittered the Prince's existence. The injury done to his political schemes of ambition at this particular crisis was irreparable. One after one, all the agents and tools by whom he could hope to work upon the counsels of the Klosterheim authorities, had been removed. Losing their influence, he had lost every prop of his own. Nor was this all: he was reproached by the general voice of the city as the original cause of a calamity which he had since shown himself impotent to redress. He it was, and his cause, which had drawn upon the people, so fatally trepanned, the hostility of the mysterious Masque. But for His Highness, all the burgomasters, captains, city officers, etc., would now be sleeping in their beds; whereas the best fate which could be surmised for the most of them was that they were sleeping in dungeons; some perhaps in their graves. And thus the Landgrave's cause not merely lost its most efficient partisans, but through their loss determined the wavering against him, alienated the few who remained of his own faction, and gave strength and encouragement to the general disaffection which had so long prevailed.

Thus it happened that the conspirators, or suspected conspirators, could not be brought to trial, or to punishment without a trial. Any spark of fresh irritation falling upon the present combustible temper of the populace would not fail to produce an explosion. Fresh conspirators, and real ones, were thus encouraged to arise. The university, the city, teemed with plots. The government of the Prince was exhausted with the growing labour of tracing and counteracting them. And, by little and little, matters came into such a condition that the control of the city, though still continuing in the Landgrave's hands, was maintained by mere martial force, and at the very point of the sword. And in no long time it was feared that with a general principle of hatred to combine the populace, and so large a body of military students to head them, the balance of power, already approaching to an equipoise, would be turned against the Landgrave's government. And, in the best event, His Highness could now look for nothing from their love. All might be reckoned for lost that could not be extorted by force.

This state of things had been brought about by the dreadful Masque, seconded, no doubt, by those whom he had emboldened and aroused within; and, as the climax and crowning injury of the whole, every day unfolded more and more the vast importance which Klosterheim would soon possess as the centre and key of the movements to be anticipated in the coming campaign. An electoral cap would perhaps reward the services of the Landgrave in the general pacification, if he could present himself at the German Diet as the possessor de facto of Klosterheim and her territorial dependencies, and with some imperfect possession de jure; still more, if he could plead the merit of having brought over this state, so important from local situation, as a willing ally to the Swedish interest. But to this a free vote of the city was an essential preliminary; and from that, through the machinations of The Masque, he was now farther than ever.

The temper of the Prince began to give way under these accumulated provocations. An enemy for ever aiming his blows with the deadliest effect; for ever stabbing in the dark; yet charmed and consecrated from all retaliation; always met with, never to be found! The Landgrave ground his teeth, clenched his fists, with spasms of fury. He quarrelled with his ministers; swore at the officers; cursed the sentinels; and the story went through Klosterheim that he had kicked Adorni.

Certain it was, under whatever stimulus, that Adorni put forth much more zeal at last for the apprehension of The Masque. Come what would, he publicly avowed that six days more should not elapse without the arrest of this "ruler of Klosterheim by night." He had a scheme for the purpose, a plot baited for snaring him; and he pledged his reputation as a minister and an intriguer upon its entire success.

On the following day, invitations were issued by Adorni, in His Highness's name, to a masqued ball on that day week. The fashion of masqued entertainments had been recently introduced from Italy into this sequestered nook of Germany; and here, as there, it had been abused to purposes of criminal intrigue.

Spite of the extreme unpopularity of the Landgrave with the low and middle classes of the city, among the highest his little court still continued to furnish a central resort to the rank and high blood, converged in such unusual proportion within the walls of Klosterheim. The schloss was still looked to as the standard and final court of appeal in all matters of taste, elegance, and high breeding. Hence it naturally happened that everybody with any claims to such an honour was anxious to receive a ticket of admission;—it became the test for ascertaining a person's pretensions to mix in the first circles of society; and, with this extraordinary zeal for obtaining an admission, naturally increased the minister's rigour and fastidiousness in pressing the usual investigation of the claimant's qualifications. Much offence was given on both sides, and many sneers hazarded at the minister himself, whose pretensions were supposed to be of the lowest description. But the result was that exactly twelve hundred cards were issued; these were regularly numbered, and below the device engraved upon the card was impressed a seal bearing the arms and motto of the Landgraves of X—.

Every precaution was taken for carrying into effect the scheme, with all its details, as concerted by Adorni; and the third day of the following week was announced as the day of the expected fête.

The morning of the important day at length arrived, and all Klosterheim was filled with expectation. Even those who were not amongst the invited shared in the anxiety; for a great scene was looked for, and perhaps some tragical explosion. The undertaking of Adorni was known; it had been published abroad that he was solemnly pledged to effect the arrest of The Masque; and by many it was believed that he would so far succeed, at the least, as to bring on a public collision with that extraordinary personage. As to the issue, most people were doubtful, The Masque having hitherto so uniformly defeated the best-laid schemes for his apprehension. But it was hardly questioned that the public challenge offered to him by Adorni would succeed in bringing him before the public eye. This challenge had taken the shape of a public notice, posted up in the places where The Masque had usually affixed his own; and it was to the following effect:—"That the noble strangers now in Klosterheim, and others invited to the Landgrave's fête, who might otherwise feel anxiety in presenting themselves at the schloss, from an apprehension of meeting with the criminal disturber of the public peace, known by the appellation of The Masque, were requested by authority to lay aside all apprehensions of that nature, as the most energetic measures had been adopted to prevent or chastise upon the spot any such insufferable intrusion; and, for The Masque himself; if he presumed to disturb the company by his presence, he would be seized where he stood, and without further inquiry committed to the Provost-Marshal for instant execution;—on which account, all persons were warned carefully to forbear from intrusions of simple curiosity, since in the hurry of the moment it might be difficult to make the requisite distinctions."

It was anticipated that this insulting notice would not long go without an answer from The Masque. Accordingly, on the following morning, a placard, equally conspicuous, was posted up in the same public places, side by side with that to which it replied. It was couched in the following terms:—"That he who ruled by night in Klosterheim could not suppose himself to be excluded from a nocturnal fête given by any person in that city. That he must be allowed to believe himself invited by the Prince, and would certainly have the honour to accept His Highness's obliging summons. With regard to the low personalities addressed to himself, that he could not descend to notice anything of that nature coming from a man so abject as Adorni, until he should first have cleared himself from the imputation of having been a tailor in Venice at the time of the Spanish conspiracy in 1618, and banished from that city, not for any suspicions that could have settled upon him and his eight journeymen as making up one conspirator, but on account of some professional tricks in making a doublet for the Doge. For the rest, he repeated that he would not fail to meet the Landgrave and his honourable company."

All Klosterheim laughed at this public mortification offered to Adorni's pride; for that minister had incurred the public dislike as a foreigner, and their hatred on the score of private character. Adorni himself foamed at the mouth with rage, impotent for the present, but which he prepared to give deadly effect to at the proper time. But, whilst it laughed, Klosterheim also trembled. Some persons indeed were of opinion that the answer of The Masque was a mere sportive effusion of malice or pleasantry from the students, who had suffered so much by his annoyances. But the majority, amongst whom was Adorni himself, thought otherwise. Apart even from the reply, or the insult which had provoked it, the general impression was that The Masque would not have failed in attending a festival which, by the very costume which it imposed, offered so favourable a cloak to his own mysterious purposes. In this persuasion, Adorni took all the precautions which personal vengeance and Venetian subtlety could suggest, for availing himself of the single opportunity that would perhaps ever be allowed him for entrapping this public enemy, who had now become a private one to himself.

These various incidents had furnished abundant matter for conversation in Klosterheim, and had carried the public expectation to the highest pitch of anxiety, some time before the great evening arrived. Leisure had been allowed for fear, and every possible anticipation of the wildest character, to unfold themselves. Hope, even, amongst many, was a predominant sensation. Ladies were preparing for hysterics. Cavaliers, besides the swords which they wore as regular articles of dress, were providing themselves with stilettoes against any sudden rencontre hand to hand, or any unexpected surprise. Armourers and furbishers of weapons were as much in request as the more appropriate artists who minister to such festal occasions. These again were summoned to give their professional aid and attendance to an extent so much out of proportion to their numbers and their natural power of exertion that they were harassed beyond all physical capacity of endurance, and found their ingenuity more heavily taxed to find personal substitutes amongst the trades most closely connected with their own than in any of the contrivances which more properly fell within the business of their own art. Tailors, horse-milliners, shoemakers, friseurs, drapers, mercers, tradesmen of every description, and servants of every class and denomination, were summoned to a sleepless activity—each in his several vocation, or in some which he undertook by proxy. Artificers who had escaped on political motives from Nuremburg and other Imperial cities, or from the sack of Magdeburg, now showed their ingenuity, and their readiness to earn the bread of industry; and, if Klosterheim resembled a hive in the close-packed condition of its inhabitants, it was now seen that the resemblance held good hardly less in the industry which, upon a sufficient excitement, it was able to develop. But in the midst of all this

stir, din, and unprecedented activity, whatever occupation each man found for his thoughts or for his hands in his separate employments, all hearts were mastered by one domineering interest—the approaching collision of the Landgrave, before his assembled court, with the mysterious agent who had so long troubled his repose.

The day at length arrived; the guards were posted in unusual strength: the pages of honour, and servants in their state-dresses, were drawn up in long and gorgeous files along the sides of the vast gothic halls, which ran in continued succession from the front of the schloss to the more modern saloons in the rear; bands of military music, collected from amongst the foreign prisoners of various nations at Vienna, were stationed in their national costume—Italian, Hungarian, Turkish, or Croatian—in the lofty galleries or corridors which ran round the halls; and the deep thunders of the kettle-drums, relieved by cymbals and wind-instruments, began to fill the mazes of the palace as early as seven o'clock in the evening; for at that hour, according to the custom then established in Germany, such entertainments commenced. Repeated volleys from long lines of musketeers, drawn up in the square, and at the other entrances of the palace, with the deep roar of artillery, announced the arrival of the more distinguished visitors; amongst whom it was rumoured that several officers in supreme command from the Swedish camp, already collected in the neighbourhood, were this night coming incognito—availing themselves of their masques to visit the Landgrave and improve the terms of their alliance, whilst they declined the risk which they might have brought on themselves by too open a visit in their own avowed characters and persons to a town so unsettled in its state of feeling, and so friendly to the Emperor, as Klosterheim had notoriously become.

From seven to nine o'clock, in one unbroken line of succession, gorgeous parties streamed along through the halls, a distance of full half a quarter of a mile, until they were checked by the barriers erected at the entrance to the first of the entertaining rooms, as the station for examining the tickets of admission. This duty was fulfilled in a way which, though really rigorous in the extreme, gave no inhospitable annoyance to the visitors: the barriers themselves concealed their jealous purpose of hostility, and in a manner disavowed the secret awe and mysterious terror which brooded over the evening, by the beauty of their external appearance. They presented a triple line of gilt lattice-work, rising to a great altitude, and connected with a fretted roof by pendent draperies of the most magnificent velvet, intermingled with banners and heraldic trophies suspended from the ceiling, and at intervals slowly agitated in the currents which now and then swept these aerial heights. In the centre of the lattice opened a single gate, on each side of which were stationed a couple of sentinels armed to the teeth; and this arrangement was repeated three times, so rigorous was the vigilance employed. At the second of the gates, where the bearer of a forged ticket would have found himself in a sort of trap, with absolutely no possibility of escape, every individual of each successive party presented his card of admission, and, fortunately for the convenience of the company, in consequence of the particular precaution used, one moment's inspection sufficed. The cards had been issued to the parties invited not very long before the time of assembling; consequently as each was sealed with a private seal of the Landgrave's, sculptured elaborately with his armorial bearings, forgery would have been next to impossible.

These arrangements, however, were made rather to relieve the company from the too powerful terrors which haunted them, and to possess them from the first with a sense of security, than for the satisfaction of the Landgrave or his minister. They were sensible that The Masque had it in his power to command an access from the interior—and this it seemed next to impossible altogether to prevent; nor was that indeed the wish of Adorni, but rather to facilitate his admission, and afterwards, when satisfied of his actual presence, to bar up all possibility of

retreat Accordingly, the interior arrangements, though perfectly prepared, and ready to close up at the word of command, were for the present but negligently enforced.

Thus stood matters at nine o'clock, by which time upwards of a thousand persons had assembled; and in ten minutes more an officer reported that the whole twelve hundred were present without one defaulter.

The Landgrave had not yet appeared, his minister having received the company; nor was he expected to appear for an hour—in reality, he was occupied in political discussion with some of the illustrious incognitos. But this did not interfere with the progress of the festival; and at this moment nothing could be more impressive than the far-stretching splendours of the spectacle.

In one immense saloon, twelve hundred cavaliers and ladies, attired in the unrivalled pomp of that age, were arranging themselves for one of the magnificent Hungarian dances which the Emperor's court at Vienna had transplanted to the camp of Wallenstein, and thence to all the great houses of Germany. Bevy of noble women, in every variety of fanciful costume, but in each considerable group presenting deep masses of black or purple velvet, on which, with the most striking advantage of radiant relief; lay the costly pearl ornaments, or the sumptuous jewels, so generally significant in those times of high ancestral pretensions, intermingled with the drooping plumes of martial cavaliers, who presented almost universally the soldierly air of frankness which belongs to active service, mixed with the Castilian grandezza that still breathed through the camps of Germany, emanating originally from the magnificent courts of Brussels, of Madrid, and of Vienna, and propagated to this age by the links of Tilly, the Bavarian commander, and Wallenstein, the more than princely commander for the Emperor. Figures and habiliments so commanding were of themselves enough to fill the eye and occupy the imagination; but beyond all this, feelings of awe and mystery, under more shapes than one, brooded over the whole scene, and diffused a tone of suspense and intense excitement throughout the vast assembly. It was known that illustrious strangers were present incognito. There now began to be some reason for anticipating a great battle in the neighbourhood. The men were now present, perhaps the very hands were now visibly displayed for the coming dance which in a few days or even hours (so rapid were the movements at this period) were to wield the truncheon that might lay the Catholic empire prostrate, or might mould the destiny of Europe for centuries. Even this feeling gave way to one still more enveloped in shades—The Masque! Would he keep his promise and appear? Might he not be there already? might he not even now be moving amongst them? may he not, even at this very moment, thought each person, secretly be near me—or even touching myself—or haunting my own steps?

Yet again, thought most people (for at that time hardly anybody affected to be incredulous in matters allied to the supernatural), was this mysterious being liable to touch? Was he not of some impassive nature, inaudible, invisible, impalpable? Many of his escapes, if truly reported, seemed to argue as much. If, then, connected with the spiritual world, was it with the good or the evil in that inscrutable region? But then the bloodshed, the torn dresses, the marks of deadly struggle, which remained behind in some of those cases where mysterious disappearances had occurred,—these seemed undeniable arguments of murder, foul and treacherous murder. Every attempt, in short, to penetrate the mystery of this being's nature proved as abortive as the attempts to intercept his person; and all efforts at applying a solution to the difficulties of the case made the mystery even more mysterious.

These thoughts, however, generally as they pervaded the company, would have given way for a time at least to the excitement of the scene; for a sudden clapping of hands from some officers of the household, to enforce attention, and as a signal to the orchestra in one of the galleries, at

this moment proclaimed that the dances were on the point of commencing in another half minute, when suddenly a shriek from a female, and then a loud tumultuous cry from a multitude of voices, announced some fearful catastrophe; and in the next moment a shout of "Murder!" froze the blood of the timid amongst the company.

So vast was the saloon that it had been impossible through the maze of figures, the confusion of colours, and the mingling of a thousand voices, that anything should be perceived distinctly at the lower end of all that was now passing at the upper. Still, so awful is the mystery of life, and so hideous and accursed in man's imagination is every secret extinction of that consecrated lamp, that no news thrills so deeply, or travels so rapidly. Hardly could it be seen in what direction, or through whose communication, yet in less than a minute a movement of sympathising horror, and uplifted hands, announced that the dreadful news had reached them. A murder, it was said, had been committed in the palace. Ladies began to faint; others hastened away in search of friends; others to learn the news more accurately; and some of the gentlemen, who thought themselves sufficiently privileged by rank, hurried off with a stream of agitated inquiries to the interior of the castle, in search of the scene itself. A few only passed the guard in the first moments of confusion, and penetrated with the agitated Adorni through the long and winding passages, into the very scene of the murder. A rumour had prevailed for a moment that the Landgrave was himself the victim: and, as the road by which the agitated household conducted them took a direction towards his Highness's suite of rooms, at first Adorni had feared that result. Recovering his self-possession, however, at length he learned that it was the poor old seneschal upon whom the blow had fallen. And he pressed on with more coolness to the dreadful spectacle.

The poor old man was stretched at his length on the floor. It did not seem that he had struggled with the murderer. Indeed, from some appearances, it seemed probable that he had been attacked whilst sleeping; and, though he had received three wounds, it was pronounced by a surgeon that one of them (and that, from circumstances, the first) had been sufficient to extinguish life. He was discovered by his daughter, a woman who held some respectable place amongst the servants of the castle; and every presumption concurred in fixing the time of the dreadful scene to about one hour before.

"Such, gentlemen, are the acts of this atrocious monster, this Masque, who has so long been the scourge of Klosterheim," said Adorni to the strangers who had accompanied him, as they turned away on their return to the company; "but this very night, I trust, will put a bridle in his mouth."

"God grant it may be so!" said some. But others thought the whole case too mysterious for conjectures, and too solemn to be decided by presumptions. And in the midst of agitated discussions on the scene they had just witnessed, as well as the whole history of The Masque, the party returned to the saloon.

Under ordinary circumstances, this dreadful event would have damped the spirits of the company; as it was, it did but deepen the gloomy excitement which already had possession of all present, and raise a more intense expectation of the visit so publicly announced by The Masque. It seemed as though he had perpetrated this recent murder merely by way of reviving the impression of his own dreadful character in Klosterheim, which might have decayed a little of late, in all its original strength and freshness of novelty; or, as though he wished to send immediately before him an act of atrocity that should form an appropriate herald or harbinger of his own entrance upon the scene.

Dreadful, however, as this deed of darkness was, it seemed of too domestic a nature to exercise any continued influence upon so distinguished an assembly, so numerous, so splendid, and

brought together at so distinguished a summons. Again, therefore, the masques prepared to mingle in the dance; again the signal was given; again the obedient orchestra preluded to the coming strains. In a moment more, the full tide of harmony swept along. The vast saloon, and its echoing roof, rang with the storm of music. The masques, with their floating plumes and jewelled caps, glided through the fine mazes of the Hungarian dances. All was one magnificent and tempestuous confusion overflowing with the luxury of sound and sight, when suddenly, about midnight, a trumpet sounded, the Landgrave entered, and all was hushed. The glittering crowd arranged themselves in a half circle at the upper end of the room; his Highness went rapidly round, saluting the company, and receiving their homage in return. A signal was again made; the music and the dancing were resumed; and such was the animation and the turbulent delight amongst the gayer part of the company, from the commingling of youthful blood with wine, lights, music, and festal conversation, that, with many, all thoughts of the dreadful Masque who "reigned by night in Klosterheim" had faded before the exhilaration of the moment. Midnight had come; the dreadful apparition had not yet entered: young ladies began timidly to jest upon the subject, though as yet but faintly, and in a tone somewhat serious for a jest; and young cavaliers, who, to do them justice, had derived most part of their terrors from the superstitious view of the case, protested to their partners that if The Masque, on making his appearance, should conduct himself in a manner unbecoming a cavalier, or offensive to the ladies present, they should feel it their duty to chastise him; "though," said they, "with respect to old Adorni, should The Masque think proper to teach him better manners, or even to cane him, we shall not find it necessary to interfere."

Several of the very young ladies protested that, of all things, they should like to see a battle between old Adorni and The Masque, "such a love of a quiz that old Adorni is!" whilst others debated whether The Masque would turn out a young man or an old one; and a few elderly maidens mooted the point whether he were likely to be a "single" gentleman, or burdened with a "wife and family." These and similar discussions were increasing in vivacity, and kindling more and more gaiety of repartee, when suddenly, with the effect of a funeral knell upon their mirth, a whisper began to circulate, that there was one masque too many in company. Persons had been stationed by Adorni in different galleries, with instructions to note accurately the dress of every person in the company; to watch the motions of every one who gave the slightest cause for suspicion, by standing aloof from the rest of the assembly, or by any other peculiarity of manner; but, above all, to count the numbers of the total assembly. This last injunction was more easily obeyed than at first sight seemed possible. At this time, the Hungarian dances, which required a certain number of partners to execute the movements of the figure, were of themselves a sufficient register of the precise amount of persons engaged in them. And, as these dances continued for a long time undisturbed, this calculation, once made, left no further computation necessary than simply to take the account of all who stood otherwise engaged. This list, being much the smaller one, was soon made; and the reports of several different observers, stationed in different galleries, and checked by each other, all tallied in reporting a total of just twelve hundred and one persons, after every allowance was made for the known members of the Landgrave's suite, who were all unmasked.

This report was announced, with considerable trepidation, in a very audible whisper to Adorni and the Landgrave. The buzz of agitation attracted instant attention; the whisper was loud enough to catch the ears of several; the news went rapidly kindling through the room that the company was too many by one: all the ladies trembled, their knees shook, their voices failed, they stopped in the very middle of questions, answers halted for their conclusion and were never

more remembered by either party; the very music began to falter, the lights seemed to wane and sicken; for the fact was now too evident—that The Masque had kept his appointment, and was at this moment in the room, “to meet the Landgrave and his honourable company.”

Adorni and the Landgrave now walked apart from the rest of the household, and were obviously consulting together on the next step to be taken, or on the proper moment for executing one which had already been decided on. Some crisis seemed approaching, and the knees of many ladies knocked together, as they anticipated some cruel or bloody act of vengeance. “Oh, poor Masque!” sighed a young lady in her tender-hearted concern for one who seemed now at the mercy of his enemies: “Do you think, sir,” addressing her partner, “they will cut him to pieces?”—“Oh, that wicked old Adorni!” exclaimed another; “I know he will stick the poor Masque on one side, and somebody else will stick him on the other; I know he will, because The Masque called him a tailor: do you think he was a tailor, sir?”—“Why, really, madam, he walks like a tailor; but then he must be a very bad one, considering how ill his own clothes are made; and that, you know, is next door to being none at all. But see, his Highness is going to stop the music.”

In fact, at that moment the Landgrave made a signal to the orchestra; the music ceased abruptly; and his Highness, advancing to the company, who stood eagerly awaiting his words, said—“Illustrious and noble friends! for a very urgent and special cause I will request of you all to take your seats.”

The company obeyed: every one sought the chair next to him, or, if a lady, accepted that which was offered by the cavalier at her side. The standers continually diminished. Two hundred were left, one hundred and fifty, eighty, sixty, twenty, till at last they were reduced to two,—both gentlemen, who had been attending upon ladies. They were suddenly aware of their own situation. One chair only remained out of twelve hundred. Eager to exonerate himself from suspicion, each sprang furiously to this seat; each attained it at the same moment, and each possessed himself of part at the same instant. As they happened to be two elderly corpulent men, the younger cavaliers, under all the restraints of the moment, the panic of the company, and the Landgrave’s presence, could not forbear laughing; and the more spirited amongst the young ladies caught the infection.

His Highness was little in a temper to brook this levity; and hastened to relieve the joint occupants of the chair from the ridicule of their situation. “Enough!” he exclaimed, “enough! all my friends are requested to resume the situation most agreeable to them; my purpose is answered.”—The Prince was himself standing with all his household, and, as a point of respect, all the company rose. (“As you were,” whispered the young soldiers to their fair companions.)

Adorni now came forward. “It is known,” said he, “by trials more than sufficient, that some intruder, with the worst intentions, has crept into this honourable company. The ladies present will therefore have the goodness to retire apart to the lower end of the saloon, whilst the noble cavaliers will present themselves in succession to six officers of his Highness’s household, to whom they will privately communicate their names and quality.”

This arrangement was complied with, not, however, without the exchange of a few flying jests on the part of the young cavaliers and their fair partners, as they separated for the purpose. The cavaliers, who were rather more than five hundred in number, went up as they were summoned by the number marked upon their cards of admission, and, privately communicating with some one of the officers appointed, were soon told off, and filed away to the right of the Landgrave, waiting for the signal which should give them permission to rejoin their parties.

All had been now told off, within a score. These were clustered together in a group; and in that group undoubtedly was The Masque. Every eye was converged upon this small knot of cavaliers; each of the spectators, according to his fancy, selected the one who came nearest in dress, or in personal appearance, to his preconceptions of that mysterious agent. Not a word was uttered, not a whisper; hardly a robe was heard to rustle, or a feather to wave.

The twenty were rapidly reduced to twelve, these to six, the six to four—three—two; the tale of the invited was complete, and one man remained behind. That was, past doubting, The Masque.

“There stands he that governs Klosterheim by night!” thought every cavalier, as he endeavoured to pierce the gloomy being’s concealment, with penetrating eyes, or by scrutiny ten times repeated, to unmasque the dismal secrets which lurked beneath his disguise. “There stands the gloomy murderer!” thought another. “There stands the poor detected criminal,” thought the pitying young ladies, “who in the next moment must lay bare his breast to the Landgrave’s musketeers.”

The figure meantime stood tranquil and collected, apparently not in the least disturbed by the consciousness of his situation, or the breathless suspense of more than a thousand spectators of rank and eminent station, all bending their looks upon himself. He had been leaning against a marble column, as if wrapt up in reverie, and careless of everything about him. But, when the dead silence announced that the ceremony was closed, that he only remained to answer for himself; and upon palpable proof—evidence not to be gainsaid—incapable of answering satisfactorily; when, in fact, it was beyond dispute that here was at length revealed, in bodily presence, before the eyes of those whom he had so long haunted with terrors, The Masque of Klosterheim,—it was naturally expected that now at least he would show alarm and trepidation; that he would prepare for defence, or address himself to instant flight.

Far otherwise!—cooler than any one person beside in the saloon, he stood, like the marble column against which he had been reclining, upright—massy—and imperturbable. He was enveloped in a voluminous mantle, which at this moment, with a leisurely motion, he suffered to fall at his feet, and displayed a figure in which the grace of an Antinous met with the columnar strength of a Grecian Hercules,—presenting, in its tout ensemble, the majestic proportions of a Jupiter. He stood—a breathing statue of gladiatorial beauty, towering above all who were near him, and eclipsing the noblest specimens of the human form which the martial assembly presented. A buzz of admiration arose, which in the following moment was suspended by the dubious recollections investing his past appearances, and the terror which waited even on his present movements. He was armed to the teeth; and he was obviously preparing to move.

Not a word had yet been spoken; so tumultuous was the succession of surprises, so mixed and conflicting the feelings, so intense the anxiety. The arrangement of the groups was this:—At the lower half of the room, but starting forward in attitudes of admiration or suspense, were the ladies of Klosterheim. At the upper end, in the centre, one hand raised to bespeak attention, was The Masque of Klosterheim. To his left, and a little behind him, with a subtle Venetian countenance, one hand waving back a half file of musketeers, and the other raised as if to arrest the arm of The Masque, was the wily minister Adorni—creeping nearer and nearer with a stealthy stride. To his right was the great body of Klosterheim cavaliers, a score of students and young officers pressing forward to the front; but in advance of the whole, the Landgrave of X—, haughty, lowering, and throwing out looks of defiance. These were the positions and attitudes in which the first discovery of The Masque had surprised them; and these they still retained. Less dignified spectators were looking downwards from the galleries.

“Surrender!” was the first word by which silence was broken; it came from the Landgrave.

“Or die!” exclaimed Adorni.

“He dies in any case,” rejoined the Prince.

The Masque still raised his hand with the action of one who bespeaks attention. Adorni he deigned not to notice. Slightly inclining his head to the Landgrave, in a tone to which it might be the headdress of elaborate steel-work that gave a sepulchral tone, he replied,—

“The Masque, who rules in Klosterheim by night, surrenders not. He can die. But first he will complete the ceremony of the night, he will reveal himself.”

“That is superfluous,” exclaimed Adorni; “we need no further revelations. Seize him, and lead him out to death!”

“Dog of an Italian!” replied The Masque, drawing a dag from his belt, “die first yourself!” And so saying, he slowly turned and levelled the barrel at Adorni, who fled with two bounds to the soldiers in the rear. Then, withdrawing the weapon hastily, he added in a tone of cool contempt, “Or bridle that coward’s tongue.”

But this was not the minister’s intention. “Seize him!” he cried again impetuously to the soldiers, laying his hand on the arm of the foremost, and pointing them forward to their prey.

“No!” said the Landgrave, with a commanding voice; “Halt! I bid you.” Something there was in the tone, or it might be that there was something in his private recollections, or something in the general mystery, which promised a discovery that he feared to lose by the too precipitate vengeance of the Italian. “What is it, mysterious being, that you would reveal? Or who is it that you now believe interested in your revelations?”

“Yourself.—Prince, it would seem that you have me at your mercy: wherefore then the coward haste of this Venetian hound! I am one; you are many. Lead me then out; shoot me. But no: Freely I entered this hall; freely I will leave it. If I must die, I will die as a soldier. Such I am; and neither runagate from a foreign land; nor”—turning to Adorni—“a base mechanic.”

“But a murderer!” shrieked Adorni: “but a murderer; and with hands yet reeking from innocent blood!”

“Blood, Adorni, that I will yet avenge.—Prince, you demand the nature of my revelations. I will reveal my name, my quality, and my mission.

“And to whom?”

“To yourself; and none beside. And, as a pledge for the sincerity of my discoveries, I will first of all communicate a dreadful secret, known, as you fondly believe, to none but your Highness. Prince, dare you receive my revelations?”

Speaking thus, The Masque took one step to the rear, turning his back upon the room, and by a gesture signified his wish that the Landgrave should accompany him. But at this motion ten or a dozen of the foremost among the young cavaliers started forward in advance of the Landgrave, in part forming a half circle about his person, and in part commanding the open doorway.

“He is armed!” they exclaimed; “and trebly armed: will your Highness approach him too nearly?”

“I fear him not,” said the Landgrave, with something of a contemptuous tone.

“Wherefore should you fear me?” retorted The Masque, with a manner so tranquil and serene as involuntarily to disarm suspicion. “Were it possible that I should seek the life of any man here in particular, in that case (pointing to the firearms in his belt), why should I need to come nearer? Were it possible that any should find in my conduct here a motive to a personal vengeance upon myself; which of you is not near enough? Has your Highness the courage to trample on such terrors?”

Thus challenged as it were to a trial of his courage before the assembled rank of Klosterheim, the Landgrave waved off all who would have stepped forward officiously to his support. If he felt any tremors, he was now sensible that pride and princely honour called upon him to dissemble them. And, probably, that sort of tremors which he felt in reality did not point in the direction to which physical support, such as was now tendered, could have been available. He hesitated no longer, but strode forward to meet The Masque. His Highness and The Masque met near the archway of the door, in the very centre of the groups.

With a thrilling tone, deep—piercing—full of alarm, The Masque began thus:—

“To win your confidence, for ever to establish credit with your Highness, I will first of all reveal the name of that murderer who this night dared to pollute your palace with an old man’s blood. Prince, bend your ear a little this way.”

With a shudder, and a visible effort of self-command, the Landgrave inclined his ear to The Masque, who added—

“Your Highness will be shocked to hear it”: then in a lower tone, “Who could have believed it?—It was—.” All was pronounced clearly and strongly, except the last word—the name of the murderer: that was made audible only to the Landgrave’s ear.

Sudden and tremendous was the effect upon the Prince: he reeled a few paces off; put his hand to the hilt of his sword; smote his forehead; threw frenzied looks upon The Masque,—now half imploring, now dark with vindictive wrath. Then succeeded a pause of profoundest silence, during which all the twelve hundred visitors, whom he had himself assembled, as if expressly to make them witnesses of this extraordinary scene, and of the power with which a stranger could shake him to and fro in tempestuous strife of passions, were looking and hearkening with senses on the stretch to pierce the veil of silence and of distance. At last the Landgrave mastered his emotions sufficiently to say, “Well, sir, what next?”

“Next comes a revelation of another kind; and I warn you, sir, that it will not be less trying to the nerves. For this first I needed your ear; now I shall need your eyes. Think again, Prince, whether you will stand the trial.”

“Pshaw! sir, you trifle with me; again I tell you—” But here the Landgrave spoke with an affectation of composure and with an effort that did not escape notice;—“again I tell you that I fear you not. Go on.”

“Then come forward a little, please your Highness, to the light of this lamp.” So saying, with a step or two in advance, he drew the Prince under the powerful glare of a lamp suspended near the great archway of entrance from the interior of the palace. Both were now standing with their faces entirely averted from the spectators. Still more effectually, however, to screen himself from any of those groups on the left whose advanced position gave them somewhat more the advantage of an oblique aspect, The Masque, at this moment, suddenly drew up, with his left hand, a short Spanish mantle which depended from his shoulders, and now gave him the benefit of a lateral screen. Then, so far as the company behind them could guess at his act, unlocking with his right hand and raising the masque which shrouded his mysterious features, he shouted aloud in a voice that rang clear through every corner of the vast saloon, “Landgrave, for crimes yet unrevealed, I summon you in twenty days, before a tribunal where there is no shield but innocence!” and at that moment turned his countenance full upon the Prince.

With a yell, rather than a human expression of terror, the Landgrave fell as if shot by a thunderbolt, stretched at his full length upon the ground, lifeless apparently, and bereft of consciousness or sensation. A sympathetic cry of horror arose from the spectators. All rushed to wards The Masque. The young cavaliers who had first stepped forward as volunteers in the

Landgrave's defence were foremost, and interposed between The Masque and the outstretched arms of Adorni, as if eager to seize him first. In an instant a sudden and dense cloud of smoke arose, nobody knew whence. Repeated discharges of firearms were heard resounding from the doorway and the passages; these increased the smoke and the confusion. Trumpets sounded through the corridors. The whole archway under which The Masque and the Landgrave had been standing became choked up with soldiery, summoned by the furious alarms that echoed through the palace. All was one uproar and chaos of masques, plumes, helmets, halberds, trumpets, gleaming sabres, and the fierce faces of soldiery forcing themselves through the floating drapery of smoke that now filled the whole upper end of the saloon. Adorni was seen in the midst, raving fruitlessly. Nobody heard: nobody listened. Universal panic had seized the household, the soldiery, and the company. Nobody understood exactly for what purpose the tumult had commenced—in what direction it tended. Some tragic catastrophe was reported from mouth to mouth: nobody knew what. Some said—the Landgrave had been assassinated; some—The Masque; some asserted that both had perished under reciprocal assaults. More believed that The Masque had proved to be of that supernatural order of beings with which the prevailing opinions of Klosterheim had long classed him; and that, upon raising his disguise, he had revealed to the Landgrave the fleshless skull of some forgotten tenant of the grave. This indeed seemed to many the only solution that, whilst it fell in with the prejudices and superstitions of the age, was of a nature to account for that tremendous effect which the discovery had produced upon the Landgrave. But it was one that naturally could be little calculated to calm the agitations of the public prevailing at this moment. This spread contagiously. The succession of alarming events,—the murder, the appearance of The Masque, his subsequent extraordinary behaviour, the overwhelming impression upon the Landgrave, which had formed the catastrophe of this scenical exhibition,—the consternation of the great Swedish officers, who were spending the night in Klosterheim, and reasonably suspected that the tumult might be owing to the sudden detection of their own incognito, and that, in consequence, the populace of this Imperial city were suddenly rising to arms; the endless distraction and counteraction of so many thousand persons—visitors, servants, soldiery, household—all hurrying to the same point, and bringing assistance to a danger of which nobody knew the origin, nobody the nature, nobody the issue; multitudes commanding where all obedience was forgotten, all subordination had gone to wreck;—these circumstances of distraction united to sustain a scene of absolute frenzy in the castle, which, for more than half-an-hour, the dense columns of smoke aggravated alarmingly, by raising, in many quarters, additional terrors of fire. And when at last, after infinite exertions, the soldiery had deployed into the ball-room and the adjacent apartments of state, and had succeeded, at the point of the pike, in establishing a safe egress for the twelve hundred visitors, it was then first ascertained that all traces of The Masque had been lost in the smoke and subsequent confusion, and that, with his usual good fortune, he had succeeded in baffling his pursuers.

[Paulina was, meanwhile, by means of forged letters, entrapped and carried off to a lonely castle, the residence of the Landgrave's innocent young daughter, who knew nothing of her father's crimes. Paulina was about to be tortured on account of her supposed connection with a conspiracy against the Landgrave, when she escaped from her gaolers and was succoured by her young hostess. The two maidens leave the castle together. The Landgrave, ignorant of his daughter's flight, issued orders for the female refugee to be shot without question when taken. Within the walls of Klosterheim, all is gloom and fear. The Landgrave relying on the growing power of the Sweden, becomes daily more tyrannous. To show his defiance of The Masque, and also as a cloak to his dark designs, he gives another great ball.]

In twenty days the mysterious Masque had summoned the Landgrave “to answer, for crimes unatoned, before a tribunal where no power but that of innocence could avail him.” These days were nearly expired. The morning of the Twentieth had arrived.

There were two interpretations of this summons. By rumour it was believed that the tribunal contemplated was that of the Emperor; and that, by some mysterious plot, which could not be more difficult of execution than others which had actually been accomplished by The Masque, on this day the Landgrave would be carried off to Vienna. Others, again, understanding by the tribunal, in the same sense, the Imperial chamber of criminal justice, believed it possible to fulfil the summons in some way less liable to delay or uncertainty than by a long journey to Vienna through a country beset with enemies. But a third party, differing from both the others, understood by the tribunal where innocence was the only shield—the judgment seat of heaven; and believed that on this day justice would be executed on the Landgrave, for crimes known and unknown, by a public and memorable death. Under any interpretation, however, nobody amongst the citizens could venture peremptorily to deny, after the issue of the masqued ball, and of so many other public denunciations, that The Masque would keep his word to the letter.

It followed of necessity that everybody was on the tip-toe of suspense, and that the interest hanging upon the issue of this night’s events swallowed up all other anxieties, of whatsoever nature. Even the battle which was now daily expected between the Imperial and Swedish armies ceased to occupy the hearts and conversation of the citizens. Domestic and public concerns alike gave way to the coming catastrophe so solemnly denounced by The Masque.

The Landgrave alone maintained a gloomy reserve and the expression of a haughty disdain. He had resolved to meet the summons with the liveliest expression of defiance, by fixing this evening for a second masqued ball, upon a greater scale than the first. In doing this he acted advisedly, and with the counsel of his Swedish allies. They represented to him that the issue of the approaching battle might be relied upon as pretty nearly certain; all the indications were indeed generally thought to promise a decisive turn in their favour; but, in the worst case, no defeat of the Swedish army in this war had ever been complete; that the bulk of the retreating army, if the Swedes should be obliged to retreat, would take the road to Klosterheim, and would furnish to himself a garrison capable of holding the city for many months to come (and that would not fail to bring many fresh chances to all of them), whilst to his new and cordial allies this course would offer a secure retreat from pursuing enemies, and a satisfactory proof of his own fidelity. This even in the worst case; whereas, in the better and more probable one of a victory to the Sweden, to maintain the city but for a day or two longer against internal conspirators, and the secret co-operators outside, would be in effect to ratify any victory which the Sweden might gain by putting into their hands at a critical moment one of its most splendid trophies and guarantees.

These counsels fell too much into the Landgrave’s own way of thinking to meet with any demurs from him. It was agreed, therefore, that as many Swedish troops as could at this important moment be spared should be introduced into the halls and saloons of the castle on the eventful evening, disguised as masquers. These were about four hundred; and other arrangements were made, equally mysterious, and some of them known only to the Landgrave.

At seven o’clock, as on the former occasion, the company began to assemble. The same rooms were thrown open; but, as the party was now far more numerous, and was made more comprehensive in point of rank, in order to include all who were involved in the conspiracy which had been for some time maturing in Klosterheim, fresh suites of rooms were judged necessary, on the pretext of giving fuller effect to the princely hospitaities of the Landgrave.

And, on this occasion, according to an old privilege conceded in the case of coronations or gala, of magnificence by the Lady Abbess of St Agnes, the partition walls were removed between the great hall of the schloss and the refectory of that immense convent; so that the two vast establishments, which on one side were contiguous to each other, were thus laid into one.

The company had now continued to pour in for two hours. The palace and the refectory of the convent were now overflowing with lights and splendid masques; the avenues and corridors rang with music; and, though every heart was throbbing with fear and suspense, no outward expression was wanting of joy and festal pleasure. For the present, all was calm around the slumbering volcano.

Suddenly the Count St Aldenheim, who was standing with arms folded, and surveying the brilliant scene, felt someone touch his hand, in the way concerted amongst the conspirators as a private signal of recognition. He turned, and recognised his friend, the Baron Adelort, who saluted him with three emphatic words—"We are betrayed!"—Then, after a pause, "Follow me."

St Aldenheim made his way through the glittering crowds, and pressed after his conductor into one of the most private corridors.

"Fear not," said the other, "that we shall be watched. Vigilance is no longer necessary to our crafty enemy. He has already triumphed. Every avenue of escape is barred and secured against us: every outlet of the palace is occupied by the Landgrave's troops. Not a man of us will return alive."

"Heaven forbid we should prove ourselves such gulls! You are but jesting, my friend."

"Would to God I were! my information is but too certain. Something I have overheard by accident; something has been told me; and something I have seen. Come you also, Count, and see what I will show you: then judge for yourself."

So saying, he led St Aldenheim by a little circuit of passages to a doorway, through which they passed into a hall of vast proportions: to judge by the catafalques and mural monuments, scattered at intervals along the vast expanse of its walls, this seemed to be the ante-chapel of St Agnes. In fact it was so; a few faint lights glimmered through the gloomy extent of this immense chamber, placed (according to the Catholic rite) at the shrine of the saint Feeble as it was, however, the light was powerful enough to display in the centre a pile of scaffolding covered with black drapery. Standing at the foot, they could trace the outlines of a stage at the summit, fenced in with a railing, a block, and the other apparatus for the solemnity of a public execution, whilst the sawdust below their feet ascertained the spot in which the heads were to fall.

"Shall we ascend and rehearse our parts?" asked the Count: "for methinks everything is prepared, except the headsman and the spectators. A plague on the inhospitable knave!"

"Yes, St Aldenheim, all is prepared—even to the sufferers. On that list, you stand foremost. Believe me, I speak with knowledge; no matter where gained. It is certain."

"Well, *necessitas non habet legem*; and he that dies on Tuesday will never catch cold on Wednesday. But still, that comfort is something of the coldest. Think you that none better could be had?"

"As how?"

"Revenge, par exemple; a little revenge. Might one not screw the neck of this base Prince, who abuses the confidence of cavaliers so perfidiously? To die I care not; but to be caught in a trap, and die like a rat lured by a bait of toasted cheese—Faugh! my countly blood rebels against it!"

"Something might surely be done, if we could muster in any strength. That is, we might die sword in hand; but—"

“Enough! I ask no more. Now, let us go. We will separately pace the rooms, draw together as many of our party as we can single out, and then proclaim ourselves. Let each answer for one victim. I’ll take his Highness for my share.”

With this purpose, and thus forewarned of the dreadful fate at hand, they left the gloomy ante-chapel, traversed the long suite of entertaining rooms, and collected as many as could easily be detached from the dances without too much pointing out their own motions to the attention of all present. The Count St Aldenheim was seen rapidly explaining to them the circumstances of their dreadful situation; whilst hands uplifted, or suddenly applied to the hilt of the sword, with other gestures of sudden emotion, expressed the different impressions of rage or fear which, under each variety of character, impressed the several hearers. Some of them, however, were too unguarded in their motions; and the energy of their gesticulations had now begun to attract the attention of the company.

The Landgrave himself had his eye upon him. But at this moment his attention was drawn off by an uproar of confusion in an antechamber, which argued some tragical importance in the cause that could prompt so sudden a disregard for the restraints of time and place.

His Highness issued from the room in consternation, followed by many of the company. In the very centre of the anteroom, booted and spurred, bearing all the marks of extreme haste, panic, and confusion, stood a Swedish officer, dealing forth hasty fragments of some heart-shaking intelligence. “All is lost!” said he; “not a regiment has escaped!” “And the place?” exclaimed a press of inquirers. “Nordlingen.” “And which way has the Swedish army retreated?” demanded a masque behind him.

“Retreat!” retorted the officer; “I tell you there is no retreat. All have perished. The army is no more. Horse, foot, artillery—all is wrecked, crushed, annihilated. Whatever yet lives is in the power of the Imperialists.”

At this moment the Landgrave came up, and in every way strove to check these too liberal communications. He frowned; the officer saw him not. He laid his hand on the officer’s arm, but all in vain. He spoke, but the officer knew not, or forgot his rank. Panic and immeasurable sorrow had crushed his heart; he cared not for restraints; decorum and ceremony were become idle words. The Swedish army had perished. The greatest disaster of the whole Thirty Years’ War had fallen upon his countrymen. His own eyes had witnessed the tragedy, and he had no power to check or restrain that which made his heart overflow.

The Landgrave retired. But in half-an-hour the banquet was announced; and his Highness had so much command over his own feelings that he took his seat at the table. He seemed tranquil in the midst of general agitation; for the company were distracted by various passions. Some exulted in the great victory of the Imperialists, and the approaching liberation of Klosterheim. Some who were in the secret anticipated with horror the coming tragedy of vengeance upon his enemies which the Landgrave had prepared for this night. Some were filled with suspense and awe on the fulfilment in some way or other, doubtful as to the mode, but tragic (it was not doubted) for the result, of The Masque’s mysterious denunciation.

Under such circumstances of universal agitation and suspense,—for on one side or other it seemed inevitable that this night must produce a tragical catastrophe,—it was not extraordinary that silence and embarrassment should at one moment take possession of the company, and at another that kind of forced and intermitting gaiety which still more forcibly proclaimed the trepidation which really mastered the spirits of the assemblage. The banquet was magnificent: but it moved heavily and in sadness. The music, which broke the silence at intervals, was

animating and triumphant; but it had no power to disperse the gloom which hung over the evening, and which was gathering strength conspicuously as the hours advanced to midnight

As the clock struck eleven, the orchestra had suddenly become silent; and, as no buzz of conversation succeeded, the anxiety of expectation became more painfully irritating. The whole vast assemblage was hushed, gazing at the doors—at each other—or watching, stealthily, the Landgrave's countenance. Suddenly a sound was heard in an anteroom: a page entered with a step hurried and discomposed, advanced to the Landgrave's seat, and bending downwards, whispered some news or message to that Prince, of which not a syllable could be caught by the company. Whatever was its import, it could not be collected, from any very marked change on the features of him to whom it was addressed, that he participated in the emotions of the messenger, which were obviously those of grief or panic—perhaps of both united. Some even fancied that a transient expression of malignant exultation crossed the Landgrave's countenance at this moment. But, if that were so, it was banished as suddenly; and, in the next instant the Prince arose with a leisurely motion; and, with a very successful affectation (if such it were) of extreme tranquillity, he moved forwards to one of the ante-rooms, in which, as it now appeared, some person was awaiting his presence.

Who, and on what errand?—These were the questions which now racked the curiosity of those among the company who had least concern in the final event, and more painfully interested others whose fate was consciously dependent upon the accidents which the next hour might happen to bring up. Silence still continuing to prevail, and, if possible deeper silence than before, it was inevitable that all the company—those even whose honourable temper would least have brooked any settled purpose of surprising the Landgrave's secrets—should, in some measure, become a party to what was now passing in the anteroom.

The voice of the Landgrave was heard at times—briefly and somewhat sternly in reply—but apparently in the tone of one who is thrown upon the necessity of self-defence. On the other side, the speaker was earnest, solemn, and (as it seemed) upon an office of menace or up-braiding. For a time, however, the tones were low and subdued; but, as the passion of the scene advanced, less restraint was observed on both sides; and at length many believed that in the stranger's voice they recognised that of the Lady Abbess; and it was some corroboration of this conjecture that the name of Paulina began now frequently to be caught, and in connection with ominous words, indicating some dreadful fate supposed to have befallen her.

A few moments dispersed all doubts. The tones of bitter and angry reproach rose louder than before; they were without doubt those of the Abbess. She charged the blood of Paulina upon the Landgrave's head; denounced the instant vengeance of the Emperor for so great an atrocity; and, if that could be evaded, bade him expect certain retribution from Heaven for so wanton and useless an effusion of innocent blood.

The Landgrave replied in a lower key; and his words were few and rapid. That they were words of fierce recrimination was easily collected from the tone; and in the next minute the parties separated, with little ceremony (as was sufficiently evident) on either side, and with mutual wrath. The Landgrave re-entered the banqueting-room—his features discomposed and inflated with passion; but such was his self-command, and so habitual his dissimulation, that, by the time he reached his seat, all traces of agitation had disappeared; his countenance had resumed its usual expression of stern serenity, and his manners their usual air of perfect self-possession.

The clock of St Agnes struck twelve. At that sound the Landgrave rose. "Friends and illustrious strangers!" said he, "I have caused one seat to be left empty for that blood-stained Masque who summoned me to answer on this night for a crime which he could not name, at a bar

which no man knows. His summons you heard. Its fulfilment is yet to come. But I suppose few of us are weak enough to expect—”

“That The Masque of Klosterheim will ever break his engagements,” said a deep voice, suddenly interrupting the Landgrave. All eyes were directed to the sound; and behold! there stood The Masque, and seated himself quietly in the chair which had been left vacant for his reception.

“It is well!” said the Landgrave; but the air of vexation and panic with which he sank back into his seat belied his words. Rising again, after a pause, with some agitation he said, “Audacious criminal! since last we met, I have learned to know you, and to appreciate your purposes. It is now fit they should be known to Klosterheim. A scene of justice awaits you at present, which will teach this city to understand the delusions which could build any part of her hopes upon yourself.—Citizens and friends, not I, but these dark criminals and interlopers whom you will presently see revealed in their true colours, are answerable far that interruption to the course of our peaceful festivities which will presently be brought before you. Not I, but they are responsible.”

So saying, the Landgrave arose, and the whole of the immense audience, who now resumed their masques, and prepared to follow whither his Highness should lead. With the haste of one who fears he may be anticipated in his purpose, and the fury of some bird of prey apprehending that his struggling victim may be yet torn from his talons, the Prince hurried onwards to the ante-chapel. Innumerable torches now illuminated its darkness; in other respects it remained as St Aldenheim had left it.

The Swedish masques had many of them withdrawn from the gala on hearing the dreadful day of Nordlingen. But enough remained, when strengthened by the bodyguard of the Landgrave, to make up a corps of nearly five hundred men. Under the command of Colonel Von Aremberg, part of them now enclosed the scaffold, and part prepared to seize the persons who were pointed out to them as conspirators. Amongst these stood foremost The Masque.

Shaking off those who attempted to lay hands upon him, he strode disdainfully within the ring; and then turning to the Landgrave he said—“Prince, for once be generous; accept me as a ransom for the rest.”

The Landgrave smiled sarcastically. “That were an unequal bargain, methinks, to take a part in exchange for the whole.”

“The whole? And where is then your assurance of the whole?”

“Who should now make it doubtful? There is the block; the headsman is at hand. What hand can deliver from this extremity even you, Sir Masque?”

“That which has many times delivered me from a greater. It seems, Prince, that you forget the last days in the history of Klosterheim. He that rules by night in Klosterheim may well expect a greater favour than this when he descends to sue for it.”

The Landgrave smiled contemptuously. “But again I ask you, sir, will you on any terms grant immunity to these young men?”

“You sue as vainly for others as you would do for yourself.”

“Then all grace is hopeless?” The Landgrave vouchsafed no answer, but made signals to Von Aremberg.

“Gentlemen, cavaliers, citizens of Klosterheim, you that are not involved in the Landgrave’s suspicions,” said The Masque appealingly, “will you not join me in the intercession I offer for these young friends, who are else to perish unjudged, by blank edict of martial law?”

The citizens of Klosterheim interceded with ineffectual supplication.

“Gentlemen, you waste your breath; they die without reprieve,” replied the Landgrave.

“Will your Highness spare none?”

“Not one,” he exclaimed angrily, “not the youngest amongst them.”

“Nor grant a day’s respite to him who may appear on examination the least criminal of the whole?”

“A day’s respite? No, nor half-an-hour’s.—Headsman, be ready.—Soldiers, lay the heads of the prisoners ready for the axe.”

“Detested Prince, now look to your own!”

With a succession of passions flying over his face, rage, disdain, suspicion, the Landgrave looked round upon The Masque as he uttered these words, and with pallid, ghastly consternation, beheld him raise to his lips a hunting horn which depended from his neck. He blew a blast, which was immediately answered from within. Silence as of the grave ensued. All eyes were turned in the direction of the answer. Expectation was at its summit; and in less than a minute solemnly uprose the curtain which divided the chapel from the ante-chapel, revealing a scene that smote many hearts with awe, and the consciences of some with as much horror as if it had really beetled that final tribunal which numbers believed The Masque to have denounced.

The great chapel of St Agnes, the immemorial hall of coronation for the Landgraves of X—, was capable of containing with ease from seven to eight thousand spectators. Nearly that number was now collected in the galleries, which, on the recurrence of that great occasion, or of a royal marriage, were usually assigned to the spectators. These were all equipped in burnished arms, the very elite of the Imperial army. Resistance was hopeless; in a single moment the Landgrave saw himself dispossessed of all his hopes by an overwhelming force, the advanced guard in fact of the victorious Imperialists, now fresh from Nordlingen.

On the marble area of the chapel, level with their own position, were arranged a brilliant staff of officers; and a little in advance of them, so as almost to reach the ante-chapel, stood the Imperial Legate or Ambassador. This nobleman advanced to the crowd of Klosterheimers, and spoke thus:—

“Citizens of Klosterheini, I bring you from the Emperor your true and lawful Landgrave, Maximilian, son of your last beloved Prince.”

Both chapels resounded with acclamations; and the troops presented arms.

“Show us our Prince! let us pay him our homage!” echoed from every mouth.

“This is mere treason!” exclaimed the Usurper. “The Emperor invites treason against his own throne who undermines that of other Princes. The late Landgrave had no son; so much is known to you all.”

“None that was known to his murderer,” replied The Masque; “else had he met no better fate than his unhappy father.”

“Murderer!—And what art thou, blood-polluted Masque, with hands yet reeking from the blood of all who refused to join the conspiracy against your lawful Prince?”

“Citizens of Klosterheim,” said the Legate, “first let the Emperor’s friend be assailed from all injurious thoughts. Those whom ye believe to have been removed by murder are here to speak for themselves.”

Upon this the whole line of those who had mysteriously disappeared from Klosterheim presented themselves to the welcome of their astonished friends.

“These,” said the Legate, “quitted Klosterheim, even by the same secret passages which enabled us to enter it, and for the self-same purpose,—to prepare the path for the restoration of

the true heir, Maximilian the Fourth, whom in this noble Prince you behold, and whom may God long preserve!”

Saying this, to the wonder of the whole assembly he led forward The Masque, whom nobody had yet suspected for more than an agent of the true heir.

The Landgrave meantime, thus suddenly denounced as a tyrant—usurper—murderer, had stood aloof, and had given but a slight attention to the latter words of the Legate. A race of passions had traversed his countenance, chasing each other in flying succession. But by a prodigious effort he recalled himself to the scene before him; and striding up to the crowd, of which the Legate was the central figure, he raised his arm with a gesture of indignation, and protested vehemently that the assassination of Maximilian’s father had been iniquitously charged upon himself:—“And yet,” said he, “upon that one gratuitous assumption have been built all the other foul suspicions directed against my person.”

“Pardon me, sir,” replied the Legate, “the evidences were such as satisfied the Emperor and his Council; and he showed it by the vigilance with which he watched over the Prince Maximilian, and the anxiety with which he kept him from approaching your Highness until his pretensions could be established by arms. But, if more direct evidence were wanting, since yesterday we have had it in the dying confession of the very agent employed to strike the fatal blow. That man died last night penitent and contrite, having fully unburdened his conscience, at Waldenhausen. With evidence so overwhelming, the Emperor exacts no further sacrifice from your Highness than that of retirement from public life, to any one of your own castles in your patrimonial principality of Oberhornstein.—But now for a more pleasing duty. Citizens of Klosterheim welcome your young Landgrave in the Emperor’s name: and to-morrow you shall welcome also your future Landgravine, the lovely Countess Paulina, cousin to the Emperor, my master, and cousin also to your noble young Landgrave.”

“No!” exclaimed the malignant usurper, “her you shall never see alive: for that, be well assured, I have taken care.”

“Vile, unworthy Prince!” replied Maximilian, his eyes kindling ‘with passion, “know that your intentions, so worthy of a fiend, towards that most innocent of ladies, have been confounded and brought to nothing by your own gentle daughter, worthy of a far nobler father.”

“If you speak of my directions for administering the torture, a matter in which I presume that I exercised no unusual privilege amongst German sovereigns, you are right. But it was not that of which I spoke.”

“Of what else then?—The Lady Paulina has escaped.”

“True, to Falkenberg. But, doubtless, young Landgrave, you have heard of such a thing as the intercepting of a fugitive prisoner; in such a case you know the punishment which martial law awards. The governor at Falkenberg had his orders.” These last significant words were uttered in a tone of peculiar meaning. His eyes sparkled with bright gleams of malice and of savage vengeance, doting in its completion.

“Oh, heart—heart!” exclaimed Maximilian, “can this be possible?”

The Imperial Legate and all present crowded around him to suggest such consolation as they could. Some offered to ride off express to Falkenberg; some argued that the Lady Paulina had been seen within the last hour. But the hellish exalter in ruined happiness destroyed that hope as soon as it dawned

“Children!” he said, “foolish children! cherish not such chimeras. Me you have destroyed, Landgrave, and the prospects of my house. Now perish yourself.—Look there: is that the form of one who lives and breathes?”

All present turned to the scaffold, in which direction he pointed, and now first remarked, covered with a black pall, and brought hither doubtless to aggravate the pangs of death to Maximilian, what seemed but too certainly a female corpse. The stature, the fine swell of the bust, the rich outline of the form, all pointed to the same conclusion; and in this recumbent attitude, it seemed but too clearly to present the magnificent proportions of Paulina.

There was a dead silence. Who could endure to break it? Who make the effort which was for ever to fix the fate of Maximilian?

He himself could not. At last the deposed usurper, craving for the consummation of his vengeance, himself strode forward; with one savage grasp he tore away the pall, and below it lay the innocent features, sleeping in her last tranquil slumber, of his own gentle-minded daughter!

No heart was found savage enough to exult—the sorrow even of such a father was sacred. Death, and through his own orders, had struck the only being whom he had ever loved; and the petrific mace of the fell destroyer seemed to have smitten his own heart and withered its hopes for ever.

Everybody comprehended the mistake in a moment Paulina had lingered at Waldenhausen under the protection of an Imperial corps, which she had met in her flight. The tyrant, who had heard of her escape, but apprehended no necessity for such a step on the part of his daughter, had issued sudden orders to the officer commanding the military post at Falkenberg, to seize and shoot the female prisoner escaping from confinement, without allowing any explanations whatsoever, on her arrival at Falkenberg. This precaution he had adopted in part to intercept any denunciation of the Emperor's vengeance which Paulina might address to the officer. As a rude soldier, accustomed to obey the letter of his orders, this commandant had executed his commission; and the gentle Adeline, who had naturally hastened to the protection of her father's chateau, surrendered her breath meekly and with resignation to what she believed a simple act of military violence; and this she did before she could know a syllable of her father's guilt or his fall, and without any the least reason for supposing him connected with the occasion of her early death.

At this moment Paulina made her appearance unexpectedly, to re-assure the young Landgrave by her presence, and to weep over her young friend, whom she had lost almost before she had come to know her. The scaffold, the corpse, and the other images of sorrow, were then withdrawn;—seven thousand Imperial troops presented arms to the youthful Landgrave and the future Landgravine, the brilliant favourites of the Emperor;—the immense area of St Agnes resounded with the congratulations of Klosterheim;—and as the magnificent cortege moved off to the interior of the schloss, the swell of the Coronation anthem rising in peals upon the ear from the choir of St Agnes, and from the military bands of the Imperial troops, awoke the promise of happier days, and of more equitable government, to the long-harassed inhabitants of Klosterheim.

The Klosterheimers knew enough already, personally or by questions easily answered in every quarter, to supply any links which were wanting in the rapid explanations of the Legate. Nevertheless, that nothing might remain liable to misapprehension or cavil, a short manifesto was this night circulated by the new government, from which the following facts are abstracted

The last rightful Landgrave, whilst yet a young man, had been assassinated in the forest when hunting. A year or two before this catastrophe he had contracted what, from the circumstances, was presumed at the time to be morganatic, or left-handed, marriage with a lady of high birth, nearly connected with the Imperial House. The effect of such a marriage went to incapacitate the children who might be born under it, male or female, from succeeding. On that account, as well

as because current report had represented her as childless, the widow lady escaped all attempts from the assassin. Meantime this lady, who was no other than Sister Madeline, had been thus indebted for her safety to two rumours which were in fact equally false. She soon found means of convincing the Emperor, who had been the bosom friend of her princely husband, that her marriage was a perfect one, and conferred the fullest tights of succession upon her infant son Maximilian, whom at the earliest age, and with the utmost secrecy, she had committed to the care of his Imperial Majesty. This powerful guardian had in every way watched over the interests of the young prince. But the Thirty Years' War had thrown all Germany into distractions, which for a time thwarted the Emperor, and favoured the views of the usurper. Latterly also another question had arisen on the city and dependencies of Klosterheim as distinct from the Landgraviate. These, it was now affirmed, were a female appanage, and could only pass back to the Landgraves of X— through a marriage with the female inheritrix. To reconcile all claims, therefore, on finding this bar in the way, the Emperor had resolved to promote a marriage for Maximilian with Paulina, who stood equally related to the Imperial house and to that of her lover. In this view he had despatched Paulina to Klosterheim, with proper documents to support the claims of both parties. Of these documents she had been robbed at Waldenhausen; and the very letter which was designed to introduce Maximilian as "the child and sole representative of the late murdered Landgrave," falling in this surreptitious way into the usurper's hand, had naturally misdirected his attacks to the person of Paulina.

For the rest, as regarded the mysterious movements of The Masque, these were easily explained. Fear, and the exaggerations of fear, had done one half the work to his hands—by preparing people to fall easy dupes to the plans laid, and by increasing the romantic wonders of his achievements. Co-operation also on the part of the very students and others who stood forward as the night watch for detecting him, had served The Masque no less powerfully. The appearances of deadly struggles had been arranged artificially to countenance the plot and to aid the terror. Finally, the secret passages which communicated between the forest and the chapel of St Agnes (passages of which many were actually applied to that very use in the Thirty Years' War) had been unreservedly placed at their disposal by the Lady Abbess, an early friend of the unhappy Landgravine, who sympathised deeply with that lady's unmerited sufferings.

One other explanation followed, communicated in a letter from Maximilian to the Legate; this related to the murder of the old seneschal, a matter in which the young Prince took some blame to himself—as having unintentionally drawn upon that excellent servant his unhappy fate. "The seneschal," said the writer, "was the faithful friend of my family, and knew the whole course of its misfortunes. He continued his abode at the schloss to serve my interest; and in some measure I may fear that I drew upon him his fate. Traversing late one evening a suite of rooms, which his assistance and my own mysterious disguise laid open to my passage at all hours, I came suddenly upon the Prince's retirement. He pursued me, but with hesitation. Some check I gave to his motions by halting before a portrait of my unhappy father, and emphatically pointing his attention to it. Conscience, I well knew, would supply a commentary to my act. I produced the impression which I had anticipated, but not so strongly as to stop his pursuit. My course necessarily drew him into the seneschal's room. The old man was sleeping; and this accident threw into the Prince's hands a paper, which, I have reason to think, shed some considerable light upon my own pretensions, and, in fact, first made my enemy acquainted with my existence and my claims. Meantime, the seneschal had secured the Prince's vengeance upon himself. He was now known as a faithful agent in my service. That fact signed his death-warrant. There is a window in a gallery which commands the interior of the seneschal's room. On the evening of the

last fête, waiting there for an opportunity of speaking securely with this faithful servant, I heard a deep groan, and then another, and another; I raised myself~ and with an ejaculation of horror, looked down upon the murderer—then surveying his victim with hellish triumph. My loud exclamation drew the murderer's eye upwards: under the pangs of an agitated conscience, I have reason to think that he took me for my unhappy father, who perished at my age, and is said to have resembled me closely. Who that murderer was, I need not say more directly. He fled with the terror of one who flies from an apparition. Taking a lesson from this incident, on that same night, by the very same sudden revelation of what passed, no doubt, for my father's countenance, aided by my mysterious character, and the proof I had announced to him immediately before of my acquaintance with the secret of the seneschal's murder—in this and no other way it was that I produced that powerful impression upon the Prince which terminated the festivities of that evening, and which all Klosterheim witnessed. If not, it is for the Prince to explain in what other way I did or could affect him so powerfully.”

This explanation of the else unaccountable horror manifested by the ex-Landgrave on the sudden exposure of The Masque's features, received a remarkable confirmation from the confession of the miserable assassin at Waldenhausen. This man's illness had been first brought on by the sudden shock of a situation pretty nearly the same, acting on a conscience more disturbed and a more superstitious mind. In the very act of attempting to assassinate or rob Maximilian, he had been suddenly dragged by that Prince into a dazzling light; and this, settling full upon the features which too vividly recalled to the murderer's recollection that the last unhappy Landgrave at the very same period of blooming manhood, and in his own favourite hunting palace, not far from which the murder had been perpetrated, naturally enough had for a time unsettled the guilty man's understanding, and, terminating in a nervous fever, had at length produced his penitential death.

A death, happily of the same character, soon overtook the deposed Landgrave. He was laid by the side of his daughter, whose memory, as much even as his own penitence, availed to gather round his final resting-place the forgiving thoughts even of those who had suffered most from his crimes. Klosterheim in the next age flourished greatly, being one of those cities which benefited by the Peace of Westphalia. Many changes took place in consequence, greatly affecting the architectural character of the town and its picturesque antiquities; but, amidst all revolutions of this nature, the secret passages still survive,—and to this day are shown occasionally to strangers of rank and consideration,—by which, mote than by any other of the advantages at his disposal, The Masque of Klosterheim was enabled to replace himself in his patrimonial rights, and at the same time to liberate from a growing oppression his own compatriots and subjects.