

German Short Stories of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries
Conrad Ferdinand Meyer (1825-1898)

1. The Page of Gustavus Adolphus (1882)

2. The Shot from the Pulpit (1878)

The Page of Gustavus Adolphus

I.

In the counting-room of a patrician house in Nuremberg, situated not far from the Church of Saint Sebaldus, father and son were sitting opposite one another at a large desk and applying themselves, with the keenest attention, to the conclusion of an important business transaction. They were both adding up, each one by himself and on his own sheet of paper, the same long list of accounts, in order to compare the two results and thereby attain the certainty desired. The frail youth, who was the spitting image of his father, was the first to lift his pointed nose from his neatly written figures. His addition was finished, and he waited for his more deliberate father, not without a touch of self-satisfaction in his thin, anxious face – when a servant entered and presented a large-sized letter with a heavy seal. A cornet of the Swedish carabineers had brought it. He was now taking a look at the Council Hall next door with its world-renowned paintings and would return in precisely an hour. The merchant recognised the bold handwriting of His Majesty the King of Sweden, Gustavus Adolphus, at first glance, and he was a little startled at the great honour of receiving a letter written in his own royal hand. It was reasonable to fear that the King, whom he had entertained and fêted in his newly-built house, the most handsome one in Nuremberg, might desire a loan from his

patriotic host. But as he was immensely affluent and appreciated the conscientiousness of the Swedish exchequer, he broke open the royal seal without any particular concern, and even with the beginning of a boastful smile. But no sooner had he run his eyes over the few lines of the letter, composed with royal concision, than he turned as pale as the stucco-work on the ceiling, which portrayed the sacrifice of Isaac by his own father Abraham in protruding masses and obtrusively grouped figures. And his good son, observing him, turned pale likewise, surmising some calamity from the sudden loss of colour from his withered face. His consternation grew when the old man regarded him from across the sheet of paper with a melancholy expression. "For God's sake," stammered the youth, "what is it, father?" Old Leubelfing, for they both belonged to this noble family of merchants, reached the sheet over to him with a trembling hand. The youth read:

Dear Sir!

Knowing and well remembering that the gentleman's son cherished the desire to enter Our service as page, we hereby announce that this may be done and accomplished today, inasmuch as our former page, the late Max Beheim † (with additional honourable mention of the penultimate, the late Utzen Volkamer †, and the antepenultimate, the late Götz Tucher †), passed peacefully away in Our arms today during the assault after both his legs had been torn off by a cannonball. It will afford Us especial satisfaction to once again take a boy from the Protestant Free Imperial City of Nuremberg, to which city We are particularly favourably inclined, into

Our personal service. The gentleman can be assured of good provision and daily Christian admonition for his son.

The Gentleman's well-disposed

Gustavus Adolphus Rex.

“Oh Good Heavens!” the son lamented, not hiding his faint-heartedness from his father, “I now carry my death-warrant in my pocket, and you, Father – with all due respect be it said – are the causer of my premature decease, for who else but you could have imparted to the King so erroneous an opinion of my wishes and desires? God have mercy on me!” And he turned his gaze up to the knife of the plaster Patriarch which hovered directly over him.

“Child, you’re breaking my heart!” the old man replied with a reluctant tear. “Cursed be the glass too much of Tokay that I drank –”

“Father,” he was interrupted by his son, who, in the midst of misery, though he did not keep up his courage, yet kept a clear head, “Father, tell me how the misfortune came about.”

“August,” the old man confessed with contrition, “you remember the great banquet I gave the King on his first entrance into the city. It cost me dearly –”

“Three hundred and ninety-nine florins, eleven kreuzer,¹ Father, and I enjoyed none of it,” the youth peevishly remarked, “for I was confined to my chamber with a wet compress over my eye.” He pointed to his right

¹ There were sixty kreuzer to the florin (or gulden).

one. “That tomboy Gussie, almost out of her senses and silly for joy at seeing the King, had flung the feather ball at my eye just as a trumpet blast sounded and led her to believe that the King was making his entrance. But speak, Father –”

“After the dishes had been removed, while the fruits and wines were being served, thunderous jubilation burst out up in the hall and down in the square from the people assembled there shoulder to shoulder. They all wanted to see the King. Bumpers clinked, healths were drunk at open windows and greeted with cheers above and below. While this was going on, a clear, shrill voice cried: “Long live Gustavus, King of Germany!” Now everyone fell dead quiet, for that was a bit much. The King pricked up his ears and stroked his Vandyke beard. “I must not hear such words,” he said. “I propose a toast to the Protestant Free Imperial City of Nuremberg.” Then jubilation really burst forth. The cannons in the square were fired, everything was pell-mell! After a while, His Majesty drew me aside, as if by chance, into a corner. ‘Who proposed the toast to the King of Germany, Leubelfing?’ he asked me in an undertone. Now an itch to boast came over me, drunken ass that I was –” Leubelfing struck his brow as if denouncing it for not having advised him better – “and I replied: ‘Majesty, that was my son, Augustus. He longs day and night to enter your service as page.’ In spite of my intoxication, I knew that the royal personal service was performed by Götz Tucher, and Mayor Volkamer, together with Lay Judge Beheim, had recommended their boys as pages. And I only said it not to be left behind my neighbours, old Tucher and that braggart Beheim. Who could have thought that the King would use up all his Nuremberg wares in

Bavaria –”

“But what if the King had sent for me with my black eye?”

“That was also thought out in advance, Augustus! That wily rascal, Charnacé,² was raising a racket in the antechamber. He had already had himself announced three times and was not to be refused any longer. The King then let him enter and made such sport of the ambassador before us patricians that every German’s heart was bound to rejoice within him. I had not left any of that out of consideration in the hurry of the moment –”

“So much and so little wisdom, Father!” sighed his son.

Then the two of them put their heads together to seek a remedy, as they called it, whispering in undertones now, after having previously forgotten to lower their voices, for their agitation had made them unmindful of the employees and apprentices working in the adjoining room. But they found no solution, and their countenances became ever more uneasy and pained, when in the corridor outside a vigorous alto burst into Gustavus Adolphus’s favourite song:

“Thou little flock, stay strong in mind
Although thy foes are sore inclined
To utterly destroy thee!”³

And a girl as tall and slender as a poplar, with merry eyes, hair cut short, a boylike figure and manners rather resembling those of a cavalryman, walked in.

² Baron Hercule-Girard de Charnacé (1588-1637), Cardinal Richelieu’s diplomatic representative in Germany.

³ “Verzage nicht, du Häufflein klein” by Johann Michael Altenburg (1585-1640), pastor at Erfurt.

“Do you want to split our ears, cousin?” the two Leubelfings scolded. She, surveying the melancholy pair, replied: “I’ve come to call you to dinner. What’s happened, Uncle, Cousin? The tips of your noses are really quite pale!” The letter which lay between the helpless men, which the girl grabbed without further ado and, after reading the boldly dashed-off signature of the King, devoured with passionate eyes, explained their terror to her. “To table, gentlemen!” she said, and she walked ahead of them into the dining-room. But here the kind-hearted girl herself was pained to see how every morsel stuck in the Leubelfings’ throats. After having the table cleared, she pushed her chair back, folded her arms, threw one slender leg over the other under the blue gown, from the belt of which hung her Gretchen’s bag⁴ and her bunch of keys, and had the whole unpleasant business expounded to her, while she listened and reflected; for she seemed to completely belong to the house and to have won herself a settled position in it through her pert character.

The Leubelfings told all. “When I think,” the girl then said spiritedly, “who it was who cried the hurrah for the King!”

“Well, who?” asked the Leubelfings, and she replied: “None other than I.”

“Devil take you, girl!” the old man exclaimed with rancour. “You must have put on the blue Swedish soldier’s coat you keep behind your aprons in your closet and stolen into the dining-room to be with your idols, instead of keeping your proper place among the women.”

⁴ A woman’s bag, hanging on a long strap from her belt, shown on depictions of Gretchen from Goethe’s *Faust*.

“They would have set me in the hindmost place,” the girl angrily replied, “little Miss Haller, big Miss Holzschuh, haughty Miss Ebner, crooked Miss Geuder, silly Miss Cresser, tutte quante,⁵ who were to present the King with our city’s gift, the two silver goblets, the celestial globe and the terrestrial globe.”

“How can a modest maiden, and that is what you are, Gussie, bring herself to wear men’s clothes!” the prudish youth said sulkily.

“That is to say,” the girl gravely replied, “my father’s uniform, where the darned hole which the Frenchman’s sword tore is still visible next to the breast pocket. I need only cast a sidelong glance –” and she did so, as though she were wearing the paternal uniform – “and I see the tear, and it works on me like a sermon. And,” she concluded, passing abruptly from gravity into laughter in her usual way, “women’s skirts don’t seem to suit me at all. It is no wonder that they become me so ill, since I sat on a horse, wearing a short habit, with my father and mother into my fourteenth year.”

“Dear cousin,” the young Leubelfing whined, not without an admixture of affection, “since your father’s death, you have been kept here like the child of the house, and now you have landed me in this! You are bringing your blood cousin as a lamb to the slaughter!⁶ Utz was shot through the forehead, Götz through the neck!” His skin turned to gooseflesh. “If you at least had some good advice for me, Cousin!”

“Some good advice,” she said with emphasis, “I shall give you that: act like a Nuremberger, like a Leubelfing!”

⁵ One and all, all of them.

⁶ Isaiah 53:7.

“A Leubelfing!” the old gentleman said testily. “Must then every Nuremberger and every Leubelfing be a rowdy like Rupert, your father, God rest his soul, who carried me off, the elder brother, he a boy of ten, on a hay wagon, upset it, and remained unhurt while I had two broken ribs? What a career! At fifteen, running away to the Swedes, at seventeen, marrying a fifteen-year-old with the drum for an altar, at thirty departing this life in a brawl!”

“That is to say,” the girl remarked, “he fell defending my mother’s honour –”

“Don’t you have any advice for me, Gussie?” young Leubelfing urged. “You know the Swedish service and the physical defects which excuse one from it. What valid excuse can I give the King?”

She burst out into uproarious laughter. “We’ll hide you,” she said, “among the girls, like young Achilles in the relief on the stove there, and when cunning Ulysses spreads out the implements of war, you don’t rush for a sword.”

“I won’t go!” he declared, angered by this mythological learning, “I am not the person whom Father described to the King.” Then he felt himself seized by both his thin arms. Pulling the left one, old Leubelfing moaned, “Would you make me, respectable man that I am, out to be a windy liar before the King?” While the girl, squeezing her cousin’s right arm, cried indignantly: “Would you dishonour my father’s good name with your cowardice?” “I’ll tell you what!” the incensed youth shouted, “You go to the King as his page! With your boyish appearance and behaviour, he is as little likely to suspect the girl in you, as the Ulysses on the stove whom you

were prattling about would be to guess the boy in me! Go to your idol and adore him! After all,” he continued, “who knows if you haven’t had this in mind for a long time? Don’t you dream about the King of the Swedes, with whom you travelled around in the world as a child, both waking and sleeping? The day before yesterday, when I walked past your bedroom on the way to my own, I heard you speaking in a dream even from a fair distance away. I truly did not need to put my ear to the keyhole. ‘The King! Turn out the guard! Present-arms!’” He imitated the commands in a shrill voice.

The maiden turned away. A crimson blush had shot over her cheeks and brow. Then she showed her warm light-brown eyes again and said: “Take care! It might come to that were it only to save the name Leubelfing from being borne by none but cissies!”

The words had been spoken and a childish dream had taken shape as a bold but not impossible adventure. Her father’s blood in her was calling. There was a superabundance of courage and daring. But maidenly modesty and propriety – her cousin had borne true testimony – and her reverence for the King raised objections. Then the whirlpool of events seized her and tore her along.

The Swedish cornet, who had brought the letter from the King and was to conduct the new page to the camp, announced himself. Instead of the grey frescoes of Master Albrecht,⁷ he had engrossed himself in a merry wine tavern and in a green rummer filled with gold, without however

⁷ The German painter Albrecht Altdorfer (1480-1538).

failing to hear the striking of the hour. The old Leubelfing, in mortal fear for his son and for his firm, made a movement to embrace the knee of his niece, no otherwise than hoary-headed Priam clasped the knee of Achilles to beg for the body of his son, while the young Leubelfing began to shiver and shake from head to foot. The girl freed herself with a convulsive laugh and ran away through a side-door, just a moment before the cornet made his way in with clanking spurs, a youth whose eyes sparkled roguery and vitality, although he observed the strict discipline enjoined by his King.

Augusta Leubelfing rummaged hastily and headily around in her chamber, packed a portmanteau, hurriedly threw on her father's clothes, which fitted her slender and slight form to a T, and then fell to her knees for a short ejaculatory prayer, to pray that she be forgiven and her exploit find favour.

When she entered the lower room again, the cornet cried to her: "Quick, comrade! Time is pressing! The horses are pawing the ground! The King is waiting for us! Take your leave of your father and cousin!" and with one draught, he poured the contents of the rummer he had been given behind his fine lace-collar.

The pretend-boy dressed in Swedish uniform bent over the old man's withered hand, kissed it with emotion twice, and received his grateful blessing; but then, suddenly passing over into unrestrained merriment, the page grasped Young Leubelfing's right hand, swung it back and forth and cried: "Farewell, Lady Cousin!" The cornet shook with laughter. "Devil take me, well I'll be – what good jokes you crack, comrade! If you'll pardon my saying so, it struck me at once: a regular old woman,

the gentleman cousin! In every feature, in every gesture, as they sing back home in Finland:

“An old woman rode an oven-fork –

“Devil take me, Lord help me!” With a quick hand, he snatched the bonnet from the chambermaid on duty and clapped it on the head, round which flaxen hair hung sparsely, of young Leubelfing. The pointed nose and the retreating chin completed the profile of an old woman.

Now the tipsy cornet familiarly linked arms with the page. But the latter took a step back and said, his hands on the hilt of his sword:

“Comrade! I am a friend of reserve and an enemy of close contact!”

“Zounds!” said the other, but he moved to the side and, with a polite wave of the hand, gave the page precedence. The two madcaps clattered down the steps.

The Leubelfings deliberated for a long time afterwards. It was clear that staying in Nuremberg was out of the question for the youth who had lost his identity. Finally, father and son came to an agreement. The latter was to transplant a branch of the business to the Electorate of Saxony, to the rising city of Leipzig to be precise, not under the patrician name he had forfeited but under the plebeian “Laubfing,” and only for a short while, until the current August von Leubelfing had fallen dead from his horse beside the King on a battlefield, which end would not be long in coming.

When the one who had changed his identity rose after a long discussion and encountered his reflection in the mirror, he was still wearing, over his troubled features, the bonnet which the Swedish ne'er-do-well had clapped on his head.

II.

“Listen, Page Leubelfing! I have a bone to pick with you. If you were, in the most pressing case, to sew up a ripping seam of the King’s coat, or replace a missing button, with your nimble fingers, you would not lower your dignity as a page in the least. Did you never look over your mother’s or your sister’s shoulder at the sewing cushion in Nuremberg? It is, after all, an easy art which any Swedish soldier can teach you. You turn up your nose, ungracious boy? Be good and obedient! Look, here is my own sewing kit! I am giving it to you.”

And the Brandenburger, the Queen of Sweden,⁸ handed Page Leubelfing a sewing kit of English workmanship with thread, thimble, needle and scissors. Travelling everywhere after the King out of jealous affection, she had surprised him with her short visit in the middle of his ill-starred camp near Nuremberg, where he was inhabiting a nobleman’s seat within its perimeter which had been partially devastated by the war. She opened the etui in the page’s reluctant hands, took out the silver thimble, and put it on the page’s finger with the gracious words, “I lay it on your conscience, Leubelfing, that my lord and king shall always appear neat and immaculate.”

“I don’t give a damn about seams and buttons, Majesty,” replied Leubelfing, blushing with displeasure, but with so droll an expression and in so agreeably vigorous a voice that the Queen did not feel insulted in any way, but rather pinched the page’s cheek with a condescending laugh. To

⁸ Marie Eleonora of Brandenburg (1599-1655), Queen from 1620 to 1632.

him, the laugh sounded hollow and silly, and the irritable youth felt an aversion for the illustrious Princess which this good-natured lady did not suspect at all.

But the King, who had overheard the scene on the threshold of the chamber, now also burst out into hearty laughter upon seeing his page with a rapier on his left hip and a thimble on his right hand. “But Gus,” he said, “you swear just like a papist or a heathen! I shall have to teach you yet.”

Indeed, Gustavus Adolphus thought it not robbery to wear the crown.⁹ How could he, who – without any relaxation of military discipline – treated every one of his men, even the humblest, with human benevolence, have denied this to a good-natured youth of agreeable appearance who lived in his presence and was not allowed to leave his side? And an innocent youth, who blushed to the roots of his hair, just like a girl, at the slightest occasion! Nor did he forget that the young Nuremberger had proposed a toast to him as the “King of Germany” at that portentous banquet, encapsulating the possible glorious outcome of his heroic exploits in a bold, prophetic phrase.

The page had already lived through a tender and wild, a blissful and fearful fable beside his hero, without the guileless king having any inkling of this surreptitious happiness. Intoxicating hours, which began immediately after the completion of eighteen dependent years and extinguished them as the sun does a shadow! A chase, a flight of sweet and proud sensations, tormenting apprehensions, concealed delights,

⁹ Cf. Philippians 2:6, referring to Jesus Christ: “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.”

pounding heartbeats, quickened breaths, such as only a young breast can contain and a carefree heart can enjoy in the hour before a death-dealing bullet or on the eve of a mortifying unmasking!

When the patrician youth of Nuremberg, August Leubelfing, was presented to the King by the cornet, the sovereign was occupied and could barely find a moment to cast a fleeting eye over his new page. This spared the latter the necessity of a barefaced lie. Gustavus Adolphus was about to swing himself onto his personal steed to make preparations for the second ineffectual assault against the Duke of Friedland's¹⁰ impregnable position. He bid his page follow, who threw himself onto the bay that was brought before him without hesitation, for he had felt at home in the saddle since childhood and had inherited a slender and equestrian body from his father, formerly the wildest horseman in the Swedish army. When the King, turning around a while later, saw the page turning deadly pale, it was not from the fiery leaps of the bay or from being unaccustomed to the saddle, but was because Leubelfing had caught sight of a captured prostitute, some distance away, who was being whipped out of the camp, her back bared, and the naked spectacle disgusted him.

Day after day – for the King did not weary of repeating the repulsed assaults with a pertinacity foreign to his nature – the page rode by his side without any feeling of fear. Any moment could bring him to lift the fatally shot King down from his horse in his arms, or to himself breathe his last, mortally wounded, in the arms of Gustavus Adolphus. When they rode

¹⁰ Albrecht von Wallenstein (1583-1634), Duke of Friedland and supreme commander of the armies on the Catholic side in the Thirty Years' War.

back without success, the King with a darkened brow, the latter would dissemble or conceal this care of his by teasing the newcomer, alleging he had lost his stirrup and grabbing his animal's mane. Or he would, on the contrary, censure his rashness, calling him a casse-cou, as the camp expression ran.

In general, he spared no pains to give his page good fatherly instruction and occasionally instill a little Christianity in him. The King had the laudable and healthy habit of idling away the last half-hour before going to bed, after the day's work was done, and indulging in all kinds of trivial amusements, casting every care behind him with trained willpower to then take it up again at the same place with dawn's first light. And he held fast to this habit now, and all the more so as the foiled assaults and sacrificed human lives destroyed his plans, wounded his pride, and troubled his Christian conscience. So in this late hour of leisure he sat, leaning comfortably back in his armchair, with Page Leubelfing on a stool beside him. They played draughts, or chess, and the page occasionally beat the King at the board game. Or the latter, when he was in a very good humour, talked of indifferent things, just as they lay uppermost in his memory. For example, of the pompous sermon he had once heard in the Court Church on his wooing-journey to Berlin. It compared life to a stage: with the people as actors, the angels as spectators, and curtain-lowering Death as stage manager. Or the incredible tale of how, following the birth of his child, it had initially been announced to him as a boy and he himself had believed the deception for a while; or about festivals and costumes, strange to say, mostly tales which could amuse a maiden just as much as,

or more than, a youth, as though the deceived King felt the effect of the deception which the page was perpetrating against him, without being able to account for the sensation, and unwittingly enjoyed the playful charm of a listening woman in the disguise of a well-behaved youth. At this, a sudden fear would come over the page. He deepened his alto voice and risked some manly gestures. But a word that could not be misinterpreted, or a short-sighted movement of the King, restored to the alarmed youth the certainty that Gustavus was a victim of the same delusion as at the birth of his Chrissie.¹¹ Then, however, feeling reassured, the page would become cocky and speak of some matter so daring or so personal as to bring down a reproof upon himself. As happened on every occasion when he followed a warm, conjugal eulogy of the Queen from the mouth of Gustavus by throwing out the impertinent question: What did Countess Ebba Brahe really look like? This sweetheart of Gustavus's youth and later spouse of De la Gardie,¹² whom she married as the bravest but one man of the century, the bravest having slipped away from her, had dark hair, black eyes, and sharp features. But the curious page did not learn this; instead, he received a fairly hard blow with the flat of the hand on his saucy mouth, in the corners of which Gustavus thought he discerned the desire to break out into roguish laughter.

One day, it came to pass that the King made his Christel the present of a first seal-ring. On its precious stone, in accordance with the prevailing

¹¹ Christina (1626-1689), Queen from 1632 to 1654.

¹² Ebba Brahe (1596-1674); Jacob de la Gardie (1583-1652), Lord High Constable of Sweden.

fashion, a motto was to be engraved, a device, as it was called, which – in contrast with the hereditary motto on the escutcheon – had to express something characteristic of the owner of the seal, a maxim from his head, a wish of his heart, in emphatic brevity, as for example the emphatic “Nondum”¹³ of the young Charles V. Gustavus would assuredly have devised a personal motto for his child himself, but, again in accordance with the prevailing fashion, it had to be in Latin, Italian, or French. So, bent low over a quarto volume, he searched with his shining yet short-sighted eyes among the thousand sayings of famous or witty people recorded therein for the one he would present to his Christel, only seven years old but precocious nonetheless, and took pleasure in the laconic sentences which often gave correct, indeed, striking expression to the character of their deviser – historical persons for the most part – but also often expressed, in accordance with human self-deception and vainglory, the exact opposite.

Now a slender finger, casting a sharp black shadow, pointed to the brightly-illuminated page and a device of unknown origin. It was Leubelfing, peeping over the King’s shoulder, and the device said: “Courte et bonne!”¹⁴ That is to say: If I am to choose my life, let it be one that is short and full of enjoyment! The King read, reflected for a moment, shook his head thoughtfully, and reached up to tug the well-formed earlobes of his page. Then he pressed Leubelfing down into his stool with the intention

¹³ “Nondum in auge” or “Not yet at its zenith,” referring to his power. This motto was adopted by Charles V (1500-1558) in 1518 when he was King of Spain and a year before he became Holy Roman Emperor.

¹⁴ “Short and sweet!” or “Short and good!”, referring to life.

of giving him a short lecture. “Gus Leubelfing,” he began with easy sententiousness, his head pressed back into the cushion, a position that made his full chin with its golden-haired goatee jut forward and the roguish light in his half-closed eyes sparkle down at the raised countenance of the listening page, “Gus Leubelfing, my son! I suspect that this questionable motto was devised by some worldling, an ‘epicurean,’ as Doctor Luther calls such people. Our life belongs to God. So we may not wish it to be either long or short, but we take it as He gives it. And good? Good, certainly, that is right and proper. But not full of intoxication and tumult, as the French motto undoubtedly signifies here. Or how did you understand it, my dear son?”

Leubelfing answered shyly and diffidently at first, but then more joyfully and resolutely with every syllable: “In the following way, my lord: I wish all the rays of my life to be united in *one* bundle of flames and in the space of *one* hour, so my happiness will spring forth in a short but dazzlingly bright light, instead of in a dim twilight, and then go out like a flash of lightning.” She stopped. The King seemed not to like this style and this “flash of lightning,” even though it was the favourite metaphor of the century. He curled his thin lips derisively. But interrupting the yet unspoken word of reproof, the page cried out, “Yes, that’s what I’d like! Courte et bonne!” Then he suddenly paused to reflect and humbly subjoined: “Dear lord! It is possible that I misunderstand the motto. It is ambiguous, like most of the ones in this book. But I do know one thing, and it is the sheer truth: If the bullet which grazed you today, my dearest lord, had –” he swallowed the word – “People would have said, courte et bonne! For you

are a youth and a man at the same time, and your life is a good one!”

The King closed his eyes and then, tired out from the travails of the day as he was, fell into that slumber which he initially feigned so as not to have heard, or at least not to reply to, the page’s flattery.

In this way did the lion play with the little dog, and the little dog with the lion. And as if a teasing or pernicious destiny had the design of uniting the doting child most intimately with his idolized hero, showing him the latter in ever new forms and in his innermost feelings, it had the page share also the most bitter pain of all with his master, that of a father.

The King employed Leubelfing, in whom he placed absolute trust, to read out the letters, written by the governess of his little Princess, which regularly arrived from Stockholm, and then to answer them. This lady wrote a scribbly cramped hand in a prolix, thorough style, which usually led Gustavus to immediately turn her lengthy letters over to his page, whose swift eyes and quick-moving lips ran down the lines of a letter-page no less nimbly than his young feet ran down the countless steps of a winding staircase. One day, Leubelfing noticed in the corner of the envelope the large S which was customarily used at that time to mark important or secret letters, so that the recipient would personally open and read them. The characteristics of a page – curiosity and forwardness – prevailed. Leubelfing broke the seal, and a remarkable affair came to light. The governess of the little Princess had – in accordance with the plan of studies drawn up by the King himself, which prescribed the early learning of languages – thought it time to procure a teacher of Italian for Christel. The choice, made with due precaution, seemed to be a happy one. The

quiet young man, a Swede of good family, who had seen much of the world on long journeys, combined in his person all excellences of appearance and of mind, a nobly slender build, prepossessing features, a finely arched forehead, an obliging manner, a confirmed morality, far removed from both sombre rigour and ridiculous pedantry, a noble sense of honour, and Christian humility. And the most important point: a genuine Lutheranism, which, as he himself confessed, had changed from something acquired from study into an independent and unshakeable conviction upon the sight of the Romish abomination in the modern Babylon. The level-headed and intelligent governess repeated in every one of her letters that this young man had won her over. And the young Princess studied with a will, having a bright head and such a teacher. Then one day, the governess caught docile and imaginative Christel secretly amusing herself, crouched in a corner, by telling the beads of a rosary of fragrant cedar-wood, which she smelt from time to time with her snuffling little nose. “A ravening wolf in sheep’s clothing!”¹⁵ wrote the worthy governess with five exclamation marks. “I threw up my hands in astonishment and turned as white as a sheet.”

Gustavus Adolphus also turned pale, shaken to the depths of his soul, and his large blue eyes stared into the future. He knew the Society of Jesus.

The Jesuit had been thrown into prison and, according to the Draconian law of Sweden, capital punishment awaited him if the King did

¹⁵ Matthew 7:15.

not temper justice with mercy. The latter ordered the page to write to the governess by return of post: No fuss should be made with the girl, the matter was to be treated as a trifle; the Jesuit was to be put over the border without any noise or ado. “For” – he dictated to Leubelfing – “I do not want to make a martyr. The deluded youth with his counterfeit conscience would willingly have his head struck off to be taken up in the purple cloud of the blood-witnesses¹⁶ and travel heavenward with his secret evil desire to maltreat the pliable brain of my child.”

But for several days, “the disaster and the crime” – thus did he call the attempt on the soul of his child – gave him no peace, and long past midnight, until his hanging lamp burned out, he perorated in the presence of his favourite, pacing restlessly up and down, admittedly more in soliloquy than in dialogue, on the lies, the sophistry, and the mummery of the pious Fathers, while the page, sitting in the semi-darkness, struck his pounding young breast and cried to himself the quiet, mortifying words, “You too are a liar, a sophist, a mummer!”

Since those nocturnal hours, the page had been terribly anxious, to the point of distraction, about his mask and his sex. The slightest circumstance could bring about discovery. To avoid this discovery, the miserable wretch decided ten times at dusk or at break of day to saddle his horse, to ride to the ends of the earth; and ten times he was held back by an innocent caress from the King, who had no inkling that a female was with him. He was easy in his mind only in powder-smoke. There his eyes

¹⁶ Hebrews 12:1.

flashed, and he rode happily to meet the fatal bullet which he invited to put an end to his fearful dream. And later, whenever the King, in the cosy glow of the evening hour, catching his page in some act of folly or ignorance, took hold of him by the head, and ran his hand through the curly hair with honest laughter, Gus would say to himself, exalting in heartfelt pleasure and fear, "This is the last time!"

In this way did he prolong his stay and enjoy a supreme life with the help of Death. It was strange. Leubelfing felt it: even the King lived on a familiar footing with Death. The Duke of Friedland had taken the offensive and brought the conqueror into the unbearable situation of one in retreat, almost in flight. So the Christian hero laid his fate in the hand of his God every day, indeed, every hour, and almost invitingly. He persistently rejected the breastplate which his page habitually offered him on the pretext of a shoulder-wound which the close-fitting steel would press against. A flexible, fine coat of mail, such as the prudent and the cautious wore next to their skin, a masterpiece of Dutch smithcraft, arrived, and the Queen wrote in the accompanying letter that she had heard the Duke of Friedland wore such a shirt, her lord and her husband must not go into battle less well protected. Gustavus contemptuously threw this exquisite work of smithery into a corner as a piece of cowardice.

At one time, in the quiet of the night, Leubelfing, whose head was separated from that of the King only by the wall, pressed up close against it and could hear Gustavus fervently praying and importuning his God to take him in his prime, when his hour came, before he became superfluous or incapable. At first, the eavesdropper's tears flowed, then a selfish joy

permeated her from top to toe, a secret jubilation, a victory, a triumph at the similarity of her small fate with this great one, which then, with the silly, childish thought that the same syllable ended her name and began that of the King, faded into slumber.

But the page had bad dreams, for he dreamed with his conscience. In the damning images which rose up before his dreaming eyes, it so happened that now the King cast the discovered girl off with flaming eyes and condemnatory gesture, now the Queen chased her away with a broomstick and the coarsest invectives, such as the cultured woman would never let pass her lips in the light of day, indeed, which she was most unlikely to even know.

At one time, the page dreamed that his bay mare ran away with him and raced through a bare region, reddened by an angry evening glow, towards a ravine, with the King dashing after him, but he plunged into the shattering depths before the eyes of his saviour or pursuant, with the sound of diabolical laughter ringing out all around.

III.

Leubelfing awoke with a sudden cry. Day was dawning, and the page found his King, who was bright and refreshed following an uninterrupted sleep, in the calmest and most affable mood in the world. A letter arrived from the Queen which contained nothing of urgency save for the postscript, in which she asked her husband to see that justice was done in a distressing and urgent case which deeply affected the benevolent woman. The Duke of Lauenburg, an immoral man, who had

married one of the Queen's many cousins for political reasons barely a few months before, had caused a public scandal by cutting short his honeymoon, being bored by the blonde braids and pale-blue eyes of his wife, and hurrying back to the Swedish camp, where he kept a very young Slavonian at his side. Highwayman that he was, he had snatched her out of the midst of an escort of the Duke of Friedland which he had ridden down. Now the Queen entreated her husband to put a swift end to this flagrant adultery; for Lauenburg, avoiding only the eyes of the King, showed his pretty booty off to his peers and allowed himself, as a Prince of the Empire, the sin and the accompanying scandal.

Gustavus Adolphus looked upon the matter as a simple fulfilment of duty and, without further ado, gave the order to seize the Slavonian – she was called Corinna – and bring her before him in the eighth hour, by which time he expected to be back from a short ride of reconnaissance. Stern and humane at the same time, he thought to admonish the girl, to whom he imputed the smaller share of the guilt, for he knew Lauenburg, and then send her to her father in Wallenstein's camp. He rode away, leaving his page Leubelfing behind with the direction to reassure the Queen by letter; he would add a line with his own hand. Eight o'clock passed, and the King had still not returned, but Corinna had, accompanied by a few grim-looking Swedish pikemen who delivered her over to the page, sitting over his letter in the antechamber, his sword and pistols laid beside him on the table. There was a guard standing before the gate of the small castle.

The page cast a curious glance over his letters towards the prisoner, whom he bid be seated, and was astonished at her beauty. Of

only middle height, she bore a well-formed little head over full shoulders on a delicate neck. Little was lacking – calmer eyes, a more open brow, more placid nostrils and corners of the mouth – to make it the sweet head of a muse, however unlike a muse Corinna herself might be. Coal-black plaits and dark, threatening eyes made the captivating face pale. Her brightly-coloured clothes, fallen into disorder and not softened by any shining southern sky, appeared gaudy and obtrusive under a northern one. Her bosom visibly heaved.

The girl could bear the silence no longer. “Where is the King, young Sir?” she asked in a high-pitched voice which was shrill with emotion. “Went out riding. Will be back any moment!” Leubelfing answered in his deepest pitch.

“The King should not imagine I shall leave the Duke,” the passionate girl continued with unrestrained vehemence. “I love him to death. And where should I go? To my father? He would maltreat me cruelly. I am staying. The King has no authority over the Duke. My Duke is a Prince of the Empire.” The anxious girl was evidently prattling what Lauenburg had said, who, though he was actually a sinful man, hung his prince’s mantle around all of his misdeeds, half in mockery, half in earnest.

“Won’t be any use to him, Miss,” replied the page of Gustavus Adolphus. “Prince of the Empire or no Prince of the Empire, the King is his Commander-in-Chief, and Lauenburg has to obey.”

“The Duke,” the Slavonian said querulously, “is from the very noblest blood, whereas the King is descended from a common Swedish peasant.” Her friend Lauenburg had no doubt told her the fairy-tale which

had arisen from the peasant's clothes worn by Gustav Vasa.¹⁷ Feeling insulted, Leubelfing stood up and walked bolt upright towards Corinna, stopped right before her and sternly asked: "What did you say?" The girl had also stood up, in anxiety, and then flung her arms around the page's neck with a suddenly changed expression: "Dear Sir! Handsome Sir! Help me! You must help me! I love Lauenburg and will not leave him! Never!" Crying and imploring thus, she kissed and hugged the page, pressing him to her breast, but then she fell back a step in indescribable bewilderment, and the strangest smile in the world passed over her mockingly pursed-up mouth.

The page turned pale and leaden. "My sister," lisped Corinna with a sly look, "if you could bring your influence" – at the same moment, Leubelfing had seized her by the arm with his strong left hand, pressed her down onto her knees and brought the barrel of his pistol, snatched in haste, near one of the temples of the small head. "Fire away," Corinna cried, half-crazed, "and let there be an end of delight and of misery!" yet she evaded the barrel with the most agile and nimblest twists and turns of her little neck.

Now Leubelfing put the cold ring of iron on the centre of her brow and said, pale as death, but calm: "The King knows nothing of this, as I hope for salvation." An incredulous smile was the answer. "The King knows nothing of this," the page replied, "and you will swear to me by this cross" – he had pulled it out of her bosom on a sound golden chain – "whom do you

¹⁷ Gustav Vasa (1496-1560) became King of Sweden in 1523. Three years earlier, he had fled the pursuing troops of Christian II of Denmark dressed as a peasant.

have this from? from your mother, you say? – You will swear to me by this cross that you too know nothing of this! Be quick, or I'll shoot!"

But the page lowered his weapon, for he heard the stamping of horses' hooves, the rattling of the military salute, and the heavy steps of the King ascending the stairs. He threw one more look at Corinna as she rose from her knees, an imploring look in which the words he had never spoken could be read: "Be merciful! I am in your power! Do not betray me! I love the King!"

He walked in, a different man from the one who had ridden out two hours before, stern as a judge in Israel, in righteous indignation, in blazing anger, like a biblical hero who must root out an injustice that cries to Heaven so the whole tribe will not go to ruin. He had witnessed an outrageous scene, a revolting sight: the plundering of a group of German peasants, who had fled before the Duke of Friedland into the Swedish camp, by German nobility under the leadership of a German prince.

The lords had caroused, played at dice, and played at cards in one of their number's tent until daybreak. An adventurer of the most dubious sort, who was the bank, had fleeced them all. After a short exchange of heated words, they let the presumed sharper – he belonged to the nobility – go his way unmolested as a man of their class; contrariwise, while returning to their tents irritated and worn out from lack of sleep, they broke in upon a tangled mass of heavily loaded carts which were blocked in a camp lane. Lauenburg, who had opened his tent when riding past and found the nest empty, and instantly cast his suspicion on the King, came dashing after them and incited their rapacity to a deed which he knew

would cut Gustavus Adolphus to the quick when he heard about it.

But the latter was to see the outrage with his own eyes. Into the midst of the tumult – crates and boxes were broken open, horses stabbed to the ground or robbed, the unarmed mistreated, those who defended themselves wounded – rode the King, to whom imploring arms, prayers, oaths, curses rose through the air, no otherwise than to the Throne of God. The King mastered and deferred his wrath. At first, he commanded that the fugitives be seen to, then he ordered the whole group of nobles to come to him at the ninth hour. Riding home, he stopped before the tent of the provost marshal and bid him throw on his red cloak and – at some distance – follow.

This was the mood King Gustavus was in when he caught sight of Lauenburg's mistress. He surveyed the girl, whose wild beauty displeased him and whose gaudy clothes offended his clear eyes.

"Who are your parents?" he began, disdainingly to enquire after her own name or history.

"A Captain of the Croats; I lost my mother early," the girl replied, her dark eyes avoiding his bright ones.

"I shall send you back to your father," he said.

"No," she answered, "he would stab me to death."

A stirring of compassion tempered the severity of the King. He sought a light punishment for the girl. "You have walked about the camp in men's clothing, that is forbidden," he accused her.

"Never," Corinna contradicted with genuine indignation, "never was I guilty of such licentiousness."

“But,” the King continued, “you are committing adultery and making a noble young Princess unhappy.”

Raging jealousy blazed in the Slavonian’s eyes. “And if he loves me more, loves me alone, what can I do about it? What do I care about the other woman?” she tossed out defiantly. The King regarded her with astonished eyes, as if he were wondering whether she had been given any Christian instruction as a child.

“I shall take care of you,” he said then. “Now I order you: You will leave Lauenburg for ever and aye. Your love is a deadly sin. Will you obey?” She stood the King’s gaze first with two blazing torches and then with a steady, fixed stare and shook her head. The King turned to the provost marshal, who was standing in the doorway. “What does he want with me?” the girl asked with a shudder. “Is he the hangman? Will he execute me?”

“He will cut your hair, then the next conveyance will take you to Sweden, where you will remain in a house of correction until you have become a Protestant woman.”

A violent shock of strange fears and unknown terrors knocked her small brain for six. A shorn head, what more degrading, more mortifying exposure could there be? Sweden, the icy land with its winter night, of which she had heard tell that the entrance to the realm of ghosts and spirits was there! Correction? What refined, cruel torture did this word, which was unknown to her, signify? A Protestant woman? What was that, if not a heretic? And so, besides all this, she was to be deprived of her modest share in Heaven? She, who broke no fasts and neglected no pious

observance! She grasped the cross, which hung down on its torn little chain, and kissed it with fervour.

Then her wild eyes circled around. They fixed on the page, and lust for revenge flared up in them. She opened her mouth, to call the King, who had accused her of adultery, an adulterer likewise. He was standing calmly to one side. He had taken the page's letter in his hands and was skimming through it, holding it close to his eyes. His attentive features, which had something majestic and divine in their expression of justice mixed with leniency, frightened Corinna; she was afraid of them, as of something strange and uncanny. The wild-grown girl, who correctly judged every male countenance which was distorted by a comprehensible passion, could make nothing out of this refined human mien. She could look at the King no longer. "In the end," she thought, "the Snow King is a frigid man, who does not feel the presence of the girl or the love which secretly creeps around him. I could ruin the young thing! But to what purpose? And then – she loves him."

Now the provost took a step forward and reached his hand out to the Slavonian. She gave herself up as lost. In a flash, she leant on the page and whispered in her ear: "Have ten masses said for me, my sister! Expensive ones! You owe me a thick candle! Well, one woman has luck, the other –" Plunging her hand into her pocket, she drew out a dagger, threw off the sheath, and, with a skilful movement, slit her jugular vein like a pigeon's. This she had no doubt learned and practised in an army-kitchen.

The provost marshal spread out his red cloak, laid her down flat on

it, shrouded her, and carried her in both his arms, like a sleeping child, out through a side-door.

Now it started to become lively in the adjoining room, where all kinds of conversations were being conducted with unseemly loudness, and with the stroke of nine the King, for whom Leubelfing opened the folding door, walked in among the assembled German princes and lords.

They formed a closely-packed circle in the narrow room and there were about fifty or sixty of them. The nobles were none too reverential in their attitude, many of them even careless, as if they knew the colour of shame just as little as the colour of fear: cunning heads beside daring ones, ambitious beside slow-witted, pious beside impudent; most of them, people who could stand their man and who had to be reckoned with. To the left of the King, Captain Erlach, who really had no business here, stood in a modest posture. This warrior had enlisted under the colours of Gustavus Adolphus as the most god-fearing hero of this time, and had often confessed to the King that he deplored the sinfulness he could not help but see out here in the Empire: Ingratitude, masks, snares, intrigues, cabals, covert doings, assigned roles, obliterated traces, corruption, the sale of countries, betrayal, all of them totally unknown and impossible things in his Helvetian mountains. He had come here, perhaps to tell his intimate friend, the French ambassador, who felt attracted to his artlessness, some news, which the French are aflame to hear, such being their nature; perhaps also to attend a victory of virtue over vice for the edification of his soul. He calmly half-closed his eyes and twirled the thumbs of his clasped hands. Opposite this picture of virtue, to the right of the King, stood barefaced Sin:

the Duke of Lauenburg, in his most splendid uniform and costliest lace-collar, his feet restless, demoniacally smiling and rolling his eyes. He had encountered one of the provost's servants who had been given his master's cloak. He had noticed a human form under its folds, and stepping up to it, he had thrown back the covering.

Gustav surveyed the assembly with condemning eyes. Then the storm broke out. Strange – the King, irritated by the contradiction between these proud faces, these arrogant postures, these ostentatious coats of armour, with the ignobleness of the hearts which beat under them, purposely employed a coarse, indeed, boorish way of speaking such as was not his wont, to bring down their pride and stigmatise their crime.

“You are robbers and thieves, from the first to the last of you! Shame on you! You rob your fellow-countrymen and fellow-believers! Fie! You disgust me! My heart is galled! I have exhausted my treasure – forty tons of gold – for your freedom and not taken as much from you as would have me made a pair of riding-breeches! Indeed, I would sooner have ridden naked than dress myself at German expense! I gave to you whatever came into my hands, I have not kept a pigsty for myself!”

With such coarse and hard words did the King insult these nobles. Then, changing his tone, he praised the valour of the lords, their irreproachable demeanour on the battlefield, and repeated several times: “You are brave, yes, that you are! There can be no complaint about how you ride and fight!” But then he let a second, more vehement transport of anger flare up: “If you rebel against me,” he dared them, “then I shall come against you at the head of my Finns and Swedes, and sparks will fly!”

He then concluded with a Christian admonition and the request that they take to heart the lesson they had received. Captain Erlach wiped away a tear with his hand. The lords pretended that it did not particularly concern them, but their attitude had visibly become more humble. Some of them seemed affected, even moved. The German character can better bear a rough, honest scolding than a weak sermon or subtle, cutting scorn.

Thus far, all had been good and in order. Then the Duke of Lauenburg, turned half towards the King, half towards his peers, threw out vicious words in bare insolence:

“How can his Majesty be angry about such a trifle? What have we lords done wrong? Unburdened our subjects!”

Gustavus turned pale. He beckoned to the Provost Marshal, who was leaning behind the door.

“Lay your hand on this gentleman’s shoulder!” he ordered him. The Provost approached but did not dare to obey; for the prince had pulled his sword from his sheath and a dangerous murmuring ran through the circle.

Gustavus disarmed the Duke of Lauenburg, planted the blade against his foot, and broke it into pieces. Then he grabbed the broad, hairy hand of the Provost, placed it and pressed it down on Lauenburg’s shoulder, who stood as if paralysed, and held it fast there for a good while, saying: “You are a Prince of the Empire, boy, I may not lay hands on you, but the hangman’s hand shall remain over you!”

Then he turned away and left. The Provost followed him with measured tread.

This incident had occasioned such delight to Leubelfing the page,

whom the closely-packed men of rank had pressed into a fenster-niche before which there hung down a heavy damask curtain with enormous tassels, that he broke out into convulsive laughter. After the bloody demise of Corinna, which had shaken and relieved him at the same time, the princes humbled by his hero appeared to him as the actors in a tragedy, somewhat as when a boy listens with pleasure and suppressed laughter to his father, whose protection he knows he has and whose power he admires, scolding a negligent servant. But at the first syllable which the Duke of Lauenburg uttered, he started with fright at the uncanny resemblance which this man's voice bore to his own. The same sound, the same pitch and timbre. And this shock turned to horror now when, King Gustavus having withdrawn, Lauenburg broke into forced laughter and burst out with the shrill words: "He cursed like a hostler, the Swedish peasant! By thunder, how we annoyed him today. Pererat Gustavus!¹⁸ Long live German liberty! Shall we play a round, Brother, in my tent? I'll have a keg of Wurzburg beer tapped!" And he linked his right arm in the left one of the princely personage standing beside him. But this lord politely withdrew his left arm and replied with a respectful bow, "Apologies, Your Grace. Already engaged."

Turning to another prince, the Raugrave, Lauenburg invited him with yet merrier and more pressing words: "You may not refuse me, comrade! You owe me a return game!" But the Raugrave, a gentleman of few words, turned his back on him without further ado. As often as he repeated his

¹⁸ Death to Gustav!

attempt, so often was he met, and ever more sharply and rudely, with a rebuff. Empty space formed before his steps and gestures and the room became vacant.

Now he stood alone in the middle of the chamber which everyone had left. It became clear to him that he would henceforth be strictly shunned by those of his class. His face contorted. In fury, the stigmatized one clenched his fist and, raising it, threatened Fate or the King. The page could not catch his murmured words, but the expression of the noble head was such a devilish one that the eavesdropper was near to fainting.

IV.

In the twilight hour of the same eventful day, a captain of the Duke of Friedland, provided with an approved safe-conduct, was announced to the King. This perhaps concerned the burial of the men fallen in the last encounter, or some other agreement such as are entered upon by armies which are facing one another.

Leubelfing the page conducted the captain into the reception room, which had just become empty, and asked him to wait here; he would announce him. But Wallenstein's soldier, a lean man with a yellow, reserved face, held him back: he would be happy to rest for a moment after his rapid ride. He carelessly threw himself on a chair and engaged the page, who was standing still before him, in an indifferent conversation.

"It seems to me," he casually remarked, "that I know your voice. I request to know the gentleman's name." Leubelfing, who was certain he had never laid eyes on this cold and dictatorial countenance in his life,

candidly replied: "Please, your Grace, I am the King's Page, Leubelfing of Nuremberg."

"A technically skilful town," the other observed apathetically. "Will the young gentleman do me the favour of trying on this glove – it is a left one. In my youthful days at Jesuit College, where I was educated, the humble and useful habit, which now seems unbecoming to my captaincy, was impressed upon me of picking up lost items which were lying on the road. This habit has simply remained with me." He took a leather riding-glove out of his bag, such as were generally worn in those days. Only, this one was of an exceptional elegance and so striking a slenderness that nine-tenths of Wallenstein's or the Swedish soldiers would have split it at every seam at the first jerk on running their hand into it. "I picked it up from the lowest step of the outside stairs." Leubelfing, somewhat offended by the sharp tone and the imperative words of the captain, but without any mistrust, took hold of the glove from obliging politeness, and drew it over his slender fingers. It fitted to a T. The captain gave an equivocal smile. "It is yours," he said.

"No, captain," replied the page, taken aback. "I do not wear such fine leather." "Then give it back to me!" and the Captain took back the glove.

Then he slowly rose from his chair and bowed, for the King had entered.

The latter took some steps forward with mounting astonishment, and his bulging, shining eyes opened wider. Then he addressed these hesitant words to his guest: "You here, Your Grace?" He had never met the

Duke of Friedland face-to-face, but had often regarded the portraits of him which were disseminated everywhere, and his head was so singular that it could not be mistaken for anyone else's. Wallenstein answered in the affirmative with a second bow.

The King returned it with solemn courtesy: "I greet Your Highness and am at your service. What do you want from me, Your Grace?" He dismissed the page with a gesture.

Leubelfing fled into his adjoining chamber, which lay, scantily furnished, a narrow strip of space, between the reception room and the King's bedchamber, the quietest one in the house. He was frightening, not by the presence of the feared commander, but by the weirdness of this late visit. A dark feeling forced him to connect it to his own fate. Driven more by anxiety than curiosity, he softly opened a deep closet, from which, through a crack in the wall, he – if it must be said – had once – only once – spied on the King, to observe him undisturbed and to his heart's content. His eye and alternately his ear did not leave the crack now – the strange content of the overheard conversation ensured that.

The two men seated opposite one another kept silent for a while, each regarding the other without staring. They knew that after the game of chess which was to decide Germany's fate had begun with ambiguous moves and covert plans and had ensnared every field, negotiations would not be in place and an agreement would be impossible before a decisive battle brought about a new state of affairs. The Duke of Friedland gave expression to this feeling. "Majesty," he said, "I have come on a personal matter." Gustav smiled coolly and politely. The Duke of Friedland began:

“I am in the habit of reading in bed when sleep eludes me. Yesterday, or early today, I found an entertaining story in a French book of memoirs. A true story with a literal account of the deposition made in court by the admiral – I mean Admiral Coligny,¹⁹ whom I appreciate as a commander. I shall tell it with His Majesty’s leave. One day, a partisan entered the admiral’s house, Poltrot or whatever the man was called. He threw himself down on a chair like a madman and began a soliloquy in which he passionately expressed his opinion of the Admiral’s political and military opponent, Francois Guise,²⁰ and spoke about ridding the world of the Lorrainian. It was, as mentioned before, the soliloquy of one who was out of his mind, and how much importance the Admiral would place on it rested with himself – I would like to recommend the scene to a dramatist, it would have a strong impact. The Admiral kept silent, taking the man’s words to be empty boasting, and Francois Guise fell, a bullet –”

“If Coligny acted in such a manner,” the King interrupted, “then I must blame him. His behaviour was inhuman and unchristian.”

“And unchivalrous,” the Duke of Friedland remarked with cold scorn.

“To business, Your Highness,” said the King.

“Majesty, I encountered something similar today, only the one offering himself to commit murder has planned a yet more ingenious scene. One of your men was announced, and as I was occupied just then, I had him brought into the side-room. When I entered, he had dozed off in

¹⁹ Gaspard de Chatillon Coligny (1519-72), French Huguenot leader during the Wars of Religion (1562-98).

²⁰ Jean de Poltrot (c.1537-63), a French nobleman converted to Protestantism who assassinated Francois, 2nd Duke of Guise (1519-63).

the sultry midday hour and was speaking heatedly in a dream. Only a few stammered words, but a connection could be guessed. If I have made him out correctly, your Majesty has, I know not how, mortally offended him, and he is resolved, indeed compelled, to assassinate the King of Sweden at any cost, or at least at a reasonable cost, which will be easy for him as he lives close to Your Majesty and in your daily society. I then woke the dreamer up without wasting a word on him, except to ask what he desired. It concerned information about a man from the Rhineland in the Imperial service who had not been heard from for years, whether he yet lived or not. An inheritance matter. I answered the query and dismissed the sly fox. His name I did not ask for; he would have given me a false one. But to arrest him on the testimony of incoherent words stammered in a speech in a dream would have been unfeasible and a flagrant injustice.”

“Certainly,” the King agreed.

“Majesty,” said the Duke of Friedland, laying heavy emphasis on every syllable, “you have been warned!”

Gustav reflected. “I do not wish to waste my time and poison my mind,” he said, “on following such dubious and obliterated tracks. I am in God’s hand. Does Your Highness have any further witness or indicia?”²¹

The Duke of Friedland produced the glove. “My ear and this trifle here! I forgot to tell Your Majesty that the dreamer was slim and had an utterly characterless, expressionless face, evidently wearing one of those close-fitting masks such as are manufactured with the greatest skill in

²¹ Circumstantial evidence.

Venice. But his voice was agreeably vigorous, a baritone or deep alto, not dissimilar to the voice of your page, and the glove which slipped from him and remained lying on my floor fits that gentleman to a T.”

The King gave a hearty laugh. “I will lay my slumbering head in my Leubelfing’s lap,” he asseverated.

“I also,” the Duke of Friedland replied, “cannot suspect the young man. He has a good, honest face, the same mischievous boyish face with which my barefooted, Bohemian peasant-girls run around. However, Majesty, I vouch for nobody. A face can deceive, and – even though it did not – I would not like to see a page around me, were it my favourite, whose voice sounds like the voice of my hater, and whose hand has the same measure as the hand of my assassin. That is dark. That is a decree of fate. That can bring ruin.”

Gustav smiled. He thought, no doubt, that the great parvenu, now that he had entered the realm of the unfeasible and the chimerical through his monstrous compact with the Habsburg,²² gave more credence than ever to all kinds of superstition. Seeing through the inherent contradiction between belief in Fate and the attempts to disarm this fate, and sure of his living God, he did not want to touch with a word, not with a hint, a field where the deceptions of Hell, as he believed, held sway. He dropped the conversation and rose to his feet, thanking the Duke for his loyal conduct. Yet at the same time, he reached for the glove, which the Duke of Friedland had carelessly thrown onto a small table in between them, with,

²² Ferdinand II (1578-1637), Holy Roman Emperor from 1619 until his death.

however, such a short-sighted gesture as to draw an involuntary smile on the part of the keenly observant Wallenstein, who had likewise risen to his feet.

“I see with pleasure,” joked the King, accompanying the Duke of Friedland to the door, “that Your Highness is anxious for my life.”

“Why should I not?” replied Wallenstein. “Although Your Majesty and I are waging war with our armies, Your Majesty and I” – the Duke politely avoided a “we” – “nevertheless belong together. The one is inconceivable without the other, and” – he joked in his turn – “were your Majesty or I to plunge from one end of the World See-Saw, the other would hit the ground hard.”

Again the King reflected, and he could not help but arrive at the assumption that some celestial conjunction or other, an alignment of the stars, had shown the Duke of Friedland the hours of both their deaths as connected, one following the other with surreptitious steps and covered head. Strange to say, this idea suddenly gained power over him, in spite of his trust in God. Now the Christian king felt the atmosphere of superstition which enveloped the Duke of Friedland beginning to infect him. He took another step towards the exit.

“Your Majesty,” the Duke of Friedland ended his visit almost jovially, “should preserve yourself at least for the sake of your child. The Princess is learning apace, so I hear, and is dear to Your Majesty’s heart. When one has no sons! I too am such a girl’s papa!” With these words, the Duke took his leave.

The page, whose hair stood on end at the overheard conversation

as at a ghost, then saw Gustavus throw himself on his armchair and play with the glove. He withdrew his eye from the crack, and staggering back into his chamber, he threw himself down beside the bed, supplicating Heaven to preserve his hero, whom his mere presence – as the Duke of Friedland thought and he himself now began to believe – could cause some mysterious disaster. “Cost what it might,” the despairing page vowed, “I shall tear myself away from him, free him from me, so my sinister presence does not ruin him.”

As he was not summoned, he did not creep back to the King until that leisure hour, the greater part of which passed by in trivial talk. Except that the King casually asked: “Where were you roving around this midday, Leubelfing? I called you but you were missing.” The page then answered in accordance with the truth: feeling the need to get fresh air after the shattering scenes of the morning, he had thrown himself onto his horse and spurred it on in the direction of Wallenstein’s camp, almost coming within range of his cannons. He wanted to bring a friendly reproof from the King upon his head, but this was not forthcoming. The conversation took a natural turn again, and now the tenth hour struck. Then Gustav, with an absent-minded gesture, lifted the glove out of his pocket, and regarding it, he said: “This is not mine. Have you lost it, you untidy fellow, and have I inadvertently put it into my pocket? Let us see!” He playfully seized the page’s left hand and pulled the soft leather over his fingers. “It fits,” he said.

But the page cast himself down before him, grasped his hands and flooded them with tears. “Farewell,” he sobbed, “my lord, my everything!

May God and his hosts protect you!” Then suddenly leaping up, he rushed out like a madman. Gustav arose, and called him to come back. But the hoofbeats of a galloping horse were already ringing out and – strange to say – the King did not set inquiries on foot about the flight and the whereabouts of his page, neither that night nor on the following day. He did admittedly have his hands full; for he had decided to break up the camp at Nuremberg.

Leubelfing had not checked his animal’s full gallop; it grew tired by itself at the farthest end of the camp. Then the rider’s agitated emotions also calmed down. The moon shone bright as day, and the horse went at a walk. On clearer reflection, the fugitive now recognised, with the keen eyes of love and hate, his doppelganger in the darkness of that event which had driven him away from the King’s side. It was Lauenburg. Had he not seen how the stigmatised prince had clenched his fist at the King’s justice? Did the punished prince not possess a voice that sounded like his own? Was he himself not woman enough to have noticed at that fearful moment the smallness of the clenched princely fist? Certainly, Lauenburg was brooding revenge, was brooding murder against the beloved head. And in this hour when his King was being pursued in sinister and stealthy wise, Leubelfing had banished himself from the threatened man’s proximity. An infinite anxiety for the most beloved thing he had ever possessed compressed his heart and, at the thought that he possessed it no longer, dissolved into a suppressed sobbing and then into tears which gushed without restraint. A Swedish guard, a musketeer with a Vandyke beard which had already turned grey, screwed his mouth up into a merry grimace upon seeing the

slim horseman crying, but then asked good-naturedly: "Is the young gentleman thinking of home?" Leubelfing pulled himself together, and slowly riding on, he decided, with that boldness which Nature had given him and the battlefield had doubled, not to retreat from the camp. "The King will strike it," he said to himself, "I'll find a place in a regiment and stay unknown during the marches and fatigues! Then the battle!"

Now he perceived a Colonel vigilantly making the rounds. The light of the moon was so strong that one could have made out a letter in it. Thus he recognised at first sight a friend of his father, the one who had been Captain Leubelfing's second in that duel which proved fatal to him. He urged his horse to the left side of the Swede. The Colonel, who had mostly been stationed at outposts of late, regarded the young horseman attentively. "Either I am mistaken," he then began, "or I have seen Your Grace, albeit at some distance, riding beside the King as page? Truly, I do recognise you now, even if you look somewhat moon-pale and melancholy." Then, suddenly caught unawares by a memory: "Are you from Nuremberg," he continued, "and related to the late Captain Leubelfing? You look frighteningly like him, or rather, his child, the tomboy Gussie, who rode with us into her sixteenth year. Yet moonlight deceives and bewitches. Let us dismount. Here is my tent." And he gave his horse and that of the page to the care of a waiting servant with a flattened nose and a broad face, who received his master with a good-natured, stupid smile.

"Make yourself at home, Sir," the old man invited the page, offering him a camp-stool and sitting down on his hard camp-bed. Two torches

gave an unsteady light.

Now the Colonel unceremoniously ran his broad, honest hand through the page's hair. With the top of the brow being exposed, an old but deeply cut scar was visible. "Gussie, you fool," he burst out, "did you think I'd forgotten how the Hungarian foal, throwing up its back hooves, hurled you over its obstinate head and sent you flying through the air, and the three of us picked you up as a dead girl, your mother howling, your father white as a ghost, and I myself deeply shaken? A perfect soldier, the late Leubelfing, my best captain and my bosom friend! Only a little mad, as you are too, it seems, Gussie! Great Heavens, child, how long have you been hanging around the King? By the way, you look just like a boy! Did you shave off the curly blonde hair on your nape, you little rascal?" and he tugged at her hair. "Just don't imagine you're the only female in the camp! Take a look at Jakob Erichson, my manservant!" The orderly had just entered with bottles and glasses. "A man like you! Have no fear, Gussie! He hasn't been able to learn *one* word of German. He is far too stupid for that. But a thoroughly virtuous, godfearing woman! And dirty! Actually, the simplest story in the world, Gussie: seven bawling brats, the breadwinner is drafted, his wife steps in for him. The best manservant imaginable! I simply couldn't do without him now!"

The page regarded the virtuous creature with decided aversion while the Colonel blustered on: "Anyway, a strong stroke of daring, Gussie, to nestle in beside the King, who abhors wenches in men's clothing! You've played a story which they call a monodrama on the benches at Uppsala, when one person, all and utterly alone, rejoices, fears, despairs, feels,

acts, gives play to his fancy! And you were Heaven only knows how proud of it, without a mortal soul knowing anything about it or caring a rap for it. You look displeased? You weren't exactly risking your neck, child! If you were unmasked: he would have scolded you, 'Clear off, stupid girl!' and then thought about something else the very next moment. Now, if the Queen had unmasked you! Phew! So I say: one should not kiss children! Such a kiss sleeps and then flames up when the lips grow and swell. And there's no gainsaying then or now that the King once took you in his arms, Goddaughter, and hugged you and covered you with kisses you so heartily that it fairly smacked! For you were a pert and pretty child!" The page could remember nothing of the kisses, but he felt them and blushed fiercely.

"And now, tomboy, what's to be done?" He thought for a moment. "In short, I'll give up my second tent to you! You'll be my errand boy, you'll give me your word of honour not to run away, and ride with me until peace comes. Then I'll take you home to Sweden with me, to my estate near Gefle. I am single. My two boys, Axel and Erik –" he suppressed a tear. "For King and country!" he said. "My surviving eldest boy lives in Falun, a servant of the Word with a lucrative living. Then you'll be able to choose between the two of us." Page Leubelfing promised his godfather what he had already vowed to himself and then, from that need to tell the truth which presents itself after a long-borne disguise as imperiously as hunger and thirst after long fasting, he gave him a complete account of his adventures. The old man thought his share and then made particular sport of cousin Leubelfing, whose portrait he had the page delineate to him. "Flaxen-head," he philosophised, "can't help it if he's a coward. It's in his

blood. My son, the priest in Falun, is a chicken too. He has it from his mother.”

From the end of summer until the harvest was over, and until the first thin flakes swirled over the military road one frosty morning, Page Leubelfing rode demurely beside his godfather, Colonel Ake Tott, in all directions, just as the vicissitudes of a campaign entail. He did not encounter the main body or the King, as the Colonel mostly led the vanguard or the rearguard. But Gustavus Adolphus filled his mind's eye, albeit in a transfigured and unapproachable form now that he had ceased to run his hand through his curls and the page could no longer hear his master, by his side, separated only by a thin wall, turn over and clear his throat at night. Then it happened by chance that Leubelfing saw his King with his own eyes again. It was in the marketplace at Naumburg, where the page, delayed on account of a purchase, was about to gallop after his Colonel, who had already left the town, being in command of the vanguard on this occasion. Pressed back towards the houses with his horse by a crowd that grew ever denser, he saw a scene in the narrow square the like of which had presented itself to human eyes only once before, many hundreds of years previously when the peacemaker made his entry into Jerusalem on a donkey. Gustavus did, indeed, sit on a stately warhorse, surrounded by captains in armour on mettlesome beasts; but hundreds of passionate figures, women who held their children over the cheering heads with both arms raised, men who reached out their hands to grasp and press Gustavus's right hand, maidens who kissed his very stirrups,

common people who threw themselves down on their knees before him, without fear of kicks from his horse, which, incidentally, stepped softly and smoothly, a populace in bold groups, caught up in a storm of love and enthusiasm, washed around the Nordic King who had saved their spiritual wealth. The latter, visibly moved, bent down from his horse to the aged local vicar, who kissed his hand close before Leubelfing's eyes without his being able to prevent it, and said in a very loud voice: "The people are honouring me like a God! This is too much and it puts me in mind of my end. Preacher, I ride with the heathen goddess Victoria and with the Christian Angel of Death!"

Tears streamed down the page's cheeks. But when he caught sight of the Queen at a window opposite and the King waved a tender farewell to her, his bosom swelled with a burning jealousy.

Barely a week later, when the Swedish companies concentrated themselves on the level field of Lutzen, Ake Tott marched at the side, not far from the coach in which the King drove. Then Leubelfing espied a bird of prey, which hovered among scattered clouds and remained over the royal group with the utmost persistence, and it would not be frightened or driven away by shots from his retinue. He thought of Lauenburg, if his revenge were hovering over Gustavus Adolphus. The page's poor heart was alarmed beyond measure. When darkness began to fall early, his alarm grew, and when it had become quite dark, he gave his horse a touch of the spurs and, breaking his word of honour, disappeared from the sight of the Colonel, who cried, "Faithless scoundrel!" after him.

He reached the King's coach after riding relentlessly and mingled

with the retinue, who seemed not to notice him or to be concerned about him on the eve of the great battle that was expected. The King proposed to spend the night in his coach, but was compelled by the coldness to alight and seek shelter in a humble peasant-house. With daybreak, the orderlies crowded into the low room where the King was already sitting over his maps. The deployment of the Swedes was complete. That of the German regiments now began. Leubelfing the Page, recognised by the King's valet, who wished him well, and not called to account, had taken back possession of the stool which bore the Swedish coat-of-arms in his embroidery, on which he used to sit beside the King, and sat down in a corner, where he remained hidden behind the alternating martial figures.

The King had now given his last orders and was in the most curious mood. He slowly rose to his feet and turned towards those present, none but Germans, among their number more than one of those whom he had reproved with such hard words in the camp near Nuremberg. Did the truth and the mercy of that Kingdom, to which he believed himself to be near, already touch him? He motioned with his hand and spoke softly, almost dreamily, more with his ghostlike eyes than with his barely moving lips:

“Gentlemen and friends, my time may well come today. And so I would like to leave you my will. Not from care for the war – let the living look to that. But – next to my salvation – for my remembrance among you! I came over the sea with all kinds of thoughts, but all were outweighed, and this is no lie, by anxiety for the true faith. After the victory at

Breitenfeld,²³ I could have dictated an acceptable peace to the Emperor and, the gospel having been made secure, withdrawn between my Swedish cliffs with my booty like a beast of prey. But I considered the state of German affairs. Not without a longing for your crown, gentlemen! Yet, and this is no lie care for the Empire outweighed my ambition! It must on no condition belong to the Habsburger any longer, for it is a Protestant Empire. Yet you think and say: a foreign King shall not rule over us! And you are right. For it is written: The stranger shall not inherit the kingdom.²⁴ But lately, I have thought about the hand of my child and of a thirteen-year-old...²⁵ His quiet words were drowned out by the boisterous song of a Thuringian cavalry regiment, which, passing by the King's quarters, fervently emphasised the words:

“His Gideon, whom He well knows,
He'll send to you against your foes...”²⁶

The King listened, and without finishing his speech, he said: “That is enough, everything is in order,” and dismissed the gentlemen. Then he fell to his knees and prayed.

Then Leubelfing the page saw, with a frantically throbbing heart, Lauenburg enter. Dressed as a common horseman, he approached with a cringing and contrite bearing and stretched forth his hands in supplication

²³ The Battle of Breitenfeld, fought on 17th September, 1631, was a resounding victory for the Swedes and Saxons, and the Catholic forces' first major defeat in the Thirty Years' War.

²⁴ Deuteronomy 17:15.

²⁵ Frederick William (1620-1688), known as “The Great Elector.”

²⁶ From the second stanza of “Thou little flock,” the first lines of which appeared on p.5. Gideon (Judges 6-8) delivered Israel from the Midianites.

towards the King, who slowly rose to his feet. Now he threw himself down before him, embraced his knees, sobbed and cried to him with the touching words of the Prodigal Son: "Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee, and am henceforth no more worthy to be called thy son!"²⁷ and he bent his penitent head. The King raised him from the ground and embraced him.

The two men holding each other in embrace became hazy before the horrified eyes of the page, as if seen in a mist. Was this, could this be the truth? Had the saintliness of the King wrought a miracle on an outcast? Or was this a satanic disguise? Was the most heinous of hypocrites abusing the words of the purest lips? – Thus she doubted with confused senses and throbbing temples. The moment passed away. The horses were reported ready, and the King called for his leather doublet. The valet appeared, holding the desired object in his left hand and a shining cuirass, grasped at the opening for the neck, in his right one. Then the page snatched the bulletproof coat of mail from him and made a move to help the King to put it on. But the latter, without being astonished at the presence of the page, refused with a look of indescribable kindness and ran his hand through the curly hair over his brow, as he used to do. "Gussie," he said, "it won't do. It's too tight. Give me the doublet."

Shortly afterwards, the King galloped away, behind him, to left and right, Lauenburg and Leubelfing, his page.

²⁷ Luke 15:18-19.

V.

In the parsonage of Meuchen, the village which lay behind the Swedish battle-line, the widowed Master of Arts Todanus sat behind his Folio Bible towards midnight reading out the penitential Psalms of David²⁸ to his housekeeper, Dame Ida, a delicate person and likewise widowed. The Master of Arts – incidentally, an able-bodied man with a rough, grey Vandyke beard, who had spent a few of his youthful years under arms – then prayed fervently with Dame Ida for the preservation of the Protestant hero, who had just now, a short distance away, either won or lost the battlefield, he did not know which. Now there was a violent banging at the yard gate, and superstitious Dame Ida suspected that a dying man was announcing his presence.

It was so. A young person staggered towards the parson when he opened, as pale as death, with wide-open feverish eyes, bareheaded, a gaping wound on his forehead. Behind him, another man lifted a dead person down from a horse, a heavy man. In spite of his disfiguring wounds, the parson recognised him to be the King of Sweden, whom he had seen making his entry into Leipzig and a good likeness of whom hung in a woodcut here in his room. Deeply moved, he covered his face with his hands and sobbed.

In feverish activity and with a hasty tongue, the wounded youth desired that his King be laid out in the choir of the adjoining church. But first he asked for lukewarm water and a sponge to cleanse the head that

²⁸ The Seven Penitential Psalms; 6, 32,38, 51, 102, 130, and 143.

was covered with blood and wounds.²⁹ Then, with the help of his companion, he laid the dead man, who was too heavy for his arms, on a shabby couch, sank down beside it and looked lovingly at the waxen countenance. But when he was about to touch it with the sponge, he fainted and slid forwards onto the corpse. His companion lifted him up, looked more closely, and noticed a second wound apart from the one to the forehead, a wound to the breast. Blood was oozing through a fresh tear in the coat beside a patched tear over the heart. Carefully opening his comrade's garment, the Swedish cornet could not believe his eyes. "Deuce take me, I'll be –" he stammered, and Dame Ida, who was holding the bowl with the water, turned red to the roots of her hair.

At this moment, the door was flung open, and Colonel Ake Tott walked in. He had been sent back to see about provisions, and hurriedly returning to the battlefield after completing his task, he was tossing off a glass of brandy in the village street, in front of the tavern, when he heard the tidings of a horseman reeling in his saddle and holding a dead man before him on his horse.

"Is it true, is it possible?" he shouted and rushed towards his King, whose hand he seized and wetted with tears. Turning around some time later, he caught sight of the youth, who lay stretched out in an armchair, unconscious. "What the deuce," he cried angrily, "so Gussie latched on to the King after all!"

²⁹ A reference to 'O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden' (translated in English as 'O sacred head, now [or 'sore'] wounded,' a hymn by the Lutheran pastor Paul Gerhardt (1607-1674).

“I found the young gentleman, my comrade,” the cornet remarked cautiously, “as he was galloping over the battlefield holding the dead King before him on his horse. He sacrificed his life for His Majesty!”

“No, for me!” a tall man with an old wife’s face interrupted him. It was Laubfing the merchant. In order to collect a considerable debt which was jeopardised by the war, he had ventured out of the safety of Leipzig and unwittingly come near to the battlefield. Having reached the village street, which was blocked by baggage wagons, he had then followed the Colonel to request a safe conduct of him. With an overwhelming feeling of gratitude and relief, he now told those present the story of his family in detail. “Gussie, Gussie,” he wept, “do you still know your own dear cousin? How can I repay you for what you have done for me?”

“By keeping your mouth shut, Sir!” the Colonel snapped at him.

But the parson intervened and spoke with calm solemnity: “Gentlemen, you know this world. It is full of slander.” Dame Ida sighed. “And mostly so where a great and pure man represents a great and pure cause. If the slightest suspicion were to sully the memory of this one –” he pointed to the silent King – “what monstrous beast would papal calumination not make out of this poor midge,” and he pointed to the unconscious page, “which burned its wings at the sun of glory! I am as convinced as I am of my own existence that the late King knew nothing of this girl.”

“Agreed, reverend Sir,” swore the Colonel, “I too am as convinced of it, as I am of my salvation not through works but through faith.”

“Certainly,” Laubfing confirmed. “Otherwise, the King would have

sent her home and hunted for me.”

“Deuce take me, I’ll be – !”³⁰ the cornet asserted, and Dame Ida sighed.

“I am a servant of the Word, you have grey hair, Colonel, you, Cornet, are a nobleman, it is to your profit and advantage! Mr. Laubfing, I can vouch for Dame Ida: we shall say nothing.”

Now the page opened his dying eyes. They wandered anxiously around and fixed on Ake Tott: “Godfather, I did not obey you, I could not – I am a very sinful girl.”

“A great sinner,” the pastor sternly interrupted her, “You are raving! You are the page Augustus Leubelfing, the legitimate son of the Nurembergian patrician and merchant Arbogast Leubelfing, born on such and such a day, departed this life on November the seventh, one thousand six hundred and thirty-two, from the wounds he received at the Battle of Lutzen on the previous day, pugnans cum rege Gustavo Adolpho.”

“Fortiter pugnans!”³¹ the cornet added.

“That is what I shall have inscribed on your gravestone! But now make your peace with God! Your final hour has come.” The Master of Arts said this not without severity, for he could not overcome his resentment of the adventurous child who had jeopardised his hero’s reputation, even though she was already lying in the article of death.

“I cannot die yet, I still have much to say!” rattled the page. “The King ... in the fog ... Lauenburg’s bullet ...” Death closed her mouth, but

³⁰ I.e. “I’ll be damned if he wouldn’t have.”

³¹ “fighting alongside King Gustavus Adolphus,” “Bravely fighting!”

he could not prevent her from seeking the countenance of the King with one final exertion of her breaking eyes. Each one of those present drew his own conclusion and completed the sentence in his own way. But the quick-witted pastor, whose patriotism took umbrage at the thought of the saviour of Germany and the Protestant cause – for him, one and the same thing – being assassinated by a German Prince, urgently admonished them all to bury this fragment of a speech, which death had shattered, together with the page.

Now, when Augusta Leubelfing had completed her destiny and lay lifeless beside his King, his cousin sobbed: “Now that Cousin is deceased and the succession has opened, I shall assume my name again, shall I not?” and he threw an inquiring look at those standing around. Magister Todanus was looking just then at the innocent face of the brave Nuremberg girl, which had a happy expression. The stern man could not help but feel moved. Now he decided: “No, Sir! You remain a Laubfing. Your name will have the honour of being inscribed on the gravemound of a high-minded maiden who loved a glorious hero unto death. You, however, have saved your supreme possession, your dear life. Be satisfied with that.”

The church was closed and bolted against the rush of the streaming crowd; for the rumour that the King was lying here had quickly spread. The dead were then washed and laid out in the choir. In the meantime, it had become light. When the church doors were opened to those who entered eagerly with impatient gestures but reverent expressions, they were both laid out before the altar on two camp beds, the King higher, the page lower and in the opposite direction, so that his head rested at the King’s feet. A

ray of morning sunlight – a blue, cloudless day had followed the previous day of fog – glided through the low church window, glorifying the King's countenance and saving a small gleam for the curly head of Leubelfing the page.