

senses were freed, that benumbing misery that had frozen her melted.

What was he saying? She had lost his first words.

'I am a widower,' he was continuing, 'bound by holy vow, to go immediately on crusade to the Holy Land. Yet ere I went I came hither to fight, not for my own hand, yet for mine own flesh and blood. My son Wolfram von Hanau hath long loved the Lady Gertrude, but he, under vow to wander for seven years as Our Lady's minstrel under assumed name, and then for two years more to battle for the Holy Sepulchre in Palestine, had not smallest opportunity of winning her. Now, returned but recently from the East, sore wounded so that he could not hold lance in rest, he heard of this knightly tournament to be held in honor of so bright and fair a prize. Forthwith I was entreated so hardly that, to save my son's life, I agreed to take his place, in lawful essoine of his weak body, and to be his champion. For this, I think, none of you bright ladies and true knights, will hold me aught but full assoilzied.'

A murmur ran through the lighted hall. Markgraf Karl's face was a study, and the Lady Gertrude, to whom life itself seemed to have been restored, clasped tremblingly the jewelled balls and golden chain of her rich rosary.

'Yet, not to permit of the shadow of discourtesy towards so fair and sweet a lady,' Markgraf John bowed low to the Lady Gertrude as he spoke. 'I have decided thus to settle the matter, if so be the Queen of the Tourney hath nor hand nor heart for me. Waiving the claim she hath vouchsafed to me I would propose a sweeter tourney for her hand, and one whercof all here are peculiarly fitted to judge.

'Wolfram hath great skill upon the harp and can sing lays of love and chivalry with any minnesinger, an art wherein many a brave knight in these halls is master. Then, if the Lady Gertrude permit her devoted

servant to suggest it, let Wolfram and the other good knights and true, suitors for her hand, now stand forth and raise some lay of beauty and of love to her praise. She and Markgraf Karl together with Counts Paul and Richard Fernhof shall then adjudge their merits and the Graf's lovely hand shall be his prize who singeth best his lady love.'

The suggestion, so akin to the generous and poetic spirit of that chivalrous age, was received with applause and delight. And late into the evening the majestic hall echoed and re-echoed to the melody of manly voices mingling with the deep throbbing of the harp. One after another the brave and accomplished singers retired amidst the acclamations and the praise their art had justly evoked. And as yet the judges found it very hard indeed to agree upon one more than another.

Last of all came Wolfram who had but newly arrived. Pale with excitement and from his sickroom confinement, but with eyes glittering and heart a-thrill, in his rich crimson robes he was yet statelier and nobler even than of old. A tense silence prevailed. Then the silence was broken. Such a gushing of purest melody! It was an exquisitely plaintive ballad of a lover separated from his love, comparing his sorrow to that of the earth winter-widowed of the sun; the final theme, that of new-budding hope, was like the fresh breathing of a sweet spring wind. It was the revelation of a human soul.

Not the judges alone, but the whole hall, after the first hushed silence that supervened, were unanimous in the decision of the musical contest. There was room neither for doubt nor for the faintest feeling of jealousy.

'Our Lady had us in her care,' said Wolfram to Gertrude, simply.

'And she touched thy harp and lent an echo of her voice to thine, fair lord,' said the oldest knight there. And he voiced the thought that was in the hearts of all.—San Francisco Monitor.

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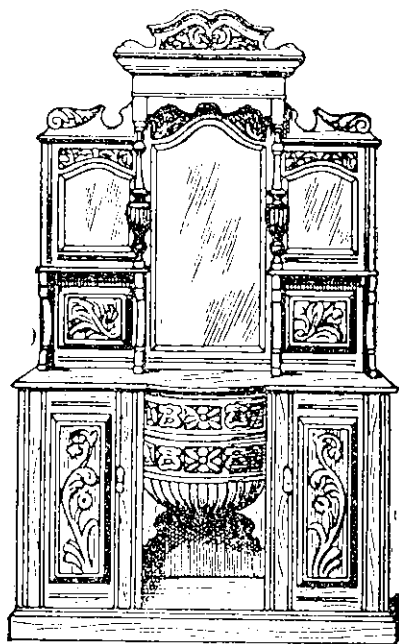
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