

THE SOLINGEN BLADE.

It was the dawn of Christmas-day in the year 1561. The morning-star still glittered brightly in the clear heavens; the church-bells of Solingen chimed forth a merry peal, the lights burned upon the altar, whilst the inspiring tones of the organ, mingled with the voices of the peasants, who poured forth their heartfelt thankgivings, in commemoration of the birth of our Lord and Saviour. The voices still echoed through the cloisters, when a maiden hastily issued from beneath the church porch. Anxiously listening and looking round, she rapidly descended the steps of the sacred edifice into the church-yard,

where she remained with her head reclined on her bosom, apparently listening to the chant of the choristers and the thrilling melody of the organ. Presently, however, she lifted up her eyes towards heaven, and praying spoke thus: "Thou knowest, oh Almighty God, that my mother, on her death-bed, placed my hand in that of Severin, and with faltering voice said, "Cling, my child, to it both in sorrow and in joy. A secret foreboding tells me that you are made for each other. Should misfortune assail thee, submit with patience, for the afflictions of your hearts will serve but to indear thee the more fondly to each other." Alas! father in heaven, grief and misery have now befallen me, enable me then, I beseech thee, to do as my mother commanded."

"Martha, dearest Martha," whispered a voice from behind the old yew trees, whose gnarled and snow-covered branches stretched over the church walls like the marrowless arms of ghosts. "Is it thou, Severin?" demanded the maiden. "Yes, I await thee at thy mother's grave!" was the answer. "I come, replied Martha, may the Lord forgive me the sin of leaving his church, to hear from thee, the result of my father's decision." Upon this she approached her mother's grave, on which the cross and the faded wreath of flowers, waved in the wind, and Severin thus began: "Dearest Martha, do not reproach thyself, for listening to me. The almighty Father protects all, who are not guilty of evil. Surely he would not prevent thee from speaking to me for the last time?" "For the last

time!" said Martha trembling violently: "What, art thou going away?" "Listen," replied he; whilst poor Martha struggled to conceal her emotion. "I thought it better not to disturb thy father, early last night, but to wait until the windows were illumined, with the lights suspended to the Christmas trees, as I then hoped to find thee with him; but Hedwig told me he was still in his workshop, occupied in finishing a suit of armour, and that he appeared unusually irritated, when any one disturbed him. However, having promised thee to speak to him, I mustered courage and went in. He received me with angry looks, inquiring what I wanted. "Master," said I: "I have not served you, as long as I could wish, — but what matters that, grant me your blessing, and say: I give thee Martha, — thou shalt be my son in law." I should have continued speaking, but he closed my mouth by uttering the most fearful *No!* — that man could hear. Seeing me overwhelmed with grief, he added that I was an industrious workman, and an honest apprentice, but that he disapproved of my intimacy with his daughter, and my connection with the Calvinists. "Have I not often told thee so?" exclaimed Martha. Severin shook his head, and replied: "My sole motive for associating with the Geneva armourer is, because he imports new models from his native town. I shut my ears but open my eyes, for, rely upon it, I will live and die a good catholic; thus I answered thy father. He heard me attentively, and for a short time appeared to be combating with

his feelings. — At length he sighed heavily and said :
“ Thou art in troth an expert workman, but thy labour
is of no use to me. ”

This astonished and irritated me, and I therefore
answered : “ If my happiness depends upon the anvil,
try my skill, Master, it is not inferior to yours. ” He
smiled contemptuously and replied : “ Well then —
know in one word that I am a ruined man. Not-
withstanding the most expensive researches and ex-
periments, I have failed to discover the secret to make
Damascus blades. My only remaining hope is my
daughter — she is beautiful — by her means I may
obtain a rich son in law, whose money will probably
melt, as well as mine, for I would sooner ruin fifty
sons in law than not discover the precious secret. ”
After these words he turned his head and stamped
on the ground — I stood thoughtful and undecided.
God or the devil then tempted me, for I said to my
Master, that, if he would give me thy hand, I would
soon satisfy him. With a heart full of hope and
happiness I added that I would forthwith proceed to
Damascus, and remain there as apprentice until I had
learned the art from the Turks, and that I would
then return and claim thee as my wife. He smiled
and said : “ Go to Damascus! For a year I will keep
Martha for thee. If by that time thou hast not broken
thy word I will fulfill mine ;—as to my daughter, thou
need est feel little anxiety for her. Now begone —
and prepare for thy journey. ” I then left him, and
flew to communicate the result of our interview to

thee." Martha listened to Severin, with sorrow and despair. At length she took his hand and exclaimed: "And wilt thou really attempt so wild a scheme?" "Yes, and that instantly," answered Severin tenderly pressing her tiny hand, "See, here is my knapsack, within a few moments I shall set out on my pilgrimage to Damascus. — Farewell, dearest Martha — think on me, and pray God that he will assist me in my enterprise. Should I not return" — Here his voice faltered, and he paused. — The silence was soon broken, however, by the following words — "May God bless, and speedily unite thee." In an instant more an old man, with silver-white hair and beard, dressed in a black ridingdress, stepped from behind a tombstone and joined the hands of the two lovers. Martha shuddering with fright laid her face on Severin's shoulder, trembling like the cypress leaves agitated by the winter's blast.

"Tremble not for me, maiden," said the stranger. — "Ill dost thou interpret my words and looks, if thou thinkest I would do thee harm. Evil is far from my thoughts. No, young man, my desire is to help thee! On St. Sylvesters night, when, God be praised, we shall be one year nearer to eternity — towards midnight, when darkness shrouds the world, repair to yonder wood; proceed until you discover lights burning in a tower; call then upon the name of Johannes — the door will open, and your journey to Damascus will be unnecessary."

Severin after gazing attentively at the stranger, who

appeared through the mist of the morning, like some unearthly spirit, exclaimed: "Are you an armourer, Friend?" "An armourer!" answered the other, "Yes that I am, but alas! my whole life has been passed in sharpening arms against myself. I feel their points rankling in my heart, and would fain help thee, in the hope, that a good action may one day be rewarded. Come!" — "Excuse me, Sir," — replied Severin hesitating. The stranger however quickly interrupted him saying. "Fool! then let it be so!" — but striking his forehead violently, he instantly continued: "No! leave her not—part not thus from the object of your affection; the goal you seek is distant; and man's life is transient. If thou wouldst ensure thy happiness, have courage and come at the appointed hour." The stranger now took his leave, and Severin with a loud voice exclaimed: "I come!" — "What hast thou done?" said Martha terrified. — Severin answered: "Nothing, I trust, against the commandments of that God, who watches over us, when in danger."

The bells now tolled and the pious crowd issued from the church, so Martha approached nearer to her lover and said: "I must speak with thee oncemore ere thou fulfillest thy engagement." But, ere she could utter another word, Hedwig, her old nurse, made her appearance in the cemetery. Fearing to be detected with her lover she hastily joined the old woman and left Severin to return to his humble lodging.

A thousand conflicting sentiments agitated the heart

of the latter when he rose upon the following morning. Dissatisfied with himself, he avoided his calvinist friend, the Geneva armourer, and proceeded to the church, where he sought relief in prayer and was enabled to exchange a few words with Martha who earnestly dissuaded him from his purpose, but he remained immoveable. The Sylvester festival at length arrived. On the eve of that day, as the clock from the church tower tolled the ninth hour — Severin seized his crucifix and stole towards Martha's abode. But although he heard his old master's voice in conversation with his beloved, still nobody was visible — so with a throbbing heart he hastened from the spot and rushed out of the town. — It was a mild winter's night; the earth, slightly covered with snow, as if it had decked itself out in bridal array to receive the new year, and the stars twinkling in the dark blue firmament, inspired the poor adventurer with hope and confidence. Severin's first thought was to implore the aid of God and his patron Saint. Then, with throbbing heart and agitated mind he searched through the forest until at last he saw the tower before him, to discover which he had vainly attempted during the day time. Scarcely daring to breathe he stood gazing on the torch, whose lurid flame flickered through a narrow casement—and his tongue failed him, as he endeavoured to call upon — Johannes. Recovering himself at last, he laid his crucifix upon the threshold, and with a loud voice pronounced the magic name. At length the door

opened, and disclosed a dimly lighted chamber, in which he perceived the stranger, whom he had met in the church-yard, attired in the same garb as the last time, but with this difference that his white head was now bare, and he held a ponderous iron clasped book under his arm. Near him, was an anvil with divers tools and implements necessary for the use of an armourer. "Enter," said the old man sternly, "and let us proceed to work forthwith, no time must be lost." Severin hesitated a while, but quickly summoning resolution he complied, exclaiming at the same time: "Sir, I am come that you should not think ill of or accuse me of cowardice. But, rely on it, I will not purchase endless happiness at the price of sin. — Speak then, will you assist me with God's help or that of?" — He could not say more, for the old man interrupted him with a short and fearful laugh. Then arranging his tools, he roared out: "What! are you one of those fools who mistake knowledge and science for the fiery works of Satan? In our miserable planet wisdom is truly of little use; but the time will come when darkness will be dispelled, and the difficulties, which obstruct the road to knowledge, will be removed."

"Strike lustily therefore, friend, on that bar of iron; and call upon one of your Saints at every stroke, if that is your fancy. — What! do you hesitate when the road to happiness is open to you? Work away in whose name you will, 't'is all one to me."

The old man then seized a bar of iron, and thrust it

into the mass of burning coals on the hearth. The flames roared and sparkled, and before the dawn of day the astonished apprentice, who carefully followed the mysterious strangers instructions, drew from out the furnace one of the finest tempered Damascus blades, he ever beheld. "Will you try your hand once more?" asked the old man. "No, master," replied Severin; "when I have once had a lesson, my memory never fails me. But what must I say? Who is my benefactor? To whom do I owe my knowledge?"

"To whom!" replied the other—"why to him who is the terror of fools and silly children. To a being hateful to himself, because he has nothing left to learn or love. My name is John Faust. — Tremble not! men number me since long with the dead — too early and yet too late. But, begone — in God's name, and think only of me, when you require my assistance." Thus speaking, he struck his staff into the flames, whence arose such clouds of smoke and vapour that they drove Severin senseless into the open air. When he recovered he fancied that he was awaking from a fearful dream, but the bright blade, which he held in his hand, proved to him the reality of his strange adventure.

The morning was already far advanced, ere he reached Solingen, where he found Martha pale and dejected in her father's chamber. With a countenance beaming with joy, Severin recited his adventure, and presented the sword to his master, assuring him, that he could easily make a thousand similar to it.

The master took the blade and examined it, while anger and envy were alternately depicted on his countenance. At last he exclaimed: "What! have I spent the best part of my life in useless researches after a secret, which has been made known to thee, by an accursed demon. Hast thou discovered without trouble, that which has ruined and reduced me to premature old age? What! has that knowledge which has deprived me of sleep, come to thee as in a dream? Must the master stand gaping before his servant like an ignorant fool?" Martha and Severin endeavoured to calm him, in the mildest and most affectionate terms, but he only waxed more angry: "You promised to proceed to Damascus, and you have not done so," said the old curmudgeon after a pause. "My engagement is therefore cancelled, but I will hold to it, nevertheless, on one condition. I can support the idea of having failed in my object, but I will never permit such swords to be made by another man. Until my eyes are closed no one shall know the secret; nay your sons alone shall learn the art and obtain the glory of this discovery. Will you swear to comply?" "I will!" said Severin, and presented his hand to Martha.

Severin kept his oath. Often in the hour of necessity, he might have benefitted richly by disclosing his secret, but he continued labouring at his anvil gaining his bread, by the sweat of his brow. Nay, when Martha, after the death of her father, advised him to get himself released from his oath, in the holy city, he

shook his head and worked the more cheerfully, conscious of having resisted temptation. In the mean while his eldest son, named Peter after his grand-father, grew up rapidly. When old enough, he learned the trade by which Severin had earned an honest livelihood. This son was the prop of his aged parents and at their death became possessor of their secret. According to history, his name was Peter Simmelpuss (Severin's family name) and he is regarded as the first inventor of Damascus blades in Germany. Of the old tower, on the Wupper, Severin never beheld a single vestige after his meeting with Faust, nor has any other person been more successful.