GEORG EBERS

MARGERY (GRED): A TALE OF OLD NUREMBERG. VOLUME 01

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Содержание

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE:

In translating what is supposed to be a transcript into modern German of the language of Nuremberg in the fifteenth century, I have made no attempt to imitate English phraseology of the same date. The difficulty would in fact be insuperable to the writer and the annoyance to the reader almost equally great.

I have merely endeavored to avoid essentially modern words and forms of speech.

INTRODUCTION:

"PIETRO GIUSTINIANI, merchant, of Venice." This was the signature affixed to his receipt by the little antiquary in the city of St. Mark, from whom I purchased a few stitched sheets of manuscript. What a name and title!

As I remarked on the splendor of his ancestry he slapped his pocket, and exclaimed, half in pride and half in lamentation:

"Yes, they had plenty of money; but what has become of it?"

"And have you no record of their deeds?" I asked the little man, who himself wore a moustache with stiff military points to it.

"Their deeds!" he echoed scornfully. "I wish they had been less zealous in their pursuit of fame and had managed their money matters better!– Poor child!"

And he pointed to little Marietta who was playing among the old books, and with whom I had already struck up a friendship. She this day displayed some strange appendage in the lobes of her ears, which on closer examination I found to be a twist of thread.

The child's pretty dark head was lying confidentially against my arm and as, with my fingers, I felt this singular ornament, I heard, from behind the little desk at the end of the counter, her mother's shrill voice in complaining accents: "Aye, Sir, it is a shame in a family which has given three saints to the

Church—Saint Nicholas, Saint Anna, and Saint Eufemia, all three Giustinianis as you know—in a family whose sons have more than once worn a cardinal's hat—that a mother, Sir, should be compelled to let her own child—But you are fond of the little one, Sir, as every one is hereabout. Heh, Marietta! What would you say if the gentleman were to give you a pair of ear-rings, now; real gold ear-rings I mean? Thread for ear-rings, Sir, in the ears of a Giustiniani! It is absurd, preposterous, monstrous; and a right-thinking gentleman like you, Sir, will never deny that."

How could I neglect such a hint; and when I had gratified the antiquary's wife, I could reflect with some pride that I might esteem myself a benefactor to a family which boasted of its descent from the Emperor Justinian, which had been called the 'Fabia gens' of Venice, and, in its day had given to the Republic great generals, far-seeing statesmen, and admirable scholars.

When, at length, I had to quit the city and took leave of the curiosity- dealer, he pressed my hand with heartfelt regret; and though the Signora Giustiniani, as she pocketed a tolerably thick bundle of paper money, looked at me with that kindly pity which a good woman is always ready to bestow on the inexperienced, especially when they are young, that, no doubt, was because the manuscript I had acquired bore such a dilapidated appearance. The margins of the thick old Nuremberg paper were eaten into by mice and insects, in many places black patches like tinder dropped away from the yellow pages; indeed, many passages of the once clear writing had so utterly faded that I scarcely hoped

to see them made legible again by the chemist's art. However, the contents of the document were so interesting and remarkable, so unique in relation to the time when it was written, that they irresistibly riveted my attention, and in studying them I turned half the night into day. There were nine separate parts. All, except the very last one, were in the same hand, and they seemed to have formed a single book before they were torn asunder. The cover and title-page were lost, but at the head of the first page these words were written in large letters: "The Book of my Life." Then followed a long passage in crude verse, very much to this effect.

"What we behold with waking Eye
Can, to our judgment, never lie,
And what through Sense and Sight we gain.
Becometh part of Soul and Brain.
Look round the World in which you dwell
Nor, Snail-like, live within your Shell;
And if you see His World aright
The Lord shall grant you double Sight.
For, though your Mind and Soul be small,
If you but open them to all
The great wide World, they will expand
Those glorious Things to understand.
When Heart and Brain are great with Love
Man is most like the Lord above.
Look up to Him with patient Eye
Not on your own Infirmity.

In pious Trust yourself forget
For others only toil and fret,
Since all we do for fellow Men
With right good Will, shall be our Gain.
What if the Folk should call you Fool
Care not, but act by Virtue's Rule,
Contempt and Curses let them fling,
God's Blessing shields you from their Sting.
Grey is my Head but young my Heart;
In Nuremberg, ere I depart,
Children and Grandchildren, for you
I write this Book, and it is true."

MARGERY SCHOPPER.

Below the verses the text of the narrative began with these words: "In the yere of our Lord M/CCCC/lx/VI dyd I begynne to wrtre in thys lytel Boke thys storie of my lyf, as I haue lyued it."

It was in her sixty-second year that the writer had first begun to note down her reminiscences. This becomes clear as we go on, but it may be gathered from the first lines on the second page which begins thus:

> "I, Margery Schopper, was borne in the yere of our Lord M/CCCC/IV on a Twesday after 'Palmarum' Sonday, at foure houris after mydnyght. Myn uncle Kristan Pfinzing was god sib to me in my chrystening. My fader, God assoyle his soul, was Franz Schopper, iclyped the Singer. He dyed on a Monday after 'Laetare'—[The fourth Sunday in Lent.]– Sonday M/CCCC/IV. And he hadde to wyf Kristine

> Peheym whyche was my moder. Also she bare to hym my brethren Herdegen and Kunz Schopper. My moder dyed in the vigil of Seint Kateryn M/CCCC/V. Thus was I refte of my moder whyle yet a babe; also the Lord broughte sorwe upon me in that of hys grace He callyd my fader out of thys worlde before that ever I sawe the lyght of dai."

These few lines, which I read in the little antiquary's shop, betrayed me to my ruin; for, in my delight at finding the daily journal of a German housewife of the beginning of the fifteenth century my heart overflowed; forgetting all prudence I laughed aloud, exclaiming "splendid," "wonderful," "what a treasure!" But it would have been beyond all human power to stand speechless, for, as I read on, I found things which far exceeded my fondest expectations. The writer of these pages had not been content, like the other chroniclers of her time and of her native town- such as Ulman Stromer, Andres Tucher and their fellows—to register notable facts without any connection, the family affairs, items of expenditure and mercantile measures of her day; she had plainly and candidly recorded everything that had happened to her from her childhood to the close of her life. This Margery had inherited some of her father's artistic gifts; he is mentioned in Ulman Stromer's famous chronicle, where he is spoken of as "the Singer." It was to her mother, however, that she owed her bold spirit, for she was a Behaim, cousin to the famous traveller Behaim of Schwarzbach, whose mother is known to have been one of the Schopper family, daughter to

Herdegen Schopper.

In the course of a week I had not merely read the manuscript, but had copied a great deal of what seemed to me best worth preservation, including the verses. I subsequently had good reason to be glad that I had taken so much pains, though travelling about at the time; for a cruel disaster befel the trunk in which the manuscript was packed, with other books and a few treasures, and which I had sent home by sea. The ship conveying them was stranded at the mouth of the Elbe and my precious manuscript perished miserably in the wreck.

The nine stitched sheets, of which the last was written by the hand of Margery Schopper's younger brother, had found their way to Venice—as was recorded on the last page—in the possession of Margery's great-grandson, who represented the great mercantile house of Im Hoff on the Fondaco, and who ultimately died in the City of St. Mark. When that famous firm was broken up the papers were separated from their cover and had finally fallen into the hands of the curiosity dealer of whom I bought them. And after surviving travels on land, risk of fire, the ravages of worms and the ruthlessness of man for four centuries, they finally fell a prey to the destructive fury of the waves; but my memory served me well as to the contents, and at my bidding was at once ready to aid me in restoring the narrative I had read. The copied portions were a valuable aid, and imagination was able to fill the gaps; and though it failed, no doubt, to reproduce Margery Schopper's memoirs phrase for phrase and word for word, I

have on the whole succeeded in transcribing with considerable exactitude all that she herself had thought worthy to be rescued from oblivion. Moreover I have avoided the repetition of the mode of talk in the fifteenth century, when German was barely commencing to be used as a written language, since scholars, writers, and men of letters always chose the Latin tongue for any great or elegant intellectual work. The narrator's expressions would only be intelligible to a select few, and, I should have done my Margery injustice, had I left the ideas and descriptions, whose meaning I thoroughly understood, in the clumsy form she had given them. The language of her day is a mirror whose uneven surface might easily reflect the fairest picture in blurred or distorted out lines to modern eyes. Much, indeed which most attracted me in her descriptions will have lost its peculiar charm in mine; as to whether I have always supplemented her correctly, that must remain an open question.

I have endeavored to throw myself into the mind and spirit of my Margery and repeat her tale with occasional amplification, in a familiar style, yet with such a choice of words as seems suitable to the date of her narrative. Thus I have perpetuated all that she strove to record for her descendants out of her warm heart and eager brain; though often in mere outline and broken sentences, still, in the language of her time and of her native province.

CHAPTER I

I, MARGERY SCHOPPER, was born in the year of our Lord 1404, on the Tuesday after Palm Sunday. My uncle Christan Pfinzing of the Burg, a widower whose wife had been a Schopper, held me at the font. My father, God have his soul, was Franz Schopper, known as Franz the Singer. He died in the night of the Monday after Laetare Sunday in 1404, and his wife my mother, God rest her, whose name was Christine, was born a Behaim; she had brought him my two brothers Herdegen and Kunz, and she died on the eve of Saint Catharine's day 1404; so that I lost my mother while I was but a babe, and God dealt hardly with me also in taking my father to Himself in His mercy, before I ever saw the light.

Instead of a loving father, such as other children have, I had only a grave in the churchyard, and the good report of him given by such as had known him; and by their account he must have been a right merry and lovable soul, and a good man of business both in his own affairs and in those pertaining to the city. He was called "the Singer" because, even when he was a member of the town-council, he could sing sweetly and worthily to the lute. This art he learned in Lombardy, where he had been living at Padua to study the law there; and they say that among those outlandish folk his music brought him a rich reward in the love of the Italian ladies and damsels. He was a well-favored man, of goodly stature

and pleasing to look upon, as my brother Herdegen his oldest son bears witness, since it is commonly said that he is the living image of his blessed father; and I, who am now an old woman, may freely confess that I have seldom seen a man whose blue eyes shone more brightly beneath his brow, or whose golden hair curled thicker over his neck and shoulders than my brother's in the high day of his happy youth.

He was born at Eastertide, and the Almighty blessed him with a happy temper such as he bestows only on a Sunday-child. He, too, was skilled in the art of singing, and as my other brother, my playmate Kunz, had also a liking for music and song, there was ever a piping and playing in our orphaned and motherless house, as if it were a nest of mirthful grasshoppers, and more childlike gladness and happy merriment reigned there than in many another house that rejoices in the presence of father and mother. And I have ever been truly thankful to the Almighty that it was so; for as I have often seen, the life of children who lack a mother's love is like a day when the sun is hidden by storm-clouds. But the merciful God, who laid his hand on our mother's heart, filled that of another woman with a treasure of love towards me and my brothers.

Our cousin Maud, a childless widow, took upon herself to care for us. As a maid, and before she had married her departed husband, she had been in love with my father, and then had looked up to my mother as a saint from Heaven, so she could have no greater joy than to tell us tales about our parents; and

when she did so her eyes would be full of tears, and as every word came straight from her heart it found its way straight to ours; and as we three sat round, listening to her, besides her own two eyes there were soon six more wet enough to need a handkerchief.

Her gait was heavy and awkward, and her face seemed as though it had been hewn out of coarse wood, so that it was a proper face to frighten children; even when she was young they said that her appearance was too like a man and devoid of charms, and for that reason my father never heeded her love for him; but her eyes were like open windows, and out of them looked everything that was good and kind and loving and true, like angels within. For the sake of those eyes you forgot all else; all that was rough in her, and her wide nose with the deep dent just in the middle, and such hair on her lip as many a young stripling might envy her.

And Sebald Kresz knew very well what he was about when he took to wife Maud Im Hoff when he was between sixty and seventy years of age; and she had nothing to look forward to in life as she stood at the altar with him, but to play the part of nurse to a sickly perverse old man. But to Maud it seemed as fair a lot to take care of a fellow-creature as it is to many another to be nursed and cherished; and it was the reward of her faithful care that she could keep the old man from the clutch of Death for full ten years longer. After his decease she was left a well-to-do widow; but instead of taking thought for herself she at once entered on a life of fresh care, for she undertook the duty of

filling the place of mother to us three orphans.

As I grew up she would often instruct me in her kind voice, which was as deep as the bass pipe of an organ, that she had set three aims before her in bringing us up, namely: to make us good and Godfearing; to teach us to agree among ourselves so that each should be ready to give everything up to the others; and to make our young days as happy as possible. How far she succeeded in the first I leave to others to judge; but a more united family than we ever were I should like any man to show me, and because it was evident from a hundred small tokens how closely we clung together folks used to speak of us as "the three links," especially as the arms borne by the Schoppers display three rings linked to form a chain.

As for myself, I was the youngest and smallest of the three links, and yet I was the middle one; for if ever it fell that Herdegen and Kunz had done one thing or another which led them to disagree and avoid or defy each other, they always came together again by seeking me and through my means. But though I thus sometimes acted as peacemaker it is no credit to me, since I did not bring them together out of any virtue or praiseworthy intent, but simply because I could not bear to stand alone, or with only one ring linked to me.

Alas! how far behind me lies the bright, happy youth of which I now write! I have reached the top of life's hill, nay, I have long since overstepped the ridge; and, as I look back and think of all I have seen and known, it is not to the end that I may get wisdom

for myself whereby to do better as I live longer. My old bones are stiff and set; it would be vain now to try to bend them. No, I write this little book for my own pleasure, and to be of use and comfort to my children and grandchildren. May they avoid the rocks on which I have bruised my feet, and where I have walked firmly on may they take example by an old woman's brave spirit, though I have learned in a thousand ways that no man gains profit by any experience other than his own.

So I will begin at the beginning.

I could find much to tell of my happy childhood, for then everything seems new; but it profits not to tell of what every one has known in his own life, and what more can a Nuremberg child have to say of her early growth and school life than ever another. The blades in one field and the trees in one wood share the same lot without any favour. It is true that in many ways I was unlike other children; for my cousin Maud would often say that I would not abide rule as beseems a maid, and Herdegen's lament that I was not born a boy still sounds in my ears when I call to mind our wild games. Any one who knows the window on the first floor, at the back of our house, from which I would jump into the courtyard to do as my brothers did, would be fairly frightened, and think it a wonder that I came out of it with whole bones; but yet I was not always minded to riot with the boys, and from my tenderest years I was a very thoughtful little maid. But there were things; in my young life very apt to sharpen my wits.

We Schoppers are nearly allied with every worshipful family

in the town, or of a rank to sit in the council and bear a coat of arms; these being, in fact, in Nuremberg, the class answering to the families of the Signoria in Venice, whose names are enrolled in the Libro d'Oro. What the Barberighi, the Foscari, the Grimaldi, the Giustiniani and the like, are there, the families of Stromer, Behaim, Im Hoff, Tucher, Kresz, Baumgartner, Pfinzing, Pukheimer, Holzschuher, and so forth, are with us; and the Schoppers certainly do not rank lowest on the list. We who hold ourselves entitled to bear arms, to ride in tournaments, and take office in the Church, and who have a right to call ourselves nobles and patricians, are all more or less kith and kin. Wherever in Nuremberg there was a fine house we could find there an uncle and aunt, cousins and kinsmen, or at least godparents, and good friends of our deceased parents. Wherever one of them might chance to meet us, even if it were in the street, he would say: "Poor little orphans! God be good to the fatherless!" and tears would sparkle in the eyes of many a kindhearted woman. Even the gentlemen of the Council—for most of the elders of our friends were members of it—would stroke my fair hair and look at me as pitifully as though I were some poor sinner for whom there could be no mercy in the eyes of the judges of a court of justice.

Why was it that men deemed me so unfortunate when I knew no sorrow and my heart was as gay as a singing bird? I could not ask cousin Maud, for she was sorely troubled if I had but a finger-ache, and how could I tell her that I was such a miserable

creature in the eyes of other folks? But I presently found out for myself why and wherefore they pitied me; for seven who called me fatherless, seventy would speak of me as motherless when they addressed me with pity. Our misfortune was that we had no mother. But was there not Cousin Maud, and was not she as good as any mother? To be sure she was only a cousin, and she must lack something of what a real mother feels.

And though I was but a heedless, foolish child I kept my eyes open and began to look about me. I took no one into the secret but my brothers, and though my elder brother chid me, and bid me only be thankful to our cousin for all her goodness, I nevertheless began to watch and learn.

There were a number of children at the Stromers' house—the Golden Rose was its name—and they were still happy in having their mother. She was a very cheerful young woman, as plump as a cherry, and pink and white like blood on snow; and she never fixed her gaze on me as others did, but would frolic with me or scold me sharply when I did any wrong. At the Muffels, on the contrary, the mistress was dead, and the master had not long after brought home another mother to his little ones, a stepmother, Susan, who was my maid, was wont to call her; and such a mother was no more a real mother than our good cousin—I knew that much from the fairy tales to which I was ever ready to hearken. But I saw this very stepmother wash and dress little Elsie, her husband's youngest babe and not her own, and lull her till she fell asleep; and she did it right tenderly, and quite as she ought. And

then, when the child was asleep she kissed it, too, on its brow and cheeks.

And yet Mistress Stromer, of the Golden-Rose House, did differently; for when she took little Clare that was her own babe out of the water, and laid it on warm clouts on the swaddling board, she buried her face in the sweet, soft flesh, and kissed the whole of its little body all over, before and behind, from head to foot, as if it were all one sweet, rosy mouth; and they both laughed with hearty, loving merriment, as the mother pressed her lips against the babe's white, clean skin and trumpeted till the room rang, or clasped it, wrapped in napkins to her warm breast, as if she could hug it to death. And she broke into a loud, strange laugh, and cried as she fondled it: "My treasure, my darling, my God-sent jewel! My own, my own—I could eat thee!"

No, Mistress Muffel never behaved so to Elsie, her husband's babe. Notwithstanding I knew right well that Cousin Maud had been just as fond of me as Dame Stromer of her own babes, and so far our cousin was no way different from a real mother. And I said as much to myself, when I laid me down to sleep in my little white bed at night, and my cousin came and folded her hands as I folded mine and, after we had said the prayers for the Angelus together, as we did every evening, she laid her head by the side of mine, and pressed my baby face to her own big face. I liked this well enough, and I whispered in her ear: "Tell me, Cousin Maud, are you not my real, true mother?"

And she hastily replied, "In my heart I am, most truly; and

you are a very lucky maid, my Margery, for instead of only one mother you have two: me, here below, to care for you and foster you, and the other up among the angels above, looking down on you and beseeching the all-gracious Virgin who is so nigh to her, to keep your little heart pure, and to preserve you from all ill; nay, perhaps she herself is wearing a glory and a heavenly crown. Look at her face." And Cousin Maud held up the lamp so that the light fell on a large picture. My eyes beheld the lovely portrait in front of me, and meseemed it looked at me with a deep gaze and stretched out loving arms to me. I sat up in my bed; the feelings which filled my little heart overflowed my lips, and I said in a whisper: "Oh, Cousin Maud! Surely my mammy might kiss me for once, and fondle me as Mistress Stromer does her little Clare."

Cousin Maud set the lamp on the table, and without a word she lifted me out of bed and held me up quite close to the face of the picture; and I understood. My lips softly touched the red lips on the canvas; and, as I was all the happier, I fancied that my mother in Heaven must be glad too.

Then my cousin sighed: "Well, well!" and murmured other words to herself; she laid me in the bed again, tucked the coverlet tightly round me as I loved to have it, gave me another kiss, waited till I had settled my head on the pillow, and whispered: "Now go to sleep and dream of your sainted mother."

She quitted the room; but she had left the lamp, and as soon as I was alone I looked once more at the picture, which showed me

my mother in right goodly array. She had a rose on her breast, her golden fillet looked like the crown of the Queen of Heaven, and in her robe of rich, stiff brocade she was like some great Saint. But what seemed to me more heavenly than all the rest was her rose and white young face, and the sweet mouth which I had touched with my lips. Oh if I had but once had the happiness of kissing that mouth in life! A sudden feeling glowed in my heart, and an inward voice told me that a thousand kisses from Cousin Maud would never be worth one single kiss from that lovely young mother, and that I had indeed lost almost as much as my pitying friends had said. And I could not help sorrowing, weeping for a long time; I felt as though I had lost just what was best and dearest, and for the first time I saw that my good cousin was right ugly as other folks said, and my silly little head conceived that a real mother must be fair to look upon, and that however kind any one else might be she could never be so gracious and lovable.

And so I fell asleep; and in my dreams the picture came towards me out of the frame and took me in her arms as Madonna takes her Holy Child, and looked at me with a gaze as if all the love on earth had met in those eyes. I threw my arms round her neck and waited for her to fondle and play with me like Mistress Stromer with her little Clare; but she gently and sadly shook her head with the golden crownlet, and went up to Cousin Maud and set me in her lap.

"I have never forgot that dream, and often in my prayers have I lifted up my heart to my sainted mother, and cried to her as to

the blessed Virgin and Saint Margaret, my name-saint; and how often she has heard me and rescued me in need and jeopardy! As to my cousin, she was ever dearer to me from that night; for had not my own mother given me to her, and when folks looked at me pitifully and bewailed my lot, I could laugh in my heart and think: 'If only you knew! Your children have only one mother, but we have two; and our own real mother is prettier than any one's, while the other, for all that she is so ugly, is the best.'"

It was the compassion of folks that first led me to such thoughts, and as I grew older I began to deem that their pity had done little good to my young soul. Friends are ever at hand to comfort every job; but few are they who come to share his heaviness, all the more so because all men take pleasure in comparing their own fair lot with the evil lot of others. Compassion—and I am the last to deny it—is a noble and right healing grace; but those who are so ready to extend it should be cautious how they do so, especially in the case of a child, for a child is like a sapling which needs light, and those who darken the sun that shines on it sin against it, and hinder its growth. Instead of bewailing it, make it glad; that is the comfort that befits it.

I felt I had discovered a great and important secret and I was eager to make our sainted mother known to my brothers; but they had found her already without any aid from their little sister. I told first one and then the other all that stirred within me, and when I spoke to Herdegen, the elder, I saw at once that it was nothing new to him. Kunz, the younger, I found in the swing;

he flew so high that I thought he would fling himself out, and I cried to him to stop a minute; but, as he clutched the rope tighter and pulled himself together to stand firm on the board, he cried: "Leave me now, Margery; I want to go up, up; up to Heaven—up to where mother is!"

That was enough for me; and from that hour we often spoke together of our sainted mother, and Cousin Maud took care that we should likewise keep our father in mind. She had his portrait —as she had had my mother's— brought from the great dining-room, where it had hung, into the large children's room where she slept with me. And this picture, too, left its mark on my after-life; for when I had the measles, and Master Paul Rieter, the town physician and our doctor, came to see me, he stayed a long time, as though he could not bear to depart, standing in front of the portrait; and when he turned to me again, his face was quite red with sorrowful feeling—for he had been a favorite friend of my father, at Padua—and he exclaimed: "What a fortunate child art thou, little Margery!"

I must have looked at him puzzled enough, for no one had ever esteemed me fortunate, unless it were Cousin Maud or the Waldstromers in the forest; and Master Paul must have observed my amazement, for he went on. "Yea, a happy child art thou; for so are all babes, maids or boys, who come into the world after their father's death." As I gazed into his face, no less astonished than before, he laid the gold knob of his cane against his nose and said: "Remember, little simpleton, the good God would not be

what he is, would not be a man of honor—God forgive the words—if he did not take a babe whom He had robbed of its father before it had seen the light or had one proof of his love under His own special care. Mark what I say, child. Is it a small thing to be the ward of a guardian who is not only Almighty but true above all truth?" And those words have followed me through all my life till this very hour.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.