

GEORG EBERS

MARGERY (GRED): A TALE
OF OLD NUREMBERG.

VOLUME 05

Georg Ebers

**Margery (Gred): A Tale Of
Old Nuremberg. Volume 05**

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CHAPTER I

The Imperial Diet in Nuremberg!—the Imperial Advent!

The next day their Majesties were to enter into the town, and with them my Hans.

A messenger had brought the tidings, and now we must use all diligence; Ann and Elsa and I, with one and twenty more, had been chosen among all the daughters of the worshipful gentlemen of the council, to go forth to greet the Emperor and Empress with flowers and a discourse. This Ursula was to speak, by reason that she was mistress of all such arts; likewise was she by birth the chiefest of us all, inasmuch as that her late departed mother was daughter to the great Reynmar, lord of Sulzbach. Nor need Ann and I seek far for the flowers. The Hallers' garden had not its like in all Nuremberg, and my dear parents-in-law had promised that we should pluck all we needed for our posies.

Or ever I mounted my horse, I had tidings that Herdegen and Junker Henning had, last evening, come to bitter strife, nay, well-nigh to bloodshed; for that when my brother had sung the ditty in praise of one Elselein and the other had called upon him to put in the name of Ann, Herdegen had cried: "An if you mean red-haired Ann, the tapster wench at the Blue Pike, well and good!" Whereupon the Junker sprang up and flung the tankard he had just emptied at Herdegen's head. Herdegen had nimbly ducked, and had rushed on the drunken fellow sword in hand; but Duke Rumpold had put a word in, and by this morning Junker Henning seemed to have forgotten the matter. In Brandenburg, verily, such frays were common at the drinking-bouts of the lords and gentlemen, and by dawn all offence given over-night in their cups was wiped out of mind.

My brother lodged again at our grand-uncle's, while the Junker dwelt at the Waldstromer's townhouse. My Lord Duke found quarters at the Hallerhof, and his Highness the Prince Elector, and Archbishop Conrad of Mainz likewise lodged there, with a great following. Cousin Maud had made ready to welcome the Margrave of Baden and the Count von Henneberg under our roof. The upper floor of the Pernhart's house was given up to his Eminence Cardinal Branda, the most steadfast friend at Rome of Master Ulman's brother the bishop. His Holiness the Pope had sent that right-reverend prelate as his legate to the assembly, and he presently celebrated mass with great dignity in the presence of their Majesties and of the assembled lords and princes.

To this day my memory is right good in all ways; and of what followed on these events much is yet as clear and plain in my mind as though I saw and heard it all at this present time; albeit I, an old woman, would fain hide my face in my hands and weep thereat. For, notwithstanding there were certain hours in those days which brought me sweet love-making, and others of sheer mirth and vanity, yet is the spirit of man so tempered that, when great sorrow follows hard on the greatest joy it sufficeth to darken it wholly. And thus we may liken heaviness of heart to the chiming of bells, which hurts the ear if they sound over near, but at a distance make a sweet and devout music. Now, in sooth, inasmuch as I must make record of the deepest woe of my life, the brazen toll is a sad one, and the long-healed wounds ache afresh.

Those two months of the Imperial Diet! They lie behind me like distant hills. I can no more discern them apart, albeit certain landmarks, as it were, stand forth plainly to be seen, like the church-tower, the windmill, and the old oak on the ridge on the horizon.

How the night sped after our return from the forest and the morning next after—the 27th of July in the year of our Lord 1422—I can no longer call to mind; but I can see myself now as, the afternoon

of that day, I set forth with Ann, attired in silk and lace—all white and new from head to foot, as it were for a wedding—to go to the open place between St. James' Church and the German House, within the Spital Gate. Whichever way we looked, behold flowers, green garlands, hangings, pennons, and banners; it was as though all the gardens in Franconia had been stripped of their blossoms. Never had such a brave show been seen, and with every breath we drank in the odors of the leaves and flowers which were already withering in the July sunshine. A finer Saint Pantaloon's day I never remember; the very sky seemed to share the city's gladness and was fair to see, in spotless blue. A light wind assuaged the waxing heat, and helped the flags and banners to unfurl: Our fine churches were decked all over and about with garlands, boughs, and banners, and meseemed were like happy brides awaiting their marriage in holiday array. The market- place was a scene of high festival, the beautiful fountain was a mighty bower of flowers, the triumphal arches, methought, were such as the gods of wood and garden might have joined to raise. Every balcony was richly hung, and even the crested gables and the turrets on the roofs displayed some bravery. All, so far as eye could see, was motley-hued and spick and span for brightness. The tiniest pane in the topmost dormer-window glittered without a spot. The poorest were clad in costly finery; the patrician folk were in the dress of knights and nobles; every craftsman was arrayed as though he were a councillor, every squire like his lord. You would have weened that day that there were none but rich folk in Nuremberg. The maidens' pearl chaplets gleamed in the sun, and the golden jewels in their fur bonnets; and what did their mothers care for the heat as they went to and fro to display the costly fur turbans which crowned their heads as it were with a glory of fur? How carefully had they dressed the little ones! They were to see the Emperor and Empress with their own eyes, and their Majesties might even, by good hap, see them!

Presently we saw the procession of the guilds with their devices and banners; never had they come forth in such goodly bravery. They were to form in ranks, on each side of the streets and the highway, a long space outside the gate.

At last it was nigh the hour when their Majesties should arrive. We maids had all assembled. Albeit we had agreed all to be clad in white, Ursula had decked her head-gear with Ostrich feathers of rose-pink and sky-blue; right costly plumes they were, but over many. Now would she look into her parchment scroll, and for us she had brief words and few. The nosegay which her servant in scarlet livery bore in his hand was a mighty fine one; and Akusch and a gardener's boy presently came up with the posies culled for Ann and me in the Hallers' garden. We, and many another maid, clasped our hands in sheer delight, but Ursula cast a look on them which might, if it could, have robbed the roses and Eastern lilies of their sweetness.

The Emperor, it was said, would keep to the hour fixed on; then all the bells began to ring. I knew them all well, and one I liked best of all; the *Benedicta* in Saint Sebalds Church, which had been cast by old Master Grunewald, Master Pernhart's closest friend. Their brazen voices stirred my soul and heart, and presently the cannon in the citadel and on the walls rattled out a thundering welcome to the Emperor, rending the summer air. My heart beat higher and faster. But suddenly I meseemed that all the bravery of the town and the holiday weed of the folks, the chiming of bells and the roaring of cannon were not meant to do honor to the Emperor, but only to my one true love who was coming in his train.

All my thoughts and hopes were set on him. And when the town-pipers struck up with trumpets and kettledrums, bagpipes and horns, when the far-away muttering and roll of voices swelled to a roaring outcry and an uproarious shout, when from every mouth at every window the cry rose: "They are coming!"—yet did I not gaze at their Majesties, to whom the day and festival belonged, but only sought him who was mine—my own.

There they are! close before us.—The Emperor and his noble wife, Queen Barbara, the still goodly daughter of the great Hungarian Count of Cilly.

Aye! and he looks the man to rule six realms; worthy to stand at the head of the great German nation. He might be known among a thousand for an Emperor, and the son of an Emperor! How

straight he sits in his saddle, how youthful yet is the fire in his eye, albeit he has past his fiftieth birthday! High spirit and contentment in his look; and meseems he has forgotten that he ever summoned the Diet to meet at Ratisbon and is entering the gates of Nuremberg against his will, by reason that the Electors and German princes have chosen to assemble there. His wife likewise is of noble mien, and she rides a white palfrey which, as she draws rein, strives to turn its pink nostrils to greet the bay horse on which her lord is mounted.

Yet do my eyes not linger long on the lordly pair; they wander down the long train of Knights wherein he is coming, though among the last. For a moment they rest on the stalwart forms of the Hungarian nobles, all blazing with jewels even to the harness of the steeds; and glance unheedingly at the Electors and Princes, the Dukes, Counts and Knights- all in velvet and silk, gold and silver; at the purple and scarlet of the prelates; at the solemn black with gold chains of the town councillors; on and beyond all the magnificent train which has come with his Majesty from Hungary or gone forth to meet him.

Hereupon Ursula steps forth to speak the address; but sooner may a man hear a cricket in a thunderstorm than a maid's voice amid that pealing of bells and shouting and cries of welcome. Meseems verily as though the fluttering handkerchiefs, the flying pennons, and the caps waved in the air had found voice; and Ursula turns her head to this side and that as though seeking help.

Emperor Sigismund signs with his hand, and the two heralds who head the train uplift their trumpets with rich embroidered banners. A rattling blast procures silence: in a moment it is as though oil were poured on a surging sea. Men and guns are hushed; the only sounds to be heard are the brazen tongue of the bells, the whinnying of a horse, the dull mutter of men's voices in the far-off lanes and alleys, and the clear voice of a young maid.

Ursula made her speech, her voice so loud at the last that it might have seemed that the honeyed verses were words of reproof. The imperial pair gave each other a glance expressing surprise rather than pleasure, and vouchsafed a few words of thanks to the speaker. His Majesty spoke in German; but in his Bohemian home and Hungarian Kingdom he had caught the trick of a sharper accent than ours.

A chamberlain now gave the signal, and we maidens all went forth towards our Sovereign lord and lady. Two and two—Tucher and Schilrstab—Groland and Stromer; and the sixth couple were Ann and I—Ann as the daughter of a member of the council—and my godfather it was, besides her sweet face, who had done most to get her chosen.

Noble youths clad as pages in velvet and silks had received the flowers offered by the damsels; but as Ann and I stood forth, the Emperor and Empress looked down on us. I could see that they gazed upon us graciously, and heard them speak together in a language I knew not; and Porro, the King's fool—and I say the King's, inasmuch as it was not till later that Sigismund was crowned Emperor at Rome, and by the same token it was at that time that my Hans' brothers, Paul and Erhart, were dubbed Knights—Porro, who rode at his lord's side on a piebald pony spotted black and yellow, cried out: "May we all be turned into drones, Nunkey, if the flowers which have given this town the name of the Bee-garden are not of the same kith and kin as these!"

And he pointed to us; whereupon the King asked him whether he meant the damsels or the posies. But the jester, rolling on his nag after a merry fashion, till the bells in his cap rang again, answered him: "Nay, Nunkey, would you tempt a Christian to walk on the ice? An if I say the damsels, I shall get into trouble by reason of your strict morality; but if I say the posies, I shall peril my poor soul's health by a foul lie."

"Then choose thee another shape," quoth the Queen, "for I fear lest the bees should take thee for a stinging wasp, Porro."

"True, by my troth," said the fool, thinking. "Since Eve fell into sin, women's counsel is often the best. You, Nunkey, shall be turned into a butterfly, and not into a drone, and grace the flowers as you flutter round them."

And he waved his arms as they were wings and rode round about us on his pony with right merry demeanor, like a moth fluttering over us. Ann looked down, reddening for shame, and the blood rose to my cheeks likewise for maiden shyness; nevertheless I heard the King's deep, outlandish tones, and his noble wife's pleasant voice, and they lauded our posies and made enquiry as to our names, and straitly enjoined Ann and me not to fail of appearing at every dance and banquet; and I remember that we made answer with seemly modesty till the King's grand-master came up and so ended our discourse.

And I fancy I can see the multitude coming on; the motley hues of velvet and silk, the housings and trappings of the horses, the bright sheen of polished metal, and the sparkle of cut gems dazzle my eyes, I ween, to this day. But on a sudden it all fades into dimness; the cries and voices, the bells, the neighing, the crash and clatter are silent—for he is come. He waves his hand, more goodly, more truly mine and dearer to my heart than ever. But not here do we truly meet again; that joy is to come later in his own garden.

That garden could already tell a tale of two happy human creatures, and of hours of the purest bliss ever vouchsafed to two young hearts; but what thereafter befell I remember as bright, hot, summer days, full of mirth and play-acting, of tourneys and courtly sports, of music and song, dancing and pleasuring. The gracious favor of the King and Queen and the presence of many princes ceased not to grace it, and went to our brain like heady wine. Things that had hitherto seemed impossible now came true. Out of sheer joy in those intoxicating pleasures, and for the sake of the manifold demands that came upon us in these over-busy days, we forgot those nearest and dearest to our hearts. Yet never was I given to self-seeking, neither before nor since that time.

Ann's beguiling of the Junker, the homage paid to her by all, even the highest, Herdegen's seething ire, his strivings to win back the favor of the maid he had slighted, his strange and various and high-handed demeanor, his shameless ways with Ursula, to whom he paid great court when my grand-uncle was present, albeit at other times he would cast dark glances at her as if she were a foe—all this glides past me as in a mist, and concerning me but little. Then, in the midst of this turmoil and magnificence, this love-making and royal grace, now and again meseemed I was suddenly alone and forlorn; even at the tourney or dance; nay, even when the King and Queen would vouchsafe to discourse with me, I would be filled with longing for peace and silent hours—notwithstanding that the mighty Sovereign himself took pleasure in questioning me and moving me to those quick replies whereof I never found any lack. Queen Barbara would many a time bid me to her chamber, and keep me with her for hours; sometimes would Ann also be bidden, and she bestowed on us both many costly jewels.

Then, no sooner had we quitted the castle, where their Majesties lodged, than we must think of our own noble guests; for Markgraf Bernhard of Baden, who was quartered on us, would often ask for me, and Cardinal Branda would desire Ann to attend him. The larger half of our days was given to arranging our persons, and while Cousin Maud and Susan would dress me I was already thinking of making ready the weed, the ribbons, and the feathers needed for the next day. My Hans was now a Knight. The same honor was promised to Herdegen—honor on honor, pleasure on pleasure, bravery and display! In the stead of our old sun twenty, meseemed, were blazing in the heavens. Many a time it was as though my breath came so lightly that I could float on air, and then again a nightmare load oppressed me. Even through the night, in my very dreams, the sounds of music and singing ceased not; but when I awoke the question would arise: "To what end is this?"

Hans held the helm, and was ever the same, thoughtful yet truly loving. Also he never forgot to keep a lookout for the surety of the bark, and if the pace seemed too great, or he saw rocks ahead, he did his part and likewise guarded me with faithful care from heedless demeanor or over-weariness. Margery the rash, who was wanted everywhere, and was at all times in the foremost rank, at the behest of the King and Queen, did her devoir in all points and nought befell which could hurt or grieve her—and she knew full well whom she had to thank for that.

Likewise I discerned with joy that my lover kept the Junker's ardors in check, for he would fain have courted Ann as hotly as though he were secure of her love; and Hans called upon my brother Herdegen to quit himself as a man should and make an end of this double game by choosing either Ann or Ursula, once for all.

In the forest Uncle Conrad had bidden this noble company to the Lodge. After the hunt was over we went forth once more to the garden of Martin the bee-keeper, by reason that Duke Ernest of Austria, and Count Friedrich of Meissen, and my Lord Bishop of Lausanne, and other of the noble lords, desired to see somewhat of the far-famed bee-keeping huts in our Lorenzer-Wald. My uncle himself led the way, and Herdegen helped him do the honors.

Presently, as he over-hastily opened a hive, some bees stung his hand badly; I ran to him and drew the stings out. Ann was close by me, and Herdegen tried to meet her eyes, and sang in a low voice a verse of a song, which sounded sad indeed and strange, somewhat thus:

"Augustho pirlin pcodyas."

Whereupon Ann asked of him in what tongue he spoke; for it was not known to her. He, however, replied that of a certainty it was known to her, and when she looked at him, doubtful yet, he laughed bitterly and said that he could but be well-content if she had forgotten the sound of those words, inasmuch as to him they were bound up with the first great sorrow he had known.

I saw that she was ill-at-ease; but as she turned away he held her back to put the words into German, saying, in so dull and low a voice that I scarce could hear him, while he stirred up the earth with the point of his sword, purposing to lay some on his swollen hand.

"A froward bee hath stung my hand;
Mother Earth will heal the smart.
But when I lie beneath the turf,
Say, Will she heal my broken heart?"

Then I saw that Ann turned pale as she said somewhat stiffly: "There are other remedies for you against even the worst!" and he replied: "But yours, Ann, work the best cure."

By this time she was herself again, and answered as though she cared not:

"I learnt them from a skilled master.—But in what tongue is your song, Junker Schopper, and who taught you that?"

To which he hastily answered: "A swarthy wench of gipsy race."

And she, taking courage, said: "One peradventure whom you erewhile met in the forest here?" Herdegen shook his curly head, and his eye flashed lovingly as he spoke: "No, Ann, and by all the Saints it is not so! It was of a gipsy mother that I learnt it; she sang it to a man in despair—in despair for your sake, Ann—in the forest of Fontainebleau."

Whereupon Ann shook her head and strove to speak lightly as she said "Despair! Are you not like the man in the fable, who deemed that he was burnt whereas he had thrust another into the fire? The cap fits, methinks, Junker Schopper."

He replied sadly, and there was true grief in his voice: "Is a hard jest all you have to give me now?" quoth he, "Nay, then, tell me plainly, Ann, if there is no hope for me more."

"None," said she, firm and hard. But she forth with added more gently. "None, Herdegen, none at all so long as a single thread remains unbroken which binds you to Ursula."

On this he stepped close up to her and cried in great emotion: "She, she! Aye, she hath indeed cast her devil's tangle of gold about me to ensnare all that is vain and base in me; but she has no more room in my heart than those bees have. And if you—if my good angel will but be mine again I will cry 'apage'—I tear her toils asunder."

He ceased, for certain ladies and gentlemen came nigh, and foremost of them Ursula; aye, and I can see her now drawing off her glove and stooping to gather up some earth to lay on the burning

hand of the man whom in truth she loved, while he strove to forestall her and not to accept such service. That night we stayed at the lodge, and Ursula again had the chamber next to ours; and again I heard her appealing to her Saints, while Ann poured out to me her overflowing heart in a low whisper, and confessed to me, now crying and now laughing, how much she had endured, and how that she was beginning to hope once more.

CHAPTER II

Our grand-uncle and guardian, the old knight Im Hoff, had ever, so long as I could remember, demeaned himself as a penitent, spending his nights, and not sleeping much, in a coffin, and giving the lion's share of his great revenues to pious works to open unto himself the gates of Heaven; but what a change was wrought in him by the Emperor's coming! This straight-backed and stiff necked man, who had never bowed his head save only in church and before the holy images of the saints, learnt now to stoop and bend. His bloodless face, which had long ceased to smile, was now the very home of smiles. His great house was filled, for there lodged Duke Ernst of Austria, the Hungarian Count of Gara—who through his wife was near of kin to the Emperor, and his Majesty's trusty secretary, Kaspar Slick, and all their people. And so soon as either of these came, a gleam as of starlight lighted up his old features, or, if it fell that the sovereign granted to him to attend him, it was broad sunshine that illumined it. And whereas the other gentlemen of the council, hereditary and elected, albeit they were ever ready to shake hands with a common workman, would stand face to face with their Majesties or the dukes and notables, upright and duly mindful of their own worth, my guardian would cast off his gravity and dignity both together; and verily we all knew full well to what end. He, who had been defrauded of his life's happiness by a Baron's daughter, yearned to move the King to raise him to the rank of Baron. He loaded the Secretary Slick with gifts and favors, and seeing that his Majesty was graciously pleased to smile on me, his ward, he would be at much pains to flatter me, calling me his "golden hair" or "Blue-eyes;" and enjoin it on me that I should make mention of him to the King as his Majesty's most faithful servant, ever ready for any sacrifice in his service, at the same time he asked with a grin how it would pleasure me to hear Herdegen called by the name and title of Baron von Schopper-Im Hoff?

Our own honest and honorable name I weened was good enough for us three; yet, for my brother's sake and for Ann's, I held my peace, and took occasion while he was in so friendly a mood to urge him to release Herdegen, and grant him to choose another than Ursula. But how wroth he waxed, how hastily he put on the icy, forbidding bearing he was wont to wear, as he rated me for a wilful simpleton who would undo her brother's weal!

It was now St. Susannah's day—[August 11th]—We were bidden to the tourney. Duke Ernest of Austria had challenged Duke Kanthner of Oels in Silesia to meet him in the lists and, besides the glory to be gained, there was a prize of sixty and four gold pieces. Other knights also were to joust in the ring.

Queen Barbara, of her grace, had bidden me attend with her ladies. At the jousting-place I found Ann; her mother had remained at home by reason that the old mother was sick. My faithful Uncle Christian Pfinzing, who played the host to the Emperor and Empress at the Castle as representing the town council, had brought his "dear watchman" hither and placed her in the keeping of certain motherly dames. Presently, seeing a moment when she might speak with me, Ann said in my ear: "I will end this sport, Margery; I can no longer endure it. He hath sworn to renounce all and everything that may keep us apart!" There was no time for more. Each one had to take his seat. As yet their Majesties were not come, and there was time to gaze about.

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