

GEORG EBERS

MARGERY (GRED): A TALE
OF OLD NUREMBERG.

VOLUME 03

Georg Ebers

**Margery (Gred): A Tale Of
Old Nuremberg. Volume 03**

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CHAPTER XI

Herdegen was to be back in Padua before Passion week, and I shall remember with thankfulness to the day of my death the few months after worthy Veit Spiesz's burial and before my brother's departure. Not a day passed without our meeting; and after my heart had moved me to tell Cousin Maud all that had happened, and Herdegen had given his consent, we were rid once for all of the mystery which had at first weighed on our souls.

Verily the worthy lady found it no light matter to look kindly on this early and ill-matched betrothal; yet had she not the heart, nor the power, to make any resistance. When two young folks who are dear to her are brimfull of high happiness, the woman who would turn them out of that Garden of Eden and spoil their present bliss with warnings of future woe must be of another heart and mind than Cousin Maud. She indeed foresaw grief to come in many an hour of mistrust by day and many a sleepless night, more especially by reason of her awe and dread of my grand-uncle; and indeed, she herself was not bereft of the old pride of race which dwells in every Nuremberger who is born under a knight's coat of arms. That Ann was poor she held of no account; but that she was not of noble birth was indeed a grief and filled her with doubts. But then, when her best-beloved Herdegen's eyes shone so brightly, and she saw Ann cling to him with maidenly rapture, vexation and care were no more.

If I had sung a loud hymn of praise in the woods over their spring and autumn beauty—and verily it had welled up from my heart—I was ready to think winter in the town no less gladsome, in especial under the shelter of a home so warm and well built as our old Schopper-hof.

In the last century, when, at the time of the Emperor Carolus—[Charles IV., 1348]—coming to the throne, the guilds, under the leadership of the Gaisbarts and Pfauentritts, had risen against the noble families and the worshipful council, they accused the elders of keeping house not as beseemed plain citizens but after the manner of princes; and they were not far wrong, for indeed I have heard tell that when certain merchants from Scandinavia came to our city, they said that the dwelling of a Nuremberg noble was a match in every way for their king's palace.

[Gaisbart (goat's beard) and Pfauentritt (peacock-strut), were nicknames given to the leaders of the guilds who rebelled against the patrician families in Nuremberg, from whom alone the aldermen or town-council could be elected. This patrician class originated in 1198 under the Emperor Henry IV., who ennobled 38 families of the citizens. They were in some sort comparable with the families belonging to the Signoria at Venice, from whom, in the same way, the great council was chosen.]

As touching our house, it was four stories high, and with seven windows in every story; with well devised oriels at the corners, and pointed turrets on the roof. The gables were on the street, in three steps; over the great house door there was our coat of arms, the three links of the Schoppes and the fool's head with cap and bells as a crest on the top of the casque. The middle windows of the first and second stories were of noble size, and there glittered therein bright and beautiful panes of Venice glass, whereas the other windows were of small roundels set in lead.

And while from outside it was a fine, fair house to look upon, I never hope to behold a warmer or more snug and comfortable dwelling than the living-rooms within which was our home the winter

through; albeit I found the saloons and chambers in the palaces of the Signori at Venice loftier and more airy, and greater and grander. Whenever I have been homesick under the sunny blue sky of Italy, it was for the most part that I longed after the rich, fresh green foliage and flowing streams of my own land; but, next to them, after our pleasant chamber in the Schopper-house, with its warm, green-tiled stove, with the figures of the Apostles, and the corner window where I had spun so many a hank of fine yarn, and which was so especially mine own—although I was ever ready and glad to yield my right to it, when Herdegen required it to sit in and make love to his sweetheart.

The walls of this fine chamber were hung with Flanders tapestry, and I can to this day see the pictures which were so skilfully woven into it. That I loved best, from the time when I was but a small thing, was the Birth of the Saviour, wherein might be seen the Mother and Child, oxen and asses, the three Holy Kings from the East—the goodliest of them all a blackamoor with a great yellow beard flowing down over his robes. On the other hangings a tournament might be seen; and I mind me to this day how that, when I was a young child, I would gaze up at the herald who was blowing the trumpet in fear lest his cheeks should burst, inasmuch as they were so greatly puffed out and he never ceased blowing so hard. Between the top of these hangings and the ceiling was a light wood cornice of oak-timber, on which my father, God rest him, had caused various posies to be carved of his own devising. You might here read:

"Like a face our life may be
To which love lendeth eyes to see."

Or again,

"The Lord Almighty hides his glorious face
That so we may not cease to seek his grace."

Or else,

"The Lord shall rule my life while I sit still,
And rule it rightly by his righteous will."

And whereas my father had loved mirthful song he had written in another place:

"If life be likened to a thorny place
Song is the flowery spray that lends it grace."

Some of these rhymes had been carved there by my grandfather, for example these lines:

"By horse and wain I've journeyed up and down,
Yet found no match for this my native town."

And under our coat of arms was this posy.

"While the chain on the scutcheon holds firm and fast
The fool on the crest will be game to the last."

Of the goodly carved seats, and the cushions covered with motley woven stuffs from the Levant, right pleasant to behold, of all the fine treasures on the walls, the Venice mirrors, and the metal cage with a grey parrot therein, which Jordan Kubbelmg, the falconer from Brunswick, had given to my

dear mother, I will say no more; but I would have it understood that all was clean and bright, well ordered and of good choice, and above all snug and warm. Nay, and if it had all been far less costly and good to look at, there was, as it were, a breath of home which must have gladdened any man's heart: inasmuch as all these goodly things were not of yesterday nor of to-day, but had long been a joy to many an one dear to us; so that our welfare in that dwelling was but the continuing of the good living which our parents and grandparents had known before us.

Howbeit, those who will read this writing know what a patrician's house in Nuremberg is wont to be; and he who hath lived through a like childhood himself needs not to be told how well hide and seek may be played in a great hall, or what various and merry pastime can be devised in the twilight, in a dining hall where the lights hang from the huge beams of the ceiling; and we for certain knew every game that was worthy to be named.

But by this time all this was past and gone; only the love of song would never die out in the dwelling of the man who had been well-pleased to hear himself called by his fellows "Schopper the Singer." Ah! how marvellous well did their voices sound, Ann's and my brother's, when they sang German songs to the lute or the mandoline, or perchance Italian airs, as they might choose. But there was one which I could never weary of hearing and which, meseemed, must work on Herdegen's wayward heart as a cordial. The words were those of Master Walther von der Vogelweirde, and were as follows:

"True love is neither man nor maid,
No body hath nor yet a soul,
Nor any semblance here below,
Its name we hear, itself unknown.
Yet without love no man may win
The grace and favor of the Lord.
Put then thy trust in those who love;
In no false heart may Love abide."

And when they came to the last lines Kunz would oftentimes join in, taking the bass part or continuo to the melody. Otherwise he kept modestly in the background, for since he had come to know that Herdegen and Ann were of one mind he waited on her as a true and duteous squire, while he was now more silent than in past time, and in his elder brother's presence almost dumb. Yet at this I marvelled not, inasmuch as I many a time marked that brethren are not wont to say much to each other, and even between friends the one is ready enough to be silent if the other takes the word. Moreover at Easter Kunz was likewise to quit home, and go to Venice at my granduncle's behest. Herdegen's love for his brother had, of a certainty, suffered no breach; but, like many another disciple of Minerva, he was disposed to look down on the votaries of Mercury.

Nevertheless the links of the Schopper chain, to which Ann had now been joined as a fourth, held together right bravely, and when we sang not, but met for friendly talk, our discourse was but seldom of worthless, vain matters, forasmuch as Herdegen was one of those who are ready and free of speech to impart what he had himself learned, and it was Ann's especial gift to listen keenly and question discreetly.

And what was there that my brother had not learned from the great Guarino, and the not less great Humanist, his disciple Vittorino da Feltre, at that time Magistri at Padua? And how he had found the time, in a right gay and busy life, to study not merely the science of law but also Greek, and that so diligently that his master was ever ready to laud him, was to me a matter for wonder. And how gladly we hearkened while he told us of the great Plato, and gave us to know wherefore and on what grounds his doctrine seemed to him, Herdegen, sounder and loftier than that of Aristotle, concerning whom he had learned much erewhile in Nuremberg. And whereas I was moved to fear

lest these works of the heathen should tempt him to stray from the true faith, my soul found comfort when he proved to us that so glorious a lamp of the Church as Saint Augustine had followed them on many points. Also Herdegen had written out many verses of Homer's great song from a precious written book, and had learned to master them well from the teaching of the doctor of Feltre. They were that portion in which a great hero in the fight, or ever he goes forth to battle, takes leave of his wife and little son; and to me and Ann it seemed so fine and withal so touching, that we could well understand how it should be that Petrarca wrote that no more than to behold a book of Homer made him glad, and that he longed above all things to clasp that great man in his arms.

Indeed, the poems and writings of Petrarca yielded us greater delights than all the Greek and Roman heathen. Master Ulsenius had before now lent them to Ann, and she like a bee from a flower would daily suck a drop of honey from their store. Yet was there one testimony of Petrarca's—who was, for sure, of all lovers the truest—which she loved above all else. In the dreadful time of the Black Death which came as a scourge on all the world, and chiefly on Italy, in the past century, the lady to whom he had vowed the deepest and purest devotion, appeared to him in a dream one fair spring morning as an angel of Heaven. And whereas he inquired of her whether she were in life, she answered him in these words: "See that thou know me; for I am she who led thee out of the path of common men, inasmuch as thy young heart clung to me." And lo! on that very sixth of April, which brought him that vision, one and twenty years after that he had first beheld her, Laura had made a pious end.

With beseeching eyes Ann would repeat to her best beloved, as they sat together in the oriel bay, how that Laura had led her Petrarca from the ways of common men; and it went to my heart to hear her entreat him, with timid and yet fond and heartfelt prayer, to grant to her to be his Laura and to guide him far from the beaten path, forasmuch as it was narrow and low for his winged spirit. And while she thus spoke her great eyes had a marvellous clear and glorious light, and when I looked in her face wrapped in the veil of her mourning for her father, my spirit grew solemn, as though I were in church. Herdegen must have felt this likewise, methinks, for he would bend the knee before her and hide his face in her lap, and kiss her hands again and again.

But these solemn hours were few.

First and last it was a happy fellowship, free and gay, though mingled with earnest, that held us together; and when Ann's father had been some few weeks dead our old gleefulness came back to us again, and then, after gazing at her for a while, Herdegen would suddenly strike the lute and sing the old merry round:

"Come, sweetheart, come to me.
Ah how I pine for thee!
Ah, how I pine for thee
Come, sweetheart, come to me.
Sweet rosy lips to kiss,
Come then and bring me bliss,
Come then and bring me bliss,
Sweet rosy lips to kiss!"

And we would all join in, even Cousin Maud; nay and she would look another way or quit the chamber, stealing away behind Kunz and holding up a warning finger, when she perceived how his Ann's "sweet, rosy lips" tempted Herdegen's to kiss them. But there were other many songs, and oftentimes, when we were in a more than common merry mood, we strange young things would sing the saddest tales and tunes we knew, such as that called "Two Waters," and yet were we only the more gay.

Herdegen could not be excused from his duty of paying his respects from time to time to the many friends of our honorable family, yet would he ever keep away from dances and feastings, and

when he was compelled to attend I was ever at his side, and it was a joy to me to see how courteous, and withal how cold, was his demeanor to all other ladies.

The master's fiftieth birthday was honored in due course at the Tetzels' house, and to please my granduncle, Herdegen could not refuse to do his part in song and in the dance, and likewise to lead out Ursula, the daughter of the house, in the dances. Nor did he lose his gay but careless mien, although she would not quit his side and chose him to dance with her in "The Sulkers," a dance wherein the man and maid first turn their backs on each other and then make it up and kiss. But when it came to this, maiden shame sent the blood into my cheeks; for at the sound of the music, in the face of all the company she fell into his arms, as it were by mishap; and it served her right when he would not kiss her lips, which she was ready enough to offer, but only touched her brow with his.

Forasmuch as she had danced with him the Dance of Honor or first dance, it was his part to beg her hand for the last dance—the "grandfather's dance;"—[Still a well-known country dance in Germany.]—but she would fain punish him for the vexation he had caused her and turned her back upon him. He, however, would have none of this; he grasped her hand ere she was aware of him, and dragged her after him. It was vain to struggle, and soon his strong will was a pleasure to her, and her countenance beamed again full brightly, when as this dance requires, he had led the way with her, the rest all following, through chamber and hall, kitchen and courtyard, doors and windows, nay, and even the stables. In the course of this dance each one seized some utensil or house-gear, as we do to this day; only never a broom, which would bring ill-luck. Ursula had snatched up a spoon, and when the mad sport was ended and he had let go her hand, she rapped him with it smartly on the arm and cried: "You are still what you ever were, in the dance at least!"

But my brother only said: "Then will I try to become not the same, even in that."

Round the Christmas tree and at the sharing of gifts which Cousin Maud made ready for Christmas eve, we were all friendly and glad at heart, and Ann found her way to join us after that she had put the little ones to bed.

Herdegen said she herself was the dearest gift for which he could thank the Christ-child, and he had provided for her as a costly token the great Petrarca's heroic poem of Africa, in which he sings the deeds of the noble Scipio, and likewise his smaller poems, all written in a fair hand. They made three neat books, and on the leathern cover, the binder, by Herdegen's orders, had stamped the words, "ANNA-LAURA," in a wreath of full-blown roses. Nor was she slow to understand their intent, and her heart was uplifted with such glad and hopeful joy that the Christ-child for a certainty found no more blissful or thankful creature in all Nuremberg that Christmas eve.

The manifold duties which filled up all her days left her but scant time wherein to work for him she loved; nevertheless she had wrought with her needle a letter pouch, whereon the Schoppers' arms were embroidered in many colored silks, and the words 'Agape' and 'Pistis'—which are in Greek Love and Faithfulness in Greek letters with gold thread. Cousin Maud had dipped deep into her purse and likewise into her linen-press, and on the table under the Christmas-tree lay many a thing fit for the bride-chest of a maid of good birth; and albeit Ann could not but rejoice over these gifts for their own sake, she did so all the more gladly, inasmuch as she guessed that Cousin Maud was well-disposed to speed her marriage.

We were all, indeed, glad and thankful; all save the Magister, whose face was ill-content and sour by reason that he had culled many verses and maxims concerning love, for the most part from the Greek and Latin poets, and yet all his attempts to repeat them before Ann came to nothing, inasmuch as she was again and again taken up with Herdegen and with me, after she had once shaken hands with him and given him her greetings.

At supper he was as dumb as the carp which were served, and it befell that for the first time Herdegen took his seat between him and his heart's beloved; and verily I was grieved for him when, after supper, he withdrew downcast to his own chamber. The rest of us went forth to Saint Sebald's church, where that night there would be midnight matins, as there was every year, and a mass called

the Christ mass. Cousin Maud and Kunz were with us, as in the old happy days when we were children and when we never missed; and in the streets as we went, we met all manner of folks singing gladly:

Puer natus in Bethlehem,
Sing, rejoice, Jerusalem!

or the carol:

Congaudeat turba fadelium!
Natus est rex, Salvator omnium
In Bethlehem.

and we joined in; and at last all went together to see Ann to her home.

Next evening there were more costly gifts, but albeit Puer natus was still to be heard in the streets, we no longer were moved to join in.

CHAPTER XII

Every Christmas all my grand-uncle's kith and kin, or so many of them as were on good terms with him, assembled in the great house of the Im Hoffs. Everything in that dwelling spoke of ease and wealth, and no banqueting-hall could be more brightly lighted or more richly decked than that where the old man welcomed us on the threshold; and yet, how well soever the hearth was piled or the stove heated, a chill breath seemed to blow there.

While great and small were rejoicing over the grand old knight's bounty he himself would ever stand apart, and his calm, hueless countenance expressed no change. Meseemed he cared but little for the pleasure he gave us all; yet was he not idle in the matter, nor left it to others; for there was no single gift which he had not himself chosen as befitting him to whom it should be given.

The trade of his great house was for the most part with Venice, and it would have been easy to fancy oneself in some fine palazzo on the grand canal as one marked the carpets, the mirrors, the brocade, and the vessels in his house; and not a few of his tokens had likewise been brought from thence.

Before this largesse in his own house he was wont to bestow another, and a very noble one, on the old men and women of the poor folks in the town; and when this was over he went with them to the church of Saint Aegidius, and washed the feet of about a score of them, which act of penitential humility he was wont to repeat in Passion week.

Then when he had welcomed his kin, each one to his house, he would say to such as thanked him, if it were a child, very soberly: "Be a good child." But for elder folks he had no more than "It is well," or an almost churlish: "That is enough."

This evening he had given me a gown of costly brocade of Cyprus; to Kunz everything that a Junker might need on his travels; and to Herdegen the same sword which he himself had in past time worn at court; the hilt was set with gems and ended in the lion rampant, coupé, of the Im Hoffs. Ursula Tetzl, like me, had had a gown-piece which was lying near by the sword.

Herdegen, holding the jewelled weapon in his hand, thanked his grand-uncle, who muttered as was his wont "'Tis well, 'tis well," when Jost Tetzl put in his word, saying that the gift of a sword was supposed to part friends, but that this ill-effect might be hindered if he who received it made a return-offering to the giver, and so the token was made into a purchase.

At this Herdegen hastened to take out a gold pin set with sapphire stones, which Cousin Maud had given him, from his neck-kerchief, to offer it to his uncle; but the elder would have nothing to say to such foolishness, and pushed the pin away. But then when my brother did not cease, but besought him to accept it, inasmuch as he cared so greatly for his uncle's fatherly kindness, the old knight cried that he wanted no such sparkling finery, but that the day might come when he should require some payment and that Herdegen was then to remember that he was in his debt.

At this minute they were hindered from further speech by the servants, who came in to bid us to supper, and there stood ready wild fowl and fish, fruits and pastry, with the rarest wines and the richest vessels; the great middle table and the side buffet alike made such a show as though Pomona, Ceres, Bacchus, and Plutus had heaped it with prodigal hand. Yet was there no provision for merry-making. My grand-uncle loved to be quit of his guests at an early hour; hence no table was laid for them to sit down to meat, and each one held his plate in one hand.

Presently, as I strove to get free of young Master Vorchtel who had served me—and by the same token made love to me—I found my cousin in speech with my grand-uncle, and the last words of his urgent discourse, spoken as I came up with them, were that a woman of sound understanding, as she commonly seemed, should no longer suffer such a state of things.

Then Cousin Maud answered him, saying: "But you, my noble and worshipful Cousin Im Hoff, know how that a Schopper is ever ready to run his head against a wall. If we strive to thwart this hot-

headed boy, he will of a certainty defy us; but if we leave him for a while to go his own way, the waters will not be dammed up, but will run to waste in the sand."

This was evil hearing, and much as it vexed me Ursula chafed me even more, whereas she made a feint of caring for none of the company present excepting only Sir Franz—who was yet her housemate—and being still pale and weak needed a friendly woman's hand for many little services, inasmuch as even now he could scarce use his right arm. Nay, and he seemed to like Ursula well enough as his helper; albeit he owed all her sweet care and loving glances to Herdegen, for she never bestowed them but when he chanced to look that way.

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