

She waited until he had again strapped his knapsack on his back, and then they walked toward the village at a rapid gait. It lay much nearer than the bell first indicated, and Arnold soon saw that what he had taken at a distance to be an alder thicket was a hedge of fruit trees, beyond which lay the old village with its quaint church and smoke-blackened houses, bordered on the north and northeast by broad fields. The streets were well laid out and rows of fruit trees extended along both sides of them. A heavy mist overhung the town almost obscuring the light of the sun.

As Gertrude led him from street to street to her father's house, he was surprised to note that instead of greeting them with a "Good morning" as strangers were always greeted in the other villages which he had visited, the villagers passed them in silence. Neither did his companion greet anyone. And how strange did the old houses look with their sharp, carved gables and their weather-beaten, straw thatches. Here and there a shutter was opened as they passed by and a maiden or an old matron glanced out, but the stillness was so oppressive to Arnold that he finally broke the silence by inquiring:

"Do you observe the Sabbath so strictly here that you do not even greet one another on the street? Does one hear nothing besides the barking of dogs and the cackling of hens?"

"It is meal time," she answered quietly, "and the people are not very talkative at that time of day, but you will find them lively enough to-night. Yonder stands my father's house."

"But I must not come in on him at dinner so unexpectedly," said Arnold. "I prefer going to the inn which I can easily find if Germelshausen is like other villages, for one need only find the church and he will always find the inn nearby."

"Germelshausen does not differ from the others in this respect," she replied, "but you must accompany me for you will receive a hearty welcome."

"If you will accept me in Heinrich's stead today, I will come with you gladly." He had spoken these last words almost involuntarily in an affectionate tone and had at the same time pressed her hand lightly. Gertrude stood still and looking him full in the face she asked:

"Do you really mean that?"

"Certainly I do," replied he almost captivated with her great