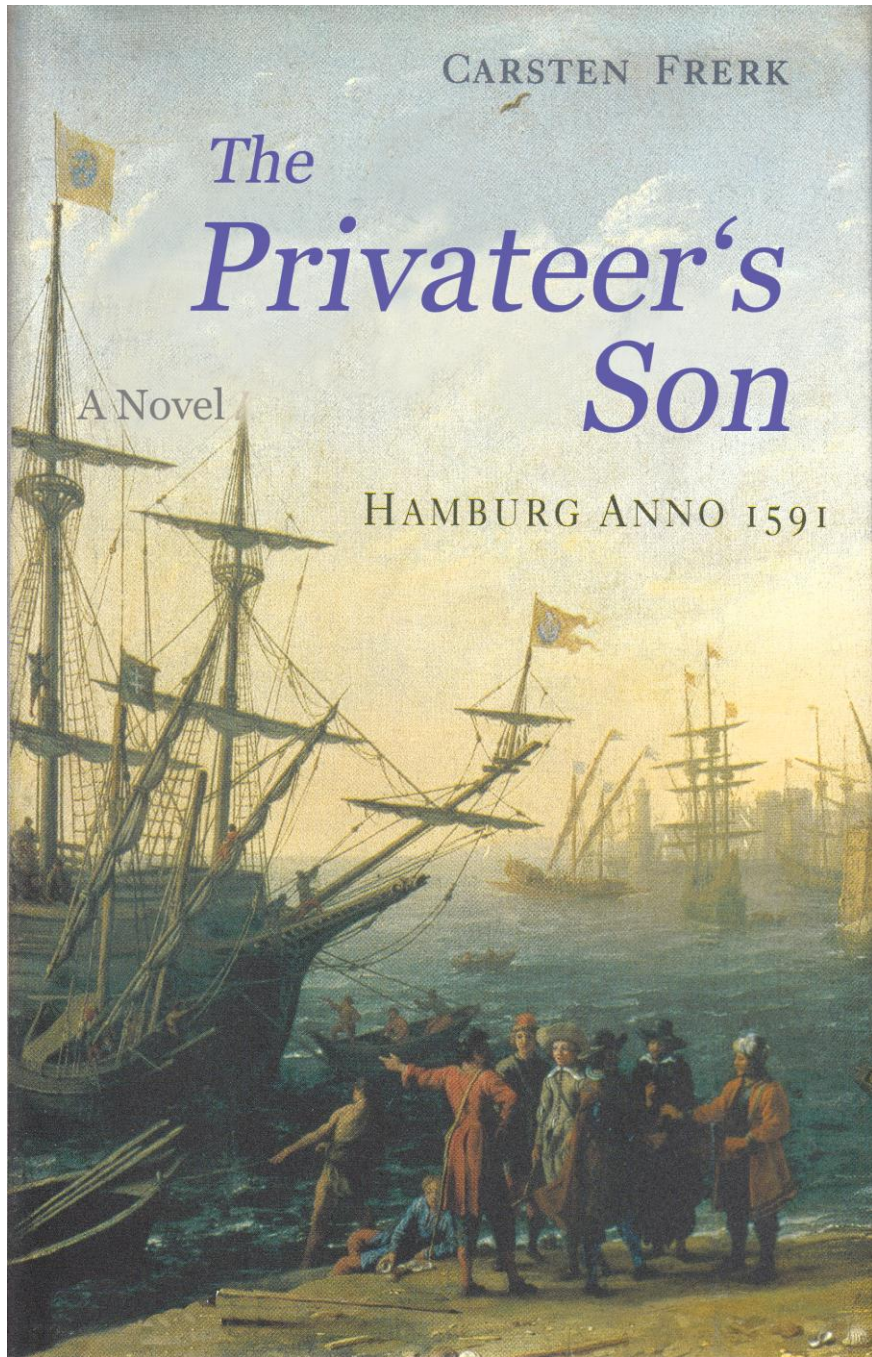


CARSTEN FRERK

The
Privateer's
Son

A Novel

HAMBURG ANNO 1591



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For Katarina





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Prologue

'What remains? Of a man's life, of the stone we lay upon the grave, of the inscriptions, of the wood? The stone – smooth, ground down by rain and wind, stripped of all human craft and labour – does it return to the original state of its nature, as though the hands, the tools of man, had never touched it?'

Laurentz gazed at the little town with its brightly painted houses of northern timber. What a contrast to Hamburg – there, where the body of this small town's bishop now lay buried in the earth beneath a heavy slab of stone.

Marthe and Agathe were too absorbed in admiring the first flowers of the budding spring to pay any heed to the brooding Laurentz, who let his thoughts drift mournfully from what lay behind him to what awaited him on the coming day: Simon van Leyden's congregation, whose shepherd he had been.

No, he decided, it would not be in keeping with Simon's spirit to make light of himself and sink into gloom. Laurentz drew himself up and thought of Simon's certainty that God loves mankind.

The Arrival



At the harbour

Laurentz looked out of the window and watched the market flag being taken down. Now the market was open to middlemen and innkeepers as well.

At the same moment the front door slammed shut with a loud bang, and he heard the hard clatter of heavy wooden clogs on the stone flags of the hallway. An unmistakable sign that Marthe had returned from the market with her purchases.

She always stayed until the very end of the citizens' shopping hours and – though in his view she squandered far too much time gossiping – she was an important source of the latest rumours going round the town.

The loud, unmissable clatter of her clogs and her shuffling steps made him close his eyes. He had been enduring it for five years now: he would never break her of the habit. Even though the town council had striven for two hundred years to prevent the fouling of the waterways, enforcing with ever harsher penalties that refuse and dung were no longer tipped into the Elbe and the canals – not even he, a councillor, could break his house-keeper of the habit of carrying the filth of the streets into the house. Were she not so fine a cook, he would long since have sent her back to Bardowick. Today of all days he restrained himself from greeting her with disapproval. Marthe was to stay in good spirits and prepare the finest meal for Simon's arrival.

Sighing softly, Laurentz bent once more over the freight papers. 'Anno Domini 1591. Right honourable sirs. Herewith we send, in the name and safekeeping of God, well-conditioned, ten colli of the finest councillors' ale ...'

As he began to check the last of the bills of lading for the casks bound for Norway, another bang of the front door made him prick up his ears: a brief scraping on the iron boot-scraper – then silence.

Laurentz looked expectantly towards the door: it could only be his eldest grandson. He had been sent out to keep watch at the High Bridge and to bring word that their ship from Norway had dropped anchor and that they must set off. Simon would be aboard that ship.

The door to his study was flung open with a rush. Young Albrecht came tumbling into the room, panting. He brushed one of his blond strands of hair from his face and blurted out breathlessly: 'Grandfather, make haste. The MARGARETA is lying in the roadstead! The dinghy has already been lowered!'

Hastily Laurentz threw the quill down onto the paper, heedless of the ink now spattering the neatly written list. In his excitement he clapped his hat on his head, snatched his cloak from the chest behind the desk, threw it over his shoulders and took his grandson by the hand. 'Then let us make haste. Tell Marthe that we have gone down to the harbour, and your mother that Simon van Leyden will soon be here!'

While Albrecht disappeared hurriedly into the back of the house to carry out his errands, Laurentz was already out of the front door. His grandson's young legs would surely catch him up soon enough. In his excitement, all that mattered to him was that Simon had arrived.

Albrecht would convey it rightly enough to his mother Agathe and the others – that his father Harald would soon be home again: he was the captain of the Moellendorff ship from Norway. To no one but his own son would the merchant have entrusted so precious a cargo: the life of his friend and milk-brother Simon.

Laurentz paid no heed to the curious glances of the farmers at their market stalls as he made his way across the marketplace before St Nicholas', nudging aside a drowsy farmhand here and there to get on faster. When the authorities were abroad, no one was foolish enough to stand in their way. And when a Hamburg councillor hurried across the square with his cloak flying, it must be something of great importance. People would ask around to see whether one of the greengrocers at the other stalls might learn what had made one of the high gentlemen forget his dignity.

Not one of the farmers tried to draw the councillor's attention by shouting, to gain the honour of having him give his wares more

notice than the other stalls. Herr Laurentz Moellendorff was known to grow very angry if one troubled him unduly.

After young Albrecht had caught up with his grandfather – like a slender, swift dinghy in the wake of a great, slower ship – it had become clear to the farmers at the market that the young man had been the bearer of some message that had prompted old Moellendorff to storm out of his house. So at least it was nothing political – otherwise a council servant or a town bailiff would have been the messenger. And besides, the two of them had hurried off towards the harbour, which spoke for a Moellendorff ship having come in. But it must have carried some special cargo, if a merchant was in such haste. They would surely learn of it yet. If not today, then in the days to come.

By now Laurentz was hard put to keep up with his grandson's quick pace. 'Did you notice anything unusual about the ship?'

'No, Grandfather. No visible damage to the hull or the rigging. It seems to have been a good voyage.'

Laurentz was relieved. Only two days before, rumours had spread through the town that English privateers were cruising in the mouth of the Elbe and would seize and plunder Hanseatic ships. Ever since the English fleet under Francis Drake had defeated the Spanish ARMADA three years earlier, these English raiders had grown visibly bolder and would, with the silent connivance of their Queen Elizabeth, most likely pick a quarrel next with the Hanse. There had already been costly sea-fights.

The council's enquiries had not yet uncovered the source of these rumours. That something was brewing against the Hanse in England, however, was well known. Should there be any truth in the rumours, it would be looked into later. For now Laurentz was simply glad that his ship had reached Hamburg unharmed.

Breathing deeply, he stood at the quay wall by the Old Crane and gazed out over the canal.

'The MARGARETA is lying by the quays, right beside the MARIT,' Albrecht reported.

Laurentz nodded silently. The MARIT, on which Albrecht had arrived from London a week before. Like all the Moellendorff ships, the MARGARETA too bore a woman's name beginning with an 'M': MALVINE, MARIT and MEYKEN were her sister ships. The MARGARETA was the vessel for the trade route to Bergen, the Hanse's base in Norway. Was that why Simon had gone to Bergen? Laurentz had not pressed him about his reasons at the time. He would make up for it.

Now he held a hand shielding over his eyes. The low midday sun dazzled him, and he could not make out exactly who was aboard the MARGARETA's dinghy as it gradually drew nearer.

Three men were seated in the stern of the boat. One was the captain, his son Harald. He had always been recognisable from a distance by his unusual green tricorne hat. Beside him stood the ship's stout paymaster, who was surely carrying the trade letters. Behind the two of them – he could not yet make him out clearly, for the little dinghy was rocking on the Nikolai canal in a fresh breeze under the vigorous strokes of the four sailors' oars – that had to be Simon.

His close-cropped, blond hair seemed to have grown lighter. He was still hidden by the two men standing before him. Only when the stern of the dinghy rose higher could Laurentz make out the pale blond hair against the cloudy March sky. Laurentz did not care whether people were watching him. With both arms he waved towards the little boat. Now the third man too rose to his feet, and the way he stood there – upright, in a straight bearing that seemed in no way presumptuous and yet signalled that nothing could throw him – that was how only one single man could stand: Simon.

Laurentz had to catch his breath and embraced his bewildered grandson stormily; the boy had never before witnessed such

outbursts of feeling from his grandfather. All that was wanting was for the council and merchant lord to have snatched the venerable velvet hat from his head and waved it about.

Moments later the boat squeezed itself between a lighter and a barge laden with salt from Lüneburg. The timber of the hull scraped, grinding, against the quay wall beside the stone steps.

Captain and paymaster sprang across onto firm land, came up the steps and shook Laurentz warmly by the hand. He, however, took scarcely any notice; his gaze stayed fixed on the boat. He heeded neither that the captain joyfully clasped his son Albrecht in his arms, after six years apart, nor did it matter to him now that the stout paymaster had plainly brought very good news and was eager to report it.

With quick steps Laurentz went down the stone stairs and reached out a hand to Simon, to ease his climb out of the swaying boat. Then both stood on firm ground.

Nine years they had not seen one another, and now, as they stood face to face again at last – full of joy, warmth and curiosity – their feelings were so strong that they could not bring out a single word and only looked at each other.

The first ship of the spring, which after the winter break carried fresh ale to the thirsting throats of Norway, was to take Simon back with it to Hamburg on its return voyage. He wished to spend this summer in his hometown. Now it was mid-March, and he had arrived.

A soft 'Brother! Welcome!' broke the spell, and at last they could fall into each other's arms, clap one another vigorously on the shoulders and hold each other as tightly as they were able.

The three men on the quay wall had watched the two older men in silence. It was all too plain to them that for the moment they were superfluous here. The captain's 'Father, we'll go on ahead!' was acknowledged by Laurentz only with a brief, dismissive wave of the hand. The captain turned wryly to his son and the

astonished paymaster: 'Let us leave the two friends alone now; the rest of the world holds no interest for them at present in any case. Come, Albrecht, you must tell me a great deal. How was it in England? How goes your apprenticeship?'

Arm in arm, father and son crossed the harbour square. The stout paymaster trotted along beside them, disappointed. He was mightily proud of the fine figures he had brought – why else would he have taken the very first boat? With a shrug he slapped his soft cap back onto his head, the one he had already removed to greet his master.

Laurentz and Simon held each other firmly by the shoulders and studied one another. To an onlooker it was not apparent what these two men, who embraced so warmly, had in common. In outward appearance they could hardly have been more different: the tall councillor, whose dress and stature proclaimed wealth, and the gaunt monk, half a head shorter, but standing so erect that, for all his plain clothing, he seemed of equal standing.

Beneath his hands Laurentz felt the coarse wool of Simon's mantle. He took his hands from Simon's shoulders and prodded him on the chest with his forefinger. 'Are you no longer a bishop?'

'Because I wear no bishop's cross?'

'Yes! No cross and no attire befitting the dignity of your high office! Only this plain, grey, woollen monk's mantle!' Almost reproachfully Laurentz plucked at the grey wool.

Simon shook his head almost imperceptibly. 'A true Christian bears the cross in his heart and does not flaunt it on his chest like a mercenary parading a military decoration. And where I come from, there they know me as a bishop of the Word and a servant of my Lord – not as the lord of my servants.'

Laughing aloud, Laurentz pressed Simon's shoulders. 'Still the silver-tongued preacher? You have not changed!'

'Is it not the privilege of youth to change, and our task to preserve what is good? You ought really to know that ...'

'Yes, yes!' Laurentz grumbled with a growl. 'I remember it still. You said it to me often enough. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God!' He snorted: 'Your mother should have named you John!'

A hidden smile flickered at the corners of Simon's mouth. At once they were both caught up again in their old disputations over the Bible and the Gospel of John. Had he not, nine years before, taken his leave of Laurentz with the very same reference to the words of John, when Laurentz kept wanting to know why he of all people should become a Lutheran bishop and not remain a pastor in Aarhus? He had answered then only: to preach the Word of God.

His smile broadened. 'Well, I am very content with the name my mother gave me. For the Lord said to Simon Peter: Feed my sheep, and so I have become a shepherd – with a shepherd's crook.'

'You don't mean your bishop's crosier by that?'

'Indeed, I do mean it, even if it was not carved from wood. But, dear friend, now I am curious about the town in which we grew up. From the ship I saw already that the Church of St Nicholas is getting a new spire?'

Simon did not have to ask the proud Hamburg Hanseat twice. Laurentz, who always found theological discussions heavy going, gladly took up the ball that Simon had tossed him.

'Yes! The spire of St Nicholas' is being fashioned after the model of the magnificent Oude Kerk in Amsterdam. Like the new exchange building, it too is being built by a Dutchman. Come, I'll show you the exchange. It was finished seven years ago already.' And with that he drew Simon up the steps to the quay wall.

'Have a care!' cried a voice from the harbour basin, as they emerged unexpectedly onto the quay wall and, above them, the mighty timber crane was just swinging out with a load of ale casks to hoist them onto the lighter that bobbed, made fast, below the quay wall. Simon had stopped abruptly. Not to dodge the crane,

which was near but posed no danger to them: he had not expected so many people.

Not only the five horse-drawn wagons of ale casks standing beside the crane, but also densely packed, shouting traders, market women crying their wares, farmers pushing their vegetables over the cobblestones on flat, rumbling carts – several town bailiffs in colourful uniform stood about and observed the scene. It was a din and a throng of people in costumes he had never seen before; he could scarcely believe all that he saw and heard. This was not the Hamburg he had left behind.

Unsettled, he closed his eyes, as though everything would be again as he had known it of old once he opened them. Laurentz had perforce stopped too, so as not to knock the bishop over, and watched with amusement as Simon grimaced, screwed up his eyes and then closed them.

'You may as well open your eyes again, little milk-brother!' He guessed what was stirring in Simon. 'Yes, Hamburg has grown! I can tell you exactly: the town now has thirty thousand inhabitants!'

Simon could not believe his ears. 'Thirty thousand?'

Laurentz had his fun as he studied his friend's astonished, almost horrified face. Then he grew serious again: 'Compared with the three thousand inhabitants of Saxon Dresden that is a great many, tenfold, but next to London with its one hundred and eighty thousand souls it is little. Albrecht told me yesterday. They are the very latest figures.'

'Little? You call thirty thousand little?'

'Why, of course, when you consider that it is barely a tenth of the number who live in Paris ...'

'Three hundred thousand people now live in Paris? Laurentius, you are trying to pull the wool over my eyes! Not three hundred thousand!'

'By God Almighty, so it has been reported to me! Ah, what am I talking for! I can show you the letter that speaks of it. Then you'll have it in black and white!' – thus spoke the honest merchant's soul out of Laurentz's words.

Simon shook his head. 'My God, how these cities have grown in but a few years!' Then he wrinkled his nose. 'If it already reeks so to high heaven here, what must it be like in Paris?'

'In Paris? They say you can smell where the city lies from thirty miles off. Whoever cannot read the milestones can still find his way easily enough: just follow your nose! We in Hamburg, mind you, take every pain to master the stench. Come, I'll show you our fine new exchange.'

With that he drew Simon on, who shook off his stupor and yet could scarcely turn his gaze from the various colourful peasant costumes of the Hamburg hinterland, the market women – now slender, now buxom – and the Dutch dress that came into his view.

'Hamburg is a cosmopolitan town, and we have taken in not only Portuguese and the British Merchant Adventurers, but also many Dutchmen who fled here from the Spaniards after the fall of Antwerp. They have shown themselves suitably grateful to the town. There, for instance!'

Laurentz had stopped and pointed, with a sweeping motion of his arm, at a strange building at the edge of the harbour square: 'The gift of the Antwerp cloth-cutters to the town of Hamburg. In thanks that we gave them refuge and freedom of trade.'

Simon stopped and again could scarcely trust his eyes. He stared fixedly at this building of the Dutch cloth-cutters. 'What is that? A giant chest of drawers made of beams and stones?'

Taken aback, Laurentz let his proudly outstretched arm sink and scratched the back of his head thoughtfully. 'Others have said as much.' He was visibly determined not to let it dampen his spirits. 'Be that as it may, it is a magnificent building, our new exchange.'

Thoughtfully Simon chewed his lips. 'The centre of trade. Nine years ago I still saw it as they were beginning to build it, without all these splendid ornaments.'

Laurentz nodded proudly. 'Do you see the stone lions on the exchange enclosure with the coats of arms? The arms of the Bergen, Skåne, England and Flanders traders, the shields of the Hanseatic offices in London and Bruges, those of the brewing trade, of the shipmasters, and crowning it all the arms of Amsterdam and Hamburg!'

Simon seemed not in the least impressed. 'Hamburg has plainly become a wealthy town.'

Laurentz raised both hands soothingly. 'One cannot quite say that. The town has taken in many a poor wretch, and only a few years ago we built almshouses for the poor in the Spitaler Strasse. The Dutch have had to set up a poor-fund for their own countrymen, since the Hamburg poor-box is barely full enough for our own poor. And the town's revenues do not suffice to begin the sorely needed building of the new fortifications. Little Dresden recognised the signs of the times long ago, and its mighty new fortress works are already finished.'

A steep furrow had formed between the councillor's eyebrows. 'It seems it comes easier to a prince to gather in the necessary taxes than to our citizenry – who have everything, but will give up nothing for it. Hamburg is deep in debt and yet bursting at the seams.'

With a mocking expression Simon had listened to Laurentz's defensive words. 'And some merchant lords are perhaps bursting at their seams as well?'

Laurentz examined his belly critically and concluded that he could not be the one meant. 'Well now, the staple right, sovereignty over the Elbe and the trade monopoly on ale and grain do leave some money in the town. As merchants we get along quite well.'

Simon felt the cloth of Laurentz's cloak testing between forefinger and thumb and pronounced: 'Aye, indeed, you are well cloaked.'

'The Dutch clothiers weave it – in keeping with our dress code – only for the council families. The finest quality. We ourselves fare well; it is only the tax revenues that fall short. We must spend three times as much as we take in. And these treasury burghers, who have kept the town's books for three decades now, sit upon the council like a louse in the fur and plague us with their long, pernicky lists of expenditure and income.' He snorted. 'True bean-counters, forever meddling in our decisions, as though politics were a grocer's shop!'

Once again, the beginnings of a mocking smile showed at the corners of Simon's mouth. 'Perhaps you would have done better to choose the Reformed church rather than the Lutherans!'

Startled, Laurentz looked about him, to see whether anyone else might have caught what Simon had just said. But the noise of the market lay over them like a protecting bell, and he grew calm again when he spied no one in their immediate vicinity.

'Are you possessed by the devil?'

'No, I am a man of God. And of all the branches that blossom to the glory of God, the Calvinist branch would surely be the most convenient for you: "God gives it to His own." And if in this world you are blessed with wealth, then perhaps the blessing of God rests not upon the town – but assuredly upon the merchants!'

Laurentz was not sure whether Simon meant to mock him or whether he was in earnest. He drew a deep breath and whispered: 'Simon, keep such words to yourself, I beg you. Do not even think them. You sin against the North-Elbian Lutherans, for whom the Reformed are even worse heretics than the Roman papists. We came to know these principles when we had to expel the British Merchant Adventurers – Anglicans though they were – officially from Hamburg, not only under pressure from the Hanse, which is

against free intermediary trade, but also at the instigation of the Lutheran senior elders: they will not tolerate any Reformed in this town.'

'But you said just now that you had taken them in?'

'Yes and no.' Laurentz turned away. How was he to explain the Hamburg gospel of trade to a Norwegian bishop?

'Alongside Luther's precepts – that you should give to the Lord what is the Lord's, and to the authorities what is theirs – we practise a third precept as well: preserve for trade what profits trade. And so the English merchants have officially been expelled to Stade – yet our town remains their centre of trade and will remain so.'

Simon rubbed his hands. He mocked at the top of his voice: 'How fortunate that Stade lies but a few miles from Hamburg. But I said it already: you are Calvinist Lutherans!'

'Please, Simon, speak more softly! And that is not quite how it is, either. We do it not because we are no Lutherans, but because it cost us a deal of money to bring the Merchant Adventurers to Hamburg. Other Hanseatic towns wanted to take them in too. We set up dye-works and warehouses for the English at the town's expense, so that they would come here. Do you think we simply give that up again, only because the church elders are as stubborn as Lutheran planks?'

Simon saw no reason to speak more softly. In the land from which he came, they still had trouble enough anchoring Christianity to be drawn into such squabbles among brethren. Only when there was something to be shared out did the wrangling of the self-righteous among kinsmen evidently begin. That was one of the reasons why, as a Protestant bishop, he had gladly gone to Norway. He had grown weary of it, and angry at the unbelief within belief. 'So you act on the precept: let not your right hand know what your left is doing! But never fear, I'll leave off now. Here I am a guest, and so I have no wish to meddle in what is none of my concern.

You must know for yourselves how to steer your ships against the wind of Lutheran orthodoxy.'

In the end Simon had grown quieter than he had actually meant to. Why should he land Laurentz in difficulties?

'Thank you!' Laurentz breathed a sigh of relief. He understood Simon well enough, but Simon plainly did not understand him. How was he to bring home to him that it was not only the senior elders who were obstinate, but that the craftsmen's guilds too clung to their outmoded privileges, and that foreign craftsmen and religious minorities increasingly settled outside the town, in Holstein's Altona and in Stade, which belonged to Denmark? The Danish king, self-appointed protector of Hamburg, had granted Stade freedom from the guilds and religious tolerance, and in Altona it was already lived much the same way. As the newcomers drifted off there, the town lost industry and capital as well. He snorted and cast about for some bridge by which to make himself understood to his old friend.

'Do you still remember the juggling balls you gave me in the year 1554, and what you said to me then?' Playfully he tossed imaginary balls into the air.

Simon's anger was as if wiped away. 'The five juggling balls! Do you still have them?'

'Yes, I have always kept them.'

'Were the two of you jugglers once?'

Simon and Laurentz gave a start, as though caught in some misdeed. Young Albrecht was suddenly standing beside them. He had plainly overheard at least the last few sentences.

Laurentz had to hold himself hard in check, in his surprise, so as not to burst out angrily. 'Where have you sprung from?'

'From home. And when you stand so close to the quay wall, one can only come from this side.'

'You might at least have cleared your throat, so that we could hear you coming.'

'The way the two of you were so deep in conversation, you'd not have heard even the trumpets of the Last Judgement!'

Out of the corner of his eye Laurentz noticed how Simon followed their exchange with amusement. 'May I present my grandson Albrecht to you!'

Simon had to suppress a smile, so gruffly had Laurentz got this introduction over with. He held out his hand in friendly greeting to the young man.

'This is Simon van Leyden, the Protestant bishop of Bergen,' Laurentz announced.

Simon had kept hold of the young man's hand as the boy regarded him with interest. 'I thought as much that you must be Albrecht.'

'How so?'

Warmly Simon laid his other hand upon Albrecht's as well. 'Because no one else your age would dare to speak in so disrespectful a tone to a Hamburg councillor.'

Albrecht was not so easily put out of countenance. 'He is my grandfather. He's only a councillor in the town hall!'

His attention turned to Simon's firm grip, and he asked, abashed: 'Must one kiss your hand now, Bishop?'

Simon did not wish to embarrass the boy. Gently he drew his hand back. 'No, God forbid. We are not in my church here, and in any case we of the Protestant faith care little for this Catholic kissing. Here I am only the oldest friend and milk-brother of your grandfather.'

Laurentz felt himself left out, and turned to his grandson: 'And why have you turned up here so suddenly?'

'Mother sends for you. Marthe is bound to be clattering loudly with her pots in the kitchen, and if you still want to go to the council bathhouse to refresh yourselves – especially Simon, after the long journey – then you had better look sharp; you know Marthe well enough, after all.'

'Marthe? The council bathhouse?' Simon looked at Laurentz questioningly.

'I'll explain it to you presently, and you ...' – he turned again to Albrecht – 'tell your mother that we are on our way and will be home in good time for the meal.'

'And the business with the juggling balls ...?'

'We'll explain that to you after the meal. Now go.'

Obediently Albrecht nodded and vanished again as swiftly as he had come.

'He's turned out well, your grandson,' Simon said, enjoying himself. 'And so there is not only a Frau Marthe who rules the roost in your kitchen, but also a special council bathhouse?'

'It is the way of the times. Come, I'll explain it to you while we bathe,' and with that Laurentz drew his friend away from the harbour.

Contentedly Simon closed his eyes and stretched his lean limbs in the hot bathwater. Now, as the warmth pervaded his body, he felt the cold March winds of the voyage more keenly in his bones than during the past days at sea. The medallion he wore about his neck on a fine silver chain still lay as a cool point on his bare skin. Laurentz caught sight of the medallion for the first time and had never seen it's like before. He would ask Simon later what lay behind it. It seemed to be the likeness of a woman's head.

'Would one of the gentlemen cares for a cleansing of the blood as well?'

The voice made Simon open his eyes again: above the head of Laurentz, who sat facing him in the bathing tub, a young woman was bending down towards them and offering him a frank view of her bosom.

Warding her off, Simon raised his hands: 'No thank you, no bloodletting!'

Laurentz too shook his head. 'Thank you, not today, Marie.' Whereupon the young woman straightened up again and moved on.

'Even if one might break into a sweat at her delightful sight, it surprises me that you hold to this bloodletting. There is something far more agreeable in the north for cleansing the body from within: sweat-houses.' Simon smiled. 'Here on earth already they give a man a foretaste of what it must look like in hell! A cramped, dark room in which many naked people sit about, sweating. The skin of their glistening bodies flickers in the bright red of the glowing fire, and they beat their skin with birch twigs until it tightens, and you think you can bear it no longer. Yet when, all heated, you then leap into the cold water, you feel as though newborn.'

'But that sounds most heathen!'

'Is everything that does a man good a godforsaken heathen custom?'

Plainly he had no trouble cursing to high heaven.

Thoughtfully Simon looked after the bath-woman and seemed to be brooding over something. 'Laurentz, were there not once separate bathhouses for the clergy in this town ...?'

Laurentz's belly set the water in the tub gurgling. 'They still exist! But tell me, which is more agreeable to you – to sit here with me in a tub full of hot water, or in the ice-cold water of the clergy's bathhouse, where young lads scrub your back roughly? As a missionary priest, I thought to myself, you are not subject to the local rules.'

Before the surprised Simon could answer, he heard a bell-bright voice behind him: 'A cleansing of the blood for you too, perhaps?'

'Thank you, Antje!' Laurentz declined.

Simon felt the breath of a movement of the hand over the large birthmark on his right shoulder blade.

Antje, as Laurentz had called her, walked on through the double row of bathing tubs, paused, looked about her as though searching

for something, and yet Simon had the unaccountable feeling that she was scrutinising him in particular most closely. To the men in the other tubs, she gave not a glance. In one hand the dish of leeches, she made as if she had merely stopped to tuck the wet hem of her dirty apron under her leather belt, while she looked him over. The warm, moist air of the bathhouse had pressed the sweat-soaked blouse against her body; the wet cloth stretched over her heavy breasts and moulded their tips so plainly and provocatively that she might as well have been naked.

Simon saw only the look on her face and wondered why this woman took so keen an interest in him. He pushed aside a stirring, distant thought and looked at Laurentz again. 'You were going to tell me who Marthe is, and why the council has its own bathhouse, in which even missionary priests may bathe.'

Laurentz had just set the beer tankard down on the middle board of the bathing tub and wiped the foam from his upper lip.

He cleared his throat. 'Even though the council has threatened the tenants of the bathhouses with severe penalties should they continue to allow men and women to bathe together in one tub, we cannot prevent it. The town bailiffs are not very vigorous in enforcing this order, however, and no complaints come from the citizens, should such be the case.'

'And so, the councillors no longer wished to make common cause with the citizens in these unlawful goings-on: you have set yourselves apart!' Laughing, Simon leaned back and struck his head against the edge of the wooden tub.

Laurentz had noticed nothing of it; he stared thoughtfully at the surface of the bathwater. 'Simon! Pray do not laugh so. There is a grain of truth in what you say, but the real reason is another. Some of the merchant class have already set up a private bathhouse of their own at home, where they had the room for it, for a disease has been rife in the town for some years now for which there is no explanation. The French call it the Spanish disease, we here call it

the French, and in Russian Novgorod, so I have heard, it is said to be called the German disease.'

Simon had grown serious again and rubbed the back of his head. He had heard nothing of this. 'And what has this disease to do with the bathhouses?'

'If people only bathed there, it would all be no trouble. An Italian physician described this disease a few years ago and, in doing so, studied its ways of spreading. It is evidently passed on through the bodily union of man and woman. A new scourge of God, as some say, to punish the lewd.'

'No, not again the Old Testament of the papists' punishing God! God is love!' Angrily Simon had struck the mirror-surface of the water, which at once splashed away in all directions. 'And so this disease can only be a work of men or of the devil – which is sometimes one and the same.'

Laurentz wiped the drops of splashed water from his face and shrugged his shoulders. 'Yes, it is truly devilish. It seems the Spaniards brought it back with them from the West Indies. But no one knows how this disease arose or what can be done against it. It was said that a particular recipe would help: two ounces of white honey mixed with two ounces of dried and pounded red roses and half an ounce of red precipitate of quicksilver. Among those who survived this medicine, it availed as little as the attempts to burn the disease out. We are powerless.'

'It suits the old Church very well: for centuries it fought against Lucifer, who was to bring man the sinful light of knowledge. And now, as we come to know, discover new worlds and new learning, the bony men of the old Church refuse to acknowledge the dark dominion of Diabolos, and ascribe evil, too, to God.'

Angrily Simon had struck the bathwater again, to underscore his words.

'Hold there!' Laurentz had held his hands projectingly over the beer tankard. 'The councillors' ale is thicker than the export ale, and it would be a pity if you were to water it down for me!'

'Forgive me, brother.' Laughing, Simon wiped the drops of water from his narrow face. 'I am no longer accustomed, it seems, to hearing such insidious imputations, so that my gall rises and my blood is soured. Perhaps this Antje should give me a bloodletting after all – or give me a draught of the councillors' ale, so that my blood is thinned again.'

With a 'Help yourself!' Laurentz turned the handle of the tankard towards Simon, who took a hearty draught, belched contentedly and set the tankard back. 'Very good! Remind me in the autumn to take a cask of it with me to Norway. But you were going to tell me about Marthe.'

The Past



The landing of King Philip II in Lisbon.
Copper engraving by Joan Schorquens, 1622.

Simon licked his fingers with relish and then, like everyone else, wiped his greasy hands and his mouth on the tablecloth. Marthe had given of her best and had chivvied Clara and Wilfriede, the two kitchen maids, to the highest quality. The members of the Moellendorff household still sat at the great wooden table, chatting with one another, until Laurentz rose from the board and most of them withdrew to their evening's work.

Simon and Albrecht had sat facing each other, in the seats of honour to the right and left of Laurentz. Albrecht had answered Simon's questions, and the bishop now knew that the young gentleman was a freshly graduated Doctor of Laws of King's College in London and that, besides German and Latin – which went without saying – he also spoke fluent English and a little Spanish.

'Tell me, Albrecht,' – and here Simon gave the attentive young man a smiling wink – 'how is it to be explained that a swift brig takes four-and-twenty days from Hamburg through the Channel to, let us say, Lisbon, yet needs only four days for the same distance back?'

Laurentz looked up, surprised, and had almost begun to ponder which way the wind might blow in the Bay of Biscay, when it dawned on him that the question was meant otherwise.

Albrecht closed his eyes to think, then opened one eye and fixed it on Simon. 'That is quite simple to answer: a Protestant simply needs longer to convince a Catholic, whereas the Catholics reach their goal a great deal faster.'

'Cleverly answered, my boy!'

Albrecht smiled proudly, feeling acknowledged and much beholden to the bishop.

'And what was clever about that?' grumbled Laurentz. He had understood neither the sense of the question nor of the answer.

'Will you explain it to Laurentz?'

Albrecht nodded. 'The simple answer would have been that the brig always takes fourteen days, no matter which direction. If she sets sail on the 5th of April, she is there by the 19th of April. But because Pope Gregory struck ten days out of the Catholics' calendar a few years ago, so that the spring equinox should fall on the 21st of March again, it is already the 29th of April in Lisbon instead of the 19th, and by the calendar dates the ship has taken four-and-twenty days. If she leaves Lisbon on the 1st of May, she is back in Hamburg on the 5th of May by our calendar. So she has needed only four days.'

'Have you any more of that in store?' Laurentz snorted. He would have known that too. It was only the way the question was put that had thrown him.

Simon regarded him thoughtfully. 'Why did you not let Albrecht study in Wittenberg, here on the Elbe?'

Laurentz looked at him in astonishment. 'At the Chancery of God, as that university is also called? God forbid. In the very same nest of Lutheran orthodoxy as here? Not on any account. Besides, it is an old family tradition to send the sons abroad to London – just as the two of us were there. It makes the mind more open, or am I mistaken?'

Simon was amused by the eagerness with which Laurentz had answered his question. 'No, you are not mistaken. Not so long ago Melanchthon still complained to his friends that in Wittenberg he had come to the very edge of civilisation, and that if he went a little further east, he would arrive in barbarism.'

When the grandfather and the bishop fell silent, Albrecht could at last put his question: 'How did the two of you come to England in those days?'

Laurentz sent Marthe to fetch wine and began: 'Yes, that was quite a tale. It was after St Peter's Day in the year 1535, when the winter break in shipping had ended and my father – your great-grandfather – was sending out again his ships, which had lain fast

in the harbour over the winter. At the end of February, after the feast of the Chair of St Peter, the boatswains and helmsmen had gathered again in Hamburg. The deckhands were already under contract, and the two of us waited impatiently to see which ship would take us along.

'The clouds of the coming war of the German nations were already showing on the horizon. The Imperial Chamber Court had condemned Hamburg to give back to the Catholic cathedral chapter its church and its confiscated goods, which the council had no intention whatever of doing. On the contrary. The council was weighing the question of on what terms the town should join the Schmalkaldic League of the Protestant princes and cities, in order – be it well understood – to preserve its own rights. Emperor Charles was unyielding in these matters. Every legal means and political possibility was exhausted. So, Hamburg paid one hundred and ten thousand pounds of the finest silver into the war-chest of the Schmalkaldic League, and the war of reckoning was only a matter of time. As a precaution my father wished to bring us to safety away from Hamburg two years before the usual time – we were both only ten years old – to his brother, then the head of the Hanseatic office in London: to the Hanse count, as we called him.

'At last, in summer, our waiting came to an end, and the ship to England took the two of us aboard as passengers. Simon and I had straightaway stationed ourselves beside the helmsman. From his place we had the best view of the river and over the ship. The helmsman Hinnerk had studied the bellying, wind-swollen sails and laughed at us: "Well now, young masters, you bring us luck, it seems! It is rare that at this time of year we have on the Elbe so brisk a wind out of the south-east. That will carry us well forward today!"

'He held the great wheel firmly gripped in both hands and had planted his feet wide apart, the better to brace his legs and

withstand the pressure of the current against the rudder. Until then our outings on the Elbe had gone only a few miles upstream, as far as Zollenspieker, when we accompanied my father, who met there at the Elbe ferry with Lüneburg councillors for negotiations. Now a great voyage was to carry us to London.

'Simon had buried himself in a colourful drawing while I looked about the ship. My gaze wandered over the Hamburg flag in the proud red and white of the Hanse and, beneath it, the office flag with our family arms on the mainmast, until my eyes came to rest high up on the mizzenmast.

""Why do we have three pennants on the mizzen?"

'Without so much as glancing up, the helmsman asked me: "What colours have those three strips of cloth up there, then?"

'I screwed up my eyes and tried to make out the colours faded by wind and rain.

""A green one, a yellow-and-white one and a red one!"

""Right!"

""And what are the colours meant to signify?"

""Mmh." The helmsman had pursed his lips, as though he did not wish to come out with it.

""Aah, I know it already! They are the colours of hope, of confidence and of blood! The colours of the Trinity!"

""Yes, one might put it so. That is a fine explanation."

'Yet his undertone told me that my supposition was not right.

""And what do the colours truly signify?"

'I studied the long pennants, which the wind set fluttering towards the bow, as though they meant to show us our goal, until the helmsman grumbled: "The thing about the Trinity is well enough. Only ..."

""But that is what I said!"

""Yes, well, but it is a different one from the one you meant."

'What another Trinity could there be than the one I knew? As I only looked at him questioningly, he went on deliberately: "The

green one I got in Palermo from a Muslim Saracen, the yellow-and-white one in Lisbon from a Catholic Portuguese, and the red one from the Lutheran preacher of the parish of Wyk on Föhr, where I am at home. Today the three of them would hardly agree on what to make of one another's faith – but my three strips of cloth have always been of one mind and always flutter together in the same direction."

'Now he too looked up at the pennants, as though he wished to satisfy himself that it was truly so and laughed: "My mother always used to say, sewn twice holds better, and so I thought to myself, sewn three times holds better still."

'I had the uneasy feeling that he had set me a riddle, even though it was plain that the three pennants fluttered in one direction. But before I could ask the helmsman whether there was a wind that would set them blowing in different directions, Simon looked up from the map.

"How long will it be before we reach the mouth of the Lühe?"

"Soon enough, I should think."

'Astonished, I looked at Simon. "What is the Lühe?"

"A river that flows into the Elbe from the south."

"How do you know that?"

'He held out to me the stiff paper he had been studying, spread out upon his knees, and pointed with a finger at a line that had been drawn in blue ink upon the parchment.

"That is supposed to be a river?"

"Yes, so it is written there." And with that he pointed to the lower edge of the parchment.

"That does not make it a river, brother-heart, only because it is written there. Where, then, is the water?"

'Now the helmsman broke into our budding quarrel. Loudly he drowned out our shrill twittering with his rough voice: "The young masters are both right."

'Incredulous, we fell silent. That could not be and must not be! Had we let anything of the kind be heard in the school of the parish of St Nicholas, there would have been a beating, to bear witness plainly that there was but a single right and but one all-embracing truth. A deep laugh shook the helmsman as he marked our eyes flung wide in wonder. "Over there, that is the little river Lühe, look yonder!" We both craned our necks to peer over the railing. "And there, on the map, that is the river too."

"But how ...?"

"It is a kind of river, a paper river, a shrunken likeness of the real one."

"But how am I to know that this blue line truly agrees with the real river? Perhaps the man who drew the parchment made a mistake?"

"Thoughtfully the helmsman gazed into the swollen sails. "That could be, of course. But I would notice it, if it were not right, and besides, he has written his name on it. I know that the man draws reliably and that I can depend on it."

"And if you notice that it is not right?"

"Why, young master!" Now the helmsman did after all let go of the wheel with one hand and scratched the bone of his skull.

"Then I mark it well and ask someone who has writing gear to change the map so that it is right."

"But then all the other maps stay wrong!" That would not go into my head.

"Well, Hinnerk, still on the right course?" Without our having noticed it, my uncle, the captain, had come onto the bridge and interrupted me.

"Aye, aye, Captain! The Hamburg buoy off the Twielenfleth sand can already be seen ahead to port!"

"Very well. And the two lads, they are not troubling you?"

"No, Captain. Apart from the fact that young Master Laurentz is asking me holes in the belly, we are making good way."

"To the helmsman's surprise, I was beside him in two steps and had pushed his woollen coat up over his broad leather belt. I turned pale. He truly did have holes in his belly.

"Forgive me, I did not know ..."

'My stammering died away in loud laughter. Questioningly I looked up. What had I said that was so funny?

"Well, my best thanks for the apology, but there was no need of it. The holes the young master saw, those I have had in my belly for a good twenty years now; they do not come from your questions."

"That is unkind!"

'Furious, I stamped on the ship's planks. It was not for the others to laugh at me. Even if I was sometimes slow of understanding – it was not for them to laugh at me, the hereditary son of a merchant lord.

"Ooh, it was not so bad as all that. In those days I had signed on with the Dutch in Amsterdam aboard a whaler. When one of the Basque seamen insulted the Frisians, we had to settle the matter with our knives. Hence the holes in my belly. But they have all healed well!" And again, a deep laugh shook his sturdy frame.

"Hinnerk, do not spin the yarn too thick. Else the two of them will believe you yet!" With that my uncle vanished from the bridge and left the three of us alone again.

'Hinnerk regarded the two of us. "Your brother bears hardly any likeness to you, master."

"Nor can he. His father is not my father, and my mother is not his mother."

'Hinnerk knitted his brows – let anyone make sense of that! "How can he be your brother, then?"

'I had my fun confounding the guileless Hinnerk and explained to him: "My father is indeed his father as well, and his mother is indeed my mother as well!"

"The helmsman studied me searchingly and let it rest at that: "Aha! Indeed!"

Laurentz had got a dry throat from telling and drank a draught of the Spanish red wine that shimmered dark in the goblet.

Albrecht, who sat beside the fire on the hearth, looked at his grandfather. 'How long were you on the way to London?'

'In those days, fifty years ago, my father still had the smaller caravels; there was no comparison with today's great sailing ships. We needed some ten to fourteen days. According as the wind was kindly disposed to us in the Channel.'

'Fourteen days! By God, that was slow. We sailed the distance in five days now!'

Laurentz smiled. Of course he knew how many days his ships needed today. The times were changing: the ships grew larger and faster, the cargoes more costly and with them the risk greater. The profits, too, however.

Simon, who had listened in silence until now, took up the thread: 'And yet the journey might well have lasted longer still, had we known what awaited us in London. The way up the Thames seemed as though it would never end. It was perhaps our impatience too, to catch sight at last of the city of which so much had already been told us. At three bells of the second watch the lookout cried: "London in sight!" We ran to the railing on the main deck, to be the first to see the colourful throng in the streets.

'The houses we did see, but we saw no people in the streets. On the ship, suddenly, not a sound was to be heard. The deckhands paused in their work and looked, as we did, over the railing. Only the yards creaked in the wind. This groaning stillness had struck everyone and had spread to the whole crew. Laurentz and I had run onto the helmsman's bridge again and stared at the banks. As we slowly passed the town walls, I thought I heard, in the stillness, the sound of a drum, and the drum grew ever louder, so that I could feel it in my body.

"Do you hear it too?" I had placed myself close beside Laurentz. He too seemed to seek my nearness.

"The drum?" He too whispered.

'On the wharves, too, not a living soul was to be seen. Only now did I notice that all day long on the Thames not a single ship had come towards us.

'The sound of the drum seemed to draw nearer. A shudder ran down my spine. Never had I heard a drum beaten in such a way. A single stroke, then stillness, then again, a single stroke, then stillness again. It was not the merry drumming we knew from the town pipers, when they came marching with drums and shawms. It was precisely this absence of other sounds, the silence between the single strokes, that came across to us so full of menace.

'Hinnerk the helmsman, too, seemed ill at ease in his skin. He had screwed up his eyes and studied the bank gliding past: "The Tower of London!" His hand pointed to a white tower that reared up over a line of hills before us. And now we saw the people too, densely packed on the bank. They stood so close upon the street that we could scarcely tell them apart as individuals. And yet we heard no sound but, over and over, those desolate, single strokes of a drum.

"So fate has decided otherwise after all," murmured the helmsman.

'Laurentz and I had taken each other fearfully by the hand and gone to Hinnerk at the wheel, as though the great, strong man could protect us from the menace. Our urgency was all too plain for us to have needed to ask him.

"It will be an execution at the Tower of London. And everything points to it that the high lord Sir Thomas More will today say to the headsman his 'God requite it thee.'"

'The beating of the drum grew louder, and as we came round the bend of the Thames, the Tower lay before us in all its greatness. Densely packed the people stood, and it seemed almost as though

the white rock of the fortress reared up defiantly out of a sea of blossom of colourful garments. The clusters of people stood unmoving; only the arms of the soldiers, in a long row along the Tower, moved with the beater that produced this dreadful hundredfold single drum-note in the stillness.

"Sir Thomas More was the former Lord Chancellor of his Britannic Majesty. Three years ago, he laid down his office, when King Henry renounced Rome and founded his own national church. Since then, these Anglican pettifoggers have tried to fasten a charge of high treason on him. We were all certain that the learned gentleman would contrive to save his life. But now fate has plainly decided otherwise."

'He spat with disgust over the ship's side. "These so-called Anglicans have at bottom remained bigoted, papist Catholics, even though the king is now the head of their church!"

'We started as he suddenly shouted across the deck: "Hannes, damn it! The men are not to stand gawping! Make ready to berth!" and at the same moment the muffled drum-stroke passed into a continuous, deafening drum-roll. With a "Now the turnip falls!" Hinnerk gave the wheel a hearty shove, and the ship turned slowly towards the bank. "Sir Thomas had asked only to be permitted to keep silence."

Now Laurentz took up the thread again: 'I had fainted under the sudden crackle of the drum-strokes and the thousandfold outcry all along the bank at the same moment and came to myself again only as our travelling chests were being carried ashore. With that our ways parted: Simon went to a good private school, I became a pupil at the Prince's School.'

'Were there then no church schools yet in those days that you could have gone to together?'

'No, the reason was that I was to go to the best school. Your great-grandmother was indeed a Baroness von Stocktonwood, and my father had always accepted that we regarded each other as

brothers, but he would not pay the school fees for the costly Prince's School for Simon, the son of my wet-nurse.'

'Is that why you call yourselves milk-brothers?'

Simon, who had studied young Albrecht very closely, now broke in: 'We are not only milk-brothers, but we are also blood-brothers as well. Here ...' – he pushed his left sleeve a hand's breadth up his arm – 'you can still see the scar today.'

Surprised, Albrecht regarded the fine white line of the scar and looked reproachfully at his grandfather: 'You never told me of it!'

Laurentz shook his head deliberately: 'Why should I have told you of it? It was our childish belief that blood meant more than milk.'

Simon had risen and paced about: 'What does a blood-kinship signify, after all? Were the bonds of blood within a family ever a warrant that parents, brothers and sisters lived in peace with one another? On the contrary! Familial bonds of blood are often rather a fetter, a burden, of which those subjected to them seek to rid themselves by the most bloodthirsty of crimes – as Cain slew his own brother Abel, his own blood. So beware whenever anyone uses the word blood and means by it not the humour of the body but an inner belonging. This longing for inner membership of a group of people will, sooner or later, end as it understands itself: founded upon blood – one's own, or that of others.'

With that he took his leave. 'Permit me to withdraw; the journey was wearisome.'

'And you truly mean to sleep in the servants' chamber again? Here in the front house I have ...'

Simon only shook his head in silence, and a melancholy smile passed over his grave face. Even though Laurentz knew that Simon regarded his mother's servant's room as his home – it had, moreover, been kept for him through all the years – he always wished to move him to take a room in the front house of the Moellendorff

family, in which the chambers of the first and the third son had stood empty for years.

'Tell Albrecht rather of your first voyage to Lisbon. He asked me earlier what we did when we had finished our schooling. He does not yet know what he is to do now.' With that he went.

Laurentz looked questioningly at his grandson. 'My first voyage to Lisbon? Very well. I counted nineteen springs, yes, as old as you are today, and my father had taken me along for the first time on a trading voyage into the distance. He was abroad in the town, and I waited for him in the German inn.'

Laurentz sipped at the goblet of red wine and had half closed his eyes, to walk over the bridge of his memories.

'I waited impatiently, when the sound of drum-rolls made me prick up my ears in the inn. I still had the drum-rolls at the Tower of London in my ears, and I hurried out into the lane to see what was afoot there. Were they again the drums of death, as I had heard them at the time with Simon in London? A surging panic tightened my throat: my father had told me that on the day of my birth in Hamburg the pirate Claus Kniephof had been executed on the Grasbrook by the sword of the Hamburg headsman – then too the drums had beaten.

'Was my coming to a place always to be bound up with the death of others? First in Hamburg, then in London, now in Lisbon? Ever and again this sound of the death-drums and the frozen silence of the gapers?

'But from the side-street I heard this time the loud voices of many people. Was the hangman's cart driving the delinquents to the place of execution, and were the people here pouring out their scorn, their derision and their filth over the poor sinners? Was their loud clamour the expression of the fear of one day standing there on the cart themselves? The expression of relief at not having

been caught by the bailiffs thus far at games of chance, theft, or the daily little necessary knaveries of survival?

'I made haste: the drum-rolls grew fainter, and a disquieting stillness spread through the streets, for which I knew no reason. I very nearly stumbled over a row of kneeling people and fell my full length as I turned hurriedly into the main street, surprised to see so many people kneeling in the open road. Only the soft scraping sound of a procession and the suppressed, heavy-breathing panting of the bearers were still to be heard.

'Banners, men in pale-blue mantles with a golden cross on breast and back lined the sun-drenched street in which the rows of the procession slowly advanced. In front a double row of four drummers each, holding their beaters crossed over the leather round of their mercenary drums. Behind them, one row to the right, one row to the left, soldiers in the coat-colours of the royal guard, their lances upright, bare-headed, the iron helmet in the crook of the arm, gazing expressionless straight ahead. Then came the bearers; eight on either side carried the heavy litter on which, decked with flowers, a statue of the Virgin rose above the people. The heavy wooden litter swayed on the shoulders of the groaning men like a ship on a heaving sea. Only Mary stood upright, untouched by the swaying of the people.

'The beauty of her soft face drew me under its spell. With wistful eyes and smiling mouth she gazed upon her child, full of the foreknowledge of the suffering and the glory that were to befall this little mite in his life, when suddenly a fearful blow struck me behind the knees, accompanied by an imperious: "De joelhos!"

'I had not understood the words, but their meaning and the blow had been plain enough: I was already kneeling, like all the others before and beside me. Full of pain, I looked behind me. There stood one of those men with the golden cross on his pale-blue over-garment, a guardian of the faith. Leaning on his heavy cudgel, he regarded me indifferently, as though he wished to make

sure whether the one blow had sufficed to force the ox to its knees. In an angry impulse I made to spring up, but my knees failed me for the pain.

'Why did this bailiff not kneel? Why did he force others to kneel and not do it himself? Have they no humility of their own, then, those who force others to their knees? I tried to prop myself up, to get to my feet, when a hand laid itself upon my right arm: "Seja silencioso!" whispered the person beside me. The hand felt its way gently down and pressed the back of my hand: "Tenha paciência!" the voice grew more insistent.

'The fingers closed about my hand, deepened the firm pressure, and I closed my eyes to master my rage. The strange hand, it held me, gave me the strength to stay within myself, to push aside the senseless thought of tearing my short sword from its sheath. The pressure of the hands pressed together warmed our skin. I felt the living strength and its tenderness: the person beside me must be a woman. Curious, I turned my head to the side to look at her, when the drum-rolls began again: as though at a command, all the people rose.

'Only I still knelt: a felled ox whose aching knees refused their service. I snorted with rage that I must give the impression of being a peculiarly devout man, a deeply moved one, whose rapture kept him longer than all the others in humility with bended knees.'

Laurentz ceased to speak. He looked across at his grandson, who hung upon his lips. Laurentz could not help laughing as he noticed the look of the younger one, who for sheer questions had slid right to the front edge of the hearth-bench.

'Yes, that was my first encounter with the guardians of the faith of the Holy Office. As a Hamburg Protestant I knew well enough the presumptions of the local poor-box administrators in the four parishes of the town, but I had as yet no notion of the merciless regiment this Holy Inquisition maintained in Portugal!'

'And Evora?'

Wearily Laurentz waved him off. 'Tomorrow.'

He drank a hearty draught of his red wine, and Albrecht took himself off, knowing well that he would have pressed his grandfather in vain: when the old man said tomorrow, then he meant tomorrow.

Laurentz was sunk in thought again and did not notice how his grandson quietly rose and left him alone.

In his thoughts he had taken up the thread again, to plait further the band of memories.

How he had turned his head to the side and his eyes upward, and above a gown of blue velvet the dark eyes of a woman had looked down upon him ...

She smiled and seemed at once to study his face and his clothing. The way she held his hand, he might have been a cripple whom some charitable sister had led to the procession.

'Alemã?' The mocking undertone in her melodious voice was not to be missed.

That he understood. Over the inn he had read 'Pousada Alemã', inn of the Germans, and, kneeling before her as he was, he was truly a picture of derision. At least for her and for him. He could not guess that it would later be a delight to him to sit at her feet, and that this kneeling, though not fitting at that moment, was nonetheless wholly consistent. So, he only nodded in answer.

'You, get up!' and her hand, with which she still held him, gave him the strength to raise himself with a groan.

'Alemão estúpido!' she said softly and gently stroked a strand of hair from his brow.

Laurentz laughed even now, in the memory, after nearly fifty years. His Portuguese had not been enough in those days to understand that Magdalena had just called him a 'stupid German' – but what were her words, whatever she may have meant by them,

against the sound of her voice and the way she had said it, against the tender gesture with which she stroked the lock of hair from his face to look him in the eyes?

In hindsight, at the distance of forgiveness, he thanked that unknown, gold-crossed bailiff for the blow that had forced him to his knees and moved Magdalena to support him, so that he might be near her, might touch her – and all had its innocent justification.

'Pousada Alemã?'

He had nodded.

'Far. I near.' She led him into a house that stood but a few steps away.

Simon regarded his milk-brother, who slept in the armchair before the fire. His own attempts to fall asleep had failed him; too much passed through his mind. Silently he stood beside the guttering hearth.

'Old friend! You have changed greatly,' he murmured softly, lost in the contemplation of the master of the house. By that he meant not only that Laurentz had got a belly, as befitted a well-to-do, hereditary burgher. What, after all, was prosperity for, if one did not show it? Even though the Hamburg council families were restrained in the splendour of their dress and took their bearing from the severe style of the black Spanish court costume – in eating and drinking they held nothing of severity or modesty.

'Magdalena!' Laurentz had reared up in his sleep and now flung his eyes open. 'Have you been sitting here long?' he asked Simon, grumbling.

'Only a few minutes, and yet ...' – a fine smile played about the corners of his mouth – 'I have accompanied you through the years of your dreams.'

'Ha?' Still drunk with sleep, Laurentz raised himself in his armchair, rubbed his eyes with the backs of his hands and reached for the goblet of red wine.

'Did you ever see Magdalena again?' asked Simon.

He knew of his friend's great love for this Portuguese woman, whom he would gladly have had at his side as a concubine – but the Hamburg rules of rank permitted no secondary wives. And even where it was silently tolerated, she had to be honourable and might not have been a whore. Even though Magdalena had been far away: the trade connections were also the channels for news of every kind, and the mere rumour would have sufficed to make the arrangement impossible. It did not bear thinking of, had Laurentz insisted on keeping her at his side, and one of the seamen who had disported themselves in a Lisbon brothel had then recognised her again in Hamburg. So Laurentz had had to decide. He decided, though with a heavy heart, for tradition.

Laurentz leaned back again, regarded Simon thoughtfully and grumbled: 'Could you please sit down? When you stand so, I feel like an old man sleeping frail in his armchair.'

Simon sat down on the hearth-bench. They were old men after all, older than most of their contemporaries. Was that his trouble, the truth?

'How did you know that I had dreamed of Magdalena?'

Laurentz had not looked up. Simon could just make out the quiet question.

'Brother, you spoke in your sleep.'

'Then it is well.' Now he looked at Simon: 'I had thought you might read my thoughts, and ...'

'You credit us clergy with a great deal! And would it be so bad? What would you have to fear?'

'God and the world. From without one will think us very mighty, but you can perhaps have no notion how greatly our actual power hangs on the thin threads of a façade we have all built up before one another, and how we must take care to let no one look behind it.'

'God you need not fear. If by "the world" you mean your fellow citizens, that I can well understand: "Homo homini lupus" – man is a wolf to man.'

'Aye. Take a goblet too, and I will tell you of Magdalena: yes, I saw her again.'

While Simon took a goblet from the hearth-shelf and poured himself wine, Laurentz sank into the contemplation of his red wine.

Musing, he looked up again. 'Years later I had followed in my father's footsteps and undertook my inaugural journey to our branches. To Lisbon I had also taken Christian with me, in the year 1563, my firstborn, who was then just eighteen. Of course – will you hold it against me? –' Simon shook his head, '– I sought out the house too in which I had been so happy with Magdalena. On the ground floor a young woman came towards us, perhaps fourteen years old, and I looked at her as at an apparition.

'I murmured: "Ma ...?" She laughed and completed it: "...ria. I am the daughter of the mistress of this house, and I know that I look the very image of her."

'Busily she carried a jug of wine into the guestroom, while my thoughts tumbled over one another. Before I had my thoughts marshalled and in order, the door to the taproom opened again, and after a brief glance of assurance Magdalena flung herself upon me with a jubilant cry of "Laurentz!" Had the passage not been so narrow, we should both have gone sprawling full length under her onslaught. Christian, who stood by in astonishment, found it all very interesting.

'Magdalena had blossomed like a rose to her full beauty, so that I could scarcely turn my gaze from her. It seemed to be much the same with her. I had no belly yet in those days.' Laurentz took a draught of wine and stroked his paunch with a smile.

'We sat together the whole day and the evening: Magdalena, Maria, Christian and I. Magdalena had become the owner of the

house, and there was so much to tell that night fell. She would allow no reason to stand and insisted that we spend the night in her house. Christian and I were shown our rooms, and I must then have fallen asleep, and dreamed of the days and weeks of my youth with Magdalena. She was again the rosebud, only I myself was by now more experienced and calmer than in the impetuous days of my youth: everything was of a more intense pleasure than in my memory.

'In the morning I was woken by the warm rays of the rising sun and the tender kisses of Magdalena, who lay beside me. We took each other in our arms, and I whispered to her: "I dreamed of us last night."

""Did your dream please you?"

""Oh, yes."

'She turned me onto my back and looked into my eyes: "Your dream of the night: that was Maria."

'I made to raise myself, but she pressed me into the pillows and laid a finger on my mouth: "I could have married Maria off two years ago already – there were suitors enough! She would not. Today she comes of age, and we both wished, she and I, that on this day she should also become a woman. We had already considered which man might come into question for it. He had to be experienced, understanding, and she was to like him: when one finds one's teacher agreeable, one has no misgivings. As we sat together yesterday, telling tales, laughing, jesting, and all so familiar with one another – did you notice the glances between Maria and your Christian?"

'I nodded, and Magdalena laughed: "I understand it very well, too; he takes after you so entirely. Then, after you had gone to your rooms, she confided her wish to me: that it should be you who opened for her the way to womanhood. With a light heart I granted her wish!"

""And you?"

'Magdalena laughed and kissed me: "I have dreamed the same dream as you."

"Christian?"

"Yes. Did you not notice how he kept looking at my bosom?"

"Yes!" I grumbled, torn to and fro between understanding and disapproval.

'Magdalena looked at me sternly: "If we wish our children to know a happy time, then they should have good teachers, who guide them through the confusions of their youthful innocence and self-doubt."

Laurentz still stood on the threshold of the past: 'She was right, of course, and we let the sun warm our bodies – our love had no need of it to be kindled. They were once again wonderful days of earthly happiness.'

'You never told me of it.'

Laurentz had arrived back in the present: 'I did not conceal it – you never asked me – and there was no cause for me to tell of it of my own accord. Perhaps, had Christian lived on? Who knows! So I kept it to myself.'

Simon regarded his brother full of compassion. 'That is why the death of Christian struck you so hard.'

'Yes. He had come back to Hamburg with Maria. Even though this accursed plague, two years later, carried off among the six thousand dead not only my dear wife but also the two of them, Christian and Maria, and I buried their young bodies in a common grave – for me they have not died. They still live a good life in my memory – in their love for one another.'

Simon could well understand him: his own dearest person had been killed in those days too by the merciless plague. 'Our good spirits, who accompany us as long as we live. Only we ourselves and our enemies become the evil spirits that pursue us.'

He sipped at his goblet and looked up. 'What of your third-born son? Is he still abroad?'

'Karl? God will know whether he still lives and where he may be just now. It is as you said yourself just now: he is still abroad. Seven years ago he accompanied Albrecht to London, took his leave of him there, and since then I have had no sign of life from him. He is a restless spirit and said he would not return until he was to stay.'

Laurentz had drunk the last draught from his goblet and grew weary again. 'Could you not sleep, or why did you get up?'

Simon yawned: 'The little room was so filled with my memories and all the people I have met within it that it grew too narrow for me. Our tales have awakened so much in me again of which, in far-off Norway, I but seldom think. Yet now I shall be able to sleep: the good spirits of love will accompany me.' 'Good night, brother.'

Simon had resolved in the morning to seek out the poor-box administrators, to speak with them: he wished to find out why these Hamburg Protestant senior elders were still so narrow-minded.

Albrecht had remained sitting at the table and waited to see whether his grandfather too would rise.

Plainly Laurentz was in no hurry this morning: the ship from Norway was being unloaded, the goods cleared through customs – his son Harald saw to everything – the freight papers for the new cargo lay ready. He had taken his time for Simon. Irresolute, he turned his great tankard of breakfast ale, when Albrecht addressed him quietly: 'You were going to tell me of Evora?'

'I?' Laurentz started out of his thoughts. 'Ah, yes. Very well, I promised it you.'

He drank a great draught of ale to moisten his throat, blinked at his eager grandson, and began: 'South of the town walls of Lisbon spreads the river Tejo. We had arrived at dusk in those days and had had our work cut out to find our place, to anchor in the roads.'

'Beside our ship lay at anchor the mighty galleons that had returned only a few days before from a great voyage. Admiral Pinto, the commander of these ocean-going ships, which could carry several hundred tons, had discovered a land east of India – Japan it was later to be called – and the city was full of speculation and buzzing rumours as to whether it meant as much gold and spice as the Portuguese possessions in America, Africa and India.

'Now the pinnacle ferried us across the Tejo, over to where the royal coach waited to take us up as passengers. Full of awe and curiosity I looked across again at the great galleons, whose huge flags with the footed Portuguese cross stirred lazily in the breeze. These ships had defied the world's oceans and outlasted storms to which the little Hamburg caravels would have been helplessly delivered up.

'These ships, however, would never be able to enter the harbour of Hamburg, since the Blankenese sand did not grant them the necessary channel. Far ahead of Hamburg they would have to anchor and then transfer with the flat pinnaces. It was then that I understood for the first time what the quarrel over the deepening of the Elbe in Hamburg was really about. While the merchant lords demanded a deepening of the Elbe, so as to be able to load their ships fully in the harbour already and not always have to carry their goods far out with lighters, the guilds regarded the existing shallow depth of the Elbe and the Blankenese sand as a natural continuation of the town fortifications: as a bulwark against deeper-draughted great warships, which from their anchorages, far ahead of the harbour, could not reach Hamburg even with their heavy ship's guns. My father directed my gaze back to the city on the Tejo behind us: "Do you see now why Lisbon is called the modern Rome?"

'My gaze and my thoughts were still with the ships of the Portuguese fleet, with the ships that brought spices, gold and silver to Europe.

"Because it is the capital of a greater empire than the Romanum?"

"Laurentz, look before you speak!"

'He had noticed that I was still looking across at the ships. So I turned and looked at Lisbon: "Because the city is as great as Rome?"

'My father laughed at my obvious foolishness. How was I to know in those days that Rome had been far greater? He took me by the shoulder and turned me further towards the city: "No, my son, because, like Rome, it is built upon seven hills."

'Now that he had told me, I could see it too. I had only been looking at the Alfama.

'My father had grown thoughtful. "The Roman name of this city was Felicitas Julia. But the king avoids being in this happy city, as the Romans called it. Why does he go into this Liberalitas Julia, as Evora was formerly called? Does he truly find his freedom there? In the Alentejo, in the country?"

'The Hanse count in Lisbon, who accompanied us, broke in: "Herr Moellendorff, you will experience it yourself: Evora is the most distinguished city of Portugal, and it is the seat of the *Of-
ficiu*m inquisitionis, an institution that King João supports with great zeal. He does not seek the nearness of his people; he prefers converse with his archbishop and residence in the mountain castle above Evora."

'My father's brow-vein became visible. An unfailing sign that this explanation displeased him deeply: "Then it is no wonder if he does not notice what harm he has done his land with the expulsion of the Jews and the Moors! Have you seen the many ragged poor and sick in Lisbon, who half starved must beg and loiter on the street because they have no roof over their heads any longer? This king is on the way to depopulate and to ruin the land!"

'The Hanse count looked out over the river and asked himself: how could he explain to this angry Hanseatic patrician that the

thoughts of an apostolic majesty were not necessarily concerned with the happiness of men on this earth, but were directed rather to sitting, not only in Evora but also in the hereafter, at the right hand of God?

'He doubted it. To a Hanseatic merchant the foundations of a Catholic spirituality would always remain hidden. He did not fear for the salvation of his soul, and did not assume that life after death would last longer than our brief earthly span; rather, for him religion was only a means to an end.

'Meanwhile the pinnacle neared the other bank of the Tejo. Beside the fishermen's pile-dwellings at the water's edge the royal customs station drew nearer, and I could already make out the arms on the coach that waited there for us.

'My father too seemed to feel the Hanse count's unspoken reproach, that he was passing judgement on decisions which he could only respect and had no business to judge.

'Only later, when I had myself become a councillor, was I to learn to understand that one always carries a responsibility with one, and cannot leave it behind at home, safely locked away in the cupboard.

'In those days my father reached into the side pocket of his coat and, laughing, tossed a coin across to me.

"Catch well, Laurentz, it is ten ducats!"

'Deftly I had caught the coin and studied both sides. On the one side a man's head was depicted, and by turning the coins I could read it: Rei João III. The other side bore the footed cross I had already seen on the flags of the Portuguese ships. "Why ten ducats? It is but a single coin." My father's laughter seemed to catch in his throat. Astonished, he looked at me: "What did they teach you in London? How many kreutzers has a reichstaler?" "Seventy-two kreutzers make a reichstaler."

"And how many kreutzers are a batzen?"

"Four kreutzers make a batzen. And before you ask further, fifteen batzen make a gulden. That does not make a gulden fifteen batzen, however; it stays a gulden. It has the value of them, but ..."

'My father laughed again now: "Aha, it seems to me I hear Simon speaking with your tongue, weighing every word on the goldsmith's scales! But you are right, this coin in your hand is a portugalöser; it has the value of ten ducats. Satisfied?"

'Before I could nod in agreement, our attention was drawn to the landing manoeuvre by the ferryman's "Cautela!" The flattened bow of the pinnace grated into the firm gravel of the landing-place, and had the ferryman not called his "Look out!", we should have been thrown over by the abrupt jolt that brought the boat to a standstill. As it was, we could hold fast to the flat jetty that jutted out into the river beside the boat.

'While the Hanse count already hastened to the waiting coach to announce our arrival, the ferry's boatmen seized our heavy travelling chest, heaved it onto the jetty and, groaning, hauled it to the coach to load it.

'We had left Estremadura and arrived in the Alentejo. Towards evening we would reach Evora, the Hanse count opined confidently. On the broad royal road there were but seldom robberies, and should anyone nonetheless have a mind to it: the royal arms on the coach would protect us.

'So we leaned back into the padded benches and dozed away as best we could. The unevenness of the country road jolted the coach so violently again and again that not only did the hinges of the coach squeal loudly, but our bodies too were shaken through, so that conversation or sleep was not even to be thought of.

'My gaze glided over the plains of the Alentejo: they put me in mind of the far-sweeping parklands of England. There must be sheep here too; the grass was so flat and even in height as a man could not have cut it even with a sharp scythe.

'No, I said to myself then, it is neither like England, nor can there be sheep here: eucalyptus trees and broom alternated, and the green meadows changed into dense carpets of blossom, out of which dark, thick cork oaks reared up. There were yellow carpets of blossom, then white again, mauve and red, and mixed blue-and-violet, and yellow again.

'It was a delight to me to lay myself down in thought upon these meadows, to look up into the blue sky and to read the riddles of the cloud-pictures. Then came a yellow carpet of blossom, and it reminded me of my past years in England, when Master Johnson had taught me.

'On a walk we had stood before a similar flower-meadow, only in England the meadow had been sprinkled merely with yellow dandelions, and Master Johnson had stopped, musing. Then he had turned to me: "Lawrence, be so kind, if you please, as to pick me out the finest flower."

'At once I had wanted to run off eagerly, when Master Johnson's voice stopped me: "Lawrence!"

'And in a few steps he stood beside me.

""Do you mean to trample the finest blossoms, if you rush off so and take no heed of your feet?"

""But how?" My voice failed me, and tears had shot into my eyes.

""You wish to know how you are to find the finest blossom, if you may not set foot on the meadow?"

'Without a word I had nodded.

'Master Johnson stood at the edge of the meadow, his hands clasped behind his coat-tails. "I only said that you should not rush off so heedlessly."

'I had been relieved and then went slowly, heeding my feet, into the meadow.

""Lawrence!"

'Again, I had stopped and looked back at Master Johnson, not daring to turn my feet.

"How do you mean to show me the finest blossom, if I stay standing here?"

'I had laughed at him merrily: "I shall pluck it and bring it here to you."

'Mister Johnson made a sorrowful face: "Then it will soon no longer be the finest."

"That had been in England – now my thoughts wandered again to the cloud-pictures over the Alentejo.

'I must after all have grown used to the jolting and lurching of the coach and have fallen asleep – a dig in the side made me start up: the landscape had grown more undulating, and before us, on a rising hill, we saw the town walls that crowned the broadly sloping hill: Evora!'

The hard clatter of Marthe's clogs in the hallway drowned out the voice of Laurentz, who looked up in surprise: 'Where can Simon be? He meant to be back here by midday. Would you go to meet him?'

Albrecht nodded.

'You will most likely find him at St Peter's.'

The Death



Myths and legends:

The Whore of Babylon rides upon the seven-headed dragon. Coloured engraving from the New Testament, printed in Augsburg.

Artist unknown.

The Church of St Peter's was but a few streets away. Albrecht had no need to hurry. After only a few paces he paused: at the bend in the road towards the Grosser Burstah he saw a cluster of people who had gathered about something that seemed to lie there on the ground.

Curious, he went on to see what had happened there. Soon enough he could make out, between the legs of the crowd, the outline of a human body stretched out in the filth of the street. Then he checked himself: this man's mantle was of the same grey as the one Simon wore.

At once he quickened his steps; an evil foreboding rose in him; he ran, forced a way through by thrusting the bystanders aside, and looked as though frozen at the man who lay on the ground, breathing with a rattle: Simon!

It could not be – it must not be!

Aghast, he seized two of the gaping men by the waistcoat at once, shouted at the one: 'You fetch a surgeon!', and to the other: 'You fetch the councillor Moellendorff, there, at the house "Zum goldenen Schiff"! Then he gave both of them a hearty shove to drive them to haste, knelt down beside Simon and grasped his hand.

Across the bishop's pale face a fine red trickle of blood made its way: it ran out of the pale-blond hair over the white brow, sideways past the eyebrows down over the cheek and dripped into the sand. A fluttering twitch passed over the eyelids. Simon opened his eyes as he felt Albrecht's hand.

'Who?' Albrecht burst out.

Simon only moved his head to the side, closed his eyelids again, and Albrecht bent nearer to his lips.

'Evil spirits ...' he heard Simon whisper, 'Albrecht ... thank Laurentz ... tell him ...'

Albrecht was thrust hard aside: the councillor Moellendorff had fallen to his knees beside him and taken Simon gently into his arms.

Simon opened his eyes and, as he recognised Laurentz, a wistful smile passed over his face: 'Brother! ... Father!' Sightless, he stared at Laurentz.

No murderous outcry had risen at the discovery of the dying man and spread through the streets, which would have alarmed the town watch; all had only looked on curiously to see whether they had ever laid eyes on the stranger before. The gaping bystanders drew back in silent respect and fear. They had never yet seen one of the mighty councillors weep and did not know whether it might not one day prove a disadvantage that they had seen the high gentleman in his grief and that he would later recognise them again.

Marthe had hurried up with a woollen cloth. The unwilling messenger had told it at once to everyone he met in the house. Silently she now stood beside Laurentz. At length she stroked her hand tenderly, full of compassion, through his grey hair. The surgeon had at last arrived and had brought with him two town bailiffs he had met on his way.

Laurentz had let Simon glide gently back to the ground, pressed shut his staring eyes, crossed himself and then risen with a groan. He took the great woollen cloth Marthe had handed him and gave it to the two bailiffs: 'Lay the body in this and carry it to my house.' Marthe and Albrecht had to support him on the short way to the house 'Zum goldenen Schiff'.

For hours now the corpse of Simon van Leyden had lain upon the great table of the Moellendorff house. Laurentz sat in the arm-chair beside the hearth and stared fixedly at the lifeless body. In the house it was deathly still: no one dared disturb the master of the house with a sound.

As the bailiffs lifted Simon's body onto the woollen cloth, they had all seen the great pool of blood that had spread beneath his body. He had lost so much blood that not all of it had yet seeped into the sand of the street. By now a crowd of the curious had gathered again, all wishing to catch a glimpse of the corpse. A beginning murmur had been ended by Laurentz with a single glance upward, and silently a lane had been opened for the bailiffs as they bore Simon's corpse away.

In the house Simon's body had been undressed. The surgeon – who introduced himself as Dr Rodrigo de Castro and supposed that he had been fetched because he lived quite nearby by the churchyard of St Nicholas' – declared after a brief examination that Simon had been killed by a deep thrust in the back and a blow to the head. Either alone would have sufficed to bring him from life to death.

'It must have been two strong men who killed your guest. Women would hardly have had the strength to drive such a thrust and such a blow. And ...' – he seemed to reflect – 'there is a fine bloody line on the nape of his neck, as though he had worn a thin chain about his throat that was torn away from him.' No one seemed to know anything of it, and so the surgeon fell silent.

Laurentz had sat the whole time in the armchair and only stared fixedly at Simon's body. He saw neither the physician, nor did he seem to notice how the two maids, following the instructions of his daughter-in-law Agathe, cut open the woollen garment and washed Simon's stiffening body, and how Marthe then, at Agathe's bidding, sought out Simon's finest garment from his clothes-chest and brought his bishop's cross. Quietly and carefully, they clothed Simon anew, laid his fingers gently one over the other and pushed the bishop's cross beneath his hands. Finally, Agathe slid a small cushion under Simon's head.

All this took place without Laurentz seeming to notice it. Not even the question of why could press into his consciousness.

Albrecht had listened to the surgeon and drawn his conclusions from it. After a brief, whispered consultation with his father he had run to the town watch. An hour later four criers of the uniformed town watch were already abroad, beating their drums and shouting their proclamation among the people throughout the whole town: 'At midday the guest of the councillor Moellendorff was murdered at the Grosser Burstah by two men. Whoever can give the councillor tidings of these two men will be rewarded with fifty marks!'

Fifty marks! At once the most various rumours whispered their way through the streets and houses: for fifty marks a poor man could buy bread for his family for five years, or eight hundred pounds of the finest veal.

Even though Cilie Cruse had been hanged only on the 1st of February, and on the 1st of March the headsman had drawn the rope tight about the necks and gullets of two strangers: for fifty marks the two sought-for men should be easy to find.

Then came the further news that the dead man had been a pastor, and the waves of the appetite for denunciation smoothed themselves out. The Lutherans, too, did not hesitate to kindle the stake, and if witchcraft played any part in the matter, the fire of the 18th of January, when Metje Rolffs had been burned as a witch, would soon be followed by another, greater fiery spectacle.

When then in the taverns the surmise went round that it had been a Catholic priest – he wore a monk's habit, at least – there was only eager talk about the question of what the Moellendorff had lately to do with the papists. First this Catholic priest in his house, and then this newly arrived surgeon – his very name: Rodrigo de Castro – who gave himself out to be a Catholic Portuguese, though it had already been surmised that he was a Marrano.

After the town watch, Albrecht had sought out the printing house by the harbour. For a small fee of three shillings the master was at

once ready to pick the needed letters from his cases and print without delay the proclamation that the uniformed bailiffs were already crying about the town.

An hour later Albrecht was already on horseback and passing through the town gates to post the notice in Altona, in Wandsbek and in the other suburbs.

Exhausted, he came back in the early evening. His horse was wet with sweat; the stallion's belly and Albrecht's boots and breeches were spattered all over with the filth of the streets. He handed the horse to the astonished stable-lad – never had horse and rider looked so filthy.

'Give him an extra ration of oats and a jug of ale: he has given of his best.' With that Albrecht patted the snorting stallion gratefully and appreciatively on the withers. Wearily he tugged his boots from his legs in the hallway and leaned exhausted against the wall. In the house it was still deathly still. Quietly he opened the door to the great room on the ground floor. Two candles bathed Simon's pale face in a warm glow of light. The armchair was empty.

On the hearth-bench sat his mother Agathe, keeping the death-watch. She came to meet him and embraced him. 'Marthe has cooked you a hearty soup. She thought you would need it when you came back.'

She drew him into the kitchen, and Albrecht let himself flop down onto the bench. His mother filled a bowl for her son from the pot that was being kept warm at the edge of the stove, and broke some bread. Hungrily Albrecht reached for the spoon and ate a few mouthfuls. Then he paused. 'What of Grandfather?'

'Marthe and your father have carried him to his bed. Marthe is warming him now with her body.'

Astonished, Albrecht looked up from his bowl and knitted his brows questioningly.

His mother saw it, laughed softly and took his hand: 'Even if you did not know it yet, Marthe has been his bedfellow these two years

and the sun of his old age. Just now your grandfather will have particular need of Marthe's warmth. If anyone can succeed in bringing him back to life out of his frightening rigidity, it will be she.'

Albrecht nodded, relieved: then it was well so.

Mechanically he lifted the spoon to his mouth and did not even notice that tears were running down his cheeks. Now, as he came to rest, he saw again before him Simon's pale, spiritual face, as he lay dying in the street. He would so gladly have spoken with him further, learned more of him: of his knowledge, his wisdom, his humanity and his life.

The first few impressions since his arrival had already been enough to make Albrecht look forward to the coming months, to the long time Simon would remain in Hamburg, in which the two of them could have talked with each other about so much.

He had still so many questions upon his heart, to which Simon, to whom he had felt himself so close in spirit, might perhaps have given him an answer.

Yet now he felt how bitter it is when it is said that someone has gone for ever.

In the smoke-blackened kitchen of a low-crouching house by the High Bridge an earthen bowl smashed against the wall. The man it had been meant to strike flung up his arms to shield his face from the flying shards. Antje, the attendant from the council bath-house, had meant to hit her husband, the court clerk Franz Lütjehann, with whom she otherwise peacefully shared board and bed. Now she had propped her arms angrily on her hips and flashed furiously at the court clerk: 'What is the meaning of that stupid question, who killed the Moellendorff's guest?'

As though he would not believe what he must now suppose, Lütjehann swallowed dryly and cleared his throat: 'Do you mean to say by that, that you ...'

'Yes, that is what I mean to say, fool!' The sharp ring of vexation altered her bell-bright voice to a spiteful crescendo.

One might say anything to Franz Lütjehann, only not fool. Even if he had a great head like an ass: he could at least read and write! Some people could indeed read already, but write – that only the fewest could, at least of those he knew. 'If, in dealing out beauty, God had not given everything to your body but had let your soul, too, share a little of it ...!'

'I did not know that this dealing-out had displeased you until now! Do you go to bed with my soul or with my body?' his wife interrupted him spitefully.

The court clerk would not be lured into this trap: 'It was not clear enough! How could you be sure?'

'Did you not describe to me the singular birthmark on his shoulder? And the age was right too!'

'You should have made certain!'

'You are not in court here, and as a wretched clerk you have nothing to report there in any case. So, hold your tongue here too and let me do as I think right!'

'Good-for-nothing wench! The man was apparently the brother of the councillor Moellendorff! People like me, who possess only the lesser burgher-right, must have a long spoon to eat from one plate with a councillor. And you cannot do it at all.'

Antje grinned broadly across her lovely face and sniffed up the mucus in her nose: men! She knew that the fellows ogled after her with lecherous looks, and the councillors were no exception in this. Why, then, should she have feared one of these gentlemen, who were just as lecherous goats as all the rest – and when they climbed naked out of the tubs in the bathhouse, they were anything but mighty! With her hand she pushed her heavy breast proudly

upward in the tightly laced bodice and reached for the beer jug that stood beside the stove.

Lütjehann had marked all too well the contemptuous look that had grazed him before her face was hidden by the beer jug. He stood up, taking good care not to knock his head against the beams of the wooden ceiling: Lütjehann, quite contrary to his name, was a tall fellow, even if he had the temper of a mouse. If he struck his head against one of the supporting beams, Antje would either laugh scornfully like a rat or ask him spitefully when they would at last move into a larger house with higher ceilings. He had no mind for either just now.

'If it is the brother, then it was wrong. Of a Moellendorff there is not one word in the commission. Besides, as a hereditary family they are known in the town and would not have needed to be sought for in the first place!'

Antje had set down the jug, wiped the beer from her upper lip with the back of her hand and gave a pert twitch of the corners of her mouth.

'The great birthmark on the right shoulder was unmistakable: a half-moon in the solar plexus. The age was right, and I saw him here in the town for the first time.'

'Repetition does not make claims into proofs, and in merchant families the brothers are often not seen for long years ...'

'Brothers! What sorts of brothers and comrades there are not: brothers in song, brothers in prayer, brothers in faith, drinking-companions! Surely you can find out what the dead stranger was called, when a file about his death is opened at the court.'

Lütjehann said nothing. His wife was right. It was idle to quarrel now – and besides: what had he to do with the death of this stranger, if it was the wrong one?

'Give me eighty pfennigs from the chest.' Antje's voice had an unwonted soft tone, and she plucked as though absent-mindedly at the ribbons of her bodice. Usually, the friendly tone sufficed to

move Franz Lütjehann to open the chest with the money; sometimes she had first to open the bodice, too, and show herself obliging, before he would part with the money.

'Let it be!' grumbled the court clerk. The spiteful look was still too present in his mind for him now to have any desire for her body. He unlocked the iron-bound chest, reached in and poured jingling coins from a leather pouch onto the table. Swiftly he counted out eighty of them and pushed the remaining copper pieces back over the edge of the table into the money-pouch, which he at once made vanish again into the chest.

'Here, take it!'

He had no need to tell Antje twice, so that she gathered up the shining coins from the table, knotted them into a striped cloth and tied it to her belt. She blew Lütjehann a kiss and took a lamp from its hook. Lütjehann had watched in astonishment. 'You mean to go out again this evening?'

'Yes, yes. There is still something to be seen to in the said matter. But I shall be back soon. It is only a short way to the council bathhouse.'

She had already lit the lamp with a burning splinter from the hearth-fire and was out of the door, while Lütjehann still puzzled over why Antje wished to go to the bathhouse at night and what she had wanted the money for.

At length he shook off his brooding. He went over to the stove, flipped back the lid of the beer jug and took a deep draught. Comfortably he felt the ale run down his throat and gather in his stomach. Contentedly Lütjehann belched and took a second long draught. Let Antje see for herself where she got any more, if she was going off and leaving him alone.

Musing, he stood so with the jug in his hand, when his roving gaze came to rest on the chest. Grumbling, he set the jug back – Antje should have something after all – and went over to the chest. He fingered out his bunch of keys again, unlocked the chest for the

second time that evening and took out a heavy square parcel, which he laid on the table. Sighing, he sat down on the wooden bench, drew open the cloth wrapping of the parcel with care and studied the gilded letters on the leather binding. 'The New Testament.'

With a sure grip his fingers sought out the hollow in the rear part of the heavy book – the pages he had read so often already, from the Revelation of John: 'Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.'

His finger slid a few lines lower: 'And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns. The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names are not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.'

Lütjehann had closed his eyes, and while his finger lingered on the last letter, he whispered: 'Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.'

Lütjehann smiled; he too knew the Psalms of the Old Testament, after all. He was an educated man, who knew not only the Gospels. He opened his eyes again, flicked a shard of the shattered bowl indifferently from the table-top and shut the New Testament.

After he had stowed the book away in the chest again, he lay down to sleep.

Today he would not wait for his wife.

In silence they had all eaten their breakfast in the kitchen and still sat, irresolute and quiet, at the table. Agathe, who as mistress of the house distributed the day's tasks to the maids and menservants every morning and conferred with Marthe, hesitated to break the stillness that had set in. Even though Laurentz sat at the table this morning – it was plain to everyone that he still had work to do within himself, that he neither wished to speak nor to be spoken to.

To the helpless glances of the family and the servants Marthe had only shrugged her shoulders helplessly, making at the same time a cheerful and yet an unhappy face, to make plain these feelings existing side by side. The living warmth of her body had been able to loosen the rigidity of his muscles – only: his soul she had plainly not reached.

Albrecht watched his grandfather in wonder. The air about him seemed to stand still – a transparent armour that nothing from without could penetrate. The gaze of his eyes was turned wholly inward, as though they saw nothing – and yet every reach for the goblet, the bread, the knife was as direct and unhesitating as ever.

At the first stroke of the bell of St Nicholas' Laurentz stood up abruptly without a further word, seized his short cloak in silence and had vanished into the hallway. He had forgotten his hat. All looked after him just as wordlessly, until suddenly, as they heard the front door fall shut, after seconds of stillness, a many-voiced flood of words broke loose: 'One might think he were his own ghost!' – 'God be thanked he is on his feet again!' – 'Does anyone know where he has gone now?' – 'He will have gone across to St Nicholas.' – 'Since when does he attend the early service on a weekday?'

Astonished at the sudden outcry, Albrecht shook his head. With the last morsel of bread in his hand he dabbed up the puddle of beer-soup in his plate and chewed thoughtfully on the soaked crust. Laurentz, his grandfather, who was in truth a father to him:

present, intervening, authoritative and understanding – to him he had always been closer than to his own father, who as a captain was too seldom at home for Albrecht to have come to know him better.

He nodded to his parents: 'Excuse me. He has forgotten his hat. I will see where our father has gone and whether he needs help. I am uneasy, too, at his going alone through the streets while Simon's murderers are not caught.'

His father laid a soothing hand on his wife's arm, since she plainly wished to hold her son back, and let him have his way: 'Go, then, and take care of yourself. Perhaps you should take one of the men with you to be at your side.'

'No thank you, it is enough to have to look after oneself.'

He relied only on his own strength and assumed of a servant that he would sooner run off than help him, if there were truly need. For unpleasantness he carried besides a short rapier at his side, at his belt. Just outside the front door, as he was about to make haste, he saw Laurentz standing at the Grosser Burstah, on the spot where they had found Simon the day before.

The news had plainly already gone round the whole town. Not only the usual course of tidings on the markets, in the inns and dives, but also the criers of the town watch had seen to its swift spreading. Respectfully the passers-by gave Laurentz a wide berth, as though he were the rock on a sandbank at which the riverbed narrows and the water is forced to flow in an arc around it.

A growing din made Albrecht turn his head and look in the direction from which the racket came: two men, chained to a cart, had come round the corner of the houses, and not only did the iron-shod wheels of the cart clatter on the cobblestones of the Kleiner Burstah, but the bells fastened to their shoulders also spread, at every step they took, a deafening jangle.

Albrecht was about to rejoice that the sought-for murderers had been caught and put in chains so quickly – when he remembered

how Laurentz had told him, two days before, that the council had lately taken to handing the condemned thieves over to the muck-reeve. Instead of the death penalty they were forced to clean the streets of the town. And each of these bells hung over their shoulders stood for one year of their penance.

The one of the two men chained to the cart wore seven of these noisy bells over his shoulder, his cart-companion five more. These thirteen bells were enough to warn every citizen betimes, drowned out any ordinary conversation and summoned the maids to carry out of the house the dirt-buckets they had not yet emptied into the street.

For a moment stillness set in, as the two stopped with their cart before the next dung-heap, but then they lifted their shovels noisily out of the cart again and began to throw the muck from the street into the cart.

When at last Albrecht tore his gaze from these strange bell-bearers, he could no longer catch sight of Laurentz anywhere. He made haste to take the way to St Nicholas', always careful not to tread in the stinking filth on the street that lay everywhere off the cleaned marketplace.

In London the magistrate had enforced that everyone had to sweep before his own door. Why did the Hamburg council let the citizens simply tip their refuse onto the streets, where it mouldered and rotted until the filth, stinking to high heaven, was at last carted off by the dirt-carts of the chained convicts? Were the hereditary merchant lords of the council, who watched so pernickety over the cleanliness of the canals and the river, concerned only with these trade routes, but indifferent to the streets?

Albrecht snorted. It was said that whenever the Emperor came to a town, all the streets there were cleaned beforehand. Only, the Emperor had never yet come to Hamburg.

On the churchyard before St Nicholas' he saw his grandfather: again he stood as stiff and upright as at the Grosser Burstah, with

the difference that he now held his head raised high and looked at the church. Before Albrecht had reached him, he turned abruptly, so that his short cloak billowed out, checked himself as he recognised his grandson and came to meet him: 'Thank you for the hat! Come! We must have a coffin made for Simon!'

With that he was already past Albrecht, who had trouble keeping up with his grandfather's quick step, no longer heeding where he trod. Two streets further Laurentz turned into the yard of a joiner, went briskly past the stacks of boards piled to right and left and made straight for the workshop, out of which Master Christian was already stepping as he recognised the councillor.

'My condolences, Herr Rat,' the master craftsman bowed. 'I heard of the death of your guest.'

Laurentz had only nodded briefly and raised a warding hand, to show plainly that he did not wish to dwell on the subject: 'Good day, Master Christian, you must build a coffin for my brother.'

The master held his breath: that he had not known, and no one had yet told him of it. Nor could he recall that with the councillor Moellendorff there had ever been talk of a brother – but with these far-travelled merchant lords one never knew where they had let further branches of their much-ramified family trees sprout. He pointed to the roofed side of the yard, where several coffins stood stacked: 'If it please you, I have there ...'

'No. I want a coffin from the wood on which my brother already lies. In an hour I expect you at the house Zum goldenen Schiff, to take the measurements. Bring a wagon and two journeymen. You know, the coffin must be finished by tomorrow afternoon.' With that he had turned on his heel and left the bewildered joiner standing amid his stacks of boards.

In the street Albrecht could not refrain from asking his grandfather: 'Why are you in such haste to bring Simon under the earth?'

Laurentz shook his head: 'It is not I who am in haste. The town council ordered years ago that all the dead must be buried within

three days. That was after the great plague epidemic. And so, I will hold to it myself, if we require it of the citizens too.'

Master Christian the joiner had appeared betimes with his two journeymen. Shaking his head, he went round the great dining-table on which Simon still lay laid out. Critically he examined the stout, thick tabletop of the finest oak and looked at the councillor sceptically: 'That will be no coffin, Herr Rat, that will be a ship!'

Laurentz seemed not in the least surprised: 'So shall it be, Master Christian. A soundly built, sturdy ship, to carry a good man unharmed across the river of the dead.'

'By tomorrow?' Not only the question, but Christian's expression too made it abundantly plain that the time allowed for it was too short.

'By tomorrow midday. And reckon your wage generously, only as befits good work.' Unmoved by the joiner's still sceptical face, Laurentz now pointed to the head of the table, at which he and Simon had sat: 'And take from this side a piece of the wood for a small table, which you shall build me from it.'

The councillor's unswerving voice, and the good wage in prospect, had in the meanwhile made the master resign himself to his fate: 'Then so shall it be.'

He turned to one of his two journeymen: 'Tilman, fetch me one of the narrow boards we have lying on the wagon.'

While the journeyman went out into the street, Master Christian took the span of his hands to measure Simon's body-length and shoulder-breadth, to have the fitting measurement. With their united strength they then pushed the death-board that had been brought in beneath Simon's body, lifted the corpse upon it from the table and laid it on the sintered tiles of the floor. Albrecht, his father Harald and the stable-lad had to lend a hand to lift the

dining-table, manoeuvre it through the hallway and heave it onto Master Christian's wagon.

The great family room on the ground floor looked unwontedly empty: a feeling that was heightened still further by the narrow board on which Simon's body now lay lonely on the tiles.

'Fetch a few beams!' Laurentz instructed the stable-boy. 'We will lay him higher, not so bare upon the ground.'

Still, he looked as though absent-minded through those he addressed, as if he were fixing something that lay behind the people and their faces. 'As he, in his church's nave, gave the direction from the pulpit to the people in the ship, so now his own death-ship will be steered by Charon across the great river.' Absent-mindedly he wiped a tear from the corner of his eye. 'Simon was permitted to come down from his pulpit – he can now leave the helm to another.'

The stable lad had stumbled, and into the stillness of the great room the wooden beams clattered across the floor. Albrecht, who had expected a loud outburst of anger, looked in wonder at the calm Laurentz, who indulgently signed to the frightened servant with a pointing finger to pick the timbers up again.

It seemed to Albrecht as though Simon had not died but had become a part of Laurentz. He and his father lifted the narrow death-board on high. Simon's body was not very heavy. Laurentz knelt down, pushed the beams beneath the board and raised himself again with a groan.

The door to the kitchen opened; Marthe came in with a great basket and placed herself at Laurentz's side. Surprised, he looked into the basket. Smiling melancholically, he nodded several times, reached in with both hands and strewed rosemary, mint, dill, marjoram, lavender and sage around the death-board upon the stony ground: now Simon lay upon one of the colourful carpets of blossom of the south, of which Laurentz had told only yesterday.

The scent of the herbs unfolded, filled the great room, as though it would leave no more room for death. Laurentz had looked about him searchingly, then took one of the embroidered wall-hangings from its hooks and spread it over Simon's lifeless body, which now looked as though it had but briefly fallen asleep on a colourful summer meadow.

A picture of peace and love.

The slam of the front door burst into the reverent stillness. A council servant stormed through the door: 'Herr Rat! At the bath-house ...! You are to come at once!'

Unwillingly Laurentz had knitted his brow at the sudden, unwelcome interruption. The breathless council servant, who had only blurted out the few words, was already back out of the door, and there was no one left whom Laurentz could have refused. Gratefully he nodded to Albrecht, who was already handing him one of two cloaks. 'Good, then accompany me.'

Outside the house two ragged beggars sprang out of the way, for it was all too plain that, instead of the expected copper coins in their outstretched hands, they would have got only hard cuffs or worse. They had come into the town only that morning and could not yet know before whose house they stood.

'Let us move on,' the one growled evilly, as they looked after Laurentz and Albrecht, 'from these patricians you can sooner expect a stroke of the blade than a copper piece.' He snorted. 'How should they give us pfennigs of copper, when they know only gold and silver!'

In silence the two Moellendorffs went the way that Laurentz and Simon had come only two days before, freshly bathed and cheerful, in the opposite direction. Two begging children with the badge of the town's beggars on their torn clothing placed themselves in their way. Laurentz gave each a copper coin, which he

always carried with him in the pocket of his waistcoat for the purpose.

Before the entrance to the council bathhouse stood two uniformed bailiffs of the town watch, who barred the curious all entry, but now stepped aside to let Laurentz and Albrecht pass. Before the door to the room with the bathing tubs stood the bathhouse-master, who ceaselessly dried his hands on the apron tied about him, even though none of the bath-women was running with the hot water-pails from the kitchen along the passage to the great bathing tubs. The great room was empty, but for a few men in dark clothing, four council servants and five maids, bath-women, who stood beside one of the wooden tubs.

Out of the bathing tub two bare feet protruded.

Laurentz recognised in the two clothed in black the court administrators of the council, one of whom now came towards him.

'Forgive us, colleague Moellendorff, for letting you be disturbed in your grief. It seemed to us, however, that the death of your guest might have something to do with what has happened here. As we have been told, only two days ago you sat with your guest in this very tub there ...'

Warding him off, Laurentz interrupted the magistrate's speech and pointed to the protruding feet: 'Who is it?'

'We do not yet know exactly. It seems to be a woman. The water is too bloody ...'

'Heave-ho!' came the cry from the bathing tub, and with united strength the four council servants dragged the body out of the water. Two pulled at the feet, the other two had bent down into the tub to take a lower hold. The thighs emerged, and then it was unmistakable: a woman. The wet triangle of the pubic hair, and then the long skirt, which still covered the upper body, wrapping it, and out of which the red-dyed bathwater now gushed in a torrent onto the floor.

The four council servants laid the corpse gently on the floorboards, while two of the bath-women pulled the dripping skirt down to cover the woman's nakedness. 'Antje!' one of them shrieked, as she caught sight of the face.

Laurentz and Albrecht stepped into the circle that had at once formed around the dead woman. It was indeed Frau Antje. The wet long blond hair snaked, plastered, over her still lovely face, out of which two sightless eyes stared at the ceiling. The bodice was torn open at one place, and the surgeon Dr Castro, who had unceremoniously pushed the bystanders aside, was already kneeling beside her. He examined carefully the tear in the bodice, which was below the left breast, rummaged a pair of scissors from his bag and cut the cloth further open. All saw the bloody cut in the swollen skin that came to light. Then he turned the dead woman's head slowly, raised it a little at the nape so that he could better examine the skull, and let it sink back to the floor. Dr Castro rose, wiped the bloody water from his breeches and declared: 'A fatal thrust, a fatal blow. It will have been the same men who killed the bishop yesterday too. This time they plainly wished to be still more certain that their deed should succeed, by drowning her, already dying, into the bargain.'

The chalk-pale Lütjehann, whom a dark foreboding had driven here and who had still heard the last words, knelt down beside his dead wife – his most secret hopes, his worst fears had come true. Even if she sometimes had no good temper, she had not deserved that, to be drowned like a rat.

He stroked the wet hair from her wax-pale face and kissed her on the cold lips. When he could not manage to close the staring eyes, he untied his neckcloth and laid it gently over her face. He clasped her lifeless hand in both his own and sobbed: 'She went out again in the evening ... wanted to go to the council bathhouse ... had had eighty pfennigs given her ...' Abruptly his sobbing

stopped, and he let go of her hand, which flopped slackly onto the floor.

Hastily he tugged Antje's wet skirt down with both hands, far enough that he could see the belt. With trembling hands he felt along the leather, then over her hips too – there was no knotted cloth fastened to the belt any longer. Seeking help, he said to the bystanders: 'The money is gone.'

One of the bath-women, Marie, nodded: 'It is true. Last evening she still wore a knotted cloth at her belt.'

'What of last evening?' The magistrate Mönckebronn had plainly taken charge of the investigation. He had stepped forward and looked at Marie questioningly.

'Nothing, sir. Nothing in particular. We were just about to clean the bathhouse as we do every evening, when suddenly Antje came in and cheerfully said she would finish it; we could go home already. It suited us well. She had done so now and then before.'

'Where was the bathhouse-master?'

Marie cast down her eyes and plainly did not wish to answer. Mönckebronn looked about him and beckoned over the bathhouse-master, who still stood wringing his hands at the door.

'Where were you last evening, when the women were cleaning the bathhouse?'

'Must I say it, sir?'

Mönckebronn drew his brows together: 'You do not seem to be clear that a judicial investigation is taking place here. If you will not speak now, there are other means to make speaking easier for you!'

The frightened bathhouse-master let go of his apron and stammered: 'I was at the tavern, sir.'

'And does it go so every evening?'

'No, sir.' He clutched again, wringing, at his apron and glanced up briefly. Judging by the searching expression of the magistrate, it seemed to him more sensible to go straight on than to wait for a

further threat of examination under torture. 'Only on some days, when Antje asked to be alone here, then ...'

'She asked for it?'

'Why, yes: she gave me five pfennigs for the tavern.'

'So that she could be alone here?'

'No, not so, sir. She met here ...' – a timid sidelong glance at Lütjehann – '... with one gentleman or another.'

The magistrate Mönckebronn narrowed his eyes: 'Do you mean to say you allowed her to make a whorehouse of the council bathhouse?'

Two bailiffs held Lütjehann fast, who with clenched fists made to hurl himself at the bathhouse-master. 'He lies, to hide his drinking! She had money of her own on her, and since when do whores bring the money with them? On the contrary, they get it only through their whoremonger!'

The magistrate Mönckebronn scratched behind his stiff collar. 'There our court clerk is probably right.'

He was too occupied with the bathhouse-master to notice the giggling whispers of the bath-women behind him.

Now he beckoned the two other bailiffs over: 'Take the bathhouse-master to the lower court. He will have to answer for his negligence.'

While the bailiffs seized the still hand-wringing bathhouse-master and led him out, Mönckebronn turned again to Lütjehann: 'What did your wife have the money on her for?'

'I do not know. Not exactly.'

Mönckebronn pursed his lips thoughtfully. 'So you do not know exactly? Was it her own money?'

'No, it was my money. She wished to buy herself a new bodice. A trader, she said, was in the town, from Flanders, who meant to travel on this morning ...'

'Lütjehann. Surely you know the Bursprake, which grants this right to the guild of tailors alone. You probably wrote it out yourself!'

The sharp tone in the magistrate's voice made the broad smile on Lütjehann's face grow more uncertain. 'That is why she wanted to go out so late, no doubt. Have you ever been able to refuse your wife anything she had set her mind on?'

Mönckebronn stared at his court clerk, and his collar seemed to him somewhat tight. Nervously he ran a finger several times between his throat and the starched shirt-collar, then closed his eyes in resignation and murmured: 'We shall speak of this further, Lütjehann. Not here.'

'Do you still need me?' The surgeon had packed up his utensils and wished to go.

'No, not today. Come to the court tomorrow and give your findings for the records.'

Mönckebronn had nodded to the surgeon and then turned to Laurentz: 'It seems I have troubled you for nothing.'

'That one always knows only afterwards. May I attach my grandson Albrecht to you for this investigation? In case it was indeed the same men ... Albrecht is a Doctor of Laws and could be a help to you.'

Mönckebronn regarded Albrecht with interest. 'I remember you. You were away for a few years?'

Albrecht grasped the magistrate's proffered hand and nodded: 'I studied at King's College in London and am also versed in German law.'

'I am content with that. We need every good jurist today, not only for this investigation. Whole mountains of files threaten to bury us clean under them.'

Laurentz nodded. 'Then I will go now. Albrecht can report to me.' With that he turned and went out.

The two town bailiffs had in the meantime let go of Lütjehann again and were now sent off to procure a cart on which the body of Frau Antje was to be carried away.

The bath-women received the order to clean the bloody tub and afterwards to lock up the bathhouse. The key they were to bring to the lower court, where it would remain until a new tenant was found.

Laurentz had gone through the streets sunk in thought. He heeded neither the blind beggar, who did not recognise his council dress and stretched out his hand towards him – which the sighted studiously refrained from doing, councillors being reckoned unpredictable – nor did the troupe of players interest him, who had set up their world of boards at the corner of the market and were loudly amusing the spectators, so that the sudden address 'Councillor Moellendorff!' startled him. The chief pastor of St Nicholas' had placed himself in his way.

The pastor raised his hands soothingly: 'I heard you had a death in your house.'

'Yes, that is so.'

'You did without priestly assistance in the hour of death?'

Laurentz could not guess that the pastor was vexed that yet another supplementary income for the last consolation had slipped through his fingers, and that he suspected Laurentz of withholding from the poorly paid pastors, as many of the rich merchant lords did, their sixling of money, which they yet sorely needed to better their meagre salary.

'The dead man had spiritual assistance enough,' Laurentz grumbled testily.

'Ah, so there were pastors present after all?' Then a probably younger colleague had snatched away the fat councillor's prize from him!

'No. The dead man was himself a bishop.'

The surprised pastor murmured: 'Then perhaps he stood in particular need of assistance ...'

'No, not he!'

The pastor's insolent manner vexed Laurentz so greatly that he forgot all consideration and tactical prudence and blustered: 'He was neither such a pot-bellied rich eunuch as the Roman bishops, nor such a sanctimonious railing preacher as the Lutheran ones. He was at one with God and with men, and in his good faith needed no other spiritual assistance than himself!'

The pastor, who noticed that with his assumptions he had backed the wrong horse, pocketed this attack on ecclesiastical authority without a word. He did, however, deeply regret that under Hamburg town law only he who addressed a councillor discourteously had to pay three pounds' fine, and that the same protection did not also apply to the pastors.

'You are right, of course: there are but few just men who do not need our help. Yet now, dead as he is, he will not be able to hold the funeral sermon himself.'

'There you are right, Herr Pastor.' Laurentz too had thought better of being so foolish any longer. 'Have you an hour free tomorrow forenoon for an obsequy?'

'A special ceremony?' Inwardly he rubbed his hands. That cost, thank God, double fees too. 'Well, a ceremony there cannot be, for whoever dies in faith has no need of it, and whoever dies in unbelief is not helped by it – but a good sermon it may well be.'

'Yes, that is how I wish it.'

'There you are so very right! When nowadays a preacher goes to the pulpit through our populous congregation at an ordinary service, such a strong reek of brandy or beer meets him – and lately tobacco fumes too – that he grows sick and faint and often thinks he must fall clean into a swoon from the pulpit. But what of it: the world will no longer be chastised by the spirit of God, but abides

by its old sinful slovenliness – preach, sing and say against it what one will.'

'Perhaps you should not preach in the cramped church, but under the open sky.'

'Oh, no! We have all we can do even now to admonish our flock to Christian conduct: to the sermon there often comes a heap of swine from their drinking, who, instead of going modestly to the house of God, mindful of what a holy place it is, where they speak with God and God with them, where the holy angels will be present, and so forth – come running from the tavern like shameless dogs, station themselves outside the church and act as though the church were on fire and they had to put it out. Why will these coarse asses make a cloaca of our God's-acre? To say nothing of those who come too late, who sit in the church like coarse, lazy peasants in the tavern and do not even stand up when the Gospel is read, and of those who chatter or sleep and snore during the sermon!'

The pastor had properly talked himself into a fervour: 'You too I have not seen in church for a long time!'

'I can read the Bible myself and have no need of your help as a reader. So keep to the people who cannot read, as your clientele. And to the citizens who sit within the town walls you may well give your instructions. A long-distance merchant is, like a seaman, alone on the open sea and in foreign lands. He must always decide for himself and out of himself, alone with God, what is good and right for him.'

The chief pastor scratched behind his ear: 'I ask myself what confession of faith you actually hold, if you mean that ...?'

Laurentz shrugged his shoulders: 'It is long since, as a young man, I occupied myself with theology, which then became the guiding line of my life. In those days it was the writings of our honoured Doctor Martin Luther that taught me these views. I will

gladly give them to you, so that you can read them up, if you do not know them.'

'Yes, yes, I know them well enough.'

Which was indeed true. All too gladly would he have burned Luther's early writings on the spot. 'But now to the funeral sermon: tomorrow at ten o'clock?'

Laurentz nodded.

Marthe and his daughter-in-law Agathe were already waiting for him. The funeral feast had to be prepared, and he asked them: 'Let me hear what you have in mind.'

Agathe nodded: 'Well, we shall be some fifty persons: the councillors with their wives, the clergy ...'

'No priests!' grumbled Laurentz.

'Very well, no pastors. It will not change the number much. So, we need: five calves, eight geese and eight young capons, six old hens and thirty young ones, four sucking-pigs and four larks. Besides, eight measures of lard, four pounds of butter, a hundred and fifty eggs. Lemons, limes, capers, two pounds of bacon, spices, cucumbers, salt, vinegar and greens. Two extra maids and three servers.'

'That will do, more or less. Think also of venison and hares, and of fish as well.'

Marthe intervened: 'But no salmon!'

The Hamburg servants had years ago enforced that they need eat salmon only twice a week, which was plentifully fished in the Lower Elbe and came cheaply to the fish market.

Laurentz nodded in agreement. 'And to drink?'

'Three hundred litres of wine, half of it good and half of it poor.'

'Order a bucketful more, rather, so that no one goes home thirsty tomorrow.'

'Then the fifty marks you allowed for it will not suffice.'

Laurentz waved the misgivings away with a movement of his hand: 'Buy only what you need, and do not save in the wrong place.' That was settled.

He left the kitchen and quietly entered the great empty room in which Simon lay laid out: now he could still be with him. Marthe had strewn fresh blossoms in the morning, and still their scent filled the room, left no place for the breath of death.

Laurentz regarded the pale face of his brother, knelt down beside the narrow board and stroked his cold brow tenderly. 'Next week we would have celebrated your birthday! To be near me, Simon, you did not need to be in my nearness. But if you had to die, then it is well that I can bury you. Or would you rather have been buried in Norway? There, where you had plainly found at last the peace and serenity you had always sought? You were so cheerful and so full of the courage of life when you arrived here – as though God wished to call you to Himself at your zenith. Perhaps because He has so few like you about Him? He must love you more than me – else He would not have let you die before me!

'Now I ask you so many questions to which you will answer me no more in this life. Yes, so it always was between us. I always had the questions to which, so many times, you knew an answer. Now, then, I shall have to cease asking or seek my answers for myself. Even though Albrecht follows very much in your footsteps, he will not be able to replace you for me. As you said: our task is to preserve, his to change. But, by God, what has not all changed in our lives! What have we not all lived through!'

Gently he stroked over Simon's cold hands: 'Now you can no longer even show Albrecht how skilfully you could handle the juggling balls.'

'Will you show it to me?'

Laurentz had not noticed that Albrecht had entered the room and stood beside him. He laid his hand on his grandfather's shoulder, and Laurentz felt his deep bond with this young man, who was closer to him than his own sons had ever been.

'In the countinghouse, in the bookcase, right at the top there lies a corded little parcel upon the folios. Fetch me that, please.'

Albrecht was off into the hallway, and Laurentz raised himself again with a groan: 'Shall I tell him, too, that as a young man you convinced more people with your juggling balls than with theological subtleties? Why did you give it up when you had become a Dominican? Did it no longer suit the severity of your new office?'

'Did you mean this here?' Albrecht stood beside him again, a corded flat parcel in his hand.

'Yes, that is right. Come, let us sit down on the bench.'

Thoughtfully he studied the colourful ribbon with which the dark-blue cloth wrapping was corded: 'More than thirty years ago Simon tied up this parcel. I have always kept it. Now it almost seems to me as though back then we tied up our carefree ease along with it, packed away a part of our life of those days. Will you open it?'

Respectfully Albrecht regarded the unremarkable parcel and handed it to his grandfather: 'Please, unpack it yourself.'

Laurentz understood what Albrecht meant to say to him by that, took the parcel and set it on his knees. Carefully he drew open one thread after another. The cloth had settled over the past years into dusty folds and showed no intention of sliding apart of its own accord. Laurentz drew open the loose edge of the wrapping: five round wooden balls lay on the dark-blue ground, each in a different colour, and three of them bore a letter.

'Why have two of the balls no letter? Or the other way round: why have three of the balls a painted letter?'

Laurentz turned the two balls without letters, and on them too a letter now came to light. 'You see, they all bear one: L, P, C, M and Z.'

'I understand: "C" stands for Caspar and "M" for Melchior. And the others?'

'No, Albrecht, with that it is a different matter: "L" stands for Luther, "P" for Pope, "C" for Calvin, "M" for Müntzer and "Z" ...'

'Stands for Zwingli!'

'Right, you have grasped it. Now ...' – he lifted the cloth across to Albrecht – 'try to juggle, please, by letting them all circle at once.'

Albrecht had laid the cloth with the balls on the bench and shook his head: 'No, that I cannot do: with all five balls.'

'Very well, then try it perhaps with three.'

Albrecht took up three balls, weighed them in his hand, then playfully threw one into the air, caught it again, threw it up again and let a second follow. As he made to throw up the third ball, the first ball got in his way; he lost his overview, and all three wooden balls clattered loudly onto the hard stone floor in the stillness of the room.

Albrecht gathered up the balls that had rolled apart again and was displeased.

'Try it once more, this time with only two,' Laurentz encouraged him.

Albrecht pressed his lips together, laid the third ball on the blue cloth and threw the first wooden ball high into the air, then the second, and let them circle.

Laurentz clapped his hands: 'Good, keep at it. Do you want a third?'

Albrecht, who had concentrated on his two balls, only nodded, and Laurentz, who had placed himself beside him with the third, held it ready. A quick reach by Albrecht for the third, and again the other two bumped over the stone floor. Laurentz patted his

disappointed grandson on the shoulder and comforted him: 'And that with the Pope not even in the game yet.'

'The Pope?'

Laurentz nodded and saw in his mind's eye Simon's face of those days. 'Lift up the ball with the "P" and tell me whether anything strikes you about it.'

Albrecht lifted the ball, weighed it in his hand, took a second ball in the other hand and slowly weighed both: 'The Pope ball is somewhat heavier.'

'That is right. And now juggle, please, with the "P" and with the' – he looked about him searchingly – 'with the "L".'

Smiling, Albrecht took the two balls, threw them up one after another, let them circle twice. Then he could not catch one of the balls in time. Frowning, he looked after the ball as it rolled across the floor.

Laurentz was amused: 'Which ball have you still in your hand?'

'The one with the "L".'

'You see: the Pope will not let himself be caught, wilfully seeks his own way, while Luther has stayed calmly in your hand.'

Uncomprehending, Albrecht stared at his grandfather with astonished eyes.

'Ah, my boy, that was just one of Simon's popular sermons on the true faith. With two theologies many people can still juggle – but only with two Protestant ones: when the Pope comes into play, there remains to one but a single confession.'

Now, only now, did Laurentz recognise the true reason why Simon could no longer show the game in those days: after he had himself become a Catholic, he could no longer let the Pope fall.

'And Simon could juggle with all five balls?'

Laurentz smiled: 'Yes, that he could. And with it he always proved to his listeners very plainly – who tried their hand at juggling and made the same experience as you just now – that theological disputations are something only for trained theologians.'

'May I practise a little more?'

'Yes, keep them for today only. But before you begin, please send to Master Christian as well and have him told he is to be here with the coffin tomorrow at nine and to bring additional boards and supports, so that we can build a great table. And, before I forget, have the chief pastor of St Nicholas' told that he is to preach tomorrow forenoon on the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, chapter 13, or on Romans, chapter 1, verses 16 and 17. I am tired now and shall lie down to sleep.'

He was himself astonished that his Bible knowledge, which he had believed long forgotten, came back to him. Plainly the discussion with the pastor had awakened memories in him that were normally hidden beneath the layer of the present.

Before he retired to rest, he settled with Agathe which servant, as steward, was to bring to the councillors and the other families the invitation, the news of the funeral.

Master Christian had brought the coffin punctually with his journeymen. Panting, the four of them had carried it into the family room and set it down beside Simon's death-board. Laurentz had examined the work and found it good: 'Sound work!'

Master Christian had placed himself proudly beside his handiwork: 'Yes, there one sees that no botcher has bungled it! There is nothing to beat a proper piece of craftsmanship!'

Laurentz had truly no interest in quarrelling with a guild master over whether the foreign craftsmen, who were not admitted by the guilds and thus not recognised, were botchers or not. He had heard only that they worked more cheaply. So, he only nodded, stepped up to the coffin and smoothed the covers Marthe had in the meantime laid in as padding. Four of the six council servants already assembled, who had been ordered as coffin-bearers, lifted Simon's corpse from the board and bedded it on the padding.

While Agathe arranged Simon's garment, Laurentz stroked Simon's mottled, cold cheek and smiled wistfully. He nodded as Marthe came from the kitchen with a basket of fresh blossoms and strewed them with both hands around Simon's corpse in the coffin. Then he looked at Albrecht: 'Fetch me the juggling balls, please.'

Albrecht had laid the wooden balls on the mantelpiece and handed them across to Laurentz. He considered a moment and then pressed them side by side into the blossoms at Simon's feet: 'You alone mastered this game, and no one will ever do it again as you could. So, take them with you on your journey. Perhaps you may yet have need of them.'

'And you, Master Christian,' he turned to the joiner, 'take the death-board on which my brother lay into your workshop and cut his name, Simon, into it. We will then, according to old custom, as a warning, ram it into the ground at the Burstah – there where he was killed.'

Master Christian nodded.

'Would you have it otherwise?' Laurentz noticed that Albrecht had drawn his brows together and did not seem to agree.

'No, it is well so. I was only thinking of the old German law, that those who watched a deed and did not break into an outcry, so that others might catch the culprits, were regarded as culprits themselves and punished just the same. The death-board will remind the people who behaved so and today go unpunished, and with good right.'

The schoolchildren who had gathered beneath the house-sign of the Moellendorffs' golden ship were in good spirits. They loved funerals. For walking singing ahead of the coffin there was not only a holiday from school, but for each of them ten pfennigs besides – if it was a great corpse, as today. At middling or lesser corpses only a few of them were allowed to go along, and there were only five

and two pfennigs for each. So, they were always cheerful when, as today, there was a great corpse to be buried.

The steward had spread the news far and wide, and so numerous funeral-invited, men and women, were already gathered before the house. Laurentz had withdrawn into the hallway and there received the expressions of condolence. It took a while until all had passed by, shaken his hand, received their condolence-money from the paymaster in the kitchen, and were out again across the yard.

Then the coffin was closed and loaded onto the wagon by the council servants before the house. The pair of horses drew off, and the mourning company set out on the short way to the church.

The pastor did not seem quite to have his heart in the matter. After the Introit, the Kyrie eleison and the Gloria, he had chosen the Epistle to the Corinthians. Listlessly he recited the sentences of the Gospel: 'Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy ...'

He wished to be neither a cymbal nor of brass and would rather have fallen back on one of his old sermons, for on nothing was there more to rely than on the forgetfulness of the congregation.

'... Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love is not boastful, is not puffed up, does not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.'

Laboriously he had racked his brains the past evening and half the night over what he could say to it. Again and again his thoughts had strayed, and he had inwardly lamented that he could not refuse the councillor's proposal. The superintendent David Penshom was ailing, seemed like to die soon, and the council had already made it plain that it might not only again leave the office unfilled for four years, but appoint no new superintendent at all, whereby

it would then assign to itself this function of supervision over the pastors, should the church not moderate its criticism of the council's stranger-friendly decisions. Then this councillor too would become one of his official superiors!

This conception of love stood in so unbridgeable a contradiction to his wish that God might send a judgement of chastisement upon this congregation, indeed upon the inhabitants of the whole town, so that they might at last bethink themselves of a Christian walk of life, that he confined himself, pitifully railing, to preaching on God's love and human weakness, for which this divine love was indeed a model, but sadly unattainable. The double fee that Laurentz paid was at least a comfort to him.

Amid the ringing of the church bells the coffin was carried out of the nave, heaved onto the cart again, and with the singing schoolchildren in front the funeral procession set itself in motion towards the Ackertor. Agathe, Marthe, the two house-maids and the additional kitchen helpers went home already. In the next two hours there was still a good deal to prepare.

The bright singing of the children at the head of the procession threatened at times to slide too far into a merry confusion, when the little singers felt the ten pfennigs in their fists and thought of what they would buy themselves with them, so that the schoolmaster striding ahead conducted still more vigorously with his arms, to direct the attention of his little band of singers to the beat.

Beside the pair of horses, which and whose harness were themselves also decked with black ribbons, walked three of the council servants on either side. In Simon's spirit Laurentz had done without any further elaborate adornment of the coffin or the wagon. The dull ringing of the church bell Simon too would have found sufficient.

The passers-by stopped, crossed themselves hastily and looked in wonder at the councillors' retinue behind the Moellendorffs. It must have been an important person, if eighteen of the four-and-

twenty councillors followed his coffin. The plain black of their clothing and the missing splendid adornment of the coffin indicated that any outward show would not have sufficed to match the importance of the dead man to be honoured. It was precisely the dark simplicity of the pair of horses and the severity of the black retinue that raised him far above the otherwise usual, gaudy funeral processions of the council families.

At Laurentz's instruction the schoolmaster had the procession halt at the inner Ackertor; the schoolchildren stepped aside, and only the pair of horses with the coffin, the council servants and the pastor, whom Laurentz alone followed, went out through the gate to the churchyards. The mourning retinue stayed within the town walls and, after a brief conversation, went their ways.

Laurentz had still considered whether he should have the open coffin set up at the town gate, so that all the inhabitants would have to pass by it and the wounds break open again, bleed anew, when the culprits passed by their victim. But how should that still be possible, with the number of the town's inhabitants?

So he had decided that he would bury Simon alone. Had he not had to have regard to the sensitivity of the church, the pastor too would have stayed within the town walls. On the other hand, he did not know whether it might not have been Simon's will to be buried with spiritual assistance, and so he let the pastor trot silently along beside him.

Albrecht had waited for Laurentz at the Ackertor and was surprised when, after the council servants with the empty pair of horses and the pastor had already passed by some time before, he saw his grandfather coming back from the churchyards beside Lütjehann.

Lütjehann led with his own hand a wretchedly emaciated nag, harnessed to a battered cart, and probably the gravediggers had helped him lower the coffin from the cart down into the grave.

Laurentz seemed not in the least put out, or to wonder why Lütjehann had not buried his wife with the greater ceremony properly due her, but had carted her to the grave like a day-labourer without burgher-right. 'In sorrow a man should not be alone. I have invited the pitiable court clerk Lütjehann to be our guest. Whatever it was that Simon and Lütjehann's wife had in common – that they were slain by the same hand is reason enough to remember her too.'

Lütjehann had not yet given up hope that the flesh of his wife's delightful body had not grown cold in vain. Perhaps he could sound out the Moellendorff as to whether his guest, or brother, as he himself called him, had taken another name? In the commission there had been talk of a Franz Böttcher, not of a Simon van Leyden. But it was nothing unusual that high gentlemen changed their names. Had not Schwarzerd called himself Melanchthon, and the simple smith from Nuremberg grandly Faber-Castell? Names did not impress him, who had daily dealings with high gentlemen and now sat among them like their equal, distinguishable only by his clothing.

He was accustomed, when as clerk of the lower court he assisted at the higher court, to sit among the councillors, and studied with greater interest their wives, some of whom he saw for the first time today at the side table of the board. The high-necked, stiff clothing pressed their breasts flat, and even sundry adornments did not disguise that they looked rather like matrons – too ripe to be plucked any longer. It was not to his taste, at any rate.

His questions to Laurentz had yielded nothing that might have made the world look more cheerful to him. On the contrary: the dead man had borne the name Simon van Leyden since his birth, and his mother had come with him from Holland. Everything else, too, that Laurentz readily answered to Lütjehann's sanctimoniously sympathetic questions seemed rather to indicate that his wife had died in vain.

The Questions



America sive Novus Orbis Respectu Europaeorum Inferior Globi Terrestris Pars. Theodor de Bry, Frankfurt, 1596.

The mourning company had already done themselves well on two calves and emptied the first cask of wine, when suddenly it grew quiet: a stranger had entered the room and stood so uprightly bold beside the board, as though he belonged there. By his clothing he seemed to be an Englishman, and the trimmed side-whiskers, above which a twirled moustache spread out to both sides, spoke for it too.

Laurentz knitted his brow as the Englishman took his broad-brimmed hat from his head and steered straight for him. He was about to call one of the council servants to have the stranger put out of the door, but at the same instant Laurentz recognised him. He stood up, and with a 'Father!' and a 'Karl!' they fell into each other's arms.

'Then I come at just the right time, when there is such good eating and drinking here!' He looked over the board and was amused: 'Is the Hamburg water still of such poor quality that you would rather export your beer and drink the Romance wine yourselves?'

That was an incredible insinuation; the councillors flung their eyes wide. Hamburg, with its five hundred and twenty-five brewhouses, was after all the greatest and most important city in Europe in the beer trade.

'What is being celebrated here today?'

An embarrassed silence settled like a second cloth over the table and those present.

'Today we buried Simon van Leyden and ... sit here at the funeral feast,' murmured Laurentz.

'Simon? The companion of your youth, and your everlasting friend and brother in spirit?'

Laurentz nodded, but Karl did not seem affected. He had seen so many men die over the past years that death could not frighten him. 'Damn me! With you Hamburg councillors one never knows whether you are just now in mourning dress or in good spirits!

When will you at last lay aside this gloomy black fashion of the Spaniards and clothe yourselves in livelier colours?'

The councillors blinked in fright, as though a rebellious citizen had got in among them and were bidding them strip naked, since they too were only men, like all the rest.

'Be that as it may, then I will drink to Simon with you and remember him!'

One of the servers, who had been the first to shake off the general surprise, had come over from the servants' table, handed him a goblet and poured in wine.

Karl raised the goblet: 'To Simon! Cheers!'

Astonished, the black flock of councillors watched him pour the goblet into himself at a draught, lick his lips and then wipe mouth and beard dry with his sleeve.

While Karl greeted his brother Harald and his wife, shook Albrecht heartily by the hand – 'you've grown a proper man, young badger!' – it was whispered around the table that this strange Englishman was the Moellendorff's third-born son and that all was therefore in order.

'Where have you been these years, Uncle Karl?' Albrecht had slid to the side, and Karl sat down between his sister-in-law Agathe and his nephew. He twirled his moustache: 'I have seen the seas, been in the New World and helped singe the beard of the Spanish king!' Invitingly he held out his empty goblet to the server.

'The Spaniards? Then you were ...?'

'Yes, quite right. I was a captain in the fleet of her English Majesty and sailed with Admiral Sir John Hawkins and Admiral Sir Francis Drake.'

'Drake is said to be cruising off the Elbe with his privateers and plundering Hanseatic ships!'

'Ah, bullshit, his mind is set on more valuable things than grain and your thin beer! He and Sir Hawkins, who always sail together, missed the Spanish silver fleet last year. Now they have sailed off

again to go a-privateering in the New World, to plunder the Spaniards' gold in Panama and Puerto Rico. Good luck to the pair of them! I always laid my prize money nicely aside and had no wish to go across the ocean once again.'

Karl beckoned to a man who had stopped at the door in his striking colourful clothing and who now gave a signal to those outside: a carter rolled in an iron-bound chest on his squeaking wheelbarrow.

'In the chest there is a good capital of gold and silver, and that fellow there ...' – he beckoned over the man in colourful dress, who now came nearer – 'that is my faithful servant Kobi!'

The man in colourful dress threw back his hood and said: 'At your pleasure!' The Hamburg councillors were left, quite literally, with the morsel stuck in their mouths, when suddenly the devil in the flesh stood among them.

Grinning broadly, Karl studied the frozen councillors and then laughed resoundingly: 'I know well enough what you black mourning-bags are startled at. The colour of my servant is fast. He comes from Africa, from Guinea. I took him from a Spaniard who kept him as a slave and took him into my service. He now speaks our tongue tolerably too and may sit among the servants.'

Kobi, who stood bolt upright and did not seem to lack self-assurance, nodded and went to the servants' table, where the maids still wavered whether they should rush shrieking away from the black man, or would not rather grope him, with a proper shudder, to test whether the colour of his skin was truly real.

Laurentz was lost in thought. He was thinking of how Karl had taken his leave of him years ago and asked: 'Shall we see each other again?'

He himself had laughed optimistically in those days: 'If you mean by that to ask whether I shall still be alive when you return, then I can tell you: yes, we shall see each other again!'

Karl had studied him sceptically, and he had taken him in his arms: 'When Gaffer Death wants to fetch me for the last great voyage, he will have to shout damned loud that I am to come aboard. And even then, I shall not follow his call! He will have to send his helpers to fetch me and drag me aboard his ship!' He had lifted Karl up to demonstrate his bodily strength. 'And then he will have to send a few of his men to overpower me!'

He sighed. With Simon two had sufficed.

The others besieged Karl with questions: 'Then you have been a pirate?'

'Well, yes, one might call it so.'

'Is the black man your slave?'

'No, no! He is my servant and gets his wages, so that one day he may return home again.'

'Then you have seen the GOLDEN HIND of Drake as well?'

'Not only that! I have often been aboard his famous ship!'

'Have you a wife too?'

'No, I am still searching. One day the right one will stand before me!'

'Have you seen the Queen?'

'Yes, several times, even.'

His gaze grew transfigured, and he seemed to see her before his inner eye: 'A clever woman, by God. Bound to her people, who revere her, as a head to its body: justices of the peace watch over the fair payment of journeymen and labourers, the sheriffs busy themselves in the care of the poor and in finding work for the needy unemployed – she cares for her subjects as though they were her children.'

'And lets her fleet, cravenly disguised as privateers, fall upon our ships too!' His brother Harald was not in agreement with this admiration.

'Good gracious! Did I claim she was not cunning? When one has but limited means, one must husband them to reach great goals

nonetheless. If the privateers do not hoist their English flag, who can then with any right maintain that they are Englishmen? Weak England has beaten the mighty Spanish ARMADA, and the Hanse too should not feel secure that the Steelyard in London can keep up its monopoly much longer. We should seek out new markets: the world is big enough for all! Why do we not sail to Siberia, to Archangel, in which the English have no interest?

The councillors flinched nervously: that now went too far for them.

Karl reached into his jacket and drew out a curved tube with a round funnel at the end: 'Will any of you drink some tobacco too?'

'You as well?' Laurentz knitted his brows.

'What, I as well?' Karl had drawn a pouch from his trouser-pocket, stuffed some cut tobacco into the pipe and searched for his flint.

'The preacher of St Nicholas' was lamenting to me only yesterday that some churchgoers lately gave off such a stench that he was near falling from the pulpit. How did you come by it?'

Karl puffed a few draughts to get the embers going and was pleased: 'Sir Drake brought it from the New World to London, and at the royal court in England everyone smokes for the wager. In London there have been public tobacco-houses for years, where many men sit comfortably together and take their ease. Oh, yes!'

The second-born Harald had turned away in disgust from the clouds of smoke: 'The New World! Pandora's box has been opened there across the ocean! We were happier in our old world grown old, when these parts of the earth were still unknown. What have they brought us but greed for gold, disease, and now this stinking devil's-weed as well, that is called tobacco?'

Karl laughed from a full throat and had another goblet of wine poured for him: 'Has the Pope, like everything good, already made a devil of tobacco? Good heavens, perhaps you should first try it before you judge so quickly, brother? It drove away the King of

France's headache, and if one puffs this healing herb properly, one grows so befogged that one can even prophesy! At the least, one can always shit well!' And again, he poured the goblet of wine into himself at a draught.

The black flock of councillors swallowed dryly and asked themselves what this poor man must have lived through, that he was so out of his senses from the drinking of tobacco. It all sounded very much of superstition and magic.

One thing was thereby clear: this weed must be banned in Hamburg with all speed, at once, without fail, at the earliest opportunity, plainly and simply.

The presiding mayor looked out the next morning over the double dozen of the councillors' assembly, several of whom looked visibly the worse for wear, regarded his signet ring, which he wore by virtue of his office, and drew a deep breath: 'Before we begin, an admonition to the councillor Riepenstipp. It has been reported to us that you walk in the funeral retinue of lesser burghers, to lend the procession more importance, and receive money for it. Let us please avoid the impression that the council, or at least individual members, are for sale!'

Riepenstipp looked at the green tablecloth and was conscious of no guilt. If as council members they received only fees, one had to see how one bettered one's income. Another resolved to ask the reprimanded Riepenstipp how much was paid, on such occasions, for a councillor. Trade turnover was stagnating, and it was always well to open up alternative sources of income. The last proper war now lay too long in the past as well. Perhaps one would soon come into better business with the Spaniards: three ships were just being loaded in Hamburg harbour – with war-important cargo for Spain aboard. Of course, these ships always had to smuggle themselves past the English and the Dutch ... Neutrality was a profitable

thing – one could trade with everyone – but sadly everything needed its time.

The mayor resolved to return to the matter on a better occasion, glanced at the sheet before him and announced: 'The floor now goes to the councillor Kieckering!'

'Over the winter a rabble of riffraff has nested itself here in the town! Sundry folk who could well earn their keep, but for the sake of their idle flesh and easy days do not do so but would rather go begging! Sturdy, lazy, insolent, lecherous, godless, wilfully disobedient and sottish drunkards and beer-swillers – women as well as men, who live in vice, whoring, knavery and all manner of sin and shame! The muck-reeve should carry them out of the town with his carts and have them tipped out before the town gate on the field of shame, or we should build a house of correction for them! And besides, I demand that the town be built in stone!'

The councillor Kieckering looked about the assembly, as though he wished to spur his fellow councillors to utter more than a merely approving murmur. He was responsible in the council for building. Though very small of body, he possessed a sonorous bass voice and had for years demanded a new town fortification with it. As long, however, as he laid no proposal how the town might pay for such fortification walls – with great ramparts, like the towns in the Netherlands, as he always stressed – no one gave him more than merely approving hearing, and the council was always glad to be able to point to the bean-counting treasury burghers.

That he closed every contribution with his demand 'And besides, the town must be built in stone!' was regarded only as superfluous posturing, with which he wished to show that he possessed a classical education and, like Cato in ancient Rome, was able through the persistent repetition of a demand at last to carry it against his annoyed colleagues. His latest hobbyhorse was apparently the building of a house of correction. The majority of the council had no interest in such newfangled ideas. They only cost

good money, which was not there in any case, and after all the headsman was not to lie idle if he was already being paid from the town chest. Kieckering sat down, disappointed, in his richly ornamented seat of the council stalls and sulked.

The councillor Godefrog beside Kieckering, who was but seldom present, turned to his neighbour: 'Are wood, straw and clay so bad, then? In nature there are trees, grain, water and earth. So we live in harmony with the divine order!'

'Fiddlesticks! Have you ever seen a forest of trees burn?'

'Yes, to be sure.'

'And have you ever seen a rock burn?'

'No, except for Moses no one has ever seen that.'

'And that is the reason why all cultures, the more advanced, populous and settled they became, have built their houses of stone: they do not burn so easily. God have mercy on us, if some fool does not watch his hearth-fire and thereby lays the whole town in ashes!'

Laurentz, who sat on the other side of Kieckering, had listened to the conversation only with half an ear. How many long years had he now led the trade business, and how often had he already sat here in the council? Always they were striving, through clever action and far-sighted reckoning, to shape the course of things after their own mind. Involuntarily he snorted: decisive events could neither be planned in advance, nor did they announce themselves betimes – they happened from one minute to the next, and no power on this earth could foresee them or undo them again.

A weariness never known before came over him. Laboriously he turned his neck and had the urgent need to tear off his white ruff, which he had until now worn proudly as a sign of the council's power, and to fling it before the tables of the other members of the council. But to what end? Happily he was not today the object of Kieckering's particular treatment: the other neighbour, Godefrog, had offered himself as victim.

'And who is to pay for the costly stone? Only the church and the nobility have the money to raise such houses for themselves.'

'Fiddlesticks! For over fifty years there has been an agreement between council and citizenry: whoever replaces a wooden gable with one of stone gets from the town building-yard, free of charge, a thousand bricks and lime to match by way of help, without his even having to pay for the transport! But that seems to trouble no one. And if we merchant lords, who have the money for it, do not go ahead with a good example – be it only to protect our own goods and chattels – who else is to do it?'

Godefrog studiously passed over this suggestion. It was, after all, his own money and not Kieckering's. He tried another tack: 'And the carpenters, who have hitherto built our houses? Would you make yet more of them paupers? When you have just this moment lamented that there were too many of them?'

Kieckering would not let himself be impressed by such objections. This supposed regard for those entrusted to them without burgher-right was always the last thing but one that occurred to his colleagues when it came to their purse. In his sonorous voice he only rumbled: 'No town government has yet taken offence at an honest poor man who seeks his day's wage. Let these people build ships, then, if the houses are raised in stone. Ships are nothing but houses that float on the water, after all!'

'Very well, if one of the others begins with the stone, then I neither will nor shall stand aside.'

Kieckering snorted. So for years ran the constant excuse, not only of his fellow councillors. He tugged at his Spanish ruff and felt the wish that the white, spreading round collars of the councillors might turn to millstones of stone, so that the others too might feel the burden he bore with the town's building.

A council servant had meanwhile spoken with the presiding mayor, who now nodded and gave the council servants at the doors

to the chamber a sign. Silently the heavy oaken wings swung open, and the twelve senior elders entered the hall.

'Let us just see what sort of Pickelherring farce it will be again today,' whispered Kieckering to Laurentz.

'They will lament their usual liri-pipio, I dare say!'

Kieckering's heckling left Laurentz unmoved.

The senior of the senior elders had stepped forward from the group and stood facing the presiding mayor on the open side of the seated round.

'What can we do for you, Master Schnitger?' The mayor was too clever not to treat the senior elders with courtesy.

'The College of Senior Elders would ask the honourable council to revise some of the Burspraken.'

Encouragingly the mayor nodded to the spokesman of the senior elders, who now drew a deep breath: 'Sundry citizens and inhabitants have presumed to sell themselves all manner of sugar confections and also drinks that were hitherto made and sold only by the apothecaries, which redounds to the visible damage of the apothecaries. These citizens should refrain from it.'

The mayor nodded understandingly – Master Schnitger was, after all, himself an apothecary – and asked him: 'Should we threaten a penalty?'

'We beg it.'

The council clerk noted down the wish.

'Furthermore there is ever more strongly the abuse among the craftsmen, particularly the shipwrights, carpenters and masons, that instead of the prescribed six Lübeck shillings' day-wage they now demand eight, nine and even ten Lübeck shillings. We desire that the honourable council may command, under threat of penalty, that they content themselves with the appointed day-wage.'

'Are you agreed to a penalty of five talers?'

'That would suit us.'

The spokesman of the senior elders made a pause, but it did not create the impression that all their wishes were already named.

'And furthermore, may the honourable council earnestly admonish the women, maids and other useless rabble who at the fire that lately broke out – which almighty God may in future graciously prevent – only stand about and would rather make off with something, and hinder others from putting out the fire ... may it earnestly admonish these women, maids and other useless rabble not to stand about and thereby obstruct others.'

Kieckering had regarded the wooden ceiling as though he saw it for the first time in his life and inwardly gave himself right that the council was again to play the bailiff of the lesser burghers.

'And finally, the manslayers, idlers and other frivolous persons and beggars who settle before the town gates and daily, both within and without the town, not only lie before good folk's doors, but also take the alms out of the very mouths of other infirm persons here present, and, when opportunity offers, pitifully rob and steal from honourable people, are not to be suffered and tolerated here. By Easter these strangers are to take themselves off, on pain that otherwise they will be proceeded against with graver penalties than hitherto.'

Kieckering was delighted: the senior elders had more usable ideas, then, than he had until now supposed and heard. Eagerly he nodded, to support the good cause.

'Your first three points we shall have proclaimed from the pulpits next Sunday after the sermon. The last point the town watch will bring home to this riffraff by hand.' The mayor plainly wished to close the hearing with this, but the senior had apparently still something to bring forward.

'Lastly one more matter, which need not be proclaimed from the pulpits.'

The councillors too, who had been reading in documents, looked up surprised: the senior elders had yet a concern that they plainly did not wish to hang on the great bell.

'It came to our ears that the monk who was recently slain in the town was a bishop of the right faith. We desire that the magistrates take up the matter earnestly and that the guilty be punished.'

The mayor looked first at Laurentz, who was himself too surprised to make any sense of it, and then across at Mönckebronn, who silently signalled to him that the matter already lay with him and was being investigated.

For the times when it was said 'Where there is no plaintiff, there is no judge' were, for offences prosecuted *ex officio*, finally past.

The mayor cleared his throat and looked questioningly at Senior Schnitger: 'So far as I know, it was no citizen of our town. You knew the man and have a personal interest?'

The senior elder waved this assumption far from him with a movement of the hand: 'No, by no means. But it must not be that a dignitary of the true-believing church should come to harm in any way in this town.'

The mayor nodded in agreement: after all, even a petty church-theft, or the impropriety of a man grasping a woman's breast on her way to church, was punished with death.

Laurentz had been very silent during the evening meal. A new great table had been built and delivered. As always he sat alone at the head. To his right now sat his son Harald, then his wife Agathe, beside her Marthe. On the left the row began with his son Karl, beside him Albrecht, then his little brothers, and on both sides followed the servants. The lower part remained free for guests.

After brief consideration Laurentz had rejected the thought of setting an empty seat of honour for Simon at the great table. Beside the hearth stood the small table that Master Christian had built from the headpiece of the previous table. On this small table

Laurentz had had a plate and a spoon laid too. When the time for it came, then he would sit down at this side-table with Simon, and his son Harald would take over the presidency of the board in his stead.

At length he ended his silence: 'In the council today it has been resolved that there will be an official investigation of the death of Simon van Leyden.'

All nodded to show that they had understood.

'And the death of the bath-woman?'

Marthe had asked.

'Frau Antje possessed no burgher-right, and her husband too has demanded no investigation. So the council is not compelled to act. The investigation takes place only at the instigation of the senior elders, who, burgher-rights or no, see in Simon a brother of their office and find it intolerable that a church dignitary has come to harm in the open street.' Laurentz had looked at the table. 'Simon does not interest them as a man, only as an institution.'

With a movement of his hand, he cut off any further remark, drank a draught and set the goblet down so hard on the wooden table that at once all looked at him again.

'I have resolved to have the servants' house pulled down and to build it up anew in stone.'

Breathless stillness lay over the table. All had stopped eating and looked, puzzled, at the master of the house.

'We will all move a little closer together in the house, so that you ...' – he looked at the servants – 'will live here in the front for the time being. It will soon be summer, and so it should be bearable. And whoever finds it too cramped can spend the night in our country house before the Neuer Wall.'

Ingvar, the stable lad, glanced stealthily across at the one maid with whom he would gladly have been closer already, but as she noticed his look, he at once cast down his eyes.

'Why just now, Father?' his son Harald interjected.

'I had long been weighing it, for the councillor Kieckering is right when he says that we patricians should go ahead with a good example, to lessen the danger of fire. That I always hesitated until now and have only now resolved on it, happened out of respect for Simon, who regarded the servant's room of his mother, in which he also grew up, as his true home. Now that he is dead, there is no longer any reason.' All saw the tears in his eyes.

The magistrate Mönckebronn wished to press on with the investigation, since through the intervention of the senior elders it had slipped too far into the political for him: even though the council did not use the installation of the secular power over the spiritual lords through Luther's doctrine for such intrusions as some Protestant princes did in the filling of preaching posts, yet the entanglement of the civic colleges with the parishes, and the fact that the lesser burghers made ever more use of the senior elders as the mouthpiece of their demands, was tinder enough that every petition of the church bodies had the political colour of a test whether the council was willing to comply with them.

Mönckebronn had entrusted Albrecht with the conduct of the matter, since his personal bond with the murdered bishop was the warrant that he would press on with the investigation with the greatest interest.

'Cui bono?' Mönckebronn and Albrecht had considered, in the old tradition. Who had a benefit from Simon's death? With this question they had got no further. The dead man had nothing to bequeath.

'If, then, it is no material motive, then there must be a personal reason. So, who could have had something against this good man, strong enough to kill him or perhaps have him killed?'

Albrecht had looked questioningly at the magistrate: 'You mean someone who had a personal motive might have hired the murderers?'

'If we consider what the surgeon said, then the murders of Simon and of the bath-woman were carried out by the same men. What connection, then, is there between the bishop and this bath-woman, who was also a whore?'

Albrecht at once shook his head. 'The two did not know each other. The bishop had been for nine years neither in Hamburg nor indeed in the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, and the short time since his arrival he was always together with the councillor Moellendorff.'

Mönckebronn had drawn invisible circles on the table with his quill. 'Will you put your hand in the fire for that? Did you know the bishop so well that you can tell me what he did at night when you were asleep? Do you truly know who this bishop was?'

With wide eyes Albrecht regarded the magistrate. He could not answer these questions. He would ask Laurentz.

'I take it upon my oath that Simon did not know this bath-woman!' Laurentz had stated it with the greatest decision. Then he hesitated: 'And yet – they met briefly in the bathhouse. Frau Antje had asked us whether we wanted a bloodletting. Then she had walked on; that was all. Simon had looked after her, but was that to be wondered at? He too was only a man, and this God-accursed bath-woman had a body that many men have looked after with interest!'

Albrecht's mother plucked at her bodice, as though she wished to say by it that she too was not of poor stock and, might she run about like these maids, could well draw the looks of many men upon herself too, while the Moellendorff men who sat about the table nodded in agreement.

'How did Simon hold with celibacy?'

Karl had thrown in the question.

'Come now!' Laurentz seemed to grow angry: 'As a Protestant he was not subject to celibacy and could have married, had he wished!'

'But he did not marry! And since he had for long years before been a Catholic monk, lived in fact celibate without having to, how will you know whether his root did not blossom when he caught sight of this well-formed bath-woman, who, so one hears, is said not to have been disinclined herself ...!'

'Karl! Cease such talk! Even if he should have felt this desire: for that he had no time at all. And besides, it did not accord with his nature to visit whores.'

Albrecht broke into the budding dispute: 'Grandfather! You are the only one at this table who knew Simon more closely. Tell us something of Simon. How did you grow up, how did he live?'

'How we grew up? Very well.' He cleared his throat. 'When Simon and I were born, they were all still living: the Roman Majesty Emperor Charles, the fifth of his name, Herr Luther and Melancthon, Erasmus, Paracelsus and Copernicus, the masters Lucas Cranach, Dürer, Holbein and Master Michelangelo. And not only the rebellious peasants died on the fields of the lost bloody battles; all of them have died since, and their successors, of whom no one will speak later, stepped into their places. When they were still living, then our life began.

'My mother died in childbed after my birth, and my father sought a wet-nurse for me. He found a Dutch woman who had a child of the same age and took her into his house: Wilma van Leyden and her son Simon. So, she became my wet-nurse. Simon and I were milk-brothers and grew up together in this house. We were inseparable, and Wilma van Leyden treated us both alike, as though I too were her own son. My father did likewise, and only later, when we came to London ...'

Karl interrupted his father: 'Who was the husband of Wilma van Leyden and Simon's father?'

'I do not know! The bloody struggles in the Netherlands, the murderous peasant wars: there were so many young women with little mites and without a husband that there was nothing remarkable in it. Hundreds of them are said to have lived in Hamburg in those days, and most sought work in a burgher's house, to feed themselves and their child. My father had made a clever choice when he decided on this Dutch widow.'

'How do you know that she was a widow and that Simon was not born out of wedlock?'

Laurentz leaned back. 'I have never thought about it, now that you ask me so. Out of wedlock, no, for then Simon would have been without honour. He could never have become a priest. So Wilma must have been married and then become a widow.'

Albrecht turned to his grandfather: 'Do you still remember exactly what Simon said when he died?'

'Yes, to be sure: "Brother, Father." By the brother he meant me, and by the father surely our Father in heaven, as Jesus Christ said in his hour of death: Father, why hast thou forsaken me?'

Karl shook his head: 'Why can he not have meant by it his own father?'

'Then he would have had to know of him!'

'A woman always knows who is the father of her child,' Agathe interjected.

'That is true. And that, in turn, he could only have known from his mother! Did he never tell you of it?'

'No. Then I should surely remember it!' Laurentz's voice had a despairing undertone, that he could give no answer to these questions. Only now did it become abundantly clear to him how little he knew of Simon. He propped his head in his hands and groaned softly: 'It is only he who asks who will find no answer!'

Albrecht had followed up the suggestion that the foreigners' registers, in which every outsider had to have himself entered if he wished to remain in the town, might give a more exact clue as to where Wilma van Leyden had come from: 'The foreigners' registers do not help us any further.'

'Did you look through all the years that come into question?'

Albrecht was about to give his uncle Karl a pert answer to his question – for how much of a fool did he take him? – but he thought better of it: 'Wilma van Leyden must have been born around 1500. So, I looked through all the foreigners' registers from that year on. Also, all the lists of the citizens who since that time took their oath before the council as admitted burghers. Nowhere, up to 1526, does the name van Leyden appear. Only in that year does her name stand in the foreigners' register, with the addition "here present, with son", which does not help us any further.'

Laurentz had reflected: 'Wilma had a good friend – I still know her name: Janneken Rodenborch – who lived with her husband in the parish of St James's and whose marriage produced two children. Perhaps she can tell us something of Wilma.'

The pastor of St James's remembered the Rodenborch family at once: 'If there were more such exemplary families, we should have less trouble.' Yet he directed Laurentz and Albrecht to Altona: they had moved there years ago, since as Baptism-minded folk, who lived according to the teaching of Menno Simons, they were tolerated in the town only through gritted teeth. And after the Lutheran superintendent had interrogated the Dutch for days on end twenty years before, it had grown too much for them and they had moved away.

In Altona too Laurentz and Albrecht received a negative answer: Janneken Rodenborch was already dead, and her children had, like many others of the Baptism-minded, emigrated to Stade and to Holstein, where they, scattered over many congregations, could live their faith unhindered.

On the way back to Hamburg Laurentz told Albrecht of the lamentable attitude of the Lutheran church wardens, who did not regard these Baptism-minded folk as devout Christians and brothers in the Gospel, but feared that with their enthusiasms, their refusal of every oath and of military service, they besmirched the purity of the Lutheran church and therefore would not tolerate them in the town.

At the Schaartor Laurentz had suddenly stopped as though rooted to the spot, had stared at the bosom of a woman who stood there in the sun in the plain grey clothing prescribed for whores, and had then sprung towards her in two bounds.

'Where did you get that?' he shouted at her and held in his hand the medallion that the woman wore on a chain about her neck.

The surprised woman at once shrieked shrilly for help and thereby brought the gatekeepers to the spot. Their first impulse, to strike down the importunate fellow, ebbed away when they recognised that the supposed evildoer was a councillor.

Albrecht, who talked soothingly at his grandfather, had no success with it, and at once a crowd gathered about them, which was pushed back by the gatekeepers with their pikes held crosswise.

Laurentz still held the trinket fast gripped and stammered: 'It is the medallion that Simon wore when we were in the council bath-house. After his death it had vanished!'

The woman tried hastily to slip the chain over her head, to free herself of it – but Laurentz held her arm fast and barked at the gatekeepers: 'Seize her and take her to the court!'

Which was done.

After all the shattered hopes of that day, the tide now seemed to turn. It was Wednesday and court day. Mönckebronn held the court staff in his hand as first magistrate; to his left sat the bailiff with his red cap, to his right the second magistrate of the council, and beside him Lütjehann.

The gate-watch had handed the pale woman over to two green-clad court officers, who had bound her hands and waited with her before the bar of the court. Laurentz conferred briefly with his grandson, and they decided that Albrecht should bring the matter before the lower court as Simon's representative. Mönckebronn raised himself as a murmur went through the listeners and the yellow-clad lay judges too looked towards the vestibule, to fathom what the stir meant. He laid down his court staff, whereby he interrupted the proceedings, to go over to the Moellendorffs.

'You wish to bring a charge against the woman there before the court?'

'Yes, I represent the person of Simon van Leyden. The woman is accused of having been party to the death of the bishop.'

'Witnesses?'

'Yes. The councillor Moellendorff, who recognised the medalion that the bishop wore about his neck, and that this woman there now wears. Then also the physician de Castro, who will confirm that a chain was torn from the bishop's neck and left a bloody imprint on the nape.'

Mönckebronn nodded thoughtfully. 'The Portuguese I do not want as a witness. Perhaps she is willing to confess without that too. I will charge one of the procurators to take up her cause at once as her advocate.'

One of the eight procurators appointed by the court had already stepped up beside the magistrate and, after a brief explanation of the charge, went over to the bound defendant. Mönckebronn sat down in his place, took the court staff in his hand again, and the running proceedings went on.

Before the bar of the court Laurentz and Albrecht whispered vehemently with one another. Laurentz whispered: 'Of course I know that she was not directly party to it. The physician spoke plainly of two men who slew and stabbed Simon.'

'Perhaps she stood by, drew Simon's attention to herself and afterwards tore the chain from his neck?' Albrecht looked at Laurentz questioningly: 'And are you absolutely certain that it is the chain with the medallion that Simon wore about his neck?'

'Yes. It is most unusual: a woman's head, chased in silver, such as I had not seen before and have not seen since. I am not mistaken!'

The magistrate had quickly concluded the proceedings; Lütjehann wrote the lay judges' verdict into the sentence-book: ten marks' fine for a baker whose bread was of too little weight; and Mönckebronn called Albrecht to the bar of the court to bring his charge.

'I stand here as representative of the murdered Simon van Leyden and accuse this woman of having slain the bishop. She wears a medallion of the bishop's that had vanished since the deed. Proof of it the councillor Moellendorff will offer, should it be so desired.'

The defendant's procurator stepped forward and made the counter-speech: 'As advocate appointed by the court, I represent the woman here accused, Frauke Wilhelmi. She denies ever having seen the plaintiff and accordingly denies having been party to the bloody deed. The medallion she was offered and took as payment, in place of money, at the maidens' house in the Niederstrasse, where she is registered. The charge is a monstrous insult to a woman who has hitherto let nothing come to her charge and struggles through life without a husband. It is ...'

Mönckebronn raised his hand: 'Master advocate, keep to the matter and do not stray off again into the supposed injustice of life. And speak more slowly, so that the court clerk can write it all down correctly. Have you anything further to say to the matter?'

'No.'

'Thank you. Can the defendant say anything about the person of the man from whom she claims to have received this medallion?'

Mutely the defendant shook her head so violently that her loosened hair flew over her eyes.

Mönckebronn reflected and tapped the court staff on the table: the woman's violent shaking of the head had seemed to him suspicious, as though she wished to protect someone or was afraid of someone.

All the listeners fell silent, and in the stillness only the soft tapping of the court staff on the table was to be heard. The lay judges too knew that Mönckebronn did this only when he was considering whether he should, as a precaution, have the instruments of torture shown to a defendant, to draw the truth out of them.

Lütjehann's eyelids twitched nervously. In the days when no one had come forward despite the reward offered, his flared-up fear that the culprits might name his wife as the one who had commissioned them had slowly died down again. Now this fear was suddenly threateningly present once more, and he had to master himself so that his hand with the quill did not tremble.

The procurator too knew this habit of the magistrate Mönckebronn, and he tried quietly to work upon the defendant: if the magistrate ended his tapping, it would be no good sign. Her shaking of the head grew slowly weaker; at length she held her head still, bowed, and whispered her answer to him.

The advocate closed his eyes with a silent thanksgiving, relieved that the fate of having to be a witness at an examination under torture had been spared him and announced loudly and audibly: 'Hans the Swede.'

At once the bailiff bent over towards the magistrate, who stopped the tapping: 'The man is known to me. Shall I fetch him with the court officers?'

Mönckebronn nodded and looked gratefully across at the defendant. He had never been able to make friends with the provision in Emperor Charles the Fifth's Criminal Court Code that required a confession of the defendants, without which they could

not be convicted. This much-vaunted advance in legislation had indeed limited the arbitrariness of the earlier inquisition trials but had of necessity introduced torture. If the Emperor wanted a confession, then he should have it. The high lord and his counsellors had plainly not considered that any suspect had only to lie steadfastly, need not confess, to escape his punishment. Happily it sufficed, in most cases, only to threaten the obstinate, to show them the instruments, to obtain a confession.

He laid his staff on the table and rose, to speak with the Moelendorffs.

'It will take some time until the bailiff has found the man, and I shall only be able to clear up in a preliminary examination who the second man is of whom the physician spoke. The woman is plainly innocent. I will let her go, if the lay judges are of the same mind. Do you want the medallion back later?' he turned to Laurentz.

'Yes, I beg it. Nor shall the woman lose her wage, if it was so. Ask her what would usually have been due her.'

After Frauke Wilhelmi's statement Mönckebronn had put off all further proceedings to the next court day, so that the bailiff with the court officers and Albrecht could set out at once to search for Hans the Swede and bring him in. The bailiff had urged haste: 'How do we know whether one of his comrades has not been lurking about the court and is already on his way with the news to warn him?'

Albrecht tried to match the quick steps of the plump bailiff. Readily people made way for the little group: when the red-capped bailiff was abroad with all his court officers, and the six green-clad men carried long pikes with them besides, everyone knew that he had no time to listen to the usual complaints and grievances but was purposefully seeking someone to bring before the court.

Albrecht had looked round and briefly studied the double row behind himself and the bailiff: 'Why have you brought all the court officers?'

'Hans the Swede is a sturdy fellow, with whom it is not good to eat cherries. Two of the men I need to seize him, the third will then bind him. The other three will guard the various exits of his hidey-hole, so that he does not vanish unnoticed when we knock at his door.'

Briskly they strode through the streets, and Albrecht regarded with wonder the change in the streetscape. The houses grew smaller and more crooked. Some leaned towards the street, as though they meant to hurl themselves upon the passers-by at any moment and were only held back and hindered by the houses standing beside them.

The cleanly whitewashed panels between the timber uprights grew grubbier, had holes and looked increasingly neglected. The more wretched the buildings became, the more often they bore the signs of taverns and inns. Topsy men, who had trouble getting out of their way and who's clothing too had seen cleaner days, appeared ever more frequently among the other passers-by. The filth of the street spread increasingly, and it seemed as though the muck-reeve but seldom sent his people here to clean the streets.

When the biting stench from a gutter made Albrecht involuntarily wrinkle his nose, the bailiff laughed at his expression, and the more so at his clumsy attempts to avoid the most soapy and jelly-like filth.

'You have not been in this part of the town before, I dare say?'

'If I did not know that we had not left the town, I would not believe that we are still in the same Hamburg.'

The bailiff twisted his mouth imperceptibly. It was not the first time he witnessed the ignorance of the more well-to-do citizens, who all lived in the west, because the prevailing wind carried the stench of the poorer quarters eastward, and who were horrified

when they saw with their own eyes how many poor the town harboured.

He snorted: 'Our town is an organism like the human body. With clean and dirty parts, with splendid hats and dirty feet, with eyes that see and hands that take ... I have not yet seen one in which it was otherwise.'

'And these here?' Albrecht had pointed, full of pity and revulsion at once, to a group of ragged children whose shaggy hair stood stiff with dirt from their heads, whose skin was scabbed with eczema and who, at the bailiff's approach, had pressed themselves for shelter into a corner of boards.

The bailiff shrugged his shoulders indifferently: 'The living proof that town air may indeed make free, but that not everyone finds his fortune here.'

He had stopped, pointed to one of the low wooden shacks and gave two court officers a sign, whereupon they vanished wordlessly through a board door beside the house. To all it was plainly known what procedure was now unfolding. The third court officer placed himself before the street window, and the bailiff hammered with his fist against the door.

'Let us just see whether the little bird has already left his cage,' murmured the bailiff, as an old woman opened the front door. Before the woman could lay her hand over her mouth, flung open in astonishment as she recognised the official person of the bailiff before her door, he had already pushed her aside and was, with Albrecht and the court officers, already in the house. Albrecht involuntarily ducked his head, so as not to knock against the low ceiling, while the bailiff pushed open a door and gave the snoring man who slept on the floor a hearty kick in the backside. At once the rattling snore ceased; the man spun round and made to spring up with an angry 'Hey, what!', when he saw the pikes of the court officers directed against him. He preferred to crawl back into the corner of the room and only glare angrily at the bailiff.

'Drunk again, Hans?' The bailiff had hooked his thumbs behind his broad leather belt, rocked on his heels, and at a nod from him the court officers stepped to the corner. Two stayed standing held the man in check with their pikes, while the third knelt down, drew a rope from his pocket and bound Hans the Swede – who plainly already knew the procedure too – by the wrists of his outstretched arms and hauled him up by the rope.

'The magistrate wants to see you, Swede! You seem to be mixed up in an evil business!'

Hans the Swede only snorted contemptuously and pushed up his lower lip in a disdainful grin, as though to say that it would be beneath his dignity to comment on it.

'Out with him and take care that he cannot break loose on the way!'

Seemingly indifferent, the tall man, who had to hold his own head bowed so as not to knock against the ceiling-beams, let himself be dragged out of the room and onto the street. While one of the pike-bearing court officers fetched his two comrades from their guard-post behind the house, Albrecht regarded the bound man, who out on the open street still kept his head lowered.

Even if the clothing looked rather crumpled and amply grubby, it was still to be seen that the stout cloth was of good quality and had been tailored to the fit of the broad-shouldered man.

As though he felt Albrecht's gaze, he suddenly raised his head and looked at him. It was a clear, self-assured look, underscored still further by the mocking grin at the corners of his mouth. Casually he blew a strand of hair from his face through the corner of his mouth and flung his head loosely back, as though to free himself thereby of the last remnant of sleep. Then the Swede's gaze caught on a window, out of which a woman looked onto the street. He grinned and shouted across to her: 'Keep your thighs nicely closed, Meitje, so that nothing comes between us before I come to visit you later!'

'Hold your tongue!' the bailiff snapped at him. 'There I would not be so sure, in your place, when you may next go to visit the whore.'

Slowly the Swede turned his head, looked at the bailiff as though he saw him for the first time, spat on the ground and grinned slyly: 'When you are in a bad temper, bailiff, then lie on your fat wife, teach her to squeal as others did before you, and don't drag blameless folk before the court.'

The court officer holding the rope tugged the Swede away from the bailiff, and the procession set itself in motion. In front the court officers – the prisoner, who overtopped them all by half a head, in their midst – followed by the bailiff and Albrecht.

Mönckebronn had had the bailiff report to him and regarded the still bound Swede. Lütjehann studied the man brought before them, who was very like him in stature and face, only that he bore himself more insolently than the court clerk would ever have dared.

Mönckebronn was still undecided how he should begin the questioning, but then he had decided.

'The bailiff reports you wished to sign on as helmsman in the spring?'

The Swede snorted: 'The owners pay nothing but starvation wages now, so there was better work to be had here on land.'

'By what do you earn your money now?'

'Now this, now that, whatever just offers. I shun no work and get by.'

'The state of your clothing speaks plainly a different language.'

The Swede smirked: 'Drinking and women don't come for nothing, and so I must save on the washerwoman. It has not troubled the innkeepers or the women so far!'

'And when the money does not suffice, then you pay with jewelry too?' Mönckebronn held up the medallion, which turned slowly on its chain.

A slight twitch of his eyes the Swede could not suppress, yet his grin now grew broader still: 'That a randy bath-woman gave me, because I serviced her well!'

'You do not deny that you know it?' Mönckebronn had reckoned with excuses and was baffled.

'Why not? I then gave it to the Wilhelmi for good service to my God-given great manly strength. Easy come, easy go!' laughed the Swede shamelessly.

Mönckebronn swallowed and looked, seeking help, across at Albrecht and the court clerk. Albrecht was just as speechless at the Swede's readiness to give information as the magistrate – he too had expected lies. Lütjehann scribbled hard in his record-book, not daring to look up, for even though the Swede had not named the randy bath-woman, Mönckebronn would surely rightly assume that it had been his wife Antje. Only the bailiff, who already knew the Swede from a few scuffles and quarrels on the markets, leaned calmly over to the magistrate and whispered something to him. Mönckebronn thereupon turned to Lütjehann, questioned him quietly, whereupon the court clerk answered just as quietly.

Mönckebronn nodded, fixed his eyes on the Swede and began amiably: 'Four days ago you boasted at the fish market of money that was tied up in a blue-and-white striped cloth.'

Nothing seemed to disconcert the Swede: 'That the bailiff's wife gave me only the other day! It was no more than right and fair, as well as I serviced her.'

The bailiff's face began to match the red hue of his bailiff's cap, but Mönckebronn laid a soothing hand on his arm.

Now Mönckebronn smiled: 'As it happens, I know the bailiff's wife personally and know that she is above your prattle. Where did you really get the money?'

'From dicing?' the Swede asked pertly.

'We shall clear it up! Take him to the dungeon for today!' Mönckebronn instructed the court officers.

The magistrate had conferred with the bailiff, and for the second time the plump representative of authority set out, with two court officers and Lütjehann in his train. After some rummaging in the disorder of the Swede's room, the court clerk then found, among soiled pieces of linen, the blue-and-white striped cloth that had belonged to his wife.

The next day Mönckebronn spread the cloth out on the table. 'Do you recognise this cloth?'

Hans the Swede blinked. 'A cloth like many another. What is there special about it, that I should recognise it?'

'The bailiff found it in your room, hidden among pieces of linen. It is the cloth that belonged to the dead bath-woman.'

'Oh, indeed? Has the rag of cloth spoken to you, then, that you know it so exactly?'

Mönckebronn leaned back. 'One might put it so. The cloth has an embroidered monogram: "A. L.", which means Antje Lütjehann, and the court clerk will bear witness that it belonged to his wife' – Mönckebronn leaned forward, the better to observe the Swede's reaction – 'who had money tied up in it, and both, money and cloth, had vanished after her death.'

The Swede grinned: 'Then she gave it, no doubt, to the bailiff's wife, who passed it on to me when I ...'

'An end now to the lies!' Mönckebronn struck the table angrily with his hand. 'Rely upon it, we shall get the truth out of you yet!'

The magistrate had no mind for long procedures. He gave the headsman, called into the torture chamber, the instruction to take off the Swede's breeches at once and apply the screws to his testicles. Only a few turns of the clamps made the Swede talkative: 'It was not I alone. Franz Kilian helped me. The medallion the bath-woman wanted as confirmation that we had carried out her commission, and because it took her fancy. But when she would pay us only a part of the reward – the man was not stone dead at once, had still spoken – then I stabbed, and Kilian finished her with a

bathing-cudgel. As mockery for her refusal to pay us the agreed wage, we sank her in the water, so that she could betray nothing to anyone!

'So she gave the two of you the commission for the murder of the bishop?'

'Yes, so it was, sir! She is to blame for it!' the Swede protested eagerly, and glanced fearfully from the headsman, who had come a step nearer again, down to his own lap, between his spread thighs.

Mönckebronn signed to the headsman to stay where he was and regarded the bound man, who began to tremble. 'Did she give you a reason?'

'No, sir. She came one evening into the tavern where we always play cards and gave us a deposit for it. In the morning we watched the house "Zum goldenen Schiff", and when the man in his grey mantle stepped out, just as he had been described to us, we followed him until an opportunity offered!'

After this confession Franz Kilian too was brought in, who likewise confessed to the deed.

The next day the mayor broke his court staff in the higher court, threw it at the feet of the two and pronounced the death sentence: 'Now may God help you; I can help you no further.'

On the evening of Palm Sunday Hans the Swede and his comrade Franz Kilian were hanged. Hans the Swede on the higher of Hamburg's two gallows, because it was he who had also stolen the medallion.

In a case of twofold murder even the higher court could find no other sentence than the shameful gallows. There was no mitigating ground to deliver them merely to the headsman's sword.

Lütjehann had simply collapsed. The description of his wife's death, the fact that she had put the two up to it, the fear that someone might ask him why she had done it ... His sickness and his fever shielded him as a victim.

Mönckebronn had visited him at home, in concern for his good clerk, and was dismayed at the feverish delirium in which the poor council servant tormented himself, and he was full of pity for this poor man on whom his wife had heaped such torments.

How was he to know, either, that Lütjehann was in truth simply drunk, that he studied the Bible night after night and read again and again in the Revelation of John: 'And I saw the dead, both great and small, stand before the throne; and the books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged according to that which was written in the books, according to their works.'

That had never yet done anyone good for his soul's salvation.

Laurentz reacted bitterly to the disclosures: 'Ten shillings – not even one mark was Simon's life worth.'

Karl contradicted his father: 'Not his life, only his death.' He twirled his moustache and said thoughtfully: 'For how much less have men been killed in the past – on command, for a supposedly good cause, because another was envious of their life – there are so many reasons even without money; take your pick, if you need one.'

'But why Simon? What reason had this bath-woman to have him killed?' Albrecht did not like his uncle's sarcasm: 'Name me but one reason or be silent!'

'The young man would forbid me to speak?' Karl laughed heartily and loud. 'The bath-woman has taken the reason with her into her wet grave. If you absolutely must know it, then go seek it!'

'Where, then?'

Laurentz saw that Albrecht, in his despair, was about to burst into tears, and broke in as a precaution: 'Perhaps in Hildesheim?'

'Why there of all places?'

'After he had left Geneva and turned away from the merciless teaching of Calvin, he was at home there. He had decided to become a Dominican monk. An order to which truth and justice are a very great concern, and in which he thought to find his task as a priest. When he then came back here from Hildesheim after years, he seemed to me distraught, almost – if I consider it rightly – as though he were in flight. From what?'

Karl was not in agreement with this: 'That gets us no further either. It is only the past!'

Laurentz looked at his third-born uncomprehendingly. 'The past is like the wind that drives our life-ship forward and that first makes it possible for you to steer for your goal. No, otherwise: memory is the sum of our experiences. If I know that off a coast where I have suffered shipwreck there are cliffs, I can in future avoid a mishap by changing my course and not being caught in the repetition of the same error – at least it should hold for the individual and his life. Whether this knowledge of avoidable errors, this experience, is important or helpful for another – that each must decide for himself.'

Karl was not in the least impressed by it: 'But what has that to do with Simon's death?'

'To the question of what motive the bath-woman had to have Simon killed, none of us has yet been able to give an answer. Perhaps someone else, in turn, gave her the commission, someone who sought Simon's life, and that someone cannot come from Norway, but only from Simon's earlier past. Hence Hildesheim.'

Albrecht nodded in confirmation: 'Hildesheim!'

The Love



The Birth of Venus (Sandro Botticelli, c. 1485).

After breakfast Albrecht gave the stable-lad the instruction to saddle his stallion. Marthe filled the provision-bag for the journey, and he himself packed good garments together into a roll that he could tie behind the saddle. At length all was made ready, and he went out to the stable building, where his parents and Laurentz waited for him.

'Why do you not take the coach, instead of wearing yourself out with the horse?'

Albrecht only shook his head. 'I have heard that the body of these coaches is but narrow. In the seats such cramping is said to prevail that everyone, on climbing out, must first reclaim leg and arm from his neighbour!'

He examined the horse's girth and was satisfied with the stable-lad's work. 'Often enough such carts have overturned, so I feel safer on horseback not to dislocate or even break my limbs. Thank you.'

Every further well-meant objection rebounded from the cheerful self-assurance of the young rider. He wanted neither a servant for company, nor did he trouble himself over the insecurity of the roads.

'If it were winter, I would do everything you so anxiously propose. But now, in April, so many people are abroad that I shall probably have to strive rather to stay alone than that I shall want for company and protection.'

He kissed his mother farewell and shook his father's hand. 'Shall we see each other again before you put out to sea once more?'

'It is not yet decided. On the last voyage I had the command, to bring Simon safely across the sea. I am now coming to the years, too, where a younger man might well stand on the planks and an armchair in the counting-house might perhaps be more agreeable to me.'

'How good that I understand nothing of seafaring!' laughed Albrecht and embraced his grandfather warmly. 'I shall search thoroughly and perhaps bring back knowledge that brings light into the dark. Fare you well!'

'Have you greased the rapier well, so that in danger it flies easily from the sheath?'

'Yes, indeed!' With that Albrecht swung himself onto his horse and, after a brief wave, rode out of the gate.

On the streets of the town he let the stallion trot yet at a quiet pace. Then he was through the Winsener gate, glanced briefly across at the Grasbrook, where on the gallows the bodies of Simon's two hired murderers still dangled, and then drove his horse on: in two days he meant to reach Hildesheim. After Bergedorf he followed the Curslack causeway and crossed the Elbe at Zollenspieker.

Laurentz had described to him the way of the Hanseatic trade road over Winsen, Klues, Bardowick to Lüneburg. From there he was then to follow the old military road towards Hanover as far as Celle, and, after crossing the Otze, ride by way of Burgdorf, Ahrbeck, Lehrte to Lühnde, cross the marshy fen that began there by the Borsum pass, and after the Bavenstedt bridge he would reach Hildesheim.

He made quick progress. The stallion relished the movement after the long winter in the stable; in the soft marsh soil the way was well to be made out, and through the long forests only the trade road led. That was on the one hand well, the way could not be missed; on the other hand, these might be the very stretches where travelling rogues lay in wait for him under cover of the trees with evil intent.

In the late afternoon he had a pass made out for himself at the Bardowick gate in Lüneburg, had no eye for the splendid town hall, nor did the salt-boiling pans interest him. He rode straight through the town and out again at the southern Red gate. He

wished to reach Celle yet that day. After the fall of darkness it was, for reasons of caution, no longer advisable to meet a stranger on the open highway.

The inn near Celle did not seem to him exactly trustworthy. In the middle of the barn the horses were tethered; to right and left on the straw-covered platforms the travellers lay and tried to sleep – always with an eye on their property.

Albrecht lay awake for some time yet and was glad that he had been born in the town and lived there. The uncomfortable, earth-bound life of the country was not to his taste. Happily there were fewer people abroad than he had supposed. The disquiet in the barn from the nervous horses and the few snoring and snuffling sleepers was bearable.

Early in the morning, while the other travellers still slept, he was already on his way again. As on the day before, it struck him that people were bound for Lüneburg, probably for the spring fair, and that he overtook no one – probably because he had ridden so early. After midday he had again crossed a long stretch of forest unharmed, when on the crest of a hill he saw a stout tree rearing up and resolved to take a rest there.

It was not unwelcome to him that on a stone beneath the tree there sat a jester, to whom he called 'Hola!' and who thereupon at once begged of him: 'Sir! Have you meat and drink, then share it with a poor wretch!' – so at least he would have a little entertainment.

He stopped his horse, climbed down, untied his provision-bag and studied the jester. 'If you have nothing to eat, why do you not go into the town and play for the people, to earn yourself a few coins by it?'

'Money?' The jester twisted his face into a hideous grimace. 'Since there has been money, one no longer lets the chicks or goslings grow properly – carries them to market to sell them, so that one can pay the rent, the advocate or the physician! The one to

harass the neighbour, the second to cure one of a fever, prescribe a bloodletting – which God forbid – or a clyster, all of which the village herb-woman – God rest her soul – used once to cure for a Paternoster, without much hocus-pocus and alchemical swindle!

With a hard blow on his lute he produced such a discord, as though the catgut of the strings had come to life again. He seemed himself surprised at it and grinned at the ill-tuned sounds of his strings: 'You must be a merchant, that you speak so of money. Let us, by old custom, requite good with good. If your provisions taste better to me than your talk, then I will requite you with a better song.'

This wandering fellow was to Albrecht's taste. An honest soul, who did not keep his opinion behind the hill. He had sat down on the other stone and drew from the provision-bag a piece of salted meat, a hunk of bread and a bag of wine. 'Try, then, whether it suits your taste and you have a better song ready for it than this cater-wauling!'

While he handed the ballad-maker meat and bread, the man had already drawn his knife from his belt, cut himself an impudently thick slice of the meat and broke off half the bread. Ravenously he tore off, with his teeth, now a piece of meat, now a bite of bread. He did not even chew it, but bolted it straight down, so that his eyes bulged with the effort.

Albrecht watched the spectacle while he cut himself thin strips of the meat and then chewed slowly upon them. This jester must have a ravening hunger, if he gulped meat and bread down so.

'Slowly, good man. I have more of it, and it will still your hunger too. Take a draught of the wine.'

The jester swallowed several times hard, then had his throat clear, held the leather bag to his mouth, poured a gush into himself and belched. 'You are easy to talk, sir. Hunger is an evil travelling-companion, and its growling will be appeased. But if you say there

is more, then I will take a pause and sing you the promised little song. What will you hear?'

'I am to choose, when you are the musician? Surely you know more songs than I.'

The jester shook his head. 'Whose bread I eat, his song I sing!' Encouragingly he struck a string.

'No, decide for yourself. You will know better what you can sing. And if it is a help to you, then play a song that you would sing when you are on the way from one town to another.'

The jester seemed to reflect, ran his thoughts over the strings and then began to sing loudly: 'Why should I go a road that's stony and is naught but plague' – a loud chord replaced the exclamation mark – 'How should I, thus without money and downcast, now heed your rede,' and a deafening succession of discordant chords made Albrecht laugh aloud. He was just about to ask the bawler whether the meat, the bread and the wine had not tasted good to him, that he sang so fervently out of tune, when he felt himself suddenly seized from behind, and a rope laid itself about his chest and arms, drawn tight with a jerk. His laughter died in his throat.

The jester had let his crooked chords fall silent with a last blow and grinned: 'Now, sir, one should not address or greet a hungry man, as you, good soul, did. Whose song I sing, his coat I wear! That you plainly did not consider!'

Then he turned to those who stood behind Albrecht. 'Lay the noose about his neck! How shall we peel him out of his clothes, if he is bound about chest and arm?'

At once Albrecht felt a second noose lay itself about his neck and heard a voice croak spitefully close at his ear: 'Misfortune would wear socks: when it comes, one hears it not!'

'Now throw him to the ground, that we may free him of his costly cloth. And I ...' – the jester glanced grinning at one of his companions – 'I will look in his clothes-roll by the horse, to see whether there is enough for us all to clothe ourselves anew.'

The croaking voice pressed again into Albrecht's ear: 'Cast not away the old coat, till thou hast first a new one!', and with a jerk he lay on his back on the earth. Whisk, his boots were pulled off, the one held the rope taut, the other tore open his trouser-belt, drew the rapier from the belt and dragged trousers together with under-linen from his legs with a jerk. Involuntarily Albrecht covered his nakedness with his hands, looked with impotent rage at the croaker, who held his trousers before the rags on his legs and hopped about shouting. 'A fine coat covers a rogue as well as any!'

The jester had come with the clothes-roll, had opened the strap and let the cloak, the trousers and undergarments whirl through the air with a flourish. Whooping, the other two sprang after them, snatched the things to themselves, and before Albrecht rightly noticed that the rope had loosened, the jester had already drawn it tight again.

Helplessly he burst out: 'You will yet bitterly rue it and have no joy of my property! A twofold punishment will strike you!'

At once the rope was drawn tighter still. 'You are but one, we are three. How, then, can there be anything twofold for us?'

'Not only that you rob me, you also break the Emperor's peace of the roads, which will yet bring you to the gallows!'

The jester bent over him: 'One can hang only a man one has caught! With a fool one achieves nothing, neither with pleading nor with threatening!', and he fell back laughing.

The second had meanwhile flung away his rags and put on Albrecht's good clothes, which the latter had wished to protect from the dirt of the road in the clothes-sack. Fine gold threads ran through the dark-red velvet and flashed in the sun. The third, who studied the spectacle of his companion strutting about, suddenly gave him a kick, so that he stumbled and landed his full length in a muddy puddle.

The jester's laughter tugged at the rope about Albrecht's neck: 'Though you dress a sow in a golden gown, she'll lay herself down in the muck all the same!'

Angrily the fallen one looked at the mocker, who laid his hands flat together and made as though he implored the aid of heaven to shield him from the revenge of the one he had kicked. All three laughed.

'To fall is no shame, but to lie long is! Get up!' rang the jester's voice in Albrecht's ear, as he hauled him up by the rope.

'Here, hold!' he commanded the golden companion, and handed him the rope. In a trice the jester and the third fellow flung their rags from their bodies and drew Albrecht's clothing over their dirty limbs.

'There!' the jester turned to Albrecht and pointed to the rags, 'pick yourself out the best pieces!'

'Clothes make the man, and rags make the lice!' Albrecht heard the dirty laughter of the golden one behind him and received a shove that flung him roughly onto the rags.

The jester held Albrecht's rapier in his hand, lifted one of the stinking shirts on its point and held it out to him. As Albrecht made no move to take it, he felt the point of the rapier in his skin. 'You surely would not wish to offer us honourable gentlemen the imposition of your nakedness?', and a blow from the golden one underscored the jester's sarcastic invitation.

Angrily the jester rounded on the golden one: 'Have done! Whoever will not be convinced by words is not helped by blows either! Come!'

With that all three turned away; the jester picked up his lute, threw it to the golden one, took the horse by the bridle, and they left Albrecht lying alone.

Impotent rage had driven the tears into Albrecht's eyes. Furious at his own folly, that he had climbed down from the horse when he

was alone, he studied the dirty rags, whether perhaps one of them was less lousy than the others.

Gathering thunderclouds spared him longer deliberation and hastened his hesitant reach for the rags. Nowhere was there any means of taking shelter, and the tender-green budding leaves on the trees were pleasant to look at but offered no protection against the first slapping raindrops. Albrecht pulled on one of the ragged trousers, threw one of the no less ragged shirts over his shoulders and clapped two other indefinable garments onto his head.

At once he felt somewhat better, laughed aloud as he looked down his legs and saw the pattering raindrops splash from his bare feet onto the sand of the road. To Hildesheim he would still need two or three hours on foot, he reckoned, and set out on his way.

Propping up his head-bundle with his raised arm soon grew too troublesome for him. He broke himself a stout, curved branch from a bare oak, with which he could hold the bundle on his head more comfortably.

The steady rain was warmer than he had felt it at first, but perhaps he had simply grown used to it quickly, and, like a small child, took a great stride over the puddles in the way or, soaked through as he already was, waded through them without ado and let the wet trouble him no more.

'May I introduce myself: Albrecht Moellendorff, Doctor of Laws!' he called loudly to a raven that squatted on a tree at the wayside with its head thrust between its wings. Startled, the black bird fluttered croaking into the air, and Albrecht looked after it in surprise, thinking: 'Very well, then at least I am still good enough for a scarecrow.'

After some time, the drops grew markedly fewer, and at length it ceased raining altogether. Albrecht's hope that he would soon meet other travellers, who during the rain had found shelter somewhere or were abroad with a wagon, was not fulfilled. There was, however, a smell of smoke, as though somewhere wet foliage were

being burned. The wind came towards him, so the fire must be ahead of him, on his way. From the next hilltop he then saw the smoking fire on a field beside the road, and – he saw the towers of Hildesheim.

Briskly he quickened his steps and threw the now useless head-bundle into the ditch. The oak stick he kept as a walking-staff and – he had by now grown more cautious – as a cudgel, to defend himself or to force his way.

The smoking fire turned out to be winter weeds. Behind the smouldering heap of weeds stood a cart with high sidewalls and a harnessed horse, which fed leisurely from a grass-sack hung about it. Beside the fire stood a man who leaned on his fork and studied the approaching Albrecht attentively. The clothing, the bearing and the appearance of this solitary wayfarer did not seem to match one another: by the one he was a ragamuffin, of the kind there were many, who now in spring set out again on their brazen raids; by the other he was a patrician who came towards him with self-assurance.

'Good day, good man!' Albrecht called to him from some distance already, in case the field-man should have grown mistrustful on account of his clothing.

'Good day, sir!' answered the field-man, and thereby yielded to his own feeling. For the rags there would surely be an explanation. Perhaps it was an honourable mendicant monk? If it should be a ragamuffin after all, he still had his weapon. As a precaution he gripped the shaft of the fork more firmly.

'Are you from Hildesheim?' Albrecht had stopped and rammed his stout oak stick into the soft ground, so as to create no false impression.

'Yes.' The field-man nodded his head towards the nearby town.

'Could you take me along on your cart, when you drive home?'

Since the field-man only pursed his lips, Albrecht added: 'I do not think the gate-watch will let me through, looking as I do,' he spread his torn trousers, 'and besides, I have not a single coin to pay the gate-toll.'

'Mmh,' grumbled the field-man, undecided. 'And why have you no better clothing on?'

'Two hours from here three highwaymen fell upon me and took everything: the clothes, the horse, the provisions and the travelling money. The rain then did the rest, to make me look like a scarecrow.'

'Why do you wish to go into Hildesheim and not simply wander on?'

'I wish to go to the cloister in Hildesheim.'

'To the cloister! Then I will gladly take you along later.' So a wandering mendicant monk after all, and, by the way he spoke, an educated one to boot. Probably one of those holy beggars who once so often journeyed from town to town. 'If you would help me a little more, we could drive the sooner.'

'Gladly; tell me what I am to lend a hand with.'

The field-man fetched a wooden rake from the cart and threw it across to Albrecht.

'The weeds must be pulled apart, so that they burn better. Take your side; I will work this other one here.'

With fork and rake they both dragged the smoking winter weeds apart, and a gust of wind at once set the flames flickering and licking anew.

The unaccustomed bodily labour and the crackling flames soon brought Albrecht out in a sweat. Undaunted he tugged at the stubborn weeds, sprang aside when the tongues of flame licked at him, and did not notice how the smoke blackened his face.

'Hola! Let it be! The rest may burn as it will. We must drive now!' the field-man called across to Albrecht. 'After the evening bell the town gates are closed, and if we still wished to get in then,

three councillors would have to be fetched to grant the gate-keepers permission to open the gate. And if they cannot agree, I should not only have trouble with the council tomorrow, but we should also have to stay out here!

He checked himself and laughed aloud: the bright eyes shone in Albrecht's sooty face, as he leaned wearily on the rake. 'One might think you came straight out of hell! And if I had not seen you a while ago with the fair skin, I would certainly not take you with me now! Now come!'

As he laid the rake and the fork on the cart, he saw Albrecht's weary eyes. 'You are plainly not used to this work. Where have you worked these past years, then?'

'In England!' murmured Albrecht wearily.

'In Engelland!' whispered the surprised field-man softly; that explained much.

He untied the grass-sack from the horse, helped Albrecht climb up onto the cart-bed, took the reins, and after a brief click of the tongue the horse set itself in motion.

'You cannot go to the cloister like this. Have you other lodging?'

Albrecht had leaned against the sideboards and only murmured wearily: 'No.'

'Then I already know where I will bring you this evening.' At the cloister he is not rightly in the right place in any case, thought the field-man to himself. Cheerfully he hummed to himself, while Albrecht dozed, lost to the world.

He scarcely heard what the field-man then explained to him further: 'Do not wonder if we drive through three town gates. The two parts of Hildesheim are like two buttocks, together and yet each for itself. In the town we must go out of the inner gate of the Old Town, to drive after a few steps through the gate of the New Town!'

With half an ear he heard, shortly after, the fragments of the conversation between the gate-watch and the field-man; then the rumbling of the cart on the stone paving shook him through. The

double gate, the entering of the New Town and the ringing of the evening bell he already slept through.

The rumbling had ceased, and the field-man, who stood behind the cart, shook Albrecht by the shoulder: 'Wake up. We are where you can stay the night today. And tomorrow' – the corners of the field-man's mouth twitched slyly – 'you can still go to the cloister – if it please you.'

He helped Albrecht down from the cart and struck with the lion's head of the doorknocker against the house-gate before which they stood. They waited a while, until a young woman opened the gate. She stared in fright at the sooty Albrecht, then she recognised the field-man, who at once whispered to the woman. She nodded several times, glanced stealthily at the grubby guest, then stepped aside and took Albrecht's hand, to draw him into the courtyard.

Willingly Albrecht let everything happen to him. The long ride that day, the highwaymen, the wandering and the hot fieldwork had been unaccustomed labours. Now he was glad to be sheltered in a house and to be able to sit quietly on a bench and rest.

From the side-rooms he heard low, excited voices and busy running to and fro, which was several times drowned by a sound as though water were being poured out. At length the woman stood before him again, a candle in her hand, made a curtsy and asked him to come with her. She led him through the house into a room that was bathed in warm light by candles, and in which two further women waited beside a shallow bathing tub. Both wore red garments, similar to a monk's habit – which, however, below the hip had a wide slit on both sides – with strikingly small hoods, patched in many places.

Without much ado the elder of the two women drew his shirt over his head, while the younger, at the elder's bidding, untied his trousers and slid them down his legs.

The woman who had brought him in stood beside the bathing tub and pointed with a 'Please' to the hot water. Only too gladly

the naked Albrecht let himself glide into the warm bathwater. He stretched himself out, let his arms rest on the rim of the tub and, full of well-being, at once closed his eyes again.

'He looks like an angel!' whispered one of the women to the other.

'His hair is quite fair, too!' the other giggled back.

'Make haste, you women, the young gentleman is quite dusty from the journey!'

Scenting, Albrecht lifted his nose and drew the sweet fragrance into his lungs, his senses, his brain. He had caught a scent such as he had never yet perceived more sweet: ethereal oils dripped onto his skin, onto his arms, his chest and his face. Several hands were at once busy washing, kneading and feeling over his body.

Surprised, he first wished to fling his eyes open, but then he let them have their way, who jestingly did him good.

It reminded him of the long-past delicious time of his childhood, when his mother still bathed him, and as though in a dream he tried to guess which of the hands belonged to which of the women.

'What the eye sees, and the heart desires, let the hand take,' he heard a woman's voice say.

'Is it not a sin, then?' a younger voice asked hesitantly.

'Mechthild, nothing is sin, except what one holds to be sin,' the elder voice answered the question of the younger, who was thus called Mechthild.

'Rightly you speak, Heilwich. Whoever ascribes anything that he does to himself and not to God lives in the ignorance that is a hell to him. Nothing in a man's work is his own.'

Albrecht already knew the deep voice – the field-man too, then, had appeared: 'Whoever recognises that God works all things in him does not sin. A man who possesses a conscience torments himself, is devil, hell and purgatory all at once. Whoever is free in the spirit escapes all this.'

Albrecht felt a cautiously feeling hand between his thighs. He blinked and recognised that it was the hand of Mechthild, who noticed his gaze and smiled at him shyly. Then the expression of a sudden resolve twitched across the corners of her mouth, and Albrecht felt how her grip grew firmer all round.

Heilwich too, who knelt on the other side of the tub, had noticed this resolve and nodded encouragingly to her younger companion.

At the end of the tub stood the field-man, together with other men and women whom Albrecht had not seen until now. The hands that now pressed him cautiously by the shoulders into the water must, then, belong to the woman who had received him at the gate.

He felt no suspicion and let his head submerge, sheltered in the warm water, borne up by the hands that now washed the dust from his hair and raised him up again.

'I would go to where no one knows me, where no man speaks my tongue. I wish for a house without wall, without gate, no neighbour near it, no watchman before it. And where, when I fall sick, no man to tend me; and where, when I die, no sound of lament stirs.' The field-man's voice had grown softer as he spoke the verses. Now he let the red habit that he, like all the others, wore glide slowly from his shoulders.

Heilwich had risen, reached her hand to the naked field-man and answered: 'To heaven each night I raise the call of love, full of the beauty of God, the call of love. On every meadow gleams a ray of God's light; to God's splendour I raise the call of love. To the rock that crowns itself with light in thy praise, I cry, and it takes up the call of love. To thee I raise, as the leaf on the tree, as the drop in the sea, to thee as the jewel in the shaft, the call of love. I was in All all things, saw God in all, and kindled to the fire of oneness, raised the call of love.'

With the last words she too slipped her habit down from her body, which all the other women and men did after her. The

flickering candles bathed their bodies in soft light and made the bared curves of the flesh appear warm and firm.

Albrecht swallowed, and his mind tried to grasp what his eyes saw. Heilwich stood invitingly with a cloth beside the tub. He rose out of the concealing water, was wrapped in the cloth and taken by the hand. While his gaze followed Mechthild, whom the field-man was just embracing, Heilwich led him into another room – he still heard the field-man explaining insistently to Mechthild: 'Until this so-called sin is committed, you have not freed yourself from the power of sin.'

Albrecht asked himself whether it was fantasies that his weary mind conjured before him, or whether this paradisaal picture that he saw was reality. Yet in paradise, so it is said, there were only Adam and Eve, while here three couples held one another entwined, laughed and coupled joyfully with each other.

Heilwich drew him into a corner, pressed him into cushions and began to rub his body dry. As she did so she kissed him everywhere and laughed: 'You are a wondrous gift of heaven, my angel. Mechthild is being initiated today into the free spirit, and with you we have, for her wedding, the holy number five for the union complete: she will come to you too, for our soul is imprisoned in the body and would rise up again to God.'

While she rubbed dry the last places of his skin, she giggled: 'The Holy Spirit will enter into her today, and afterwards she will ride, as in a saddle, upon the Holy Trinity!'

Albrecht felt the greedy desire that pulsed ever more strongly through him, and while he watched how the field-man entered Mechthild, Heilwich mounted him, as though he himself were the Trinity.

Yet these words – whence did he know such verses and praises of the flesh, which he put into the field-man's mouth? Words underscored by the panting of Mechthild, who thrust out fervent ejaculations in praise of the Lord: 'When we give ourselves to the

purity of the heart, then we must move without willing it. It is the power of divine joy that compels one to bend to and fro. It is the spirit that sets the body in motion. The spirit makes the joy, and the wine of longing will raise you to ecstasy!"

Albrecht had closed his eyes and let the waves of orgiastic rapture flow through his body. Relaxed, he rested afterwards upon the cushions and swallowed the dainties with which Heilwich fed him, licked off the wine with which she moistened his lips.

Lost to himself, he heard a voice whisper above him: 'In men's consciousness of God, God becomes conscious of Himself!' It was the voice of Mechthild, who had changed places with Heilwich and now nestled her breasts against him, plainly eager to learn more of free spirits. It had then, however, rather more to do with the Trinity.

The crowing of the cocks woke Albrecht the next morning. Drunk with sleep, he rubbed his eyes and looked about him: he saw only an empty room in which he lay on a straw mat, and beside which his rags lay – washed, however, and neatly folded.

Thank God, he thought, I am no Catholic and need not confess. Even if it had been but a dream. He was not indeed firm in his Bible, but assumed that there was not a single passage in Holy Scripture in which what he had seen and done in the dream would have been described as God-fearing. On the contrary, two cities were described there – their names did not come to him just now – that had been sorely punished by God for such doings. Shaking his head, he yawned loudly and pulled the rags over himself. Into what sort of inn had he strayed, that he fantasised such night-spooks?

He tried to remember: there was a Mechthild, the indefinite feeling of dissolving wholly into eternity, and the definite feeling of having cried 'I' in the dream – a word that had never yet until now crossed his lips.

Searching, he went through the other rooms, which were as bare as his sleeping-room. The woman too who had let him in the evening before was nowhere to be seen. Did this house come to life only at night? He would consider later what to make of it. With a shrug he opened the gate and went out.

On the street he followed a trader's cart that was surely on the way to the local marketplace, to offer its wares there. There too was to be the house 'Zur grünen Linde', in which the Moellendorffs' trading partner in the Hanseatic town of Hildesheim resided, and to whom Albrecht was to turn for lodging and for his questions – which had not seemed advisable to him the evening before, when he was so filthy.

'Who would you be?' The merchant Benningstedt studied appraisingly the ragged figure that stood in his hall. 'Albrecht Moellendorff?'

'Even though the outward appearance must truly make you doubt it, I assure you that I was set upon yesterday, and the fellows left only their own rags there ...'

With two quick steps the mistrustful merchant Benningstedt stood beside Albrecht and lifted the right sleeve of his patched shirt. 'And where does this precious stone come from? Would you have me believe that someone simply throws such things away?'

Surprised, Albrecht looked at the glittering stone. 'I cannot explain it to you. I see it myself for the first time!'

What had happened in the past night, that his rags had not only been washed and dried, but this precious stone sewn on as well? The jester and his comrades would surely not have overlooked such a stone. A star of the night?

'Very well, you will answer me a few questions. What is the Christian name of the merchant lord Moellendorff?'

'Laurentz.'

'What names do his ships bear?'

'All the ships have a name that begins with an "M": Margareta, Marit, Malvine ...'

The features of the merchant Benningstedt grew softer. 'And now one last question: Laurentz Moellendorff had an eldest son, who ...'

'... was carried off by the plague in the year 1565: Christian.'

Now the merchant Benningstedt held out his hand to Albrecht. 'Forgive me for doubting you. I took you at first for a Beghard – dressed as you are.'

'A Beg... what? Forgive me if I do not understand what you mean. I have been educated these last seven years in England.'

'Ah, yes, the family tradition! But probably in Hamburg one does not know these vice-ridden heretics, who despise all law and call themselves "free spirits". They hold all things to be common property, from which they conclude that they may lawfully whore, steal and rob, and, since they hold themselves to be spotless, they believe they may wear any kind of clothing whatever!'

'I understand,' murmured Albrecht.

'But not only that! They honour no sacraments and live in sin! And even though our most illustrious lordship, the Prince-Bishop, God rest him, has rooted out and driven off these heretics: one can never be sure whether some one of these shameless sinners does not nevertheless dare to come into the town again. It belongs to their articles of faith, so they say, to play every conceivable role that helps them to influence, and thereby to win by cunning the favour of simple souls!'

Albrecht could not shake off the impression that the zealous merchant Benningstedt might have meant himself by that, the way he praised his Prince-Bishop. In Hamburg neither a nobleman nor a Catholic received the burgher-right!

'But now come: I will call my daughter, so that she may help you seek out clothing befitting your station.' With that he turned and called into the house: 'Mechthild!'

Albrecht was glad that the merchant Benningstedt had turned his back to him and so could not notice his start.

'Yes, Father!' he heard her voice from the upper storey, then her steps on the stair. As she caught sight of Albrecht beside her father, she checked her steps and blushed.

Jovially the merchant Benningstedt clasped her shoulders. 'You need not be afraid, my child! He is a Moellendorff from Hamburg and only had a misfortune on the highway!' Then he turned to Albrecht and whispered: 'Is it not delightful, how innocent and shy she still is!'

Albrecht had to suppress the fierce wish to rub his suddenly itching loins.

'Take him with you and see whether something suitable for the young gentleman is to be found in the clothes-chests! You will stay for second breakfast, will you not?'

Albrecht nodded, and the merchant Benningstedt went into the kitchen to inform the housekeeper of the presence of a guest. Stealthily his daughter looked after him, and Albrecht opened his arms. 'I am indeed the man your father named to you.'

Mechthild lay in his arms and whispered: 'You will not betray me, will you?' Albrecht stroked her now finely plaited hair gently. 'No.'

'Nor my aunt Heilwich either?'

'No,' and he asked himself whom else he would meet here in the house.

'Then come!' With that she had freed herself from him, grasped his hand and drawn him up the stairs.

Softly she hummed to herself: 'When I kiss the lip of the cup, sipping the purest wine, in deep bliss and joy, I knew not, while he was with me, any homesickness ...' and then: 'Wait here.'

The meal passed amid lively conversation. The merchant Benningstedt wished to have all manner of information about the development of the Hanse, the situation in England, in Hamburg, the

reason for Albrecht's visit, and he himself told readily of the goings-on in town and country. Mechthild and Heilwich, between whom and Albrecht a quiet composure had settled, bore their part in the conversation and then, after the meal, withdrew.

Thoughtfully Albrecht looked after the two women. 'You have a delightful daughter!'

'Will you have her?' The merchant Benningstedt meant his offer quite in earnest.

'What?' Albrecht looked at the master of the house, disconcerted.

'Ah, do not misunderstand me, my young friend!' laughed the merchant Benningstedt. 'These are not only economically difficult times; it is more difficult still to get my daughter and my widowed sister under a bonnet. The everlasting wars and feuds, which cost so many men their lives, the celibacy of the many clergy: where is one still to find husbands of fitting station today for two women such as these?' He sighed deeply. 'Were we noble, I could buy her into a convent, and were we peasants, some shelter would be found for her too – but what place can a woman of our station find outside marriage?'

Again, he sighed deeply at the hopelessness of the situation. 'Yet I will not complain: I have had the good fortune that both are cheerful and in good spirits and do not suffer from the hysteria, as some women of befriended families do who have found no husband. But ...' – again he sighed – 'of my daughter I am no longer so sure: this morning she gave away all her garments to the poor, because she holds that to have more than one garment is a hindrance to her soul's salvation!' Again, he sighed. 'And tomorrow she will probably want new ones.'

Albrecht nodded wordlessly, and he knew that it was time for him to set out and visit the cloister.

For hours already the paymaster had been sitting at the writing-desk in the counting-house, writing and comparing lists, going again and again to the table on which a good dozen heaps of coins lay, and counting them through once more.

From the courtyard came the calls of the craftsmen who were pulling down the servants' house, and now and then the brief noise of an impact, when a beam crashed onto the ground of the inner court. Laurentz had taken up one of the silver coins from the table, flicked it into the air with two fingers and let it fall onto the tabletop. 'Did you hear that?'

'Yes, and? What is that supposed to be good for?' Harald did not know what his father was driving at.

Laurentz had taken up the coin again and regarded it in his palm. 'A double Spanish ducat.' He pointed to the other heaps of coins. 'There gold saluts, there English crowns and Emden guilders, there portugalösers! And even if our good paymaster has his trouble reckoning it all correctly according to its worth, so that we finally know in pounds, shillings and pence how much it is – how do we know that the gold and silver content is indeed the one we have hitherto taken as the basis?'

'Would it not be simpler for us if the Emperor had more power and all could trade and reckon uniformly with the reichstaler?' Harald looked with a certain despair at the heap of the various currencies on the table.

'God preserve us from that! The easiest way in which the princes increase their money is that they debase its content.'

'And why do you throw the coin on the table?'

'I hear from the sound whether anything has changed in the gold or silver content!' He laughed melancholically. 'That was one of the few things in which I had the advantage of Simon: my hearing. He would have had to melt down the coins with his learned knowledge and separate them, yet I could always demonstrate to

him that with coins, as with nuts, one can test by the sound alone whether they are filled or not – without having to destroy them.'

'And you have the sound so well in your ear that you can tell which coin is which?'

'Put me to the test! I will close my eyes, and you throw a coin.'

The paymaster looked up with a smile; he knew this ability of his master, while Harald at first could not decide, then took a rarer coin and let it fall noisily onto the table. With a 'Plap' the coin fell on the wood.

'That was a Burgundian rider!'

Baffled, Harald took another coin in his hand and threw it into the air. With a 'Plup' it fell on the table and rolled to a stop.

'That was an English crown!'

Harald shook his head in wonder and murmured: 'That is beyond me. A strange game, but I am sorry, I do not hear it.'

Laurentz grinned, satisfied. 'Now, never fear, you will learn it yet. When a Hamburger speaks English, then you hear it too, by the sound of his pronunciation, that he is no true Englishman. So too the minting of a coin is only a borrowed costume, if the inside, its heart, is not genuine. When you are once, as my successor, responsible for the money too, you will learn it soon enough.'

The crash of a beam in the courtyard set itself like an exclamation mark behind this observation.

'No, Father, I do not want to become your successor. I need the open sea to be able to breathe.'

Laurentz regarded his son. 'I understand you well enough, Harald. Would I have let you sail out these past years still as captain, otherwise, if I had not known of it? And last year, when I kept you here more often – do you think I did not notice how you stood restlessly at the windows, looked out across the market to the river, and were always at once out and down at the harbour when one of our ships dropped anchor? But did you not yourself say to

Albrecht, when he set out for Hildesheim, that you could imagine an armchair in the countinghouse more comfortable?'

His son Harald did not give up so easily. 'Then it was wrongly said: it is not only the vastness of the sea, Father, it is also the standing firm against the adversities of the wind and the storms, which care not whether our little ship is just there where they rage – there I am needed, that craft I have learned, there it has a meaning for me to live. There I feel that I am a man: when our proud, great ships have left the safe harbour and become a little nutshell on the sea, I know the humility that a peasant, perhaps, still knows too.'

Laurentz chewed his lower lip. 'I ought probably to have taken you sooner into the leadership of our firm as junior. One grows into this task, too, only by degrees. Here too you are like the captain on his command-bridge, the man who determines the course! And humility! That you will learn here damned well too.'

'The course of the fluctuations of interest, and humility before the manoeuvres of the grain speculators? Father, I am a peaceful trading captain, but you – and thereby what, in your view, I am to become – you are like a general who is constantly in a war. Is competition not merely another grimly growling word for war: defeat or victory, even if no cannon are brought to bear? With the forces of nature I am not at odds; they do not mean me personally, and I could never conquer them either. I can only use them for myself when they are favourable to me, and I must bear and outlast them when they are ill-disposed towards me.'

Exulting, Laurentz struck the tabletop with his hand. 'That is nothing other than the leading of a trading house! And yet ...' – he regarded his hand thoughtfully – 'sometimes I think I hear my grandfather speaking out of you, who still lived in the valid order of an undivided heaven! Why do you not take Columbus, Vasco da Gama or Amerigo Vespucci for your model, who set out as captains to face unknown challenges, who were curious?'

His son Harald shook his head deliberately. 'No, Father. They were just as greedy for glory and money as Ferdinand, King of Aragon, and his Isabella, Queen of Castile, who financed their risky adventures. Yes, you are right, they are the models of this new age. These captains pushed open a door that suddenly called everything into question, and since then a rich man counts for more than an honest one!'

Laurentz slowly grew angry: 'That was always so! And if this principle has in the meanwhile sunk down, or spread, from the high spheres of the nobility and the Curia to the burghers of the free imperial cities, then the only difference is that our forefathers did not yet have to concern themselves with it, because it played out above the sphere of their life!'

'Then tell me one thing, please, Father: what part does it still play, then, whether a born Moellendorff leads this trading house or not?'

Laurentz had narrowed his eyes, but his son went on unmoved: 'When did you last speak personally with one of your trading partners and look him in the eye? We as merchants in the long-distance trade are no hucksters or horse-dealers, who conclude their contracts with a handshake and lead their trade in person.'

Laurentz had shaken his head. 'You err, Harald. The good name Moellendorff is our greatest capital. And just as the merchants entrust you with their valuable wares with a good conscience, when they know of you that you are an experienced, reliable and honest captain, so the moneylenders will advance you their gold and silver for financing, if you have a good name.'

'Bah! When you cannot repay it with compound interest, then just try once to pay with your good name!'

'Of course I have to repay them their money with compound interest; that is, after all, their business. And the money that we earn: it is all this here ...' – he turned with outstretched arms about the

room – 'and this here, it is the foundation for the happiness and the prosperity of our life!'

His son Harald had risen, stepped to the narrow bookshelf, chose a volume, drew it out and, after a brief leafing, had found the passage he sought. 'Then I will read you what Erasmus of Rotterdam wrote about it not so long ago: "Those who rather crave money and goods, and see in them a special protection for life, who praise themselves happy when it remains unharmed and think themselves wretched when it perishes – these have without doubt made themselves several gods. You have set money on a level with Christ, if it can make you happy or unhappy."' He shut the book again and put it back.

'Would you thereby turn the wheel of history backward? It is left to you yourself how you lead your trade as a merchant: as a company with several, or as an individual with greater risk and also greater gain. If you will, you can also speculate on the rising grain prices and win, or lose everything, and you can, if you will, bind your happiness or unhappiness to the possession of money.'

'So everything is permitted that the individual wills!'

Laurentz would not be put off: 'No! I myself followed my fathers, in the fourth generation, without question. You now have only the damned duty of having to decide for yourself what you want. This responsibility no one takes from you any longer. No God, no church and no tradition.'

The loud crash of the next beam was followed in the courtyard by excited shouts. Laurentz and his son broke off their dispute and listened to the stable-lad Ingvar, who was helping the craftsmen and now stood, dusty, in the room.

'Master, you are to come at once; the craftsmen have found something you should look at.'

In the courtyard Laurentz tried involuntarily to fan aside the swirling dust, then, shaking his head, drew a cloth from his

trouser-pocket and held it before mouth and nose as he followed the stable-lad, who had waited for him.

He sought his way through the thick beams and the broken lattice of wattle, on which remnants of the clumps of clay still hung.

Coughing, Laurentz climbed the stairs and stood in Simon's former room, whose outer walls already lay as rubble in the courtyard. A part of the floorboards had already been torn up; two carpenters stood beside the last board and, as they recognised the councillor, pointed to the floor: a dusty casket lay there between the beams.

'When we took up the last boards, the little box suddenly lay there,' explained one of the carpenters. 'A short piece of the last board had only been laid loosely on top.'

Yes, that was true. Laurentz knew it himself. This small space beneath the loosened piece of the board had been their hiding-place. When Simon and he as children had found something or had again forbiddenly picked four apples in the mayor's garden, which tasted far more delicious to them than the many of their own that lay in the great basket in the kitchen, then they had hidden their booty in this hollow there. Simon's mother had known of their secret and betrayed it to no one. Consternated, Laurentz regarded the casket: why had Simon hidden this little box in their hiding-place?

'Bring it to the countinghouse at the front,' he instructed the stable-lad who stood beside him. 'But wipe it clean first!'

The wiped little box stood on Laurentz's desk, and he regarded it mistrustfully from all sides. He did not like surprises of this kind. Even on closer examination there was nowhere a lock or a fastening to be seen. Although the two hinges were rusty, the lid opened without trouble: two letters, and beneath them a cloth parcel, lay within.

Carefully Laurentz lifted the upper letter, of which only the seal on the folded side was to be seen, and turned it over. For my son

Simon stood on the other side. On the second letter he read: For him who finds this. It was the uneven flourishes of Wilma's handwriting, which he knew still from the time when he and Simon learned to write at school, and they had made a jest of correcting Wilma's clumsy script and her German. Why had she taken the trouble to write herself?

Laurentz laid the first letter aside, took out the second, turned it over and regarded the seal. It was not known to him. After a brief hesitation he broke the seal and unfolded the heavy paper. A second letter, enclosed within it and likewise sealed, fell onto the table. It had no addressee.

He pushed the enclosed letter aside, smoothed out the folds of the opened paper and read: Whenever God in His everlasting wisdom has so decided the casket and this letter be found: my son Simon will no more be alive – else this letter surely not been opened.

My son is at Dominican cloister in Hildesheim, and if the honest finder of this casket be not certain whether he still lives, let him ask there.

Only if he be certain my son no more dwells on this earth, then let him open second envelope, that is fast enclosed in this letter.

Laurentz smiled wistfully: Wilma wrote as she had spoken. He smoothed out the lower fold, to decipher the date: At Trinity, A.D. 1565.

So, the casket had not been hidden there by Simon, then. Probably it had, like Laurentz himself, never occurred to him to look in their childhood hiding-place whether anything but dust lay concealed there. Since he himself had deposited nothing there, and might surely assume that Laurentz too no longer had need of it – why should he have looked?

Why did Wilma van Leyden make such ado about this cloth bundle and hide it all in this casket beneath the boards of her room? It seemed to be a kind of bequest: she too had been killed

with all speed by the plague in the year 1565. But what could a wet-nurse have to bequeath to her son?

Grown curious, he lifted the cloth bundle out of the box, surprised how heavy it was. Carefully he shook it – nothing jingled: no coins.

He laid the little bundle on the table, broke the seal and let the contents roll out onto the table: jewels, rings and precious stones flashed magnificently in the light – each one many times the worth of all that the paymaster had heaped together in gold and silver coins on the counting-house table.

The Search



The Baptism of Christ in the Elbe before Wittenberg.
Woodcut by Jacob Lucius, 1555.

The young monk bade Albrecht wait and hurried down the cloister-walk with his cassock billowing, to fetch the head of the cloister.

Albrecht meanwhile looked about him and studied the drawings on the wall of the inner side of the cloister. In wonder he stepped several paces nearer to the wall, to examine more closely an engraving on which he had recognised the likeness of Martin Luther.

Softly he murmured the line of writing at the upper edge of the engraving: 'The figure of the baptism of our Saviour Jesus Christ, whereby the glorious revelation of the eternal, sole Godhead in three persons came to pass, which all Christians should behold in their invocation.'

He was just bending down to read the smaller lines of writing at the lower edge of the picture, which ran: 'How God has made Himself known through His Son, the true life; this image shows us ...', when a voice from the side startled him: 'Be greeted, young sir.'

In his absorption he had not perceived the soft steps of the two monks who now stood beside him. The elder of the two studied him attentively and cast a sidelong glance at the engraving Albrecht had been regarding.

'You are surprised to find this picture here with us?' 'Well, yes ...' – only now did Albrecht become aware of what had puzzled him about this picture – 'it is astonishing that one can compel you to hang up a picture of the Protestant reformer in your cloister.'

A quicker flutter of the lashes was the only visible reaction of the elder monk to this assumption. He pointed to the picture and asked: 'What do you see in this picture?'

'On the right side our Lord Jesus in a river; he is just being baptised. Above him the dove of the Holy Spirit, and above that, in the clouds, the heavenly hosts of the angels and God the Father, spreading out his blessing.'

The monk nodded in agreement and added: 'The river is the Elbe, and the man who baptises our Lord is John the Baptist. The

town you see in the background is Wittenberg. And on the left side?'

'A kneeling man, apparently of noble rank; beside him, kneeling, a woman, upon whose shoulders Herr Martin Luther lays his hands. Behind them three men, likewise kneeling.'

A smile played about the lips of the elder monk. 'The kneeling couple are the Elector Johann Friedrich of Saxony and his consort Sibylle. The three kneeling behind them are the princes, their sons. Now tell me, does anything strike you about Doctor Luther?'

'He is' – Albrecht noticed it only now – '... he is the only one in the picture who stands upright. All the others, even our Lord Christ, kneel.'

The monk's smile had deepened, and with obvious pleasure he pointed to the picture: 'Is there a finer example of the presumption of this Doctor Martin Luther and his adherents towards our Lord Jesus, the Gospel and our holy Mother Church than this representation by a Lutheran artist? All the others – not only the worldly power of the Elector, but the Messiah too – have to kneel before him, who himself stands haughtily.'

Albrecht closed his eyes. Seen thus, the Dominican was right in what he said, and he went on: 'No one has compelled us to hang up this Lutheran pamphlet here. Sometimes it is better for one's own cause to show people the conceptions of their opponents in faith: they denounce themselves far more plainly than we could! We have never claimed that the Messiah is Catholic, and if the Lutherans now have the Messiah baptised Lutheran once more, and Wittenberg is their Jerusalem and the Elbe their Jordan ... but you surely did not wish to speak with me of questions of the true faith.'

Albrecht was so astonished at the Dominican's pleasure in a Lutheran self-portrayal that he had first to collect himself again on his actual errand: 'I come on account of Simon van Leyden, my uncle, the milk-brother of my grandfather. He was here with you.'

'Simon! Yes, he was our brother too.' The monk's smile had crept back into the deep folds of his skin, and he studied attentively the young man, well-to-do by his clothing: 'Then you are a Moellendorff.'

'Yes, Albrecht; how do you know?'

'We spiritual brothers have no secrets from one another, and so we know that Simon grew up in the house of the Moellendorffs. Be welcome to me, then, young sir. I am Gregor von Mechttersheim, the prior of this cloister. Let us go into the refectory.'

He turned to the young monk, who still stood silently beside him, and sent him to fetch an infusion of balm with mint from the kitchen.

On their way down the cloister-walk, Albrecht took careful heed not to tread on the shadows of the columns that the sun's rays cast onto the flags of the stone floor. He had not yet been in a monks' cloister and did not wish inadvertently to offend against the customs and usages on this island of the diaspora. Only when he noticed that the prior plainly did not care where he trod did he raise his head and quicken his steps, to lessen again the distance that had arisen.

The old monk at length stopped before the last door, let the heavy wooden door swing open and bade Albrecht enter before him, then closed the door again behind himself.

'Simon van Leyden ...' – the prior's gaze seemed turned inward, as though he sought in the archives of his memory for the fitting memorabilia. 'Sometimes I had the impression that his name had been given him as a burden. He suffered at this world, and that was, in the end, the reason too why he left the order in those days.' He turned again to Albrecht. 'Do you know how he fared in his later life?'

'He was first a pastor in Danish Aarhus and became at last bishop of Bergen in Norway.'

'Bishop! I knew there was something special in him. Of which confession?'

'As I heard from himself: a Christian. Of a particular confession he never spoke. He knew only one God – the one who loves men – and he always wore his plain grey mantle. Only those about him knew of his high station.'

'So he did not change, and yet found the happiness he strove for. But why do you speak of him as though he no longer lived?'

'He was slain in Hamburg a month ago.'

'Slain, you say? Murdered?' The prior's voice had sunk to a whisper: 'Then he could not, after all, escape his fate.'

Albrecht could not make out the monk's last murmur, so softly had the old man spoken to himself. He leaned forward to be nearer the prior. 'That is why I come to you. Perhaps you know an explanation for his violent end and can help us?'

A sudden jolt went through the monk's body. 'If Simon had died a peaceful death – who would then have asked after his life? Would you have come to me then too?'

What else could Albrecht have answered to these accusing words but a 'probably not' – so he let it rest at his silence.

'Why do people ask after the why only at violence and murder? Why not also at peace and justice?'

Gregor von Mechttersheim suddenly stood up, and the scraping of the pushed-back oaken chair on the wooden floor drowned the monk's suppressed agitation.

'Violence and murder, hunger, want and misery are our constant companions in this vale of tears we call the world. It is far more to be wondered at and would give more cause to ask after the why, when a man dies in peace and justice, than when he perishes miserably!'

His arms, which had lifted the black sleeves of his habit high, sank down. The door to the refectory had opened softly, and the young monk who had been sent to the kitchen came in with a jug

and two cups. Noiselessly he set it all down on the wooden top at the head of the table and remained standing beside the pushed-back chair.

'Thank you, Rudolph. Our guest will eat with us later. Let a place more be laid.'

After a brief nod the monk turned to the door and vanished again just as silently as he had come in.

'Forgive me, Herr Moellendorff, if I have troubled you with questions on whose account you did not come to me.' The prior sat down again, pushed one of the cups before Albrecht and now filled both vessels with the steaming herbal infusion.

'Simon stood especially close to me. When I now hear of him again after more than twenty years, and the occasion is his violent death, then it touches me more than I myself suspected.'

He laid his hands around the cup, as though he wished to warm his hands at the heat of the infusion.

'We were both in those days assistants to the Inquisitor for North Germany. Simon was indeed the youngest, but nevertheless the most learned of us all. So it was no wonder that the Inquisitor gave him preferred treatment and, as we thought, had chosen him for his successor. Had it come so, it would have surprised no one, and he would have been recognised by all as such. Now ...' – carefully the prior sipped at his cup – 'Inquisitor he would no longer have become, even though his revision of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, the so-called "Hammer of Witches", met with general approval – the times had brought it about that this office here in the north was not filled anew – but he would surely be sitting here in my place today. He might even have been called to Rome and received an important office within the Curia. Perhaps.'

The prior leaned his head against the high back of his chair and looked up at the ceiling of the refectory. 'That was the one side, which you have described so briefly and rightly: he believed that God loves men and that sin is an invention of the devil. But that

made him doubt ever more of his task, to track down and purify the godless. His doubts whether it be possible for man to recognise what is the work of the devil and what the work of God, and that His will be done ... urgently he sought a solution to these doubts, the certainty that it was indeed the will of God whose obedient instrument we are.'

As though he wished to banish the present from his memories, the prior closed his eyes. 'For weeks scarcely anyone laid eyes on him. He sat only in the library and studied everything that stood written of guilt and atonement.

'For months we disputed the nights away, until our eyes fell shut for weariness: is there an original sin that the individual has received from the father, and the fathers again from their fathers, as a guilt, and to which he is subject whether he will or no – or is there only a guilt of the individual, for which he has to answer only for himself and before God?'

The prior looked at Albrecht. 'You can follow me?'

Albrecht cleared his throat and sought for words. 'If I understand it rightly, he tried to decide whether he should follow the Old or the New Testament.'

'You are a merchant?'

'No, a jurist.'

'Very interesting. As a merchant I would have told you the parable that you must decide with which wind you let your ships sail. As a jurist you are much closer to us theologians already. You too have your writings, in which the law reveals itself and to which you are subject, when you have to judge whether a man and his deeds agreed with these writings – whether he is guilty or not.'

Albrecht shook his head vehemently: this asserted closeness of jurisprudence to theology did not please him at all. 'No. Jurisprudence has *prudentia*, the shrewd wisdom, within it, and means careful weighing – theology, on the other hand, already proclaims in its very name the claim to proclaim the Word of God!'

The prior sipped comfortably at his herbal water. 'Well parried, young sir. You remind me of Simon. But I will not quarrel with you, though it would surely be an exercise in which I have been too little challenged since his going – so let us leave it at this, that Simon honestly tried to reconcile his simultaneous office as theologian and as jurist. Whereby you apparently are of the opinion ...' – he looked searchingly across the table at Albrecht – 'that they exclude one another: like the devil and holy water.'

'Please ...' – Albrecht raised a warding hand – 'let me answer less theologically. We jurists too must in the end have an opinion on a question, must find a judgement. From the tradition of German law, however, we know that our law rests on the agreement of a community to lay down certain rules as law, is therefore human and changes over the ages. The proverb "at court and on the high sea, man is in God's hand" cites God wrongly, since it means the arbitrariness of human judges. It aims at dependencies withdrawn from the individual's decision, at dependencies to which he is, in his view, unjustly subject – whereas, conversely, no jurist would go so far as to claim that he proclaims the Word of God.'

While Albrecht spoke, Gregor von Mechttersheim had drawn himself up ever more stiffly. 'You speak not only so complicatedly, but also as presumptuously as a jurist, Doctor Moellendorff! Your youthful zeal, my hospitality and my respect for our brother Simon forbid me, however, to have you thrown out of this cloister as a blasphemous heathen.'

It was all too plain that they both had still something to practise: the prior, that disputations with those of other belief demanded more of him than the exercises of his little obedient flock of monks, who lived peacefully on their Catholic island; and Albrecht, that boundless scientific questioning was not everywhere in the right place.

He cleared his throat. 'Forgive me if I have let the necessary respect towards you and this place be wanting. But truth, since Aristotle, is won only in open dispute!'

'Truth!' The prior rose again from his chair, propped his fists on the table and stared piercingly at Albrecht. 'If you wish to know the truth about Simon, Doctor Moellendorff, then I will give you a document to read, of which but few people know!'

The threatening undertone in the prior's voice was drowned by the loud sound of a bell. At the same time the door to the refectory opened, and two monks, each carrying a stack of plates in the crook of the arm, began to lay the table.

The prior drew himself up, relaxed his hands and growled at Albrecht: 'After the meal we shall see further.'

For Albrecht a narrow table had been carried in, at which he sat to the side of the great board and which made it plain to him that as a guest he was not part of the circle of the monks, who, contrary to Albrecht's expectation, all spooned up their soup chatting and jesting with one another.

Silently he wiped his plate with the last crust of bread and asked himself what could have moved Simon to leave this hospitable and cheerful community.

Gregor von Mechttersheim kept his word and, after the meal, betook himself with Albrecht to his office, to which the archive of the cloister was attached.

'The files of the former Inquisitor are accessible only to the prior of the day. If you will be patient a moment. I will seek out the relevant year.'

Albrecht was not allowed to enter the archive and waited. It was not long before the head of the cloister came back into the room with a folio under his arm and laid the thick book on the desk. The great wooden table stood athwart the two windows, the chair at the desk on the window side, so that the light fell into the visitor's eyes and the prior sat in shadow. He had bent over the book and

ran his finger along a kind of index at the beginning. Behind him hung an oil painting on the wall between the windows, on which a representation of Christ raised its hand in blessing and looked searchingly at the visitor. Albrecht had the uneasy feeling that this Christ did not let him out of his sight, no matter where in the room he was.

'Yes, I had rightly supposed: here it is.' The finger of Gregor von Mechttersheim had come to a stop. He murmured: 'Pagina 153,' and turned the pages open. 'The Inquisition used only chancery formats, and so we could bind together all letters, records, sentences and declarations by year and provide them with an index. 1566 was right, and here it is. I will read it to you.' Then he checked himself and turned the folio towards Albrecht. 'Forgive me, I forgot that you, as a man of learning, can of course read the Latin yourself. Should the church Latin cause you difficulty, tell me. I will read in the Bible meanwhile.'

He went over to a lectern on which an open book lay.

Hesitantly Albrecht stepped up to the table. The letters of a striking hand filled the paper of the open page. It gave him no trouble to decipher the hand and the Latin.

Declaration of Simon van Leyden concerning his petition to be permitted to leave the Order of the Dominicans. Albrecht seemed to hear the bishop's voice. After the conclusion of the Council of Trent we are bound by His Holiness Pius IV to the profession of the Tridentine faith. I have, as you will remember, of my own free choice sought admission to this order, which in its search for truth seemed to me more credible than the dogmatic raging of Johann Calvin in Geneva, which I left in the year of our Lord 1553, after the burning of a believing pantheist, having become homeless in the faith. In the profession of the doctrines of the Tridentine faith, Rome once more demands the submission of each single priest to the dictate of princes of the church. They set themselves, as men, into the dominion of God and usurp God's rights

for themselves. Where in Holy Scripture does anything stand about the seven sacraments? Where does it stand that we as men can dispense the grace of redemption through the administration of the means of grace? Where in the Gospels is there an Index of forbidden books, and wherein is celibacy grounded? Where does it stand that our pastoral office unfolds the power to legislate, to judge and to punish? I will believe in freedom, not in bondage.

For over ten years I have been your obedient assistant, and my struggle for truth and justice always found understanding in you, since you knew that I, as the only son of a man who repented his deeds by the headsman's sword, doubted most deeply whether I myself, like my father, might become a murderer. Is it my fate too? When we as inquisitors condemn but a single innocent man, have we then not ourselves become guilty? No papal doctrine can take these doubts from me, and yet I see for myself the danger that I might come to think myself no longer responsible for my actions. I will be so. I must be so.

Albrecht closed his eyes, laid both hands over his mouth and looked up in fright, whether the blessing Christ still stared at him. The prior addressed him: 'Well? Are you still sure that truth, since Aristotle, is won in dispute?' He had said it without any malice. 'The Inquisitor let him go. As it stands in the Fifth Book of Moses: "Even his posterity, unto the tenth generation, shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord."'

Albrecht had propped himself on the table and found no words of reply. Was Simon's father a Hamburger? Strangers were banished from the town, but he was a murderer who had been beheaded? Whom, and why, had he killed? The questions rushed upon him all at once. He rose abruptly, turned and hurried out without leave-taking. Gregor von Mechttersheim let him go without a farewell. He knew the reactions of such self-assured men of learning when they were confronted with a truth they did not wish to accept.

Laurentz hesitated but then set the casket on the table before Mönckebronn and laid the two letters beside it.

'I think you should concern yourself with this. I cannot decide the question that is raised in this writing.'

Uninterested, Mönckebronn had lifted the lid of the unremarkable little box and started in astonishment as he saw the jewels. Lütjehann, who sat beside the magistrate – healthy indeed but still pale from much drinking – at once got colour in his face.

Uncomprehending, Mönckebronn looked at Laurentz.

'Read!' Laurentz bade him, unfolded the second letter and pushed it nearer to Mönckebronn. The latter was plainly unwilling, reached into his jacket pocket, brought out a pair of spectacles, and while he clamped the two glasses on his nose, he grumbled: 'God knows! Since I have had these spectacles, I am given ever more to read!' Now that in the past decades this multitude of books had been printed, people needed spectacles to read. Apparently, he thought, it was as in seafaring: as long as one sailed only along the coasts, one needed no additional navigation by the stars.

He glanced over the first lines, then took off his spectacles, cleaned them with the tablecloth, as though the glasses were playing him false, began anew and spoke the sentences softly to himself: *If it be a God-fearing and just finder, my son Simon will no longer be among the living. So let the finder wipe out the blemish and the curse that lay over my son's life and help earthly justice to do good.*

The father of my son is Claus Kniephof, who in the year of our Lord 1525 in Hamburg on the Grasbrook, together with his comrades, had his head parted from the trunk by the headsman. When my Simon and I came to Hamburg, everywhere the notices of the merchant Jan Fredersen, the last of his family, whom Kniephof had killed, swore a personal feud against a small child: he made known he would kill the son of Kniephof, Franz Böttcher – known by his birthmark, a half-moon in a sun on the right

shoulder – in his name and for the honour of his family. Eye for eye, tooth for tooth. So, I named him Simon van Leyden, to protect. To the merchant Jan Fredersen, or his wife, or, if they no longer live, his children, shall the cloth parcel be handed as atonement-money, that their loss be requited to them and the harm done be made good again. Wilma van Leyden, at Trinity, in the year of our Lord 1565.

Laurentz had listened silently with closed eyes to what Mönckebronn read out softly – he had himself read it over and over, until he could no longer defend himself against recognising upon what lie the life of his so dearly beloved milk-brother had been founded. Despairingly he had tried to lay the guilt on Simon's mother, his wet-nurse, who had nourished and raised him with her own milk; yet he could understand her. He himself had never asked her who Simon's father was. Whom, then, had she deceived when she said that Simon's father had been killed? Is it not the right and the instinct of every mother to protect the life of her child, the life she herself had borne?

Lütjehann suddenly looked very healthy again. He would set up a thick candle in his wife's memory, and a fine gravestone she should have too. Later, when the questions had calmed down – when this foolish merchant had gathered strength enough again to bear that he had, with this letter, assigned to Lütjehann a fine inheritance.

Mönckebronn reflected. He sensed what it meant for his esteemed council colleague not only to have found this writing, but to have carried it here as well. He shook his head. 'Fredersen? A merchant family of that name no longer exists in Hamburg. The last descendant, this very Jan Fredersen, vanished years ago, did not return from a voyage. He was not married and had no children either. His property has, so far as I remember, passed into the trusteeship of the town. But that can be cleared up.'

Albrecht had gone as though senseless through the streets, tormented his way through the noisy people at the market, and at length sought refuge in the cathedral, to find peace in the stillness. Again and again he rubbed his brow, pressed against his temples, as though he could thereby crush the thoughts that tormented him: what tidings could he bring back to his grandfather?

'Are you not well, my son?' A light hand touched his shoulder gently.

Albrecht looked up and found himself facing an old Benedictine monk, who said to him: 'Come, accompany me into the garden. The fresh air will do you good.'

Without further bidding he took Albrecht by the sleeve, drew him along behind, straight across the nave and then through a small door out into the cloister garden.

Albrecht breathed the fresh air deeply, and he was glad that the monk had taken him out into the open from the stone church, which with its stale smell of incense had seemed to him like a huge vault of death. He followed the old man, who had gone over with a watering-can in his hand to the round apse of the cathedral, which bounded the inner court on one side.

'Is that a rosebush?' Admiringly Albrecht stroked the high tendrils on the apse of the cathedral.

The Benedictine looked at him from the side, scratched his bald crown and asked: 'You are not from Hildesheim?'

'No. How do you come to think so? Can one tell it of me?'

'No. The cloth you wear on your body, a Hildesheim merchant might wear that too.'

'In that you are right. It belongs to the local merchant Benningstedt, who wore it when he was younger. So that was not it.'

'No, it was your ignorance, that you stand before the thousand-year-old rosebush that everyone in this town knows, and which is known beyond it too. Always it is the eldest monk's task to tend and care for it: only the knowledge of age concerning one's own

mortality awakens the wish for eternal life. If I cannot attain it myself, then at least this rose-bush shall. In it my work too will live on.'

Placidly he had regarded the rosebush and now turned again to Albrecht: 'But perhaps there is a reason that you have found your way just here, if you did not know what you would find here.'

'No, I did not even suspect it. Had I known it, I would probably not have undertaken this journey. Now that I am here, I do not know how I am to return home.'

'Then stay, do. It is a fine town and a quiet place to live. It will please you well enough.'

'No, I must go back. I only came here to learn something about a man who lived here years ago, then went away and has now died.'

'Could it be that I knew the man?'

Albrecht watched the monk loosening the earth. Why should he trouble this man with his cares? 'No, you cannot have known him: Simon van Leyden was a Dominican, not a Benedictine.'

Calmly the monk laid down his little gardener's trowel, wiped his earthy hands clean on his apron and drew himself up. 'Simon van Leyden is dead? Well, it is the way of all life; then I shall see him again soon. But yes, I knew him. I knew him even quite well. I was myself a Dominican years ago.'

With the force of a sudden hailstorm it burst out of Albrecht: 'A Dominican who becomes a Benedictine, a Protestant bishop who is first a Calvinist, then becomes a Dominican and finally dies a Lutheran! Have you been so wavering with yourselves that you changed the confessions of faith as other people change their coat, and sell yourselves as mercenaries now to this lord, now to that?'

Reproachfully loud Albrecht had raised his voice, which moved the old Benedictine only to an indulgent, but also a wistful smile. Placidly he looked at his guest, as though he did not mean him. 'How should you understand it, my son, young as you are. Wisdom is found sooner under wrinkles than under smooth skin. I can

name you many men who have fared, in these decades, as I have. Each of us had found his house in which he wished to abide for his life and had settled himself properly in it. But then – it was not our fault – then everything came tumbling down: they were warlike times when we were of your age. Many of us in those years lost our spiritual and worldly home and had to seek a new abode. Have you ever had to live with the loss of the world in which you felt yourself secure?'

Carefully the old monk had touched Albrecht's shoulders, whose outburst of anger had passed as quickly as it had come. 'Forgive me if I have reproached you with something that sprang only from my own helplessness. I have these questions myself, which I directed at you.'

He fell silent and stretched out both his hands to the Benedictine like a beggar seeking help. 'What the prior gave me to read ...!'

The old monk laughed resoundingly. 'Ah, dear me, now I understand: you have been with Gregor von Mechttersheim, and he has sought out for you a folio from his poison-archive and told you terrible things about Simon!'

'No, he only gave me a document in a book to read!'

Warmly the Benedictine now grasped Albrecht by the shoulders with both hands. 'My son! Be certain of one thing above all: books are the enemies of every living memory!'

'The prior spoke nothing ill of Simon ...'

'Ah! That surprises me. When Simon in those days laid aside his black garment and left the order, it was like an earthquake, a huge crater that had suddenly opened, without a sound or a warning, in the midst of the cloister, and into which the whole flock of monks threatened to plunge! The Inquisitor and his faithful adlatus Gregor von Mechttersheim had all they could do to hold their distraught flock together.'

The memory of it seemed to amuse him even now: 'For our little world of the cloister, Simon's resignation meant the same as if the

Pope in Rome had declared that he would leave the Vatican and the bosom of holy Mother Church!

He gathered his gardening implements together and smiled. 'The clergy would hate and damn him to the very depths, because he had supposedly betrayed their cause, and the Lutherans would rejoice, because they had always said, after all, that the Pope was in truth the Antichrist.'

He winked at the astonished Albrecht, who could not have guessed that the simple Catholics found themselves in constant strife with the Curia. 'It is probably my great age that makes me make such foolish jests.'

He grew serious again: 'No matter what you have learned from Gregor von Mechttersheim: Simon was a good man – the best of us all!'

A feeling of happiness streamed through Albrecht that let him breathe freely again. He had to hold himself back from seizing the monk who reminded him of Simon in his arms and thanking him for taking from him the care of what he could report to Laurentz. Of that he wished to know more: 'If you knew Simon, can you tell me of him?'

'Certainly. Come with me into my workshop. It is growing cooler now, and my old bones prophesy that there will be rain.'

The Benedictine – Bartholomäus, as Albrecht by now knew – had taken off his garden apron and tied on another of soft leather. Albrecht tried to get his bearings in the half-dark of the spacious workshop, while Bartholomäus was busy lighting the lamps over the workbench. In the brightening light Albrecht stepped nearer in astonishment to the workbench, to study a bewildering jumble of cogwheels, chains and weights that he would not have expected of a gardener.

'Do you work at that? Has it a particular purpose?'

'I beg your pardon?' Bartholomäus paused, standing on his stool. 'You ask whether this marvel of mechanics has a purpose?'

He carefully lit the last lamp, climbed down from his stool and stood beside Albrecht. 'But perhaps you are right? What need has one of clocks when the sun shines anyway? Yet, in the dull weather here in the north ...'

'It is to be a clock?'

Bartholomäus chuckled. 'I see that you have never yet seen the complicated inner life of a clock, always only the outside: the flat, brightly painted dial and the two hands!'

He went over to a cupboard – it sounded as though glass knocked against glass – and came back to the workbench with two glasses. 'Drink a liqueur with me; it will warm your stomach.'

Carefully Albrecht sipped at his glass and let the spicy taste of the herb-spirit dissolve slowly on his tongue.

Bartholomäus had drawn up a stool, showed Albrecht a second, that he might sit down, and clicked his tongue. 'Yes, there is indeed one – no, two – particular reasons that I, like my brothers in the order, build these clocks. Is there a finer allegory for the harmony of the divine order than a clock? It consists of hundreds of parts that all interlock, in which each single part has its task and its purpose, and the one exists only through the others.'

He searched on the table, found what he sought, and held out to Albrecht a disc regularly notched at the edge. 'You see, that is such a part, a simple cogwheel. As it lies here in my hand, it is indeed pleasant to look at, but useless, and one might ask why it was laboriously, lovingly made at all. To lie here in my hand? No: only when I set it there ...' – he held the cogwheel between two others in the clock – 'then it has found its place, which it has in this design and for which it is really intended. And when all is joined together and I wind the clock, tense its mainspring, then it is like life: it purrs, the parts turn and move, one grips into the other, all the parts have found their meaning! And when it has run down, then its life is at an end – unless I wind it up again!'

Albrecht too had taken a cogwheel between his fingers and looked musingly at the clock. 'Do you not thereby set yourself in the place of God, and your key is the breath of life?'

Bartholomäus had risen, fetched the bottle of herb-liqueur, filled the glasses again, drank a draught and reflected.

'Does man not stand at times in the temptation to set himself in the place of God? And does he know beforehand what he thereby brings about? When we had no clocks yet, we lived by the light of the sun. Since we have rebuilt this divine harmony, the hands drive us ... One might almost think God punishes us for our presumption by having us build a devilry to which we are now subject, instead of mastering it.' He drank another draught and seemed to smile inwardly. 'Formerly the abbot never cared whether the sun went right. When it rose, we rose; when it sank, we went to sleep. But you should see him now, when the poor brother who must tend the great clock in the refectory has forgotten to wind it and its gong-strokes do not ring punctually through the cloister at five o'clock, to drive us out of our beds!'

'I had not looked at it so.'

'Ah, nor need you. This wonderful mechanism has made our life more comfortable. Formerly one of the brothers had to stay awake at night and turn the sandy hourglass, then at sunrise ring the bell and thereby drive us out of bed. There the gong of the clock is dearer to me already than the violent jangling of the bell!' He drank the rest in the glass at a draught, filled up again and went on.

'In the one truth there is not only one truth. Is that not why we have a Trinity as the one only God? God the Father can indeed be hard and wrathful; God the Son is the forgiveness, the love; and the Holy Spirit ...? On that I must yet reflect!' It seemed not to disconcert him in the least that he knew no answer to it.

'But the building of the clocks has yet another purpose: when Benedict of Nursia founded this order, he gave it two principles for

its way: to pray and to work. And so our work shields us from brooding over questions we cannot decide. For the original sin of man is not the knowledge of his bodily nature, not the loss of the chastity of his flesh, when they knew the other sex – it is the presumption to think that man is made in the image of God, and to make him, but really himself, the measure of all things.

'Since I live by the wise rules of Benedict, I have not fallen prey to this temptation again. As a Dominican I was always in danger, as Simon was. There was a time when he wished to be lord of his fate, and was punished by God for it. He accepted it, and thereby grew only the more in my esteem as a man.'

With an abrupt movement of the hand Albrecht pushed his glass aside. 'For what was Simon punished? For being the son of his father?'

Bartholomäus stared at the clock, then turned again to Albrecht: 'Gregor von Mechttersheim let you read the petition that Simon wrote in order to be allowed to leave?'

Albrecht nodded.

'Did he report anything more?'

'No.'

Albrecht started as the mild Bartholomäus now struck the workbench with his clenched fist. 'How should he, either, this supposed vicar of God on earth, over whose tongue the word humility would not come even if one tried to thrash it out of him. This word is simply not present at all in the wondrous pearls of his vocabulary!' He swallowed. 'Forgive me; I know myself that pride and anger are counted among the seven deadly sins, and I will confess that I am only a man and no image of God!'

He looked down at himself, stood up, lifted the sleeves of his habit and turned, so that his lean legs became visible. As he did so he stroked his bald crown. 'Or do you perhaps think God bears a likeness to me?'

Albrecht was in no mood for jesting. What more was there to report of Simon? What did this monk know that he did not speak of?

Bartholomäus had surely seen the questioning earnestness in Albrecht's face, and he ran about the workshop like a caged animal. He wrung his hands, then stopped before the half-finished clock, tore himself away from it again, stood once more before the clock, took up the cogwheel lying beside it and at last murmured: 'Everything grips into everything, and only when each single part is at the place where it is meant to belong is the order restored again.'

With straight step he went to the cupboard, came back with a candle in his hand, which he lit at one of the lamps and set beside Albrecht on the workbench, laid a folded paper he had held in the other hand before Albrecht, held his hand upon it and sat down on his stool.

'It is no accident that you met me after you had been with Gregor von Mechtersheim, and that I addressed you because you had need of a fellow man's help. Before you are now to read this writing, I should like first to tell you something of the time in which Simon wrote this letter to me.'

He folded his hands, spread the fingers against one another so that the joints cracked, and coughed.

'I was abroad in those days, on a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. When I returned, Simon had gone away. I had no explanation and could ask no one. In the cloister his name was no longer to be uttered. Too great hopes had the Inquisitor set on his best assistant for him to wish to be reminded of this painful loss. Some things were indeed whispered, but Gregor von Mechtersheim watched strictly over it, so that everyone feared to be suddenly surprised by him in the midst of talk.'

He gazed, lost in thought, at the candle, at whose wick the heat of the flame burned the wax.

'When we last saw each other, before my departure for Santiago, Simon had for some weeks been as though transformed. From the brooding library-stool who could sometimes get on one's nerves, when he wanted again and again to discuss with one his deeply preoccupying theme of guilt and atonement, there had become a man from whose shoulders a burden seemed to have been taken, who rejoiced in the sun of God and even took part in our sometimes coarse jests, which he had always avoided before. The conduct of the trials he left to Gregor von Mechttersheim.

'Where before it had been respect for his learning, esteem for his eloquence, the knowledge of the depth of his understanding, in these weeks everything changed, from a distance, into a great affection for a brother of the order who made life easier for himself and for us, because he was cheerful.'

The candle cracked dryly, and Bartholomäus fetched a pair of scissors to trim the wick.

'The more incomprehensible it was to me that he had gone away without taking leave of me. I carried this rancour and this melancholy about with me for some days, when one evening I wished to read for comfort in my Bible – my favourite parable of the prodigal son, which Simon knew – and this thin, folded sheet lay hidden between the pages at that very place. Now read for yourself.'

Albrecht hesitated to unfold the paper. What would be harder to bear, the knowledge or the ignorance? If thereby, perhaps, something might be cleared up? He unfolded the sheet.

The hand that he had already seen once that day he recognised at once, but here it seemed more hurried, more driven and at the same time more personal than in the official petition.

Dear friend! Today I leave the cloister – will try to go as far north as possible. You remember the last trial I conducted as judge? Against the merchant Jan Fredersen, who told everywhere in the town that he sought a man who bore a certain witch's mark on the right shoulder, the half-moon in the sun?

Whom I had seized, accused as a sorcerer? He had salves and tinctures enough among his wares, so that the proof was not difficult, who at last, after examination under torture, confessed too and was delivered up to the secular execution? – The man he sought was I myself, son of a father on whom Fredersen wished to avenge himself. – I thanked God that He sent me this man when I could defend myself, was no longer powerless. With his death a burden was taken from me. The sword of Damocles of revenge that he had hung over me and my descendants. I could turn it against himself. I became free to live, free to love. It was a serving-maid whom I loved, and when she awaited a child by me, she was dragged before the tribunal as a witch by another man to whom she had denied herself. Despite all pleas, Gregor von Meckersheim did not hand the proceedings over to me. He knew of us, no doubt, let her go the way that I myself had let the merchant Fredersen go. I could not prevent it.

I took one life; God took from me two. He has punished me hard in His wrath. I recognised only too late, when He took my beloved from me, that I could not withstand the power my office gave me, saw only my own advantage. Let it be a lesson to me. Perhaps God is merciful to me, lets me find rest. Fare thee well! Simon.

Albrecht had read the letter with leaden concentration, so as not to let the trembling of his hand break through. Slowly he let the sheet sink.

Bartholomäus regarded him attentively and was silent. The movement of the air set the candle flickering and drew Albrecht's attention.

'If it seems right to you, young friend, then do it – I have nothing against it.'

Albrecht still held the sheet fast with his fingers, raised it slowly, as though in a trance, turned it so that the one corner caught fire

in the candle flame, and the embers, licking greedily, blackened the paper and let it go up in smoke.

Bartholomäus reached behind him, produced a bowl of water, which he set on the workbench, and the glowing remnants of the letter tumbled towards the water.

At last Albrecht found his words again: 'And you said that he had risen in your esteem?'

Bartholomäus nodded calmly. 'Who has grown as old as I and could say he had remained without guilt? But Simon accepted it and confessed to it.'

Lost in thought, his forefinger drew circles with the drops of water that had slopped over from the bowl. 'My young friend, you have today met another man who behaved exactly as Simon once did and is still what he was then! More than that: Gregor von Mechttersheim has even risen.'

'And you?'

'I left the Dominicans, was one of the little sheep that could not be gathered in again, and found my refuge here, where I pray, build my clocks and now, since I am old and worthy, may tend the rosebush.'

'Why did you have me burn the letter, if you have kept it for yourself all these years?'

'It was a bond between me and Simon. It always protected me from committing follies. Now my bones are old' – he chuckled – 'only my mind, perhaps, is still foolish. I no longer need this protection. To you I could still explain who Simon was, what this sheet was about, and now you know of it too. But little time has granted me to tend the rosebush, and when I shall have laid aside the gardener's apron for good, another will take over my Bible and find this letter – could he understand it, then? No! When the living memory has been buried with those who carried it within them, then we die a second time. Irrevocably. The paper that remains is then just as dead as the man who wrote it.'

'But one can still read it! And, they say, after all, that he who writes, remains!'

'Ah, drink another liqueur rather; we waste too much time anyway with brooding. What remains is the colour of the letters, which another may perhaps still read later, if the paper is not already spoiled. But what are the letters, if I do not know their spiritual content? That is as good as a bottle of liqueur that is empty, dry, evaporated, and someone would then claim that he could taste the flavour!'

Not only the flickering candlelight made hectic spots glow on Albrecht's cheeks. 'And all the studying, learning, reading, all the libraries, universities?'

Bartholomäus had risen, gone to the cupboard, brought out a book and laid it beside the liqueur bottle on the table.

'This is ...' – he threw back the cover – 'as you can read for yourself, the Old and the New Testament. It has the form of a book, and these strange scrawls are no fly-dirt, but letters – yet really ...' – Bartholomäus made a pause, to heighten the suspense – 'it is an empty bottle.'

'How do you mean?'

'Every generation has made a different sense of what these words are supposed to mean. Had these letters kept their meaning, then no theologian would need to write anything else about them. But everyone has poured a different spirit into this empty bottle, not only one after another, but at the same time too. The whole history of the church is nothing other than the succession of different brewmasters, who always set up new mixtures, and since the Reformation there are now even various brewhouses with yet more brewmasters. All pour in indeed the same letters, yet, oh wonder, not only is the label different, but the content too has truly become another!'

He laughed. 'One might almost think God not only sets no store by it but wishes rather to prevent Himself from being recognised by us men.'

Bartholomäus filled the glasses full once more. 'Young friend, do not take it so seriously: I am only a foolish old fool, to whom his clocks have become more important than all theology, and whom one can frighten no longer. I shall soon stand myself before my Lord, and He will then tell me in person whether my rhymes have pleased Him or not. But now, permit me, I will go and fetch a new bottle.'

Left alone, Albrecht wandered about the workshop. He shivered. He stopped before the bowl of water and stared at the mirroring surface, at whose rim a white remnant of the letter floated like a rose-petal on the water. The ink of the three words that were still preserved began to dissolve in the water: 'Fare thee well! Simon.'

Albrecht felt his armour growing weaker and questions relentlessly forcing their way through. There lay now the charred fragments of the letter, wetted by the water, in the bowl: why had he burned the letter, if he had transferred the words of Simon into his head? He had come here so unwitting; now everything seemed to move in a whirl – the abyss of which Bartholomäus had spoken, which opened when Simon left the cloister, now opened for him, as he visited these places of Simon's past.

What had he himself sought, what had he thought to find, when he came here? If Simon had told nothing of it, then he had his reason for it.

He, Albrecht, ought surely to have known that they would be bloody secrets, for which Simon's blood had flowed. He, Albrecht, had after all opened the capsules of the past, had had them opened, by those with whom they lay well hidden. Would it have happened with Simon's will, had he been able to speak of it? Had

he died too soon? Yes. And yet again, no! Had he not died so, then he, Albrecht, would not now be standing here.

Simon himself had, through his silence, made ready the spade with which others now dug in his past and sought an answer! What answer had he found? At least none for the sake of which he had come here.

Albrecht groaned and pressed his hands against his temples again. Now he understood what his philosophy teacher in London had meant, when he had warned his pupils:

'The question is the beginning of all philosophy. But when you begin to ask, be clear that every answer is a new question. When you begin to ask, you have begun a road of which you do not know whither it will lead you. Let us assume you wish to visit a village strange to you and go along the highway. Because you are not quite sure, you ask a peasant whether you are on the right way. If he names you another, then you ask yourself why the friend who described the way to you named you a false one, or you ask yourself whether the peasant really knows the right one. If he confirms your view, then there may have been something in his face, a crooked grin, that makes you ask whether he did not say something false on purpose, because he does not like people from the town and has his fun in letting them wander on down a wrong road. So, you ask yourself what you should now do.

'Probably you will now ask another, whom you then meet, if you have gone on at all. The second answer will perhaps even be a question – namely, that there are two villages of the same name and which do you mean? How should you know that, for if you knew it, you would not have asked. It would have been simplest had you not set out at all or had not asked when you were on the way. Whether you would then, however, have arrived where you wished to go – that is again a new question.'

Through the passage the striking of the clock in the refectory was to be heard. Nine o'clock. At the same time the bells of the cloister chapel began to ring.

'No!' Albrecht had shouted out so loudly that Bartholomäus almost dropped the bottle from his hand in fright.

Disconcerted, he asked timidly: 'If you would perhaps like to take part in our evening Mass? When we sing the Domine, it sounds unearthly beautiful, and I could, if you wish, explain to you ...'

Albrecht had not been listening. He looked up, his eyes were like those of a hunted animal, and he stammered: 'Forgive me, I must be off ... before the watch is set ... have no lantern ...' It was plain that it was all only a pretext.

Bartholomäus had set down his bottle, looked full of fellow-feeling and at the same time of incomprehension at his confused guest, and embraced him. 'Then go, young friend. Do you promise me one thing more?'

'Yes, surely!' Albrecht would have promised anything – he wished now only to get out from these walls.

'When you come to Hildesheim again some time later, visit my grave, and think of me as a good man, as ...' – he looked searchingly at Albrecht and pressed both hands firmly against his arms – 'as I always think of Simon as a good man.'

Albrecht nodded hastily: 'That I will gladly do and thank you ... for everything ... and may you live long yet!'

The loudly shouted No had, in his feeling, rebounded upon a Yes: Mechthild's voice rang in his head.

Scarcely was Albrecht out of the workshop when he sprang over the balustrade of the cloister-walk, ran across the green sprouting lawn, past the rosebush, tore open the door of the apse, had in a few moments crossed the nave and heaved open the portal. He sprang over the legs of two beggars who lounged in the entrance to shelter from the rain, and who now crept in fright under their

blankets, as though Albrecht were one possessed, escaped from an exorcism, who now raced across the cathedral square, down to the market, past the splendid Butchers' Guild Hall, across the empty marketplace, on which only a drowsy night-watchman started up in a niche, took up his halberd and thought it was now time to light his lantern, for he had not made out who ran there over the paving, whose steps lost themselves in a side-street and then died away.

Mechthild had waited for him at the door and waved as she recognised Albrecht, who flung himself into her arms and kissed her as though he wished to lose himself in her.

She pushed him away from her, saw with full concern his pale face. 'I already feared you would not come today.'

Again Albrecht drew her wordlessly, vehemently, into his arms, and reluctantly she suffered it a moment, until she freed herself again. 'Come inside. Father has already gone to bed and said I should wait and show you your chamber.'

She took him by the hand and led him up the stairs, through a dark, long passage that led into the back house, into a room in which a candle burned and a bedstead with soft pillows stood ready for him.

Albrecht wished to embrace her again, but Mechthild fended him off: 'Not so fast. I must first lock the front door, put out the lights and see whether my father is really asleep.'

Hastily Albrecht tore the clothing from his body, rubbed the wet and the cold sweat from his body with a cloth and crept under the warming cover.

The blood throbbed in his body, as though the veins had grown too narrow, pulsed through his head, which seemed to him about to burst, and Albrecht drew the air so loudly into his lungs and thrust it out again through his nose that Mechthild stroked his brow: 'Quiet, Albrecht! Hush!'

He was so driven to forget everything that Mechthild was at first delighted, but then almost began to be afraid, when he would not

let go of her and thrust into her so violently and again and again, as though he wished to destroy something, until, after a time that seemed endless, he slid exhausted to the side and lay, breathing heavily, in her arm.

Herself out of breath, astonished, yet most deeply satisfied, she stroked his sweaty hair: 'It is all well, my dearest!' – and was not sure whether he had noticed her at all when she came back into the chamber. Was that important? she thought. Was it not the innocence of paradise, if he had not recognised her? She relished it that he lay like a fallen angel at her naked breast and gently stroked him into sleep.

Albrecht had slept deep and dreamless, awoke rested, pushed aside a hand that he felt under the cover, and blinked: it was Heilwich's hand.

'I would gladly have waited for you yesterday, too. But my brother thought that, if at all, it should be Mechthild. He seemed to promise himself something from it.' She pursed her mouth: 'Mechthild too, but presumably something else – has she got it?'

She let her hand glide under the cover, which Albrecht pushed away again. 'That was yesterday.'

Heilwich pouted: 'Very well. Breakfast is ready.'

She stood up and turned round once more. 'If there is still a to-day, then think of me.'

Albrecht looked after her, rubbed his fingers through his hair and asked himself whether there might be a bathhouse in the town where he could cleanse himself. He gathered together his clothing that lay about and dressed.

The merchant Benningstedt refrained this time from offering him his daughter and confined himself to chit-chat, since Albrecht too was not very talkative as far as the results of his enquiries about Simon were concerned.

They cleared up the question of where he could best buy a new horse – the precious stone would bring in many times what he had

to pay – and Benningstedt took his leave: he wished to go to the merchants' guild.

Albrecht and Mechthild remained sitting at the table. When they were alone, he reached for her hand. 'Will you come with me to Hamburg?'

Mechthild laid her hand on her heart in surprise and looked at him in wonder. 'You want to marry me?' Her breast rose and fell more quickly. 'Why? Because my father wants to get me under a bonnet?'

'Do you need a reason for it? If you ask why, then you have already said no by it.'

'Only because we coupled a few times together?'

She reached across the table for his hand. 'Even though I would gladly experience it with you again and again – why should I content myself with you alone, when I can still have so many other men?'

To that nothing at first occurred to Albrecht. He stared at the table, as though he could find a solution in the labyrinth of the grain, but he came to the conclusion that Mechthild was probably already lost to the burgher order.

He felt her sympathetic squeeze of the hand, as though he were a poor little dog that stood drenched in the rain – then he had an idea and drew himself up: 'And yet, you might perhaps come to Hamburg with me after all! Your father spoke of it: he regretted that you are not of noble birth, because then he could buy you and Heilwich into a convent – so that you would be provided for and live according to your station!'

'Since when are there noble convents in Hamburg? I thought no nobleman could acquire the burgher-right in Hamburg?'

'Yes, but that is just it! There is indeed no hereditary nobility in Hamburg that could show an imperial or royal patent of nobility, but the hereditary council families feel themselves to be the patri-cians of the town and have therefore set up just such convents for

their unmarried daughters and sisters. Exactly what your father spoke of. Herwardeshude it is called, I believe.'

'Do you really think I want to go into a ladies' convent and forever only crochet and sing – then I might as well become a nun. But I don't want to!'

Albrecht grinned broadly. 'I will make inquiries. For I have heard it whispered that it does not go there as in a cloister, but rather as in your merry house, in which I was a guest one night.'

'Hush, be still.'

Albrecht leaned across the table and whispered: 'When it was reported to the church superiors that it did not go there as in a cloister, they wished to send a commission to check it. But the ladies of the convent are then said to have spoken with their brothers and fathers on the council, which promptly, as the church supervisory authority, forbade the commission entry to the convent!'

Undecided, Mechthild rolled a cup to and fro between her palms.

'I could then also visit you now and then!'

That he should not have said. With that the question was settled for Mechthild. 'No, I do not want to go there. That would be a kind of convent-marriage! I always have to wait for you and may not visit you when I have a mind to! No, put it out of your head. I stay here.'

'A pity,' murmured Albrecht, visibly disappointed. 'Very well, then I will set out on my way.'

Was it the new horse, which was apparently no longer used to being moved long distances and grew ever more unwilling, or was it he himself who grew increasingly nervous the nearer he drew to Hamburg?

Albrecht had joined in Hildesheim a group of riders who stayed together as far as Celle and passed the time pleasantly by galloping

now and then to certain goals, each wishing to be the first. One fell twice from his horse, which drew salvos of laughter and lasting teasing from the others.

Now, on the second day, he rode beside a coach-and-four that was escorted in front by two armed riders. The steady trot beside the coach, the uniform motion in the saddle, the slight distraction from himself did him no good.

If yesterday he had still had the feeling of having left Hildesheim and all his experiences behind him, Simon's handwriting now seemed to have caught him up again.

What was he to report to Laurentz?

Should he simply keep silent?

Could he try to forget his knowledge?

If he acted as though he had been able to find out nothing: who would wonder at it? Who would investigate? And if so, for whom would the prior seek out his book once more? Bartholomäus's letter was destroyed. Why not let everything rest in the past?

No, he contradicted himself: then I would be just like Simon and would repeat his tragic error, in that I keep silent and do not speak.

He brooded, and one thing became certain to him: as he now felt, Simon had probably felt too, when he kept silent. He had no fear of the past. No. He was afraid of his future.

Albrecht had withstood the temptation to ride past Hamburg, or to put in another night's lodging in Bergedorf, before the town, to delay the meeting with Laurentz.

His mother Agathe embraced him warmly but studied him closely. 'What has happened? You ride a different horse and look like a grown man, from whom the last of his youthful chubby cheeks have been melted away in the past days!'

'Mother, later I will gladly tell you everything in full. Where are the others? Where is Grandfather?'

'Your father Harald is on the way to Norway, Karl is at the harbour, Marthe sits with Kobi and the maids in the spinning-room, and your grandfather sits with Mönckebronn in the lower court.'

'Is it court day today, then? What does he want there?'

Agathe stroked his lean cheeks. 'Just run along there. He should be coming home soon anyway. Go to meet him. He himself will be able to tell and explain to you better what has happened.'

The way confused Albrecht still more. One of his legs wished to run, the other resisted it, and he was out of breath when he at last reached the lower court, limping like a cripple.

In the lower court Laurentz was just concluding: 'Simon is dead, and the last descendant of this family, Jan Fredersen, has been missing for years. Neither of the two has descendants. With that this accursed private feud is ended!'

Lütjehann had to suppress a grin, since Moellendorff could not guess that he knew what all slumbered there on the long shelves of the court archive.

Albrecht, who was just entering the conference room of the lower court and heard what Laurentz had proclaimed in a loud voice, went deathly pale. 'What was this family called, and this man who is missing?'

Laurentz stood up, came towards him smiling, embraced him and said casually: 'Ah, that one: Jan Fredersen.'

Albrecht swallowed. His throat threatened to wither – yet he knew instantly that if he kept silent now, he would never say it again, and forced it out: 'Jan Fredersen? He died in Hildesheim.'

Why did he creep about the facts?

'At the stake!'

The frozen look of Laurentz made him look down ashamed at the floor, and yet, now it had to come out entirely: 'Simon himself condemned him to it, although he knew that he was not guilty.'

'Do you mean to say ...' – Laurentz gripped Albrecht's shoulders with a painful grasp – 'that Simon killed Fredersen deliberately?'

'Yes, Grandfather.'

Laurentz swayed. 'Simon! A murderer?'

While Mönckebronn stood up abruptly, Albrecht supported the ashen Laurentz, who groped for the edge of the table, and Lütjehann set as uninvolved an expression as possible on his face. That would make a sensation this evening, when he reported it to his drinking-companions at cards – quite in passing.

Laurentz drew himself upright again, closed his eyes briefly and drew his grandson onto the bench beside him. 'Report everything, please, that you found out in Hildesheim.'

Albrecht told of the conversation with Gregor von Mechttersheim, the petition, his dismay, and then of Bartholomäus and his letter. Finally of his fear at having to report it to him.

Laurentz took him sympathetically in his arm. 'Then I will tell you who Simon's father was: the pirate Claus Kniephof. It was probably he too whom he meant by "Father" when he died.'

Albrecht closed his eyes and tried to order his thoughts that whirled in confusion. 'A privateer! That is why he wrote that his father had been a murderer and he himself feared to become a ...'

He avoided speaking on. If in Hildesheim it had almost torn his head apart, how must Laurentz feel now, who had told of Kniephof with a seemingly placid face.

'You cannot remember who that was. Nor did I experience it myself, when in Hamburg a grim festival of death took place such as has not been celebrated since in that manner, and of which my father told me: it lasted three days, and seventy-one men were executed by the headsman's sword. Their dying began when I was born.'

He paused and seemed to look back: 'Simon was five months older than I. Then Wilma van Leyden may have come to Hamburg to accompany her lover to his last hour.' He fell silent; too many thoughts whirled in confusion in his head.

'Come, let us go home.' Albrecht had taken Laurentz's coat and hat from the hook and held them out to him.

Mönckebronn nodded; what they had to discuss was settled. The question of what was to happen with the casket and the jewels the council, as higher court, would have to decide. Lütjehann hastily pushed his sheets of paper together and brought them, with inkwell and quill, to a cupboard that Mönckebronn locked.

Albrecht looked out of the kitchen window into the courtyard. 'Only the stable is still standing of the servants' house: how quickly a house is pulled down, and how much longer it took to build it up.'

'Reckon about one to thirty days; that comes near it. In three days is pulled down what one needed ninety days to build up!' Karl drew on his pipe. 'So, it is in life! No,' he corrected himself, 'in life there is indeed destroyed in one day what a man needed sixty years to build up.'

'You do not mean by that Simon, surely?'

Laurentz still had difficulty growing used to the manner of his third-born, which had become strange to him.

'Why not? Let us take only the facts: son of an executed pirate, illegitimate birth, concealment of his Christian name ...'

'That is enough, Karl! You can only speak so because you never came to know him – because he means nothing to you!'

'Oh indeed? Only, each single one of these three facts, which yet others far graver might follow, would already have sufficed for him not even to have been allowed to set foot in this town!'

Laurentz tried to damp his son's agitation: 'With a good wine and a good man one should not ask after their origin!'

Surprised, Karl glared at his father. 'Really? Does your councilor's cloak now turn with the wind? Those are quite new views!'

Now Laurentz had had enough. 'If every single ground had sufficed with Simon, what then of you? You privateer captain! Were you anything better than a sea-robber?'

Karl planted his hands on his hips and looked proudly at Laurentz. 'Yes! Francis Drake was knighted for it! Because we did it not on our own account and for our own advantage, but on the commission of her royal Majesty!'

Albrecht turned away from the window and came between them: 'Kings are subject to the same law as every free man!'

Karl puffed and turned slowly to his young nephew. 'Look at that! The young badger would instruct me on law and morals?'

Albrecht waved aside Karl's pipe-smoke. 'Not on morals! It is the last argument of the weaker, when the law is no longer on his side. Whoever has the power needs it not!'

'You will shout the whole house together at me yet!'

Agathe had come down from the upper storey and regarded, shaking her head, the fighting-cocks in their territories: Albrecht at the window, Karl on one side of the table, Laurentz on the other. 'Go to the front: Marthe must see to the meal and does not wish to get between your battlelines.'

It was no point of discussion at all who was the mistress of the house. The three men left the kitchen wordlessly and went. The more men there were in the house, the more important became Agathe's task of organising the household.

Karl took a roll from the shelf in the great room and laid it on the table. 'Let the past rest at last and let us think of the future! Here, the drawings for the new servants' house.'

Laurentz and Albrecht were content with it. They both had the feeling of being stuck in a blind alley and of needing time to find their bearings again, so they nodded in agreement. Without having spoken of it, the agreement had formed itself between Karl and his father that Karl was responsible for the rebuilding of the

servants' house. Laurentz was glad to be able to delegate tasks, and Karl had silently accepted it.

The paper lay unrolled on the table, four cups on the corners to prevent its rolling back, and he pointed to the plan: 'Here below, beside the stable, our own bathhouse is planned, and beside it a washhouse. The well in the inner court lies directly before the entrances: it is only a short way for the maids to carry the water-pails across.'

Albrecht pointed to the area between the front house and the servants' house: 'Are the privies to stay there in the courtyard, where they still are now?'

'Yes, of course! Would you bear the stench of the cesspit in the house?'

'Should not the kitchen too come beside the wash-house – here beside the stairs? That would be a direct connection between the rooms. The maids would not always have to run across the inner court with the hot water.'

Laurentz interrupted the two and turned to Albrecht: 'Ask Agathe whether she can come to us. That we cannot decide without her.'

The evening passed in a solitary quiet, in which all, after the meal, occupied themselves with plans, tidying and other work, as though there were an agreement to avoid a conversation about past and future. The following day passed similarly: Laurentz slipped off to the town hall, Karl had to meet the carpenters and masons for consultations about the servants' house, and Albrecht was at the saddler's the whole day, to settle the last fine points of the new horse's bridle.

Only in the evening did all sit again around the table. Among the servants also the black Kobi, whose role in the household was not yet more closely determined. As Karl's personal servant he had no tasks, since Clara, Wilfriede, Matthias, Knut and Ingvar – the two maids and the three men-servants – under Marthe's rule did

all the work in the house. Bodily labour he regarded in any case as beneath his dignity as personal servant.

Kobi liked best to sit with the maids in the spinning-room on the first floor and tell the most adventurous tales of seafaring, rolling his eyes mightily and not taking it too exactly with the truth either – the main thing was that Clara and Wilfriede gaped with open mouths and eyes. Something too seemed to be brewing, for he did not budge from the side of the sturdy Clara, and the others already whispered slyly that she had lately two dark shadows.

When the others were too busy, he went at first often alone into the Moellendorffs' garden before the Neuer Wall – but after the Hamburg children had developed a new game, it grew gradually irksome to him: scarcely was Kobi in the street and a few playing children caught sight of him, when the cheekiest of them shouted: 'Who's afraid of the black man?' All the others then shouted at the top of their lungs: 'No one!' and they scattered shrieking to all the points of the compass.

At first he had still laughed and pulled faces, then it grew too much for him – the children did not care. When Kobi no longer let himself be seen, they painted the weakest playmate with a piece of coal a black stripe on nose and cheek; he then had to cover his eyes, bellow at the top of his lungs: 'Who's afraid of the black man?', and with 'No one!' the others ran apart, hid, and the poor black one had to seek them.

At this evening's supper no conversation would come. Kobi was just filling his plate with a spoonful of spelt-porridge, when the panes of the right-hand street window fell into the room with a deafening crash and jangle, a board came clattering after onto the floor, and outside, amid whoops, a good dozen people ran off.

The spoon had fallen from Kobi's hand; Clara and Wilfriede, who sat with their backs to the window, had sprung up shrieking. Karl, Albrecht and Marthe already ran to the door, while Agathe held Laurentz's hand, who had flung his eyes wide as though he

did not understand what had just happened. Moments later Karl came clattering back into the room. "The cowardly rabble is already gone!"

Marthe stood right beside him and was already giving instructions to fetch shovel and broom and clear away the shards.

Agathe had let go of Laurentz's hand and had risen in concern. "Where is Albrecht?"

"He has run to the stable. Saddles the horses."

At once the stable lad ran out to stand by him.

Karl climbed over the shards and the splintered wood of the window frames and lifted up the long, narrow board: it was the death-board of Simon that had stood rammed in at the Grosser Burstah – now a red muck ran over the letters of his carved name.

"Councillor Moellendorff!" a uniformed bailiff of the town watch shouted from outside through the shattered window: "A mob of the rabble means to dig the dead bishop out of the earth! They are already on the way to the churchyards with shovels!"

"Father! You go with the watch and take the menservants with you! Albrecht and I, we will ride ahead!" With that only Karl's steps were still to be heard in the hallway, and shortly after the hoof-clatter of the two horses.

Laurentz, freed from his rigidity, beckoned to the two men-servants Matthias and Knut, who still stood about quite dumbfounded. "Each of you fetch a stout cudgel and bring my sabre!" He went outside, dragged on the coat that Marthe held out to him and hurried, with the uniformed man in his company, towards the Ackertor.

At Simon's grave they met Albrecht, Karl and the stable lad. "None of this rabble dared to attack the horses! We drove them with their own bodies into the ditches!"

"This cowardly gate-watch actually withdrew into their shelters when the mob pressed out of the town gate!"

Karl held his sabre in his hand, Albrecht his rapier. Laurentz, who had arrived panting at Simon's grave, the two menservants

and two uniformed men in his train, sat down breathing heavily on a gravestone and let the sergeant of the town watch report.

'In the evening sermon the chief pastor of St Nicholas' demanded that the corpse' – the sergeant pointed to Simon's grave – 'be dug up again out of the consecrated earth and put on trial. He was a murderer, who might not find his last rest in the churchyard, but belonged on the gallows.'

'God have mercy on him!' growled Karl – whereby it remained unclear whom he meant by it.

'It is still the affair of the council and its courts to decide who is accused of what and who is not!' Laurentz had had the manservant give him the body-belt with the sabre, gripped the basket-hilt firmly and tried a few strokes with the heavy weapon. On account of his age he no longer had to take part in the exercises of the civic militia and had grown somewhat clumsy.

'Karl, ride home now. Take Matthias, Knut and the good town watchmen with you. Keep watch in the house and have the window mended. Albrecht and I will stay a while yet, in case the rabble should after all dare to appear here again.'

'Very well, Father!' With that he had untied his horse, swung himself into the saddle and galloped off. The two menservants and the town bailiffs stumbled after and asked themselves, panting, what use all this running about could be.

Albrecht pushed his rapier back and asked: 'Why Simon? The same would surely hold for the bath-woman too?'

'I assume this pastor wishes to cool his spite and to teach me in particular a lesson, since he knows how important Simon was to me. But I think he has overrated himself in it.'

Laurentz looked about him searchingly, regarded the mare that Albrecht had tied to a grave-cross and that plucked grass there. 'Why have you a new horse?'

At last Albrecht found the occasion to tell of the journey, the assault, parts of the supposed dream and a little of Mechthild. Then both hung after their thoughts.

Suddenly Albrecht laughed out. 'I was just thinking that this pastor wants to have Simon dug up. Would it not be more sensible no longer to bury all the dead, but to burn them straightaway? The fire would cleanse them of every guilt, and their souls could rise purified to heaven. Then it could be said again: *De mortuis nihil nisi bene!*'

'A fine maxim: of the dead nothing, unless it be good. But if we burn the dead, then it would mean that they were all heretics!'

'Are we not, then? Has not each of us already done something un-Christian and, as a Protestant, received no absolution for it?'

'Nothing but good!' murmured Laurentz, lost in thought.

'You are thinking of Simon?'

'Yes. How easy it would be, could he come out of his box for just one hour and tell his view of things.'

'Has he not reported enough of it to us through the rest of his life?'

'What has he reported to us by it?' Laurentz poked, without being aware of it, with the point of the sabre in the fresh earth that covered Simon's coffin. 'A lovable man who removed himself from the arena of the power-struggles of the theologies? Who was modest, cheerful and ironic? With whom one could quarrel without being hurt, in whose nearness one felt better than alone? That is all true; I too thought and felt so before.'

He rammed his sabre into the ground, stood up and paced restlessly to and fro. 'If in all these years he always showed me only the bright side of his character, was silent about his dark side – why should he have changed in Norway?'

'Would you have wished to see the dark side of his nature while he still lived? Did he perhaps let fall hints, invite you to speak with

him of it, to help him, and you would not admit it, would not recognise it?'

Laurentz stood bowed, chewed his lips. 'What am I to say to that? If I did not recognise it then, how am I to recognise it today, without his help, without his speaking to me?'

He began to take up his pacing again. 'The bright and the dark side – the image of a truth that has two sides, like a coin, and yet forms a unity. An image that might hold for man too, as though his soul consisted of two sides, a good one, which we ascribe to God, and an evil one, in which the devil sits! With me it is otherwise: when I thought of Simon before, he was a clear lake, of which I believed I could see the bottom. Now I know that I could not see down to the bottom. The morass that covered the floor has now, stirred up, darkened the clear water too.'

Laurentz spread out his arms, and in the evening sun his shadow lay like a cross over the grave of his brother.

Albrecht was silent, thinking that not only the prior of the cloister in Hildesheim had compared him with Simon. Wherein lay the impression of their likeness? The pleasure in peaceful contests of words, which he, like Simon, loved? Or their theoretical education? Had it deformed their natural feeling and developed instead their capacity to formulate ideas in which evil dwelt?

And the soul? Should he tell Laurentz of the Italian scholars who, three hundred years ago, poisoned a man condemned to death, put him in a barrel and sealed it fast? After four days they opened the bung again in the expectation that the soul must now escape. And they began to doubt when they perceived nothing.

'Does one love only what one knows of the other? But: what changes when I learn something about another man that contradicts my love for him? The other man has remained as he was before; only my knowledge of him has changed. He has remained the same; only I have changed, in that my knowledge widened – into regions that I could not love in myself! These two sides of a coin,

of which one can always see only the one side – either the good or the evil – contradict our innermost need to experience ourselves and every other man as a unity: either he is good, or he is evil.'

The light of the setting sun cast long shadows over the graves and made Laurentz's face appear more angular. 'Was Simon a good man, although he was a murderer?'

Albrecht's horse snorted, and the two men looked up: their assumption that someone approached with evil intent and that they must lay into him properly dissolved in a smile: Marthe came along the path, a basket under her arm, with Kobi in her train.

'You will probably be hungry, having had to spring up in the middle of the meal.' With that she set the basket on the path, drew the shawl from her shoulders and spread it out on the ground.

Albrecht stared at Kobi as though he saw him for the first time. 'Tell me, Kobi, have you a black soul too?'

Kobi seemed not to be surprised and answered grinning: 'No, sir. Since we bear the dark on the skin, we have a bright soul. Whites, who bear the bright on the outside, they have a dark soul!'

'How do you come to that?'

'Have not heard that black men catch whites like animals and make them their slaves.'

'Good gracious! That is good. Then we Hamburg councillors must have a bright soul too. We have no slaves, and our outside is black as well!'

Kobi shook his head. 'No. Clothing one can change, the colour of the skin not.'

'If men could feed themselves on talk, then they would probably all have a fat belly! Since that is not so, eat now!' Marthe did not see why she had lugged the basket so far and the men were talking again instead of eating.

Albrecht did not have to be bidden twice and helped himself. 'Were you not both afraid to come here without weapons?'

Kobi only laughed: 'Have a big knife!'

He had indeed the great kitchen knife in his cloak, which he now brought out and showed. 'Has no blood-groove like a sabre, but for making dead is good!'

Albrecht laughed as though liberated at Kobi's face, who bared his teeth and then joined in his laughter.

'Great children!' Marthe had propped her hands on her hips: 'If anyone goes to war once more with my peaceful kitchen knife, there is nothing to eat!' With that she took the knife from Kobi, who looked in wonder at his empty hand.

Laurentz had reflected in silence while he ate. 'We cannot go on sitting here the next days too. Tonight we need stay no longer. The stirred-up rabble will soon withdraw into the town and, after the closing of the town gates, creep into its cellar-holes and shacks. Tomorrow I will have a heavy stone slab brought here, to be laid on the grave, which twenty men cannot heave up.'

Albrecht was still chewing. 'Where do you mean to get such a massive block?'

'Yesterday a barge with sandstone from Saxon Pirna arrived in the harbour. I will speak with the skipper.'

The new crane at the lower harbour had lifted the great sandstone slab from the ship the next day; a sturdy coach-and-four carried it out to the churchyards, and with united strength it was manoeuvred from the rollers on which it lay, up a sloping ramp, onto the grave.

On account of the goings-on at the Moellendorffs' the mortally sick superintendent was summoned before the council and afterwards left the sitting with a face flushed crimson. 'This chief pastor will yet be the last nail to my coffin.'

The mayor had pointed out to him with icy courtesy that the council's patience had reached its very limit. If he as superintendent did not fulfil his duty of supervision over the pastors, the

council itself would step in. It was indeed true, but ever again embarrassingly irksome, that Luther had formulated so plainly that no moral standards for worldly action could be derived from faith. And the question whether a corpse be exhumed was still the affair of the higher court, that is, of the council, to whose decisions the church had to keep silent.

The chief pastor had ventured a trial of strength that would now cost him his position.

In the following two weeks Laurentz left the work in the countinghouse to his third-born Karl, who quickly found his way into the work, and as whose secretary Kobi now proudly functioned.

Laurentz himself had withdrawn into the country house before the Neuer Wall. He went out early in the morning, came back late in the evening, only shortly before the closing of the town gates, and stayed within the town walls only for the council sittings. The question whether he would travel at the beginning of May with the Hamburg delegation to the Hanseatic Diet in Lübeck he had declined, just as he declined invitations to the family celebrations of his council colleagues. He scarcely spoke, seemed only to reflect and to wait for something.

Marthe, who always brought him out a little basket of food at midday, told the others they should not worry: 'He sits peacefully in the sun, watches how nature grows, blossoms and thrives again, talks kindly with me and eats his food. What more can one want: everyone must rest sometime!'

How was she to know, either, that Laurentz sat most of the day at Simon's grave and brooded. Punctually with the one o'clock ringing he always set out for the garden house, to sit there in the sun and wait for Marthe.

Meanwhile Albrecht became ever more indispensable to Mönckebronn. He was given in particular the task of preparing the appeals for the higher court, since the procurators of the lower court

had no right of representation before the council, and the council inclined ever more to prefer written pleadings as the basis of the higher court's proceedings, rather than enter into longer oral discussions.

The second-born, Harald, had returned with the MARGARETA from Norway, wondered that his brother, instead of his father, awaited him on the quay, and had then gone out to the country house.

Laurentz had come home with him earlier than in the past days, whispered with Marthe in the kitchen and then announced the following at supper: 'I will sail with Harald to Norway. Simon's affairs there must be seen to – that I wish to do. Marthe will accompany me. Harald will take his wife Agathe along on the journey, and Karl will conduct the business during this time, as he has already done these past weeks. A good voyage!'

The crew of the MARGARETA rejoiced when the provisions were loaded and, besides the usual casks of grain and pickled fish, cages with live hens and ducks were brought aboard too. They were not a little astonished when the merchant lord came aboard and discussed his accommodation with the captain. He would be aboard on this voyage, then. Then they looked sceptical when, with the last boat, besides Kobi two women too stepped onto the ship's planks, and it at last became plain that they would remain on the ship: that could only mean misfortune.

Laurentz had marked all too well the looks of the deckhands when Agathe and Marthe came aboard and called the boatswains to him: 'Tell your men that they need not fear the Klabautermann because there are women aboard. After all, all our ships have always borne a woman's name, without its having brought them misfortune!'

At Kobi no one took offence. Karl had sent him along to look about him in Bergen.

Even before the highest tide was reached, the anchor was weighed, and the commands to set the sails rang across the deck. With the beginning of the ebb the MARGARETA was to be at the Blankenese sand and beyond it already.

Laurentz had withdrawn with Agathe and Marthe into a corner of the railing, where they were not in the crew's way at the sail manoeuvres, when the long ropes for setting the sails were hauled across the deck, and explained to them the structure of the rigging. He had just reached the mizzen when the captain joined them and was in good spirits. 'We make good way, and by the look of the weather we shall have plenty of sun too.' He was glad to have his wife aboard and was confident that after this voyage his father would understand why he wished to remain captain and not change over to the countinghouse.

Laurentz nodded and still looked towards the mizzenmast. 'What do you think, would anything speak against our ships bearing three pennants on the mizzen? A green one, a yellow-and-white one and a red one?'

Harald took his green tricorn from his head and wiped the sweatband dry. 'What do you promise yourself from that?'

'Nothing in particular. It would only be a fine memory of an old helmsman,' and he told his son and the two women of the peculiarity of Hinnerk the helmsman, who had always let them fly.

'You are the owner of this ship, Father, and if you wish it so, then so shall it be.'

Laurentz laid his hand on his second-born's shoulder. 'Here aboard you are the captain; I am only your guest. If you meant to say by that that my wish is something like a command – that I truly do not want.'

'Herr Captain!' The ship's cook plainly had a problem and wrung his hands. 'Can someone show me how one slaughters and prepares live hens?'

Marthe detached herself from the group, took the despairing cook by the sleeve and was amused at his helplessness: 'Then let us go and pluck a chicken together.'

It was the first time she was aboard a great ship and found everything very confusing – running rigging, standing rigging, every single wooden pole had its own name – and was now glad to be able to do something she was versed in.

Laurentz had had two folding chairs set up for himself and Marthe at the stern of the ship, where they were least in the way. He watched thoughtfully how the captain was plainly in his very own element, enjoyed the warm May sun and the sea-wind that drove the ship before it with bellied sails.

When they had left the mouth of the Elbe, a sudden sun-shower whipped across the deck and he grew queasy in the light swell, Harald had laughed heartily. 'Father! You must not brace yourself against it. Just give yourself over to the movements of the waves and the ship!'

That was easier said than followed, and Laurentz grumbled: 'If I had had no firm will in my life, we would not be today on this, our own ship!' Yet after the day and the following night, which he spent as in a gently rocking cradle in Marthe's arms, his face had taken on its healthy colour again, and his spirits romped more freshly than ever before in the past years.

'A strange contradiction of the elements,' said Laurentz. 'The water brings me the queasiness, and the fresh wind blows it away again. The one, plainly, one does not get at sea without the other! Perhaps these contradictions can somehow be resolved?'

Marthe too was glad that both this year and Laurentz stood in a new spring, which showed itself, among other things, in his hearty appetite. The ship's cook no longer needed her help; he now knew himself how best to chop through the hens' necks and then pluck

them, so that she not only spent, as in Hamburg, the nights with Laurentz, but could be together with him the whole day too.

Laurentz thereby came to know quite other sides of her: what sensibility lay hidden beneath her sturdy peasant-woman's body, what jests she knew and how cheerful and light-hearted she now was, once her responsibility for the kitchen of a great household in Hamburg had been left behind. Agathe had marked it all well – what, indeed, stays hidden from the others on a ship – and, when her husband had no time, sat with her embroidery-frame at the bow and left Laurentz alone with Marthe.

'Ship in sight!' shouted the lookout suddenly from his crow's nest down to the deck and pointed with his arm towards port ahead. At once all stepped to the railing and saw too the little ship on the horizon. The captain narrowed his eyes and fixed the approaching ship. 'We are still on the northern route, by which the Hamburg Spain-traders too sail north around England. But the English are not stupid. If the Hanse's ships think they can evade the English and Dutch controls in the Channel by having their weapon transports for Spain sail around Scotland ... Is it an English privateer?' he shouted up to the crow's nest.

'No, Captain! As far as I can make out, it is a Spanish galleon!'

'A Spaniard?' The captain seemed astonished.

'What do you find strange in that?' Laurentz turned to his son.

'We have never yet met a Spanish galleon up here. And if it is so, why is she quite alone? Since the Spanish ARMADA was beaten by the English, that makes no sense.'

Curiously all looked towards the ship, which lay full in the wind and came surging up.

'Can you make out the flag already?' the captain shouted up again to the crow's nest.

A tense calm settled over the ship. The wind creaked in the shrouds, and the MARGARETA ploughed unmoved through the waves.

The strange ship neared quickly.

'Give word when you can make out the flag!' the captain called up to the masthead man, which the sailor answered with an 'Aye, aye, Herr Captain!'

'No flag? Speaks for a privateer,' murmured Harald thoughtfully. And as though the other ship's captain wished to confirm his assumption, a cloud of smoke became visible at the side of the galleon, followed by the crack of a cannon. Moments later a high fountain of water spurted up as the cannonball struck the waves before the bow of the MARGARETA.

'Brace the sails!' the captain shouted at once, and the boatswains drove their deckhands with bellowing to turn the yards with the sails out of the wind.

'An Englishman!' shouted the lookout in the crow's nest, and all at the railing now saw how at the stern of the Spanish galleon the great cloth of an English flag unfurled itself proudly in the wind.

'Why do you not try to escape him?' Laurentz shouted, in the din of the slapping sails and the command-cries of the boatswains, across to the captain and son.

'Do you want them to sink us with their cannon? This way we still have a chance to defend our skins! Kobi!' His gaze sought the man he called. 'Run and fetch the sabres!' Then he turned to the first officer: 'The women below deck, and the crew is to arm itself with cudgels!'

The officer could indeed command the crew, but with the two women he soon gave up his attempts as useless. Marthe and Agathe simply refused to seek refuge below deck. 'You surely do not mean to defend a cargo of beer with your blood?'

The officer snorted. How was he to explain to the two that it was here a matter of the principle of free trade, and that ships of the

Hanse did not simply let themselves be seized. No matter by whom!

The galleon seemed about to ram the MARGARETA, turned alongside just before the critical point, and shortly after grappling-hooks flew on thick hawsers over the railing and dug their sharp barbs into the wood, so that the two women and Laurentz sprang back a few steps in fright. They had to hold fast when the ship came abruptly to a stop and was then drawn backwards.

With loud shouts the English sailors swung themselves on long ropes from their ship across to the MARGARETA. A big fellow with long-shafted boots and a broad-brimmed hat seemed to lead the band, stood on the railing and tore his sabre from his belt.

Kobi, who had at last appeared on deck, saw the leader, flung the long iron blades he had brought clattering onto the deck, tore the hat from his head and shouted excitedly: 'Hyppolite Dawson! Hey! Ye bastard son of a bloody bitch!'

'What did he shout?' Marthe wished to know.

Laurentz laughed. 'He said: Hello, old friend!'

Marthe knitted her brows, astonished that such a long sentence had so short a translation, while the fellow with the broad-brimmed hat let his sabre sink, stared at Kobi, then tore the sabre up again and, flailing to both sides, shouted 'Stop!'

Surprised, the English seamen let their irons and cudgels sink and stared, frowning, after their captain, who had sprung from the railing and went towards Kobi with outspread arms.

'Hey, ye bastard! What's with you on this damned ship?'

'What I want on this ship?' Kobi laughed, rolled his eyes grinning, and the two men embraced. Then Kobi took the Englishman by the sleeve and drew him over to Laurentz and Harald, who had watched this strange scene with knitted brows.

Kobi pointed to the Englishman: 'May I present: Captain Hippolyte Dawson.' The Englishman made an elegant bow and with a grand gesture drew his hat from his head before the two women.

Then Kobi pointed to Laurentz and Harald and presented them to the English captain: 'May I introduce: Sir Lawrence Moellendorff and Captain Harald Moellendorff.'

The Englishman stared at the two, suddenly laughed out resoundingly and then grinned, as though he wished to apologise: 'Oh, what a shame! Then you are the father and you the brother of Karl!' He offered them his hand in greeting, which both, with a questioning look, struck.

Hippolyte Dawson held Laurentz's hand fast in his and shook his head: 'Nobody at home will believe me that I meant to seize my great-uncle!' At Laurentz's astonished look he added, in good humour and proudly: 'My grandmother was a Baroness von Stocktonwood too, sister of your mother! That is why Karl could become a captain in the English fleet. Yeah! And I was his first officer on our BLACK DRAGON!'

'And that is why you speak our tongue too?'

Hippolyte Dawson nodded. 'It is good when the officers can talk with one another in a tongue the crew does not understand.' Then he grew serious again: 'By God, the sea is so big! What a joy to meet you. What have you loaded?'

'Hamburg beer for Norway!'

Hippolyte Dawson breathed a sigh of relief. 'Then I am glad I do not have to take you on the hook. I should have had to; had you been transporting weapons for the Spaniards.'

Warding him off, Harald raised his hand: 'We Hamburgers are neutral and can trade with anyone.'

Hippolyte Dawson shook his head very decidedly: 'No. In war there is no neutrality – unless you have loaded beer, which the Spaniards do not drink.' Laughing, he struck Harald on the shoulder, and Laurentz now understood better whence his son Karl had the manner that was strange to him.

Hippolyte Dawson turned round, whistled shrilly on two fingers and called to his men: 'Finish, you bastards! Back to the DRAGON!'

Grumbling ill-humouredly, all the English seamen put away their weapons, for now it was clear that there would be no prize money, while the good Hamburg and Frisian deckhands, relieved, threw their cudgels into a barrel. The grappling-lines still held the two ships side by side, and Laurentz, Harald, Agathe and Marthe curiously studied the Spanish galleon.

'On this ship my son Karl was captain?'

Laurentz thoughtfully studied the dark wood of the hull, the cannon and the bearded Englishmen.

Surprised, Hippolyte Dawson looked at him. 'Has he never told you of it?'

Harald cleared his throat and threw in cuttingly: 'It has no good repute in Hamburg to have been a captain in the fleet of Drake and Hawkins!'

Hippolyte Dawson took his worthy cousin by the shoulders. 'Man, let him tell of it. They were good years of his life! He came as a polite, reserved Hanseat and learned in those years that politeness is not fitting when you have to decide between success or death!'

Yet when he saw Harald's still sceptical look, he added, grinning: 'Very well, the merchant fleet may see that otherwise. Only, the thing is, that we soldiers must always first heave open the doors mightily for you, through which you traders can then comfortably stroll!'

On both ships the sails were reefed, and not only Hippolyte Dawson and the Moellendorffs had a good deal to tell one another; the crews too exchanged their experiences and tried thoroughly whether the beer could stand up against the whisky. The next morning the hooks with the grappling-lines were torn from the

wood, and the MARGARETA, like the BLACK DRAGON, set their sails again.

Hippolyte Dawson gave Harald a small English flag, which he was to hoist on the mainmast if an English ship approached him, so that he would not again get a cannonball fired before his bow.

Two days later they had reached the Norwegian coast, and Harald explained the situation to Laurentz.

'You are lucky that you chose May to come to Bergen, for then it rains there the least! We ran into the Byfjord this morning and shall arrive towards midday.'

The sun had risen over the mountain pastures, and the ship sailed past the outlying islands until, in the innermost angle of the fjord, a cluster of colourful houses could be made out: Bergen.

Now Laurentz understood his son Harald. It was all as he had described it to him already at sea, as he had expected it. It did not disappoint him – it remained as it was and probably would remain. He regretted not having accompanied his son to Norway sooner. He could have visited Simon and also experienced Harald's reality – his own, which meant so much to him.

'To the right there,' the captain pointed to the entrance of the harbour bay, 'lies the fortress of Bergenhus, beside it the Rosenkrantz tower. The Danish king's governor has built it up to demonstrate his power to us of the Hanse. We are here only tolerated, with our privileges!'

The salty taste of the air now mingled with an intense smell of fish. Bergen was the great exchange-centre of the north. Fish from all Norway, especially stockfish from the Lofoten, were exchanged for salt from Central Europe. The fine Hamburg beer was, for the people who lived here in the harsh northern climate, food and refreshment in one.

'That is the bay Vagen. At the end our fenced-off Hanseatic office quarter, in which Lübeck law holds.'

Harald pointed to the colourful row of houses. 'There at the quay of the German Bridge, the Tyskebryggen, we shall berth.'

He seemed to have something more upon his heart, had taken off his tricorn and turned it in his hands. 'Could you pass Marthe off as your wife?'

Laurentz raised his hands, as though he wished to say by it 'Be that as it may,' and waited for the reason.

'Officially women have no access to our Hanseatic quarter – with the wives of the captains and merchants, however, an exception is made.'

Laurentz took Marthe tenderly in his arms. 'Did you hear? From today, then, you are my wife.'

Marthe had nothing to object to it. She needed no blessing of the church to lead a marriage with Laurentz.

Harald had cleared up all the formalities: Agathe and Marthe were given a pass and could leave and enter the Hanseatic quarter as it pleased them.

'If you seek me, I am in the house "Zum braunen Einhorn"!', and above the stacks of wares only his bobbing tricorn was still to be made out, and the black head of Kobi, who accompanied the captain.

Between the trading ships, fishing boats landed their fresh cargo. Beside long racks with the strung-up, and the stacks of packed, stockfish, the herring-casks, cod and smoked salmon, stood crab-boilers and vegetable-sellers who never tired of crying up their wares. The two women drew many a wondering and desirous look.

Agathe laughed. 'Come, let us go to the assembly house; it is said to be especially fine: manly, austere, as indeed the Hanseatic quarter is said to be the chastest zone in all Northern Europe!'

As they entered the assembly house, Laurentz's mouth stood open in amazement: on the balustrade a great tutelary goddess was fixed, like a figurehead, with truly gigantic, naked breasts.

'Mmh, mmh!' he murmured, 'the chastest corner in all Northern Europe!'

Even though he knew that he really had other things to do, he persuaded the two women to climb up with him the mountain that rose behind the warehouses. He wished to fritter away this first day ashore, and they enjoyed the wide view over the town, the fjord and the mountains that surrounded them. Only late did they come back aboard.

Now, on the second day, Laurentz would no longer put off why he had come here. The great wooden church stood outside the Hanseatic quarter, which, beside the broad quay installations and the office-houses with their warehouses lying behind, left no further room, least of all for something so economically uninteresting as a house of God.

Laurentz was given a trading-clerk as interpreter and set out on the toilsome way to the church board, to bring the news of Simon's death.

The broad-shouldered fisherman, whose weather-tanned face was framed by grey hair and a white beard, pressed Laurentz's hand firmly. 'He spoke of you as his brother.' As he did so he felt the costly cloth of the black clothing. 'How different brothers can be! Like the different branches of a tree: seeing them alone, one does not think they are of the same trunk.' He let the cloth go again. 'You wish to see his lodging?'

Laurentz nodded mutely and followed the man, who went round the church to a narrow wooden lean-to.

'He set no store by possessing anything. But it was not for that reason the people here so honoured and loved him – it was his cultivation of heart and his trust in God, which excluded no one from the faith. What other preachers proclaim from the pulpit, he lived before us all: namely, that tolerance towards others does not mean having no principles of one's own. On the contrary. A man

can only be tolerant if he does not call his own principles into question. If I am strong, I need not prove my strength to others. Amen.'

The fisherman opened an unlocked door, stepped aside and pointed into the small room: 'Here he lived.'

Hesitantly Laurentz crossed the threshold and looked about him: a narrow, simple bed, an open cupboard with Simon's church vestments and his bishop's crosier, a stove, between the two windows a writing-desk, before it a stool and above it a shelf with books, beneath which a drawing hung. That was all.

Laurentz swallowed. This simple room had been Simon's home these past years. Reverently he went the few steps to the writing-desk, sat down carefully on the stool and looked out of the window: the harbour lay before him, the hills – a wide view.

Then he regarded the drawing on the wall and smiled. An awkward picture of the Moellendorff house 'Zum goldenen Schiff' in Hamburg. Full of affection he took up a pencil that lay beside a flat stack of papers and drew in the columns beside the door correctly. Then he paused, looked aghast at the pencil in his hand and began to rub out his corrections again – and thereby smudged everything, Simon's drawing of the memory too.

Helpless, angry at himself and his presumption, his gaze caught on the writing on the topmost sheet of the flat stack of paper. Simon's handwriting and the word: 'Reflectiones.'

Involuntarily he wished to draw the stack towards him, paused, looked out of the window and back again to the stack. Carefully he took the topmost sheet in his hand and read:

My mother named me Simon – after the Hamburg mayor Simon van Utrecht, who two hundred years ago captured Klaus Störtebeker and his Victual Brothers. By rights, then, she should really have named me Dietmar – after the Hamburg Dietmar Koel, who later also became mayor and who defeated my father, took him prisoner and brought him to Hamburg. She thought the

name Simon would protect me as unsuspected – for what sea-robber would name his child Simon!

Laurentz felt pains in his right shoulder. He let the arm rest on his thigh and leafed slowly through the pages with his left hand.

The carefree youth of my life found its end when I came back from England – Laurentius had stayed there still – and my mother disclosed to me who my father was. She told of a letter of feud and implored me to become a priest. It would be unsuspected if I did not marry and had no children, for whose life I should have to fear as for my own. As a priest I could also atone for the guilt of my father – as though a priest and a privateer balanced out, on the whole, to innocence! So I went to Geneva: it was far enough away.

Laurentz rubbed his eyes – so that was why Simon had become a priest.

This merchant Jan Fredersen seemed to have found the purpose of his life in seeking me everywhere, and travelled through all North Germany, the Netherlands and Flanders, because he supposed me there. Why did he threaten me? What had I done to him? What guilt had I loaded upon myself? The blood-kinship to my father, who lived on through me, whose descendants he wished to root out, stem and stump? Like weeds in God's garden? And when I stood before him, he did not recognise me.

Laurentz propped his head in his hands and sighed: 'Simon, why did you not let me share in your despair? My father could surely have helped you as a councillor – later I myself. Was I, no, am I so narrow-minded and small-hearted that you could expect no understanding from me? Why did you allow me to leave you alone?'

A tear dripped onto the paper. Laurentz drew a cloth from his coat-pocket to dab it up, to dry his eyes and read on what Simon had written.

Was Fredersen the one who visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation – as it is written in the Second Book of Moses? I had challenged an ordeal, a judgement of God: if this blood-avenging merchant recognised me, then God was on his side; if not, He would thereby show me that I should free myself from this curse. God had decided in my favour. So it was easy for me to leave this godless persecutor to his fate.

It was an intoxication of freedom: my sympathy for a serving-maid was allowed to unfold into love; I was now allowed to have children myself, and we were happy when she was in a blessed condition. We were happy whenever we saw each other, and so that she could always be with me, she gave me a medallion with a picture of herself, which I was always to carry with me.

Laurentz searched in his coat-pocket, then found the medallion and laid it beside the disarranged sheets of paper. He had taken it with him because he had not been sure whether there might be a place here in Norway where it would be well kept.

And then this beloved woman was dragged before the tribunal of the Inquisition. I begged Gregor von Mechttersheim, I knelt before him, that he might hand the proceedings over to me, to save her. He only had her guarded the more strictly. I had told him of us, tried to change his mind, but he answered only coldly: 'Then regard it as a judgement of God,' and I recognised at last my own blindness. It was my guilt that the beloved woman and our unborn child found death in the flames. I had desired her, wooed her, won her over and seduced her, given away all the court proceedings and thereby delivered her up to the power of Gregor von Mechttersheim. I myself had set myself in God's place, used Him for my own ends – what man should be able to grant me absolution for that? So I left the order, professed the Gospel, that no one should set himself between God and the individual man. There are no vicars of God on earth empowered to administer His

grace, to grant or to refuse it, but who act as though God's grace were a flour from which they bake the wafers. I have changed my life. What more can I do as a man? Some day I shall know whether it pleases God.

Laurentz stared out of the window over the water of the wide fjord. As he folded the sheets together, the last sheet slid towards him.

This summer I will spend in Hamburg, with my brother Laurentius. We shall at last have time to talk with one another. Since England we have not often met: I was always in flight from the past, he always had far goals in the future in view. I hope we shall find each other in the present and be able to talk with one another.

Laurentz buried his head in his hands: it was bitter, but it was true. Always other duties had been more pressing: the council, the countinghouse, the invitations he had to attend – always they had, always he had, put it off to the next time.

Now it was too late.

The churchwarden, who had waited before the door with the interpreting trading-clerk, now stood beside Laurentz and cleared his throat. 'I understand that his death touches you nearly. Take the papers and the picture with you, if you wish. It was his only personal possession. Come tomorrow to the memorial service, if you need comfort, as we ourselves all do too.'

In the church the trading-clerk translated the pastor's words for Laurentz: 'Our bishop will remain in his old home: in the town in which he grew up, he has now died and been buried.'

A groaning murmur filled the crowded nave. When the news spread, no one had wished to believe it, but now his death was no longer to be denied. Cloths were held before faces, and Laurentz could at last let his tears run freely, when he became part of this honest mourning congregation.

He had asked the trading-clerk to translate no more, listened, with tears in his eyes, to the resonant voice of the pastor, who spoke for more than two hours and again and again invoked the name Simon, and thereby the only thing Laurentz understood.

However much the congregation mourned, one should not think it could not drink too: the conclusion of the sermon was the pastor's summons to drink a water of life to Simon's welfare, and the aquavit made the round through the church pews.

When it got about that he was Simon's brother, all wished to express their condolence to Laurentz, came to him, shook his hand firmly and drank with him to Simon: that he may live!

The water of tears mingled with the water of life, and later no one could say which of the two had flowed more freely. The seven little casks of aquavit, so much was certain, were at last empty, and Laurentz had, until the departure, a hellish splitting head.

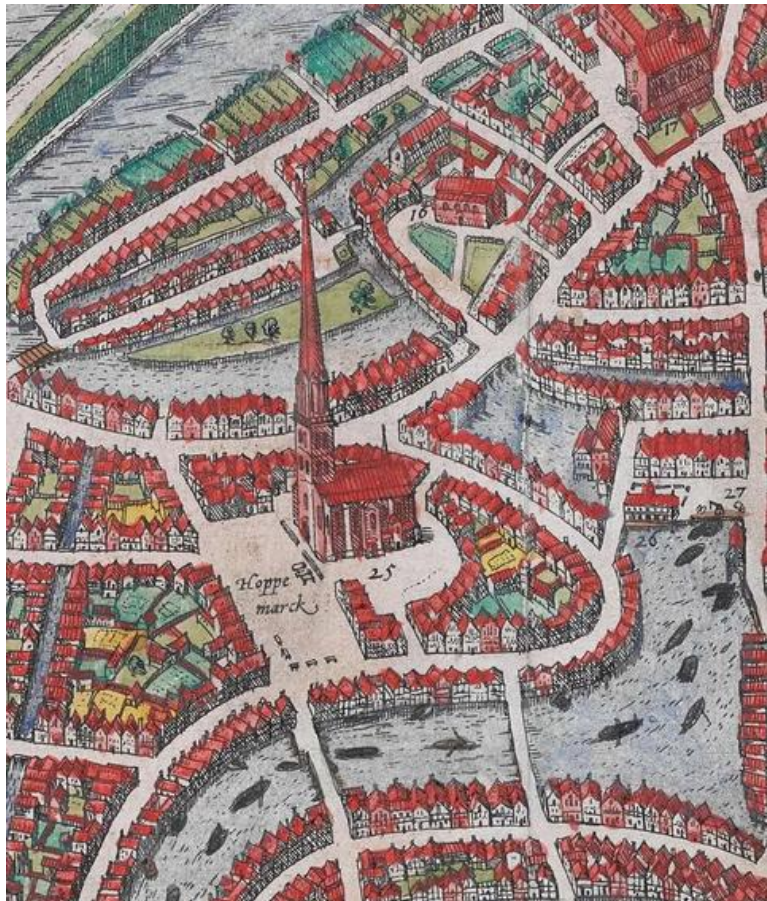
He was glad to feel the fresh sea-wind about his nose and that the sea was sympathetically calm. Evenly the MARGARETA furrowed through the water, laden with fish-casks, hides and empty beer-casks.

Laurentz sat with Marthe again at the stern of the ship, or wandered with her, arm in arm, across the deck. He spoke of how, though he had never been a captain, he could yet feel with Harald that one does not so easily give up the command. Had not the time come for him too to pass on the responsibility for the firm to a younger man?

Harald and Kobi spoke of their impressions and exchanged information, for Kobi had caused a mighty stir in the taverns and had thereby learned more from the sailors than was normally known to merchants and captains.

And the crew no longer kept fearful watch for Klabautermanns or fire-signs in the mastheads.

The Decision



Map of Hamburg – Braun/Hogenberg, 1588

Albrecht had waited at the new crane, and when he at last made them out among the many barges and lighters that criss-crossed the Elbe, he waved vigorously with both arms.

'I hope he does not spring into the Elbe now,' growled Laurentz. 'It looks as though he wanted to swim out to meet us!'

In which he was not wrong, for Albrecht was almost bursting with news and could scarcely wait to be rid of it. The dinghy seemed to move only at a snail's pace, until at last it grated against the quay wall and he held the rope fast, so that Laurentz, Marthe, Agathe and Harald could climb across onto the steps.

Laurentz took him heartily in his arms and winked at him: 'Well, the town is still standing – so we have been lucky, it seems, that you two bachelors did not get up to too much mischief!'

He pushed his grandson up the steps; the latter was just about to say that there was now only one bachelor, when Laurentz narrowed his eyes and looked after a passing coach, as though he had just seen an incredible apparition. 'Was that not just now ...?'

'Yes indeed! That was Lütjehann just now!'

'How ...?'

'He has been thrown out of work. Mönckebronn dismissed him because he used confidential court documents to his own advantage.'

'I do not understand. And since then he drives about in a coach?'

'Not only that; he has acquired the greater burgher-right as well!'

Laurentz raised both hands in defence. 'Now slowly, and please, right from the beginning.'

Albrecht smiled. 'That is a long story. Let us first go home.' In for a penny, in for a pound, he thought. There was, after all, a good deal else to report.

For the celebration of the return a damask cloth lay on the great table. Clara and Wilfriede stood, excited and sweating, in the

doorway to the kitchen and hoped that their cooking would be found good by the strict Marthe.

Karl had come over from the countinghouse to greet them, and on the stairs the arrivals heard light-footed steps that could not have belonged to any of the servants: a graceful young woman, in a long yellow skirt with white stripes, high-necked bodice and finely plaited hair, came towards them. She was grace personified and smiled unaffectedly.

As a matter of course Karl took her in his arm, beamed all over his face and presented her: 'Mechthild Benningstedt, my betrothed.'

Laurentz had decided that it could not be the after-effects of the aquavit that gave him a booming head. 'The daughter of the merchant Benningstedt from Hildesheim?'

'Do you know another Benningstedt?'

'No.'

'Come, let us sit down around the table. The maids have prepared a welcoming drink and food.'

Laurentz set down his cup and looked at Karl and Albrecht, between whom Mechthild sat. 'So, from the beginning, please.'

'Good, then I will begin.' Albrecht told of Benningstedt and his lament that they were not noble and that he could therefore not buy his daughter and her aunt into a convent. He told of his own suggestion of the Herwardeshude convent near the town of Hamburg, into which non-noble daughters too were received.

'That is why I had come here,' Mechthild went on, 'I thought Albrecht might be able to help me further as to where I could find this convent, and I came to this house to ask him ...' She fell silent and gave Karl a tender nudge in the side, who added:

'Yes, and there I was. When she came in at the door, I must have stared at her like an ox.' Karl smiled at the memory and pressed Mechthild's hand. 'Well, she looked as daft as a cow too. Then we both turned red, no doubt, and luckily no one watched how we

crept awkwardly about each other, eyed each other and slowly drew nearer. Amor, the god of love, had struck both our hearts alike with but a single arrow.' Lovingly he laid his arm about Mechthild's shoulders.

Albrecht had sat down sideways on the bench, propped his head on his chin and gazed pensively at the loving pair. There was no suspicion between them. He had at first felt uneasy when he saw the happiness of the two, had hemmed and hawed, sought an occasion to speak with his uncle about it – but Mechthild herself had already told Karl of her time of the free spirit and of her couplings with Albrecht. Karl had asked whether it was over and had then cheerfully pushed it aside: 'The past! I was no child of sorrows either.' Albrecht could then also understand perfectly why he was so happy with Mechthild. What did the past matter to him! If he were to tell of every woman he had lain with these past years, that would take a damned long time. Water under the bridge.

Agathe looked across at her son Albrecht and wished for him that he too might soon become so happy. Her husband Harald was more practical. When new cargo came aboard, it had to be well stowed as well. 'When is the wedding to be?'

'In August!' answered Karl and Mechthild at the same time, and all laughed.

Karl grew serious again: 'Mechthild is still assembling her trousseau; she has still to embroider monograms, and I am now more often in Lübeck than in Hamburg: the Hanseatic Diet drags and drags on, as though it would find no end.'

Laurentz put off the question of what that meant to later and turned to Albrecht: 'Now, what is the matter with Lütjehann?'

Albrecht sat up straight at the table again and sorted his thoughts anew.

'You were scarcely gone when an advocate stepped before the bar of the lower court and demanded, in the name of Lütjehann – who as always sat beside Mönckebronn as clerk – the redemption

of a legacy that the merchant Jan Fredersen had deposited at the court fifty years ago. Mönckebronn dropped his court staff from his hand in surprise, and the further hearing of this question was put off to the next court day.'

'A legacy from Fredersen? For what, and for whom?'

Albrecht first stared at the table, folded his hands as though he had to give himself courage, and then looked Laurentz in the eyes. 'For whoever kills Simon.'

Into the numbing stillness Karl cleared his throat. 'Excuse me: Albrecht and I have already spoken of it long and often – I still have work to do in the countinghouse.' With him Kobi too vanished.

Agathe invited Mechthild with a silent smile to come with her: at last there was a sister-in-law in the house, and she wished to know more of her.

Marthe withdrew into the kitchen, to praise the work of Clara and Wilfriede, while Harald took his leave with the excuse that he had to see to the ship and the customs.

Albrecht detached himself from the contemplation of his hands and now reported on: 'Legally this legacy has two sides: on the one hand it is valid, since all the formalities of German legal tradition had been observed by Jan Fredersen. He had in his time publicly declared the private feud, and this legacy is a correct bequest: in accordance with the town law, a transfer upon death – recorded in the notary's book of the council and the will deposited in the treasury.

'On the other hand, however, the Emperor's Roman law, since the Perpetual Public Peace a hundred years ago, expressly forbids just such private feuds. Yet the Perpetual Public Peace had at first only the worth of the paper on which it is written. Not only in the Emperor's Criminal Court Code of 1532, but since then in a further twenty-five ordinances and laws, this prohibition was repeated, which means that territorial and regional legal traditions

remained valid – which was indeed sanctioned by the Emperor's Criminal Court Code, but thereby at the same time weakened the Public Peace.'

'Well now, that may all be so; do not make it so complicated. What did that mean for Lütjehann and this legacy?'

'You know the reservation of the council and the citizenry – who in this point are for once wholly in agreement – that the imperial laws are only of secondary rank, and that in Hamburg the town law, the Burspraken and recesses should serve first and foremost as the basis of law?'

'And that means that this legacy was recognised?'

'In short: yes. But the matter had one more snag, of which the council had no notion, since it was of the opinion that both Jan Fredersen and Simon had died without descendants, and that thus this private feud was finally ended ...'

Laurentz nodded: of that opinion he too had been.

'... and that the inheritance which Fredersen had offered in this legacy was no longer there at all or so trifling that Lütjehann might as well have it as a gratuity – he had, after all, always been orderly and diligent.'

'And that was not so?'

Albrecht laughed. 'Oh yes, it was so. Lütjehann had been very diligent and had, as court clerk, under a pretext, rummaged through all the wills in which an inheritance had fallen to the town. You cannot imagine what uproar broke out in the council when Lütjehann laid the document on the table, and it became known what the town had to hand over to him as inheritance!'

'Come, say it already!'

'So, you had no notion of it either?'

'Why should I know and remember to whom what belonged. It is decades ago, and besides, the treasury burghers see to the town finances and the property that has fallen to the town. It will surely not be the town hall itself?'

'No. That the council could still have borne. A new one is to be built anyway. It is far worse: it is the three largest brewhouses in the town! A part of the family silver, as it were.'

Laurentz was silent, then he smiled.

Albrecht asked in astonishment: 'It does not upset you at all?'

'For the moment it is a strange comfort to me that Simon's death was worth more, after all, than only the ten shillings.' He was silent again, thoughtful, and then snorted: 'A good man has his price too, then, after all!'

'You mean Simon?'

'Yes. Even though I wavered at times – after my journey I am now convinced that he was a good man. He changed his life – and what more can a man do to confess his guilt?'

Laurentz marked all too well the doubting look of his grandson. 'You are not of my opinion?'

'No. He is and remains guilty for me. In his favour it speaks, however, that the laws of the church gave him a freedom, positively urged upon him, in the name of these very laws, the possibility of yielding to his personal, base motives. That is why we need better laws, to protect the accused before the judge and the judges before themselves.'

The front door clapped, footsteps came across the hallway, and Mönckebronn entered the room.

'I heard just now, Moellendorff, that you are back in the town, and wished to fetch you to a special sitting of the council.'

Laurentz looked unwilling. 'Since when are there special sittings of the council?'

Mönckebronn rubbed his nose. 'Since the council has been considering how it can take the three brewhouses from Lütjehann again.'

Unasked, Albrecht now broke in: 'How does the council imagine that? On the one hand it insists, for political reasons, on not applying the imperial laws, and on the other hand Lütjehann

threatens, if the legacy is not recognised, to sue before the Imperial Chamber Court, which the council wishes at all costs to avoid.'

Albrecht had talked himself into a rage with these two sentences and almost struck the table: 'They are sleight-of-hand tricks, when the council has set the inheritance value of the brewhouses at five hundred Rhenish gold guilders, because it clings to the imperial privilege of 1553, according to which the Imperial Chamber Court may only be appealed to as a court of appeal against the higher court when the value in dispute lies above six hundred guilders. Everyone knows that the brewhouses are worth at least ten times as much! Lütjehann, at any rate, is not impressed by it!'

Councillor and Praetor Mönckebronn regarded the young hot-head thoughtfully. 'The council is right not to run the risk of drawing the Imperial Chamber Court's attention to Hamburg's peculiarities – which would happen if Lütjehann became active – for as long as the suit for the recognition of our town's exclusive sovereignty over the Elbe has not been decided by the Imperial Chamber Court in Hamburg's favour, so long we should be wise enough to keep still.'

'That means, then, that an appeal before the higher court would lead to the same result in Lütjehann's favour?'

'Firstly, who is to lodge this appeal? And secondly, would the council have so worded its directive for the lower court, that Lütjehann's legacy be recognised, if it were not resolved to reject an appeal before the higher court altogether? Whoever says A must also say B.'

'Perhaps in the political alphabet – not in the juristic ABC!'

Mönckebronn seemed surprised. 'You make a distinction there?'

'Yes! And I think there is also a juristic way to settle the matter in the desired sense. Set a date for the appeal hearing on the list of the higher court. I must think about it and will provide the council with the arguments.'

Mönckebronn nodded, relieved and in agreement. And time was short.

Albrecht had already walked round St Nicholas' three times that afternoon, then climbed up onto the Neuer Wall, walked to and fro up there, looked out over the Kleine Alster, the roof-gables of the town and the garden-houses before the rampart into the distance, to sort his thoughts. Only at the beginning of the evening twilight did he arrive back at the house 'Zum goldenen Schiff'. Laurentz, who had come back from the council sitting only shortly before, looked at him expectantly. 'Well, have you found a juristic solution to our problem?'

'Yes! It concerns the question of the imputability of the deed to Lütjehann. The corpse of Lütjehann's wife Antje was not dug up, so that she might be hanged as a murderess, because she was of no concern to the church and because her instigation to murder was accepted as the execution of the legacy. Thereby the legacy has lost its protection for the perpetrator.'

Albrecht rubbed his weary eyes. 'Lütjehann did not place himself under the protection of this legacy, since his advocate probably pointed out to him the questionableness of this protection – the council, after all, accepted the legacy only for political reasons ...'

'Now I am curious. But, please, I am no jurist; you can explain it to Mönckebronn tomorrow. He will also have a piece of news for you.'

Laurentz made a mysterious face, upon which Albrecht did not, however, respond with a question.

'Very well, even if you do not ask me, I will tell you all the same: the council has resolved to appoint a public prosecutor.'

'A Fiscal?'

'Yes, that was the term used for it. And you are proposed for this office!'

Albrecht turned suddenly pale. 'Then the council wishes to lay the whole responsibility on my shoulders and withdraw to the evaluating position of the court of appeal?'

Laurentz laughed. 'Now the council actually resolves on a reform that accords with your notions, that law and politics belong to different spheres, and now it does not suit you?'

'Oh, yes, it does, but it is a difficult office.'

'That is true, but if you are strong, you will grow with it.'

Mönckebronn nodded in agreement with what Albrecht meant to put forward as his argument.

'Your grandfather has already told you what awaits you?' Mönckebronn seemed to be pleased, as though he had a present for Albrecht, who now swallowed hard and asked: 'The council wishes to appoint me Fiscal?'

Mönckebronn nodded. 'Come along, the assembly is already waiting.'

With that he pushed the hesitating man to the door, which was flung open by the council servant, led him past the elaborately carved benches of the councillors, until they stood before the presiding mayor, who rose from his seat and stepped up to Albrecht. 'You are ready to take on this office?'

'Yes.'

The mayor had nodded to the magistrate, who stepped up beside the two with a folio, opened the thick book, and Albrecht could read the title page: The Statutes and Court Order of the Town of Hamburg. On the left-hand side a sheet was clamped in, to which the mayor pointed: 'Then speak these sentences and swear.'

The councillors all rose from their seats; Albrecht raised his right hand, laid the left on the town law, drew a deep breath and made his oath as Public Prosecutor of the town: 'In the name of

the Holy Trinity: I swear to honour and defend the laws of this town, to prosecute injustice, to be subject to the council, and to bring charge against all evil that turns against our town and its citizens, without advantage to myself. So help me God and His Holy Word.'

While the mayor shook his hand and the councillors applauded, a stone fell from Albrecht's heart. He had spoken fluently, had not stumbled and not stuttered: otherwise the oath would have been invalid, and he could have gone home. Inconspicuously he blinked across at Laurentz, who stood proudly upright and just as inconspicuously kept his fingers crossed for him. Plainly he rejoiced at that moment more than his grandson.

Mönckebronn had laid the town law aside, received from a council servant a folded length of black cloth, which he unfolded and drew over the head and shoulders of the freshly installed prosecutor: the robe of office.

Surprised, Albrecht felt the soft cloth, and Mönckebronn now shook his hand. 'You now wear this robe as a sign that you have sworn an oath of office and need not be sworn in anew each time. It is black like our council dress, since you have now become a representative and member of the authorities.'

'Red was not possible?'

'By no means; only the judges who can pronounce death sentences wear the colour of blood. The mayor might do so – but then he would have to keep changing his clothes, according to whether our college sits as council or as higher court.' The notion of a mayor constantly changing his clothes seemed to amuse him.

'Ah, before I forget' – he took Albrecht by the shoulder and pushed him along behind the benches again. 'You have entry here always when the council sits as higher court. Since we now wish to discuss something political, you must please wait outside for the present.'

With that he had pushed him back through the door into the vestibule of the council chamber, in which Lütjehann already waited, a paper in his hand. Lütjehann studied the black-robed prosecutor; Albrecht studied Lütjehann, wrapped in red velvet, who wore a matching hat cocked jauntily on his head and now came towards him. 'I have received a summons to appear before the council!'

'That is so; it is to be heard anew before the higher court today.'

Lütjehann puffed himself up. 'The Imperial Chamber Court already awaits my suit.'

With a shrug Albrecht left the former court clerk standing, wandered about the vestibule and rehearsed his speech.

After a while the doors to the council chamber opened, and a council servant asked Albrecht and Lütjehann in. Mönckebronn, who now sat beside the presiding mayor, signed to Albrecht to take his place on the right, Lütjehann on the left, at the table that stood within the horseshoe-shaped, encircling bench of the councillors.

'The case is heard: the Town of Hamburg against the former court clerk Franz Lütjehann, concerning a legacy awarded to him by the lower court.'

Lütjehann had stood up, made a brief bow and said: 'Merchant and brewery owner.'

The mayor rapped his court staff testily on the table. 'Lütjehann, no monkey-tricks here. You know from your own time as a council servant that you have to speak here only when you are asked, and secondly, that is exactly what is being heard today!'

Lütjehann collapsed again. His fresh wealth had not agreed with him too well – it was like a greed that will not be satisfied, and the mocking song in the taverns, 'More drown in the wine-glass than in the sea!', was aimed at him.

'The floor goes to the Fiscal!'

Albrecht stood up, concentrated – mindful of the principles: speak freely, as briefly as possible, only to the point – and began:

'The summoned man has claimed for himself, as the husband of the bath-woman Antje Lütjehann, the legacy of the merchant Jan Fredersen. Had he himself killed the bishop, or himself hired the two murderers, he would, like his wife, be protected from further prosecution. But since he claims only the inheritance of his wife, the principles of the law of inheritance are to be applied to him!'

An approving murmur went through the row of councillors, and not only Lütjehann asked himself what the prosecutor was actually driving at.

'Since this inheritance springs from a bloody deed, it is to be clarified how far this deed is imputable to the summoned man. Of all those involved, only the summoned man originally had knowledge of this legacy, who told his wife of it and thereby first brought her to the idea of seeking the man described in the legacy. When she thought she recognised him on the basis of this knowledge, she commissioned the two murderers. The summoned man himself admitted, over his wife's corpse, that it was his own money with which she paid the hired murderers. Both by the information with which he first made possible the villainy of his more energetic wife, and by the sum of money required for the execution of the bloody deed, the murder of the bishop is to be imputed to the summoned man. Thereby not only does his claim to inheritance lapse, for bloody hands do not inherit ...'

Lütjehann had sprung up and shouted: 'How, then, is the blood-vengeance demanded by the legacy, and recognised as lawful by the lower court, to be carried out, without getting bloody hands? What was law cannot now be wrong!' He was seized by two council servants and dragged down onto his chair.

Albrecht began once more anew: 'Thereby not only does his claim to inheritance lapse, for bloody hands do not inherit, but at the same time, on account of his imputability for the deed, he is guilty of the deliberate, treacherous bloody deed out of greed for money, and convicted of murder!'

Mönckebronn exulted and felt confirmed that they had offered this young man the office of prosecutor. He had forged the higher court a sharp juristic sword. Lütjehann sat goggling on his stool, tugged at the green tablecloth and clutched at his throat.

The mayor was undecided. This new prosecutor was so convinced of his argument that he would be difficult to integrate into the deliberations of the higher court. But where was the higher court to withdraw to deliberate among itself? He conferred briefly with Mönckebronn, who arranged that both the prosecutor and the summoned man, who was now the defendant, should wait outside in the vestibule. Two council servants were, for safety's sake, placed at Lütjehann's side.

The chalk-pale face of Lütjehann, to which the red velvet cloth of his clothing formed a sharp contrast, gradually got colour again as a many-voiced din penetrated the town hall from the marketplace. A council servant had run through the vestibule and vanished into the council chamber. Lütjehann smiled coldly. The servant would report to the mayor that a crowd of people had gathered before the town hall, threatening to make a riot if Lütjehann's inheritance were denied him – to what end, after all, had he had ample free beer poured out for them the evening before, and promised still more?

The door opened again, and a loud hubbub of voices sounded out. The council servant hurried across the vestibule again and probably wished to alarm the town watch, to protect the town hall.

After some time Lütjehann was asked into the council chamber by a council servant, and Albrecht waited on alone. He regarded the carved high doors with the town arms in the middle, wandered to the windows onto the marketplace and looked down on some fifty people who had been pushed back by the town bailiffs and were keeping quiet. He wandered on and asked himself why he was not allowed to be present at the deliberations. He thought of what Mönckebronn had told him, when as prosecutor he had a

right of entry to the council chamber, and it became plain to him that this college was like a two-faced head of Janus: on the one hand council, on the other, and at the same time, higher court. His train of thought was interrupted by a council servant, who fetched him into the council chamber.

The councillors seemed to be content, even though Laurentz, at a glance from Albrecht, shrugged his shoulders and Mönckebronn looked at him thoughtfully. Lütjehann sat peacefully on his stool and stood up as Albrecht stepped to the middle table.

The secretary of the higher court rose from his place: 'In the case of the Town of Hamburg against Franz Lütjehann the following judgement has been found: the inheritance awarded to Lütjehann by the lower court is revoked and falls back to the town. Franz Lütjehann is stripped of the burgher-right and is banished from the town. He is to leave Hamburg this very day before the closing of the town gates. Should he ever set foot in this town again, he will, without further proceedings, be delivered to the gallows as a murderer.'

Albrecht had to master himself so as not to clap his hands for joy. So Lütjehann had at last been overtaken by his just fate; yet, he now checked himself, why did he stay so calm, as though all this did not interest him at all?

'As compensation for the inheritance denied him in the appeal, two of the three parts of the atonement-money kept by Wilma van Leyden are awarded to Lütjehann. He has already received it, may now go, and should never let himself be seen here again.'

With the secretary's last word Lütjehann seized the pouch that lay beside him on the table, bowed with a triumphant smile to all sides, and it wanted only that he should have waved. Then he left the room a rich man.

Albrecht stood as though frozen.

Heavy shoes scraped over the floor as the councillors rose, and Mönckebronn, who had marked Albrecht's rigidity all too well,

signed to Laurentz to stay away from him, took Albrecht's arm and commented: 'A very clever judgement, is it not?'

Mönckebronn's words had the effect of a bursting dam upon Albrecht, and it welled out of him, yes, he almost shouted it: 'This ..., this judgement is a perversion of justice!'

Mönckebronn remembered his first years as syndic of the council, his own inner conflict between the subjective right of personal claim and the objective right of the laws and knew that Albrecht was caught in the same trap.

'Are you in a state to hear the considerations of the court?'

'Considerations? I have rather the impression that the council and Lütjehann decided the matter at a game of dice, or that they proceeded on the principle of the swindlers: one hand washes the other!'

With that he hastily dragged the robe over his head, thrust it abruptly into the arm of the baffled Mönckebronn and rushed out, blazing with rage.

Laurentz had observed the scene and now went to his council colleague, who was just passing the robe on to a servant. Mönckebronn looked after Albrecht with a sympathetic smile and turned to him: 'He must go through that, our young hero. He surely has the feeling of having fought valiantly – has he not laid Lütjehann's neck ready on the block for the higher court, and what does the court now do? Rewards the malefactor!'

Mönckebronn regarded Albrecht's robe musingly. 'The administration of justice has the political decisions of the council as its basis. It seems to me as though our young jurists wished to assign the laws to a sphere of their own and withdraw them from the council. But only merchants can steer the destinies of a town and a land!'

Laurentz did not spend long seeking where he might find Albrecht, but went straight to the stable and asked Ingvar, the stable-lad: 'Have you seen Albrecht?'

'Yes, master. He came storming in here a short while ago, saddled his horse so fast I could not even help him, and rode off. He seemed very upset.'

'Well, he will calm down again soon enough,' grumbled Laurentz, and – what else was he to do – went into the countinghouse to speak with Karl, who in the next few days meant to travel again to the Hanseatic Diet in Lübeck.

There Karl received him with the lament: 'Ah, Father, it has become a pitiable league, our Hanse. For three weeks now the delegates of the Hanseatic towns have been sitting in Lübeck, and if it goes on like this, they will still be there the coming months, talking.'

'Has anything at all been decided yet? How does it go on?'

Karl drew on his pipe and blew out the smoke. 'In Lübeck nothing at all goes on. Since Jürgen Wullenwever deposed the council and the rule of the citizens held sway in Lübeck, until he was himself deposed and executed, the fright still sits so deep in their bones that they only mark time and defend their old rights. It is an assembly of men of yesterday!'

He gave his anger air through an ironic laugh. 'The grandest idea of this year is to forbid the export of grain to England. These Hansards actually believe they can still deal with England as they did a hundred years ago, when they determined trade policy in London and in Denmark! But the English queen is not named Christian, and the Hansards had better not be surprised if she has the Steelyard in London closed. I would even understand her!'

'You have some sympathy, it seems, for this queen?'

Through a thick cloud of smoke came the answer: 'The one has nothing to do with the other. What I want is a clear policy that can be carried through. And what does the Hanse do? On the one hand the Hanseatic towns of Amsterdam, Hamburg and Danzig finance for the first time a regular postal-courier service between their towns, which benefits all the others too, and on the other hand this

export prohibition on grain, which will hit Danzig directly, Hamburg indirectly! From these Hanseatic towns one truly cannot expect that they will ratify this resolution!

'We must build up these postal and courier services further: Hamburg must become a centre of news! Why do you think the Thurn und Taxis man got the imperial postal privilege from the Emperor? Quite simply because he can report to the Emperor what has been written earlier than the actual recipient learns of it.'

He made a dismissive gesture of the hand. 'But no matter. The Hanseatic Diet is a debating club that can make and carry out no decisions – that was probably no problem in earlier times, when all decisions took months or even years, but today it is: time has grown swifter and demands swifter decisions. We soon stand before the turn of the century, and the Hanse acts as though we still wrote the year 1500 and not soon 1600!'

Laurentz snorted: 'That is strong tobacco, though!'

Karl first looked in astonishment at his pipe, then laughed and seemed to have calmed down. 'Kobi, hand me a paper over here.'

Kobi laid the paper before Karl on the table; he turned it towards Laurentz, took a quill from the inkwell and drew a group of little men, around whom he then drew three circles. 'You see, Father, that was the Hanse once: towns that were singly too weak and joined together, first to lessen the risk for the individual, secondly to realise greater undertakings jointly, and thirdly to defend themselves against the grasping power of the nobility and the sea-robbers. Unity makes strength. That was still exactly right a hundred years ago. But how does it look today?'

He drew three little men side by side and pointed to each one. 'The money today is earned in the long-distance trade. You yourself no longer work cooperatively, but as a single firm. You let your own ships sail to Bergen, to Spain, England and Italy. The capital for it the Moellendorffs have, like others too, gathered together themselves in past generations – with that the first reason falls

away. Further: now that the Reformation has at last lifted the old church's prohibition of interest, you finance greater undertakings through credit from moneylenders. And the third reason has just as much vanished: the territorial states have grown so mighty that they could smash any Hanseatic town, and the whole Hanse, if we do not go wiser ways than hitherto!

'And what is your thought?'

'We must find new forms and fields! Take for example the relationship between merchant and moneylender. The capital strength of the single moneylender is limited too. If he stretches it too far, the temporary losses of one merchant will drag him into the abyss. Several merchants of a town must join together and, as the Dutch indeed show us, found a bank, to get out of the dependence on the moneylenders and to bring together greater capital. Correspondingly one would have to resolve, after the English and Dutch model, on mutual insurances, to spread the risk of the individual, in case of damage, over many: risk-insurances, such as Bartolotti concluded here in Hamburg for the first time three years ago. As long-distance merchants we can no longer act as though it were only a matter of carting the Lüneburg salt to Hamburg, moving the Brabant cloth to Lübeck and bringing herrings to Frankfurt for it!'

Laurentz had listened, nodded in agreement by turns and then shaken his head again in refusal.

Karl now came to his final point: 'Our Hamburg ships together carry about 9,000 tons; every year the tonnage grows further – and we are still to let Lübeck prescribe to us what is lawful? I have spoken with Johann Hulscher, with Hans Alvermann and Lukas Beckmann, who let their ships sail directly as far as Rio de Janeiro. It is time that we transfer the good principles of the old Hanse exclusively and solely to our town of Hamburg: each for himself and all for one!'

'And you think the town is strong enough to stand alone? And that we should separate trade and financing from each other?'

'Yes, Father! That is at least our direction. That must be our goal! And through this separation we would at last stand securely on two legs.'

That Laurentz first had to digest. He strolled thoughtfully across the Hopfenmarkt, when Mönckebronn came towards him. 'Well, has our hothead calmed down again?'

'He fetched his horse and rode out.'

'Then he came to me straight afterwards, it seems.' Mönckebronn was in good spirits. 'Oh, yes, he was still in full sail. "Advocates make the law into a dough and knead it as they then want the bread, so says the proverb," he grumbled. Whereby it was the council that kneaded the laws as it pleased!'

'He said that?'

'Yes! And then I probably made a mistake. I asked him whether he knew Article XVI from Section A of the town law?'

'Well?'

"I will not question you myself –" Albrecht knew it by heart: "The council is mighty in criminal matters: to lighten a judgement that is too heavy, and to make heavier one that is too light." And he then interpreted it thus, that the council probably regarded itself as an authority instituted by God, bound by no law, which formerly, when there was still the undivided double summit of Europe with Emperor and Pope, the Emperor had claimed for himself!

'But he did not also propose straightaway that we should adorn our fine town hall with real figures of emperors?'

'That not – he had then vanished again at once – but that is a fine idea, to replace the painted panels with the emperor figures on the present façade with great statues in niches. Perhaps we can still take it into account for the planned annexe. Yes, indeed! That would not only be a fine decoration, it would be of the deepest, best

symbolism too. Somebody must, after all, possess the highest worldly authority. Who else but we, the magistracy?'

'Mmh. Were you able to name him the reasons for the judgement too?'

'No, I shall only be able to bring our clever construction home to him later: how we, firstly, got the brewhouses back, which will please the treasury burghers; how we, secondly, got rid of Lütjehann's loathsome face, by informing him that he would hang if he let himself be seen here once more; and how we, thirdly, at the same time stopped his mouth and thereby got past the Imperial Chamber Court, by giving him a part of the bloody treasure of this sea-robber. That we should otherwise have had to give wholly to the church, which is now, with its third for the poor-box of the alms-care, very content too! Is there a cleverer judgement than one with which all are content?' He checked himself. 'Well, so good as all.'

Mönckebronn's argument reminded Laurentz spontaneously of Simon's ability to juggle with five balls.

'I think I shall be able to explain to him that this generally satisfactory solution was only possible because he carpentered together for us this excellent charge.'

'Better take another expression in this connection than "carpentered together" – I think he might misunderstand it.'

Mönckebronn nodded thoughtfully. 'Yes, I too have already had the impression several times that he really believes in the good, when he speaks of laws.'

The market hours were once again at an end, the front door clapped; Marthe's hard clogs must at any moment be heard on the stone floor of the hallway with their loud clatter. Laurentz started up: he heard nothing.

Full of concern he stuck his little fingers in his ears, but they seemed to be in order. He said loudly: 'Boo!', and that he could hear well enough.

He looked up as Marthe came into the counting-house, and looked at her questioningly. 'Do you think I am growing old?'

Marthe, who had just been about to ask him for something, shook her head. What should a woman answer to such a question from a man with whom she shared board and bed? He knew himself well enough how many years he already had on the tally – that he certainly did not want as an answer. Did he want to hear whether he was still good for anything as a lover? She had no cause to complain – but that he need not necessarily know. If she wanted a man who could tear up tree-trunks, then she would have chosen a young peasant. So she decided to answer his question pragmatically: 'Has something fallen on your head?'

'No. But on my ears, it seems. I did not hear the hard clatter of your shoes.'

Marthe placed herself beside him, bent down to him and whispered very softly in his ear: 'Nor could you, because from today I leave them behind the front door and pull on leather house-shoes!'

'Oh, God!' groaned Laurentz with a feigned expression. 'That I should have lived to see this!'

He turned round and clasped Marthe about the hips. 'Now I can at last stop sitting about in the council brooding over the severest penalties for non-observance of the town's rubbish ordinances, once I have managed to make you take off your street shoes at the door!'

'What have you managed? Did you take my shoes off, then? Conceited fellow!' Playfully she tried to free herself from his clasp.

'No, please, stay a moment yet. I am truly growing older. My shoulder aches more often, which I did not know before. I have considered – that is, it would be my wish, if you had nothing against it ...'

'Now say it already! I shall not say no!'

'Then pack the chest with linen and a few personal utensils. We two will move for the summer into our country house before the Neuer Wall!' Laurentz had risen and embraced Marthe firmly, who showed her agreement by kissing him.

Then she pushed Laurentz back a little. 'Could you please settle one small thing first?'

'I shall not say no!'

'Karl and Albrecht are just now demolishing my kitchen, and you would do me a favour if ...'

She had not yet finished speaking when Laurentz was already on the way to the kitchen.

Already in the hallway he heard the voice of Karl: 'You see, that is what this town looks like when you look at it once from above!'

Laurentz opened the door to the kitchen and stopped in surprise. Karl stood on one side of the table with one of the great kitchen knives raised in his hand, Albrecht opposite him on the other side. Kobi sat on a stool, smoked and seemed to be amused.

'What does our town look like?' Laurentz broke in with pointed calm, to soothe the supposedly heated tempers.

Karl pointed disdainfully with the knife at the table: 'Like a halved mangel-wurzel!'

Laurentz's fear that the two were quarrelling in earnest found no foothold, neither in the grim-looking Karl nor in Albrecht, who had come home only an hour before. In the meantime he had spoken once more with Mönckebronn and had apparently found his balance again.

'Here ...' – Karl ran the knife-blade along the cut surface – '... that is the Bleichenfleet and the Kleine Alster, the curve is the present town fortification, and here below, at the stalk, is the Baumwall by the entrance to the inner harbour.'

'And what is there to find fault with in that? So the town looks, well, so it is. It has grown well thus.'

'No!' Karl had laid the knife down, reached for the other half of the mangel-wurzel and clapped both halves together. Then he reached for the knife again, hacked triangles out of a second wurzel and arranged them around the halved wurzel so that they lay with the points outward: 'This is how Hamburg ought to look: like a round hedgehog, with many spines pointing outward, that make the courage sink into any attacker's breeches at the very thought of laying hold!'

'Karl!' Laurentz had stepped to the table. 'Have you spoken with Kieckering about his costly idea of the new town fortification?'

'Yes! And not only with him!' He turned round, searched for something in a basket, came back to the table, cracked a large hen's egg and slapped it down beside the wurzels, so that the yolk splashed away to all sides: 'That is the policy of the Hamburg council – as far as the town's territory is concerned!'

Laurentz understood what Marthe had meant when she feared for her kitchen, and wished to raise an objection, but Karl would not be put off. 'The yolk is the town territory within the rampart. And this here ...' – he pointed to a fleck of white that had splashed furthest away – 'that is the district of Ritzebüttel at the mouth of the Elbe out there, and this blob here, those are the forest villages in the north, and that blob there, that is Moorburg in the south ... shall I count off yet more scattered enclaves?'

'No, that is enough, and if you would perhaps leave the food-warens out of your explanations, it would be no less convincing.'

'Very well. I only wished to demonstrate to Albrecht what a clever policy this God-sent Hamburg council has pursued in the last decades. It is well, indeed, that there is no direct Elbe crossing to the south and that the broad river keeps the Counts of Harburg off our necks as a barrier. But we must orient ourselves more to the north. The Holstein great landowners deliver us much grain; the Rantzaus and Reventlows buy the Hamburg town bonds and help us finance the town budget!'

'Yes, yes! We simply knew no better hitherto. Have you still more points of criticism or proposals as to how one might do something better?'

'Plenty. For example, on your favourite theme of rubbish. One-and-twenty years ago – I repeat, in the year 1570, for we write, as is well known, already 1591 – the assembly of the hereditary citizenry granted the council a catalogue of demands that included, among other things, emphatically increased efforts to deepen the Elbe and to keep the Alster clean. And what has happened so far? Nothing! Nothing at all!'

Karl raised the knife high, rammed it into the wurzel halves and growled: 'What do you actually do in the council behind the tightly closed doors? Dice and card-playing?'

Laurentz did not know whether he should laugh or scold. In the council they truly had no time for such amusements, yet sometimes he asked himself too whether he might not have had one more ship built, had he had more time, had there been less talk and more action in the council. He said: 'I have just proposed to Marthe that she move with me into our country house, and if I do not wish always to come into the town for the council sittings, you could take my place in the council.'

'I?' Karl pointed in surprise at his own breast and laughed at the top of his voice. 'Do you mean to punish me? I want to work on further at what I have begun these past weeks, to bring our firm further forward, open up new markets, fetch new wares to Hamburg – from Archangel, from Brazil, from the vastness of the Pacific Ocean!'

Still he shook his head almost indignantly, as though someone had presumed to ask him to scrub the deck of a ship. 'But I would know of someone who could sit in the council in your place!' Slowly he turned his head and pointed with outstretched arm at Albrecht. 'Our young Doctor of Laws, who believes in the good and in laws!'

Albrecht did not respond to his uncle's irony. 'Did I believe in the good in man, I would need no laws. But if I expect that the citizenry, and thereby every single citizen, recognises the council as the highest authority, then I need good and up-to-date laws that hold for each and all. And what have we in Hamburg? A patchwork of an old town law that my great-great-grandfather still helped to write, sundry ordinances and several recesses. The Hamburg law is an outdated jumble, confused and contradictory, and it should urgently be newly ordered, adapted to the times. And it must hold for all.'

'By God! The young badger would lace up our freedom with laws?'

'Which freedom do you mean? Your own? The struggle, the civil war you trust yourself to win? Or an order that allows you, in quiet and safety, to carry on your trade in freedom?'

'Quiet and safety? Ah! Bah!' Karl's expression gave the impression that someone had offered him milk to drink and he had to be sick. 'That is just right for stay-at-homes who sit behind their stove and complain that there is a draught when a window is once opened to air the room!'

Albrecht would not be impressed. 'If only a thousand, ah what, only a hundred peaceful citizens whom you call touchy stay-at-homes come out from behind their warm stoves, there is such a tumult in the streets that the carts transporting your goods, fetched from afar for dear money, are tipped into the muck, and you can see what becomes of our fine trading firm!'

'I will give my costly wares an armed escort, and whoever should dare so much as to touch them: prrt, zack!' The knife whizzed down.

Albrecht smiled. 'But now the stay-at-homes are armed as part of the civic militia. That is why you need so much armed escort, will have to pay so much money for it, only to protect your wares,

that you might as well spare yourself trading in them at all, because their protection eats up more than your profit!

'And that you mean to prevent with your good laws, then?'

Albrecht smiled. Karl too would have to see that politics held the primacy. 'No, not through the laws – those are only agreements that stand on paper – through an authority, a state, that enforces them against anyone who should offend against them and gives them validity.'

'State? Where did you get that word from?'

'In London I also studied the writings with which in Italy the best constitution has been disputed for decades already.'

'Aha. But that would mean the authority would have to arm itself in order to ensure an order in which I need not arm myself to defend my right for myself?'

'Yes, that means so, among other things.'

'What else?'

'That you bind yourself to obey the laws and their representatives ...'

'What?' Karl had torn the knife out of the wurzel again. 'I am to give obedience to some bailiff, an arsehole perhaps, only because he wears a uniform or holds an office?'

'Yes! You even have to obey the representative of the laws if he should be godless or unjust. It is not subject to your judgement whether he is, with respect, an arsehole, but he is only the interchangeable personification of the law as the highest authority!'

Karl clutched his head. 'I think I should not, after all, like to see you sitting in the council. You are worse still than our present dignitaries. With them one could still comfortably correct something when they had decided wrongly out of stupidity. You, on the other hand, show an inexorability that seems to me cruel.'

Albrecht would not be put off. 'This inexorability will demand of you nothing that it does not give you back: your freedom to live undisturbed and to go about your work.'

Albrecht and Karl made a pause and both looked at Laurentz, who had listened in silence, now drew up a stool, sat down and regarded his two hands musingly.

'I think I understand you both: as I have two hands ...' – with that he stood up, placed himself between son and grandson and laid one of his hands on the shoulder of each – 'so I give you this bequest: you, Karl, shall carry on the trading firm, and you, Albrecht, will be my successor in the council. It is true that the time seems to be past in which the councillors could do everything at once. Both trade and politics have grown more difficult, need the exclusive concentration on their own matter. So I give each of you one half of my work – yet, as my two hands were always held together by my body, and I always knew what the right hand and what the left was doing – never forget that there is a greater unity above your two now separated spheres.'

Karl nodded in agreement; Albrecht hesitated: 'And if I do not want to go into the council?'

Laurentz clapped him encouragingly on the shoulder. 'If the council elects you into its college and you should decline, then, according to the provisions of our – as you thought – dusty town law, you will lose your burgher-right and be banished from the town for ever.'

Karl's succession was his personal decision; but on account of Albrecht, Laurentz now sat together with Mönckebronn and the mayor.

'For four generations the Moellendorffs have had a seat in the Hamburg council. I am already over sixty years old and have thereby sat far beyond the usual time in this chair, because my sons went other ways. As for my grandson: I know that by the law he is too young; he only turns twenty in the winter and should number twenty-five. How would it be if the council set off the time I have overrun against what he still lacks?'

The mayor nodded and was willing; only Mönckebronn held against it: 'Do we mean to give up our good Fiscal again straightaway? It does seem to prove its worth when the prosecutor is no councillor and thereby no member of the higher court either. Let us have Albrecht work for us as the town's prosecutor for the five years yet, and pledge already now that he will be a councillor afterwards.'

All three shook hands: it was thereby resolved and settled.

Marthe had in the meantime, together with Agathe and Mechthild, inspected the country house. The maids and menservants received their orders as to what still had to be made ready and what, after subsequent examination, was found good.

In the morning, with the last load, the small table too, at which Laurentz meant in future to sit with Marthe, and the few personal belongings of the two, had been carried out.

To Karl's and Albrecht's question whether they did not wish to be accompanied, Laurentz had waved them off, shaken their hands and grumbled: 'You can come and visit us on my birthday, in August. Flowers you need bring none; we have plenty of those there ourselves,' and had then strolled off with Marthe.

At the crossroads to the churchyards he stopped, pressed Marthe's hand and said: 'Go on ahead, please; I have still something to see to.'

In the cemetery Laurentz went to Simon's grave. He scratched some of the earth out from under the great grave-slab, regarded once more the medallion with the woman's head, which had been so important to Simon that he had worn it, invisible to all others, beneath his bishop's cross.

Laurentz murmured thoughtfully: 'You must have loved this woman very much, Simon,' knelt down and pressed the medallion as deep as possible beneath the grave-slab. 'Be united, stay

together.' Then he carefully stopped up the opening beneath the grave-slab again with the earth, knocked the traces of earth from his breeches and wandered over to the country house.

There Marthe had in the meantime unpacked the chest and held out to him questioningly a letter with which she knew not what to do. 'For my son Simon' stood on the envelope.

Laurentz paused a moment, regarded thoughtfully the dear face of Marthe and then, smiling, made a warding gesture of the hand. 'The dead write no letters.'

Glossary

Almshouses (Gotteswohnungen): dwellings built by the church, made available to recognised town poor and needy Lutherans.

Bailiff / reeve (Vogt): the supervisory official who, on the authority's commission, controlled the carrying-out and observance of the laws and ordinances – in today's sense, roughly: the executive. As a sign of his office he wore in Hamburg a red cap.

Beghards and Beguines: men and women who, much as in ecclesiastical mysticism, longed for the immediate vision and immediate union with God in intuitive and ecstatic experience. Since they did not observe the bounds set by the church, they were branded as heretics and persecuted (compare Müntzer). The 'Brethren and Sisters of the Free Spirit' were uncompromisingly subjective and bowed to no authority but their own – on account of their self-estimation that they had attained perfection and could sin no more. Attested since the beginning of the thirteenth century, they existed as secret societies until the end of the seventeenth.

Botcher / unguilded craftsman (Böhnhase): craftsmen in Hamburg who belonged to no guild and whose trade was merely tolerated. In other towns they were also termed 'Pfuscher' (bunglers). Attacks by the guild craftsmen, who destroyed the workshops of the Böhnhasen, were forbidden by imperial decree.

Burgher / citizen (Bürger): an inhabitant of the town who was subject to the legal statutes. From 1376 there was an oath of the citizenry; from 1483 the burgher-oath to the council existed as a permanent institution. In the course of time there were three classes of citizen: 1. the powerful councillor families; 2. the hereditary citizens with real property in the town (until 1859 a constitutional organ); and 3. the remaining citizens (without landed property), who came increasingly to be represented through the church-sworn officers. About 70–80% of the town's inhabitants had no burgher-right, since they could either not pay the burgher-

money or not fulfil the conditions for taking the burgher-oath before the council (e.g. nobles, or those without a Lutheran profession of faith).

Burgherright (Bürgerrecht): existed until the nineteenth century, on account of the differing amounts of burgher-money paid, as a distinction between the greater and the lesser burgher-right. The greater burghers had the privilege of using the town weighing-scales (important for merchants) and of hunting (a pastime). Politically this distinction had no consequences.

Bursprake: a collection of legal ordinances. Originally discussed in citizens' assemblies within the framework of civic self-government, the term then came to mean the written records of the articles to be proclaimed. As fixed Bursprake dates, on which all citizens assembled, the days of Thomas the Apostle (21 December) and Cathedra Petri (21 February) are known. On 22 February (the end of the winter break) the civic official year ended in Hamburg (among other things, the rotation of the council, new mayors), and the citizens were called together in the forenoon by the ringing of the bell at the lower court; the town gates were closed, and mounted bailiffs patrolled the streets. Even though the Burspraken were proclaimed by the council, the silent or express consent of the citizens had to be present – who made themselves heard loudly, and by force too, when they did not agree with the council.

Calendar (Kalender): from 46 B.C. the Julian calendar held in Roman Europe – introduced by Julius Caesar, when the Roman calendar showed an error of 67 days against the tropical year. Through the reform, the 1st of January came onto the first new moon after the winter solstice (the shortest day), and the spring equinox onto the 24th of March. But since every 129 years of this calendar were one day too long, the spring equinox already fell in 1574 on the 11th of March. According to the calculations of a commission appointed by Pope Gregory XIII, the Gregorian calendar

was then introduced. To bring the calendar into line with the tropical year, ten days were dropped in 1582; that is, after the 4th of October the 15th of October was counted straightaway. This change was accepted variously: in Catholic Germany in 1583, in Protestant Germany about 1700, in England only in 1752.

Calvin, John (1509–1564): founder of the 'Reformed' church, which recognised the Bible alone as the source of Christian truth and proceeded from the double predestination: the unconditional foreordination of believers to blessedness, of unbelievers to damnation. Popularised: whoever acquires success and prosperity already in this life is chosen by God. The dividing difference from the Lutherans lay in the question of the Lord's Supper.

Calvin himself set up in Geneva a theocracy (from 1541) that proceeded mercilessly against despisers of divine service, immoral persons and heterodox opinions. The deeds, words and expressions of the Geneva citizens were strictly watched: in 1542–46 alone, 58 persons were executed and 76 burned.

Caravel (Kraweel): a large three-master and successor to the cog; the planks of the hull meet flush. Armed also with cannon, this type of ship established itself quickly in the fifteenth century.

Cathedra Petri: the 21st of February of a year, and the end of the winter break in the shipping of those days. Originally, probably, also a Thing-day, on which the men assembled to discuss and decide questions before their voyage. To this tradition go back, presumably, the great Biike-fires of the Frisians too, with which the winter's bed-straw was burned and at the same time all the inhabitants were called to assembly, before the men were abroad for months.

Cog (Kogge): a seaworthy sailing ship with one large sail. The typical ship of the Hanseatic age, therefore sometimes synonymous with Hanse-cog. Hull of clinker construction, with overlapping planks and with an after-castle as a superstructure.

Council (Rat): from 1225 a college that took to itself the legal statutes and the keeping of the town books. The council supplemented itself by co-optation from the hereditary citizenry and set itself off increasingly against the remaining citizens. Its most respected and influential members had, since the late fifteenth century, been graduate jurists. Since the Reformation the council approached the ideology of princely rule and understood itself as an authority instituted by God. From the seventeenth century the council then called itself the Senate, to underscore this lordly, aristocratic accent.

Council of Trent (Tridentinisches Konzil): a Catholic church council convened at Trent by Emperor Charles V to remove the confusions caused by the Reformation, which sat in three sessions (1545–49, 1551–52 and 1562–63). The resolutions confirmed by the Pope in 1564 laid down the principles of the new Catholicism, pushed back all reform endeavours within Catholicism and deepened the gulf to Protestantism. All endeavours towards rapprochement (e.g. permitting the lay chalice and priestly marriage) were rejected. The fixing of celibacy, the drawing up of an Index of forbidden books, etc.

Court staff (Gerichtsstab): the emblem of judicial power. (Similar: the Emperor's sceptre, the marshal's baton, the officer's cane.) If the staff – at first wooden staves, later ornamental staves – was laid on the table, the proceedings were thereby interrupted. After the pronouncement of death sentences the staff was broken over the condemned.

Criminal Court Code (Halsgerichtsordnung): from the late Middle Ages, legal codes that reformed the criminal law and criminal procedure under the influence of Roman ideas. The most famous was the 'Constitutio Criminalis Carolina' (CCC), or Criminal Court Code of Emperor Charles V, passed at the Diet of Regensburg in 1532. To appease its opponents, a 'clausula salvatoria' was inserted, according to which old territorial law could be left in

force. In Hamburg, citizenry and council refused far into the seventeenth century to apply this imperial law.

Drake, Admiral Sir Francis (1543–1596): one of the most famous English privateers and sea-heroes. Was the first Englishman to sail round the world in three years. His flagship (compare GOLDEN HIND) was preserved as a national monument. In 1587 he attacked a Spanish war-fleet at Cadiz and 'singed the Spanish king's beard'; in 1588 he took part in the destruction of the Spanish ARMADA and died in 1596 on a raid against the Spaniards off Portobelo (Panama).

Dress code (Kleiderordnung): the estate-based society of the Middle Ages and the beginning modern period was characterised by a multitude of ordinances that laid down anything and everything. Dress codes served, on the one hand, to make the differences of social estate – and thereby the rights and privileges too – already outwardly visible and recognisable (who might wear which cloth, which adornment, what kind of cap or bonnet), and, on the other, to limit the rampant need for pomp and display, and thereby the indebtedness of aspiring classes. These ordinances brought about their opposite, since everyone now went to the very upper limit of what was allowed. These problems ceased only when the dress codes were abolished.

Ewer: an open, flat, small sailing boat with one mast. The working boat for the transfer of goods and the transport of wares.

Fees (Sporteln): before the Hamburg councillors received (from 1603) a fixed salary, they got only personal fees for an official act – the Sporteln, which raised their corruptibility unduly.

Fiscal (Fiskal): a public prosecutor (in today's terms: state attorney). With the emergence of the state as the highest legal authority, the citizens lost their (Germanic) right to private feuds. The principle 'Where there is no plaintiff, there is no judge' altered in such a way that offences to be prosecuted ex officio were laid down, which were in any case pursued by the authorities. In the

literature on Hamburg there are, on the one hand, accounts that assume the Fiscal since the fourteenth century, and on the other, 1595 is named as the first time a councillor was appointed salaried Fiscal.

Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg (Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg): denoted the imperial immediacy of the town, which was thereby subject to no other authority than the Emperor. In distinction to other towns that were subject to the jurisdiction and tax legislation of a territorial lord.

GOLDEN HIND: the most famous ship of Sir Francis Drake (compare Drake). He was commissioned (1577) to plunder the Spanish gold-ships from South America, which he did most successfully. To intercept Drake, the Strait of Magellan was blocked by 23 Spanish ships, but Drake sailed through the Pacific, the Indian Ocean and around Cape Horn. A tremendous feat of seamanship: without sea-charts and with a 100-ton ship. When in September 1580 he ran into Plymouth with the GOLDEN HIND, the sensation was complete: never before had an English ship laden with such treasures landed in England. Aboard his own ship, Drake was knighted by Queen Elizabeth.

Hawkins, Sir John (1532–1595): privateer and teacher of Francis Drake. As naval treasurer he organised the build-up of English sea-power and was admiral of the English fleet that (1588) defeated the Spanish ARMADA. He died during his last privateering voyage against the Spaniards off Puerto Rico.

Headsmen / executioners (Henker): as the representative of a dishonourable calling, the headsman had to wear a specific (usually red) dress, so that one did not touch him by accident. The executioner was ever the object of superstition, in which everything united that was feared in connection with the demonry of death. In Hamburg he stood under the protection of the eldest magistrate.

The headsmen usually had good knowledge of anatomy, since, for example, at torturings they were responsible that the tormented were not so injured that they died of it; and so the headsmen's knowledge – also in the mixing of magical salves and potions, in secret of course – was decidedly sought after.

Hexenhammer, or Malleus maleficarum (1487): composed by the inquisitors Institoris and Sprenger. On the one hand, in that day, a legal advance, since through procedural rules for the trials the personal arbitrariness of the accuser, verdict-finder and judge (in one person) was limited; on the other hand, a hotchpotch of the necessity of a confession – which led to the rampant use of torture – and of ordeals and witch-tests, which had women in particular in their sights as witches. The Hexenhammer led primarily to the denunciation of women; the male sorcerers were neglected.

Higher court (Obergericht): the second instance of the Hamburg jurisdiction and the highest court for capital crimes. Its composition was almost identical with the council of the town. For all criminal matters, and for all legal disputes up to a value of six hundred Rhenish gold guilders, the last instance (imperial privilege of 1553). Only proceedings with a higher value in dispute could be laid before the Imperial Chamber Court as the last court of appeal.

Illegitimacy (Unehelichkeit): a blemish for a whole life. Thus an illegitimate person could neither attain burgher-rights nor be admitted into a guild, and he was not considered in the law of inheritance. For the enforcement of Christian-monogamous codes of morals and marriage, the children were made the victims, in order to bring the unmarried women under discipline. By the same logic, women who had brought an illegitimate child into the world and killed it were not prosecuted, since they had harmed no one.

Lighter (Leichter): a smaller vessel for taking over the cargo from larger ships (also: Phram, barge).

Lower court (Niedergericht): Hamburg's jurisdiction was subject to the council. The lower court was competent as the first instance; its building was, until the great town fire (1842), built directly onto the town hall. To it belonged two councillors as magistrates, the bailiff, and eight or eleven citizens as lay judges.

Luther, Martin (1483–1546): a monk who called upon the Catholic church for a spiritual purification and turned against every hierarchy. His criticism, however, was so fundamental, and was turned into the political by the aspiring territorial princes, that, unlike earlier movements of purification within the Catholic church, it could no longer be integrated. Core elements of Luther's teaching are the personal relationship of man, and the responsibility of the individual, to God (compare Beghards and Beguines); the non-transferability of Christian categories to worldly questions; the separation of state and church; the abolition of most of the sacraments.

In the social ferments of the sixteenth century his teaching became, among other things, the leaven of political movements, from which Luther himself, however, distanced himself (the Peasants' Wars, the Anabaptists). In continuation of Luther's teaching, the Lutheran established church developed after his death into an orthodox hierarchy that is 'more papal than the Pope' and developed the greatest mistrust of the other reforming confessions. Thus in Hamburg, for example, only Lutherans could acquire the burgher-right.

Marranos (Marranen): Jews who, under the compulsion of the Inquisition in the century before their expulsion from the Iberian peninsula (1492 – Portugal/Spain), had themselves baptised Catholic (the forcibly baptised). The first Marranos in Hamburg (from 1590) gave themselves out to be Catholic Portuguese, in order to be protected from the Lutheran antisemitism.

Mennonites (Mennoniten): a Protestant faith-community arising in the sixteenth century, founded by Menno Simons. They

rejected state compulsion in matters of faith, refused military service and the oath – which led to persecutions in many states.

More, Sir Thomas (Morus, 1478–1535): English humanist, statesman and (since 1935) a saint of the Catholic church. A successful jurist and advocate, law-reformer and defender of the rights of Parliament. From 1529 Lord Chancellor, the decisions of Henry VIII (secularisation, Reformation and royal supremacy) contradicted his conscience, and he resigned in 1532. He asked only not to have to approve publicly the divorce and the king's supremacy, to be allowed to keep silent on them. Condemned as a traitor, the royal grace commuted the lawful penalty of disembowelling into execution by the axe.

Müntzer, Thomas (1490–1525): theologian and revolutionary. In contrast to Luther, Müntzer held to the inner revelation through God; the mystical experience of the cross displaced Luther's justification by faith, made the interpretation of Scripture and the scribes superfluous, and led all men, of whatever estate, to the certainty of being chosen. Filled with this consciousness of a mission, to prepare the way for the Kingdom of God even now on this earth, Müntzer became one of the forerunners of the Anabaptist movement and of spiritualism, and the leader of the Peasants' War in Thuringia. After the lost battle at Mühlhausen (in Thuringia) he was tortured and executed.

Ordeal / judgement of God (Gottesurteil): various forms of finding law, when the worldly or spiritual magistrates would not or could not pronounce a judgement. For example, a combat between two knights, of whom the survivor was then in the right. In today's form: tossing a coin to decide a question.

Palm Sunday (Palmsonntag): the Sunday before Easter, derived from the strewing of palms at Jesus's entry into Jerusalem (Matthew 21). In the Catholic church celebrated by palm procession and the blessing of palms (also willow catkins, boxwood twigs, etc., with which the high altar was adorned and which were

to protect against harm); in the Protestant church the beginning of Holy Week, often the day of confirmation.

Poor-box (Gotteskasten): the confiscated property of the Catholic cathedral chapter in Hamburg was handed over to the Lutheran parishes, which used the revenues, according to confessional criteria, in the care of the poor.

Praetor (Prätor): the 'eldest' magistrate. Elected for one year at a time, he had charge of the leadership of the lower court, and under his protection in particular the headsman/executioner of the town.

Procurator (Prokurator): the Latin term for the 'advocates' appointed by the lower court. According to the Hamburg legal order of the sixteenth century, men under 18 years and all women needed a representative (as guardian) before the court. In the case of women this guardian was the husband. To penniless defendants and widows the procurators were assigned by the court.

Recesses (Rezesse): written agreements (contracts) between council and citizenry, in which, in addition to the town law and the Burspraken, contested political themes and legal questions were set down.

Important recesses were, among others: 1483, the 3rd Recess (after a rebellious counter-government of the citizens), out of which the town law of 1497 then arose; 1529, the 'Long Recess', in which, as the conclusion of the Reformation in Hamburg, the rights of council and citizenry were laid down most precisely (132 articles); 1712, the 'Main Recess', which until 1859 constituted the constitution of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg.

Rigging (Gut, nautical): all the cordage aboard a sailing ship. The standing rigging serves to support the masting (immovable holding-ropes); the running rigging to work the topmasts, yards and sails.

Schabab!: the imperative of 'abschaben' (to scrape off): be off, clear off, get out!

Schute: a large open cargo boat without sail. It was towed (tracked) or pushed forward with long wooden poles (punted).

Senior elders (Oberalte): a supreme 'civic college' created after the Reformation, with three representatives each from the four parishes of the town (Petri, Jacobi, Katharinen and Nikolai) = 12 senior elders. Supplemented by nine further deacons each, they formed the College of the Forty-Eight (12 + 4×9), who in turn, with 24 civic delegates (subdeacons) each from the parishes, made up the College of the Hundred-and-Forty-Four.

Steelyard (Stalhof, also Stahlhof): the Hanseatic office in London. Was closed by the English king in 1597 and stripped of its privileges. One of the most visible signs of the decline of the Hanse as a sea-power.

Whores (Huren): in accordance with the regulating and ordering need of the Middle Ages and the early modern period, the prostitutes were not only organised in brothels – which, as 'free women', they could also leave again at any time – but had to wear a particular dress that made them outwardly recognisable. Where in many towns yellow additions were prescribed (ribbons, hems, badges), in Hamburg they might show themselves in public only in plain clothing without any adornment whatever.

Wullenwever, Jürgen (1492–1537): as leader of a radical popular movement, he became mayor of Lübeck in 1533. Despite his partly successful efforts to restore the supremacy of Lübeck in the Baltic, he was, after a judgement of the Imperial Chamber Court for the restoration of the patrician order and at the demand of several Hanseatic towns, overthrown in 1535 and, after a dubious trial, executed in 1537.