

**IN THE BLUE PIKE: A ROMANCE
OF GERMAN CIVILIZATION AT
THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE
SIXTEENTH CENTURY**

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GEORG EBERS & MARY J. SAFFORD

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*A ROMANCE OF GERMAN CIVILIZATION
AT THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE
SIXTEENTH CENTURY*

BY

GEORG EBERS

AUTHOR OF *LARBA*, *CLEOPATRA*, ETC.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FIFTH EDITION

BY MARY J. SAFFORD

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Dedicated

TO

HERR ADOLF SCHWABE

AND HIS BELOVED, HONOURED WIFE,

FRAU MATHILDE SCHWABE,

IN OLD AND LOYAL FRIENDSHIP,

BY THE AUTHOR,

GEORG EBERS.

IN THE BLUE PIKE.

CHAPTER I.

"MAY a thunderbolt strike you!" The imprecation suited the rough fellow who uttered it. He had pointed out of doors as he spoke, and scarcely lowered the strange tones of his voice, yet of all the rabble who surrounded him only two persons understood his meaning—a fading, sickly girl, and the red-haired woman, only a few years her senior, who led the swearing man by a chain, like a tame bear.

The Nuremberg magistrates had had Cyriax's tongue cropped for gross blasphemy, and listeners could scarcely comprehend the words he mangled in his gasping speech.

The red-haired woman dropped the knife

with which she was slicing bread and onions into a pot, and looked at her companion with an anxious, questioning glance.

"Nuremberg Honourables," he stammered as fast as he could, snatched his wife's shawl from her shoulders, and drew it over his unkempt head.

The woman beckoned to their travelling companions—a lame fellow of middle age who, propped on crutches, leaned against the wall, an older pock-marked man with a bloated face, and the sickly girl—calling to them in the harsh, metallic voice peculiar to hawkers and elderly singers at fairs.

"Help Cyriax hide. You first, Jungel! They needn't recognise him as soon as they get in. Nuremberg magistrates are coming. Aristocratic blood-suckers of the Council. Who knows what may still be on the tally for us?"

Kuni, the pale-faced girl, wrapped her bright-coloured garment tighter around her mutilated left leg, and obeyed. Lame Jungel, too, prepared to fulfil red-haired Gitta's wish.

But Raban had glanced out, and hastily drew the cloth jerkin, patched with green and blue linen, closer through his belt, ejaculating anxiously:

"Young Groland of the Council. I know him."

This exclamation induced the other vagabonds to glide along the wall to the nearest door, intending to slip out.

"A Groland?" asked Gitta, Cyriax's wife, cowering as if threatened with a blow from an invisible hand. "It was he——"

"He?" laughed the chain-bearer, while he crouched beside her, drawing himself into the smallest space possible. "No, Redhead! The devil dragged the man who did that down to the lower regions long ago, on account of my tongue. It's his son. The younger, the sharper. This stripling made Casper Rubling,* poor wretch, pay for his loaded dice with his eyesight."

He thrust his hand hurriedly into his jerkin

* Dice, in gambler's slang.

as he spoke, and gave Gitta something which he had concealed there. It was a set of dice, but, with ready presence of mind, she pressed them so hard into the crumb of the loaf of bread which she had just cut that it entirely concealed them.

All this had passed wholly unnoticed in the corner of the long, wide room, for all the numerous travellers whom it sheltered were entirely occupied with their own affairs. Nothing was understood except what was said between neighbour and neighbour, for a loud uproar pervaded the tavern of The Blue Pike.

It was one of the most crowded inns, being situated on the main ferry at Miltenberg, where those journeying from Nuremberg, Augsburg, and other South German cities, on their way to Frankfort and the Lower Rhine, rested and exchanged the saddle for the ship. Just at the present time many persons of high and low degree were on their way to Cologne, whither the Emperor Maximilian, having been unable to come in April to