CHAPTER I.

IN the autumn of the year 1847, one might have seen a young, vigorous-looking fellow trudging leisurely along the road from Marisfeld to Wichtelhausen, a knapsack on his back and an alpenstock in his hand.

It could be seen at a glance that he was no apprentice, traveling about in search of work, even if the trig little portfolio which he carried had not betrayed him to be an artist. The black, broad-brimmed hat, resting jauntily on one side, from underneath which fell long, blonde, curling locks, the full beard, the black velvet coat, half thrown back,—all these things indicated the artist.

The morning was warm, and the young man had stopped for a moment on the crest of a slight hill to rest, when the bells sounded forth the hour for church in Marisfeld, which was, perhaps, a quarter of a mile away. Leaning on his staff, he listened intently to the full, musical tones, which were borne across to him so distinctly. The tones were long since silent, and still he stood gazing dreamily out upon the mountain-sides. His thoughts went home, to the peaceful little village in the Taurus Mountains, to his mother and sisters; and it seemed almost as if a tear was about to come into his eye. But his gay, joyous spirit did not let sad thoughts oppress him long. With a bright laugh he took off his hat, and waved a greeting in the direction of home; and then grasping his trusty stick firmer, he started merrily on his way again.

The sun poured down with increasing heat upon the broad, monotonous way, on which the dust lay thick, and our traveler had for some time been looking about him, to right and left, in search of a more comfortable road. At his right branched off a path which promised no improvement, and also took him too far out of his way; so he kept on in the old track a while longer, until he finally came to a clear mountain-stream, on the banks of which the ruins of an old bridge were yet to be seen. From this place there turned off a grassy pathway, which led into the valley, without any particular boundaries; and as it would probably afford many opportunities of enriching his portfolio, he sprang across the brook, stepping on the isolated stones which poked their heads above water here and there, letting him across dry-footed.

On the other side was the closely-mown meadow, with its soft, yielding grass, and the cooling shade of the thick alder-bushes.

“Now,” he laughed to himself, “I have the pleasure of not knowing in the least whither I am come. There are none of those tiresome sign-posts here which tell one, hours before he cares to know, what’s the name of the next place; and they always have the distance wrong into the bargain. I wonder how these people measure their hours here, anyhow—so uncommonly still here in this valley. On Sundays I suppose the peasants have nothing to do; and if they have to follow their ploughs or their carts all the week, they don’t feel much like going out walking of a Sunday morning. So they sleep through the church-service, and then stretch their legs under the tavern-table after dinner. Tavern, by Jove! A glass of beer wouldn’t taste so bad, after all this heat.—But in default of beer, I think that this clear water would perhaps quench one’s thirst;” and throwing down his knapsack and hat, he bent down and drank to his heart’s content. Some-what refreshed by this, his glance became attracted by a curious, uncouth old willow-tree, which he rapidly sketched with expert hand; then starting up, he went on again, whither, he neither knew nor cared. It might have been a mile farther on that he had wandered thus, collecting, here a curious rock, and there a clump of alders or a gnarled oak branch, for his portfolio. The sun had risen higher and higher, and he perceived that he must hasten on, to get his midday meal in the next village, when suddenly he saw, not far before him, seated on a rock, where had once stood a picture of the Virgin Mary, a young peasant-girl, who was