This astonished him much; for in all the neighboring villages it was considered almost a sin not to salute a stranger with a "Good-day," or something of the sort. But here they greeted neither him nor the maid by his side, but simply passed by, or perhaps stood and looked after them. The old houses looked very grim and weird with their gables and straw-thatched roofs; the window-panes were round, and fastened in with lead, and showed upon their surfaces that shimmering of all colors sometimes seen in old houses. Here and there a shutter was opened as they went by, and friendly girlish faces or old matronly ones peeped out at them.

The appearance of the people was totally different from that of the neighboring villages, and besides, a nearly unbroken stillness reigned, which was almost painful, until finally Arnold said to his companion, "Do you keep Sunday so strictly here that when people meet each other they do not exchange greetings? You don't even hear a dog bark or a cock crow, and one would think the whole place was dead."

"It is dinner-time now, you know," said Gertrud, quietly, "when people are not given to talking much; to-night it will be merry enough. But here is my father's house, and he will, I am sure, give you a welcome; they are waiting for us."

"Waiting for us! You mean for you and your Heinrich? Ah, Gertrud! if you would only take me in his place to-day, I would remain with you until you yourself send me away." He had uttered the last words almost unconsciously — pressing lightly the little hand he still held in his own — when Gertrud of a sudden stopped, and looking at him earnestly, said, "Do you mean that — truly?"

"A thousand times yes!" cried the young artist, carried away by the young girl's extreme beauty.

Gertrud said nothing more, and they entered the tall house before which they had been standing, where already the Mayor had appeared in the doorway. From a side window was thrust out the head of an elderly woman, who cried out, "Why, Gertrud, how long you have staid out to-day, and what a fine gentleman is with you! It is not Heinrich, either. Ah! I always said he would not come again."

"It is all right, mother," said the Mayor, holding out his hand toward the stranger. "You are welcome to Althausen, sir, however you chanced to meet my daughter." He left the young man no chance for apologies, but conducted him into a broad, low room with a wooden floor sprinkled with clean white sand, where a table was spread with snowy linen, and plates and spoons upon it. In the recesses of the windows stood several rosy-cheeked children. But little time was given him for observation before a door at one side was pushed forward, and a stout serving-maid appeared bearing a platter of steaming dumplings, which she placed on the table. Thereupon all gathered about the table, but no one sat down, and the children looked almost affrightedly at their father, who, leaning with one arm upon his chair, his hand clenched, was murmuring something which sounded more like a defiance than a prayer.

Gertrud went up to him softly, and, laying her hand on his shoulder, looked at him beseeingly for a moment in silence. "Let us then to dinner," said the man harshly, "since nothing can help us;" and, after serving the dinner, he sat in silence during the rest of the meal. The man's whole manner appeared most uncanny to Arnold, and among the repressed tone of the others, he did not feel very comfortable. The Mayor did not, however, mean to spoil the midday meal by disagreeable associations; and, rapping on the table until it shook, he signified his desire for wine and glasses to be brought. The wine was old and costly, and the enlivening effects soon appeared to change the former restraint into cheerfulness, if not jollity. The noble fluid streamed like liquid fire through Arnold's veins; never had he tasted anything similar to it. Gertrud, also, and the old frau drank thereof; the latter of whom seated herself by the spinning-wheel in the corner, and sang softly a little song of the homely life of Althausen. The Mayor was, however, changed most of all. In proportion as he had been pre-