After Long Years and Other Stories

Translated from the German by Sophie A. Miller and Agnes M. Dunne

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Produced by Charles Aldarondo, Tiffany Vergon, Tonya Allen,
Charles Franks and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team.

[Illustration: “The Count then opened the door and overcome with emotion he fell at the feet of the Countess.”—From *“Royal Palace to Lowly Hut”*]

SUNSHINE AND SHADOW SERIES

AFTER LONG YEARS
AND
OTHER STORIES
TRANSLATIONS FROM THE GERMAN BY
SOPHIE A. MILLER
AND
AGNES M. DUNNE

NOTE

These ethical stories have been translated from the German with the view of instilling into the minds of youthful readers such truths as will help materially toward building a character that will withstand the trials and temptations of life.

It is conceded by educators that ethics presented in the lecture form fails of its purpose; therefore the writers have presented this subject in the form most appealing to children—the story.

AFTER LONG YEARS

[Illustration: “He halted, offered his assistance to the two half−frozen men, helped them into the sleigh and hurried on with them.”]

CHAPTER I. THE JOURNEY

The Duchess of Banford and her two children were driving toward their villa, when, owing to the roughness of the road, the front wheel of their coach was suddenly broken. Considerably frightened, mother and children quickly alighted. The approaching darkness, coupled with the loneliness of the place, added to the difficulty; for the prospect of spending the night in the woods was particularly distressing.

Just then a stable−boy chanced along and seeing the predicament, said: “Oh, that wheel can be easily mended. Not far from here there lives a wheelwright, and I am sure he can repair it in a very short time.” The boy then looked about him, and seeing a long pole, said: “We can use this to support the wagon as it drags along. The road is rugged, and it will take us about an hour to get there.”

“Is there no shorter route?” inquired the Duchess.

“This is the only wagon road; but if you wish, I will lead you along a shorter path across the fields which will cut the distance in half.”

The Duchess thanked him, and asked: “Do you think that we may take this pole? It seems to me as though some wood−cutter had left it here to prop a tree.”

“Oh, yes,” he answered, “it belongs to the wheelwright to whom I am taking you. All the wood around here belongs to him, and he will be glad to have this pole so handy.” So saying, he hurried to get the pole and helped the coachman fasten it in place. The horses then drew the carriage slowly over the rocky road, while the coachman walked alongside.

The family, however, followed the footpath, which led between tall elms and blooming shrubbery along the edge of a babbling brook.

The silence was broken now and then by the plaintive song of a nightingale. The Duchess and her two children seated themselves upon the trunk of a fallen tree and listened to the music till it ceased. A gentle wind sighed softly through the leaves of the trees, and merrily flowed the near−by brook. As the nightingale repeated its song, they all listened intently.

When the song was ended, the Duchess said: “I would give twenty pounds if I had such a bird in my garden. I have heard many nightingales sing in the city, but here in the country, in this wooded region and deep stillness, and at this twilight hour, its song seems doubly enchanting. Oh, that I might hear it sing in the little bower near my villa.”

“Hm,” whispered the stable−boy, who stood near her oldest son, Alfred, “those twenty pounds could be easily earned.”

Alfred nodded, and motioned to the boy to be still, for just then the nightingale began to sing. When the song ceased the Duchess arose to continue her way. Alfred, however, lagged behind with the stable−boy, with whom he was soon busily engaged in earnest talk.

“A nightingale in a cage is not what my mother wants; what she wants is a nightingale that is at liberty, to sing and nest and fly as it pleases in our beautiful garden, and to return to us in the spring from its winter home.”

“I understand very well what you mean. I should not want to catch a bird and deliver it into captivity.” After questioning Alfred more closely about the trees near his villa, the boy said: “I feel sure that I can get a nightingale and its nest for you. I know just how to go about it. You will soon hear its song resound from all parts of your garden— possibly not this week, but surely next.”

Alfred stood still for a moment and looked at the boy—clothed in a shabby suit, with his hair protruding from his torn hat. Then he asked, wonderingly, “What would you do with the money?”

“Oh,” said the boy, and the tears stood in his eyes, “twenty pounds would help us out of our troubles. You see, my father is a day−laborer. He is not a very strong man, and I was just on my way to visit him, and do what I could to help him. My foreman has given me a few days' leave of absence. I don't earn much, but it helps my father a little. I often feel that it would be a great help to him if I could earn more. I certainly should like nothing better than to be a wheelwright. It must be grand to be able to take the wood that lies here in the forest, and make a beautiful carriage out of it, like the one you own. I have often talked with the wheelwright, but he will not take me as an apprentice until I have a certain amount of money. Besides, I should need money to buy tools. It would

cost twenty pounds, and my father and I haven't as much as that together.

“Poor boy,” thought Alfred, “if what he says is true, we must help him.” Then he said aloud, “Bring me a written recommendation from your schoolmaster; and if the wheelwright really wants to take you, I will give you ten pounds as soon as the nightingale sings in our garden; and I know that the missing ten pounds will soon be forthcoming. But you must say nothing about this to anyone until my mother's wish is gratified. I should like to give her an unexpected pleasure.”

Soon they struck the main road again, and the rest of the distance was quickly covered.

While the wheelwright was repairing the carriage, Alfred engaged him in conversation concerning the stable−boy, all of whose statements the man corroborated. He also showed a willingness to apprentice the boy on the terms stated.

The damage had now been repaired, so the Duchess paid the charges, giving the stable−boy a few coins, and seated herself in the carriage with her children.

After whispering a few words to the boy, to tell him how to reach the villa, Alfred joined his mother and sister, and with tooting of horns they proceeded on their journey in high spirits.

CHAPTER II. APPRENTICESHIP

The little stable−boy, Michael Warden, hurried on to his sick father. It was late, and the journey would take him two hours. On his way he stopped to buy a few delicacies for his father with the coins the Duchess had given him. To his surprise, he found on arrival that his father was very much improved.

Before daybreak on the following morning, Michael hurried to the woods to find the nightingale's nest he knew so well. When he had last visited it, he had seen five brownish−green eggs there. But as he now peered into it he found, to his great astonishment, that the young birds had broken through their shells. With all haste he set out for the villa, several miles distant, to study the situation and decide where he could best fasten the nest. Arriving there, he found a suitable place, and then hurried back to the woods.

In the course of a few days, he succeeded in caging the parent birds. Placing the nest beside them in the cage, he carried it to the garden of the Duchess. He arrived there toward evening, and was hospitably received by the gardener, who had been fully acquainted with the idea.

Adjoining the villa was a large tract of land, well wooded, which was beautifully laid out with garden plots, pebbly, shaded paths, vine−covered bowers and rustic seats. In one corner of the garden there stood an odd little thatch−covered arbor, nestling between high rocks in the shadow of the tall trees. A brook which fell in foaming whiteness flowed past this little nook, clear as crystal, and made the stillness fascinating by its intermittent murmuring. This spot the Duchess loved well, and many hours of the day she spent here.

Scarcely a hundred feet distant, there stood a willow tree closely resembling the late home of the caged nightingales. The boy had chosen this tree and had prepared a place for the nest on a forked branch. He went there late one evening, as the moon was shining brightly, and placed the nest securely on this tree; then he gave the parent birds their freedom.

The next morning, the boy returned to the spot and hid himself in the thick shrubbery, to see whether the birds would feed their young, who were loudly crying for food. In a little while the parent birds returned and fed them.

“Now I have triumphed,” said Michael; and he hurried to the villa to carry to Alfred the welcome news that in a few days the nightingales would be singing their song in his garden.

“Fine,” said Alfred, “and then the money will be yours. Stay a few days longer and you can take it with you.”

Two days later, the Duchess invited her friends to a lawn−party. The sun had risen in all its glory, the sky was unclouded, and the breezes were light and refreshing. The garden, with all its natural beauty, afforded a most entrancing spot for the feast, which proved perfect in every detail and was enjoyed in full measure.

After the guests had departed, the Duchess said to her children, “Let us spend this delightful twilight hour here in quiet. My soul is satisfied; for what can compare with this blessed evening hour? What comparison can there be between the grandeur of our salon and the beauty of nature?”

Just then the nightingale broke the stillness with its ecstatic song. The Duchess was surprised, and listened intently until the song was ended.

“I wonder how this nightingale came to my garden. The oldest residents cannot remember ever having heard one in this region.”

“Dear mother,” said Alfred, “you often wished that a nightingale would lend its song and its presence to grace this beautiful spot. The same boy who assisted us out of a difficulty recently, helped me gratify your wish. You remember, dear mother, that you said at that time: 'I would give twenty pounds to have a nightingale in my garden.' That boy has helped us please you, and we have paid him half this amount out of our savings. The boy is worthy of the money, and it may be the foundation of his future success.”

“You have acted nobly,” said the Duchess. “I am transported with ecstasy at hearing the nightingale sing for the first time in my garden, and also at the love which you have shown for your mother. It moves me still more, however, when I think that my children possess a heart big enough to part with money intended for their own use, and voluntarily give it up to afford help and joy to others. I, too, will reward the boy generously. I wonder what use he would make of the money.”

“We could not give the money to a more worthy person,” said Alfred, who then related to his mother the boy's aspirations. “Besides, I have written to his teacher, and this is what he says about him: 'A greater deed of charity

you could not perform than to help Michael Warden carry out his desire to learn a trade. He is a clever, ingenious boy, and would learn quickly. I think he would like best to be a wheelwright, and I would suggest that you apprentice him with the master in our village.' So you see, mother, the money would not be spent in vain."

"Very well, the money shall be his."

On the following morning, Alfred sent for Michael, and counted out to him the money, increasing it to fifty pounds. Michael's astonishment almost carried him off his feet, and he thanked Alfred profusely for the extra money. He hurried home to his father and laid his wealth before him on the table. The old man stared at it in blank amazement, and said: "My boy, I hope you have not stolen this money!"

"No, father, but a little bird in the forest helped me," and Michael related the incident.

His father, overjoyed, now made all preparations for Michael's outfit. He then conducted him to the master wheelwright, paid the stipulated sum and entered him as an apprentice. At the end of three years, the boy was as accomplished in his trade as his master.

Before starting out into the world, Michael returned to the Castle of Banford to tell of his progress, and once more thank the Duchess and her children for their kindness to him. They praised him heartily for the strides he had made. The Duchess then gave him another gift of money for his journey, and said: "Success be yours. We must never do good by halves; the sapling that we plant we should also water." Then with many encouraging remarks, the Banfords bade him good−bye.

Touched by their interest and charity, Michael was so stupefied that he could scarcely speak. When he recovered his self−control, he thanked them all, and promised faithfully to do his best and always remember their good advice.

CHAPTER III. ALFRED BANFORD

Alfred Banford had always been kind to the poor and dutiful and affectionate to his mother. Suddenly he was seized with patriotic fervor. For some time he had nursed the desire to be a soldier. At the age of seventeen, he studied the art of warfare at a military academy. He surprised all the officers with his military genius.

The Duchess, too, loved her fatherland, and at last she tearfully recognized that she must give up her son to fight in defense of his country.

"Go, then," said she, "fight for the right and your country; and may God protect you."

Alfred fought valiantly and well, and at last was forced to proceed with the great French army against Russia. On the way to Moscow the ranks were greatly depleted, owing to the long, wearisome marches and privations. After untold hardships and bloodshed, the army at last reached Moscow, with her many palaces and temples and spires and the old palace, the Kremlin. It was a pleasing picture. Alfred, like every other soldier, now hoped to recuperate from the hardships of warfare. But he found the city uninhabited, the streets deserted, the palaces and houses empty.

At midnight, a dreadful fire which had been smoldering for several days, broke out in wild fury and laid the greater part of the city in ashes. The army was obliged to retreat; and many thousand brave soldiers, exposed to snow and ice, hunger and cold, met a horrible death. One single freezing night killed thousands of horses, Alfred's among them. He was obliged to walk knee deep in icy water.

They traversed miles and miles of country without passing one hut; and when in the distance a human habitation appeared and gave promise of warmth and food, they found upon approach that it was deserted and devoid of everything.

The poor, miserable, weakened soldiers were obliged to spend many a weary night on the snow−covered ground, with no roof but the sky. The need of food became more and more imperative each moment; yet if they had had the wealth of kings, they could not have bought a dry crust of bread; so they were reduced to the extremity of eating the flesh of their fallen horses. They quenched their thirst with snow.

The street upon which the greater part of the army had gathered was marked with deserted cannons and powder wagons; and on both sides lay the dead, upon whom the fast falling snow had spread a white coverlet. Many of the soldiers of Alfred's regiment had fallen, and lay frozen in the snow; others were scattered here and there.

Alfred and a chum, both in a weakened condition, tried to go on. They descried a little village, about half an hour distant; but before they reached it, Alfred had become so weak that he fell exhausted in the snow, saying: "Thus must I die here!" He extended his hand to his friend and with tears in his eyes said: "Should you ever reach the Castle of Banford, bear my love to my mother and sisters. Tell them that Alfred Banford fought bravely, and fell in the service of his country."

These words reached the ears of a Russian gentleman, Vosky by name, who in a rude sled was going in the direction of the village. He halted, offered his assistance to the two half−frozen men, helped them into the sleigh and hurried on with them. A few minutes' drive brought them to a little inn, half concealed by the drifted snow.

The men were conducted into the house and furnished with food and warmth. The host asked them no questions, for he saw that they were benumbed and almost unconscious. At last, when they had recovered, he raised his glass and said: "To your health, gentlemen. All brave soldiers should live. I sympathize with you, although I am a Russian subject. The sad fate of your fellow soldiers pains me. I will do all in my power to help you. I know you are not our enemy. We have but one enemy—the man whose iron will has forced all these hundreds of thousands of men into our country." Then he arose and went about the place, giving orders to his assistant.

The sleigh still stood at the door, and the horses impatiently shook the sleigh bells and pawed the snow. As Vosky re−entered the room, his two guests had finished their repast.

"Now," said he, "let me conduct you to a room where you can rest and sleep, undisturbed and undiscovered." After climbing a ladder and walking through a narrow passage, they came to a secret door which opened into a bedroom. Alfred Banford looked about him, and was startled when he saw in a mirror the reflection of such a

pale, hungry−looking visage and such tattered clothes.

Pity was plainly written in Vosky's kind face, but all he said was: “Stay here and recuperate. To my sorrow, I must leave you for a little while in order to transact some urgent business; but I will instruct my valet to provide you with every possible comfort. Everything in this house stands at your service.”

Alfred Banford ventured to ask whether it would be perfectly safe to remain, for he feared that Russian soldiers might capture him and that he would be sent to Siberia.

“I give you my word,” said Vosky. “You will be as safe here as the Czar is in his Castle. Give me your word of honor to remain until my return. I will then devise means to help you reach your country. But I must be off now. Take good care of yourselves.” And hurriedly he closed the door behind him.

Alfred Banford marveled at the friendliness and goodness of this strange man who had come to his rescue so unexpectedly and so opportunely, like an angel from heaven. “It seems like awakening from a dream, to find myself transported from an icy field to a warm, cozy room,” said he. “It borders on the miraculous—I cannot fathom it.” But sleep was fast overpowering him. He had lain for so long on straw, on icy ground, and even in the snow, that it seemed as if he had never felt anything softer or warmer than this bed. He soon fell asleep and rested quietly and peacefully till the dawn.

CHAPTER IV. THE STRANGER

On the following morning, at breakfast, Alfred Banford turned to the kind−hearted Russian servant, and said: “Do tell me what sort of man your master is, and what is his name?”

“He is a very good man,” said the servant. “I can think of no one who is kindlier. His name is Vosky, the Czar's chief financial adviser, and he is particularly concerned with the care of the Russian army. He has always shown me great consideration, for I was only a poor beggar boy.

“One day one of Mr. Vosky's assistants lost a package containing some valuable papers and a large sum of money. It was extensively advertised. I fortunately found the package and brought it to Mr. Vosky, who was so pleased with my honesty that he offered me a home, had me trained for a commercial life, and now takes me with him on his journeys, partly as secretary and partly as valet.

“His home is in St. Petersburg. This house is only used as a stopping place when his business carries him to this region, which happens quite frequently. Before leaving yesterday, he gave me strict orders to look after your welfare. I trust you will be pleased with my efforts, and give Mr. Vosky a good report when he returns.”

By slow degrees Alfred Banford recovered his strength. He found books with which to while away the time. The stillness of this secluded spot was a gratifying change from the noisy battlefield.

One night, Mr. Vosky returned. As he entered the house, his face shone with enthusiasm and gay spirits. “I come,” said he, turning to Alfred, “to give you liberty after your long confinement. I stand at your service, and wish to do everything in my power to see you safely restored to your own country. I would suggest that you go with me to St. Petersburg; from there you can easily return to your own home by water. I should like to introduce you to my wife and children. Besides, I could not let you depart without suitable clothing, and I cannot provide you with that here.”

“My good man,” said Alfred, “your extraordinary kindness to me exceeds all measure. I cannot understand how I should merit such consideration from you.”

“But,” said Mr. Vosky, almost choked with emotion, “I find nothing extraordinary or bountiful in my acts. It is my duty, an act of gratitude.”

“I fail to understand you,” said Alfred. “I cannot remember the slightest favor that I have ever proffered you. I never saw you before, and what is more, I never heard of you in my life.”

“Never?” cried Mr. Vosky. “Then listen to what I have to say. My entire fortune I owe to you. All my success I lay at your door.”

Alfred looked at him in astonishment and shook his head.

“Did you never help a poor boy, by giving him fifty pounds?”

“Just now I don't remember ever having done any poor boy such a charity.”

“Now,” said Vosky, “perhaps you may remember a nightingale that you wished to have brought to your mother's garden. You will recall that poor stable−boy who managed it for you.”

“Oh, yes,” said Alfred, “I remember the boy very well. He was a poor, worthy, ambitious lad, named Michael Warden. The last I heard of him was when he went out into the world as a wheelwright, to make his fortune.”

“So, you do remember him. Well, that boy Michael was none other than myself. Now I am the owner of a large factory, besides being financial adviser to the Czar. I had my name legally changed to Vosky. I was that stable−boy, that wheelwright.”

“You!” cried Alfred, filled with admiration and astonishment. He sprang forward and embraced his benefactor. “But why didn't you tell me all this at first?”

“That was impossible,” said Vosky. “It would have taken too long to explain; and my business affairs were so pressing, and you were so exhausted, that you could not have listened to a detailed account. I deferred it for a more quiet, restful time, when I could express to you my thanks. I saw that you did not recognize me, and I, too, would never have recognized you had you not said that day as you sank in the snow, 'Give my love to my mother and sisters and say that Alfred Banford fell in the service of his country.' Let us be thankful that we have been brought together, and that the opportunity has been afforded me to show you that I am not ungrateful. I cannot express to you the joy it gives me to see you, and to be able to serve you.”

Mr. Vosky then related some of the events of his life. How he had visited the principal cities of Europe; and how he had studied under the best men, in order to make himself proficient in his line of work. Having heard that many Londoners were competing for the construction of carriages for Russia, he had hastily sent in his estimate. The work was accorded to him, and in a few years time he had amassed a large fortune. He had also opened a large wagon factory, and as soon as the war broke out with France, he had received orders from the Czar to supply the Russian army with additional powder wagons. The government had been as pleased with his promptness as with his honesty. Later, he had received the title of “Imperial Financial Adviser.”

Alfred listened earnestly, and said: “God blessed you with excellent talents. Even as a child you showed genius. You certainly made good use of your gifts. I see from all that you have told me, that you were always ready to embrace an opportunity; that you worked with diligence, honesty and system, and that you began and ended all your work with an honest purpose. God, upon whom you relied, has blessed all your undertakings.”

“That is true,” said Mr. Vosky. “The fortune which I have accumulated gives me pleasure; for with it I can help the needy. Many a poor lad, like myself, have I (in memory of my own childhood) taken by the hand and helped to become a man of standing in the world.”

Mr. Vosky became silent, and after a long pause said, “I sorely regret that my poor father did not live, to see how valuable was the good training which he gave me, and that I was not permitted to make some return to him for his love and devotion.”

On the following day, Mr. Vosky and his guests started on their journey to St. Petersburg. The route lay along a beautiful section of the country; and so, with entertaining conversation, they reached their destination before they had expected.

Mr. Vosky's home was a beautiful place. His family came forward with warm greetings, and were introduced to Alfred Banford. The children could hardly understand how any man who looked so shabby and worn could ever have been their father's benefactor. The father, however, explained to them that the trials and tribulations of warfare, through which Alfred had passed, accounted for his appearance; and they were moved to sympathy for his sufferings.

Mr. Vosky had his tailor furnish Alfred with a complete outfit, suitable to his station.

Alfred remained with the Vosky family until the following spring, when they escorted him to the wharf. Mr. Vosky gave him a large roll of bills, for which Alfred thanked him, and said: “I will send you a check for this amount as soon as I reach home.”

“Oh, no,” said Mr. Vosky; “rather give the money to some poor boy. What we give to the poor always returns to us.”

With many adieus and handshakes, Alfred departed; and the Vosky family continued waving their handkerchiefs until the vessel was lost to view.

THE CAPTIVE

[Illustration: The Master of the House.]

CHAPTER I. HOME−COMING

Early one morning, Antonio, a noble youth of sixteen, was wandering by the seashore. He had just come from a high school in Salerno, Italy, and wished to spend the Easter holidays at his father's ancestral home. The earth looked gay in all the beauty of spring, and the sea shone in the rosy light of the morning sun. Antonio's heart glowed with adoration as he gazed upon the scene, and he thanked the Creator of all these wonders. With hurried steps he continued his way, thinking of his home and the reception awaiting him.

His parents were of noble birth. They had lost considerable property and money; but they desired to give their son every advantage and—what was worth more than money—an excellent education. From his earliest childhood, they had taught him to reverence God and respect the laws. All his talents were being carefully developed. At a great personal sacrifice, they had sent him to the high school. Here Antonio denied himself many pleasures in which his richer classmates indulged, and tried in every way to live economically. He made no secret of his lack of money, nor did he envy those who possessed more than he did. So on this particular morning we find Antonio saving traveling expenses by making the journey to his home on foot.

The path led through some tall bushes and curved around a huge rock. Here he suddenly espied a queer looking vessel lying at anchor. Several men with swarthy faces, clothed in a strange, odd fashion, were drawing water from a spring which gushed from the rock. They were pirates from Algiers. As soon as they caught sight of the boy, they sprang upon him, like tigers upon a harmless lamb, seized him, dragged him to the ship, robbed him of his beautiful clothing, dressed him like a slave, bound him hand and foot and placed him beside some other captives, who greeted Antonio with loud cries.

When Antonio had recovered from the first great shock, he folded his chained hands, and turning his eyes towards the heavens, he cried aloud to God for strength to bear this great trial, and for safe deliverance from, the hands of his enemies.

The other prisoners, mostly Italians, had understood his prayers and were deeply touched by his great faith. They soon became confidential, and little by little they unfolded to one another the story of their lives. One prisoner, well versed in law, who knew Antonio's father, showed the boy much sympathy. Another prisoner, a sailor, grieved over the old parents whose mainstay he had been for many years. “Oh,” sighed he, “now hunger and want will overtake them.” Another, a fisherman, somewhat older than the rest, was the saddest of them all. He sat apart at one end of the ship, holding his head in his hand and weeping silently. He was the father of five children. He grieved sorely when he thought what his absence would mean to them. Antonio tried to comfort the old man with the assurance that some rescuer would be sent to save them.

All the prisoners listened to Antonio. His appearance, his friendliness, his cheerfulness, his faith, his trust brightened them all and gave them renewed hope. Then the fisherman stood up and said: “This boy has been sent to cheer us. Let us trust as he does, and some day, perhaps, our chains may be removed.” Then he began to sing and all the prisoners joined in the song.

CHAPTER II. THE SLAVE

The pirates now weighed anchor, and slowly the ship began to move. Antonio watched the mountains, the hills, the temples and the palaces gradually become smaller and smaller and finally fade from view. Then a great pain at leaving his beloved fatherland, his sunny Italy, clutched his heart. Soon he was able to see nothing but the heavens and the vast expanse of water.

For several days the vessel sailed hither and thither, in search of more prey. Suddenly the pirates spied in the distance a warship, which was in pursuit of them. The prisoners rejoiced in silence and felt buoyed by the hope of an early rescue. The pirates lashed the prisoners to greater activity, and made them help with the oars. Under cover of the night, the pirates made their escape.

As the morning sun broke over the sea, Antonio gazed upon the waters, and saw nothing of the warship. His heart sank, and he could scarcely repress his tears. But suddenly he raised his voice, and said to his fellow−prisoners, “Though our trusting prayers have not been answered, they will not pass unheeded, and our deliverance will surely come.”

In less than an hour they saw in the distance the city of Algiers, glistening in the sunlight. Little by little they were able to distinguish the houses, and the Temple of the Turks, with the sign of the Crescent upon it.

The ship anchored, the prisoners were landed, and after a short rest were led through the narrow, dirty streets to the market place. Here they were exhibited for sale like cattle. The purchasers passed among the prisoners, and examined them as they would horses. In order to display their strength, the prisoners were obliged to lift heavy stones, placed there for that purpose. Many sales were made. The lawyer, the sailor and several others went for a good price. As Antonio could not lift the heavier stones, the buyers considered him too weak for a slave and scornfully passed him by.

A little removed from the crowd, there stood a merchant with a very wrinkled face, who seemed to be taking but little interest in the sale. After all the captives had been sold, except Antonio, the merchant stepped nearer, put on his spectacles, and surveyed Antonio from head to foot. He examined his hands, and hesitated when he found them soft and white. “But,” said the merchant, speaking in Italian, “there must be something that you have learned.” Antonio thought a moment, and not wishing to hide anything, said confidently that he could do clerical work and could write in the Italian and French languages. “Hm, hm,” said the merchant, “that is something, but what else can you do?”

Antonio said, “I understand Latin and Greek.”

“Oh, my, such wares we cannot use here. Is there nothing else that you know?”

“Yes,” answered Antonio, “I can sing and play the guitar.”

“I wish I had an instrument at hand,” said the merchant; “but suppose you sing a song for me.”

Antonio did as the old man wished, and his voice was sweet and clear.

The merchant offered three gold pieces for Antonio, but as the dealers kept on raising the price, the merchant shrugged his shoulders, turned and went on.

The pirates called him back and offered him the boy for ten gold pieces. The merchant paid the price, and the boy belonged to him.

It grieved Antonio to think that he had been bought like a horse or a dog; but his trust and faith were so steadfast that he knew, in the fullness of time, some good would result from it.

The merchant was named Jesseph. He carried on a slave business, but only occasionally. Slaves who were accustomed to rough, hard work he never deigned to purchase; such as were young, active, refined or clever suited his purpose best. Besides, he tried to buy at the lowest figure, and sell at a great profit. He certainly hoped to sell Antonio at a high price.

When he reached home, he said to his overseer: “See what a fine specimen I have brought. Notice his manly bearing and refined, handsome face. See the intelligence that beams from his eyes. All these things fill me with the expectation of soon disposing of him profitably.

“Now,” said he, turning to Antonio, “go with my overseer and buy yourself a guitar of the very best make.” Then, addressing the overseer, he said, “Be sure you pay the very least amount possible.”

When they returned Jesseph bade Antonio play and sing.

"Oh, that is beautiful!" cried he. "That touches the heart. You talk well and you sing well; both are good recommendations and will certainly secure for you a fine position." And, thought he to himself, "will bring me a good price, too."

Jesseph did not try to sell Antonio immediately. He hoped to teach him a little of the language, manners and customs of the Turks, so that he could the better fill a position in a Turkish household. He gave him instruction, and was surprised at his rapid progress. He fed him well and housed him well, and exacted from him daily labor at clerical work. Often Antonio was obliged to unpack large cases of goods; but he performed all the work with patience, cheerfulness and obedience.

CHAPTER III. IN THE TURKISH FAMILY

A year had slowly passed. One day Jesseph called Antonio to him and said: “I have some good news to impart. I have secured a very desirable position for you, and I am certain that you will meet all the requirements.”

Jesseph bade Antonio gather together his things, and provided him with a suitable outfit. At the end of the week, he conducted Antonio to a Turkish house in the heart of the city. The servant, having announced their arrival, ushered them into a magnificent reception room.

The master of the house, a Turk, clad in rich Turkish garments, sat upon a divan, smoking a long bamboo pipe which was filled with fragrant tobacco. Beside him, on a low table, stood a cup of coffee.

Turning to Antonio, the Turk said, “I have been told that you are a fine singer and player. Let me hear you perform.”

Modestly Antonio addressed the Turk and said: “I can sing nothing in your language; I know only Italian songs.”

“That will please me, as I understand Italian. Just sing and play what you know best,” said the Turk.

Then Antonio, who felt himself an outcast from his own pleasant, sunny Italy, and transported as a captive to Africa, softly lifted his voice, and sang a song of home and fatherland, with deep tenderness and soulfulness.

The Turk listened attentively, the smoke rising from his pipe, and said as soon as the song was ended: “Bravo! your talent exceeds my expectation.”

After plying Antonio with a few more questions, he said, “I think you possess the necessary qualifications.”

Then the Turk counted out one hundred gold pieces to Jesseph and laid them upon the table. Jesseph counted them and placed them in his leather bag. “Your honor,” said he, turning to the Turk, “will be pleased with this bargain, I am sure; and you, Antonio, must show by your good works that you are worthy the price. Live well! Adieu!”

The Turk, Ashmed by name, was a rich merchant who traded extensively with other countries. He wished Antonio to carry on his correspondence with French and Italian merchants, and to serve in his house.

As it was now time to dine, he directed Antonio to prepare himself and then proceed to the dining−room.

[Illustration: “Now you may sing and play for us.”]

Here Antonio became acquainted with the other members of the household. At the table there were four persons, Ashmed, his wife, Fatime, and their two children, a boy and a girl.

As Ashmed's wife removed the veil which had concealed her face, Antonio was struck by her exquisite beauty. The children, who were very well behaved, greeted him in a friendly way and watched him attentively. Antonio tried to do his best, and felt amply repaid when Ashmed said: “Your services this day have pleased us. Now you may sing and play for us.”

As Antonio had noticed the affection which existed in this household, he sang a sweet Italian song of motherly love.

“The song is beautiful,” said the girl. And the boy said, “I wish I could sing like that.”

“Very well,” said the father, “Antonio shall teach you.”

The children were overjoyed, and Antonio assured the father that it would give him great pleasure to instruct them. The music served as a bond to draw them closer, and soon the children grew very fond of Antonio. This pleased the parents, and won for Antonio their full appreciation.

CHAPTER IV. THE LION

Ashmed now decided to take his family, Antonio included, to visit his country estate, which lay in the southwestern part of Algeria near the mountains. Here he owned a large house, surrounded by a beautiful garden. A short distance from the house stood a great number of olive trees belonging to the estate. Many slaves were busily employed gathering the olives, which were afterwards pressed to extract the oil.

Shortly after their arrival, Ashmed took his family to view the estate and to watch the laborers finishing their day's work. The sun was fast declining and the men, before leaving the grounds for the day, tried to extinguish a small fire which they had shortly before lighted. They stamped on the burning material and scattered it, leaving a brand or two to die out slowly.

Ashmed and Fatime walked on to view the mountains, whose tops glowed in the sunlight, while the valley lay in shadow. The two children enjoyed themselves chasing insects that looked to them like flying diamonds.

Suddenly there came down the mountain path a ferocious lion, with bristling mane and wide open month. All fled toward the house, pale with fright. The little girl, Almira, who could not run so fast, lost her footing and fell helpless on the ground as the lion was approaching her. Antonio quickly seized a glowing fire−brand, swung it in circles and thus renewed the flames. With this fiery torch whirling before him, he walked boldly in the direction of the lion.

He knew that all animals fear fire. The lion stumbled, stood still, shook his mane, uttered a roar that brought a thunderous echo from the mountains, then slowly retreated, always keeping his eyes fixed upon the torch. The enraged lion again stood still, growled and roared louder than before, and once more stood ready to spring. Antonio plucked up courage, and steadily swung his fiery weapon before him. The lion stood still for the third time. Suddenly it turned, trotted up the mountain path, and soon disappeared in the darkness of the approaching night.

In the meantime the frightened child had reached her mother, who had tried hard to save her, but had found herself too helpless to move. Almira sank into her mother's arms, overcome with the shock. The mother pressed her child's pale face close to her own, and their tears mingled. The father turned his eyes, full of gratitude, toward heaven. He drew Antonio, inwardly trembling, close to his side and pressed his hands in silent thanks. Little Aladin caressed his sister and said: “How glad I am that you are saved. If Antonio had not been here, the lion would have eaten you.”

The father and mother praised Antonio for his heroism. But Antonio was only too glad to have saved Almira; and at night he thanked God for the strength and courage which He had sent him to save a human life.

CHAPTER V. THE OFFER

In his whole life Antonio had never slept so peacefully as he did on this night; never had he arisen from his bed in such a happy frame of mind as on the following morning. He walked out into the garden and gazed for a long time at the sun, just peeping over the hills; he thought it had never shone so brightly. Never had the heavens appeared so blue or the flowers more vivid. Each dewdrop, too, seemed to be more brilliant. All nature proclaimed itself friendlier than ever. With the fragrance of the flowers, his grateful prayer ascended to heaven. As he went about gathering blossoms for the decoration of the house, he met his master, Ashmed, who wished him a pleasant good−morning.

“Come with me; I have something important to tell you,” said Ashmed.

He took Antonio affectionately by the hand and led him to a pathway lined on both sides with flowering bushes, where they walked up and down for a few moments in deep silence. After a short pause, Ashmed said: “I am greatly indebted to you, Antonio. You have saved my child. Each moment I realize your bravery more and more fully. From this hour you shall no longer be my slave, but I will look upon you as my son. You shall share all our joys.”

For a moment Antonio seemed unable to utter a word, so completely was he lost in thought and overcome with emotion. Oh, the delight of being once more free, with the possibility of some day clasping in his arms his loved ones, still so far away. Suddenly awaking from his reverie, Antonio thanked Ashmed again and again.

Resuming their walk, Antonio talked of his childhood and his home in Italy; and so tenderly and pathetically did he speak of his parents that Ashmed's heart was deeply moved.

Appreciating the confidence and love which he felt drawing him closer and closer to the Turk, Antonio continued the conversation. He vividly described his home and country, and expressed a great longing to visit the familiar scenes again, and be clasped in the arms of his parents.

This awoke in Ashmed a sense of the great loss which Antonio and his parents had suffered. As he had on the previous day almost lost his dear Almira, he now understood much better what the loss of a child could mean. He began to think how noble it would be to restore Antonio to his parents. He said nothing, however, and together they walked toward home.

When Antonio entered the house he found Fatime awaiting her husband.

“Good Antonio!” she cried, as he entered, “you certainly performed a heroic deed yesterday. You snatched my child from death's grasp, and you did it at the risk of your own life.”

“It was no more than my duty,” said Antonio.

Then Almira took his hand and said: “Antonio, how good you were to save me”; and she kissed him again and again.

Fatime then led him to talk of himself, and became intensely interested in the tale of his home and early training. Her mother's heart went out to the boy who had saved her child.

Breakfast had been long delayed. As Ashmed now entered the room, the meal was soon dispatched, and the children went with Antonio to an adjoining room, where they sang and played till dinner time.

CHAPTER VI. THE PLANS

Ashmed and Fatime withdrew to the library, and seated themselves to enjoy a quiet half−hour in conversation.

“My dear husband,” said his wife, “I wish you had come a few moments sooner, and you would have heard a sad story. It was so full of love and longing that if I could help Antonio get back to his mother I feel that I should be repaying him, in a measure at least, for saving my child. Oh, how much better I understand now what a mother must feel at the loss of a child.”

Ashmed's face brightened as he heard these words. “How thankful I am that you are so minded,” said he. “I feel just as you do, and I wish to discuss the matter fully with you.”

Fatime was ready with plans at once. “You have,” said she, “often spoken of taking a trip to Italy and making your residence there. What could better suit your purpose than to do it now. Our treasures of gold and silver, pearls, diamonds and other valuables we could take with us. Our landed estates and all your wares we could sell. Let us do so as soon as possible, and leave Algiers forever.”

Ashmed praised his wife for her cleverness, and resolved to carry out her plans immediately.

After a few more months of planning, he met with unusual success in disposing of his property, real and personal, and with his wife, the children and Antonio soon took passage on a steamer bound for Italy.

As the city of Algiers receded from view, Ashmed and his family felt happy. Antonio was the happiest boy in the world. The thought of home and parents made the voyage seem a short one to him; and soon the city of Salerno could be seen in the distance. When the steamer reached port, Ashmed and his family took up their quarters at a hotel, while Antonio was permitted to seek his home and family.

One evening, as Antonio's parents were seated beneath a tree at the door of their cottage, thinking and talking of their loved boy, there came toward them a stranger. At first they did not recognize him as their Antonio, for he had grown taller and his complexion browner; but when they looked into his face, they saw there such an expression of love and tenderness, that they immediately knew their son. Oh, the great joy of this meeting, and the embracing and hand−shaking! Words failed them; for they were so overcome with emotion that they could not speak; but they drew him in triumph into the house. Antonio removed his cloak and stood before them, richly clad, suitable to his station. His mother soon prepared a sumptuous meal for him, and while partaking of it, he related to his parents the events that had occurred during his long absence. They wept over his woes, and rejoiced over his bravery, and praised him for his steadfastness.

At the end of the week Ashmed and his family called upon Antonio's people. Ashmed honored them as if they were his own. He knew, too, that they had met with many financial losses, so he had made out a deed to them, which he handed to them, saying: “As I have been benefited through you and your son, whom you trained so well, and who saved my child, I feel that it is my duty to share my fortune with you. Here is a deed which represents one−fourth of my wealth.”

“No—no,” answered Antonio's father. “Far be it from me to accept one penny. True, we are not rich; but neither are we poor, and in the return of our long−lost Antonio we feel richly repaid. We offer you our gratitude and thank you for your protection of him, and for your generosity.”

“I regret that you will not accept my offer, but I trust you will not prevent me from bestowing it upon your son, Antonio. He has been so well tested that I know riches will not spoil him. Here, my dear Antonio, take this deed.”

“I,” answered Antonio, “cannot accept your handsome gift, but if I may, I would beg you to use your riches in behalf of those men who were taken captive with me on that pirate ship, particularly the young lawyer, the poor sailor and the old fisherman, and buy their freedom for them. There is a society here in Salerno which devotes its time and attention to the needs of the outcast, the lost and the captive; and as it is in great need of funds, I know that your donation would be most acceptable to it and be productive of much good. I beg you to use the money in this way. A greater charitable work you can never perform.”

Ashmed answered: “Not only half, but all of this money, I will give as a ransom for the three unfortunates you name, and for many more.”

This greatly pleased Antonio, and he said: “I thank you sincerely, and I am sure that many blessings will be

sent you in return.”

CHAPTER VII. RESTORED TO FREEDOM

After searching for a suitable place to settle, Ashmed purchased a beautiful house not far from Antonio's home. The families exchanged visits, and their friendly relations continued for years and years. Antonio resumed his studies at the best colleges, his tuition being paid by his friend and benefactor.

One day, at Eastertide, Antonio returned home for a short visit. Ashmed and his family called upon Antonio, to whom they presented a letter which they had just received. In it, Antonio read the greetings which his friend, the lawyer, extended to him, together with thanks to him and Ashmed for their kind helpfulness in securing his liberty for him.

On the following day, as the guests were all seated at the table, a knock announced some strangers. They were the old fisherman and the young sailor who had been captives with Antonio, but were now free and had come to offer their thanks. It was a touching sight.

Ashmed said, “Don't thank me, but rather this boy. He is your emancipator.”

“Yes,” said the old fisherman, “this is the boy who appeared to us, like an angel, and comforted us as we sat in chains. We now lay our thanks at his feet.”

Antonio waved them back and said, “Thank my dear parents, for they taught me by word and example; and everything I have done is due to their training.”

Then Antonio's father stepped into their midst and raising his eyes to heaven, said: “All honor and praise we give to God. As always, He has made everything turn out for the best. He sends us great sorrows for some good purpose; but He also sends us great joys. When a child follows the good instructions received from good parents, makes good use of his talents, and forgets not to be grateful, he will become an instrument of good for the benefit of humanity. Antonio was sent to you in your captivity, and through Antonio you were all led back to your liberty. Let us give thanks.”

After a long silence, the conversation again became animated. The men narrated the varied incidents in their lives, and talked about their future prospects.

Ashmed gave the men some ready money with which to start in business, and they promised to repay him as soon as they were able. Ashmed did not wish the money refunded, but they felt that it would be more manly to do this.

As the time for departure arrived, the men bade Antonio and Ashmed good−bye, and were off.

The next day Antonio returned to college. He continued his studies there for several years, and was graduated with high honors.

In the course of time he became an opera singer of international fame. He always maintained a dignified bearing, free from any vanity; and recognizing his gift as coming from God, accepted the praise and acclamation of the world in all humility.

He found time in his busy life to help the needy, and later became a director of the society which we have said was organized for the rescue of the outcast. He devoted his voice, his hands, his strength and his life to the betterment of mankind.

THE ARTIST'S MASTER−PIECE

[Illustration: “Hans, undaunted, stepped up to her father.”]

CHAPTER I. THE GIFT

A little village with its scattered glimmering lights lay in peaceful dreams. Just as a black swan draws her young under her, so the mighty Cathedral rested in the midst of the low houses, which seemed to creep, like birds, under its wing.

It struck twelve from the church tower, and larger and smaller clocks, near and far, carried the message onward. Dead silence again hovered over the sleeping village.

Just as dawn bathed the hills in sunlight, two stately men wandered along the Cathedral Square. One seemed somewhat older, with his full gray beard. His hair, rich and abundant, curled beneath his velvet cap. He walked so majestically that one could see, at the very first glance, that he was no ordinary person, but one upon whose shoulders an invisible weight rested. Handsome, tall and noble, just as one would picture the highest type of man—a king from head to foot.

Here, in the little village of Breisach, as he named it, Emperor Maximilian liked to rest from the cares of his Empire. Here, in this little retreat, filled with calm and quietude, he loved to wander. From here he sent letters full of tender thoughts to his daughter in the Netherlands.

He loved the place well, and christened it “Care−Free.”

As Emperor Maximilian walked proudly, but with heavy tread, along the parapet of the Cathedral Square, his eye rested upon the gay scene at his feet. To−day the invisible world of care pressed heavily upon his shoulders. Suddenly he stood still, and turning to his private secretary, he said, “I wonder who those children are who are so industriously planting a rose−bush in the niche of the wall?”

The children, a girl and a boy (the former about eight, and the latter twelve years of age), were so engrossed in their work that they had not noticed the approach of the Emperor, until his presence was so near that it startled them. They turned full face upon him. Then the boy touched the girl and said, “It's the Emperor!”

“What are you doing there?” he asked, and his artistic eye feasted on the beauty of this charming pair.

“We are planting a rose−bush,” said the boy, undaunted.

The Emperor smiled, and said, “What is your name?”

“Hans Le Fevre, sir.”

“And the little one, is she your sister?”

“No, she is Marie, our neighbor's child.”

“Ah!—you like each other very much?”

“Yes, when I'm old enough, and when I own a knife, I'm going to marry her.”

The Emperor opened his eyes wide, and said, “Why do you need a knife?”

“Surely,” answered the boy, earnestly, “if I have no knife I cannot cut, and if I cannot cut I can earn no money. My mother has always said that without money one cannot marry. Besides, I should have to have much money to enable me to marry my little friend Marie, as she is the Counselor's daughter.”

“But,” questioned the Emperor, “what do you want to cut?”

“Wood!”

“Ha! ha! I understand. You want to be a wood−carver. Now, I remember that I once met two young boys, named Le Fevre. They were studying in Nurnberg, with Durer, 'The Prince of Artists.' Were they, perhaps, your relatives?”

“Yes, my cousins, and once I saw them carve, and I would like to learn how, too; but my father and uncle are dead, and my mother never buys me a knife.”

The Emperor thrust his hand into his pocket, and after much fumbling and jingling, pulled out a knife with an artistically carved handle. “Will that do?” said he.

The boy flushed, and one could see how beneath his coarse, torn shirt his heart beat with joy.

“Yes,” stammered the boy, “it's beautiful.”

“Well, take it and use it diligently,” said the Emperor.

The boy took the treasure from the Emperor's hand as carefully as if it were red hot and might burn his fingers.

“I thank you many times!” was all that he could say; but in his dark eyes there beamed a fire of joy whose sparks of love and gratitude electrified the Emperor.

“Would you like to go to your cousins in Nurnberg, and help them in plate−engraving! There's plenty of work there.”

“I would like to go to Durer in Nurnberg, but I don't want to be a plate−engraver. I would rather cut figures that look natural.”

“That's right,” said the Emperor, “you will be a man, indeed; always hold to that which is natural and you will not fail.”

At that moment the Emperor drew a leather bag from his velvet riding jacket and gave it to the boy.

“Be careful of it. Save the golden florins within; give them to no one. Remember, the Emperor has ordered that they be used toward your education. Study well, and when you are full−grown and able to travel, then go to Durer, in Nurnberg. Convey to him my greetings; say to him that, as I, while in his studio one day, held the ladder for him lest he fall, so should he now hold the ladder of fame for you, that you may be able to climb to the very top of it. Will you promise me all that, my boy?”

“Yes, your majesty!” cried Hans, inspired, and, seizing the Emperor's right hand, he shook it heartily and kissed it. Then the Emperor passed on, while the boy stood there in a dream. Marie still held tightly to her apron.

Just at that moment a servant appeared who had been in search of Marie. The children ran to meet her and related their experience with the Emperor. The servant called all the townsfolk together to see the knife and the contents of the bag, but wise Hans kept the bag closed.

The next day the Emperor rode off; but for many days to come his talk with Hans was the town topic. “Surely, it is no wonder,” said the envious ones. “Hans always was a bold boy and knew how to talk up for himself, so why shouldn't he know how to talk to the Emperor?” This speech was decidedly undeserved; but Hans was too young to understand their meanness. He was absorbed in the Emperor's greatness and kindliness.

CHAPTER II. UNDER THE EMPEROR'S BUSH

Years passed. Hans Le Fevre lost his mother and Marie hers; and closer and closer did the bond of companionship draw these children.

In the evening, when her father was busy with a committee−meeting and the housekeeper was gossiping with the neighbors, Hans and Marie would climb the garden wall. Here they would sit together, while Hans cut beautiful toys for her, such as no child of those times had. He would talk with her about all the beautiful pictures and carvings he had lately seen, and of the masters in the art of wood−carving; for now he was attending art lectures and studying hard. Hours were spent in this way; but often, when the opportunity offered, they would run off to the Cathedral and water the rose−bush, which Hans had now christened the “Emperor's Bush.”

There they loved best to linger, for there they hoped always that the Emperor would return. And often they would cry out aloud, “Your Majesty, Your Majesty, come again!”

But their voices died away unanswered; for, far from them, the Emperor was concerned with the affairs of State. The children waited for him in vain. The Emperor came no more.

As the time went by, the children grew, and the rose−bush grew also. Just as if the tender threads of love in their hearts had unconsciously entwined them as one around the roots of the little bush, it kept drawing them to itself, there in the niche of the wall. There they found each other, day after day. The bush was like a true friend, who held their two hands fast in his. But their true friend was not strong enough to hold together what other people wished to separate.

The lovely, highly respected Counselor's daughter was no longer permitted to meet Hans. Her father forbade her one day, saying that Hans was not only poor but was not even a native of the town. His ancestors were Hollanders who had wandered into Breisach. A stranger he was, and a poor stranger at that. He was a sort of Pariah and could not be fitted into their time−honored customs. Then, too, he did not pursue any regular trade. “He expects to be an artist.” At that time that was as good as to be a robber, or a tramp or a conjurer.

Whatever Hans did or whatever he worked at, he kept a secret. He had bought the little house in which he dwelt, and since his mother's death had lived there all alone. Nobody came or went, except a famous sculptor who had quarreled one day with a native in Breisach and been obliged to leave the town. People said that Hans helped him get away. Ever since that time Hans had been in ill−repute with his rich neighbor, the Counselor.

Often Hans met Marie at the “Emperor's Bush,” and these little meetings seemed to make them like each other more than they had ever dreamed. After Hans had missed Marie for many days, he sang a little song beneath her window.

The next day she met Hans at the “Emperor's Bush,” and there they promised to be true to each others always. Then, in a moment of ecstasy, Hans cried out, “Would that the Emperor were here!” Just as if he felt that no one but the Emperor was worthy of sharing his great joy.

As the Emperor did not come, Hans cut the initials “M.” and “H.” in the bark of the rosebush, and above it a little crown. This meant “Marie, Hans and Emperor Maximilian.”

The fall passed and winter came; and the children now seldom saw each other. Hans sang so frequently beneath Marie's window that her father heard him one night, and in great anger threatened to punish her if she continued her acquaintance with this boy.

One evening Hans and Marie stood for the last time under the rose−bush which they had planted eight years before. He was now a youth of twenty years; she a rosebud of sixteen summers.

It was a lowering day in February. The snow had melted and a light wind shook the bare branches of the bush. With downcast eyes she had related to him all she had been forced to hear concerning him; and big tears rolled down her cheeks.

“Marie,” said the boy in deep grief, “I suppose you will finally be made to believe that I am really a bad person?”

Then she looked full upon him, and a light smile played over her features as she said: “No, Hans, never, never. No one can make me doubt you. They do not understand you, but I do. You have taught me (what the others do not know) everything that is good and great and noble. You have made me what I am; just as your artistic hands

have cut beautiful forms out of dead wood." She took his big, brown hands and gently pressed them to her lips. "I believe in you, for you worship the Supreme with your art; and the man who does that, in word or deed, cannot be wicked."

"And will you always remain true, Marie, till I have perfected myself and my art, and can return to claim you?"

"Yes, Hans, I will wait for you; and should I die before you return, it is here under this rosebush, where we have spent so many happy hours, that I wish to be buried. You must return here to rest, when wearied by your troubles; and every rose−leaf that falls upon you will be a good wish from me."

Her tears fell silently, and their hearts were sorely tried by the grief of parting.

"Don't cry," said Hans, "all will yet be well. I am going to Durer, as the Emperor bade me. I will learn all that I can; and when I feel I know something, I will seek the Emperor, wherever he may be, tell him my desires, and beg him to intercede for me with your father."

"Oh, yes, the Emperor—if he were only here, he would help us."

"Perhaps he will come again," said Hans. "We will pray that he be sent to us, or I to him."

They sank upon their knees in the cold, soft winter grass; and it seemed to them as if a miracle would be performed, and the rose−bush be changed into the Emperor.

There—what was that? The big clock on the church struck slowly, solemnly, sadly—

The two looked up. "What is it, do you suppose? A fire—enemies, perhaps? I sense a great calamity," said she.

Just at that moment people were coming toward the church. Hans hurried up to them, to find out what was the trouble, while Marie waited.

"Where have you been, that you don't know? Why, yonder in the market place the notice was read—'the Emperor is dead!'" they cried.

"The Emperor is dead?"

There stood Hans, paralyzed. All his hopes seemed shattered. As soon as quiet reigned again, he returned to Marie, and seated himself on a bench. Leaning his head in uncontrollable grief against the slender stem of the rose−bush, he moaned aloud: "Oh, my Emperor, my dear, good Emperor, why did you leave me?" Lightly Marie touched his shoulder in sympathy.

The last rays of the setting sun had now departed. The last tones of the dirge had died away. Everything was still and deserted, as if there could never again be spring.

"Oh, Marie!" lamented Hans, hopelessly, "the King will never come again."

"Bear up," said Marie, "for we have each other." And as she gazed far off in the twilight, her eyes seemed like two exiled stars, yearningly seeking their home.

As Hans gazed at her, standing there before him with her hands crossed over her breast, in all her purity and humility, a great joy lit up his countenance. He folded his hands, inspired.

"Marie," he whispered, "let us not despair. In this very moment I have received an inspiration, and if I can bring to pass that which I now see in my mind's eye, I shall be an artist who will need the help of no one —not even an Emperor."

The dawn of the next day found Hans ready to set out on his journey. He carried a knapsack on his back, and on his breast the little leather bag which the Emperor had given him, with the few florins that remained. He closed the door of his little house, put the key into his pocket, and walked slowly off. Loud and clear sounded his rich, soft voice as he sang, "On the rose thorn, on the rose thorn, there my hope is hanging!"

Softly in Marie's house a window was raised, and with a little white handkerchief she gently waved her mute farewell.

Quickly mastering himself, Hans grasped his staff more firmly, and now only his heavy tread echoed through the streets.

CHAPTER III. NO PROPHET IN HIS OWN COUNTRY

Year after year passed. Hans Le Fevre had not been heard from. People thought of him, however, when they passed his house with the front door firmly locked and the shades drawn, and wondered who would next lay claim to it.

Only Marie thought constantly of him, and hoped and waited longingly. No pleading, no scolding, no threats could arouse her. She never left the house, unless it was to visit the rose−bush which she watered and tended so well that it had now grown tall and stately. She knew that the sight of it would cheer his faithful heart on his return. It was the only bond between them. He had planted it with her, and they both loved it. It was almost as high as the niche where it stood, and seemed as if it wished to stretch beyond. Marie bent it and fastened it to the wall with a string, so that its flowering top had to bend beneath the vaulted niche.

These quiet acts were her only joy, her only recreation. In work and prayer she passed her days, and her fresh young cheeks began to pale. Her father noticed the change, but without pity.

It was fortunate for her that his busy life took him away from home so often.

Just at this time the people of Breisach desired a new altar for their church. A proclamation was accordingly sent forth to all German artists to compete, by submitting drawings and estimates for the work. To the one who sent the best the contract would be given to carry out the design.

Marie heard little about this, as she seldom came in contact with the people. She lived lonely in her little home. It was now the fifth year since Hans' departure, and long ago his letters had ceased to come, because her father had forbidden any correspondence. Hans had no friends in Breisach through whom he could communicate. But such uncertainty gnaws. Marie was tired of waiting—very tired.

One afternoon she seated herself at her desk and started to write her last wish. Her father was absent, and she was unwatched.

“When I die,” she wrote, “I beg you to bury me yonder beside the Cathedral wall, under the rose−bush which I planted in my childhood. Should Hans Le Fevre ever return, I beg you—” she paused, for just then a song, at first soft, then louder, greeted her ears.

No star ever fell from heaven, no swallow ever flew more quickly than flew the maiden to her window, drawn by this call.

In trembling tones the final words of the song died away. Her paper, her ink, her pen, everything had fallen from her in her haste. As a captive bird, freed from its cage, flies forth joyously, so Marie bounded forth from her home. Faster and faster she went, never stopping till she reached the rose−bush. Breathless and with beating heart, she halted. There before her stood Hans Le Fevre.

They seated themselves upon the bench. Long, long they sat silently.

At last Hans said, “My dear, true girl, how pale you have grown. Are you ill?”

She shook her head. “No more, and I trust never again. But you stayed away much too long. Couldn't you have come back sooner?”

“No, my dear, I could *not*. Had I returned as a poor, struggling carver your father would have banished me from his door−step. We should then have seen each other again, only to be parted for the second time. So I waited till I had accomplished what I set out to do. I have traveled extensively and feasted my eyes on the beautiful works of art in great cities. I have studied under Durer, and now my name is mentioned with honor as one of Durer's pupils.”

“Oh, Hans, do you really believe that that will soften my father's heart?” said Marie, anxiously.

“Yes, Marie, I don't think that he can fail me. I heard in Nurnberg that a new altar is to be built in this Cathedral, so I hastened here to compete. Should I be deemed worthy to do such a piece of work, what could your father have against me?”

Marie, however, shook her head doubtfully; but Hans was full of hope.

“But see how our rose−bush has grown!” cried Hans in astonishment. “You tended it well; but it seems almost as if the roses had taken from you all your life and strength and health. Return my darling's strength to her,” Hans said laughingly; and taking a handful of roses, he softly stroked her face with them; but her cheeks remained

white.

"Rejoice, my rosebud, rejoice, my darling, for the spring will soon be here; and with my care you will soon be well."

A half hour later, the beadle walked timidly into the council hall of the high−gabled Council House, and said, "Honored Counselor, will you graciously pardon me, but there is a man without who pressingly begs to be ushered into your presence."

"Who is it?" asked the Counselor.

"It is Hans Le Fevre," answered the beadle, "but he is handsomely attired. I hardly recognized him."

This was a great surprise to all. Hans, the runaway, the tramp, who slipped away by night—to me. "See! see! ingeniously thought out," cried he.

"But just to design a thing is far easier than to carry it out," said another.

"Hans Le Fevre never did this kind of work before."

"Perhaps he has progressed," remarked the Mayor, "and possibly he would do it cheaper than the renowned Master Artist."

This idea took root. "But," said one, "it would be an unheard of thing to give such an exalted work to a simple boy like Hans Le Fevre, whom everybody knew as a stupid child, and whom we looked upon disdainfully. The appearance of the thing alone would not justify us in selecting him."

But this remark had its good side, too; for the gentlemen now decided that, in order that the work be given to the most competent, it would be advisable to send to Durer all the designs thus far submitted, and ask his opinion in the matter.

Marie cried bitterly when she heard of the treatment Hans had received; but Hans did not yet despair. At the same time that these worthy gentlemen dispatched the designs to Durer, Hans sent a letter to his great friend and teacher, in whom he had great faith.

Weeks elapsed. The Counselor's attention was directed to affairs of state, and thus withdrawn from his daughter, who lived and bloomed with the returning spring.

Hans had opened his desolate house, for which, in the meantime, he had carved a beautiful front door. Notwithstanding all the depreciation expressed for the native artist's ability, this door caused quite a sensation.

Durer's answer was long delayed. At last, after four weeks, the letter arrived. Who can describe the astonishment of the assembled committee, as the contents of the letter revealed the design of the disdainfully rejected applicant, Hans Le Fevre.

Durer wrote, "With the very best intentions, I could recommend no wiser course for you to pursue than to use the sketch presented by my friend and pupil, Hans Le Fevre; and I will furnish security for the complete execution of his plan. I cannot understand how a town that harbors in its midst such a genius, should look abroad for other artists. Hans Le Fevre is such an honorable lad and such a great artist, that the town of Breisach should be proud to name him as her own, and should do everything in its power to hold him captive; for to Hans the world lies open, and only his attachment to Breisach has moved him to return there once more."

Directly upon receipt of this letter, an unheard of number of villagers crowded the narrow street. Hans, who was working quietly in his shop ran to the window to see what the noise was about. But lo! the crowd had stopped at his house and loudly did they make the brazen knocker resound, as it struck the carved lion's head upon the door.

Hans came forth, and before him stood a deputation of men in festive attire, followed by a throng of residents.

"What do you desire of me?" asked Hans, surprised.

"Hans Le Fevre," began the speaker, "the honorable Counselor makes known to you that he has finally decided to honor your application, with the instruction that if money be needed for the purchase of materials, application may be made to the clerk of the town."

Hans clapped his hands in glee. "Is it true—is it possible!" said he. "To whom am I indebted for this good fortune?"

"The Council sends you this letter which we will now read before these assembled people." Hans had not noticed in his joy that his neighbor, the Counselor, had angrily closed his windows, as if the praise bestowed upon the young artist might offend his ears.

After the deputation had departed, and Hans found himself alone, he dressed, put a flower in his buttonhole,

and walked over to the Counselor's house; for now the moment had arrived when he could prove his worth.

CHAPTER IV. THE CONDITION

Marie opened the door. A loud cry of joy escaped her, and she ran to her room.

Hans, undaunted, stepped up to her father.

“What do you wish?” said the Counselor, with flashing eyes.

“I wish first to thank you for your faith in me.”

“You need not thank me,” interrupted her father. “I did not cast my vote for you.”

“So?” said Hans, disappointed. “That was not kind. What did you have to say against me?”

“What, do you still ask the same old question? You well know my opinion of you. You know that I wish my daughter to marry a good and honorable man.”

“Well,” said Hans, “I know a worthy man and I have come to bring him before you.”

“Pray, who can he be?”

“I, worthy Counselor.”

“You? Did anyone ever hear such audacity from a beggar boy?”

“Mr. Counselor, I never was a beggar. I was poor, but let that person come before you who dares say he ever gave me a cent. My father supported me until his death, when my mother took up the burden. The only thing I ever received was the King's gift, and for that I never begged. The King gave it to me out of his big heart. His eye could pierce with love the soul of humanity; and in me, a poor boy, he sensed appreciation. Truly, his money has accumulated interest. I am no beggar, Mr. Counselor, and will not tolerate such a speech.”

“No, you will not tolerate it;” said he, somewhat calmed. “Where, then, is your wealth?”

“Here,” said Hans Le Fevre, and he touched his head and his hands. “I have a thinking head and skilled hands.”

“Well, what do you purpose doing?”

“For the next two years I shall be busy with the altar, which will yield me ample means to marry your daughter.”

Long and wearily they argued, till Hans felt as if he could control himself no longer.

“O, patience!” he cried, “if it were not that I regard you as something holy, because you are the father of Marie, I would not brook your disdain. A king held the ladder for Durer, and a Counselor treats his beloved pupil like a rogue. Yonder is a laughing, alluring world. There I have enjoyed all the honors of my calling; and here, in this little dark corner of the earth, I must let myself be trodden upon. All because I bring a ray of sunshine and beauty that hurts your blinded eyes—in short, because I am an artist.”

“Go, then, into your artistic world. Why didn't you stay there? Why did you bother to return to this dark corner, as you name it?”

“Because I love your daughter so much, that no sacrifice I could make would be too great.”

“Did you for one moment think that I could sink so far as to allow my daughter to marry an artist?”

“Yes, considering the respect I enjoyed.”

“Well, I don't care how many times the King held the ladder, or whether or not he cleaned Durer's shoes, I will hold to this: that as impossible as it is for you to build within the Cathedral an altar that is yet higher than the Cathedral, just so impossible is it for you to marry my daughter, who is so much above you in station.”

“Mr. Counselor, is this your last word?” said Hans.

The Counselor laughed scornfully, and said, “Carve an altar that is higher than the church in which it is to stand. Then, and not before then, you may ask for my daughter.”

Hans hastened from his presence and turned his steps to the rose−bush. It was a beautiful day. Shadowless the world lay before him. Splendor and glory streamed from the sky. But nature in all her beauty seemed to him, this day, like a disinterested friend, who laughs while another grieves. He seated himself in the niche under the rose−bush, where somehow he always felt the Emperor's presence and influence, and where, too, he always found peace and hope.

But what hope could ever come to him again? Could the bush uproot itself and plead with the Counselor? Could the King, who had never returned in life, return from death to help him? No one could help him, for had not

the Counselor taken an oath, that he would not give his daughter to him, unless he built an altar higher than the church in which it should stand. This, of course, was impossible. His overcharged feelings gave vent to tears, and he cried, “My Emperor, my Emperor, why did you desert me?” This time Marie was not at his side to cheer him, and tell him that God would not desert him.

All was still, except the humming of the bees among the roses; and in the distance the birds sang. All of a sudden something struck him in the back. He thought that maybe the Emperor had returned. But what was it but the rosebush, which by the force of its own weight had loosened itself from the arched wall and had pressed itself outward. For the first time, Hans noticed that the bush had grown much higher than the niche in which it had been planted. As quick as lightning a thought flashed through his brain. What had the rose−bush taught him?

CHAPTER V. THE FULFILMENT

Hans could not see Marie, for her father had sent her far away.

From early morn till late at night Hans worked, without rest or quiet. Neither pleadings nor threats moved him to desist from his labors. He lived like a hermit in his workshop. Two long years had passed; and at last Hans appeared at the Council Chamber and made known the fact that he had accomplished the work assigned him.

Great excitement reigned in Breisach. The Cathedral was locked for three days, during which time the altar was to be placed. Many inquisitive neighbors gathered around the Cathedral to get a glimpse of the work, if possible. But well−wrapped and concealed, Hans brought the pieces, one by one, from his house—and so the excitement grew intenser every moment.

On the fourth day the altar was to be dedicated. Early in the day the people started for the Cathedral. Joyously the big clock resounded. From all sides, by foot and by wagon, the country folk swarmed to see the wonderful work, the talk of the neighborhood for the past two years.

At break of day Hans had hastened to the Cathedral once more to test his work with his critical eye. Just then the bell pealed forth. He dropped his hat, and with folded hands offered a short prayer.

Anyone who has worked for years, in the sweat of his brow, for future and fortune, knows how Hans felt as he stood there in his mute eloquence. His God understood it, too.

Now the crowd surged into the Cathedral, and the critical moment had arrived when the artist gave his work, executed through long, lonely days and nights, freely to the public eye. One last look he cast upon his creation, then he withdrew, and in anxious suspense watched the impression it would make upon the assembled people.

The morning sun sent her full rays directly upon the altar, and an exclamation of astonishment echoed from the high−vaulted roof. Joy and wonder filled each breast. There stood the altar before the people in all its glory. Was it really wood—stiff, hard wood—from which these figures had been carved? Were they not human? And that host of angels that seemed to be singing “Hallelujah,” each one so perfectly natural. All figures were life size. The entire work was entwined and crowned with wreaths of artistically carved foliage, the center branch of which reached upward to the arched ceiling.

The untrained eye of the simple villagers could not all at once, drink in such a work. Not one of them had ever beheld the like. They felt there must be some magic in it. They now crowded around the artist, who, modest and deeply affected, felt every eye that beamed upon him. The Mayor stepped forward and heartily shook him by the hand. Each one followed his example, except the Counselor, who leaned sullenly against a pillar.

Marie, who had been permitted to return for this occasion, stood beside her father, paler than ever, but with a heavenly expression in her charming face.

“Do you not notice that one of the angels on the altar resembles Marie?” said one to the other.

“True it is.”

“And that another angel resembles the Emperor Maximilian?” said an old man. Like lightning, this news flew from row to row. Marie and the Emperor had been portrayed.

“Yes, my friends,” said Hans, calmly and distinctly, “I did that because I know of nothing more beautiful in the world than the Emperor and Marie. God made people in His image, and the sculptor, who is like a creator, has the right to choose those forms which he feels are most like the Image.”

“Well said,” echoed from all sides.

Now Hans, with bold strides, neared the bench where the Counselor sat with his daughter.

“I still have something to say to you, and you must hear me. I have fully carried out your behest. Will you now keep your oath? You demanded of me what seemed impossible; namely, 'To build an altar higher than the Church in which it should stand,' and you solemnly vowed, that if I accomplished this, I should wed your daughter. Now, Mr. Counselor, look up. The altar is exactly one foot higher than the Church, and yet it stands within the Church—I have merely bent the top of it.”

The Counselor saw it and paled. He had not dreamed of such a thing. It sickened him; but, as Counselor, in all propriety and dignity, he would have to keep his word before these assembled people.

A long pause ensued. Hans kept his patience. Then the Counselor arose, and taking his daughter by the hand,

presented her to Hans, saying, “A Counselor should never break his word. There, take my child. You have fulfilled the condition and I keep my vow.”

Two young boys hastily brought in some branches from the rose−bush, and wove wreaths for the pair. With loud approval, they crowned the master and his bride. Humbly, Hans removed his crown, and laid it on the altar. “These roses belong to God. With them He saved me. Do you notice, Marie,” said he, as he pointed upward to the curved top of the altar, “that's what the rose−bush taught me. To you, Mr. Counselor, I would say that one may bend and still be greater than the one who causes him to stoop.”

A few weeks later, Hans and Marie were married at this altar. It was a wedding the elegance of which surprised Breisach. For his work the grateful town had paid Hans a sum of money which, for that period, was a small fortune.

Marie's father paid all the expenses which this occasion demanded. By this time he realized how unreasonable he had been, and did all in his power to make amends. Besides, he now respected his artist son−in−law, and for many years he lived with the couple in peace and happiness.

THE VINEYARD ON THE HILLSIDE

[Illustration: “They reached the cradle and discovered the child in it.”]

CHAPTER I. MISSING

Many years ago, in a quaint little village bordering the bank of the Rhine River, there lived a hard−working farmer, named Joseph Swift, and his industrious wife, Caroline.

Their neat little white cottage stood very near the edge of the water, where on the bright, sunny days it was beautifully reflected. On one side of the cottage, there jutted out into the river a little hill, overgrown with grapevines which Joseph had planted, and which as a result of training and watchfulness yielded him abundant fruit. South of the house there stretched a field, bordered on all sides by leafy shrubbery. This plot of ground was used by Mrs. Swift as a bleachery, and through her industry and carefulness she succeeded in making her linen snow−white, so that all the housewives of that village and neighboring town brought her their linens to bleach.

In this way Joseph Swift and his good little wife earned their daily bread and a little more to lay by for time of need.

A big brown dog guarded the bleachery during the spring and summer months; but in the early fall, when the grapes were ripening, he transferred his attention to the vineyard. During the entire year, and particularly in the long winter months, the house was his particular care.

The little family lived happily and contentedly in simplicity and love. These good people found their greatest joy and richest treasure upon earth in their five little children. The youngest was a baby, less than a year old. They trained them with the greatest care, and taught them to work and pray. The children had a living example of goodness and uprightness in their parents. This happy household, however, was soon to experience a great change.

A cold, hard winter had set in and covered the fields and house−tops with many blankets of snow. The river had frozen; and the people feared that when the ice−floes and the immense quantity of snow began to melt, the river would overflow its banks.

Weeks passed and at last a thaw set in. The ice and snow began to melt. The brooks and rivulets swiftly carried the water to the great river.

Joseph Swift and his family retired early one night, and lay wrapped in deep sleep. About midnight, the father's slumbers were broken by the tones of the village clock. As he became more and more awake, he heard a great splashing of water.

Hastily jumping out of his bed, he seized his clothing and rushed to find out the cause of the disturbance. But so much water had filled the hall that for a moment it seemed as if he could go no further. He managed, however, to push along. As he opened the door of the house, the water rushed in with such force and volume that it almost tore him from his footing. He sprang back into the bed−room and cried: “Oh, Caroline, Caroline, help me save our children!”

Caroline, half awake, tumbled out of bed and wrapped a garment around each child. Then both parents made strides to reach the vineyard on the hill.

The water rushed against them with such violence that they nearly sank with their load. The night was dark, for the moon had long since gone under and heavy clouds obscured the stars. The rain was falling in torrents and a dreadful wind raged about them. The water so filled the streets and by−ways that the Swifts thought each moment would be their last. The children, half asleep, were crying loudly. From each house still louder cries reached their ears.

In the distance, lamps began to flash their lights. Hundreds of people could be seen striving with all their might to reach the hill. On all sides difficulties and dangers confronted them.

Near the low window of a little hut, there stood a weeping mother with her children. She passed them, one after the other, to her husband, who stood in water up to his waist and could scarcely keep an upright position.

In another place, grown sons were carrying an invalid mother, fleeing with difficulty on account of their heavy burden. Some brave, humane men hurried along with boats and brought them safely to the hill.

Mrs. Swift, with a child on each arm, was overthrown. Her husband, equally burdened with two other children, could render her no assistance. Two stalwart men rushed toward her, however, and brought mother, children, and father to the neighboring hill.

Some men gathered sticks, and after many futile attempts at last started a fire on the hill, so that the drenched people might dry themselves.

As Mrs. Swift, breathless and in a half−dazed condition, reached the hill top, she looked at her children and uttered a loud cry: “Where is my baby, where is my Edward?” The child—the baby—who had lain in a cradle at the mother's bedside, was missing.

The water had rushed into the house in such volume that the cradle had begun to move, and was carried along gradually by the force of the water, till it passed out unnoticed through the open door. The mother had tried to reach the cradle in the darkness; but, not finding it, she had concluded that the father had taken the cradle and the baby to a place of safety, and so she had given all her attention to the other children. But now, discovering her mistake, she wrung her hands in grief and cried pitifully. She started to return to her home to seize her child from so dreadful a fate, but the father held her in his strong arms.

“Stay,” said he, “you could never reach our house safely. The water is rising too quickly and is too powerful. I will go and rescue our child. Our helpful neighbors will go with me.”

“Yes, willingly,” said the two men who had just helped Mrs. Swift.

Armed with long poles which they could thrust into the ground and with which they could steady themselves, they started forth by the light of a lantern.

All the people on the hill watched those three men tremblingly. At last the light died away in the distance. Still they looked, although they could distinguish nothing. They only heard the dreadful rushing of the waters, the sighing of the winds, and from time to time the crash of a falling house.

Mrs. Swift waited with bated breath for the return of her husband and his faithful assistants. An hour had passed and nothing could be heard or seen of them. Her fears increased each moment. At last the father returned, with saddened countenance. One of his assistants said: “It was impossible to reach your house, my good woman; the water was too deep. We were in water up to our necks and were almost drowned.”

Then the other man spoke up and said: “But don't give up hope, for many brave men have been helping, all along the way. Before the water got the upper hand, they went about with lanterns, rousing the people. Perhaps they have cared for the baby in its cradle.”

Many people, laden with household goods, reached the hill from time to time, but the cradle never appeared and no one knew the whereabouts of the baby.

After the dreadful night, the dawn at last broke forth; rain and storm subsided; the clouds rolled away and the morning sun streaked the horizon in flaming red.

From the people gathered about the fire, there arose a dreadful cry of dismay. By the morning light, they saw that half of their village had been submerged.

Mr. Swift's house, with many others, had been swept away by the flood. Many a house stood roofless and in a state of threatened collapse. People cried for the loss of their homes, but Mrs. Swift cried for the loss of her babe. “Though everything be gone,” said she, “I should care not, had I but my child.” Poor Mr. Swift, too, was more concerned about his baby than about his other losses, and it was with a great effort that he controlled his feelings.

The children lamented the loss of their brother as well as that of their big pet dog, Rover.

Meanwhile, from the neighboring towns, many people had come in boats, brought the homeless ones provisions and clothing, and offered them shelter in their own homes. This was a great comfort for the unfortunates.

Mr. Swift accepted their hospitality for that night. “To−morrow morning,” said he, “I will try to reach my brother's home, where I know I can be housed with my family until the spring. Then I will rebuild my home and help my neighbors build theirs. Let us not forget that if we faithfully do our best, God will not forsake us. Perhaps this calamity may in time bring us some blessing.”

CHAPTER II. THE FAITHFUL DOG

Shortly after the Swifts fled, on the night of the flood, the walls of their house had fallen with a thud, and only the strong beams remained standing. By the time the house collapsed, the baby in its cradle had drifted many miles down the river, along the banks of which much damage had been wrought. The cradle passed a village which had been built on an eminence and had consequently escaped.

The villagers who had gathered near the shore saw various household goods floating down the river; there a table, here a chair, yonder a trunk, and in one place even the entire roof of a house.

Two daring boys ventured to stand as near the water's edge as possible, in order to see things a little better. All of a sudden one of the boys cried: “Oh, see, there is a cradle afloat in mid−stream!” The other boy, whose sight was keener, shouted: “See, a dog is swimming after it and is trying to push it toward the shore!”

Several strong men standing near−by had long hooked poles, and were busily engaged dragging things out of the river. One of them, a young fisherman, saw the cradle and cried: “A baby must be in that cradle, because the dog would not bother about an empty cradle. Up, brothers, up, let us try to save the child. Let not the fidelity and bravery of a dog put us to shame.”

Notwithstanding the threatening danger of being crushed to death by the rushing ice−floes, the men launched a boat and jumped into it. They reached the cradle and discovered the child in it. They placed cradle and babe in their boat and brought them safely to land.

The people rushed forward and crowded around the cradle to look at the infant. Among the spectators were a gentleman and his wife, named Trent.

“Oh, what a beautiful child,” cried Mrs. Trent, as she bent over the baby. “See how peacefully it sleeps, not knowing through what dangers it has passed, not dreaming it has been saved.”

Mrs. Trent had lately lost a dear little baby, so she approached her husband and said: “Do see how this babe resembles our lost Isabel; and it seems to be of the same age. Let me take this child, and if its parents cannot be found, I will be a mother to it.”

Mr. Trent smiled pleasantly, nodded his head and said: “Well, well, take it. Let us not be less sympathetic than these three men, and that pitying dog.”

By this time the poor dog had reached the shore, and stood shaking the water from his coat; so that the bystanders had to rush aside to escape a good wetting. Then he began to bark with joy and wag his tail, springing first at this one, then at that one, as if to express his thanks for the baby's rescue.

Mr. Trent noticed this, and said: “See how thankful this dog is, and human beings should never be less thankful.” He took some gold coins out of his pocket, and handed two to each of the three fishermen. They hesitated, not wishing to take the money. “What we have done was purely out of love for humanity and without any thought of reward,” said they.

Mr. Trent was pleased with them, and said: “Yes, I understand and realize how very noble it is of you to refuse a reward for your self−sacrificing services, but I must insist that you take it.”

“Well, then,” said the younger fisherman, “we will accept the money and help our poor brothers in the neighboring villages who have suffered so many losses during this flood.”

The dog had now passed through the crowd. His loud barks of joy had awakened the babe, and it started to cry. Mrs. Trent raised the child in her arms and kissed it. It looked about as if it were seeking something.

“You are looking for your mother,” said she, “but little do we know where she is. Cry not, my dear, I will be your mother.”

She then carried it into her house, while the two fishermen followed with the cradle. The faithful dog did not wait for an invitation, but followed of his own accord.

CHAPTER III. THE FOND FOSTER−PARENTS

Mrs. Trent hastily heated some milk, and with a small spoon she fed the foster−child. Then she dressed it in fine clothes which had belonged to Isabel, and brought it to Mr. Trent, saying: “See what a beautiful babe this is, with its golden, curly hair, blue eyes and red cheeks. How fresh and healthy it looks. But now we have a weighty matter to decide. We do not know the baby's name and we must call it something. Let us take your name.”

“Very well,” said Mr. Trent, “we will adopt him and call him Daniel Trent. That is a very nice name. As God saved Daniel out of the lion's den, so He saved this child from a dreadful calamity. Let us hope that this boy will grow to be as sensible, with as much faith in God, and as obedient to God's will, as young Daniel was.”

“Let us hope it may be so,” said his wife, as she cast admiring glances upon the babe.

The faithful dog who had accompanied her now rested for awhile, as he saw the babe in comfort and safety. After he had been fed and had stretched himself awhile before the fire, he suddenly arose, shook himself well, and rushed out of the house. As soon as he reached the water's edge, he swam across the river, ran hastily up on the opposite shore and was soon lost to view.

“Have a care, my dear,” said her husband, “I fear you will soon lose your babe. I am sure the dog has gone in quest of the child's parents and will return here with them.”

Mrs. Trent sighed. “Oh,” said she, “I understand how pained those people must be. For that reason, I would willingly restore the lost babe to its parents. Although it would be very hard for me to part with it.”

After an absence of three days, just as Mr. and Mrs. Trent were seated at the fireside, the good, faithful dog rushed into their presence and greeted them by barking and joyfully wagging his tail. But in a few moments he hung his head, dropped his tail, and looked very sad; and from that moment on he showed no desire to leave the house.

“From the dog's manner,” said Mr. Trent, “I surmise that he was not successful in finding the baby's parents, who were undoubtedly lost in the flood. Let us take good care of him, for he has so faithfully fulfilled his duty. We, too, have a duty to perform, for we must train and educate this child whom we have taken into our family.”

Though the child's position in life was now on a higher plane, yet his training was no different from that which his own parents would have given him. His new parents worked hand in hand. Daniel soon felt a childish reverence for his foster−father, and toward his foster−mother he showed a trusting love. He grew to be a handsome boy, displaying many splendid talents. He was a diligent scholar and stood highest among his classmates. He did everything in his power to give pleasure to his foster−parents. He regarded them as his true parents, for no one had told him otherwise. It had happened that when Daniel was two years old his foster−parents bought a house in another section of the country and moved into it. The new neighbors looked upon Daniel as the real son of Mr. and Mrs. Trent.

CHAPTER IV. THE ERRAND

When Daniel Trent had reached his fourteenth year, he was able to assist his foster−father in his business. He wrote a fine hand, did much of his “father's” clerical work, and carried out all orders with exactness.

One evening he was sent out on an errand to a little village on the Rhine, not far from where they now resided. Daniel was pleased at the prospect of a long walk in the cool evening air. His good dog, who was still living and in fairly good condition for his age, accompanied him.

Just as Daniel's business had been transacted, a ship came into port. The passengers crowded the gang plank and the wharf. Several boys and young men pressed forward and offered to show the travellers the way and to carry their baggage.

At last a little boy addressed a refined, though shabbily dressed old man, and asked if he could direct him to a hotel.

“Oh, no,” said the old man, “I will remain on shipboard over night; I couldn't pay the price of a room in a hotel. My meal will be a sandwich that I have in this bag; and as for a drink, a glass of fresh water will appease my thirst.”

Daniel listened with sympathy to the old man, who had an honest kind look. Timidly moving a little closer to him, he said, while his face grew red: “If you would not feel offended, I should like to give you a little money, out of my allowance.”

“My dear young man,” said the traveller, “true it is that I have never accepted charity, but I must admit, you have offered it to me in such a friendly, well−meaning manner that I would gladly accept it, if I could; I thank you heartily for it. May your kind thoughtfulness be rewarded.”

The dog, who in the meantime had hurried to the water's edge to quench his thirst, hastily returned, just as Daniel was about to continue his way. The next minute, he was leaping and springing and barking, as loudly as he could, and showing unbounded joy. The traveller cried out in astonishment: “My dog, you are my Rover. Do I find you again, after so many years? How did you get here?”

Daniel looked surprised and said: “It seems that the dog knows you very well. Did he ever belong to you?”

“Yes, truly,” said the man, “but I thought he was drowned thirteen years ago, when the Rhine overflowed and carried my house with it. I never expected to see my dog again.—But,” said he, as he dried his eyes, “I sustained at that time a greater loss than could ever be retrieved.”

“What was that?” asked Daniel.

Then the old man told the tale of the flood and said that, in the darkness of the night, and in the great hurry and excitement, his youngest child, a babe, had been left lying in its cradle. Perhaps it had been crushed to death by the collapsing walls of his house and been buried in the waters of the river.

Daniel was deeply moved by the sad fate of this babe. Little did he dream that he was the child whom he was pitying. He tried to comfort the old man over the loss of the infant.

The old man then said, “I have learned to accept my grief, as having been sent from God. In the end He will prove to each life that what is sent is for the best.”

Daniel agreed with him, and offered him his hand in friendship. Then he bade him good−bye, saying that the lateness of the hour was the cause of his haste.

Daniel walked on and called his dog. The faithful Rover did not wish to forsake his long−lost and newly−found master, but neither did he wish to lose Daniel. He would hurry ahead and stand in front of Daniel, barring the way, as if he wished to stay him, and then he would run back to the old man.

Daniel at last stood still. The dog lay down between them and looked appealingly, first at one and then at the other, as if he wished to beg them to remain together. Again Daniel started, but the dog went through the same antics. A half hour passed in this way. At last Daniel said: “I really don't know what to do. I love this dog, but I would like you to have him, too; but I can't let you take him, for he belongs to my father. Come with me, and let him decide who shall have the dog.”

They walked together along the lamp−lighted streets, and the happy dog, with leaps and barks, gave evidence of his great joy.

CHAPTER V. THE OLD MAN

Mr. Trent and his wife had delayed the evening meal, awaiting Daniel's return. Daniel led the strange man into the dining−room, where the table was spread with a beautiful white cloth, relieved by polished silver and food temptingly arranged. It was a welcome sight to the travel−weary old man.

Mr. Trent was about to reprimand his son for his belated return, but he hesitated at the sight of the stranger. Daniel related the incidents of the evening, and they amply served to excuse him for his tardiness. Mr. Trent then asked the old man what he knew about the dog.

Mr. Swift related at length the same story that he had told Daniel; and added that his losses were great, but that the loss of his baby boy had given him the greatest pain in his life.

Mr. Trent and his wife both came to the conclusion, in a flash, that the babe which they had adopted was most assuredly this man's son. Mr. Trent, a clever, as well as a careful man, wished to probe the matter to his entire satisfaction, so he dismissed Daniel on some errand. Then he questioned the stranger, as to his name, his place of residence, the year and the month and all circumstances surrounding that dreadful night, in minutest detail.

“Tell me,” said he, “did your dog wear a collar?”

“O yes,” said the old man, “it was made of red leather, and engraved on a metal plate was his name Rover, and the letters J. M. S., which stand for my name, Joseph Martin Swift.”

“Now,” said Mrs. Trent, “will you describe the cradle?”

“Very well,” said the man, “it was made of pine wood. The body was painted blue and it had a red canopy.”

Mr. and Mrs. Trent looked deeply into the old man's eyes, and found in his face, looking through the wrinkles which deep sorrow and care had chiseled there, a remarkable resemblance to their adopted son.

“I have no further doubt,” said Mr. Trent, “that the son who thirteen years ago, as a tender babe, floated in its cradle down the Rhine, was saved from the flood, and lives today.”

“How, what?” cried the man in joyful astonishment. “Oh, where is he? Where is he? Lead me to him at once.”

“You have already seen him,” said Mr. Trent. “The young man who brought you here is your son.”

“What?” cried the old man, “that handsome young lad. Could it he possible? Oh, how miraculous!” He folded his hands and stood in silence, till his overwrought feelings broke forth in a torrent of tears. At last he said: “How was he saved? How did he reach this house and these good circumstances?”

Mr. Trent related everything in a few words: how the faithfulness of the dog had been the first means toward the rescue of the infant. “We took your child, adopted him and brought him up. He always behaved well and has given us great joy. As we did not know his name, we had him renamed Daniel. We never let him know that he was not our own child. We must now disclose this fact to him. I hear him coming and will ask you to withdraw to the next room until you recover yourself.”

“Thank you,” said the highly elated father, “I should like to be alone for a few moments, that I may offer my thanks for this great goodness.”

By this time Daniel had reached the dining−room. As he missed the stranger, but still saw the dog, he asked: “Well, my dear father, did you satisfy the old man?”

“My dear boy, come seat yourself beside me, for I have something to say to you. We, whom you have always considered as father and mother, are not your parents.”

Daniel was greatly disturbed by this news and could scarcely speak. At last he said: “Oh, my dear parents, what great good you have always rendered me. How deep has been your love to me. All the rest of my life I will thank you. But, how is it that you only now divulge this great secret? You do not intend to cast me out, I hope?”

“Certainly not, my dear Daniel,” said Mr. Trent, “but listen further. You are the child that was rescued from the river, and the stranger whom you brought here is your father.”

“This man!” cried Daniel in astonishment; “yet he appears to me to be a good, honest man.”

Then Mr. Trent continued, in order to test Daniel, and said: “That may be! But he is so poor, while you are now so rich. You don't need him. Besides, in his poor clothes, he would not be any credit to you. So I thought I would give him a sum of money, and send him back to his village.”

“Oh, no,” cried Daniel, springing from his chair. “I hope you have not already sent him to the ship. If so, let

me hurry after him. I must see my father's face again and embrace him. I trust you did not mean what you said. Were my father the poorest and most unfortunate man in the whole world, I would not be ashamed of him, for he is my father. Everything that I have, I would share with him."

Daniel's own father had heard these words, in the adjoining room. He stepped forward, rushed upon Daniel, and cried: "My son!" and Daniel cried: "My father!" They embraced each other and their tears fell freely.

CHAPTER VI. THE LEGACY

Mrs. Trent now invited all to partake of the evening meal. The conversation became animated, and Mr. Trent was happy to find that his guest was such a sensible, honest man. He then asked him how he happened to take such a long trip.

Joseph Swift said that a legacy had been bequeathed to him, and that he was on his way to a distant city to claim it. He had stopped at the near−by port in order to break the monotony of the journey. “Before the disaster that befell me,” continued he, “I lived in comparative comfort, but ever since I have been struggling. I was obliged to begin all over again and build a new house and start a new business. You can easily understand that I soon fell behind in money matters. The news of this legacy was very welcome, for every little helps. Some difficulty, however, has arisen, so I decided to go personally; and whether I shall get the money or not, remains to be seen.”

“I trust you have all the necessary papers and credentials with you.”

“O yes,” said Joseph, drawing out a wallet containing the papers, in order to prove his words.

Mr. Trent looked them over and found them correct, but conjectured that the outcome would be somewhat doubtful. Besides, when he took into consideration the cost of the journey, living expenses, the cost of the trial, he found that very little would remain of the legacy after all.

Mr. Trent, who was as noble as he was rich, said: “Do you know what I think, my dear friend? The rest of this journey would be very tiresome for you; and besides, you would have to remain there for some time before you could claim the money. I will give you the sum stated, and you can give me a power of attorney so that I can get the money. I can then instruct my business manager in that city to look after this matter for me.”

Joseph Swift was delighted with the proposition, and took the proffered money with the heartiest thanks; although he did not realize to its full extent the thoughtfulness of this act.

Mrs. Trent, who was as kind−hearted as her husband, inquired after the other members of Mr. Swift's family, and then said: “Now that you have been spared the weariness of the rest of the journey, I beg you to spend a week with us. Then Daniel may escort you home, and remain a few days with you, and have the pleasure of meeting his mother and sisters and brothers face to face.”

Joseph declared that he had never met such good people, in all his life and Daniel was overjoyed in the anticipation of seeing his mother.

“I feel I must give my mother and my sisters each a gift,” said he. “How pleased I am that I saved my money. Now I can use it for a good purpose.”

Early the next morning, Mrs. Trent and Daniel went forth to purchase the gifts, and many a beautiful present did they bring back. Turning to Mr. Swift, she said: “Here is a handsome gold watch which Daniel bought for you, and also the material for a new suit of clothes. I have ordered the tailor to come and take your measurements, and he promised to deliver the suit in a week.”

Poor Mr. Swift could hardly find words to express the thanks that filled his heart.

But Mr. Trent, noticing his deep emotion, said: “Never mind, Mr. Swift, let it be so. Why would God give some people more than they need, unless he intended they should give some of it to those who didn't have enough? Sharing with others, brings us happiness.”

CHAPTER VII. THE JOURNEY

Early the following week Daniel and his father started on their journey. The dog accompanied them and sat on the front seat of the carriage, next to the driver.

As Mr. Swift neared his home, the linen lying in the bleachery was plainly discernible, and the dog, recognizing the locality, leaped out of the carriage. Mrs. Swift and her daughters were wetting the linens and the two boys were busy in the vineyard. The dog ran up to his old mistress, sprang at her joyously, and then ran to her daughters. They were much surprised to see the dog that they had thought dead. The sons joined the group, and while they stood discussing the dog's return, they heard the toot of the tally−ho horn. Suddenly the horses galloped up to the door and halted.

Said Mrs. Swift, “What can this mean? The driver must have made a mistake.” But in an instant Mr. Swift alighted and greeted his family warmly.

Mrs. Swift's expression was very grave as she said: “What ever possessed you to return in such a carriage; and now that I look at you, I see you are dressed in new clothes from head to foot. Even the dog, for which I suppose you paid a good price, has a new collar. I always looked upon you as a better business man than that, I fear now that nothing remains of the legacy. Most likely you lost your senses when you saw so much money. If you begin by spending it so lavishly it will soon be gone.”

Mr. Swift laughingly replied: “Don't be so sure, my dear. Let me unpack the things. You will see that not a penny of the legacy is missing.” He opened the trunk which the coachman had just brought in, took out a bag, and shook the golden contents upon the table.

“Oh, my,” cried his wife in glee, “so much money! I never saw that much in all my life. It dazzles me. It seems as if I were dreaming—But, tell me, where did you get the clothing?”

“O, never mind, just yet; I haven't shown you all, for I have brought material for new suits for you and all the children.” He laid out the goods, the velvets, and the laces upon the table, which was scarcely big enough to hold them all.

“This is too much. My reason actually refuses to take it in. Do tell me, how did you get these costly things?” continued his wife.

“All these things, my dear wife, have been presented to you by my fellow−passenger,” pointing his finger at Daniel, who had kept somewhat aloof.

[Illustration: “As I notice it now you are dressed in new clothes from head to foot.”]

Mother and children had scarcely noticed him in their happiness, but all the while Daniel had been enjoying their rapture.

The mother looked sharply at Daniel and said: “This young man brings us all these things! Well, who is he?”

Mr. Swift bent his head and folded his hands; then he spoke with devout earnestness: “This friendly young man is your son, our child, whom we mourned as dead. A rich merchant and his good wife took him into their home and heart.”

Daniel could no longer restrain himself. He fell on the neck of his new−found mother and embraced her tenderly. Then he greeted his brothers and sisters heartily. The ecstacy of moments like these is indescribable.

At first, a little shyness existed between the brothers and sisters and this long−lost brother. But as he was entirely without vanity and modest and friendly, he soon won their confidence and respect, and they conversed with him as naturally as if they had been with him always.

One morning the family mounted the hill to show Daniel the spot where they had spent the night of terror.

“Yes,” said the father, “in the morning light, we found that our house had been swept away. In the face of all that disaster, I remember saying: 'This dreadful calamity will yet bring us some blessing,' and so it has happened. The people in the whole country around became more industrious than they had been in the time of their prosperity. Many who had been haughty and extravagant became humble, thrifty and moderate. God awoke many people to the performance of good deeds. Many a family quarrel was terminated; all the people became peace loving; each helped the other in the hour of need.

“Who would have believed that we would again see our beloved child? Who would have thought it possible

that we, who once spent on this hill the worst night of our lives, would live to spend upon it the happiest day. Let us learn not to give up hope, no matter how bad the prospect may seem, for better times will come—God will make all things right at last."

In the course of time, when Mr. Trent knew to a certainty of Mr. Swift's honesty, he gave him the position of treasurer in his large business enterprises. This position was accepted, and Mr. Swift transferred his bleachery and vineyard to the care of his eldest son. With his wife and the other members of his family he then moved to a house adjacent to the Trents.

Daniel became his foster−father's assistant, and proved himself worthy of all the care which had been bestowed upon him; and he remained a good, true, helpful son to his own and his foster−parents.

[Illustration]

THE DAMAGED PICTURE

CHAPTER I. THE ARTIST

If one had been seeking for a man who combined all the qualities of goodness and greatness, one would have chosen artist Laurier. He bore the title of “Master of Arts” and his works, mostly landscapes, were famous far and wide. He had amassed a considerable fortune, and his house was the handsomest building in the city, equipped with every luxury. Besides, it was the home in which all artists, rich or poor, found welcome at all times.

But conditions changed. Hard times, following quickly in the wake of recent wars, had made the demand for art, particularly painting, less and less urgent, till there was no market whatever for the artist's works. Little by little, he had to draw upon his capital in order to support his family. However, he continued to paint with unabated diligence, for he hoped with the betterment of the times to sell his paintings; or if he should not be permitted to live so long, he would leave them as a heritage, for the benefit of his wife and children.

Alas, the great man did not live to carry out his purpose. A contagious disease swept over the country, numbering him among its victims; and he intuitively felt that he would never again rise from his sick bed.

One morning, following a night filled with great pain and misgivings, his dutiful wife was seated at his bedside trying to cloak the great sorrow which she felt at his approaching death. His two little daughters stood at the foot of his bed. The dying man looked tenderly at his wife and children, and said: “Be comforted and weep not. True, I can bequeath you but little; but God, the Father of the widow and orphans, will watch over you.” He then invoked God's blessing upon them, and with his last breath said, “In heaven we shall meet again.” His eyes closed and he passed out of this life. Mother and daughters stood convulsed in tears.

The widow now found herself in very straightened circumstances. Her house was so heavily mortgaged that she could no longer hold it. The pictures which her husband had bequeathed to her were valuable as works of art, but the widow could not realize their worth in money. Soon it became imperative to sell them at auction, at any price. Before the day set for the sale, mother and daughters saw, with anguish, these works hurried off to the auction room. The house, too, fell under the hammer. The poor, miserable family left the home in which they had lived for many years in love, peace and contentment. Still, a certain pride and satisfaction filled the widow's heart when she realized that, though her husband had died poor, yet he owed no one a penny—that his name stood in the community respected and revered by all the good people. The poor particularly held him in loving memory.

The widow was obliged to seek a new home in a cheap section of the city. She was an expert in all household arts, particularly in the art of sewing. Each night found the widow busily engaged with her work, the proceeds of which kept the wolf from the door.

Her two daughters, whom she had brought up with the utmost care, were her only joy. They grew into beautiful girlhood, were modest and good, and loved their mother with all the tenderness of devoted childhood. They, too, helped with the sewing; and their combined efforts, though feeble, were not without visible returns.

Mother and daughters often talked about their departed father. “It gives me great pain,” said the mother, “that every picture which your father painted should have been taken from us. If it were but a little landscape that we possessed, how happy I should be. It would enrich our otherwise barren home and make it equal to the most beautiful salon of the grandest castle.”

Mother and daughters rarely went anywhere, but every Sunday found them attendants at a church at the other end of the city. There, on those sacred walls, hung a beautiful painting executed by their father. “This indeed is exquisite work,” said the mother, and the children fully agreed with her sentiments.

When the services were ended they all slowly wended their way through the city to their modest home. Sunday after Sunday, rain or shine, found them carrying out the same program, always returning with hearts filled with reverence and peace.

The long, weary winter nights were passed reading the books which their father had collected during his lifetime, and which, by the merest accident, had not been disposed of.

Thus they passed their days, quietly and contentedly, each one cheerfully doing her daily share of good deeds and good works in this great vineyard of the world, where we have all been placed to do our best.

CHAPTER II. THE PICTURE

One day, as the mother was examining the apparel, she turned to her daughters and said: “Children, I see that your summer frocks are really very much worn and faded. As we have saved a little more than we expected, I feel that I want to reward you for your diligence and willingness in helping me so faithfully and uncomplainingly, by giving you each some money, with which to buy material for a few new dresses.” She then handed each daughter a hard−earned ten dollar bill, and said: “Select what you wish, and we can make the dresses ourselves.”

Both daughters were elated with this generous gift; and at once began to argue with each other as to the shade and material which would be most desirable, and which would also be most durable, from an economical standpoint. At last they started out to make the purchases. Soon they found themselves before a massive building, upon which was placed a sign: “Auction Sale of Paintings.” Both girls, as an artist's daughters, had an inherited love for pictures.

“Shall we go in?” said Lottie, the elder, to Louise—“Not to buy, of course; for how could we do that? But just to look at the beautiful works.”

They stepped timidly and modestly into the great gallery where several gentlemen and many richly gowned ladies had already assembled. Lottie and Louise remained unnoticed, standing not far from the door.

The auctioneer just then raised a picture to view, and cried: “A landscape, in a handsome gold frame, by the artist Laurier—ten dollars for the first bid.”

“Hm,” said a portly gentleman, “this picture was certainly executed more hastily than any of his other works. It lacks a certain finish. However, I'm an ardent admirer of Laurier. I bid fifteen dollars.”

The children had forgotten all about their dresses, and after a moment's whispering and hesitation, Lottie called out with a beating heart and trembling voice: “Seventeen dollars!”

Several of the ladies and gentlemen turned to see where this gentle, timid voice had come from, and noticed the poorly clad children standing so far back that they could scarcely see the picture. When the children became conscious of the many eyes fastened upon them, they turned pale. The portly gentleman, without taking any notice of them, continued: “I give nineteen dollars.”

Then Lottie said, timidly and almost inaudibly, “Twenty dollars.”

“Oh, those dear children,” said a friendly lady, “they are the artist's daughters; let us bid no higher, so the picture may be theirs!”

Everyone was deeply affected, praised the deceased artist and father, and respected the love of his daughters.

Then the auctioneer went on calling, “twenty dollars once—twice—for the third and last time.” He then summoned Lottie, the purchaser, to take the picture.

Lottie stepped forward to the long table, and laid upon it the two ten dollar bills which her mother had given her.

“You have made a good purchase, my child,” said the portly gentleman, “and were you not the daughter of the artist, I would not have let you outbid me.”

The assembled people wished the children luck; and taking the picture, which was not large, both sisters hurried out of the gallery.

“O mother,” they cried, as they entered the neat little living room of their home, “we have had great good luck. The wish you have so long expressed is at last fulfilled. See, here is a picture painted by our beloved father.”

The mother looked at it for a long time in deep silence, and at last broke forth in tears of joy and homesick longing.

“Yes,” said she, “the picture is his, though I cannot remember ever having seen him work at it. But I know his art, his beautiful thoughts and his delicate colorings. It is an exquisite landscape. Notice the evening glow over the wooded hill, behind which the sun has just disappeared; the huts, from whose chimneys the light−blue smoke ascends; the distant village, with the old church tower which the last rays of the declining sun still illumine; and the rosy, hazy light which spreads over all. It is beautiful beyond description, and stirs within me memories of the past. Such scenes have I ofttimes viewed in company with your father. But how did you ever get this picture?”

Lottie related the incidents leading up to its purchase, and said: “Louise and I are perfectly willing to wear our

old clothes."

"We certainly have a treasure in the house now, in comparison with which all the grandeur of the world counts as nothing," said the mother. "You are, indeed, good children, and I appreciate your self−sacrificing spirit. I consider that more acceptable than a great collection of paintings. The love which you have shown for your departed father and for me affords me unbounded joy. Come now, let us hang the picture at once."

Often all three would stand before the painting and gather from it such joy and strength that the work of the day seemed lightened and brightened.

"When you study with exactness the details of a beautiful landscape," said the mother, "you will find more and more to admire at each view. So it is with reading. We learn much that may befall us in life from books, and by thinking and reviewing the good and the beautiful in the lives of others we may better know how to act under the changing scenes of life."

CHAPTER III. THE DISCOVERY

With the returning spring, the mother received an urgent letter from her best friend, a widow, who lived in the country. This friend had been seriously ill for some time, and her life was despaired of. She was particularly desirous of seeing Mrs. Laurier about making a few final arrangements.

The mother made hasty preparations, and at break of day started on her journey, her two daughters accompanying her a short distance from the house.

The mother gave them a parting injunction to work diligently and to remain at home. “Within two or three days, I shall return,” she said. “I know that my friend has much to tell me, and will not hear of my going sooner. Behave yourselves in such a manner that when I return, I may be so pleased with your conduct that my troubles will be the lighter to bear.”

As the two girls returned to the house, Lottie said to her sister: “Do you know, dear Louise, our rooms have become somewhat dingy during our stay here. Let us, while mother is absent, have them painted. We could launder the curtains and polish the floors. These bright spring days seem to demand it. Then, when mother returns, steps into the house, and sees its whitened walls, its beautiful fresh draperies and its brightened aspect, what a pleasure it will give her. What do you think about it?”

Louise clapped her hands in joy, and said: “You always have the cleverest ideas. Yes, let us send for the painter at once.”

The girls then worked industriously for two days, and everything seemed to glide along swiftly and entirely to their satisfaction.

On the morning of the third day, Lottie said: “Everything is now in readiness, and I will hasten to the market and order some things, so that we may provide a good dinner for our mother when she returns this evening.”

“That is wise,” said Louise, as she helped Lottie put on her coat.

When Lottie returned after an hour's absence, Louise rushed up to her with red−rimmed eyes, and cried: “Oh, Lottie, I have met with a great misfortune. Through ignorance, I damaged the beautiful painting. Come quickly and see it.”

Lottie looked at the picture, in horror.

“Oh,” said Louise, “it seemed somewhat dusty to me, and I tried to wash it off with soap and water. But, not until it was too late, did I notice that the colors ran together and the beautiful painting was completely ruined.”

“Completely!” said Lottie, and began to cry. But, in order to reassure her sister, she said, “Perhaps it may yet be restored by some good artist.”

As the two girls sat conferring as to the best method to pursue, the mother stepped into the house. She was exceedingly delighted to find her home in such exquisite order and newness. “You certainly are very dutiful children. But what is troubling you? What has happened that I find you both in tears?”

“Oh,” cried Louise, “just look at the painting. I wanted to clean it. I meant well, but met with such disappointment. Forgive me, forgive me!” and she fell at her mother's feet.

The mother was greatly agitated, as she gazed at the painting. She paled and trembled. “This misfortune is indeed pitiable,” said she. “You know not how much I would give had it not occurred.” She drew on her glasses and viewed the damaged picture scrutinizingly. “The colors,” said she, “were but water−colors, and that is why they were so easily blurred. But, it is peculiar. I see, under these water−colors, a ground work of oil paint, and there, I see a little finger, most assuredly painted by a master. What shall I do? I will dare, as long as the picture is damaged and past restoration, to wash it off entirely.”

The mother then took a big sponge and deliberately began to wash the painting. A hand, an arm, an angel's form appeared to view, such as only the greatest master could portray. Though the mother hated to destroy the work of her beloved husband, yet she worked assiduously to remove all the water−colors, and lo! a painting of extraordinary beauty and genius met her admiring gaze.

It was a historical picture of ancient times The figures stood forth in living beauty and seemed to speak from out the canvas.

“If I see rightly,” said the mother, “this is a painting by an old master. On a journey, which I once took with

your departed father, I saw many paintings by this same artist. But this painting, unless I am very much mistaken, is classed among his best productions. It is one of the finest in art. Nothing in this picture is without purpose and shows the stroke of a genius.

"I must seek advice from Mr. Raymond—an old, true friend of your dear father. He is a connoisseur on works of art." So she hurriedly donned her cape and hastened to his house.

The venerable gentleman was only too glad to welcome her to his home. He had scarcely looked at the picture, when he cried in astonishment: "Yes, truly, this painting is by one of the earliest Italian masters. It is exquisite and sublime. And now it dawns on me how this beautiful work came to be hidden by the brush of another artist.

"During the late war, as the besiegers were drawing nearer and nearer a certain castle, the owner had his paintings and works of art concealed in the cellar.

"As this picture, however, was the most valuable and the choicest of his wonderful collection, he could not for one moment think of parting with it. So he sent for your worthy husband to paint a picture over it in water−colors, which could be easily removed, and yet serve to conceal the picture's real value. In this way, he hoped to save it from the hands of the besiegers.

"However, he did not live to see the war ended, and your dear husband passed away also. This twice painted picture could have remained forever undiscovered, but it has been destined otherwise. A wonderful treasure has been sent to save you and your children from all future want. It only now depends upon finding a lover of pictures, and an admirer of genius, who will pay the full value for this work of art."

"But," said the good woman, "can I with a clear conscience keep in my possession so valuable a picture, for which we paid but such a trifling sum of money?"

"Of course you can, and no person can dispute your right to it. The owner of this picture was a noble, right−living man, whom I knew well. He had no relatives and did much good to the poor. For himself he needed but little. His only pleasure in life was buying the paintings by the old masters. Little by little, he collected quite a gallery. This constituted his entire fortune. After his death, the pictures which had been concealed in his home were brought forth and were sold, together with this beautiful one. The late merchant, Mr. Pinole, purchased most of them.

"If you take my advice, I would suggest that you advertise in the daily papers the fact that you have this beautiful picture for sale. Then a purchaser will surely present himself who will pay you its value."

Mrs. Laurier then asked him to undertake this responsibility, to which he kindly acceded.

Soon the whole city was aware of Mrs. Laurier's wonderful possession, and people were filled with astonishment. Mr. Pinole's son, at whose salesroom the picture had been sold at auction, hastened to Mrs. Laurier's house.

He had, he said, not only received less than half his due, but the picture was worth a thousand times more than she had paid for it. As she made no attempt whatever to return the picture to him, he left her presence in rage, and determined to sue her at once.

When he presented the case to his lawyer, the latter explained that as the picture had been sold at public auction, he could do nothing about it. "Besides," said the lawyer, laughingly, "remember, your father paid still less for it."

Disappointed and chagrined, Mr. Pinole returned to his home.

Through the untiring efforts of Mr. Raymond, the picture was at last sold to a wealthy gentleman, who paid a high price for it.

The money which Mrs. Laurier realized from this sale enabled her to live with her two daughters in comparative ease and comfort. The two girls soon married well−to−do merchants, who succeeded in purchasing Mrs. Laurier's former house, which happened just then to be on sale. It was large and sufficiently commodious to admit of the two families occupying it. The best room in the house was accorded to Mrs. Laurier.

The families lived together harmoniously, and vied with each other to brighten the declining years of the mother's peaceful life.

MEMORIES AWAKENED

CHAPTER I. THE CHANGE OF CIRCUMSTANCES

A very wealthy and worthy merchant, named Vollmar, lived in a large commercial city. Here he carried on a prosperous business which had descended to him from his father. By clever management, industry and honesty, he succeeded in enlarging it; and thereby increased his wealth.

Up to the present time, Mr. Vollmar had had unusual success, but circumstances were soon to change. One morning as the family was breakfasting, the postman delivered a letter containing the information that the ship which carried a valuable cargo belonging to Mr. Vollmar had been lost at sea.

This was a severe blow; for the greater part of his fortune was now gone. But as luck and riches had not made him proud, so this misfortune and loss did not make him despondent.

Turning to his children, he said: “God gives and He also takes away. He may restore all things unto us when His wise purposes have been fulfilled. You can see that this is true, when you review the lives of your grandparents and great−grandparents, whose pictures in the golden frames grace this room so beautifully.

“Your great−grandfather, Lucas Vollmar, was the richest man in the city. All that we once had and now have would not have equalled his fortune by one quarter. Owing to the 'Thirty Years' War,' he lost all. He was obliged to flee from the enemy. His wife did not survive the journey. Their only son, my father, was then but a tender youth, and suffered much during those troublous times.

“Soon this city was invaded by the enemy and plundered. Many bombs were fired into it and homes were reduced to ashes. Into this very house, which belonged to him, fell a great cannon ball which did much damage but did not set it on fire. All the families, too, suffered the greatest misery. Hunger and pestilence carried off many of them.

“Your worthy great−grandfather sought refuge in strange lands and suffered many hardships. He had taken as much money with him as he could carry, but on the way he was robbed. He earned his livelihood in various ways, and soon put his son out as an apprentice. When the lad was fourteen years old, he was called upon to face another hardship in the loss of his father, who died in misery and poverty, although he had once been the richest man in this city.

“This son, my father, now alone in the world, continued as an apprentice and made progress in his trade. At last, when the war was over and peace had been restored, he returned to this city, poor in the world's goods, but rich in knowledge and goodness.

“Through a decision of the court, this house was returned to him. The things that he found when he entered were empty chests and those two pictures hanging on the wall opposite. Look at them. Do you not read in those faces kindness and true worth? Yes, my children, they were indeed good people.

“You never saw your great−grandparents, but you do remember your grandfather, for he often held you both on his lap. He had to work hard to build up a business, but through the help of his good wife he soon acquired wealth.

“So, my children, you have now seen how from wealth one may be reduced to poverty, and how from nothing one may rise and become something.

“My father showed me that no matter how rich he became, he always laid by some money for the time of need. He employed the best workers and paid the best wages; and was a great benefactor to the poor.

“His example and his teachings I have followed, or to−day we would be very poor indeed, now that I have lost my goods at sea. We must be very economical and, perhaps, in time we may retrieve our loss.”

Other tradesmen, too, suffered by this shipwreck. Mr. Vollmar did what he could to help them and, little by little, they were able to go on with their business. But times changed, and there was little demand for Mr. Vollmar's goods. Failure stared him in the face.

“If I must give up my business, it will comfort me to know that when I have paid all my debts I shall still have a few dollars left. My conscience will be clear when I know that no one has lost one cent through me, and that my honor before God and man remains unspotted.”

Pressed on all sides, he was almost forced to give up, but as a last resort he made up his mind to seek aid from two friends, both very rich men. But the one said: “I am sorry that I cannot help you, for I need my money

myself.” The other man said: “I would lend you some money, but I'm afraid I won't get it back.”

This treatment at the hands of his best friends, pained him sorely, and he returned in sadness to his home. Before entering, he seated himself in a little bower to review the situation. The sun shone with a friendly light; the birds sang their gladsome songs; and the flowers stood forth in all their gay coloring.

“How hard it will be for me to leave this beautiful garden upon which I have spent so much money, and in which I have enjoyed so many happy hours. Who knows in what corner of the earth I shall be obliged to seek a new home?”

He became sadder each moment, and, sinking upon his knees, he prayed for help. Hearing footsteps, he arose, and, looking down the footpath, he saw an old man with snow−white hair being led by a little boy. Both seemed very poor, but they were neatly clothed.

Just then the boy said to his companion: “Here, under this tree, is a nice seat. You are so tired, dear grandfather, rest here a little and be comforted; for the way is not much longer.” Then they both seated themselves.

“It is a great undertaking for a man like me, blind and feeble, to travel such a distance,” said the old man. “'Tis true, oculists often cure blind people, but I wonder if my blindness can be cured by that doctor of whom we have heard so much? Besides, we have so little money, and what will we live on while we're in the city? It must soon be fifty years since I worked as a mason there. I really know no one to whom we could apply for aid; for all my friends have passed on to a better land. But I trust God will help us find some place to rest.”

As Mr. Vollmar heard these words, he became greatly touched. “To be blind,” said he, “and not to see the blue sky, the trees, the flowers, the sun and the people—that must be hard indeed. This man's sorrows are greater than mine. I have my two strong eyes; and should I lose my whole wealth, it would be as nothing compared to the loss of my sight.

“These poor people—this blind man, this brave boy—know how to find comfort in their sorrow by trusting in God. I will learn from them and trust, too.”

Just then Mrs. Vollmar entered the garden with her two children, and Mr. Vollmar beckoned them to join him. He related all that he had heard the old man say.

“My dear husband,” said Mrs. Vollmar, “let us take them into our house. Though we are getting poorer each day, I am sure that what we do for them will not hurt us; for, it is written: 'Be merciful and you shall obtain mercy.'“

“True,” said Mr. Vollmar, “and you certainly have a bigger heart than I have. Let us not only give them food and shelter, but let us call in an eminent eye doctor and have him examine this man's eyes.”

Just then the old man rose to depart with the boy, but Mrs. Vollmar hastened toward them, and said that they could remain with them for a while.

Thanking them for this exceeding kindness, the strangers entered the house, and soon the old man began to talk about himself.

“My name is Armand Seld. At one time I was a builder and mason, and lived with my son in this city. I have been blind for the last seven years.”

As he seemed very tired, Mrs. Vollmar urged him to rest. She prepared a repast for him and after he had partaken of it, she showed him to his room.

On the following morning, Mr. Vollmar sent for the doctor. After examining the old man's eyes, he said that they were both covered with cataracts, of such a nature that he could remove them. He also held out the hope that he could cure them in a very short time.

“But,” said he, “the old man must rest for three days before I can undertake the work.”

After three days had elapsed the doctor returned and began the operation. Then the eyes were bandaged and the old man was kept in a darkened room. At the end of a week, the doctor removed the bandage from the patient's eyes and slowly led him to the light.

“I see! I see the light!” cried the old man. “I see your faces! Oh, I thank God!” Then he folded his hands and silence filled the room; for each one was in sympathy with the old man and thanked God for his mercy.

“But now,” interrupted the doctor, “we must cover the eyes again, and let them become accustomed to the light by degrees, and each day they will grow stronger. I will return daily and watch their progress; meanwhile the patient must have nourishing food, in small quantities, and he must be kept very quiet in order to save his

strength.” Then he bade them good−bye and Mr. Vollmar and his wife escorted the doctor to the door.

The children kept shouting: “He sees! he sees!” and tumult and joy ran riot.

At last the bandages were removed for good, but the doctor warned the patient not to strain his eyes nor look into the sunshine for another week.

CHAPTER II. THE REVELATION

Armand Seld was now able to go about the house. The first room that he entered, after his tedious stay in his own darkened bedroom, was the dining−room, where the family loved best to sit. The walls of this room were graced by the pictures of the Vollmar ancestors, together with a landscape by a famous master.

The old man's attention was attracted to this painting.

“What do I see?” he shouted. “This picture I once saw by candlelight, and I cannot forget it.”

“Strange,” said Mr. Vollmar, “that it should have made such an impression upon you.”

“May I ask,” continued the old man, “have you owned this picture long? Have you lived here some time?”

Mr. Vollmar replied: “This house, as well as the picture, descended to me from my sainted grandparents. But why do you ask?”

“I must inquire still further before I can answer. Tell me—did your grandfather die in this house, or did he flee to a distant country during the war?”

“He died far from here, in a strange land. But it surprises me how you should hit upon this question.”

“Did your grandmother die first?”

“Yes; but your questions disturb me.”

The old man continued: “Was your own father present before your grandfather's death, and did he not disclose to him a very important secret?”

“My grandfather died of a malignant fever which robbed him of his senses. My father, then a boy, was sent for, but when he arrived he found his father dead.”

“One more question I must ask—and I know you will forgive me. Did your father receive a big fortune?”

“My father,” continued Mr. Vollmar, “returned to this city and this house a poor man. He married a woman as poor as himself, but with industry they at last became rich.”

“Do you know,” continued the old man, “you look just like your grandfather? He, too, was about the same age as you are now, and I feel, as I talk to you, as if he were here. But listen to my story and perhaps it may be of value to you.

“Shortly before this city was plundered I worked as a mason. One day my employer, a very honest man, received word to call at once upon a gentleman who wished him to do some work which was to be kept a secret. As my employer was sick, he sent me in his place, vouching for my honor and trustworthiness.

“I entered the house and was ushered into a room where your grandfather (for I have no doubts but that it was he) was seated. He started, and was indeed surprised that my employer should have sent as a substitute such a young man as I was then. After reading my recommendation, he ordered the servants to light two candles and set them on the table over which this picture hung. He made me vow never to tell the secret which he would entrust to me, except in time of need, and then only to one of his descendants. He spoke the oath and I repeated it, word for word, looking up at this picture all the time.

“Then he led me into the cellar, down another stairway made of stone into a lower cellar, where he opened a strongly bolted door. I gazed into a hollow in the wall, where many chests were standing. 'These boxes hold all my valuables, which I wish to save,' said he. 'Now, I want you to cement this door so cleverly that no one will discover its whereabouts.'

“As all the tools were lying there in readiness, and the mortar had been previously prepared, I started to work at once. It cost a little labor and much pains to do the work well and to hide the door, but I succeeded, and received a gold piece for my labor.

“The gentleman laid his finger on my lips, and said: 'Remember your vow.'

“Soon after the enemy appeared. Your grandfather fled and so did I. Never again did I return to this city, nor did I think of the valuables secreted in these walls. The sight of this picture, however, recalls to my mind my vow.” With a sigh of relief, Armand Seld continued: “My dear Mr. Vollmar, God moved your heart to help a poor, strange, blind man. He helped to open my eyes, so that I could behold this picture, and to disclose to you your buried riches. Thus has He rewarded you for your kindness to me.”

Mr. Vollmar had listened attentively to the old man's story, and said: “You need not thank me. I did only what

was my duty. You may be right about the treasure, for we often wondered what could have become of all my grandfather's wealth.

“Being the wise man that he was, he would have known what havoc the war would bring, and consequently would have collected his money and possibly have hidden it somewhere. But where? Neither my father nor I could ever get the slightest clue. What you have said of the little stone stairway and the lower cellar describes exactly the place under this house. I am more and more convinced, each moment, that my grandfather hid his treasures there, but now the question is whether they are still there. Let us go, at once, and find out.”

[Illustration: “The chests were opened.”]

They went, arm in arm. As they reached the lower cellar, the old man shouted: “This is the place. I remember this little round spot that I filled with putty and covered with cement.”

By means of a long crow−bar, an opening was at last made, and one stone after another fell to the floor.

“Victory!” shouted the old man. “Here are the chests, untouched. I know my work. The treasure is still here.”

Mr. Vollmar then called his son and a helper to his assistance, and the chests were soon opened. Bags upon bags of money, jewels unnumbered, silverware, hammered copper ornaments and some papers which had yellowed and had almost fallen to pieces—all these, met their astonished eyes.

Taking the papers first, Mr. Vollmar read many important family records, besides an index of the contents of the chests, and the disposition to be made of them.

“Oh, what good luck this is! It has all been sent to us just when we need it most,” said Mr. Vollmar.

The family soon assembled to hear the good news and see the treasures.

A feast followed and fun and great merriment filled the house. The care of the old man and his grandchild was willingly undertaken by the Vollmars; and these good people lived together in peace and contentment for many years.

THE INHERITANCE

[Illustration: “By this time they had reached the grave, which was graced by a flowering plant.”]

CHAPTER I. MR. ACTON AND HIS SON

Mr. Acton was a clever and highly respected merchant who owed much of his success in life to the system and exactness with which he carried on his business. Then, too, he was so reliable, so honest, and sold his goods so cheaply, that everyone preferred to trade with him.

His home, which he could have furnished luxuriously, was the model of simplicity.

The only surviving member of his family was his son George, who was now twenty years of age. He was a sturdy, manly, upright youth; willing and obliging to his friends and kind−hearted to the poor. He reverenced God and everything which should be held sacred in life. He was the joy of his father's heart.

Partly on account of his father's business and partly to increase his own knowledge and ability, George had journeyed to England, and Mr. Acton daily awaited his return.

Late one afternoon, after a day of strenuous work, Mr. Acton sat dreamily near the fireside, smoking his pipe. Mr. Richmond, his bookkeeper, who had been one of his school−mates, and who on account of his loyalty and honesty was classed as his nearest and dearest friend, sat beside him. Together they were planning for a banquet which they would give in honor of George's return.

A knock at the door interrupted their conversation, and in response to the pleasant “Come,” the servant entered and delivered a package of letters. Mr. Acton broke the seals and hurriedly glanced over them, in turn. As he took one which seemed to please him, his face suddenly changed color, and the hand which held the letter began to tremble. Mr. Richmond became startled, for he well knew that business losses, which Mr. Acton had often experienced and borne calmly, could not be the cause of this agitation. He touched him lightly on the shoulder and said, with deep concern: “Do tell me what has happened.”

“There, read it,” said Mr. Acton, with a deep sigh, as he handed him the letter. Then, sinking back in his arm chair and folding his hands, he stared blankly into the distance, his grief too deep for words.

Mr. Richmond read the letter which a fellow merchant in a distant city had written, and which referred incidentally to the sinking of a ship in the English Channel. Unknown to the merchant, this ship had been the one on which George Acton was to have taken passage.

This sad news stunned Mr. Richmond, but he tried to reassure his friend, and said: “Perhaps your son is among the saved, or possibly he may not have embarked, owing to some business delay.”

“You certainly do kindle a faint spark of hope in my heart, my dear Richmond, but I fear it will be extinguished. Let us lose no time in getting all the information we can.” He rang, and said to the servant who answered: “Go at once and send this telegram.” Then taking up the evening newspaper his eye glanced hurriedly over column after column, and finally he read that the ship Neptune had been sunk, and that eleven persons had been rescued, but no names had been reported.

Between hope and fear, the next day passed. He summoned all his courage and waited anxiously for an answer to his telegram.

All the neighbors, in fact all the people of the town, held Mr. Acton and his son in the highest esteem, and they awaited the news of George Acton's fate in dread suspense. At last the answer arrived: “George was numbered among the passengers on board, but not among those rescued.”

Poor Mr. Acton was so overcome that his eyes held no tears. With dumb grief he shut himself up in his room to find his comfort in God, alone.

Several days later, there came to Mr. Acton's house an old sailor, who had been on the ill−fated vessel, and who could give an accurate account of the calamity.

“We encountered a storm,” said the sailor, “such as I, an old sea−dog, have never experienced. It broke shortly before midnight, and in less than two hours it had driven us out of our course and seriously damaged our ship. Suddenly, we felt a great thud, which threw us off our feet, and a dreadful crash told us that the ship had foundered. The water poured into the vessel from all sides, and the ship was soon submerged.

“The helmsman, seven sailors, two passengers and myself swam through the tempestuous sea toward the cliffs which had shattered our ship. The brave captain and all the other passengers went to their watery grave.

“The loss of young George Acton,” continued the sailor, as he dried his eyes, “was deeply lamented by us all.

The sailors loved him very much, for he was always so helpful and friendly. I know positively that every one of us would willingly have sacrificed his life, in order to save that of your son. But there was no moment to wait; the ship went under, and we were obliged to sink or swim.

[Illustration: The Helmsman.]

"I last saw him near the bow of the vessel, just as the storm was threatening to break. From that time on, I saw no more of him; but I chanced to find this wallet, as I descended from the rigging;" and he passed it over to Mr. Acton.

"It contains several letters from you to your son, and a bank note of value. That is why I wished to deliver it myself."

Mr. Acton took the wallet, and opened it with trembling fingers. He found the letters there which he had sent his son. "My good boy," said the father, "kept all my letters so carefully, carried them with him, and as I would have wished, read them often!"

The affectionate father whose grief had been dumb and dry, for the first time shed the tears that would give relief to his pent−up feelings.

The sailor continued: "On the morning following the disaster, we found ourselves on the bare rocks, with nothing about us but the immeasurable sea. We found a stick and a piece of sail which had been cast upon the rocks, and this we hoisted. We were taken up by the sailors of another ship and landed at Havre."

Mr. Acton had listened attentively to each word. Then, taking the money from the wallet, he presented it to the sailor, saying: "Take this for your love to my son and for your honesty in returning the wallet to me. Lay the money by for your old age."

The sailor was astonished at this rich gift. He thanked Mr. Acton for his generosity and then departed.

Mr. Acton felt the loss of his son more and more each day, and soon his health began to fail. One Sunday morning, as he returned from church, he suddenly became very ill. He hadn't the strength to remove his clothing, but sank into the nearest chair.

Mr. Richmond, who had accompanied him, hoped that the illness would be slight, and buoyed his spirits with the thought that he would soon recover.

"My dear Richmond," the merchant said, "my hopes in this world are over, and I must now set all my affairs in order. Come, seat yourself at this table. There is pen, ink and paper. I wish to dictate to you my last wishes. The notary can then sign and seal the instrument.

"The great wealth with which God has blessed me would, in the natural course, all fall to my relations. But, as I know them, this would not be the best thing for them, but rather unfortunate. They shall each receive a suitable portion, with the understanding that the money be not wasted, but invested and bequeathed to their children. If the children do not wish to study and learn some trade, they shall not get a penny of mine.

"For you, my dear Richmond, and for all my faithful assistants who helped me amass my fortune, I shall provide generously. The worthy poor and the afflicted, I shall not forget. Come now, write quickly; I fear the time is short."

Mr. Acton began to dictate, but suddenly he stopped and cried: "I hear my summons. I must go. God, who has not permitted me to finish this deed, will in His wisdom fulfill it, and let it reach my heirs to their best advantage!"

He paused, prayed silently and passed away.

All the members of the household were grieved at their loss. Mr. Richmond spoke gently to them and said: "Our good, helpful, pious friend sleeps in peace. Richly did he sow good deeds while here on earth, and now he has gone to the land beyond where richly he will reap."

CHAPTER II. THE UNINVITED GUEST

The death of Mr. Acton cast a gloom over all the people, with the exception of his relatives, who felt such unbounded joy over the unexpected inheritance, that it gave them much trouble to mask their true feelings.

“The inheritance is enormous!” was all they could say and think. When the time came to make the division, and it was found upon investigation that the value of the estate to be divided was only about a million, the heirs were heard to grumble at the amount. They reprimanded the worthy bookkeeper, Mr. Richmond, and all the other able assistants, as if they had embezzled some of the money. These good, faithful men, instead of receiving what Mr. Acton had fully intended they should, were obliged to accept reproaches and immediate dismissal.

Soon the heirs began to quarrel among themselves, and for a time it seemed as if they would have to settle their affairs in the court. However, their eagerness to possess the money soon brought them into accord, and each one accepted his portion.

Then, one began to build; another bought a country estate; another gave up his business, and rode about in his carriage. Not one of them ever thought of Mr. Acton, much less of erecting a monument on his grave.

Mr. Acton's house, besides a large share of his money, fell to the lot of a man named Mr. Bond. He immediately had the house renovated and furnished magnificently, and when it was completed to his satisfaction, he invited all his relatives to celebrate the event. On the appointed night, hundreds of lights illumined the house and gleamed in the crystal, like so many colors of the rainbow. They were reflected from the mirrors and shone upon the highly polished silver.

All the heirs of the departed Mr. Acton had responded to the invitation, and were dressed to honor the occasion. Especially happy were the wives and daughters, whose elaborate gowns were works of art. Mr. Bond's daughter resembled a princess in the elegance of her attire, and strutted about, in order to display her beautiful diamonds.

After supper had been served, the guests retired to the grand salon. The entrancing tones of the music soon led couple after couple to dance to its rhythm, and the revelry ran high.

It struck twelve by the big church clock. Suddenly there flashed over the faces of the assembled guests, consternation and horror. The music stopped—the dancers seemed rooted to the floor. A sudden stillness, broken only by the echoing tones of the clock, or here and there a gasp of fear or an exclamation of surprise, hovered over all. In one instant the doors had been thrown open, and there on the threshold, clad in black, and with a countenance pale as death, stood George Acton.

If he had really returned from the grave, the fear and shock that his appearance caused could not have been greater.

All present felt a shudder pass over them, as they realized the certainty of his return. However courteous it would have been for them to have hidden their displeasure and to have extended their greetings to him, not one came forward. The loss of their fortune was too distasteful to them; the awakening from a happy dream, from a life of joyous forgetfulness of right and duty, to a life of hard work was too revolting for them. Mr. Bond had been obliged to seat himself to recover his strength. Some swooned and had to be carried out.

The noble George Acton had not for one moment thought that his entrance would have caused his relations such a shock. So he withdrew to another room. Then the questions were heard: “Do we sleep or dream? Was it really he, or was it an apparition?”

The heirs could not understand how George Acton, who was considered as dead by everyone, even by the courts, could have the audacity to live, and by his unexpected return to give them such a blow; but it came about in a very natural way.

George Acton had, on the night of the shipwreck, swung himself from the fast sinking vessel to a plank. Wind and waves soon carried him many miles. Then the storm had subsided and a gentle wind had arisen. He found himself very much exhausted, for it had taken all his strength to cling to the plank.

After a while he managed to seat himself upon the board. At dawn, all he could see on every side was water and sky. Completely drenched, and faint from hunger and cold, he passed the day.

As the sun was beginning to sink, he felt that there was nothing for him but death. He raised his eyes to

heaven and prayed silently. Suddenly, in the distance he saw the smoke−stacks of a ship, lighted by the rays of the declining sun. The ship came nearer and nearer. At last, he was spied by the captain and saved. His thanks to God and man for his rescue were as hearty as his prayers had been fervent. When George had been warmed and nourished, he begged the captain to land him at the nearest port.

The captain expressed his willingness to do all that lay in his power; but, said he, “This is an English warship. I dare not deviate one hair's breadth from my appointed course. You will be obliged, unless we meet another vessel, to continue with us on the journey to St. Helena.”

The ship reached its destination, and after a weary wait of several months, George was advised to take passage on board a coaling steamer, then in port, and bound for Lisbon. “From there you can easily get to London,” said the captain.

George accepted this good advice, but found himself in a very great dilemma. He, the son of a rich merchant, was, what he had never thought possible, without one penny. As he sat lost in thought, the captain aroused him and said: “What is it that troubles you?”

George looked up at him abashed, and said: “How can I make this trip when I am entirely penniless?”

“Is that all?” said the captain. “Well, I have provided for that.” Whereupon he counted out to the astonished George a good round sum of money. “Now all I want is a receipt.”

“What?” cried George. “You intend to trust me, a person of whom you know so little, with this large amount of money! You know nothing of my circumstances, but what I have told you.”

“I know your sentiments, your thoughts,” said the captain, “and that is sufficient. I would willingly give you more, if I had it to give. But the amount will be sufficient to carry you to your destination. Were I not able to trust a boy like you, I should not want to deal with anyone. Now perhaps you would not mind doing a little favor for me. When you arrive in London, please deliver this money to my old mother, who needs my help.” George promised faithfully to carry out the captain's wish.

On the morning of departure, George bade the captain and his crew farewell, and after a devious journey, he at last arrived in London. He hurried to the home of his father's friend, at whose house he had so recently sojourned.

The merchant was speechless with astonishment when he recognized George, whom he had reckoned among the dead. But greater still was George's grief and despair when he learned that his kind, loving father had passed away.

Without further delay, he transacted the business which the captain had deputed to him, bought some clothing for himself, and sailed with the next steamer to Havre. From there he took the train to his native town, arriving late at night.

With a heavy heart, he walked through the streets to his father's house. He expected to find it quiet and gloomy, but the brightly illuminated windows were a painful sight. The joyous laughter and the music all wounded his saddened heart. He could not resist the temptation to present himself, unannounced, and end this wild revelry, this dreadful disrespect for the dead. So, it happened that he appeared on the threshold of the grand ball−room—an uninvited guest.

CHAPTER III. THE FLOWERING PLANT

On the following morning, George wended his way to the cemetery to visit his father's grave. After wandering about for some time, he thought: “How strange it is that I can not find it.” At last he met a worker there, to whom he said: “Friend, would you be so kind, as to direct me to the tomb−stone that marks the grave of the late Mr. Acton.”

The old grave−digger thrust his spade into the newly, upturned sod, and said to George, whom he did not recognize, “Yes, I can show you the grave, but the tomb−stone is still missing. His heirs have set up no stone, and probably will never erect one. They have forgotten the good, noble old soul.”

By this time, they had reached the grave, which was graced by a beautiful hydrangea, handsomer than any plant of its kind that George had ever seen. A mass of beautiful flowers crowded forward between the dark−green leaves and thousands of dew−drops hung on the plant and sparkled in the morning sun.

George stood there silent, with his hands clasped tightly before him, and his head bowed in grief, while the tears fell on the grave. The beauty of the plant was a little comfort to him.

After he had spent some moments thinking of his departed father, he turned to the grave−digger, and said: “Who planted this beautiful bush?”

“Oh, that good child, Lucy, the oldest daughter of Mr. Richmond who was the book−keeper for the late Mr. Acton, she planted it. She was very much concerned because it seemed as if the good man were never to have a tomb−stone.

“'Oh, that we were rich' said she, 'then he certainly should have the finest monument here in the church−yard. However, I will do what I can. I will plant this bush and, though it be not costly like a monument, yet it represents no less in good intentions.'

“She bought the bush last April and brought it here; and with the spade I loaned her, she dug the earth with her tender hands and set it here. You see it is a long distance from yonder stream and yet, she brought the water that distance, to wet this plant whenever she visited the grave. She really felt grateful to Mr. Acton for his kindness to her father. All her people, too, loved him.”

While George listened with interest to the grave−digger's recital, a young man from the village happened along. He joined the group and admired the bush. After a pause, he added; “I, too, remember Mr. Acton, everyone speaks of his goodness. It would have been better for the old, honest Mr. Richmond and his children had Mr. Acton lived a little longer, for then, they would have suffered no want. Nor would Mr. Richmond have been thrust out of business so shamelessly.

“As one misfortune seldom comes alone,” continued the stranger, “so it happened that Mr. Richmond had put all his savings into Mr. Acton's business, where he thought it would be well invested. The heirs accused him of falsifying the accounts and brought him to court. But the case was deferred, and put on the calender for some distant date. In the meantime Mr. Richmond lost his all.

“His daughter's needle is now his only support, as Mr. Richmond's failing sight keeps him unemployed. The other members of the family are too young to earn anything.”

George had been deeply touched by these revelations. He picked a flower from the bush, and put it into his button−hole. Then he slipped a golden coin into the old man's hand, asked for the street and number of the humble house where the Richmonds now resided, and turned his steps in that direction.

CHAPTER IV. THE TWO FAMILIES

The report that George Acton had returned was the talk of the town and had reached the ears of the Richmond family in their out−of−the−way home. Mr. Richmond had gone forth in search of more facts on the subject. He returned highly elated, with the good news confirmed, and stood in the midst of his family relating it to them. Lucy stopped sewing and her hands dropped in her lap, for the news was such a wonderful surprise to her. Mr. Richmond closed his remarks by saying that he regretted his inability to find George Acton anywhere, and nobody seemed to know what had become of him. To search for him in the cemetery had not occurred to anyone.

Just then a knock at the door announced a visitor. The door was opened, and George stepped into their midst. Everyone was dumbfounded. The old Mr. Richmond ran forward and pressed him to his breast. Lucy and her brothers kissed his hands and wet them with their tears. “Oh, that your father were with us,” was all Mr. Richmond could say.

George then seated himself and learned the history of his father's last days. Mr. Richmond told everything as he remembered, and every eye was moist. He told, too, how rough, mean and cruel the heirs had been, particularly Mr. Bond.

Hours passed like seconds to George, who listened breathlessly. He assured them of his good will and promised them soon to return and better their condition. He then left to make a few visits and to attend to some important business.

In the meantime, the affairs in Mr. Bond's household were not very agreeable. Following the unfortunate feast and revelry, Mr. Bond and his wife and daughter had passed the remainder of the night planning what they would do next.

“Nothing worse could have befallen me,” said Mr. Bond, “than the return of this boy. I would rather that this house had tumbled in on us, and killed us all as we stood there. When I return my inheritance to George Acton, I become a beggar. What we have wasted, is twice as much as we ever had, and nothing will be left for us.”

“Oh,” said his wife, “then we must sell our jewels and our carriages, and I must again walk to the theatres, like other ordinary people. I shall never survive it!”

“You will, most likely, never get to a place of amusement,” said Mr. Bond. “What we have spent in one night for pleasure alone, will have to support us for almost a year.”

His daughter, who had been admiring her diamonds, then said: “Must I return my diamonds, too?”

“Yes,” said her father, “jewels, gold, silver, house, garden, money must be returned and all luxury is at an end.”

Suddenly the Bonds resolved upon a plan to flatter George Acton, beg his pardon for their seeming disrespect, and invite him to a celebration in honor of his return. As they were still devising how best to carry out the plot, George Acton entered. They jumped to their feet, hastened to greet him and assure him that his return gave them the greatest joy and happiness, and informed him of the feast with which they proposed to honor him.

George hesitated a moment. Then, as if it had suggested some new idea to him, he agreed, with the understanding that he would be the host on that occasion, and that he would reserve the rights to invite a few of his old friends. He also requested that the feast be postponed for two weeks, as he wished to pass that time quietly, out of respect to his father.

CHAPTER V. THE FEAST

The day that was to be crowned by a night of joy at last arrived. Late that afternoon, George Acton called upon his friends, the Richmonds and invited them for a walk. Lucy begged for a few moments in which to change her dress, but George dissuaded her, saying that her simple frock of beautiful white linen could not be improved upon.

After strolling leisurely for some time, they came to the cemetery. “Let us go in,” said George, “and visit my father's grave.”

Lucy felt awkward, for she feared that he would consider the planting of the bush as audacious on her part, but she said nothing. He stepped toward the grave and held his hat in his hand. All were silent. Only the breeze sighed through the trees, and scattered here and there a leaf or flower upon the grave. Every eye was wet with tears.

“Lucy,” said George, turning toward her, “the first bit of comfort that came to my heart after I learned of my father's death, was the sight of this bush, planted here by your hands. I always respected your high and worthy thoughts and I have learned now to respect them even more. Were my dear father living, I would lead you to him, and say that next to him I cared most for you, and ask him to give us his benediction. But, now I lead you to his grave, which to you as well as to me, is holy ground, and here I ask you to give me your hand, that I may care for you and protect you while I live; and I will ask your parents for their blessing.”

Mr. Richmond, quickly recovering himself from his surprise, said: “My boy, remember that you have millions and that my daughter is penniless.”

“Your daughter's kind heart is worth more than millions.” He then broke a flower, and placing it in Lucy's hair, said: “This flower with which Lucy decorated my father's grave, represents her dower. My dear Mr. Richmond, add your blessings.”

Recognizing George's earnestness, then Mr. Richmond said: “God bless you, my children, and may He keep you as happy, as He has made us all this day.”

Silent and engrossed in deep thought, they approached George Acton's house. “Here,” said he, “I am expected. It grieves me that I must spend this night in the company of relatives who have dealt so cruelly with you, my good people, whom I love so dearly. But I must remain, for I have given my word; and you must all accompany me.”

With Lucy at his side, followed by the Richmond family, George Acton stepped into the brilliantly illuminated room, which was gorgeously decked with flowers. They were greeted by soft strains of sweet music. The Bonds were all prepared with flattering speeches, but the sight of the Richmond family surprised them as greatly as George Acton's return had done, and words failed them.

“They have complained to him,” whispered Mr. Bond, “and so he has dragged them here in their shabby clothes. Such impertinence on their part.”

George stepped forward into the ball−room and beckoned to the musicians to stop. The guests had risen by this time, and stood about him in a circle.

Mr. Bond then addressed George saying: “I know why you come with these good people. Probably, it is on account of the law−suit which I have brought. It gives me great pain to think that any difference or ill−feeling exists between Mr. Richmond and myself, but I shall certainly call off the law−suit and I will pay him the money which belongs to him, this very night.” Turning to his servant, he said: “Summon my book−keeper, at once.”

“Don't bother any further about it,” said George, “for it is no longer a matter which concerns you, but me. I will see to it that Mr. Richmond's rights are restored to him. It was not for that purpose that I brought him here. I have an entirely different object in view. Where do you think we have been? We come, just as we are, from the grave of my beloved father.”

Mr. Bond felt embarrassed and said: “Oh, I feel very much disturbed that the idea of giving your father a tomb−stone has never been carried out, but the stone−cutter disappointed me so often.”

Then his daughter took up the thread of the conversation and said: “Yes, we regret so much that this delay has arisen, for only two days ago I visited your father's grave, and thought how beautiful a monument would look there, if it were chiseled from Carrara marble.”

“If you were there but two days ago,” said George, “then you must have noticed that it has a tombstone,

though not of marble. How did it please you?”

She paled and began to stammer: “I was—I don't know—it must have—”

Then followed a painful silence which was broken by George saying: “It is evident that you never visited the grave. However, that monument has stood there several months.

“It pains me deeply, Mr. Bond, that you did not consider my father, who so generously enriched you, worthy of a slight token of your thanks. Let me tell you that this night my relationship to you changes.”

Turning to the other members of the party, George said: “I notice in this gathering many true friends of my father who loved me and esteemed me as a boy. I feel gratified that you have come to celebrate my return. But I must tell you that this celebration has a double purpose; for this is the night on which I present to you my future wife—Lucy Richmond. She it was who planted the flowering bush on the grave of my father, never dreaming that it would be recognized by any one. But I think more of that flower, than of all the riches of the world.”

His friends came forward and with hearty cheers cried: “Long live George Acton and his bride.”

“Now,” said he, “as this house and all the fortune of which Mr. Bond still holds the greatest share, falls again to me, I take upon myself the rights of host, and heartily invite all those who are my friends, to spend the rest of the night in celebration of this threefold event: My return, the restoration of my fortune and Lucy to share it.”

One by one, the Bond family quietly slipped out of the room.

Later in the evening, during the feast, Mr. Richmond offered a toast to the health and happiness of George and his daughter, and ended by saying: “Noble purposes and noble thoughts are the only foundation for happiness; and yield at all times buds and blossoms unnumbered.”

HOW IT HAPPENED

[Illustration: “As soon as David saw that the boat was firm on the rocks he hurried out.”]

CHAPTER I. THE WOODED ISLAND

In a quaint little cottage not far from the sea−coast, David Duval first saw the light of day. His father, a very industrious man, supported his family by making willow baskets, and his children, as they grew able, helped him considerably. David, the oldest child, was the father's favorite, for he showed great skill in his work, was quick and obliging and rendered his father considerable assistance. Although David gave promise of being a great man some day, yet he had a very grave fault, and this was his headstrong will. He always wanted to have his own way in everything, would never yield to another's rights, and his parents found great difficulty in teaching him to obey orders. His sisters, too, suffered much from his bad temper and from his overbearing manner.

His rich uncle, Philip, gave him many invitations to dine with him. David enjoyed nothing better than to have the feasts which his uncle provided, but they made him dissatisfied with the simple fare of his own modest little home. He grumbled all the while he was eating in his own house, and did not think it worth while to thank God or his parents for his food.

When he was reminded of his faults, he would promise to do better, but in a little while he would fall back to his old ways. This saddened his parents and they thought that the fond hopes which they held for his future would all be blasted.

His uncle would often say to him: “David, David, take care! God will yet send you to a special school, the 'School of Experience,' where He will discipline you, in order to make something good of you.”

From the hill upon which David's house stood, one could see a vast expanse of water. A little island which lay not far from the coast lent beauty to the scene by its wealth of verdure. No one lived upon it and David's father visited it, from time to time, in order to gather willow branches for his basket weaving.

David, who was now strong enough to help his father row and also to cut down the branches, often accompanied him. One night his father said to him: “If the sky and the sea stay propitious, we will both row over to the island in the morning.” David leaped for joy, and the prospect of the trip would hardly let him sleep.

At dawn on the following day, as the sky began to glow and the morning star grew paler and paler, David stood ready. He helped his mother carry food and wraps into the little boat. It had once happened that the weather had suddenly changed, and David and his father had been obliged to remain on the island for three days, suffering much for the want of food and covering; therefore, mother took the precaution to give them a pot, a pan and some matches, so that they could start a fire and cook something, if necessary.

As everything was now in readiness for the trip, David took his straw hat, while his sister playfully pinned a feather in the ribbon.

“Oh,” said his father; “get a couple of baskets, David; we'll need them.”

“What for?” asked David.

“You'll find that out soon enough,” said his father, laughingly. “Don't you trust that I well know to what use I will put them? You do the same to me, as many people do to their Father in heaven. They always want to know why this or that was ordered. Do what I tell you, and in the end it will come out all right.” David then hurried and brought back the baskets.

They both seated themselves in the boat, and pushed from the shore. Mother and daughter called after them: “A pleasant trip and a happy return.” David vied with his father in rowing, and it made him so warm that he took off his coat.

Soon they reached the island and made a landing, while David tied the boat to a tree stump. They hurried toward the willow trees, cut the branches, tied them together in bundles and carried them to the little boat. The father was delighted with David's helpfulness, and said: “That is right; children should help their parents as much as their strength will permit.”

When they had gathered as many branches as were needed, the father said: “Now, let us rest a while and eat some lunch. After labor, rest is sweet, and one's food tastes so much better.” When the meal was ended, the father said: “Now I want to give you another pleasure. Get the baskets and follow me.” Soon they came to a beautiful walnut tree, whose branches, spreading far out on all sides, were laden with nuts. David was overjoyed at this sight, as he had never seen the tree before. He at once filled his pockets with nuts and tried to crack one with his

teeth and get at the kernel. “Father,” said he, “why did God put the sweet nut between two shells, a bitter and a hard one?”

“My dear boy,” said his father, “God had the wisest purpose for doing this. He wanted to protect the sweet kernel, out of which such a beautiful tree could grow and save it from the gnawing animals. This teaches us how to take the bitter and hard trials of this life. As we do not despise or throw away this sweet nut, because it has a bitter and a hard shell, so we must not resent the sorrows and disagreeable situations that come to us. The first experience we feel is that sorrows are bitter and hard, but we must trust that the good and sweet kernel which they have hidden within them will come to light at last, and will be not only of use, but also a blessing to us.”

The father then climbed the tree and began to shake it. David gathered the nuts which rained down and put them into the baskets, which he carried to the boat, where he emptied them, returning many times for more.

“How your mother will rejoice when she sees these nuts,” said the father, “and what shouts of joy we'll hear from your sisters when I divide them. The thought of it pleases me now, for certainly there is no joy greater than that of giving pleasure to others.”

While David and his father were busy with their work, there crept over the heavens heavy black clouds. Then there arose a dreadful wind storm, just as David stood in the boat emptying his last basket of nuts. The wind bent the trees and raised the waters into high waves. All at once, a blast came, tore the boat from its moorings and took it far out to sea.

David cried loudly, in horror. His frightened father hurried to the shore and saw the boy in the boat, in the far distance. The waves increased in size and soon the little boat could be seen, first on the crest and then hidden in the trough. It was carried rapidly along.

The father saw his boy wringing his hands, but of his cries he could hear nothing, for the sound of the roaring waters and rushing wind drowned them.

The entire sky was now enveloped in black clouds and dark night hovered over the sea. Flashes of lightning illuminated the heavens and dreadful crashes of thunder filled the air. Seeing no more of his son or of the boat, the father sank disheartened under the willow tree and spent the night alone with his grief.

Meanwhile, his wife and other children were distracted with fear. As the lightning broke forth, followed by thunderous crashes, and the island was shrouded in rain, they prayed for the absent ones. When the storm abated, they gazed long and patiently, in the hopes of getting a signal of the returning boat. They saw and heard nothing. The mother spent the night in sleepless anxiety.

As the morning broke forth in beautiful sunshine, and still no sign of the little boat could be seen, the mother's fears grew greater and greater. She ran crying to Philip, and told him her troubles. He knit his brow and shook his head. “It is strange that they have not come back yet. I'll just row over and see what has happened to them.” He stepped into his boat lying close at anchor, and, with his assistant, rowed over to the little island. Mother and children stood watching them in anxiety and dread.

At last, they saw the little boat, in the distance, returning with its load. “Oh thanks,” cried the mother. “Philip has other passengers in the boat, besides his assistant. Now, it is all right.” She hurried down to the shore, but as the boat neared them she cried in fright: “Where is my David?” The father, deathly pale, looked at her in silence. His deep grief had made him dumb. Uncle Philip then spoke to her: “May God comfort you, for our David has been drowned in the sea. Poor David had his faults, but he was a good−hearted boy.”

The mother could find no comfort and the children cried.

CHAPTER II. FAR FROM HOME

While David was being wept over as dead, he still lived. He had had a dreadful shock, riding on the tumultuous waves, far, far out to sea. His boat, over which the waves had dashed in fury, threatened each moment to sink. At last, after hours and hours of torture, the wind drove his boat upon the coast of a rocky island.

As soon as David was sure that the boat was firm on the rocks, he hurried out, waded through the foaming, shallow water to the land and climbed up the rocks, while his clothes dripped with rain and sea water.

After he had recovered a little from his shock and fear, he gazed out at his little boat and wondered how it had been so well guided into the clefts of the rocks. A good sailor could have made no better landing. “Who steered this rudderless boat so safely into this haven? God's great goodness and mercy has certainly led me to this safety, and all my life I shall be grateful.”

The storm had now been broken and the rain ceased. David thought he could see the green island, with its trees but it seemed no bigger than a bush, that he could easily have covered with his straw hat. The land, still farther away, seemed to touch the horizon, and it looked like a little cloud.

“Oh,” cried David, “how dreadfully far I am from human help. This island, on which I have been cast, cannot be seen by my people; I never saw it when I looked out to sea. They will never think that I am here and they will mourn me as dead. The men will go and get my father, but no one will come for me. I have often heard them say, 'for fifty miles out, there is no sign of land.'“

The waters, little by little, grew calmer, so David hurried down to his boat; but, as he was about to step into it, he noticed that it had sprung a leak. “Oh,” cried he, “my little boat is useless now, and I am a prisoner on this rocky island. I must stay here till I die and never again shall I see my people.” His face grew white with fear and the tears rolled down his cheeks.

As David saw starvation staring him in the face, he collected the nuts that were in the boat, put them into the baskets and carried them to safety, where he also placed the few utensils that had not been washed overboard. Then he pulled his little boat as far up on the rocks as he could get it.

The fear through which he had passed had now exhausted him. He felt almost afraid to sleep, out in the open, all alone, but he prayed his evening prayer as he had been accustomed to, lay down beside his nuts and his few kitchen utensils, and soon was fast asleep. After a restless night, filled with many strange dreams of home, he was awakened by the noise of sea birds, fluttering overhead. As he gazed before him and saw nothing but the boundless sea, he uttered a loud cry.

A bevy of birds flew toward the land. “Oh, dear birds, I wish you could carry a message to my people and tell them that I am here. My good father and uncle would risk their lives to get me.”

After he had breakfasted on a few nuts and a little piece of bread, he decided to examine the island. “Perhaps I shall find some fruit trees that will afford me nourishment till God delivers me from this captivity; and maybe I shall find some people living here who will take me to my home.”

He wrapped a few pieces of bread and nuts in his handkerchief, tied the bundle to the end of a stick, slung it over his shoulder and started forth. It was a dangerous, weary journey that gave no signs of human life. Nor did he see any of the narrow paths usually made by animals. Numberless trees were there, but none that bore fruit.

“If I have to stay long on this island, I'll die of starvation,” said he, as the perspiration rolled down his cheeks. “But before hunger kills me, I know I'll die from thirst.” As he continued his way, he heard a murmuring sound, like that of water. He hurried in the direction of the sound, and found a little spring, cold and clear as crystal. He seated himself beside it to cool off, and then drank to his heart's content. He had never before noticed what a blessing from God water really is; but now he appreciated the drink and offered his thanks for it.

He proceeded on his way, and at last reached the highest point of the island. It filled him with dread, as he saw the entire island covered with trees, and lying there, at his very feet and on every side—the immeasureable sea. Now he realized that he was all alone and far from help. “I will come to this point every day and watch. Perhaps a passing steamer will pick me up and take me home.”

The sun began to sink and colored the heavens with gold−rimmed rays of purple and red. As David stood gazing at the beauties of the sky which he had never before noticed, he prayed to the Creator to send him help and

guide some ship to this lonely island. Then he descended the rocks and retraced his steps. Soon he lay down under a clump of trees and fell fast asleep. When he awoke, he ate a few nuts and some bread.

Each day he wandered to the rocky summit and watched for a ship. But all in vain, for on the great, wide sea no ship was to be seen. He saw the necessity of eating sparingly, or his food would not last; so he took his little knife and made cuts across his bread, showing how much he could eat daily, and only when he was very hungry. The little piece of bread had become very hard and he had to soften it in the water from the spring.

“Oh,” cried he, “how many good things I had at my father's table, that I grumbled about and for which I never thanked God.” As he sat thinking about himself and all his ingratitude, he saw the fishes swimming in the water. “I'd catch some fish,” said David, “if I only had a line.” Picking up his straw hat, he ripped out the thread, and taking the pin with which his sister had fastened the feather, he made a hook out of it and tied the thread to it. He searched for some worms, and soon, he began to angle. He tried again and again, but not a nibble could he get. At last luck favored him, and soon he had three fishes. Remembering the matches which his mother had put into the tin−covered pail, he decided to start a fire and cook his fish, adding a little salty water for seasoning. He relished this little repast more than the finest feast served at his rich uncle's house.

One morning, as he again ascended the rocky summit, he saw a large ship that seemed no more than a mile away. Its sails were all unfurled and gilded with the rays of the bright sun. Hope filled his breast and he trembled with fear. He watched it, as it came nearer and nearer. Suddenly, he seized a stick, and tying his red handkerchief to it, moved it to and fro like a signal of danger and distress. But before the ship had come close enough to see the sign, it changed its direction and sailed away into the far distance. David followed its course, till it was lost to view, and then he sank upon the ground disheartened and cried bitterly.

The hours of the day that were not used in fishing, cooking, or chopping, he spent gathering shells, in which he often found pearls. As no person had ever been there to gather them, he found them in quantities. Then, too, he found many beautiful corals in the moss−covered rocks. “If God permits me to return to my people,” said he, “I will bring them these pearls and corals, as presents.”

He spent his time as best he could and often sighed for companionship. For hours he would gaze at the friendly moon, at which he had never before gazed more than a second. And the twinkling stars, too, seemed to have a new meaning for him. “The heavens truly show God's wonderful work,” said David. Even the delicate green moss that he had never deigned to notice now had its value, since it afforded him a soft bed. “I see God's finger in everything about me,” said he. “How well everything has been ordered.” Good thoughts were now awaking in his mind and they were, like wings, carrying his heart to heaven.

“Loneliness must be sent for a good reason,” thought he. “Perhaps God sent me to this dreary, lonely place to make me see and feel what I never understood before.” David realized now that he had never been grateful to his parents for their care. Nor as obedient to their wishes as he should have been.

“Oh, if I ever get back to my home, I will be grateful and obedient to my parents.” He remembered, too, how disagreeable he had often been to his sisters, and said: “Oh, how sorry I am. If God lets me return I will ask their forgiveness and be a good brother to them. I never appreciated my home, my parents, nor my sisters. God forgive me and let me return, and I will try to repay them in kindness and love for all my negligence.”

An intense longing for his people filled David's heart; and it grew stronger every minute. Each day he watched for ships and often sighted one, but they never neared the island. At last he came to the conclusion that the coast was rocky and dangerous, and so no ship would ever come near it.

With this sad thought, he was retracing his steps one day, carrying some wood to his little retreat. But what a terror seized him. He saw in the direction of his little retreat thick, black, clouds of smoke ascending to the heavens, and two red flaming brands of fire, like two church spires. David had often heard of islands that were volcanic and sent forth fire, and now he thought that this was one. He threw his wood to the ground and with palpitating heart drew closer and closer: but all he could see was smoke and flames. The crackling of the fire filled him with more fear. At last he saw that it was not from the earth that the fire issued. He realized that the wind had blown the flames of his little fire, which he always kept lighted, against some bushes and had set them on fire. Almost everything he owned was being destroyed and two immense trees were being consumed.

When he considered, above all, the loss of his little fishing line that meant so much to him, he cried aloud: “Oh, what a misfortune this is! Now, I'll die of hunger. I often heard my father say that from misfortune, fortune sometimes grows, but, when I look at this damage, it doesn't seem possible that any luck could come from it.

“Oh, how good it is to live with people. How easily one can help the injury to another. Oh, if ever I have the luck to get back to my family, how willingly will I help them in times of need. But who will help me, a poor, lost boy, on this lonely island? I am like a poor bird driven from her nest.” A mighty painful longing for his father's house again seized him. “If only a ship would come and take me back,” he said.

CHAPTER III. THE SMOKE

His people too, were mourning through these weary, weary weeks. One day the father said to the mother: “I need some willow branches and although it is very painful for me to go to that island, still, there is no other place where I can get them.”

“Then you must not go alone,” said the mother. “Take the children with you. They will be a help and a comfort to you.” Soon they were all ready and rowed over to the island. After landing, they sat under a tree for a while.

“This poplar tree,” said the father, “is the very one under which David and I sat the last day we were here. And over in that direction,” pointing toward the island, “he was carried in his little boat.” Tears stood in the father's eyes; the boy, Andreas, turned his head to wipe a tear; while the girls cried.

“Let us go now and gather nuts,” said the father, to cheer them again. They soon filled their baskets and were about to return to the boat, when the boy said: “Dear father, let us go to the top of the hill and get a view. I've never been up there.” “Oh, yes,” begged the girls, “do let us go.”

The father consented and they all mounted the hill. It was a beautiful day. The sky was cloudless and the air was so clear and dry, that one could see distinctly far out into the distance. Suddenly Andreas shouted: “Father, what is that I see? Isn't smoke coming up out of the water?” The father looked in the direction pointed, and seeing smoke, said: “I don't know what it is. I fear it is a steamer on fire. It seems,” continued he, shading his eyes, “that I see a dark spot, out of which the smoke is ascending. Don't you see it?”

“Oh, yes,” cried the girls, “and it has two sharp points at the top.”

“I see it, too,” cried Andreas. “One point is higher than the other.”'

“That is no ship,” said the father, “for a ship would have a different shape, and wouldn't look so big from such a great distance. It must be an island, but I am sure I never heard of it. People must live there, or how could smoke arise from it.”

“Oh, my,” cried one of the girls, “wouldn't it be wonderful if our dear David lived there.”

“Maybe so,” cried Andreas.

“Nothing is impossible with God,” said the father. “We must leave nothing undone in our search for him. We will ask Uncle Philip's advice and get him to help us. Let us retrace our steps, now, for it is time for us to return.”

Little did they know how truly they had prophesied, for the smoke which they saw was ascending from the fire on the rocky island—the same that had cost David many tears of anguish and fear.

When they reached home, they told the mother their happy conjecture at once, and a faint ray of hope filled her heart.

The neighbors were now called together, but their ideas on the subject were varied.

“Nonsense,” cried one. “How did that island get there. I never heard about it in my life. It must be a burning ship.”

“No,” cried another, who always thought he knew better than anybody else, “that's no ship, but a volcano sending out its fire. I have often heard that such islands appear over night. We would come to a nice place, if we should sail near such a fire−brand.”

“It's either a ship or a volcano,” said a third; “but for a hundred dollars I wouldn't go over there in such little boats as we have.”

“If you'll pay me,” said a fourth, “I will go, but not otherwise.”

The old, honest Uncle Philip raised his quiet voice, and said: “Brother, I will go with you. Here is my hand on it. David was my beloved nephew. It may not be certain that he lives, hardly probable, but still possible. Therefore it is worth the trouble of undertaking the dangerous trip; and God, who gives us courage to go ahead, will also see us through.”

Peter, a young, strong lad, shouted: “I will go too. I have often risked my life for a fish, so I'll risk it now to save a human life, if I can. I want no money, for as long as I live I would be happy in the thought that I had helped to save David, and this thought would be a sufficient reward.”

“God give us all this joy,” said Uncle Philip. “If wind and weather continue favorable, we will set sail at

daybreak." The other men departed, shaking their heads and predicting misfortune.

Peter and Uncle Philip remained and discussed the matter a little further. "I will take my sail boat and furnish the food," said Philip.

The following morning proved perfect and a light wind was blowing. Mother and daughter accompanied the men to the boat landing, and said: "God grant that you may return safely, bringing our David with you."

The men unfurled the sails and pushed off from the land, passing the green island and going in the direction of the smoke. Nearer and nearer, did they come, and at last Peter cried: "It is really an island. Let us help with the oars." Suddenly Uncle Philip shouted: "Stop, and furl the sails. There are many dangerous rocks in the sea. We must be very careful or we will founder."

By means of the rudder and much care and pains, they at last made a landing. Peter was the first to leap on shore, and cried: "Now we have reached the island and perhaps we shall find David. Whatever is begun in God's name and out of love to humanity, will succeed."

The other two men now stepped out and fastened the boat securely. Uncle Philip looked at the rocks, shook his head and said: "This isn't a nice place to live."

They began to search the island and climbed over the rocks and deep clefts. At last they reached a little trodden path which led them to David's retreat. Peter hurried ahead.

David had passed a sleepless night in fear and sadness. As the morning sun shone over all, a little lightness had crept into his heart, and he sank upon his knees and prayed.

As David was kneeling, the three men came behind him. But he was so absorbed that he heard no steps.

Peter saw him first, and said to the others: "See, there is a hermit, maybe he can direct us. Brother, can you tell us?"—he had no time to finish his question, for David had risen to his feet. He recognized his father, and cried: "Oh, my father! my father!" Then a silence broke over them, for neither had the power to speak.

At last they controlled their emotion and thanked God in one voice, for bringing them together. David then greeted his uncle and Peter and gathering up his belongings, hastened with them to the boat.

On the homeward trip, David related all his adventures, and shed tears of joy. Even his father had to dry his eyes several times. "You were very wise, and helped yourself wonderfully. Necessity awakened your understanding," said Peter.

"Don't you remember?" said his uncle, "what I once said to you that God would send you to a special school? That's where you've been. In the school of Experience. In this school you learned to know God, to pray to Him, to love Him, and to thank Him for his blessings. What I find most wonderful of all in your story is about the smoke which arose from your island. What is more trivial than smoke, yet the smoke was like a sign from heaven, that this was an island upon which some one lived. That was God's finger." All silently gave thanks for the sign.

"I thought," said David, "that the fire was the worst thing that could have happened to me, but now I see it was my greatest fortune."

Then Uncle Philip said: "Our beloved ones at home are watching and waiting for our return." So, Peter quickly busied himself with a stick upon which he fastened some ribbons.

"What are you going to do with that?" asked David.

"I promised your sisters if we succeeded in finding you, to raise this banner. How they will rejoice when they see it." Then and there he fastened it to the prow of the ship.

Each moment brought them nearer home and David's heart beat high with hope, for on the shore his mother and sisters and all the villagers, big and little, were gathered. As David stepped on land, a cry of joy arose from the people; but the mother's joy at seeing her David was so intense that she wept.

Men and women, boys and girls, shook his hand and wished him a thousand times welcome. David's mother wanted to hear his story and was about to drag him home but the people wouldn't let her. "We want to hear it too," and they led him to a big linden tree and bade him step upon the seat and tell his story. All pressed around him. All eyes were on him. When it was still, David began. He told them of his dangers, trials and suffering, and said, in the end, that these had taught him the things which he had never learned before. "I am grateful to God for my deliverance and for the joy of being with you all again."

Thanking them for their interest in him and bidding them good−bye for the present, he entered his father's house, where a hearty meal was spread before him.

When the meal was over, David opened his little bundle and displayed his pearls and corals and said: "I have

brought you all a present from my island.” All stood in astonishment and admired them.

“My, my,” cried Uncle Philip, examining them closely, “you have brought some valuable things. These pearls and corals will yield much money, for some of them are very large. Now you have helped your father out of all his debts and trouble.”

“No, no,” said his father, “we will share them with Peter and yourself. You shared the dangers of this trip with me, and you shall also share the treasures. Philip, you take first choice, and then Peter next.”

Two of the men who had offered to go on the trip for money, now entered the room and wished they had gone for nothing. “For such a reward as that,” they said, “it would have been worth while.”

“Go, go, you poor, miserable wretches,” cried Philip, “you wouldn't move a hand or foot to help a fellow man in trouble without being paid for it. It serves you right that you get nothing,”

“I wish none of this money,” continued Philip, “I have enough and ask no more. But Peter must take his share, for the spirit which he showed gave all of us courage, and he must be rewarded. Besides, he needs it.”

Deeply touched, Peter took the reward with thanks.

Then the grateful parents again urged Philip to take the pearls, but he replied: “Let it be, as I said before. The pearls and corals are the least that David brought back with him; for he has gathered unto himself costlier treasures: 'Love for God and to humanity.' These are priceless pearls.”

Turning to David, he said: “Not only have you found these treasures for us, but you have brought good fortune to our little community. For pearls and corals can now be gathered by the men of this village, and offered for sale. This will furnish a comfortable living for many of them. So, you have become a public benefactor.”

The little household soon resumed its usual routine and David entered into the life and spirit of his home. He became a model of virtue for the village youths, and the joy, staff and crown of his parent's life. He grew to be a noble, pious man, full of love and helpfulness to his fellow men; and his memory remains blessed.

FROM ROYAL PALACE TO LOWLY HUT

CHAPTER I. THE SUBURBS

During those unhappy times when the Empire of France was overthrown and a number of the richest people were plunged into the deepest misery, a very wealthy family, named Berlow, lived in a palace in Paris.

Count Berlow was a high−minded, honorable man, and his wife was good and charitable. Their two children, Albert and Marguerite, were the exact counterpart of their parents.

Just as those revolutionary times broke forth, Count Berlow, with his family, moved from Paris to his mansion in the suburbs. Here he lived quietly, surrounded by orchards of fruitful trees, free from the turmoil of the noisy city. His family rejoiced at having him constantly in their midst and he was glad at the opportunity of being the instructor of his children, particularly in music.

One gloomy winter evening, the family was gathered in the brilliantly lighted music room. Count Berlow had composed a pretty little poem, and had fitted it to music. Albert had with difficulty mastered the playing of it, but Marguerite could sing the song remarkably well. The children had practised this piece faithfully and diligently and purposed to surprise their mother by singing and playing it that very evening. After the Count and Countess had sung several operatic selections, the father turned to his children, saying: “Let us hear what you can do.” Albert seated himself at the piano and played, while Marguerite modestly sang in a sweet tone.

The Countess was delighted over this, their first song. She embraced both the children affectionately, and praised them for their efforts and the pleasure which they had afforded her.

Suddenly, the door was thrust open, and armed soldiers crowded into the room. The leader presented an order in which the Count was declared a friend of the King and an enemy of freedom and equality, and in consequence he was to be conducted to prison. Although the Countess, weeping and lamenting, threw her arms about her husband's neck to hold and guard him, and his children clung to his knees, the soldiers rudely tore him from their embrace. The cries of the mother and children were heart−rending.

The unhappy wife did everything in her power to save her dear husband. She hastened to the city and appeared before the magistrate, to prove the Count's innocence. She called upon all her neighbors to bear testimony to her husband's quiet, retiring life, and to the fact that he had taken no share in the affairs of his country, and had talked with no one concerning them. But everything was in vain, and she was informed that in a few days her husband would be sentenced to death.

After an absence of several days, the Countess returned to her country seat and found her home occupied by soldiers, who had ransacked it and reduced it to a common tavern to which admittance was denied her. Her two children were nowhere to be found, and all her servants had been driven away. It was late at night, and she knew not what to do next.

As she turned, she met Richard, her old, true and faithful servant, who said to her: “My dear, good Countess Berlow, you, too, stand in danger of suspicion this very minute, for you have been heard to speak of the injustice and cruelty of the government. There is no escape for you, except by secret flight. You cannot save your husband, and your presence here will only bring trouble upon your own head. Your children are both in one of the out−houses with my wife. Follow me there. My brother, John, the old fisherman, has been notified, and I will take you to him to−night. He will conduct you and your children across the river to safety. In this way you will at least save your lives.”

She entered Richard's house, but there a new trouble awaited her, for Marguerite had become suddenly ill from the fright and the shock, and lay unconscious, sick with a high fever. The Countess wished to nurse her child back to health, but the doctor would not hear of it, and advised her immediate flight. Richard and his good wife promised to care for the sick child, as if it were their own.

Countess Berlow knelt beside the bedside of her beloved daughter, and said: “If I must bow to this decree, I leave her in your care, my good people, and ask God in His mercy to watch over her and restore her to me in His good time.” She paused for a moment, then rose quickly from her knees, kissed her unconscious child, took her son by the hand, and trembling and swaying, hastened out of the house, without one backward look.

CHAPTER II. THE RETREAT

Richard now conducted the Countess and her son to John, the fisherman, who quickly rowed them over the river to safety. As there was no time to rest, with the help of a guide, the fisherman's friend, she hastened on with her son to find the hut which Richard had suggested.

After days and weeks of journeying hither and thither, over hills and through valleys, they found that their strength was almost exhausted. At last they came to a little low hut in a thickly wooded country. The guide pointed to it with his staff, saying: “That is the hut; there live the old shepherd and his wife who will harbor you.”

Countess Berlow sighed, and followed the narrow path to the hut.

The old shepherd, who had been expecting her, came forward with a pleasant smile and welcoming, outstretched hands. To show his great respect for her, he had dressed himself in a gray suit. Around his neck he had tied a red handkerchief, and he wore a nice, green hat with a little bent feather at its side.

“Greetings to you, noble lady,” said he. “I consider it a great honor to protect you and your son. This is my wife, and between us we will do all in our power to make you feel contented.”

So saying, he turned to his wife, who repeated his greetings, and invited all to partake of her simple meal, which consisted of bread and milk and a few apples.

The good shepherdess then conducted the Countess to a room which opened on an adjoining room. These two rooms were to serve as bedrooms. The larger one was meagerly furnished, and its only window looked out upon the forest and two high mountain tops.

Countess Berlow was thankful for having been guided to this humble retreat. She cared for her own rooms daily and spent the remaining time in knitting, sewing or reading. But her greatest anxiety was to find amusement for her son, Albert. She undertook to continue his instruction, but she was at a loss for books.

One morning, as she sat musing over her wants, she was aroused from her reverie by the ringing of the near−by church bell. The good, old shepherdess came running into the room saying that the clergyman from over the hill would hold services in the chapel that day. Countess Berlow, with her son, hastened at once to attend.

The clergyman delivered a short sermon, every word of which touched the hearts of his earnest listeners. After the services, the Countess sought the clergyman and engaged him in conversation. She found him to be a thoughtful, devout, kind−hearted old man. He showed great interest in Albert. He promised to supply the much needed books for his use, and offered to give the boy two hours' instruction each day, provided Albert would take the trouble to journey over the hills to his house.

Albert promised to come, overjoyed at the prospect of continuing his studies under such an able teacher. He could scarcely wait each day for the hour when, with his books under his arm, he would set out over the hills, whistling lively tunes and keeping step to his music.

On rainy days, when the roads were heavy and ofttimes dangerous, he was obliged to forego his visits. His mother would then suggest some recreation for him, for she well knew that all work and no play would tend to make him dull.

In this locality, large numbers of canary birds were raised and sold and sent far and wide to other countries. Even the old shepherd had many of these birds. Albert begged his mother to purchase one of them for him. “Marguerite always had one,” said he, “and I would dearly love to own one, too. It would remind us of her and our own dear home.”

His mother agreed, and Albert chose a bird that closely resembled the one belonging to his sister. The bird with its beautiful yellow plumage, its clear, brilliant, coal−black eyes, afforded Albert much pleasure. Soon the bird became tame, flew upon Albert's outstretched finger and ate seeds from his lips.

Whenever Albert wrote, the bird would alight on his penholder and peck his fingers. Though he enjoyed the bird's presence and tricks, yet he was obliged at times to cage him, in order to carry on his work undisturbed. Later, when the bird began to sing, Albert could not praise it enough.

“You must teach it to whistle nice songs,” said the old shepherd one day.

Albert thought the old man was joking. He did not yet know that one can teach a bird to imitate. The old man then brought out a flute and presented it to him.

“Oh, what a fine flute! How glad I am to own one,” said Albert.

The old shepherd took the flute, played a waltz upon it, and showed Albert how to use the stops, Albert was pleased with the light, clear tones of the flute, and as he had talent for music and had a good ear, he soon mastered the difficulties of the instrument.

Often he played tirelessly for the bird and always a song which his father had taught him. After striving for hours and days and weeks to teach the bird, lo! his wonderful patience was rewarded. The bird began to sing the song, and sang it through without a mistake.

[Illustration: “Soon the bird became tame and flew upon Albert's outstretched finger.”]

Albert leaped with joy and thanks. He praised the bird, over and over again, and rewarded it with lettuce, apple and hemp seed. The little flute and the little bird helped Albert and his mother to while away many an hour.

As the months rolled along, the sorrows of the Countess still lay heavily on her heart. Many a night she spent in tears and sleeplessness, and many a day was sad and dreary. She tried very hard to cloak her woe, and hide it from her son. In her unselfishness, she choked back her tears and grief, filled each day with work, and gave strict attention to her son's comfort, instruction and diversions. She always had a pleasant word and smile for the old shepherd and his wife, whose life, though lonely, was spent in the satisfaction of right living and lending a helping hand. The joy that comes from doing one's best is the only lasting joy, for every other pleasure fades and passes away.

Countess Berlow tried in every way to get news of the Count, but she had not been very successful, although some news was printed in the daily papers. The thoughtful old clergyman sent her a copy of the news, once each week, as he did not receive it any oftener.

One night Albert returned carrying the paper, and said: “The good clergyman did not have time to read it through, but he noticed from the head lines, that the paper contains much good news.”

The Countess took it and read anxiously. Finding the news somewhat encouraging, she built hopes that soon she might return to her much loved home; but, alas, in the very last column of the paper, she read that many noblemen were to be sentenced to death for their loyalty to the king. In the list, she found the name of her worthy husband, Count Berlow. She reeled as if struck by a thunder−bolt, the paper fell from her hands and she sank in a swoon.

A few minutes passed before the good shepherdess came in response to Albert's cry, and brought the Countess back to consciousness. She had to be carried to her bed, and it seemed as if she would never recover. Poor Albert, who rarely left her bedside for a moment, began to fail and fade day by day.

The old shepherd often said, shaking his head at the same time: “The coming fall will surely scatter its leaves upon the grave of the Countess, and her poor son will doubtless never see the spring.”

CHAPTER III. THE PRISON

The faithful old Richard had waited on that memorable day of the flight for the return of his brother John, the fisherman. He was elated when he heard of the safety of the Countess. Richard's greatest trouble now was how to save his master, the good Count Berlow. He considered it very unjust and cruel that an honest and right−living citizen should be sentenced to death for loyalty to his king.

On the following morning, Richard hurried to the city where his son, Robert, served in the National Guard. With help he hoped to gain a meeting with this good−natured, intelligent boy, who from time to time acted as sentinel before the prison. He would try to secure his son's aid in releasing the Count, so unjustly imprisoned. At last the opportunity presented itself, and father and son had a hasty talk over the situation. Robert found no chance, however, and gave up hope of saving the Count.

At last the day arrived when the Count's sentence was to be carried out. Sleepless and sad, with his head resting on his hands, the Count sat in his lonely cell. The warden had not considered it worth while to bring him a light, and heavy darkness enveloped him. He thought of his wife and his children. Not for himself did he suffer so much, but for those who were so dear to him. He knew not where they were, and he was greatly troubled about their condition.

While the noble Count sat lost in these thoughts, a loud shouting arose in the corridors. Soldiers ran here and there, crying: “Save yourselves, if you can. Fire! Fire!” This reached the Count's ears. All at once the door of his cell was thrown wide open. Thick volumes of smoke and dust poured in and dreadful flashes of light illumined his dark cell. A young soldier stood before him, and cried: “Save yourself!”

Through the carelessness of a drunken servant, a fire had started in the building. The soldiers had torn off their coats and weapons and had hurried to put it out. Robert had seized the first opportunity that afforded itself, had taken the clothing and weapons of a soldier, and had hastened to the Count with them, saying to himself: “The only chance to save him is to dress him as a soldier.”

“Hurry, put on these clothes,” said Robert. He helped the Count pull on the coat, placed the hat on his head, buckled on his knapsack, and gave him a musket. The Count's face had not been shaved during his imprisonment, so that this gave him the wild appearance which all soldiers had at that time.

“Now,” said Robert, “hasten down the steps and out of the front door. With this outfit, I trust you will easily get through the crowd unnoticed. Then go directly to John, the fisherman, and there you will meet my father.”

Count Berlow knew exactly how to act his part. Earnestly, as if he had some urgent business to transact, he hurried down the steps and shouted in haughty tones to the men who were carrying buckets, “Aside, aside!” At last he reached the street without being detected. With quick strides and fast−beating heart, he made his way to the city gate and continued on, as Robert had taken care to give him the pass−word.

At midnight, he reached the fisherman's hut. He knocked at the window. The fisherman came to the door, but stepped back frightened at seeing a soldier who might wish to arrest him or his brother. He based his fears on the fact that they had both made many enemies on account of their fidelity to the Berlow family. When John recognized the Count, he raised his hands and exclaimed, “Oh, it's you, Count Berlow; how happy I am to be able to help you!” Richard, who had waited and watched there for the last ten nights, rushed into the room and shouted: “Oh, my master!” and both embraced and wept.

The first question which the Count asked was for his wife and children. Richard quickly related the details of their flight and the illness of Marguerite, who had now recovered and was sleeping in the adjoining room. The noise, however, had awakened her, and recognizing her father's voice, she rushed into the room. With great joy she hurried into his outstretched arms. He kissed her rosy cheeks and looked at her long and tenderly.

The Count decided to continue his flight that very night from the land which once had been to him a paradise but was now only a murderers' den. On the same boat that had safely carried his wife and son, he now took passage. The old fisherman led the way and Richard followed last. The night was clear and the heavens bright with stars. Suddenly they heard sounds of shooting, and voices shouting: “Halt! Halt!—Halt, halt!—You are deserters!”

It so happened that when the fire in the prison had been extinguished, the soldiers had carefully searched each

cell, to find if anyone had escaped. To their great astonishment, they found the cell of Count Berlow empty. The soldier who had lost his uniform cried loudly with rage: “He has flown with my clothing and my weapons. Up and follow him!” The pursuers soon found a clue to the Count's route.

[Illustration: “On the same boat that had safely carried his wife and son he now took passage.”]

The poor Count and Richard were almost stupefied when they heard the distant shouting, but they seized the oars all the more firmly and rowed with every muscle strained to the utmost. Soon the soldiers reached the shore and began to fire upon the occupants of the boat. Marguerite crept under the seat, while the men tried to dodge the bullets. One bullet pierced the Count's hat, two pierced Richard's oar. The little boat, which was scarcely an inch above the water, rocked and rolled and almost capsized, but the occupants escaped without injury and finally reached the opposite shore in safety.

Count Berlow was thankful for his escape, and so were Richard and Marguerite. They seated themselves on an overturned tree trunk, to recover a little strength. When they had rested a little, the Count quickly threw off his uniform and donned some old clothes belonging to Richard. With a staff in his hand and a bundle on his back, Richard now led the way, while the Count and Marguerite followed. In order to allay all suspicion, Richard took a roundabout course through the thickly−wooded country.

CHAPTER IV. THE PURCHASE

Count Barlow's greatest desire was to see his wife and son. “I shall not have a restful moment,” said he to Richard, “until I shall have found them. You tell me they are safe in a shepherd's lowly hut, but how shall we reach them? My daughter cannot go on foot, and I have not the means to ride there.”

Then Richard drew out of his bundle a bag of gold. “You are not as poor as you think, my noble master,” said he. “This money is all yours.” Count Berlow stared first at the gold and then at his faithful servant.

“You see,” said Richard, “while you were rich, you paid me well and presented me with large gifts of money. Many people, too, were generously aided by you. During the time you were imprisoned, I set out to gather in as much money from these people as I could possibly move them to give you. 'Tis true we often find people who never feel grateful for any good they receive, but I must confess that these grateful souls not only returned all you ever gave them, but out of love and deep thankfulness added much more thereto.”

Count Berlow counted the money. “It is a very, very large amount,” said he, and raised his eyes in thanks to heaven. “But how long can even this last us?”

“We will economize,” said Richard, “in every possible way, but let me first of all purchase a horse and wagon,” This was soon accomplished. The wagon was provided with a canvas covering, which served to shield the occupants from view, and also to protect them from the sun and rain.

They rode for days and days, and the way was long and dreary. Owing to the rough handling which the Count had received in the prison, the terror which his death sentence had caused him, the sorrow and fear of his flight, and the weariness of the journey, he soon became very much weakened and was forced to stop at a little village and rest for a while.

Richard hired a few rooms and bought the food. As he was well trained in all household duties, he took upon himself the care of their temporary home. Marguerite helped, as best she could, and from morning till night performed each task willingly, always wearing a sunny smile.

Count Berlow was confined to his bed for many weeks, and it was a long time before he could sit up, even for a little while. Marguerite cared for her father, read to him, cheered him, and thus made the time pass pleasantly. Her father returned his thanks with every evidence of love and contentment.

Marguerite's birthday was now at hand. When she awoke one morning, she found the window−sills filled with potted geraniums, her favorite flowers, and a beautiful canary bird hanging above them in a pretty golden cage. The bird exactly resembled the one which she had had at home. She thanked her father in the tenderest tones for his selection.

“Take these simple gifts, my child, for at present I can give you no more.”

Richard now served dinner and all seemed once more to be bright and happy. When the meal was ended, the Count drank to the health of his daughter and his absent wife and son. “I wonder, my child,” said he to Marguerite, “where your mother and brother are this day, and how they are celebrating your birthday? What has befallen them? I always had a happy heart; but now I often have many troubled hours. I fear—I fear.”

Marguerite threw her arms about her father's neck and tried to reassure him. “Be comforted, dear father,” said she. “We shall be brought together again, for surely God cares for us.”

“Yes, that is true,” he said, and dried his eyes.

All was silent. It was a deep, solemn, soul−stirring moment.

All at once the canary bird began to sing a song—the song which father and daughter recognized at once as the one which the Count had composed and taught his children. No one else had ever heard it or played it.

Marguerite clapped her hands and shouted: “What can this mean! That is the first piece that you taught us, dear father.” All gazed at the bird in astonishment. The bird repeated the song, twice, thrice. “It is our song. No note is missing.”

“This is truly wonderful,” said the Count. “Certainly no one could have taught that song to the bird but my boy Albert; but how? I do not know. Now, Richard, where did you get this bird?”

Richard then related how he had purchased the canary on the preceding night from a bird fancier in the village.

"Hasten to the village and possibly he may be able to tell you more about the bird."

Richard ran to the village, and was gone what seemed an interminable time. At last he returned with the information that the fancier had bought the bird from a little boy who lived with his mother, many miles beyond, and who had trained this little bird to sing and whistle. The fancier described the boy and mother so well that all were unanimous in their decision that this was the boy and mother for whom they were seeking.

CHAPTER V. REUNITED

Preparations were now made for a hasty departure, for the Count seemed suddenly stronger. Richard packed their belongings and placed them in the wagon. The bird was hung from a hook fastened in the top of the vehicle. Everything was soon in readiness.

On the following morning they started off. The Count and Marguerite were regaled on the journey by the sweet song of the canary. It cheered them and seemed to make the time pass all the more quickly. After a journey of twenty miles, they reached the village, at sunset.

They repaired at once to the clergyman's house, where they learned that the Countess and Albert Berlow lived in the shepherd's lowly hut, some miles distant. “The Countess holds her husband as dead,” said the clergyman, “and no joy can now penetrate her heart. Her health has failed and it seems as if she would not last very long.”

Count Berlow asked how she could have received such incorrect news. The clergyman then brought out a package of newspapers, searched for one sheet, and laid it before the Count. He read that, on such a day, and at such an hour, Count Berlow, with twenty others, had been hung. “Strange it is,” said the Count, “either they forgot to cross my name from the list, or else they did not wish to, in the hope that in that way they would not be answerable for my escape.”

It pained the Count sorely that this false news had brought much suffering to the Countess, for death seemed almost to have enrolled her, too. The clergyman advised them to proceed slowly and cautiously, lest the joyful news of the Count's return should be too great a shock to her.

Intending to follow the good clergyman's advice, they continued their journey. Soon they reached the summit of a wooded hill, and from the distance they discerned the low hut with its flat, thatch−covered roof and smoking chimney. Richard then went hurriedly ahead.

Countess Berlow, dressed in black, sat knitting at the fireside, the light of which illuminated the room, which had been slowly filling with the shadows of the approaching twilight. Albert sat at her side, reading from her favorite volume. As she saw her faithful servant enter, she uttered a loud cry and her work fell from her hands. She hastened toward him, and with a thousand exclamations of joy and pain, she greeted him heartily, as if he were her dear father. Albert, too, was deeply affected.

Countess Berlow then pointed to a chair which Albert had drawn close to the fire, and said: “My good, true friend, be seated. So we see each, other again. Over the death of my dear husband let us draw a veil. The memory of it is too painful for me. But tell me, how is my daughter! Did she die, as the doctor said she might?”

Richard then explained that the doctor had diagnosed the case as more serious than it really was, in order at that time to hurry the mother's flight; and that Marguerite had very shortly after recovered and had remained well ever since. The Countess was greatly pleased with this report, and her eyes gleamed with joy.

“But,” said she earnestly, and with a clouded brow, “why did you not bring her with you? Why did you not tear her from the unhappy fatherland where no hour of her life could be safe? How could you leave without her—you hard, cruel man? Why did you not—” she could say no more, for the door opened, and Marguerite rushed to her mother and embraced and kissed her as if nothing could ever again tear them asunder. Albert joined them and gladder tears were never shed than those which the Countess wept in her exceeding happiness.

Alas, the joy soon melted into yearning. “Oh, that my dear, true husband still lived,” said the Countess, as she looked to heaven, “for then my measure of joy would be full. Now, my dear children, you are poor and fatherless. The sight of you fills the heart of your oppressed mother with pain. For what can I, a poor, lonely widow, do for you?”

Then Richard interrupted the conversation with the glad news of the Count's rescue. The Countess proved herself more self−controlled than Richard had anticipated, for the great joy of having seen her true servant, the greater joy of again clasping her daughter in her arms was for this woman the preparation for the greatest of joys—the joy of again seeing the husband whom she had mourned as dead.

The Count had long stood, with palpitating heart, waiting before the door of the hut, where each word had fallen distinctly on his ear.

Richard's last words had scarcely been uttered when the Countess cried: “He lives; he has been saved from the

hands of his oppressors." The Count then opened the door, and overcome with emotion, fell at the feet of the Countess.

Timid and fearful, as if she half doubted that he really lived, she gazed at him long and steadily as the light of the fire irradiated his face. She could scarcely express her rapture. Then after a long pause she said: "Oh, the joy of again seeing my loved ones for whom I have wept so long!"

Father and mother, son and daughter, and faithful servant spent a peaceful, joyous evening in the little, lowly hut. The old shepherd and his good wife shared in the contentment which filled their little home to overflowing.

On the following morning, there was brought into this lowly hut another guest who had rendered such helpful service in the speedy reuniting of the separated family—the little canary bird.

Albert was delighted to see his bird again, for during his mother's illness he had found it impossible to care properly for it, and had reluctantly disposed of it at the fancier's in a distant village.

Count Berlow then related at length the circumstances which had brought the bird into his possession and how it had helped to give him the needed hope and strength to continue the journey which had ended so successfully in their reunion.

Albert joined in the conversation, and said, "Wasn't it a happy thought to teach the bird that particular song, when I knew so many songs? But then, you see, it was the song nearest and dearest to my heart. It was my father's song. Little did I think, when I had to part with my pet, that it would be taken from me only to restore my father and sister to me."

"So we see," said the Count, "how through a little trial we may find a great joy. I trust that through our losses we all have gained in humility and sympathy, which have a lasting worth; and perhaps God will return to us our past fortune, just as he has returned your canary to you."

Count Berlow was obliged to spend the winter under the roof of this lowly hut, and Richard was housed in a neighboring one.

The canary bird was hung in the same place it had graced before it was sold to the fancier. Marguerite cared for it daily and never neglected to give it proper food and water.

Often, when the family was gathered together around the friendly fireside, on a cold winter's evening, the bird would begin to sing the song so acceptable to them. The children and the parents would join in the chorus, and they found therein comfort and hope.

The noble family was forced to live for some time in these same narrow quarters; but at last they were permitted to return to their fatherland, where they again came into possession of their property. The Count and Countess rejoiced in being wealthy once more, for now they could return in measure full and overflowing, the goodness and kindness of the friends who had proven themselves in the hour of need.

The good, faithful Richard, with his kind wife and their clever, honest son; John, the brave old fisherman; and the helpful shepherd and shepherdess, together with the devout clergyman, were among the first to receive this reward—the expression of gratitude and love from a family of loyal members.

THE UGLY TRINKET

[Illustration: “Nursed her foster−mother with the tenderest care.”]

CHAPTER I. THE OPEN DOOR

Respected and beloved by all her neighbors, Mrs. Linden, a rich widow, lived a solitary life in her grand, old castle.

One day some urgent business called her to the city of Antwerp. Here she was detained longer than she had expected, and during her stay she visited the principal points of interest, among them an old cathedral, famed far and wide for its beauty.

With deep reverence, she entered this time−honored house of worship. Its high, vaulted roof, its long rows of stately columns, its beautifully painted windows, the altar in the distance, and the twilight and the stillness of the holy place filled her with admiration and awe. In her heart arose a feeling of the nearness of God, and she knelt and prayed.

Then she passed slowly on, stopping often to study the wonderful paintings by the old masters, and the inscriptions upon tablets placed on the walls in memory of notable men and women long since passed away.

Suddenly she stopped and read a tablet. It had been placed there in honor of a pious woman who had suffered much in her life, but had always striven to do good; and these words were written there: “She rests from her cares, and her good deeds live after her.”

Mrs. Linden then and there resolved that as long as she lived she would bear all her troubles and trials patiently, and do good to all, so far as lay within her power.

As she neared the altar of this grand cathedral, she noticed a little girl eight years of age, clad in black, who was kneeling there and praying fervently. Her eyes were riveted on her hands, tightly clasped before her, so she noticed nothing of Mrs. Linden's presence. Tears were rolling down her cheeks and her face had a look of sorrow and reverence.

Mrs. Linden was at once moved to pity. She did not wish to disturb her, but as the child arose, she said softly: “You seem sad, my little one! Why do you cry?”

“I lost my father a year ago, and a few days ago they buried my mother,” said the child, as the tears rolled the faster.

“And for what did you pray so earnestly?” asked Mrs. Linden.

“I asked for help. 'Tis true I have some relatives in the city, and I would like one of them to take me. The clergyman says that it is their duty, but they do not want the trouble. I can't blame them, for they have children enough of their own.”

“Poor child,” said Mrs. Linden, “no wonder you feel sad.”

“Truly, I was much sadder when I entered this cathedral,” said the girl, “but all at once I feel much better.”

These words pressed on Mrs. Linden's heart and she said, in a motherly way, “I think that God has answered your prayer. Come with me.”

“But where? For I must return to my house.”

“Let us go to the clergyman. I know him well, and I will ask his advice,” continued Mrs. Linden. Then she offered her hand to the child, and led the way.

The aged clergyman arose with astonishment from his chair, as he saw the woman enter with this child.

Mrs. Linden explained to him how and where she had met the little one, at the same time asking the girl to step aside while she engaged the old man in quiet conversation.

“I have decided to adopt this little girl and be a mother to her. My own dear children died when they were infants and my heart tells me that I could give the love that I had for my own to this little orphan; but I would like you to advise me further. Do you think that my care would be given in vain?”

“No,” said the clergyman, “a greater deed of charity you could not do; nor could you easily find such a good, well−mannered child. Her parents were right−living people, and they gave this, their only daughter, a good training. Never will I forget her mother's last words: 'Father, I know that Thou wilt care for my little one, and send her another mother.' Her words are now being fulfilled. You have been sent to do this.”

The old clergyman then called the little girl into the room, and said: “Amy, this good, kind woman wishes to be your mother. Do you want to go with her and be a good daughter to her!”

“Yes, yes,” said Amy, and cried for joy.

“That is right,” said the clergyman. “Be to this gracious woman, the new mother whom God has sent to you, as good and obedient a child as you were to your own mother. Remember that trouble and sorrow may come into your life, as they must come into every life; but if you pray with the same trust in God as you prayed to−day, help will surely be sent in the same way.”

Her relatives were then summoned and acquainted with the fact, and not one of them objected; instead, they were very much pleased.

When Mrs. Linden said that she would take the child just as she stood there, and that they could have all of her clothing for their own children, they were more than delighted.

But Amy begged to keep just a few books which her mother had given her, and which she cherished; and this wish was granted.

On the next morning, Mrs. Linden and Amy started for the castle home. The servant, who had expected them, had everything in readiness. After the evening meal had been served, Mrs. Linden showed Amy to her room.

Amy was charmed with her home and her new mother. With tears of thanks she prayed, and soon was fast asleep. When she awoke, she found the sun streaming into the room. She walked to the window and gazed out into the lovely, sunny grounds and wooded walks surrounding the castle. In the distance, she could see the spire of the grand cathedral.

After a few days, Mrs. Linden sent Amy to school. When she returned each afternoon, she helped in the garden and in the kitchen as much as her years would permit; for Mrs. Linden wished to train her to a useful, industrious life. Often, when the opportunity offered, she taught her to sew and knit and care for the house, something she thought that every girl should learn. Under the guidance of such a kind, loving woman, Amy grew to girlhood, simple and modest.

CHAPTER II. THE TEST

Ten years passed by, filled with joy and happiness. Then suddenly Mrs. Linden became dangerously ill.

Amy nursed her foster−mother with the tenderest care and bestowed as much love upon her as if she were her own mother. She entered the sick room noiselessly; spoke in soft, gentle tones; opened and closed the doors without the least sound, so that Mrs. Linden preferred to have Amy rather than a nurse.

Often Amy would sit in the darkened room and watch over her charge during the long, weary hours of the night. Days and weeks passed, and the invalid grew no better; still Amy nursed her with the same untiring patience and care.

Mrs. Linden was very thankful that she had taken Amy into her home and heart, and realized it more and more each day, and said: “My dear Amy, you do so much for me. A daughter could do no more. God will reward you. I, too, will not forget you; and you shall see that I am not ungrateful.”

Amy bade her speak no more about it.

Mrs. Linden said no more on the subject. After a lingering illness, she became very weak, and at last passed away.

Amy cried as bitterly at this loss as she had done at the loss of her own mother.

In the course of the week, many of Mrs. Linden's rich relatives were summoned to the house, where her will was to be read. The lawyer unfolded the document, and Amy was greatly surprised to learn that her foster−mother had bequeathed to her five thousand dollars, with the instructions to choose from her treasures the costliest, as a remembrance.

The rich relatives were not pleased with this bequest, nor did they wish Amy to take any of the rings, pearls or jewels. Amy had never been covetous; and when she was told to select, she said: “It is not at all necessary for me to have a valuable remembrance. The smallest piece will suffice. Knowing that it comes from such a good woman, it will have great value in my eyes. It is more than enough that she has bequeathed to me such a large sum of money which I have not earned. Therefore, I choose the old, tarnished, clumsy locket which she held in her hand and wet with her tears as she bade me good−bye. This will be the most precious treasure for me, and I know her blessing will go with it.”

One of the onlookers laughed and said to Amy: “What a silly girl. Why didn't you take the diamond ring? That ugly old locket, what good is that! How ridiculous for you to choose such a worthless thing!”

But Amy was more than satisfied and perfectly contented; while the rich relatives quarreled over the distribution of the other trinkets and had more disappointment out of it than pleasure.

The relative to whom the castle had been bequeathed gave orders to Amy to find a new home. This she had in a measure expected, of course, but she did not know just where to go. At last the old gardener and his good, kind wife offered to share their home with her. She thanked them heartily and gladly accepted.

Amy now invested her money in a business house in the city, and although her income was not large, still she had enough for her simple wants.

One year went by in quietude and peace, in the simple surroundings of the old gardener's home. But as the new occupants of the castle no longer wished the services of a man as old as he was, he received orders to leave. This meant to give up his life−long work and the home which had become so dear to him.

“Be comforted,” said Amy, “for I will collect my money and buy a little house near the city. Then I will take in some sewing, and we can all three still live together contentedly.” They soon found a house which suited them exactly.

As Amy had not been able to get her money from the merchant, they were obliged, for the time being, to borrow it from another man, to whom she promised payment when her money fell due.

The house was bought and renovated to suit them. It was small and simple, but ample for their wants. Amy kept the home bright and comfortable; flowers graced the windows, and the old people basked in the sunshine of her smiles and helpfulness.

Although they could see the castle in the distance, where they had spent so many years of their lives, and from which they had all three been so rudely cast, they never longed to return; for their little home was filled with

happiness and contentment. As joy and sorrow, however, must change places with each other now and then here upon earth, so this little household was called upon to meet an unwelcome friend, “Trouble.”

CHAPTER III. REVERSES

One morning, after almost a year's sojourn in the little home, the news was brought that the large business house in the city where Amy had invested her money had failed, and that the whole amount was lost to her. The time was almost due to pay the debt on the house. Where would the money come from, now that they could no longer give security?

Sad, troubled days had dawned for them.

On the eve of the day when the payment on the house was due, Amy went up to the attic, where she could be alone and cry out her grief, and pray.

In her anxiety and nervousness, she clutched the old, ugly locket that hung from a chain—the little reminder of the time of her joys, her sorrows, her patience, her trust and her gratitude, while she lived with her good foster−mother.

In one moment of intense feeling, she pressed the locket tightly in an agony of grief. Lo! as she unfolded her hand in utter helplessness, the locket fell apart. Into her lap rolled one little stone after another. When she took them up to look at them, she discovered that each stone was a diamond, seemingly of great worth.

She raised her thankful eyes to heaven and poured out her grateful heart. She paused, then gathering her treasure in her hands, she hastened with joyous steps to acquaint her two companions of her wonderful discovery.

The good, old people were overcome with joy, and thanked God, again and again. Then the old man said: “With the money that these jewels will bring you, you can pay for the house and still have enough left to keep you comfortably.”

Early the next morning, Amy hurried to the clergyman, her very best friend, to show him the jewels and tell him how accidentally she had found them.

“May I,” said she, “keep these costly jewels or must I return them to Mrs. Linden's heirs? I think they are the most valuable of all the trinkets that she left.”

“No,” said he, “the jewels belong to you. Mrs. Linden intended them for you, I am sure, when she gave you the right to choose first, and take the best. When you selected the least attractive trinket, you unknowingly chose a treasure which to you was only valuable because worn by the one whom you hold dearest. God sent you this secret treasure; and it is worth many thousand dollars, at least. Take it, sell it, and enjoy the benefits which you derive therefrom. But always keep the locket, as a memento of Mrs. Linden and her great benevolence.”