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Little Frida

A Tale of the Black Forest

Looking anxiously at the babe in her arms.
See page 42.

LITTLE FRIDA

A TALE OF THE BLACK FOREST

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"LITTLE HAZEL, THE KING'S MESSENGER"
"UNDER THE OLD OAKS; OR, WON BY LOVE"
ETC. ETC.

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CONTENTS

I.	LOST IN THE WOODS	9
II.	THE WOOD-CUTTER'S HUT	16
III.	FRIDA'S FATHER	23
IV.	THE PARSONAGE	29
V.	THE WOODMEN'S PET	36
VI.	ELSIE AND THE BROWN BIBLE	42
VII.	IN DRINGENSTADT	46
VIII.	THE VIOLIN-TEACHER AND THE CONCERT	54
IX.	CHRISTMAS IN THE FOREST	68
X.	HARCOURT MANOR	76
XI.	IN THE RIVIERA	86
XII.	IN THE GREAT METROPOLIS	95
XIII.	IN THE SLUMS	104
XIV.	THE OLD NURSE	115
XV.	THE POWER OF CONSCIENCE	127
XVI.	THE STORM	131
XVII.	THE DISCOVERY	137
XVIII.	OLD SCENES	151

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Looking anxiously at the babe in her arms	*Frontispiece*
Ere the child consented to go to bed she opened the little "brown book"	17
"Come, Frida," she said, "let us play the last passage together"	66

LITTLE FRIDA.

CHAPTER I.

LOST IN THE WOODS.

"When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up."

"SEE, Hans, how dark it gets, and thy father not yet home! What keeps him, thinkest thou? Supper has been ready for a couple of hours, and who knows what he may meet with in the Forest if the black night fall!" and the speaker, a comely German peasant woman, crossed herself as she spoke. "I misdoubt me something is wrong. The saints preserve him!"

The boy, who looked about ten years old, was gazing in the direction of a path which led through the Forest, but, in answer to this appeal, said, "Never fear, Mütterchen; father will be all right. He never loses his way, and he whistles so loud as he walks that I am sure he will frighten away all the bad—"

But here his mother laid her hand on his mouth, saying, "Hush, Hans! never mention them in [10] the twilight; 'tis not safe. Just run to the opening in the wood and look if ye see him coming; there is still light enough for that. It will not take you five minutes to do so. And then come back and tell me, for I must see to the pot now, and to the infant in the cradle."

The night, an October one, was cold, and the wind was rising and sighing amongst the branches of the pine trees. Darker and darker gathered the shades, as mother and son stood again at the door of their hut after Hans had returned from his useless quest. No sign of his father had he seen, and boy though he was, he knew too much of the dangers that attend a wood-cutter's life in the Forest not to fear that some evil might have befallen his father; but he had a brave young heart, and tried to comfort his mother.

"He'll be coming soon now, Mütterchen," he said; "and won't he laugh at us for being so frightened?"

But the heart of the wife was too full of fear to receive comfort just then from her boy's words.

"Nay, Hans," she said; "some evil has befallen him. He never tarries so late. Thy father is not one to turn aside to his mates' houses and gossip away his time as others do. It is always for home and children that he sets out when his work is done. No, Hans; I know the path to the place where he works, and I can follow it even in the dark. Stay here and watch by the cradle of the little Annchen, whilst I go and see if I can find thy father."

"Nay, Mütterchen," entreated the boy; "thee must not go. And all alone too! Father would never [11] have let you do so had he been here. O Mutter, stay here! Little Annchen will be waking and wanting you, and how could I quiet her? O Mütterchen, go not!" and he clung to her, trying to hold her back.

Just as his mother, maddened with terror, was freeing herself from his grasp, the sound of a footstep struck her ear, and mother and child together exclaimed, "Ah, there he comes!"

Sure enough through the wood a man's figure became visible, but he was evidently heavily laden. He carried, besides his axe and saw, two large bundles. What they were could not be distinguished in the darkness.

With a cry of joyous welcome his wife sprang forward to meet her husband, and Hans ran eagerly to help him to carry his burden; but to their amazement he said, though in a kindly tone, "Elsie—Hans, keep off from me till I am in the house."

The lamp was lighted, and a cheerful blaze from the stove, the door of which was open, illumined the little room into which the stalwart young wood-cutter, Wilhelm Hörstel, entered.

Then, to the utter astonishment of his wife and son, he displayed his bundle. Throwing back a large shawl which completely covered the one he held in his arms, he revealed a sleeping child of some five or six years old, who grasped tightly in her hand a small book. In his right hand he held a violin and a small bag.

Elsie gazed with surprise, not unmingled with fear. "What meaneth these things, Wilhelm?" she said; "and from whence comes the child? *Ach*, how wonderfully beautiful she is! Art sure she is a [12] child of earth? or is this the doing of some of the spirits of the wood?"

At these words Wilhelm laughed. "Nay, wife, nay," he replied, and his voice had a sad ring in it as he spoke. "This is no wood sprite, if such there be, but a little maiden of flesh and blood. Let me rest, I pray thee, and lay the little one on the bed; and whilst I take my supper I will tell thee the tale."

And Elsie, wise woman as she was, did as she was asked, and made ready the simple meal, set it on the wooden bench which served as table, then drew her husband's chair nearer the stove, and restraining her curiosity, awaited his readiness to begin the tale.

When food and heat had done their work, Wilhelm felt refreshed; and when Elsie had cleared the table, and producing her knitting had seated herself beside him, he began his story; whilst Hans, sitting on a low stool at his feet, gazed with wondering eyes now on the child sleeping on the bed, and then at his father's face.

"Ay, wife," the wood-cutter began, speaking in the *Plattdeutsch* used by the dwellers in the Forest, "'tis a wonderful story I have to tell. 'Twas a big bit of work I had to finish to-day, first cutting and then piling up the wood far in the Forest. I had worked hard, and was wearying to be home with you and the children; but the last pile had to be finished, and ere it was so the evening was darkening and the wind was rising. So when the last log was laid I collected my things, and putting on my blouse, set off at a quick pace for home. But remembering I had a message to leave
[13] at the hut of Johann Schmidt, telling him to meet me in the morning to fell a tree that had been marked for us by the forester, I went round that way, which thou knowest leads deeper into the Forest. Johann had just returned from his work, and after exchanging a few words I turned homewards.

"The road I took was not my usual one, but though it led through a very dark part of the Forest, I thought it was a shorter way. As I got on I was surprised to see how dark it was. Glimpses of light, it is true, were visible, and the trees assumed strange shapes, and the Forest streams glistened here and there as the rising moon touched them with its beams. But the gathering clouds soon obscured the faint moonlight.—You will laugh, Hans, when I tell you that despite what I have so often said to you about not believing in the woodland spirits, that even your good Mütterchen believes in, my heart beat quicker as now one, now another of the gnarled trunks of the lower trees presented the appearance of some human form; but I would not let my fear master me, so only whistled the louder to keep up my courage, and pushed on my way.

"The Forest grew darker and darker, and the wind began to make a wailing sound in the tree-tops. A sudden fear came over me that I had missed my way and was getting deeper into the Forest, and might not be able to regain my homeward path till the morning dawned, when once more for a few minutes the clouds parted and the moon shone out, feeble, no doubt—for she is but in her first quarter—and her beams fell right through an opening in the wood, and revealed
[14] the figure of a little child seated at the foot of a fir tree. Alone in the Forest at that time of night! My heart seemed to stand still, and I said to myself, 'Elsie is right after all. That can only be some spirit child, some woodland being.'

"A whisper in a little voice full of fear roused me and made me approach the child. She looked up, ere she could see my face, and again repeated the words in German (though not like what we speak here, but more the language of the town, as I spoke it when I lived there as a boy), 'Father, father, I am glad you've come. I was feeling very frightened. It is so dark here—so dark!' As I came nearer she gave a little cry of disappointment, though not fear; and then I knew it was no woodland sprite, but a living child who sat there alone at that hour in the Forest. My heart went out to her, and kneeling down beside her I asked her who she was, and how she came to be there so late at night. She answered, in sweet childish accents, 'I am Frida Heinz, and fader and I were walking through this big, big Forest, and by-and-by are going to see England, where mother used to live long ago.' It was so pretty to hear her talk, though I had difficulty in making out the meaning of her words. 'But where then is your father?' I asked. I believe, wife, the language I spoke was as difficult for her to understand as the words she had spoken were to me, for she repeated them over as if wondering what they meant. Then trying to recall the way I had spoken when a boy, which I have never quite forgotten, I repeated my question. She understood, and answered in her sweet babyish accents, 'Fader come back soon, he told little Frida. He had lost
[15] the road, and he said I'se to wait here till he came back, and laid his violin and his bag 'side me, and told me to keep this little book, which he has taught me to read, 'cos he says mother loved it so. Then he went away; and I've waited—oh so long, and he's never come back, and I'se cold, so cold, and hungry, and I want my own fader. O kind man, take Frida to him. And he's ill, so ill too! Last night I heard the people in the place we slept in say he'd never live to go through the Forest; but he would go, 'cos he wanted to take me 'cross the sea.' Then the pretty little creature began to cry bitterly, and beg me again to take her to father. I told her I would wait a bit with her, and see if he came. For more than an hour I sat there beside her, trying to warm and comfort her; for I tell you, Elsie, she seemed to creep into my heart, and reminded me of our little one, who would have been about her size had she been alive, though she was but three years old when she died.

"Well, time went on, and the night grew darker, and I knew how troubled you would be, and yet I knew not what to do. I left the child for a bit, and looked here and there in the Forest; but all was dark, and though I called long and loud no answer came. So I returned, took the child in my arms (for she is but a light weight), and with my tools thrown over my shoulder, and the violin and bag in my hand, I made my way home. The child cried awhile, saying she must wait for fader, then fell sound asleep in my arms. Now, wife, would it not be well to undress her, and give her some food ere she sleeps again, for she must be hungry?"

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[16]

CHAPTER II.

THE WOOD-CUTTER'S HUT.

"Jesus, tender Shepherd, hear me;
Bless Thy little lamb to-night."

"INDEED you are right, Wilhelm," said his wife. "No doubt the poor little maid must be hungry, only I had not the heart to waken her.—See, Hans, there is some goat's milk in the corner yonder. Get it heated, whilst I cut a bit of this bread, coarse though it be. 'Tis all we have to give her; but such as it is, she is right welcome to it, poor little lamb."

As she spoke she moved quietly to the bed where the child lay asleep. As she woke she uttered the cry, "Fader, dear fader!" then raised herself and looked around. Evidently the story of the day flashed upon her, and she turned eagerly to the wood-cutter, asking if "fader" had come yet.

On being told that he had not, she said no more, but her eyes filled with tears. She took the bread and milk without resistance, though she looked at the black bread as if it were repugnant [17] to her. Then she let herself be undressed by Elsie, directing her to open the bag, and taking from it a nightdress of fine calico, a brush and comb, also a large sponge, a couple of fine towels, a change of underclothing, two pairs of stockings, and one black dress, finer than the one she wore.

Ere the child consented to go to bed she opened the little "brown book."

Ere the child consented to go to bed she opened the little "brown book," which was a German Bible, and read aloud, slowly but distinctly, the last verse of the Fourth Psalm: "Ich liege und schlafe ganz mit Frieden; denn allein Du, Herr, hilfst mir, dass ich sicher wohne" ("I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety"). Then she knelt down, and prayed in simple words her evening prayer, asking God to let father come home, and to bless the kind people who had given her a shelter, for Christ's sake.

Elsie and Wilhelm looked at each other with amazement. Alas! there was no fear of God in that house. Elsie might cross herself when she spoke of spirits, but that was only as a superstitious sign that she had been told frightened them away.

Of Christ and His power to protect and save they knew nothing. Roman Catholics by profession, they yet never darkened a church door, save perhaps when they took a child to be baptized; but

they only thought of that ordinance as a protection to their child from the evil one. God's holy Word was to them a sealed book. True, all the wood-cutters were not like them, but still a spirit of ignorance and indifference as regarded religion reigned amongst them; and if now and then a [18] priest sought their dwelling, his words (such as they were) fell on dull ears. Things seen and temporal engrossed all their thoughts. The daily work, the daily bread, and the nightly sleep—these filled their hearts and excluded God. So it was not to be wondered at that little Frida's reading and prayer were an astonishment to them.

"What think you of that, Elsie?" said Wilhelm. "The child spoke as if she were addressing some one in the room."

"Ay, ay," answered his wife. "It was gruesome to hear her. She made me look up to see if there was really any one there; and she wasn't speaking to our Lady either. Art sure she is a child of earth at all, Wilhelm?"

"Ay, she's that; and the question is, wife, What shall we do with her? Suppose the father never turns up, shall we keep her, or give her over to them that have the charge of wanderers and such like?"

Here Hans sprang forward. "Nay, father, nay! Do not send her away. She is so pretty, and looks like the picture of an angel. I saw one in the church where little Annchen was baptized. Oh, keep her, father!—Mutter, do not send the little maid back into the forest!"

But Elsie's woman's heart had no thought of so doing. "No, no, my lad," she said. "Never fear; we'll keep the child till some one comes to take her away that has a right to her. Who knows but mayhap she'll bring a blessing on our house; for often I think we don't remember the Virgin and the saints as we ought. My mother did, I know;" and as she spoke great tears rolled down her cheeks.

[19] The child's prayer had touched a chord of memory, and recalled the days of her childhood, when she had lived with parents who at least reverenced the Lord, though they had not been taught to worship Him aright.

Wilhelm sat for a few minutes lost in thought. He was pondering the question whether, supposing the child was left on his hands, he could support her by doing extra work. It would be difficult, he knew; but if Elsie were willing he'd try, for his kind heart recoiled from sending the little child who clung to him so confidingly adrift amongst strangers. No, he would not do so.

After a while he turned to his wife, who had gone to the cradle where lay their six-weeks-old baby, and was rocking it, as the child had cried out in her sleep.

"Elsie," he said, "I'll set off at break of day, and go amongst my mates, and find out if they have seen or heard aught of the missing gentleman.—Come, Hans," he said suddenly; "'tis time you were asleep."

A few minutes later and Hans had tumbled into his low bed, and lay for a short time thinking about Frida, and wondering who she had been speaking to when she knelt down; but in the midst of his wondering he fell asleep.

Wilhelm, wearied with his day's work, was not long in following his son's example, and was soon sound asleep; but no word of prayer rose from his heart and lips to the loving Father in heaven, who had guarded and kept him from the dangers of the day.

[20] Elsie was in no hurry to go to bed; her heart was full of many thoughts. The child's prayer and the words out of the little book had strangely moved her, and she was asking herself if there were indeed a God (as in her childhood she had been taught to believe), what had she ever done to please Him.

Conscience said low, Nothing; but she tried to drown the thought, and busied herself in cleaning the few dishes and putting the little room to rights, then sat down for a few minutes beside the stove to think.

Where could the father of the child be, she asked herself, and what would be his feelings on returning to the place where he had left her when he found she was no longer there? Could he have lost his way in the great Forest? That was by no means unlikely; she had often heard of such a thing as that happening. Then she wondered if there were any clue to the child's friends or the place she was going to in the bag; and rising, she took it up and opened it.

Besides the articles we have already enumerated, she found a case full of needles, some reels of cotton, a small book of German hymns, and a double locket with chain attached to it. This Elsie succeeded in opening, and on the one side was the picture of a singularly beautiful, dark-eyed girl, on the verge of womanhood; and on the other a blue-eyed, fair-haired young man, a few years older than the lady. Under the pictures were engraved the words "Hilda" and "Friedrich." [21] Elsie doubted not that these were the likenesses of Frida's father and mother, for the child bore a strong resemblance to both. She had the dark eyes of her mother and the golden hair of her father, if such was the relationship she bore to him.

These pictures were the only clue to the child's parentage. No doubt she wore a necklace quite unlike anything that Elsie had ever seen before; but then, except in the shop windows, she had seen so few ornaments in her life that she knew not whether it was a common one or not.

She put the locket carefully back in its place, shut the bag, and slipped across the room to take another glance at the sleeping child. Very beautiful she looked as she lay, the fair, golden hair curling over her head and falling round her neck. Her lips were slightly parted, and, as if conscious of Elsie's approach, she muttered the word "fader." Elsie patted her, and turned once more to the little cradle where lay her infant. The child was awake and crying, and the mother stooped and took her up, and sat down with her in her arms. A look of anxiety and sadness crossed the mother's face when she observed that although she flashed the little lamp in the baby's face her eyes never turned to the light.

For some time the terrible fear had been rising in her head that her little Anna was blind. She had mentioned this to her husband, but he had laughed at her, and said babies of that age never took much notice of anything; but that was three weeks ago, and still, though the eyes looked bright, and the child was intelligent, the eyes never followed the light, nor looked up into the mother's face.

[22] The fear was now becoming certainty. Oh, if only she could make sure, see some doctors, and find out if nothing could be done for her darling!

A blind child! How could they support her, how provide for the wants of one who could never help herself?

Poor mother! her heart sank within her, for she knew nothing of the One who has said, "Cast all your cares upon me, for I care for you."

Now as she gazed at the child she became more than ever convinced that that strange trial had fallen upon her. And to add to this new difficulty, how could she undertake the charge and keeping of this stranger so wonderfully brought to their door?

Elsie, although no Christian, had a true, loving woman's heart beating within her, and putting from her the very idea of sending away the lost child, she said to herself, "The little that a child like that will take will not add much to the day's expense; and even if it did, Elsie Hörstel is not the woman to cast out the forlorn child." Oh, the pity of it that she did not know the words of Him who said, "Inasmuch as ye did it to one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me;" and again, "Whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me." But these words had never yet reached her ears, and as yet it was only the instincts of a true God-created heart that led her to compassionate and care for the child lost in the forest.

Taking the babe in her arms, she slipped into bed and soon fell asleep.

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[23]

CHAPTER III.

FRIDA'S FATHER.

"And though we sorrow for the dead,
Let not our grief be loud,
That we may hear Thy loving voice
Within the light-lined cloud."

Early in the morning, ere wife or children were awake, and long before the October sun had arisen, Wilhelm Hörstel arose, and putting a hunch of black bread and goat-milk cheese into his pocket, he shouldered his axe and saw and went out into the Forest.

The dawn was beginning to break, and there was light enough for the practised eye of the wood-cutter to distinguish the path which he wished to take through the Forest.

Great stillness reigned around; even the twittering of the birds had hardly begun—they were for the most part awaiting the rising of the sun, though here and there an early bird might be heard chirping as it flew off, no doubt in search of food. Even the frogs in the Forest ponds had not yet resumed their croaking, and only the bubbling of a brooklet or the falling of a tiny
[24] cascade from the rocks (which abound in some parts of the Forest) was heard. The very silence which pervaded, calmed, and to a Christian mind would have raised the thoughts Godward. But it had no such influence on the heart, the kindly heart, of the young wood-cutter as he walked on, bent only on reaching the small hamlet or "Dorf" where stood the hut of the man with whom he sought to hold counsel as to how a search could be instituted in the Forest for the father of little Frida.

As he reached the door, and just as the sun was rising above the hill-tops, and throwing here and there its golden beams through the autumn-tinted trees, he saw not one but several wood-

cutters and charcoal-burners going into the house of his friend Johann Schmidt. Somewhat wondering he hastened his steps, and entered along with them, putting as he did so the question, "*Was gibt's?*" (What is the matter?) His friend, who came forward to greet him, answered the question by saying, "Come and help us, Wilhelm; a strange thing has happened here during the night.

"Soon after Gretchen and I had fallen asleep, we were awakened by the noise of some heavy weight falling at the door; and on going to see what it was, there, to our amazement, lay a man, evidently in a faint. We got him into our hut, and after a while he became conscious, looked around him, and said 'Frida!' Gretchen tried to find out who it was he wished, but could only make out it was a child whom he had left in the Forest; but whether he was still delirious none
[25] could tell. He pressed his hand on his heart and said he was very ill, and again muttering the word, 'Frida, Armseliger Frida,' he again fainted away.

"We did what we could for him, and he rallied a little; and then an hour ago, Gretchen stooping over him heard him say, 'Herr Jesu. Ob ich schon wandelte im finstern Thal fürchete ich kein Unglück: denn Du bist bei mir' ('Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me'); and giving one deep breath his spirit fled."

As their mate said these words, exclamations of sorrow were heard around. "*Ach*, poor man!" said one. "Thinkest thou the child he spoke of can be in the Forest?" "And the words he said about fearing no evil, what did they mean?" said another. "Well," said one who looked like a chief man amongst them, "I believe he was *ein Ketzer*, and if that be so we had better send to Dringenstadt, where there is a *ketzer Pfarrer* [heretic pastor], and get his advice. I heard the other day that a new one had come whom they called Herr Langen."

Then as a momentary pause came, Wilhelm Hörstel stepped forward and told the tale of the child he had found in the Forest the night before, who called herself Frida. The men listened with amazement, but with one breath they all declared she must be the child of whom the dead man had spoken.

"Ay," said Wilhelm, "and I am sure she is the child of a *Ketzer* [heretic]; for what think ye a child like that did ere she went to bed? She prayed, and my wife says never a word said she to the Virgin, but spoke just straight to God."

[26] "*Ach*, poor *Mädchen*!" said another of the men; "does she think the Lord would listen to the prayer of a child like her? The blessed Virgin have pity on her;" and as he spoke he crossed himself.

"If these things be so," said the chief man, by name Jacob Heine, "then it is plain one of us must go off to Dringenstadt, see the *Pfarrer*, and settle about the funeral."

His proposal was at once agreed to, and as he was overseer of the wood-cutters, and could not leave his work, Johann Schmidt, in whose hut the man had died, was chosen as the best man to go; whilst Wilhelm should return to his home, and then take the child to see her dead father.

"Yes, bring the *Mädchen*" (little maid), said all, "and let us see her also; seems as if she belongs to us all, found in the Forest as she was."

There was no time to be lost, for the sun was already well up, and the men should have been at work long ago.

So they dispersed, some going to their work deeper in the Forest, Wilhelm retracing his way home, and Johann taking the path which led through the wood to the little town of Dringenstadt.

As Wilhelm approached his door, the little Frida darted to him, saying, "Have you found my fader? Oh, take me to him! Frida must go to her fader." Tears rose to the wood-cutter's eyes, as lifting the child in his arms he entered the hut, and leaving Frida there with Hans, he beckoned his wife to speak to him outside; and there he told her the story of the man who had died in Johann's cottage.

[27] "Ah, then," said Elsie, "the little Frida is indeed an orphan, poor lambie. How shall we tell her, Wilhelm? Her little heart will break. Ever since she woke she has prattled on about him; ay" (and the woman's voice lowered as she spoke), "and of a Father who she says lives in heaven and cares both for her earthly father and herself. And, Wilhelm, she's been reading aloud to Hans and me about the Virgin's Son of whom my mother used to speak."

"Well, never mind about all that, wife, but let us tell the child; for I and my mates think she should be taken to see the body, and so make sure that the man was really her father."

"Fader dead!" said the child, as she sat on Wilhelm's knee and heard the sad story. "Dead! Shall Frida never see him again, nor walk with him, nor talk with him? Oh! dear, dear fader, why did you die and leave Frida all alone? I want you, I want you!" and the child burst into a flood of tears.

They let her cry on, those kind-hearted people—nay, they wept with her; but after some minutes had passed, Wilhelm raised her head, and asked her if she would not like to see her

father once more, though he could not speak to her now.

"Yes, oh yes! take me to see him!" she exclaimed. "Oh, take me!" Then looking eagerly up she said, "Perhaps Jesus can make him live again, like he did Lazarus, you know. Can't he?" But alas! of the story of Lazarus being raised from the dead these two people knew nothing; and when they [28] asked her what she meant, and she said her father had read to her about it out of her little brown book, they only shook their heads, and Wilhelm said, "I feared there was something wrong about that little book. How could any one be raised from the dead?"

Frida's passionate exclamations of love and grief when she saw the dead body of the man who lay in Johann Schmidt's hut removed all doubt from the minds of those who heard her as to the relationship between them; and the manner in which the child turned from a crucifix which Gretchen brought forward to her, thinking it would comfort her, convinced them more firmly that the poor man had indeed been a heretic.

No! father never prayed to that, nor would he let *her* do so, she said—just to Jesus, dear Jesus in heaven; and though several of those who heard her words crossed themselves as she spoke, and prayed the Virgin to forgive, all were much taken with and deeply sorry for the orphan child; and when Wilhelm raised her in his arms to take her back to his hut and to the care of Elsie, more than one of the inhabitants of the Dorf brought some little gift from their small store to be taken with him to help in the maintenance of the little one so strangely brought among them. Ere they left the Dorf, Johann Schmidt had returned from executing his message to Dringenstadt. He had seen the *Pfarrer*, and he had promised to come along presently and arrange about the funeral.

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[29]

CHAPTER IV.

THE PARSONAGE.

"The Lord thy Shepherd is—
Dread not nor be dismayed—
To lead thee on through stormy
paths,
By ways His hand hath made."

ON the morning of the day that we have written of, the young Protestant pastor of Dringenstadt was seated in a room of the small house which went by the name of "Das Pfarrhaus."

He was meditating more than studying just then. He felt his work there an uphill one. Almost all the people in that little town were Roman Catholics. His own flock was a little one indeed, and only that morning he had received a letter telling him that it had been settled that no regular ministry would be continued there, as funds were not forthcoming, and the need in one sense seemed small. He had come there only a few months before, knowing well that he might only be allowed to remain a short time; but now that the order for his removal elsewhere had come, he felt discouraged and sad. Was it right, he was asking himself, to withdraw the true gospel light from the people, and to leave the few, no doubt very few, who loved it to themselves? Karl [30] Langen was a true Christian, longing to lead souls to Jesus, and was much perplexed by the order he had received. Suddenly a knock at the door roused him, and the woman who took charge of his house on entering told him that a man from the Forest wished to speak to him. Telling her to send him in at once, he awaited his entry.

Johann Schmidt was shown into the room, and told his sorrowful tale in a quiet, manly way.

The pastor was much moved, and repeated with amazement the words, "A child lost in the Black Forest, and the father dead, you say? Certainly I will come and see. But why, my friend, should you think the man was an Evangelisch?" Then Johann told of the words he had repeated, of the child's prayer and her little brown book.

Suddenly a light seemed to dawn on the mind of the young pastor. "Oh!" he said, "I believe you are right. I think I have seen both the father and the child. Last Sunday there came into our church a gentleman and a lovely little girl, just such a one as you describe the child you speak of to be. I tried to speak to them after worship, but ere I could do so they had gone. And no one could tell me who they were or whither they had gone. I will now see the Bürgermeister about the funeral, and make arrangements regarding it. I think through some friends of mine I can get money sufficient to pay all expenses."

Johann thanked him warmly, and hastened back to tell what had been agreed on, and then got off to his work.

[31] Late in the afternoon Pastor Langen took his way to the little hut in the Black Forest.

The Forest by the road he took was not well known to him, and the solemn quiet which pervaded it struck him much and raised his thoughts to God. It was as if he had entered the sanctuary and heard the voice of the Lord speaking to him. It was, as a poet has expressed it, as if

"Solemn and silent everywhere,
The trees with folded hands stood
there,
Kneeling at their evening prayer."

Only the slight murmuring of the breeze amongst the leaves, or the flutter of a bird's wing as it flew from branch to branch, broke the silence. All around him there was

"A slumberous sound, a sound that
brings
The feeling of a dream,
As when a bell no longer swings,
Faint the hollow echo rings
O'er meadow, lake, and stream."

As he walked, he thought much of the child found in the Forest, and he wondered how he could help her or find out to whom she belonged. Oh, if only, he said to himself, he had been able to speak to the father the day he had seen him, and learned something of his history! Johann had told him that if no clue could be found to the child's relations, Wilhelm Hörstel had determined to bring her up; but Johann had added, "We will not, poor though we be, let the whole expense of
[32] her upbringing fall on the Hörstels. No; we will go share for share, and she shall be called the child of the wood-cutters."

As he thought of these words, the young pastor prayed for the kind, large-hearted men, asking that the knowledge of the loving Christ might shine into their hearts and bring spiritual light into the darkness which surrounded them. The afternoon had merged into evening ere he entered the wood-cutters' Dorf. As he neared Johann's hut, Gretchen came to the door, and he greeted her with the words, "The Lord be with you, and bless you for your kindness to the poor man in the time of his need."

"Come in, sir," she said, "and see the corpse. Oh, but he's been a fine-looking man, and he so young too. It was a sight to see his bit child crying beside him and begging him to say one word to her—just one word. Then she folded her hands, and looking up said, 'O kind Jesus, who made Lazarus come to life, make dear fader live again.' Oh, 'twas pitiful to see her! Who think you, sir, was the man she spoke of called Lazarus? When I asked her she said it was all written in her little brown book, which she would bring along and read to me some day, bless the little creature."

The pastor said some words about the story being told by the Lord Jesus, and recorded in the Holy Scriptures. He did not offer her a Testament, as he knew if the priest heard (as it was likely he would) of his having been there, he would ask if they had been given a Bible, and so trouble would follow. But he rejoiced that the little child had it in her heart to read the words of life to
[33] the kind woman, and he breathed a prayer that her little brown Bible might prove a blessing to those poor wood-cutters.

Pastor Langen at once recognized the features of the dead man as those of the stranger whom he had seen with the lovely child in the little church. He then made arrangements for the funeral the next day, and departed.

On the morrow a number of wood-cutters met at the house of Johann Schmidt to attend the funeral of the stranger gentleman. Wilhelm Hörstel, and his wife, Hans, and little Frida, were there also. The child was crying softly, as if she realized that even the corpse of her father was to be taken from her.

Presently the young pastor entered, and the moment Frida saw him she started forward, saying in her child language, "O sir, I've seen you before, when fader and I heard you preach some days ago." All this was said in the pure German language, which the people hardly followed at all, but which was the same as the pastor himself spoke. He at once recognized the child, and sought to obtain from her some information regarding her father. She only said, as she had already done, that he was going to England to see some friends of her mother's. When questioned as to their name, she could not tell. All that she knew was that they were relations of her mother's. Yes, her father loved his Bible, and had given her such a nice little brown one which had belonged to her mother.

Could she speak any English, the pastor asked.

[34] "Yes, I can," said Frida. "Mother taught me a number of words, and I can say 'Good-morning,' and 'How are you to-day?' Also mother taught me to say the Lord's Prayer in English. But I do not know much English, for father and mother always spoke German to each other."

No more could be got from the child then, and the simple service was gone on with; and when the small procession set off for Dringenstadt, the kindly men took it by turns to carry the little maiden in their arms, as the walk through the forest was a long one for a child.

In the churchyard of the quiet little German town they laid the mortal remains of Friedrich Heinz, to await the resurrection morning.

Tears rose to the eyes of many onlookers as Frida threw herself, sobbing, on the grave of her father. Wilhelm and Elsie strove in vain to raise her, but when Pastor Langen drew near and whispered the words, "Look up, Frida; thy father is not here, he is with Jesus," a smile of joy played on the child's face, and rising she dried her tears, and putting her hand into that of Elsie she prepared to leave the "God's acre," and the little party set off for their home in the Black Forest.

Darkness had fallen on all around ere they reached the Dorf, and strange figures that the trees and bushes assumed appeared to the superstitious mind of Elsie and some of the others as the embodiment of evil spirits, and they wished themselves safe under the shelter of their little huts.

That night the little stranger child mingled her tears with her prayers, and to Elsie's
[35] amazement she heard her ask her Father in heaven to take greater care of her now than ever, because she had no longer a father on earth to do it. Little did the kneeling child imagine that that simple prayer was used by the Holy Spirit to touch the heart of the wood-cutter's wife.

And from the lips of Elsie ere she fell asleep that night arose a cry to the Father in heaven for help. True, it was but

"As an infant crying in the
night,
An infant crying for the light,
And with no language but a
cry."

But still there was a felt need, and a recognition that there was One who could meet and satisfy it.

At all events Elsie Hörstel clasped her blind babe to her heart that night, and fell asleep with a feeling of rest and peace to which she had long been a stranger.

Ah! God had a purpose for the little child and her brown Bible in that little hut of which she as yet had no conception. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings He still perfects praise.

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[36]

CHAPTER V.

THE WOODMEN'S PET.

"Lord, make me like the gentle
dew,
That other hearts may prove,
E'en through Thy feeblest
messenger,
Thy ministry of love."

PASTOR LANGEN, ere leaving Dringenstadt, visited the hut in the Black Forest where Frida had found a home.

His congregation, with two or three exceptions, was a poor one, and his own means were small; yet he had contrived to collect a small sum for Frida's maintenance, which he had put into the hands of the Bürgermeister, who undertook to pay the interest of it quarterly to the Hörstels on behalf of the child. True, the sum was small, but it was sufficient to be a help; and a kind lady of the congregation, Fräulein Drechsler, said she would supply her from time to time with dress, and when she could have her now and then with herself, instruct her in the Protestant faith and the elements of education. Frida could already read, and had begun to write, taught by her father. Every effort was being made to discover if the child had any relations alive. The
[37] Bürgermeister had put advertisements in many papers, German and English, but as yet no answer had come, and many of the wood-cutters still held the opinion that the child was the offspring of some woodland spirit. But in spite of any such belief, Frida had a warm welcome in every hut in the Dorf, and a kindly word from every man and woman in it.

The "woodland child" they called her, and as such cherished and protected her. Many a "bite and sup" she got from them. Many a warm pair of stockings, or a knitted petticoat done by skilful

hands, did the inmates of the Dorf present to her. They did what they could, these poor people, for the orphan child, just out of the fullness of their kind hearts, little thinking of the blessing that through her was to descend on them. The day of Pastor Langen's visit to the hut, some time after her father's funeral, Frida was playing beside the door, and on seeing him coming up the path she rose from the spot where she was sitting and ran eagerly to meet him.

But though unseen by her, he had been standing near for some time spell-bound by the music which, child though she was, she was bringing out of her father's violin, in the playing of which she was amusing herself.

From a very early age her father, himself a skilled violinist, had taught her to handle the bow, and had early discovered the wonderful talent for music which she possessed.

[38] The day of which we write was the first one since her father's death that Frida had played on the violin, so neither Wilhelm nor Elsie was aware that she could do so at all. The pastor was approaching the cottage when the sound of music reached his ears, and having a good knowledge of that art himself, he stood still to listen. A few minutes convinced him that though the playing was that of a child, still the performer had the true soul of music, and only needed full instruction to develop into a musician of no ordinary talent. As he drew nearer his surprise was great to see that the player was none other than the beautiful child found in the Black Forest. Attracted by the sound of steps, Frida had turned round, and seeing her friend had, as we have written, bounded off to meet him. Hearing that Elsie had taken her babe and gone a message to the Dorf, he seated himself on a knoll with the child and began to talk to her.

"How old are you?" he asked her.

"Seven years and more," she replied; "because I remember my birthday was only a little while before Mütterchen (I always called her that) died, and that that day she took the locket she used to wear off her neck and gave it to me, telling me always to keep it."

"And have you that locket still?" queried the pastor.

"Yes; Elsie has it carefully put away. There is a picture of Mütterchen on the one side, and of my father on the other."

"And did your mother ever speak to you of your relations either in Germany or England?"

"Yes, she did sometimes. She spoke of grandmamma in England and grandpapa also, and she said they lived in a beautiful house; but she never told me their name, nor where their house was.
[39] Father, of course, knew, for he said he was going to take me there, and he used to speak of a brother of his whom he said he dearly loved."

"But tell me," asked the pastor, "where did you live with your parents in Germany?"

"Oh, in a number of different places, but never long at the same place. Father played at concerts just to make money, and we never remained long anywhere—we were always moving about."

"And your parents were Protestants?"

"I don't know what that means," said the child. "But they were often called 'Ketzers' by the people where he lodged. And they would not pray to the Virgin Mary, as many did, but taught me to pray to God in the name of Jesus Christ. And Mütterchen gave me a little 'brown Bible' for my very own, which she said her mother had given to her. Oh, I must show it to you, sir!" and, darting off, the child ran into the house, returning with the treasured book in her hand. The pastor examined it and read the inscription written on the fly-leaf—"To my dear Hilda, from her loving mother, on her eighteenth birthday." That was all, but he felt sure from the many underlined passages that the book had been well studied. He found that Frida could read quite easily, and that she had been instructed in Scripture truth.

Ere he bade her farewell he asked her to promise him to read often from her little Bible to Wilhelm, Elsie, and Hans. "For who knows, little Frida, that the Lord may not have chosen you to be a child missionary to the wood-cutters, and to read to them out of His holy Word."

[40] Frida thought over these words, though she hardly took in their full meaning; but she loved her Bible, and wished that the people who were so kind to her loved it also.

On his way home the pastor met Elsie with her babe in her arms, and told her of his farewell visit to Frida, and of his delight with the child's musical talent, and advised her to encourage her as much as possible to play on the violin.

Elsie's face brightened as he spoke, for she and her husband, like many of the German peasants, dearly loved music.

"O sir," she said, "have you heard her sing? It is just beautiful and wonderful to hear her; she beats the very birds themselves."

Thanking her once more for her care of the orphan child, and commending her to God, the pastor went on his way, musing much on the future of the gifted child, and wondering what could be done as regarded her education.

In the meantime Elsie went home, and entrusting her babe to the care of Frida, who loved the

little helpless infant, she made ready for her husband's return from his work. Hans had gone that day to help his father in the wood, which he loved much to do, so Elsie and Frida were alone.

"Mutter," said the child (for she had adopted Hans's way of addressing Elsie), "the pastor was here to-day, and he played to me—oh so beautifully—on my violin, it reminded me of father, and made me cry. O Mutter, I wish some one could teach me to play on it as father did. You see I was
[41] just beginning to learn a little how to do it, and I do love it so;" and as she spoke, the child joined her hands together and looked pleadingly at Elsie.

"*Ach*, poor child," replied Elsie, "how canst thou be taught here?"

And that night when Elsie repeated to Wilhelm Frida's desire for lessons on the violin, the worthy couple grieved that they could do nothing to gratify her wish.

Day after day and week after week passed, and still no answer came to any of the advertisements about the child; and save for her own sake none of the dwellers in the wood wished it otherwise, for the "woodland child," as they called her, had won her way into every heart.

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[42]

CHAPTER VI.

ELSIE AND THE BROWN BIBLE.

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

FRIDA, as time went on, was growing hardy and strong in the bracing Forest air. Every kindness was lavished on her, and the child-spirit had asserted itself, and though often tears would fill her eyes as something or other reminded her vividly of the past, yet her merry laughter was often heard as she played with Hans in the woods. Yet through all her glee there was at times a seriousness of mind remarkable in one so young, also a power of observation as regarded others not often noticeable in one of her years. She had become warmly attached to the kind people amongst whom her lot was cast, and especially so to Elsie. Several times she had observed her looking anxiously at the babe in her arms, taking her to the light and endeavouring to attract her attention to the plaything which she held before her. Then when the babe, now some months old, showed no signs of observing it, Frida would see a great tear roll down Elsie's
[43] cheek, and once she heard her mutter the words, "Blind! my baby's blind!" Was it possible? Frida asked herself; for the child's eyes looked bright, and she felt sure she knew her, and had often stretched out her little arms to be taken up by her. "No," she repeated again, "she cannot be blind!" Poor little Frida knew not that it was her voice that the baby recognized. Often she had sung her to sleep when Elsie had left her in her charge. Already father and mother had noted with joy the power that music had over their blind babe. One day Frida summoned courage to say, "Mutter, dear Mutter, why are you sad when you look at little Anna? I often notice you cry when you do so."

At that question the full heart of the mother overflowed. "O Frida, little Frida, the babe is blind! She will never see the light of day nor the face of her father and mother. Wilhelm knows it now: we took her to Dringenstadt last week, and the doctor examined her eyes and told us she *ist blind geboren* [born blind]. O my poor babe, my poor babe!"

Frida slipped her hand into that of the poor mother, and said gently, "O Mutter, Jesus can make the babe to see if we ask Him. He made so many blind people to see when He was on earth, and He can do so still. Let me read to you about it in my little brown book;" and the child brought her Bible and read of Jesus healing the two blind men, and also of the one in John ix. who said, "Whereas I was blind, now I see."

Elsie listened eagerly, and said, "And it was Jesus the Virgin's Son who did that, do you say? Read me more about Him." And the child read on, how with one touch Jesus opened the eyes of
[44] the blind. She read also how they brought the young children to Jesus, and He took them into His arms and blessed them, and said to His disciples, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

"Oh," said Elsie, "if only that Jesus were here now, I'd walk miles and miles to take my Anna to Him; but, alas! He is not here now."

Frida was a young child, and hardly knew how to answer the troubled mother; but her faith was a simple one, so she answered, "No, Jesus is not here now, but He is in heaven, and He answers us when we pray to Him. Father once read to me the words in Matthew's Gospel—see, here they are—'Ask, and it shall be given you.' Shall we ask Him now?" and kneeling down she prayed in child language, "O Lord Jesus, who dost hear and answer prayer, make little Anna to see as Thou didst the blind men when Thou wert on earth, and oh, comfort poor Elsie!"

As she rose from her knees, Elsie threw her arms round her, saying, "O Frida, I do believe the God my mother believed in hath sent thee here to be a blessing to us!"

Often after that day Frida would read out of her brown Bible to Elsie about Jesus, His life and His atoning death. And sometimes in the evening, when Hans would sit cutting out various kinds of toys, for which he had a great turn, and could easily dispose of them in the shops at Dringenstadt, she would read to him also; and he loved to hear the Old Testament stories of Moses and Jacob, Joseph, and Daniel in the lion's den; also of David, the sweet psalmist of Israel,
[45] who had once been a shepherd boy. They were all new to poor Hans, and from them he learned something of the love God has to His children; but it was ever of Jesus that Elsie loved to hear, and again and again she got the child to read to her the words, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And erelong it was evident, though she would scarcely have acknowledged it, that she was seeking not only the rest but the "*Rest*-Giver." And we know that He who gave the invitation has pledged His word that whosoever cometh to Him He will in no wise cast out.

All this while Wilhelm seemed to take no notice of the Bible readings. Once or twice, when he had returned from his work, he had found Frida reading to his wife and boy, and he had lingered for a minute or two at the door to catch some of the words; but he made no remark, and interrupted the reading by asking if supper were ready. But often later in the evening he would ask the child to bring out her violin and play to him, or to sing one of his favourite songs, after which she would sing a hymn of praise; but as yet it was the sweetness of the singer's voice and not the beauty of the words that he loved to listen to. But notwithstanding, by the power of the Holy Ghost, the Bible was doing its work—slowly, it may be, but surely; so true is it that God's word shall not return to Him void.

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[46]

CHAPTER VII.

IN DRINGENSTADT.

"Sing them over again to me,
Wonderful words of love."

THREE years had passed. Summer had come round again. Fresh green leaves quivered on the trees of the Forest, though the pines still wore their dark clothing. The song of the birds was heard, and the little brooks murmured along their course with a joyful tinkling sound.

In the Forest it was cool even at noontide, but in Dringenstadt the heat was oppressive, and in spite of the sun-blinds the glare of light even indoors was excessive.

In a pleasant room, into which the sun only shone through a thick canopy of green leaves, sat a lady with an open book in her hand. It was an English one, and the dictionary by her side showed it was not in a language she was altogether familiar with. The book evidently recalled memories of the past. Every now and then she paused in her reading, and the look which came into her eyes told that her thoughts had wandered from the present surroundings to other places, and it might be other days.

[47] Sitting beside her, engaged in doing a sum of arithmetic, was a beautiful child of some ten years old, neatly though plainly dressed. The lady's eyes rested on her from time to time, as if something in her appearance, as well as the book she was reading, recalled other days and scenes.

"Frida," she said, for the child was none other than our little friend found in the Forest, "have you no recollections of ever hearing your mother speak of the home of her childhood, or of her companions there?"

"No, dear Miss Drechsler, I do not remember her ever speaking of any companions; but she told me about her mother and father, and that they lived in a beautiful house in England, somewhere in the country; and whenever she spoke of her mother she used to cry, and then she would kiss me, and wish she could show me to her, for she knew she would love me, and I am sure it was to her that my father was taking me when he died. See, here is my little brown Bible which her mother gave to her and she gave to me."

Miss Drechsler took the Bible in her hand, and examined the writing, and noted the name "Hilda;" but neither of them seemed to recall any special person to her memory.

"Strange," she said to herself; "and yet that child's face reminds me vividly of some one whom I saw when I was in England some years ago, when living as governess to the Hon. Evelyn Warden, and I always connect it with some fine music which I heard at that time."

[48] Then changing the subject, she said abruptly, "Frida dear, bring your violin and let me hear how far you are prepared for your master to-morrow."

Miss Drechsler, true to her promise to the German pastor, had kept a look-out on the child known as "the wood-cutters' pet," who lived in the little hut in the Black Forest. From the time Pastor Langen had left, she had her often living with herself for days at a time at Dringenstadt, and was conducting her education; but as she often had to leave that town for months, Frida still had her home great part of the year with the Hörstels in the Forest. At the time we write of, Miss Drechsler had returned to her little German home, and Frida, who was once more living with her, was getting, at her expense, lessons in violin-playing. She bid fair to become an expert in the art which she dearly loved. She was much missed by the kind people in the Forest amongst whom she had lived so long. Just as, at Miss Drechsler's request, she had produced her violin and begun to play on it, a servant opened the door and said that a man from the Forest was desirous of seeing Fräulein Heinz. The girl at once put down her instrument and ran to the door, where she found her friend Wilhelm awaiting her.

"Ah, Frida, canst come back with me to the Forest? There is sorrow there. In one house Johann Schmidt lies nigh to death, caused by an accident when felling a tree. He suffers much, and Gretchen is in sore trouble. And the Volkmans have lost their little boy. You remember him,
[49] Frida; he and our Hans used to play together. And our little Anna seems pining away, and Elsie and all of them are crying out for you to come back and comfort them with the words of your little book. Johann said this morning, when his wife proposed sending for the priest, 'No, Gretchen, no. I want no priest; but oh, I wish little Frida were here to read to me from her brown book about Jesus Christ our great High Priest, who takes away our sins, and is always praying for us.'"

"Oh, I remember," interrupted Frida. "I read to him once about Jesus ever living 'to make intercession for us.' Yes, Wilhelm, I'll come with you. I know Miss Drechsler will say I should go, for she often tells me I really belong to the kind people in the Forest." And so saying, she ran off to tell her story to her friend.

Miss Drechsler at once assented to her return to the Forest to give what help she could to the people there, adding that she herself would come up soon to visit them, and bring them any comforts necessary for them such as could not be easily got by them. Ere they parted she and Frida knelt together in prayer, and Miss Drechsler asked that God would use the child as His messenger to the poor, sorrowing, suffering ones in the Forest; after which she took Frida's Bible and put marks in at the different passages which she thought would be suitable to the different cases of the people that Wilhelm had spoken of.

It was late in the afternoon ere Wilhelm and Frida reached the hut of Johann Schmidt, where
[50] he left the child for a while, whilst he went on to the Volkmans to tell them of Frida's return, and that she hoped to see them the next day. Gretchen met the girl with a cry of delight.

"*Ach!* there she comes, our own little Fräulein. What a pleasure it is to see thee again, our woodland pet! And see, here is my Johann laid up in bed, nearly killed by the falling of a tree."

The sick man raised himself as he heard the child's voice saying as she entered, in reply to Gretchen's words, "Oh, I am sorry, so sorry! Why did you not tell me sooner?" And in another moment she was sitting beside Johann, speaking kind, comforting words to him. He stroked her hair fondly, and answered her questions as well as he could; but there was a far-away look in his eyes as if his thoughts were in some region distant from the one he was living in now. After a few minutes he asked eagerly,—

"Have you the little brown book with you now?"

"Yes, I have," was the reply. "Shall I read to you now, Johann? for Wilhelm is to come for me soon."

"Yes, read, read," he said; "for I am weary, so weary."

Frida turned quickly to the eleventh chapter of Matthew, and read distinctly in the German, which he could understand, and which she could now speak also, the words, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

He stopped her there. "Read that again," he said. She complied, and then he turned to her, saying, "And Jesus, the Son of God, said that? Will He give it to me, thinkest thou?"

[51] "Yes," she said, "He will; for He has promised to do it, and He never breaks His word."

"Well, if that be so, kneel down, pretty one, and ask Him to give it me, for I need it sorely."

Frida knelt, and in a few simple words besought the Saviour to give His rest and peace to the suffering man.

"Thanks, little Frida," he said as she rose. "I believe that prayer will be answered." And shutting his eyes he fell quietly asleep, and Frida slipped out of the room and joined Wilhelm in the Forest.

"Is little Anna so very ill?" she queried as they walked.

"I fear she is," was the answer the father gave, with tears in his eyes. "The mother thinks so also; though the child, bless her, is so good and patient we hardly know whether she suffers or

not. She just lies still mostly on her bed now, and sings to herself little bits of hymns, or speaks about the land far away, which she says you told her about, and where she says she is going to see Jesus. Then her mother begins to cry; but she also speaks about that bright land. 'Deed it puzzles me to know where they have learned so much about it, unless it be from your little brown book. And the child has often asked where Frida is. 'I want to hear her sing again,' she says."

"O Wilhelm, why did you not come for me when she said that?"

"Well, you see, I had promised the pastor that I would let you visit Miss Drechsler as often as possible, and then you were getting on so nicely with your violin that we felt as if we had no right
[52] to call you back to us. But see, here we are, and there is Hans looking out for us."

But Hans, instead of rushing to meet them as he usually did, ran back hastily to his mother, calling out, "Here they come, here they come!"

"Oh, I am glad!" she said.—"Anna, dear Anna, you will hear Frida's voice again."

The mother looked round with a smile, but moved not, for the dying child lay in her arms. A moment longer, and Frida was beside her, her arms round the blind child.

"Annchen, dear Annchen, speak to me," she entreated—"just one word, to say you know me. It is Frida come home, and she will not leave you again, but will tell you stories out of the little brown book."

A look of intelligence crossed the face of the blind child, and she said,—

"Dear Frida, tell Annchen 'bout Jesus, and sing."

Frida, choking back her sobs, opened her Bible and read the story that little Anna loved, of Jesus taking the children in His arms and blessing them; then sang a hymn of the joys of heaven, where He is seen face to face, and where there is "no more pain, neither sorrow nor crying, neither is there any more death," and where His redeemed ones *see* His face.

The mother, almost blinded with tears, heard her child whisper, "'See His face;' then Annchen will see Him too, won't she, Frida?"

"Yes, Annchen. There your eyes will be open, and you will be blind no more."

As Frida said these words she heard one deep-drawn breath, one cry, "Fader, Mutter, Jesus!"
[53] and the little one was gone into that land where the first face she saw was that of her loving Saviour, whom "having not seen she loved," and the beauties of that land which had been afar off burst on her eyes, which were no longer blind.

Poor father! poor mother! look up; your child sees now, and will await your coming to the golden gates.

Heartfelt tears were shed on earth by that death-bed, but there was a song of great rejoicing in heaven over another ransomed soul entering heaven, and also over another sinner entering the kingdom of God on earth, as Wilhelm Hörstel bent his knee by the bed where his dead child lay, and in broken words asked the Saviour whom that child had gone to see face to face to receive him as a poor sinner, and make him all he ought to be. In after-years he would often say that it was the words little Frida, the woodland child, had read and sung to his blind darling that led him, as they had already led his wife, to the feet of Jesus.

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[54]

CHAPTER VIII.

THE VIOLIN-TEACHER AND THE CONCERT.

"There in an arched and lofty room
She stands in fair white dress,
Where grace and colour and sweet sound
Combine and cluster all around,
And rarest taste express."

THREE years had passed since all that was mortal of the blind child was laid to rest in the quiet God's acre near where the body of Frida's father lay. After the funeral of little Anna, Frida at her own request returned to the Forest with her friends, anxious to help and comfort Elsie, who she knew would sorely miss the blind child, who had been such a comfort and companion to her when both Wilhelm and Hans were busy at work in the woods; but after remaining with them for a few months, she again returned for a part of each year to Dringenstadt, and made rapid progress under Miss Drechsler's tuition with her education, and

especially with her music.

The third summer after little Anna's death, Frida was again spending some weeks in the Forest. It was early summer when she returned there. Birds and insects were busy in the Forest, and the
[55] wood-cutters were hard at work loading the carts with the piles of wood which the large-eyed, strong, patient-looking oxen conveyed to the town. Loud sounded the crack of the carters' whips as they urged on the slow-paced oxen. Often in those days Frida, accompanied by Elsie (who had now no little child to detain her at home), would take Wilhelm's and Hans's simple dinner with them to carry to them where they worked.

One day Frida left Elsie talking to her husband and boy, and strolled a little way further into the Forest, gathering the flowers that grew at the foot of the trees, and admiring the soft, velvety moss that here and there covered the ground, when suddenly she was startled by the sounds of footsteps quite near her, and looking hastily round, saw to her amazement the figure of the young violinist from whom she had lately taken lessons.

"Fräulein Heinz," he said, as he caught sight of the fair young girl as she stood, flowers in hand, "I rejoice to meet you, for I came in search of you. Pupils of mine in the town of Baden-Baden, many miles from here, where I often reside, are about to have an amateur concert, and they have asked me to bring any pupil with me whom I may think capable of assisting them. They are English milords, and are anxious to assist local musical talent; and I have thought of you, Fräulein, as a performer on the violin, and I went to-day to Miss Drechsler to ask her to give you leave to go."

"And what did she say?" asked the child eagerly. "How could I go so far away?" And she
[56] stopped suddenly; but the glance she gave at her dress told the young violinist the direction of her thoughts.

"Ah!" he said, "Fräulein Drechsler will settle all that. She wishes you to go, and says she will herself accompany you and also bring you back to your friends."

"Oh! then," said Frida, "I would like very much to go; but I must ask Wilhelm and Elsie if they can spare me. But, Herr Müller, do you think I can play well enough?"

The violinist smiled as he thought how little the girl before him realized the musical genius which she possessed, and which already, young as she was, made her a performer of no ordinary skill.

"Ah yes, Fräulein," he said, "I think you will do. But you know, as the concert is not for a month yet, you can come to Dringenstadt and can have a few more lessons ere then."

"Come with me, then, and let me introduce you to my friends;" and she led him up to the spot where Wilhelm, Elsie, and Hans stood.

They looked surprised, but when they heard her request they could not refuse it. To have their little woodland child play at a concert seemed to them an honour of no small magnitude. Hans in his eagerness pressed to her side, saying, "O Frida, I am so glad, for you do play so beautifully."

"As for that matter, so do you, Hans," she replied, for the boy had the musical talent so often found even in German peasants, and taught by Frida could really play with taste on the violin.

[57] "O Herr Müller," she said, turning to him, "I wish some day you could hear Hans play; I am sure you would like it. If only he could get lessons! I know he would excel in it."

"Is that so?" said the violinist; "then we must get that good Fräulein Drechsler to have him down to Dringenstadt, and I will hear him play; and then if we find there is real talent, I might recommend him to the society for helping those who have a turn for music, but are not able to pay for instruction."

Hans's eyes danced with delight at the idea, but in the meantime he knew his duty was to help his father as much as he could in his work as a wood-cutter. "But then some day," he thought, "who knows but I might be able to devote my time to music, and so it would all be brought about through the kindness of little Frida."

Frida was a happy girl when a few days after the violinist's visit to the Forest she set out for Dringenstadt, to live for a month with Fräulein Drechsler, and with her go on to Baden-Baden. A few more lessons were got from Herr Müller, the selection of music she was to perform gone through again and again, and all was ready to start the next day.

When Frida went to her room that evening, great was her amazement to see laid out on her bed a prettily-made plain black delaine morning dress, neatly finished off at neck and wrists with a pure white frill; and beside it a simple white muslin one for evening wear, with a white silk sash to match. These Miss Drechsler told her were a present from herself. Frida's young heart was
[58] filled with gratitude to the kind friend who was so thoughtful of her wants; and she wondered if a day would ever come when she would be able in any way to repay the kindnesses of the friends whom God had raised up for her.

In the meantime Herr Müller had told the Stanfords, in whose house the concert was to be held, about the young girl violinist whose services he had secured. They were much interested in her, and were prepared to give a hearty welcome, not to her only, but to her friend Miss Drechsler, whom they had already met.

Sir Richard Stanford, who was the head of an old family in the south of England, had with his wife come abroad for the health of their young and only daughter. Sir Richard and Lady Stanford were Christians, and interested themselves in the natives of the place where they were living, and themselves having highly-cultivated musical tastes, they took pleasure in helping on any of the poorer people there in whom they recognized the like talent.

"Father," said his young daughter Adeline, as she lay one warm day on a couch under a shady tree in the garden of their lovely villa at Baden-Baden, "suppose we have a concert in our villa some evening; and let us try and find out some good amateur performers, and also engage two or three really good professionals to play, so that some of the poorer players who have not opportunities of hearing them may do so, and be benefited thereby."

Anxious in any reasonable way to please their daughter, a girl not much older than Frida, Sir Richard and Lady Stanford agreed to carry out her suggestion; and calling their friend Herr
[59] Müller to their assistance, the private concert was arranged for, and our friend the child of the Black Forest invited to play at it.

The day fixed for the concert had come round, and Adeline Stanford, who was more than usually well, flitted here and there, making preparations for the evening. The concert-room had been beautifully decorated, and the supper-table tastefully arranged. Very pretty did Ada (as she was called) look. Her finely-cut features and graceful appearance all proclaimed her high birth, and the innate purity and unselfishness of her spirit were stamped on her face. Adeline Stanford was a truly Christian girl whose great desire was to make those around her happy. One thing she had often longed for was to have a companion of her own age to live with her and be as a sister to her. Her parents often tried to get such a one, but as yet difficulties had arisen which prevented their doing so. The very morning of the concert, Ada had said, "O mother, how pleasant it would be, when we are travelling about and seeing so many beautiful places, to have some young girl with us who would share our pleasure with us and help to cheer you and father when I have one of my bad days and am fit for nothing." Then she added with a smile, "Not that I would like it only for your sakes, but for my own as well. It would be nice to have a sister companion to share my lessons and duties with me, and bear with my grumbles when I am ill."

Adeline's grumbles were so seldom heard that her parents could not help smiling at her words,
[60] though they acknowledged that her wish was a natural one; but then, where was the suitable girl to be found?

"Ah! here we are at last," said Miss Drechsler, as she and Frida drove up to the door of the villa where the Stanfords lived. "How lovely it all is!" said Frida, who had been in ecstasies ever since she arrived in Baden.

Everything was so new to her—not since her father's death had she been in a large town; and her admiration as they drove along the streets between the rows of beautiful trees was manifested by exclamations of delight.

Once or twice something in the appearance of the shops struck her as familiar. "Surely," she said, "I have seen these before, but where I cannot tell. Ah! look at that large toy-shop. I know I have been there, and some one who was with me bought me a cart to play with. I think it must have been mamma, for I recollect that the purse she had in her hand was like one that I often got from her to play with. Oh, I am sure I have lived here before with father and mother!"

As they neared the villa, the "woodland child" became more silent, and pressed closer to her friend's side.

"Ah! here they come," exclaimed Adeline Stanford, as followed by her father and mother she ran downstairs to welcome the strangers. Miss Drechsler they had seen before, but the appearance of the girl from the Black Forest struck them much. They had expected to see a
[61] peasant child (for Herr Müller had told them nothing of her history nor spoken of her appearance), and when Frida had removed her hat and stood beside them in the drawing-room, they were astonished to see no country child, but a singularly beautiful, graceful girl, of refined appearance and lady-like manners. Her slight shyness soon vanished through Ada's unaffected pleasant ways, and erelong the two girls were talking to each other with all the frankness of youth, and long ere the hour for the concert came they were fast friends.

"Come, Frida," she said, "let us play the last passage together." *See page 61.*

Ada was herself a good pianist, and could play fairly well on the violin, and she found that Herr Müller had arranged that she and the girl from the Forest should perform together.

"Come, Frida," she said, "let us play the last passage together; we must be sure we have it perfect."

"Oh, how well you play!" she said when they had finished. "Has Herr Müller been your only teacher?"

"Latterly he has," was the answer; "but when I was quite little I was well taught by my father."

"Your father!" said Adeline; "does he play well? He cannot have had many advantages if he has to work in the woods all day."

"Work in the woods! why, he never did that." Then she added, "Oh! I see you think Wilhelm Hörstel is my father; but that is not the case. My own dear father is dead, and Wilhelm found me left alone in the Black Forest."

"Found in the Black Forest alone!" said Ada. Here was indeed a romance to take the fancy of an imaginative, impulsive girl like Adeline Stanford; and leaving Frida with her story unfinished, she
[62] darted off to her parents to tell them what she had heard. They also were much interested in her story, for they had been much astonished at the appearance of the girl from the Forest; and telling Ada that she had better go back to Frida, they turned to Miss Drechsler and asked her to tell them all she knew of the child's history.

She did so, mentioning also her brown Bible and the way in which God was using its words amongst the wood-cutters in the Forest.

The concert was over, but Sir Richard, Lady Stanford, and Miss Drechsler lingered awhile (after the girls had gone to bed), talking over the events of the evening.

"How beautifully your young friend played!" said Lady Stanford; "her musical talent is wonderful, but the girl herself is the greatest wonder of all. She cannot be the child of common people, she is so like a lady and so graceful. And, Miss Drechsler, can you tell us how she comes to be possessed of such a lovely mosaic necklace as she wore to-night? Perhaps it belongs to yourself, and you have lent it to her for the occasion."

"No, indeed," was the answer; "it is not mine. It evidently belonged to the child's mother, and

was on her neck the night she was found in the Forest."

"Then," said Sir Richard, "it is just possible it may be the means of leading to the discovery of the girl's parentage, for the pattern is an uncommon one. She is a striking-looking child, and it is
[63] strange that her face haunts me with the idea that I have seen it somewhere before; but that is impossible, as the girl tells me she has never been in England, and I can never have met her here."

"It is curious," said Miss Drechsler; "but I also have the feeling that I have seen some one whom she greatly resembles when I was in England living in Gloucestershire with the Wardens."

"'Tis strange," said Lady Stanford, "that you should see a likeness to some one whom you have seen and yet cannot name, the more so that the face is not a common one."

"She is certainly a remarkable child," continued Miss Drechsler, "and a really good one. She has a great love for her Bible, and I think tries to live up to its precepts."

That evening Sir Richard and his wife talked together of the possibility of by-and-by taking Frida into their house as companion to Ada, specially whilst they were travelling about; and perhaps afterwards taking her with them to England and continuing her education there, so that if her relations were not found she might when old enough obtain a situation as governess, or in some way turn her musical talents to account.

The day after the concert, Frida returned with Miss Drechsler to Dringenstadt, to remain a few days with her before returning to her Forest home.

As they were leaving the Stanfords, and Frida had just sprung into the carriage which was to convey them to the station, a young man who had been present at the concert, and was a friend
[64] of the Stanfords, came forward and asked leave to shake hands with her, and congratulated her on her violin-playing. He was a good-looking young man of perhaps three-and-twenty years, with the easy manners of a well-born gentleman.

After saying farewell, he turned into the house with the Stanfords, and began to talk about the "fair violinist," as he termed her. "Remarkably pretty girl," he said; "reminds me strongly of some one I have seen. Surely she cannot be (as I overheard a young lady say last night) just a wood-cutter's child."

"No, she is not that," replied Sir Richard, and then he told the young man something of her history, asking him if he had observed the strange antique necklace which the girl wore.

"No," he answered, "I did not. Could you describe it to me?" As Sir Richard did so a close observer must have seen a look of pained surprise cross the young man's face, and he visibly changed colour. "Curious," he said as he rose hastily. "It would be interesting to know how it came into her possession; perhaps it was stolen, who knows?" And so saying, he shook hands and departed.

Reginald Gower was the only child of an old English family of fallen fortune. Rumour said he was of extravagant habits, but that he expected some day to inherit a fine property and large fortune from a distant relative.

There were good traits in Reginald's character: he had a kind heart, and was a most loving son to his widowed mother, who doted on him; but a love of ease and a selfish regard to his own
[65] comfort marred his whole character, and above all things an increasing disregard of God and the Holy Scriptures was pervading more and more his whole life.

As he walked away from Sir Richard's house, his thoughts were occupied with the story he had just heard of the child found in the Black Forest. He was quite aware of the fact that the girl's face forcibly reminded him of the picture of a beautiful girl that hung in the drawing-room of a manor-house near his own home in Gloucestershire. He knew that the owner of that face had been disinherited (though the only child of the house) on account of her marriage, which was contrary to the wishes of her parents, and that now they did not know whether she were dead or alive; though surely he had lately heard a report that, after years of bitter indignation at her, they had softened, and were desirous of finding out where she was, if still alive. And then what impressed him most was the curious coincidence (he called it) that round the neck of the girl in the picture was just such another mosaic necklace as the Stanfords had described the one to be which the young violinist wore.

Was it possible, he asked himself, that she could be the child of the daughter of the manor of whom his mother had often told him? and if so, ought he to tell them of his suspicions—the more so that he had heard from his mother that the lady of the manor was failing in health, and longing, as she had long done, to see and forgive her child? If he were right in his surmises that this "woodland girl," as he had heard her called, was the daughter of the child of the manor, then
[66] even if the mother was dead, the young violinist would be received with open arms by both the grand-parents, and would (and here arose the difficulty in the young man's mind) inherit the estates and wealth which would have devolved on her mother, all of which, but for the existence of this woodland child, he, Reginald Gower, would have inherited as heir-at-law.

"Well, there is no call on you to say anything about the matter, at all events at present," whispered the evil spirit in the young man's heart. "You may be mistaken. Why ruin your whole future prospects for a fancy? Likenesses are so deceptive; and as to the necklace, pooh! that is

nonsense—there are hundreds of mosaic necklaces. Let the matter alone, and go your way. 'Eat, drink, and be merry.'"

All very well; but why just then of all times in the world did the words of the Bible, taught him long ago by the mother he loved, come so vividly to his remembrance—"Do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God;" and those words, heard more distinctly still, which his mother had taught him to call "the royal law of love"—"As ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them"?

Good and bad spirits seemed fighting within him for the mastery; but alas, alas! the selfish spirit so common to humanity won the day, and Reginald Gower turned from the low, soft voice of the Holy Spirit pleading within him, and resolutely determined to be silent regarding his meeting with the child found in the Black Forest, and the strange circumstance of her likeness to the picture and her possession of the mosaic necklace.

[67] Once again the god of self, who has so many votaries in this world, had gained a great triumph, and the prince of this world got a more sure seat in the heart of the young man. But all unknown to him there was one "climbing for him the silver, shining stair that leads to God's great treasure-house," and claiming for her fatherless boy "the priceless boon of the new heart."

Was such a prayer ever offered in vain or unanswered by Him who hath said, "If ye ask anything according to my will, I will do it. Ask, and ye shall receive"?

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[68]

CHAPTER IX.

CHRISTMAS IN THE FOREST.

"Christmas, happy Christmas,
Sweet herald of good-will,
With holy songs of glory,
Brings holy gladness still."

SUMMER had long passed, autumn tints had faded, and the fallen leaves lay thick in the Forest.

For days a strong wind had blown, bending the high trees under its influence, and here and there rooting up the dark pines and laying them low. Through the night of which we are going to write, a heavy fall of snow had covered all around with a thick mantle of pure white. It weighed down the branches of the trees in the Forest, and rested on the piles of wood which lay ready cut to be carted off to be sold for fuel in the neighbouring towns. The roll of wheels, as the heavily-laden wagons passed, was heard no more. The song of the birds had ceased, though the print of their claws was to be seen on the snow. All was quiet. The silence of nature seemed to rest on the
[69] hearts of the dwellers in the Forest. In vain Elsie heaped on the wood; still the stove gave out little heat. She busied herself in the little room, but a weight seemed to be on her spirit, and she glanced from time to time uneasily at Frida, who sat listlessly knitting beside the stove.

"Art ill, Frida?" she said at last. "All this morning hast thou sat there with that knitting on thy lap, and scarce worked a round at it. And your violin—why, Frida, you have not played on it for weeks, and even Hans notices it; and Wilhelm says to me no longer ago than this morning, 'Why, wife, what ails our woodland child? The spirit has all left her, and she looks white and tired-like.'"

Frida, thus addressed, rose quickly from her seat, a blush, perchance of shame, colouring her cheeks.

"O Mutter," she said, "I know I am lazy; but it is not because I am ill, only I keep thinking and wondering and—There! I know I'm wrong, only, Elsie dear, Mutter Elsie, I do want to know if any of my own people are alive, and where they live. I have felt like this ever since I was at Baden-Baden; and I have not heard from Adeline Stanford for such a long time, and I suppose, though she was so kind, she has forgotten me; and Miss Drechsler has left Dringenstadt for months; and, O Mutter, forgive me, and believe that I am not ungrateful for all that you and Wilhelm and the kind people in the Dorf have done for me. Only, only—" And the poor girl laid her head on Elsie's shoulder and cried long and bitterly.

Elsie was much moved, she did so love the bright, fairy-like girl who had been the means of letting in the light of the gospel to her dark heart.

[70] "*Armes Kind*" (poor child), she said, soothing her as tenderly as she would have done her own blind Anna, had she been alive and in trouble, "I understand it all, dear." (And her kind woman heart had taken it all in.) "It is just like the little bird taken from its mother's nest, and put into a strange one, longing to be back amongst its like again, and content nowhere else. But, Frida, dost

thou not remember that we read in the little brown book that our Lord hath said, 'Lo, I am with you alway'? Isn't that enough for you? No place can be very desolate, can it, if He be there?"

In a moment after Elsie said these words, Frida raised her head and dried her eyes.

Had she been forgetting, she asked herself, whose young servant she was? Was it right in a child of God to be discontented with her lot, and to forget the high privilege that God had given her in allowing her to read His Word to the poor people in the Forest?

"I must throw off this discontented spirit," she said to herself; and turning to Elsie she told her how sorry she was for the way in which she had acted, adding, "But with God's help I will be better now."

Frida was no perfect character, and, truth to tell, ever since her return from Baden-Baden, a sense of the incongruity of her circumstances had crept upon her. The tasteful surroundings, the cultured conversation, the musical evenings, the refinement of all around, had enchanted the
[71] young girl, and the humble lot and homely ways of her Forest friends had on her return to them stood out in striking contrast. And, alas! for the time being she refused to see in all these things the guiding hand of God. But after the day we have written of, things went better. The girl strove to conquer her discontent, and in God's strength she overcame, and her friends in the Forest had once more the pleasure of seeing her bright smile and hearing her sweet voice in song.

Johann Schmidt had fallen asleep in Jesus with the words of Holy Scripture on his lips, blessing the "wood-cutters' pet," as he called her, for having, through the reading of God's Word, led him to Jesus. But though sickness had left the Forest, the severe cold and deep snow were very trying to the health of all the dwellers in it, and the winter nights were long and dreary.

One day in December, Wilhelm Hörstel had business in Dringenstadt, and on his return home he gave Frida two letters which he had found lying at the post-office for her. They proved, to Frida's great delight, to be from her two friends Miss Drechsler and Adeline Stanford.

Miss Drechsler's ran thus:—

> "Dear Frida,—I have been thinking very specially of you and your friends in the Forest, now that the cold winter days have come, and the snow, I doubt not, is lying thick on the trees and ground. Knowing how interested you are, dear, in all your kind friends there, I have thought how nice it would be for you, if Elsie and Wilhelm consent,
> [72] to have a Christmas-tree for a few of your friends; and in order to carry this out, I enclose a money order to the amount of £2, and leave it to you and Elsie to spend it to the best of your power.
>
> "I am also going to write to Herr Steiger to send, addressed to you, ten pounds of tea, which I trust you to give from me to each of the householders—nine in number, I think —in the little Dorf, retaining one for your friends the Hörstels. Will you, dear Frida, be my almoner and do my business for me? I often think of and pray for you, and I know you do not forget me. I fear I will not be able to return to Dringenstadt till the month of May, as my sister is still very ill, and I feel I am of use to her.—Your affectionate friend.
>
> M. Drechsler."

"Oh, isn't it good? isn't it charming?" said Frida, jumping about the room in her glee. "Mayn't we have the tree, Mutter? And will you not some day soon come with me to Dringenstadt and choose the things for it? Oh, I wish Hans were here, that I might tell him all about it! See, I have not yet opened Adeline's letter; it is so long since I heard from her. I wonder where they are living now. Oh, the letter is from Rome."

Then in silence she read on. Elsie, who was watching her, saw that as she read on her cheeks coloured and her eyes sparkled with some joyful emotion.

She rose suddenly, and going up to Elsie she said, "O Mutter, *was denken Sie?* [what do you
[73] think?]. Sir Richard and Lady Stanford enclose a few lines saying they would like so much that I should, with your consent, spend some months with them at Cannes in the Riviera, as a companion to Adeline; and if you and Miss Drechsler agree to the plan, that I would accompany friends of theirs from Baden-Baden who propose to go to Cannes about the middle of January. And, Mutter," continued the girl, "they say all my expenses will be paid, and that I shall have Adeline's masters for music and languages, and be treated as if I were their daughter."

Elsie looked up with tears in her eyes. "Well, Frida dear," she said, "it does seem a good thing for you, and right glad I am about it for your sake; but, oh, we will miss you sorely. But there! the dear Lord has told us in the book not to think only of ourselves, and I am sure that He is directing your way. Of course I'll speak to Wilhelm about it, for he has so much sense; but I don't believe he'll stand in your way."

Frida, overcome with excitement, and almost bewildered with the prospect before her, had yet a heart full of sorrow at the thought of leaving the friends who had helped her in her time of need; and in broken words she told Elsie so, clinging to her as she spoke.

Matters were soon arranged. Elsie and Wilhelm heartily agreed that Frida should accept Sir Richard and Lady Stanford's invitation. They only waited till an answer could be got from Miss Drechsler regarding the plan. And when that came, full of thankfulness for God's kindness in thus

[74] guiding her path, a letter of acceptance was at once dispatched to Cannes, and the child of the Forest only remained with her friends till the new year was a fortnight old.

In the meantime, whilst snow lay thick around, Christmas-eve came on, and Frida and Elsie were busy preparing the tree. Of the true Christmas joy many in the Forest knew nothing, but in some hearts a glimmer at least of its true meaning was dawning, and a few of the wood-cutters loved to gather together and hear Frida read the story of the angelic hosts on the plain of Bethlehem singing of peace and good-will to men, because that night a Babe, who was Christ the Lord, was born in a manger. How much they understood of the full significance of the story we know not, but we *do* know God's word never returns to Him void.

The tree was ready at last. Elsie, Frida, and Hans had worked busily at it for days, Miss Drechsler's money had gone a long way, and now those who had prepared it thought there never had been such a beautiful tree. True, every child in the Forest had had on former occasions a tree of their own at Christmas time—none so poor but some small twig was lit up, though the lights might be few; but this one, ah, that was a different matter—no such tree as this had ever been seen in the Forest before.

"Look, Hans," said Frida; "is not that doll like a little queen? And only see that little wooden cart and horse; won't that delight some of the children in the Dorf?—And, Mutter, we must hang up that warm hood for Frau Schenk, poor woman; and now here are the warm cuffs for the men,
[75] and a lovely pair for Wilhelm.—And, O Hans, we will not tell you what *you* are to have; nor you either, Mutter. No, no, you will never guess. I bought them myself."

And so, amid chattering and laughing, the tree got on and was finished; and all I am going to say about it is that for long years afterwards that particular Christmas-tree was remembered and spoken of, and in far other scenes—in crowded drawing-rooms filled with gaily-dressed children and grown-up people—Frida's eyes would fill as she thought of the joy that Christmas-tree had given to the dwellers in the Forest, both young and old. Ere that memorable night ended, Frida and Hans, who had prepared a surprise for every one, brought out their violins, and sang together in German a Christmas carol; and as the assembled party went quietly home through the snow-carpeted Forest, a holy influence seemed around them, as if the song of the angels echoed through the air, "Peace on earth, and goodwill to men."

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[76]

CHAPTER X.

HARCOURT MANOR.

"Shall not long-suffering in thee be
wrought
To mirror back His own?
His *gentleness* shall mellow every
thought
And look and tone."

THREE years and a half have passed since the Christmas-eve we have written of, and the golden light of a summer day was falling on the earth and touching the flowers in a lovely garden belonging to the old manor-house of Harcourt, in the county of Gloucester in England.

In the lawn-tennis court, which was near the garden, preparations were making for a game. Young men in flannels and girls in light dresses were passing to and fro arranging the racquets and tightening the nets, some gathering the balls together and trying them ere the other players should arrive. It was a pleasant scene. Birds twittered out and in the ivy and rose covered walls of the old English manor-house, and the blithe laughter of the young people blended with the melodious singing of the choristers around.

[77] The company was assembling quickly, kind words were passing amongst friends, when there appeared on the scene an elderly lady of great elegance and beauty, to whom all turned with respectful greeting, and a hush came over all.

Not that there was anything stern or severe in the lady's appearance to cause the hush, for a look of calmness and great sweetness was in her countenance, but through it there was also an appearance of sadness that touched every heart, and although it would not silence any true young joy, had certainly the effect of quieting anything boisterous or rude.

The "gentle lady" of Harcourt Manor was the name Mrs. Willoughby had gone by for some years. It was pretty well known that a deep sorrow had fallen upon her whilst still in the prime of life; and those there were who said they could recall a time when, instead of that look of calm peace and chastened sorrow, there were visible on her face only haughty pride and fiery temper.

It was hard to believe that that had ever been the case; but if so, it was but one of many instances in which God's declaration proved true, that though "no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous, nevertheless *afterward* it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness."

Mr. Willoughby, a man older by some years than his wife, was a man who had long been more feared than beloved; and the heavy trial, which had affected him no less than his wife, had apparently hardened instead of softening his whole nature, though a severe illness had greatly mitigated, it was thought, some of his sternness.

[78] The party of which we are writing was given in honour of the return from abroad of the heir of the manor, a distant relation of the Willoughbys, Mr. Reginald Gower, whom we have written of before. For five years he had been living abroad, and had returned only a month ago to the house of his widowed mother, the Hon. Mrs. Gower of Lilyfield, a small though pretty property adjoining Harcourt Manor.

Just as Mrs. Willoughby entered the grounds, Reginald and his mother did so also, although by a different way, and a few minutes passed ere they met.

The young man walked eagerly up to the hostess, a smile of real pleasure lighting up his handsome face at the sight of the lady he really loved, and who had from his boyish days been a kind friend to him. But as he greeted her, the look of sadness on her countenance struck him, and some secret thought sent a pang through him, and for the moment blanched his cheek. Was it possible, he asked himself, that he had it in his power, by the utterance of a few words, to dispel that look of deep sadness from the face of one of the dearest friends, next to his mother, whom he possessed?

"Very glad to see you back again, Reginald," said Mrs. Willoughby. "But surely the southern skies have blanched rather than bronzed your cheeks. You were not wont to be so pale, Reggie. Ay, there you are more like your old self" (as a flush of colour spread over his face once more).
[79] "We hope you have come to stay awhile in your own country, for your dear mother has been worrying about your long absence.—Is it not so, Laura?" she said, addressing herself to Mrs. Gower, who now stood beside them.

"Yes, indeed," was the reply; "I am thankful to have my boy home again. Lilyfield is a dull place without him."

"Yes," said Mrs. Willoughby; "it is a dreary home that has no child in it." And as she spoke she turned her face away, that no one might see that her eyes were full of tears.

But Reginald had caught sight of them, and turned away suddenly, saying, "Farewell for the present;" and raising his cap to the two ladies, he went off to join the players in the tennis-court, to all outward appearance one of the brightest and most light-hearted there.

But he played badly that day, and exclamations from his friends were heard from time to time such as, "Why, Reginald, have you forgotten how to play tennis?" "Oh, look out, Gower; you are spoiling the game! It was a shame to miss that ball."

Thus admonished, Reginald drew himself together, collected his thoughts, concentrated his attention on the game, and played well. But no sooner was the game over than once again there rose before his eyes the face and figure of the beautiful foundling of the Black Forest, with her strange story and her extraordinary likeness not only to the picture of the young girl in the drawing-room of the manor, but also to his gentle friend Mrs. Willoughby.

Oh, if only he had never met the young violinist; if he could blot out the remembrance of her
[80] and be once more the light-hearted man he had been ere he heard her story from Sir Richard Stanford!

He had been so sure of his sense of honour, his pure morality, his good principles, his high-toned soul ("True," he said to himself, "I never set up to be one of your righteous-overmuch sort of people, nor a saint like my noble mother and my friend Mrs. Willoughby") that he staggered as he thought of what he was now by the part he was acting. Dishonest, cruel, unjust—he, Reginald Gower; was it possible? Ah! his self-righteousness, his boasted uprightness, had both been put to the test and found wanting.

"Well, Reggie, had you a pleasant time at the manor to-day?" said his mother to him as they sat together at their late dinner.

"Oh, it was well enough," was the reply; but it was not spoken in his usual hearty tone, and his mother observed it, and also the unsatisfied look which crossed his face, and she wondered what had vexed him.

A silence succeeded, broken at last by Reginald.

"Mother," he said, "what is it that has deepened that look of sadness in Mrs. Willoughby's face since I last saw her? And tell me, is the story about their daughter being disinherited true? And is it certain that she is dead, and that no child (for I think it is said she married) survives her? If that were the case, and the child should turn up and be received, it would be awkward for me and my prospects, mother."

"Reginald," Mrs. Gower replied, for she had heard his words with astonishment, "if I thought

[81] that there was the least chance that either Mrs. Willoughby's daughter or any child of hers were alive, I would rejoice with all my heart, and do all I could to bring about a reconciliation, even though it were to leave you, my loved son, a penniless beggar. And so I am sure would you."

A flush of crimson rose to Reginald's brow at these words. Then his mother believed him to be all that he had thought himself, and little suspected what he really was. But then, supposing he divulged his secret, what about debts which he had contracted, and extravagant habits which he had formed? No! he would begin and save, retrench his expenses, and if possible get these debts paid off; and then he might see his way to speak of the girl in the Black Forest, if she was still to be found.

So once more Reginald Gower silenced the voice of conscience with, "At a more convenient time," and abruptly changing the subject, began to speak of his foreign experiences, of the beauty of Italian skies, art, and scenery; and the conversation about Mrs. Willoughby's daughter passed from his mother's mind, and she became absorbed in her son's descriptions of the places he had visited. And as she looked at his handsome animated face, was it any wonder that with a mother's partiality she thought how favoured she was in the possession of such a child? Only—and here she sighed—ah, if only she were sure that this cherished son were a true follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that the Word of God, so precious to her own soul, were indeed a light to his feet and a lamp to his path!

[82] That evening another couple were seated also at their dinner-table, and a different conversation was being held. The master of Harcourt Manor sat at the foot of the table, opposite his gentle wife; but a troubled look was on his face, brought there very much by the thought that he noticed an extra shade both of weariness and sadness on the face of his wife. What could he do to dissipate it? he was asking himself. Anything, except speak the word which he was well aware would have the desired effect, and, were she still alive, restore to her mother's arms the child for whom she pined; but not yet was the strong self-will so broken down that those words could be spoken by him, not yet had he so felt the need of forgiveness for his own soul that he could forgive as he hoped to be forgiven.

Did not his duty as a parent, and his duty towards other parents of his own rank in life, call upon him to make a strong stand, and visit with his righteous indignation such a sin as that of his only child and heiress marrying a man, however good, upright, and highly educated he might be, who yet was beneath her in station (although he denied that fact), and unable to keep her in the comfort and luxury to which she had been accustomed?

"No, no, *noblesse oblige*;" and rather than forgive such a sin, he would blight his own life and break the heart of the wife he adored. Such was the state of mind in which the master of Harcourt Manor had remained since the sad night when his only child had gone off to be married
[83] at a neighbouring church to the young musician Heinz. But some months before Reginald Gower's return from abroad, during a severe illness which had brought him to the borderland, Mr. Willoughby was aroused to a dawning sense of his own sinfulness and need of pardon, which had, almost unconsciously to himself, a softening effect on his mind.

His wife was the first to break the silence at the dinner-table. "Has not Reginald Gower grown more manly and older-looking since we saw him last?" she said, addressing her husband.

A shade came over his face as he answered somewhat testily, "Oh, I think he looks well enough! Of course five years must have made him look older. But Reginald never was the favourite with me that he is with you, wife; a self-indulgent lad he always seems to me to be."

"Well, but surely, husband" (once she always called him father, but that was years ago now), "he is a good son, and kind to his mother."

"Well, well, I am glad to hear it. But surely we have some more interesting subject to discuss than Reginald Gower."

Mrs. Willoughby sighed. Well she knew that many a time she had a conflict in her own heart to think well of the lad who was to succeed to the beautiful estates that by right belonged to their own child.

Dinner over, she sought the quiet of her own boudoir, a room specially endeared to her by the many sweet memories of the hours that she and her loved daughter had spent together there.

The day had been a trying one to Mrs. Willoughby. Not often nowadays had they parties at
[84] Harcourt Manor, and she was tired in mind and body, and glad to be a few minutes alone with her God. She sat for a few minutes lost in thought; then rising she opened a drawer, and took from it the case which contained the miniature of a beautiful girl, on which she gazed long and lovingly. The likeness was that of the daughter she had loved so dearly, and of whose very existence she was now in doubt. Oh to see or hear of her once more! Poor mother, how her heart yearned for her loved one! Only one could comfort her, and that was the God she had learned to love. She put down the picture and opened a little brown book, the very *fac-simile* of the one which little Frida possessed, and which God had used and blessed in the Black Forest. Turning to the Hundred and third Psalm, she read the words, well underlined, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." Then turning to the Gospel of Matthew, she read Christ's own blessed word of invitation and promise, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and *I* will give you rest." Ah, how many weary, burdened souls have these words helped since they were spoken and then under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost written for the

comfort of weary ones in all ages! Ere she closed the book, Mrs. Willoughby read the fourth verse of the Thirty-seventh Psalm: "Delight thyself in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desire of thine heart." Then kneeling down she poured out, as she so often did, the sorrows of her heart to her heavenly Father, and rose quieted in spirit.

[85] Ere she put away the little brown book she looked at it thoughtfully, recalling the day, not long before her daughter had left her, when they had together bought two Bibles exactly alike as regarded binding, but the one was in German, the other in English. The German Bible she had given to her daughter, who presented the English one to her mother. On the fly-leaf of the one she held in her hand were written the words, "To my much-loved mother, from Hilda." Ah, where was that daughter now? And if she still possessed the little brown German Bible, had she learned to love and prize its words as her mother had done her English Bible? Then carefully locking up her treasured book and portraits, she went downstairs, to wait in solitary grandeur for her husband's coming into the drawing-room.

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[86]

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE RIVIERA.

"My God, I thank Thee who hast
made
The earth so bright,
So full of splendour and of joy,
Beauty, and light;
So many glorious things are here,
Noble and right."

MORE than four years had elapsed since Frida had left her home in the Black Forest. April sunshine was lighting up the grey olive woods and glistening on the dark-green glossy leaves of the orange-trees at Cannes, and playing on the deep-blue waters of the Mediterranean there.

Some of these beams fell also round the heads of two young girls as they sat under the shade of a palm tree in a lovely garden there belonging to the Villa des Rosiers, where they were living. A lovely scene was before their eyes. In front of them, like gems in the deep-blue sea, were the isles of St. Marguerite and St. Honorat, and to the west were the beautiful Estrelle Mountains. Around them bloomed masses of lovely roses, and the little yellow and white noisettes climbed up the
[87] various tall trees in the garden, and flung their wealth of flowers in festoons down to the ground.

The two girls gazed in silence for some minutes at the lovely scene. Then the youngest of the two, a dark-eyed, golden-haired girl, said, addressing her companion, "Is it not lovely, Adeline? The whole of nature seems to be rejoicing."

"Yes, indeed," answered her companion. "And I am sure I owe much to the glorious sunshine, for, by God's blessing, it has been the means of restoring my health. I am quite well now, and the doctor says I may safely winter in England next season. Won't it be delightful, Frida, to be back in dear old England once more?"

"Ah! you forget, Adeline, that I do not know the land of your birth, though I quite believe it was my mother's birthplace as well, and perhaps my own also. I do often long to see it, and fancy if I were once there I might meet with some of my own people. But then again, how could I, on a mere chance, make up my mind to leave my kind friends in the Forest entirely? It is long since I have heard of them. Do you know that I left my little Bible with them? I had taught Elsie and Hans to read it, and they promised to go on reading it aloud as I used to do to the wood-cutters on Sunday evenings. It is wonderful how God's Word has been blessed to souls in the Forest. And, Adeline, have I told you how kind your friend Herr Müller has been about Hans? He got him to go twice a week to Dringenstadt, and has been teaching him to play on the violin. He says he has
[88] real talent, and if only he had the means to obtain a good musical education, would become a really celebrated performer."

"Yes, Frida," replied her friend; "I know more about all that than you do. Herr Müller has been most kind, and taken much trouble with Hans; but it is my own dear, kind father who pays him for so doing, and tells no one, for he says we should 'not let our left hand know what our right hand doeth.'"

A silence succeeded, broken only by the noise of the small waves of the tideless Mediterranean at their feet.

Then Frida spoke, a look of firm resolution on her face. "Adeline," she said, "your father and

mother are the kindest of people, and God will reward them. This morning they told me that they mean to leave this place in a couple of weeks, and return by slow stages to England; and they asked me to accompany you there, and remain with you as your friend and companion as long as I liked. Oh, it was a kind offer, kindly put; but, Adeline, I have refused it."

"Refused it, Frida! what do you mean?" said her friend, starting up. "You don't mean to say you are not coming home with us! Are you going back to live with those people in the little hut in the Forest, after all your education and your love of refined surroundings? Frida, it is not possible; it would be black ingratitude!"

"O Adeline, hush! do not pain me by such words. Listen to me, dear, for one moment, and do not make it more difficult for me to do the right thing. Your parents have given their consent to my plan, and even said they think it is the right plan for me."

[89] "Well, let me hear," said Adeline, in a displeased tone, "what it is you propose to do. Is it your intention really to go back to the Forest and live there?"

"Not exactly that, Adeline. I have thought it all over some time ago, and only waited till your parents spoke to me of going to England to tell them what I thought was my duty to do. And this is what has been settled. If you still wish it, as your parents do, I shall remain here till you leave, and accompany you back to Baden-Baden, where your parents tell me they intend going for a week or so. From there I propose returning to my friends in the Forest, not to live there any more, but for a few days' visit to see them who are so dear to me. After that I shall live with Miss Drechsler. Her sister is dead, and has left her a good deal of money, and she is now going to settle in Dringenstadt, and have a paid companion to reside with her. And, Adeline, that situation she has offered to me."

"Well, Frida," interrupted her friend, "did not I wish you to be my companion? and would not my parents have given you any sum you required?"

"O Adeline dear, hush, I pray of you, and let me finish my story. You *know* that it is not a question of money; but you are so well, dear, that you do not really *need* me. You have your parents and friends. Miss Drechsler is alone, and I can never forget all she has done for me. Then I am young, and cannot consent to remain in dependence even on such dear friends as you are. I
[90] intend giving lessons in violin-playing at Dringenstadt and its neighbourhood. Miss Drechsler writes she can secure me two or three pupils at once, and she is sure I will soon get more, as the new villas near Dringenstadt are now finished, and have been taken by families. And then, Adeline, living there I shall be near enough to the Forest to carry on the work which I believe God has called me to, in reading to these poor people the words of life. And at Miss Drechsler's I mean to live, as long as she requires me, *unless* I am claimed by any of my own relations, which, as you know, is a most unlikely event. I believe I am right in the decision I have come to. So once again I pray of you, dear Adeline, not to dissuade me from my purpose. You know how much I love you all, and how grateful I am to you. Only think how ignorant I would have been had not your dear parents taken me and got me educated, as if I had been their own child. Oh, I can never, never forget all that you have done for me!"

Adeline's warm heart was touched, and her good sense convinced her, in spite of her dislike to the plan, that her friend was right. "Well, Frida," she said, after a minute or two's silence, "if you feel it really to be your duty, I can say no more. Only you must promise me that you will come sometimes, say in the summer time, and visit us."

Frida smiled. "That would be charming, Adeline; but we will not speak of that at present. Only say you really think I am right in the matter. I have not forgotten to ask God's guidance, and you know it is written in the Word of God which we both love so well, 'In all thy ways acknowledge
[91] him, and he shall direct thy paths.' But come; we must go now and get ready, for we are to go to-day to the Cap d'Antibes."

And in the delights of that lovely drive, and in strolling amongst the rocks honeycombed till they look almost like lacework, the two friends forgot the evils of the impending separation.

In the meantime Frida was warmly remembered by her friends in the Forest, and their joy when they heard that she was once more coming to live near them was unbounded.

"Ah," said Elsie, as she bent her head over a sweet little year-old girl whom she held on her lap, "now I shall be able to show her my little Gretchen, and she will, I know, sing to her some of the sweet hymns she used to sing to my little Annchen, and she will read to us again, Wilhelm, out of the little brown book which I have taken great care of for her."

"Ay," put in Hans, "and Mütterchen, she will bring her violin, and she and I will play together some of the music you and father love; and she will, I know, be glad to hear that through Sir Richard Stanford and Herr Müller I am to become a pupil in the Conservatorium of Leipsic. I can hardly believe it is true."

"Ay, my son, thou art a lucky one, and ye owe it all to Frida herself. Was it not she who told Sir Richard about your love of music, and got Herr Müller to promise to hear you play? Ah! under the good God we owe much to the 'woodland child.'"

And so it fell out that after a few more happy weeks spent at Cannes and Grasse, Frida found
[92] herself once more an inmate of Miss Drechsler's pretty little house at Dringenstadt, and able every now and then to visit and help her friends in the Forest.

"Ah, Mütterchen," she said as she threw herself into Elsie's arms, "here I am again your foundling child, come to live near you, and so glad to see you all once more.—And Hans, why, Hans, you look a man now; and oh, I am so pleased you are to go to Leipsic! You must bring down your violin now and then to Miss Drechsler's, and let us play together. I am sure you will be a great musician some day, Hans."

The young man (for such he now was) looked much gratified at his friend's hopeful words, and said, "If I do turn that, I shall owe it all to you, Frida."

But the girl interrupted his speech by saying, "Now, Mutter, let me see little Gretchen;" and next minute she was stooping over the bed where lay the sleeping child—the very bed whence the spirit of the blind child whom she had loved so dearly had taken its flight to the heavenly land.

"What a darling she looks, Elsie! Oh, I am glad God has sent you this little treasure! She will cheer you when Hans has gone away and her father is all day in the Forest."

"Yes," said Elsie, "she is indeed a gift from God; and you, Frida, must teach her, as you taught her parents and Anna, the 'way of life.' And O Frida, thou must go down to the Dorf, for all the people there are so eager to see thee once more. And now that thou hast grown a young lady, they all wonder if thou still beest like the woodland child, and wilt care about the like of them, or if perchance thou hast forgotten them."

[93] "Forgotten them! O Elsie, how could they think so? Could I ever forget how they and you gave of their little pittance to maintain the child found in the Black Forest, and how you all lavished kindness on her who had neither father nor mother to care for her? I must go at once and ask them what I have done that they should have thought so badly of me even for a minute. Don't you know, Mutter, that I have given up the going to England to live with Miss Drechsler at Dringenstadt, in order that I may often see my dear friends in the Forest; and that shall be my life-work, unless"—and here the girl looked sad—"any of my own friends find me out and claim me."

"Hast had any clue to them, Frida?" asked Elsie.

"Alas, no!" said the girl, "none whatever; and yet I have seen a great number of people during these few years. And I have always worn my necklace, which, being such a peculiar one, might have attracted attention and led to the discovery of my parentage; but except one Englishman, whom I met at the Stanfords', who said I reminded him of some one whom he had seen, there has been nothing to lead me to suppose that any one thought of me except as a friend of the Stanfords. But, Elsie, though I am not discontented, still at times there is the old yearning for my own people. But God knows best, and I am not going to waste my life in useless longings. I have got five pupils in Dringenstadt already, and several more applications, and next week I begin my life-work as a teacher of the violin.—Don't you envy me, Hans?"

"That is what I do, Fräulein Frida," said Hans. Somehow as he looked at the fair young lady the [94] old familiar name of Frida seemed too familiar to use. Frida turned quickly round on him as he uttered the word "Fräulein."

"Why, Hans—for I will not call thee Herr—to whom did you speak? There is no Fräulein here—just your old sister playmate Frida; never let me hear you address me again by such a title. Art thou not my brother Hans, the son of my dear friends Elsie and Wilhelm?" and a merry laugh scattered Hans's new-born shyness.

And to the end of their lives Frida and Hans remained as brother and sister, each rejoicing in the success of the other in life; and in after years they had many a laugh over the day that Hans began to think that he must call his sister friend, the companion of his childhood, his instructor in much that was good, by the stiff title of Fräulein Frida.

Ere Frida left the hut that day, they all knelt together and thanked God for past mercies, and it was Elsie's voice that in faltering accents prayed that Frida might still be used in the Forest to lead many to the knowledge of Christ Jesus through the reading of the Word of God.

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[95]

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE GREAT METROPOLIS.

"There are lonely hearts to cherish
While the days are going by,
There are weary souls who perish
While the days are going by.
If a smile we can renew,

As our journey we pursue,
Oh, the good we all may
do
While the days are passing
by!"

THE London season was at its height, but though the pure sunshine was glistening on mountain-top and green meadow, and beginning to tinge the corn-fields with a golden tint in country places, where peace and quietness seemed to reign, and leafy greenery called on every one who loved nature to come and enjoy it in its summer flush of beauty, yet the great city was still filled not only by those who could not leave its crowded streets, but by hundreds who lingered there in the mere pursuit of pleasure, for whom the beauties of nature had no charm.

On one peculiarly fine day a group of people were gathered together in the drawing-room of a splendid mansion in one of the West End crescents.

There was evidently going to be a riding party, for horses held by grooms stood at the door,
[96] and two at least of the ladies in the drawing-room wore riding habits.

In conversation with one of these—a pretty fair-haired girl of some twenty years—stood Reginald Gower. "Will your sister ride to-day, do you know?" he was asking, in somewhat anxious tones.

"Gertie? No, I think not; she has a particular engagement this morning. I don't exactly know what it is, but she will not be one of the party. So, Mr. Gower, you and Arthur Barton will have to put up with only the company of myself and Cousin Mary."

Ere the young man could reply, the door opened, and a girl dressed in a dark summer serge and light straw hat entered. She carried a small leather bag in her hand, and was greeted with exclamations of dismay from more than one of the party.

"Are you going slumming to-day, Gertie? What a shame! And the sun so bright, and yet a cool air—just the most delightful sort of day for a ride; and we are going to call on your favourite aunt Mary."

"Give her my love then," replied Gertie, "and tell her I hope to ride over one of those days and see her. No, I cannot possibly go with you to-day, as I have an engagement elsewhere."

"An engagement in the slums! Who ever heard of such a thing?" said her sister and cousin together.

"I am sorry to disappoint you, Lily dear, and my cousin also; but I had promised two or three poor people to see them to-day before I knew anything of this riding party, and I am sure I am right not to disappoint them.—And, Mr. Gower, I know your mother at least would not think I was wrong."

[97] "That is true, Miss Warden. My mother thinks far more about giving pleasure to the poor than she does about the wishes of the rich. But could you not defer this slumming business till to-morrow, and give us the pleasure of your company to-day?"

But she shook her head, and assuring them they would get on very well without her, she turned to leave the room, saying as she did so, "O Lily, do find out if it is true that Aunt Mary's old governess, Miss Drechsler, of whom we have all heard so much, is coming to visit her soon, and is bringing with her the young violinist who lives with her, and who people say was a child found in the Black Forest. I do so want to know all about her. We must try and get her to come here some evening, and ask Dr. Heinz, who plays so well upon the violin, to meet her; and you also, Mr. Gower, for I know you dearly love music."

Had Lily not turned quickly away just then, she would have noticed the uneasy, startled look which crossed Reginald Gower's face at her words. Was this woodland child, he asked himself, to be always crossing his path?

He had hoped he had heard the last of her long ago, and some years had elapsed since he had seen her. The circumstance of the likeness to the picture in Harcourt Manor, and the coincidence of the necklace, had *almost* (but as he had not yet quite killed his conscience), not *altogether*, escaped his memory; and still, as at times he marked the increasing sadness on Mrs. Willoughby's countenance, he felt a sharp pang of remorse; and since he had known and begun to
[98] care for Gertie Warden, her devoted Christian life and clear, truthful spirit were making him more conscious than ever of his own selfishness and sin.

True, he had no reason to suppose that she cared for him in any way except as the son of his mother, whom she dearly loved, but his vanity whispered that perhaps in time she might do so; and if that came to pass, and he found that his love was returned, *then* he would tell her all, and consult with her as to what course he should follow.

Lately, however, he had become uneasy at the many references which Lily Warden made to a Dr. Heinz, who seemed to be often about the house, and of whom both sisters spoke in high terms as a Christian man and pleasant friend. What if he should gain the affection of Gertie? Heinz! something in the name haunted him. Surely he had heard it before, and in connection with the

young violinist. And now was it possible that that beautiful girl was really coming amongst them, and that his own mother might meet her any day? for she was often at the house, not only of the Wardens, but also of their aunt Mary, with whom the girl was coming to stay.

No wonder that during the ride Lily Warden thought Mr. Gower strangely preoccupied and silent. She attributed it all to his disappointment at her sister's absence, and felt vexed that such should be the case, as well she knew that in the way he wished Gertie would never think of Reginald Gower; but she felt sorry for him, and tried to cheer him up.

[99] Through that long ride, with summer sunshine and summer beauties around him, Reginald saw only one face, and it was not that of Gertie Warden, but that of the young girl whom he had heard play on the violin at the house of the Stanfords at Baden-Baden.

Oh, if he had only had courage then to write home and tell all that he had heard about her! And in vivid colours there rose before his mind all the disgrace that would attach to him when it became known that he knew of the girl's existence and kept silence. The reason of his so doing would be evident to many. And what, oh, what, he was asking himself, would his loved, high-souled mother think of her son? Surely the words of the Bible he heeded so little were true, "The way of transgressors is hard," and his sin was finding him out.

As soon as the first greetings were over, and the party were seated at the lunch-table in Miss Warden's pretty cottage situated on the banks of the Thames, Lily said, "O Aunt Mary, is it true what Gertie has heard—that Miss Drechsler and a beautiful young violinist with a romantic story are coming to visit you? Gertie is so anxious to know all about her, for neither she nor any of us can believe that she can excel Dr. Heinz in violin-playing; and, indeed, you know how beautifully Gertie herself plays, and she often does so now with Dr. Heinz himself."

"Yes, Lily dear, I am glad to say it is all true. I expect both Miss Drechsler and her young *protégé* next week to visit me for a short time, after which they propose to go to the Stanfords at Stanford Hall, who take a great interest in the young violinist—in fact, I believe she lived for [100] three or four years with them, and was educated along with their own daughter.—By the way, Mr. Gower, you must tell your mother that her old friend Miss Drechsler is coming to me, and I hope she will spend a day with me when she is here."

"I am sure she will be delighted to do so, Miss Warden," replied the young man; but even as he spoke his cheek blanched as he thought of all that might come of his mother meeting the young violinist.

Reginald rode back with his friends to their house, but could not be induced to enter again, not even to hear how Gertie had got on with her slumming. "Not to-day," he said; "I find I must go home. I don't doubt your sister has been well employed—more usefully than we mere pleasure-seekers have been," he added, in such a grave tone that Lily turned her head to look at him, as she stood on the door-steps, and inquire if he were quite well. "Quite so, thanks," he replied, in his usual gay tone; "only sometimes one does think there is a resemblance between the lives the butterflies live and ours. Confess it now," he said laughingly; but Lily was in no thoughtful mood just then, so her only reply was,—

"Speak for yourself, Mr. Gower. I have plenty of useful things to do, just as much so as making a guy of myself and going a-slumming, only I am often too lazy to do them," and with a friendly nod she followed her cousin into the house.

Reginald rode slowly homeward, and, contrary to his usual custom, went to his own room to try to collect his thoughts and make out in what form he would deliver Miss Warden's message to his [101] mother. It was very evident to him that the meshes into which his own sins had brought him were tightening around him. Turn which way he liked, there was no escape. At least only one that he could see, and that was, that if the secret came out, and the young violinist of the Black Forest were proved to be the grandchild of the Willoughbys, he should keep silence as to his ever having known anything of the matter.

The more he thought of it, the more that seemed his wisest course; and even if it should come out that he had heard her play, that would tell nothing. Yet his conscience was ill at ease. Suppose he did so, what of his own self-respect? Could he ever regain it? Fortune would be lost, and all ease of mind gone for ever. Then again, if he told his story now, it would only be because he knew that in any case it would be disclosed, and shame would await him.

How could he ever bear the reproaches of his kind friends the Willoughbys, and more than all, the deep grief such a disclosure would cause to his loved mother? In that hour Reginald Gower went through a conflict of mind which left a mark on his character for life. But, alas! once more evil won the day, and he resolved that not *yet* would he tell all he knew; but some day *soon* he might. But once again, as he rose to go downstairs, Bible words came into his mind: "*To-day*, while it is called to-day, harden not your hearts."

O happy mother, to have so carefully stored the young heart with the precious words of God! Long they may be as the seed under ground, apparently forgotten and useless, yet surely one day [102] they will spring up and bear fruit. True even in this application are the words of the poet,—

"The vase in which roses have once been
distilled
You may break, you may shiver the vase if you

will,
But the scent of the roses will cling to it still."

Well may we thank God for all mothers who carefully teach the words of Holy Scripture to their children.

That day Reginald delivered Miss Warden's message to his mother, but did not mention the young girl who was to accompany her.

"Oh, I will be delighted to see Miss Drechsler again," said his mother. "I liked her so much when she was governess at the Wardens'. We all did; indeed, she was more companion than governess, and indeed was younger than I was, and just about Mary Warden's own age. I remember well going one day with Mrs. Willoughby's daughter, Hilda, to a musical party at the Wardens', and how charmed Miss Drechsler was at the way Hilda played the violin, which was not such a common thing then as it is now."

"The violin?" queried Reginald. "Did Miss Willoughby play on the violin?"

"Oh yes! she was very musical, and that was one of the great attractions to her in the man she married. He, too, was a wonderful violinist—Herr Heinz they called him. He was, I believe, a much-respected man and of good family connections, but poor, and even taught music to gain a livelihood."

[103] "Heinz!" Reginald was repeating to himself. Then he had heard that name before first in connection with the child of the Black Forest; but he only said, "It is curious that I have lately heard that name from the young Wardens, who speak a great deal of a Dr. Heinz. He also is a good violinist. Can he be any relation, do you think, of the one you allude to?"

"Possibly he may; but the name is not at all an uncommon German one. By the way, I heard a report (probably a false one) that Gertie Warden is engaged to be married to a Dr. Heinz—a very good man, they say. Have you heard anything of it?"

"I never heard she was engaged, nor do I think it is likely; but I have heard both her and her sister speak of this Dr. Heinz, and I know it is only a Christian man that Gertie would marry."

Having said so much, he quickly changed the subject and talked of something else. The mother's eye, however, was quick to notice the shade on his brow as he spoke, and she was confirmed in the opinion she had formed for some time that the very idea of Gertie Warden's engagement was a pain to him. As he rose to go out he turned to say, "Remember, mother, that I have given you Miss Warden's message."

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[104]

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE SLUMS.

"In dens of guilt the baby
played,
Where sin and sin *alone* was
made
The law which all around
obeyed."

THE summer sunshine, of which we have written as glistening among the "leafy tide of greenery," and on the ripening corn-fields and gaily-painted flowers in the country, was penetrating also the close streets of one of the poorest parts of London, cheering some of the hearts of the weary toiling ones there, into whose lives little sunshine ever fell, and for a while, it may be, helping them to forget the misery of their lot, or to some recalling happier days when they dwelt not in a narrow, crowded street, but in a country village home, amidst grassy meadows and leafy trees, feeling, as they thought of these things, though they could not have put the feeling into words, what a poet gone to his rest says so beautifully,—

"That sorrow's crown of sorrow
Is remembering happier
things."

But the very light that cheered revealed more clearly the misery, dirt, and poverty around.

[105] In one such street, where little pale-faced children, without the merriment and laughter of childhood, played in a languid, unchildlike way, sickness prevailed; for fever had broken out, and indoors suffering ones tossed on beds, if they could be so called, of sickness.

At the door of a small room in one of the houses stood a girl of some ten or eleven years old, looking out anxiously as if in expectation of some one, turning every now and then to address a word to her mother, who lay in the small room on a bed in the corner.

"He baint a-comin' yet," she said, "'cos I knows his step; but he'll be 'long soon—ye see if he don't! I knows as how he will, 'cos he's that kind; so don't ye fret, mother—the doctor 'ill be here in no time. There now! Susan Keats giv' me some tea for ye, and I'll get the water from her and bring you some prime and 'ot—ye see if I don't!" So saying, the child ran off and went into a room next door, and entering begged for some "'ot water." "Ye see," she said, addressing a woman poorly clad like herself, "she be a-frettin', mother is, for the doctor, for she's badly, is mother, to-day, and she thinks mayhap he'll do her good."

When the child returned to her mother's room, she found Dr. Heinz (for it was he) sitting by her mother's side and speaking kindly to her. He turned round as the child entered. "Come along, Gussie," he said; "that's right—been getting mother some tea. You'll need to tend her well, for she's very poorly to-day."

"Ay, ay," muttered the woman, "that's true, that's true. Be kind to Gussie, poor Gussie, when I
[106] am gone, doctor. The young lady—Miss Warden be her name—she said she'd look after her, she did."

The doctor bent over the dying woman and said some comforting words, at which the woman's face brightened. "God bless ye," she said, "for promising that. Oh, but life's been weary, weary sin' I came 'ere—work, work, and that not always to be 'ad. But it's true, sir, what ye told me. He says even to the like o' me, 'Come unto me, and I will give you rest;' and He's done it, I think. Ye'll come again, sir, won't ye?"

After a few moments of prayer with the poor woman, and giving her some medicine to allay her restlessness, Dr. Heinz left the room. From house to house in the fever-stricken street he went, ministering alike to body and soul, often feeling cast down and discouraged, overwhelmed at times by the vice and poverty of all around. The gospel had never reached these poor neglected ones. The very need of a Saviour was by the great majority of them unfelt. Love many of them had never experienced. The evil of sin they did not comprehend. Brought up from babyhood in the midst of iniquity, they were strangers to the very meaning of righteousness and virtue. No wonder that the heart of the doctor was oppressed as he went out and in amongst them. Yet he felt assured that by love they could be won to the God of love, and that only the simple gospel of Jesus Christ dying in their room and stead, told in the power of the Holy Ghost, could enlighten their dark souls and prove the true lever to raise them from their sin and misery. And so, whilst
[107] alleviating pain, he tried when possible to say a word from the book—God's revealed will, which alone "maketh wise unto salvation." More than once on the day we write of, as he went from house to house, the vision of a young girl whom he had often met going about doing good flitted before his eyes.

Gertie Warden and Dr. Heinz had first met in one of those abodes of wretchedness, where she stood by a bed of sickness trying to comfort and help a dying woman.

Only two years before that and Gertie was just ready to throw herself into the vortex of the gay society in which the other members of her family mingled; but ere she did so the voice of the Holy Ghost spake to her as to so many others, and showed her how true life was only to be found in Christ and lived in Him. Henceforth she lived no longer a life of mere worldliness, but a life spent in the service of Him who had loved her and given Himself for her; and then her greatest joy was found in visiting the poor, the afflicted, the tried—ay, and often the oppressed ones of earth.

In her own family she found great opposition to her new mode of life; but the Lord raised up a kind helpful friend to her in the person of the gentle, sorely-tried Mrs. Willoughby of Harcourt Manor. To her Gertie confided all her difficulties as regarded her district visiting (or, as her sister called it, her slumming), and many a word of sympathy and wise counsel she got from her friend.

One day she spoke of Dr. Heinz.

"You cannot think how much the people love him," she said, "and trust him. 'Ah!' I heard a poor
[108] woman say the other day, 'if only all were like him, it's a better world it would be than it's now.' And do you know," she went on, "he is actually interesting my father and Aunt Mary in some of his poor patients. And he likes to come to our house sometimes in the evenings and play on the violin along with us; and he does play beautifully. I wish you knew him, dear Mrs. Willoughby, for I know you would like him. But, dear friend, are you not well?"

For at the name of Heinz a deadly faintness had overcome Mrs. Willoughby. Was not that the name of her daughter's husband? and if he should prove to be in any way related to him, might he not be able to give some information regarding her loved one? But she composed herself, and in answer to Gertie's question she replied,—

"It is nothing, dear, only a passing weakness. I am all right now. Tell me something more of this Dr. Heinz and the Christian work he is engaged in. He must be a German, I fancy, from his name."

"Yes, he is," replied Gertie; "he was speaking to me lately about his relations. He was born in Germany, and lived there till he was a boy of seven years old. Then his parents died, and he came

to this country with an older brother who was a wonderful violinist, and he taught him to play; but many years ago this brother married and returned to Germany, leaving him here in the charge of some kind friends; and though at first he heard from him from time to time, he has ceased to write to him for some years, and he fears he is dead. He knows he had a child, for his last letter mentioned her, but he knows nothing more."

[109] Again that terrible pallor overcame Mrs. Willoughby, but this time she rose and said in an excited tone,—

"I must see this Dr. Heinz. Could you bring him to see me, Gertie, and soon? Say to him that I think, although I am not sure, that I knew a relation of his some years ago."

"Oh yes, Mrs. Willoughby; I will gladly ask him to come and see you. Indeed, I was just going to ask if you would allow him to call—" Here the girl hesitated a moment, then said, "You see, it was only last night, but I am engaged to be married to Dr. Heinz, and do wish you to know and love him for my sake."

Love one of the name of Heinz! Could she do so, the gentle lady was asking herself. What if he should prove to be the brother of the man who had caused her such bitter sorrow? But at that moment there rose to her remembrance the words of Scripture, said by Him who suffered from the hand of man as never man suffered, "Forgive, as ye would be forgiven," and who illustrated that forgiveness on the cross when He prayed for His deadly enemies, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." The momentary struggle was over. Mrs. Willoughby raised her head, and said in a calm, quiet tone,—

"God bless you, Gertie; and may your union be a very happy one. I should like to see Dr. Heinz."

And so it came to pass that ere many days had elapsed, Dr. Heinz was ushered into Mrs. [110] Willoughby's drawing-room in the London house which they had taken for the season. He was hardly seated before she said,—

"Yes, oh yes—there can be no mistake—you certainly are the brother of the man who married my daughter. Tell me, oh tell me," she added, "what you know of her and of him!"

Dr. Heinz was strongly moved as he looked on the face of the agitated mother.

"Alas!" he said, "I grieve to say I can tell you nothing. I have not heard for several years from my brother, and at times I fear he must be dead. My poor brother, how I loved him! for, Mrs. Willoughby, a gentler or more kind-hearted man never lived. You may be sure, however much your daughter was to blame in marrying any one against her parents' wishes, she found in my brother a truly loving, kind husband."

"Thank God for that!" she replied. "But now tell me, was there a child? Gertie spoke as if you knew there was one."

"Certainly there was. In the last letter I had from my brother, he spoke of the great comfort their little girl (who was the image of her mother) was to them—his little Frida he called her, and at that time she was three or four years old. Oh yes, there was a child. Would that I could give you more particulars! but I cannot; only I must mention that he said, 'I am far from strong, and my beloved wife is very delicate.'"

"Ah," said the mother, "she was never robust; and who knows what a life of hardship she may have had to live! O Hilda, Hilda! Dr. Heinz, is there no means by which we may find out their [111] whereabouts? I have lately had some advertisements put into various papers, praying them to let us know where they are; but no answer has come, and now I am losing all hope."

"Would that I could comfort you!" he said; "but I also fear much that we have lost the clue to their whereabouts. I will not cease to do all I can to trace them; but, dear Mrs. Willoughby, we believe that there is One who knows all, whose eyes are everywhere, and we can trust them to Him. If I should in any way hear of our friends, you may be sure I shall not be long of communicating with you. In the meantime it has been a great pleasure to me to have made the acquaintance of one whom my dear Gertrude has often spoken to me of as her kindest of friends."

Then Dr. Heinz told of the work in which he was engaged amongst the poor, sorrowful, and also too often sinful ones, in the East End of London.

Before Dr. Heinz left, Mrs. Willoughby showed him the little brown English Bible which her daughter had given to her not long before her marriage, and told him about the German one, which looked exactly the same outwardly, which she had given to her daughter.

"Strange," said Dr. Heinz, as he held the little brown book in his hand, "that in the last letter I ever received from my brother, he told me of the blessing which he had got through reading God's Word in a brown Bible belonging to his wife, adding that she also had obtained blessing through reading it."

[112] "Praise God!" said Mrs. Willoughby; "then my prayers have been answered, that Hilda, like her mother, might be brought to the knowledge of God. Now I know that if we meet no more on earth we shall meet one day in heaven.—I thank Thee, O my God!"

It was with a heart full of emotion that Dr. Heinz found himself leaving Mrs. Willoughby's house. Oh, how he longed that he could hear tidings of his brother and his wife, and so be able to

convey comfort to the heart of the sorrowful lady he had just left!

As he was walking along, lost in thought, he came suddenly face to face with Reginald Gower, whom he had lately met several times at the Wardens', and to whom he suspected the news of his engagement to Gertrude Warden would bring no pleasure; but from the greeting which Reginald gave him he could not tell whether or not he knew of the circumstance.

He accosted him with the words: "What are you doing, doctor, in this part of the town? I thought it was only in the narrow, dirty slums, and not in the fashionable part of the west of London, that you were to be found; and that it was only the sick and sorrowful, not the gay, merry inhabitants of Belgravia that you visited."

"Do you think then," replied Dr. Heinz, "that the sick, sad, and sorrowful are only to be found in the narrow, dark streets of London? What if I were to tell you that although there is not poverty, there are sorrowful, sad, unsatisfied hearts to be found in as great numbers in these fashionable squares and terraces as in the places you speak of; and that the votaries of fashion, whom you
[113] style gay and merry, are too often the most wretched of mankind, and that beneath the robes of silk and satin of fashionable life there beats many a breaking heart? You see that splendid square I have just left. Well, in one of the handsomest houses there dwells one of the sweetest Christian ladies I have ever met. She has everything that wealth and the love of friends can give her, yet I believe she is slowly dying of a broken heart, longing to know if a dearly-loved daughter, who made a marriage which her parents did not approve of, years ago, is still alive; and no one can tell her whether she or any child of hers still survives. I know all the circumstances, and would give a great deal to be able to help her. He would be a man to be envied who could go to that sweet mother, Mrs. Willoughby, and say, I can tell you all about your daughter, or, if she is not alive, of her child. O Reginald Gower, never say that there are not sad hearts in the west part of London, though you may see only the smiling face and dry eyes. You remember the words of the gifted poetess,—

'Go weep with those who weep, you say,
Ye fools! I bid you pass them by,
Go, weep with those whose hearts
have bled
What time their eyes were dry.'

But I must go. Have you not a word of congratulation for me, Reginald?"

"Why?" was the amazed reply; "and for what?"

"Oh," said Dr. Heinz, somewhat taken aback, "do you not know that I am engaged to be married to Gertrude Warden?"

[114] "You are?" was the reply, with a look of amazement that Dr. Heinz could not fail to notice; "well, I rather think you are a lucky fellow. But"—and a look of deep sorrow crossed his face as he spoke—"I do believe you are worthy of her. Tell her I said so. And would you mind saying good-bye to her and her sister from me, as I may not be able to see them before starting for America, which I shall probably do in a week; and should you again see the Mrs. Willoughby you have been speaking of, and whom I know well, please tell her I could not get to say farewell to her, as my going off is a sudden idea. Good-bye, Dr. Heinz. May you and Miss Gertrude Warden be as happy as you both deserve to be;" and without another word he turned away.

Dr. Heinz looked after him for a moment, then shook his head somewhat sadly, saying to himself, "There goes a fine fellow, if only he had learned of Him 'who pleased not himself.' Reginald is a spoiled character, by reason of self-pleasing. I must ask Gertrude how he comes to know Mrs. Willoughby, and why he is going off so suddenly to America, although I may have my suspicions as to the reason for his so doing."

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[115]

CHAPTER XIV.

THE OLD NURSE.

"It chanced, eternal God, that chance did guide."

"HOW are you getting on with your packing, Frida?" said Miss Drechsler, as the girl, wearing a loose morning-dress, looked into the room where her friend was sitting.

"Oh, very well," was the answer; "I have nearly finished. When did you say the man would come for the trunks?"

"I expect him in about an hour. But see, here comes the post; look if there is one for me from

Miss Warden. I thought I would get one to tell me if any of her friends would meet us at Dover."

Frida ran off to meet the postman at the door, and returned in triumph, bearing two letters in her hand.

"One for you, auntie" (she always now addressed Miss Drechsler by that name), "and one for myself. Mine is from Ada Stanford, and yours, I am sure, is the one you are expecting."

A few minutes of silence was broken by Frida exclaiming,—

[116] "O auntie, Ada has been very ill again, and is still very weak, and she asks, as a great favour, that I would come to visit them before going to the Wardens; and adds, 'If Miss Drechsler would accompany you, we would be so delighted; but in any case,' she writes to me, 'you would not lose your London visit, as my doctor wishes me to see a London physician as soon as I can be moved, specially as to settling whether or not I should go abroad again next winter. So in perhaps another month we may go to London, and then you can either remain with us or join your friend at Miss Warden's.'"

"What do you think about it, auntie? Of course it is a great disappointment to me not to go with you; but do I not owe it to the Stanfords to go to them when I may be of use during Ada's convalescence?"

Miss Drechsler looked, as she felt, disappointed, she had anticipated so much pleasure in having Frida with her in London; but after a few minutes' thought she said, "You are right, Frida: you must, I fear, go first to the Stanfords. We cannot forget all that they have done for you, and as they seem to be so anxious for you to go there, I think you must yield to their wishes; but I must go at once to Miss Warden, who is expecting me. You had better write at once and tell them we hope to be at Dover in four days. They live, as you know, not so far from there. I think that the train will take you to the station, not above a couple of miles from Stanford Hall, where I doubt not they will meet you; but I must write at once and let Miss Warden know that you cannot accompany me, and the reason why, though I hope that erelong, if convenient to her, you may
[117] join me there. Ah, Frida! 'man's heart deviseth his way: but God directeth his steps.'"

And so it came to pass that Miss Drechsler arrived alone at Miss Warden's, whilst Frida went to Stanford Hall.

When it became known in the Forest that the woodland child, as they still called her, was again about to leave them for some undefined time, there was great lamentation.

"How then are we to get on without you?" they said. "*Ach!* shall we have to do without the reading of the book again? True, Hans Hörstel reads it well enough; but what of that? He too has left us. *Ach!* it is plain no one cares for the poor wood-cutters and charcoal-burners who live in the Forest, and some grand English gentleman will be getting our woodland child for a wife, and she will return to us no more."

But Frida only laughed at these lamentations. "Why, what nonsense you speak!" she said. "It is only for a little while that I am going away. I hope to come back in about three months. And many of you can now read the Bible for yourselves. And as to the grand gentleman, that is all fancy; I want no grand gentleman for a husband. The only thing that would detain me in England would be if any of my relations were to find me out and claim me; but if that were to be the case, I am sure none of my friends in the Forest would grudge their child to her own people, and they may be assured she would never forget them, and would not be long in revisiting them."

[118] "*Ach!* if the child were to find her own friends, her father or her mother's people, that would be altogether a different matter," they said simultaneously. "We would then say, 'Stay, woodland child, and be happy with those who have a right to you; but oh, remember the poor wood-cutters and workers in the Forest, who will weary for a sight of the face of the fair girl found by one of them in the Black Forest.'"

Very hearty was the welcome which awaited Frida at Stanford Hall. Ada received her with open arms.

"Ah, Frida, how glad I am to see you once again; and how good of you to give up the pleasure of a month in London to come to see and comfort us!—You will see how quickly I will get well now, mother.—And erelong, Frida, we shall take you to London ourselves, and father will show you all the wonders there."

Frida answered merrily, but she felt much shocked to see how delicate-looking Ada had become.

The girls had much to tell each other of all that had happened since last they met; and when dinner was over, and Frida went to see Ada as she lay on her couch in her prettily-fitted-up boudoir, Ada roused herself to have, as she said, "a right down delightful chat."

"See, Frida, here is a charming easy-chair for you; please bring it quite close to my couch, and now tell me all about your Forest friends. How are Elsie and Wilhelm, and their little Gretchen and Hans? But, indeed, I believe I know more about them than you do; for only two days ago my father received a letter from Hans's music-teacher in Leipsic, giving him unqualified praise, and predicting a successful musical career for him."

[119] "Oh, I am glad!" said Frida. "How pleased his parents will be, and how grateful to Sir Richard

Stanford for all he has done for him!"

And so in pleasant talk the evening of the first day of Frida's visit to Stanford Hall drew to a close. As time passed on, Ada's health rapidly improved, and together the girls went about the beautiful grounds belonging to the Hall—Ada at first drawn in an invalid chair, and Frida walking by her side. But by-and-by Ada was able to walk, and together the girls visited in some of the cottages near the Hall—Frida finding out that Ada in her English home was conveying comfort and blessing to many weary souls by reading to them from her English Bible the words of life, even as she had done from her German one in the huts of the wood-cutters, carters, and charcoal-burners in the Black Forest.

"Have you heard, Ada," said Lady Stanford one morning at breakfast, "that the old woman who has lately come to the pretty picturesque cottage at the Glen is very ill? I wish you and Frida would go and see her, and take her some beef-tea and jelly which the housekeeper will give you. I understand she requires nourishing food; and try and discover if there is anything else she requires."

"Certainly, mother," answered Ada; "we will go at once and see what can be done for her.—That Glen is a lovely spot, Frida, and you have never been there. What say you—shall we set off at once? The poor woman is very old, and her memory is a good deal affected."

[120] "I shall be pleased to go, Ada; but I have a letter from Miss Drechsler, received this morning, which I must answer by the first post. She tells me that her friend Miss Warden is in great distress about the illness of a friend of hers. She wishes to know how soon I can join her in London; and now that you are so well, Ada, I really think I ought to go."

"Ah, well," said Ada with a laugh, "time enough to think of that, Frida. We are not prepared to part with you yet; but seriously, mother talks of carrying us all off to London by another fortnight, and that must suffice you. But after you have written your letter we will set off to the Glen."

It was a lovely walk that the girls took that summer day through green lanes and flowery meadows, till they came to a beautiful glen overshadowed with trees in their fresh summer foliage of greenery, through which the sunbeams found their way and touched with golden light the green velvety moss and pretty little woodland flowers which so richly carpeted the ground.

"How beautiful it is here!" said Frida, "and yet how unlike the sombre appearance of the trees in the dear Black Forest!"

"Ah," said Ada, "that Forest, where I do believe your heart still is, Frida, always seemed to me to be so gloomy and dark, so unlike our lovely English woods with their 'leafy tide of greenery.'"

As they spoke they neared the cottage where dwelt the old woman they were going to see. It was thatch-covered and low, but up the walls grew roses and ivy, which gave it a bower-like appearance.

[121] "She is a strange old woman," said Ada, "who has only lately come here, and no one seems to know much about her. A grandchild of fourteen or fifteen years old lives with and takes care of her. Her memory is much impaired, but she often talks as if she had friends who if they knew where she lived and how ill-off she was would help her; but when questioned as to their name, she shakes her head and says she can't remember it, but if she could only see the young lady she would know her. They fancy the friends she speaks of must have been the family with whom she lived as nurse, for her grandchild says she used often to speak of having had the charge of a little girl to whom she was evidently much attached. But here we are, Frida, and yonder is little Maggie standing at the door."

When they entered the room, Frida was amazed to see how small it was and how dark; for the ivy, which from the outside looked so picturesque, darkened the room considerably. Ada, who had seen the old woman before, went forward to the bed where she lay and spoke some kind words to her. The old woman seemed as if she hardly understood, and gave no answer.

"Ah, madam," said the grandchild, "she knows nothing to-day, and when she speaks it is only nonsense."

Frida now came forward and laid her hand kindly on the poor woman, addressing a few words of sympathy to her. The invalid raised her eyes and looked around her, giving first of all a look of recognition to Ada, and holding out her thin hand to her, but her eyes sought evidently to
[122] distinguish the face of the stranger who had last spoken. "She knows," explained Maggie, "yours is a strange voice, and wishes to see you, which she can't do, miss, for you are standing so much in the shade."

Frida moved so that the glimmer of light which entered the little room fell on her face. As she did so, and the old woman caught a glimpse of her, a look of joy lit up the faded face, and she said in a distinct voice: "'Bless the Lord, O my soul;' my dear has come to see me. Oh, but I am glad! It's a long time since I saw you, Miss Hilda—a long, long time. I thought you were dead, or you would never have forgotten your old nurse you loved so dearly; but now you've come, my lamb, and old nurse can die in peace." And seizing Frida's hand, the old woman lay back as if at rest, and said no more.

Frida was startled, and turning to her friend, said, "O Ada, whom does she take me for? Can it be that she knew my mother, whose name was Hilda, and that she takes me for her? Miss

Drechsler says I am strikingly like the picture I have of her. Perhaps she can tell me where my mother lived, and if any of her relations are still alive;" and bending over the bed, she said in a low tone, "Who was Hilda, and where did she live? Perhaps she was my mother, but she is dead."

The old woman muttered to herself, but looked up no more, "Dead, dead; yes, every one I loved is dead. But not Miss Hilda; you are she, and you have come to see your old nurse. But listen, Miss Hilda: there is the master calling on us to go in, and you know we must not keep the master
[123] waiting for even a minute;" and then the old woman spoke only of things and people of whom no one in the room knew anything. But through all Frida distinctly heard the words, "Oh, if only you had never played on that instrument, then he would never have come to the house. O Miss Hilda, why did you go away and break the heart of your mother, and old nurse's also? Oh, woe's the day! oh, woe's the day!"

"Was his name Heinz?" asked Frida in a trembling voice.

"Oh yes, Heinz, Heinz. O Miss Hilda, Miss Hilda, why did you do it?" and then the old woman burst out crying bitterly.

"O miss, can you sing?" said Maggie, coming forward; "for nothing quiets grandmother like singing."

"Yes, I can," replied Frida.—"And you, I am sure, Ada, will help me. I know now the woman, whoever she is, knows all about my mother."

Together the two young girls sang the hymn, "Jesus, Lover of my soul."

As they sang the dying woman became quieter, her muttering ceased, and presently she fell into a quiet sleep; the last words she uttered before doing so were, "Jesus, Lover of my soul." Much moved in spirit, Frida quitted the house; she felt as if now she stood on the verge of discovering the name and relations of her mother. She and Ada hastened their return home to confide to Lady Stanford all that had passed. She was much interested, and, as Sir Richard entered the room just then, she repeated the story to him. He listened eagerly, and said he would
[124] at once find out all he could about the woman and her friends; and so saying he left the house.

He returned home cast down and discouraged. The woman had become quite delirious, and the names of Hilda and Heinz were often on her lips, but he could, of course, get nothing out of her. The grandchild could tell nothing of her former life; she never remembered hearing where she had been nurse, but her father, who was now in Canada, might know. Sir Richard could write and ask him. She had his address, and sometimes got letters from him. The doctor said he did not think that grandmother would live over the night. The only thing that had quieted her was the singing of the young lady whom she had called Miss Hilda, and who had come to the cottage that day with Miss Stanford. Maybe if she could come again and sing grandmother would be quieter.

On hearing this Frida rose, and said if Lady Stanford would allow her, she would go and remain all night with the old woman, who she felt sure must have been her mother's nurse. She often, she said, watched a night by dying beds in the Black Forest, and had comforted some on their death-beds by reading to them portions of God's Word.

The Stanfords could not refuse her request; and when Lady Stanford had herself filled a basket with provisions for Frida herself and little Maggie, the girl set off, accompanied by Sir Richard, who went with her to the door of the cottage.

Finding the poor woman still delirious, Frida took off her cloak and bonnet and prepared to
[125] spend the night with her, and sitting down beside the bed she once more began to sing some sweet gospel hymns. In low and gentle tones she sang of Jesus and His love, and again the sufferer's restlessness and moaning ceased, and she seemed soothed.

Hours passed, and the early summer morn began to dawn, and still the old woman lived on. Every now and then she muttered the name of Miss Hilda, and once she seemed to be imploring her not to vex her mother; and more than once she said the name of Heinz, and whenever she did so she became more excited, and moaned out the words, "Woe's me! woe's me!" Frida watched anxiously every word, in the hope that she might hear the name of Hilda's mother or the place where they lived; but she watched in vain. It was evident that though there was a look of returning consciousness, life was fast ebbing. A glance upward seemed to indicate that the dying woman's thoughts had turned heavenward. Frida opened her Bible and read aloud the words of the "shepherd psalm," so precious to many a dying soul, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me."

To her amazement the sick woman repeated the words, "*thou* art with me;" and as she finished the last word the soul fled, and Frida and Maggie were alone with the dead. The story of Frida's birth was still undisclosed, but God's word, as recorded in Holy Scripture, had again brought peace to a dying soul. Neighbours came in, and Frida turned away from the death-bed with a
[126] heart full of gratitude to the Lord that she had been allowed with His own words to soothe and comfort the old nurse, who she felt sure had tended and loved her own mother.

When she returned to the Hall, the Stanfords were truly grieved to hear that the old woman was dead, and that there had been no further revelation regarding Frida's relations. Lady Stanford and Ada had just persuaded Frida to go to bed and rest awhile after her night of watching, when the door opened, and the butler came in bearing a telegram to Miss Heinz. Frida opened it with trembling hands, saw it was from Miss Drechsler, and read the words, "Come at

once; you are needed here."

What could it mean? Was Miss Drechsler ill? It looked like it, for who else would require her in London? Fatigue was forgotten; she could rest, she said, in the train; she must go at once. In a couple of hours she could start. Ada was disconsolate. Nevertheless, feeling the urgency of the case, she assisted her friend to pack her boxes; and erelong Frida was off, all unaware of what might be awaiting her in the great city. But ere we can tell that, we must turn for a while to other scenes, and write of others closely linked, although unknown to herself, with the life and future of the child found in the Black Forest.

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[127]

CHAPTER XV.

THE POWER OF CONSCIENCE.

"Being convicted by their own conscience."

THE day on which Reginald Gower met Dr. Heinz on the street, and sent through him a farewell message to Gertrude Warden, found him a couple of hours afterwards seated in his mother's boudoir, communicating to her his suddenly-formed plan of starting in a few days for America.

It was no easy thing to do. The bond between mother and son was a very strong one, and her pleasure in having had him with her for some little time had been great. Her look of pleasure when he entered the room made it more difficult for him to break the news to her.

"Earlier back to-day than usual, Reggie," she said, "but never too early for your old mother. But is anything amiss?" she said in a voice of alarm, as she noticed the grave look on his face. "Have you heard any bad news, or are you ill?"

[128]

"No, mother, it is neither of these things—there is nothing the matter; only I fear, mother dear, that what I am going to say will vex you, but you must not let it do so. I am not worth all the affection you lavish on me. Mother, I have made up my mind to go to America, and to remain there for some time. I cannot stop here any longer. I am tired—not of my dear mother," he said, as he stooped over her and kissed her fondly, "but of the idle life I lead here; and so I mean to go and try and get work there, perhaps buy land if I can afford it, and see if I can make anything of my life as a farmer. Nay, mother, do not look so sad," he pleaded; "you do not know how hard it is for me to come to this resolution, but I must go. I cannot continue to live on future prospects of wealth that may—nay, perhaps ought never to be mine, but must act the man—try and earn my own living."

"Your own living, Reginald!" interposed his mother; "surely you have enough of your own to live comfortably on even as a married man, and your prospects of succeeding to Harcourt Manor are, I grieve to say for one reason, almost certain. O Reginald, don't go and leave me so soon again!"

But the young man, usually so easily led, fatally so indeed, stood firm now, and only answered, "Mother, it must be, and if you knew all you would be the first to advise me to go. Mother, you will soon hear that Gertie Warden is engaged to be married to a man worthy of her—a noble Christian doctor of the name of Heinz; but don't think that that circumstance is the reason of my leaving home. Fool though I have been and still am, I was never fool enough to think I was worthy of gaining the love of a high-principled girl like Gertie Warden. But, mother, your

[129]

unselfish, God-fearing life, and that of Gertie and Dr. Heinz, have led me to see my own character as I never saw it before, and to wish to put right what has been so long wrong, and which it seems to me I can do best if I were away from home. Ask me no more, mother dear; some day I will tell you all, but not now. Only, mother, I must tell you that the words of the Bible which you love so well and have so early taught to me have not been without their effect, at least in keeping my conscience awake. And, mother, don't cease to pray for me that I may be helped to do the right. Oh, do not, do not," he entreated, as his mother began to urge him to remain, "say that, mother; say rather, 'God bless you,' and let me go. Believe me, it is best for me to do so."

At these words Mrs. Gower ceased speaking. If, indeed, her loved son was striving to do the right thing, would she be the one to hold him back? Ah no! she would surrender her will and trust him in the hands of her faithful God. So with one glance upward for help and strength, she laid her hand on his head and said, "Go then, my son, in peace; and may God direct your way and help you to do the right thing, and may He watch between us when we are separate the one from the other."

Just as Reginald was leaving the room Miss Drechsler entered. She greeted Mrs. Gower cordially, remembering her in old times; and she recognized Reginald as the young man who had spoken to Frida the day after the concert, though then she had not heard his name.

[130] As Reginald was saying good-bye, he heard his mother ask Miss Drechsler where her friend the young violinist was. "I thought you would have brought her to see me," she added. Her answer struck Reginald with dismay.

"Oh! she did not accompany me to London after all. A great friend of hers was ill, and she had to go to her instead. It was a great disappointment to me."

Reginald went to his room feeling as if in a dream. Then it might never come to pass, after all, that Frida's parentage would be found out; and Satan suggested the thought that therefore he need not disclose all he knew, but let things go on as they were.

He hugged the idea, for not yet had he got the victory over evil; at all events he thought he would still wait a bit, but he would certainly carry out his intention of leaving the country for a while at least; and two days after the time we write of, his mother sat in her own room with a full heart after having parted from her only son. Well for her that she knew the way to the mercy-seat, and could pour out her sorrow at the feet of One who has said, "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me."

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[131]

CHAPTER XVI.

THE STORM.

"More things are wrought by
prayer
Than the world dreams of."

AFTER Mrs. Willoughby's interview with Dr. Heinz of which we have written, her thoughts turned more than ever to the daughter she loved so well.

It seemed certain from what Dr. Heinz had said that there had been a child; and if so, even although, as she feared, her loved daughter were dead, the child might still be alive, and probably the father also. The difficulty now was to obtain the knowledge of their place of residence.

Mrs. Willoughby quite believed that if any news could be obtained of either mother or child, Mr. Willoughby's heart was so much softened that he would forgive and receive them thankfully. Once more advertisements were inserted in various papers, and letters written to friends abroad, imploring them to make every inquiry in their power.

[132] More than once Dr. Heinz called to see his new-made friend; but as Mr. Willoughby had returned to Harcourt Manor, whither his wife was soon to follow him, he never met him; and as Dr. Heinz was leaving town to take a much-needed holiday in the west Highlands of Scotland, nothing more could be done for the present to obtain information regarding the lost ones. It thus happened that although Dr. Heinz was a frequent visitor at Miss Warden's, he never met Miss Drechsler; but he heard from Gertie that she had not been able to bring the young girl violinist with her.

It was to Mrs. Willoughby that Mrs. Gower went for sympathy and consolation at the time of her son's departure. Mrs. Willoughby heard of his sudden departure with surprise and deep sorrow for her friend's sake.

"Reginald gone off again so soon!" she said. "Oh, I am sorry for you, dear friend! And does he speak of remaining long away? Making his own living, you say? Has he not enough to live comfortably on in the meantime? And then, you know," and her eyes filled with tears as she spoke, "his future prospects are very good, unless—"

But here Mrs. Gower interrupted her. "Dear friend, from my heart I can say, if only dear Hilda or any child of hers could be restored to you, there is no one would more truly rejoice than I would; and I believe Reginald would do so also." But even as she said these words a pang of fear crossed her mind as to Reginald's feeling on the subject; but the mother's belief in her child refused to see any evil in him, and she added, "I am sure he would. But in any case the day of his [133] succession as heir-at-law to Harcourt Manor is, we trust, far off, and so perhaps it is best for him that he should make his way in life for himself. I have been able now to trust him in God's hands, who doeth all things well."

From that visit Mrs. Gower returned to her home comforted and strengthened. Alone she might be, yet, like her Saviour, "not alone, for the Father was with her." And ere many days had elapsed she was able to busy herself in making preparations for her return to her pleasant country home, which she had only left at Reginald's special request that for once they might spend the season together in London.

One thing only she regretted—that she would be for some weeks separated from her friend Mrs. Willoughby, who was not to return to Harcourt Manor for some weeks.

Ah! truly has it been said, "Man proposes, but God disposes." The very day that Mrs. Gower started for her home, Mrs. Willoughby received a telegram telling her that Mr. Willoughby was very ill at the Manor, and that the doctor begged she would come at once; and so it turned out that, unknown to each other, the friends were again near neighbours, and Mrs. Willoughby in her turn was to receive help and comfort from her friend Mrs. Gower.

Long hours of suspense and anxiety followed the gentle lady's arrival at her country home. It soon became evident that Mr. Willoughby's hours were numbered, but his intellect remained clear. His eyes often rested with great sadness on his wife, and as he thought of leaving her alone
[134] and desolate, his prayer was that he might hear something definite regarding the child ere he died. Could he but have obtained that boon, he would have felt that that knowledge had been granted to him as a pledge of God's forgiveness.

Not always does our all-wise God grant us signs even as an answer to our prayers. Still, He is a God who not only forgives as a king, royally, but also blesses us richly and fully to show the greatness of His forgiving power. And such a God He was to prove Himself in the case of Mr. Willoughby.

Whilst he lay on that bed of death, watched over and tended by loving friends, Reginald Gower was tossing on a stormy sea, a fair emblem of the conflict between good and evil, right and wrong, that was still raging within his breast. But that night, when the waves of the Atlantic were wellnigh overwhelming the vessel in which he sailed, when fear dwelt in every heart, when the captain trod the deck with an anxious gravity on his face, light broke on Reginald's heart. So his mother's prayers were answered at last. The Holy Spirit worked on his heart, and showed him as it were in a moment of time his selfishness and his sin; and from the lips of the self-indulgent young man arose the cry never uttered in vain, "God be merciful to me a sinner." And when the morning light dawned, and it was seen they were nearing in safety the harbour whither they were bound, Reginald Gower looked out on the sea, which was fast quieting down, and gave thanks that the conflict in his soul was ended, and that clear above the noise of the waters he
[135] heard the voice of Him who, while He tarried here below, had said, "Peace, be still," to the raging billows, say these same words to his soul.

"Safe in port," rang out the captain's voice; and "Safe in port, through the merits of my Saviour," echoed through the soul of the young man.

"Now," he said to himself, "let house, lands, and fortune go. I will do the just, right thing, which long ago I should have done—write to Mrs. Willoughby, and tell all I know about the child found in the Black Forest."

At that resolution methinks a song of rejoicing was heard in heaven, sung by angel voices as they proclaimed the glad news that once more good had overcome evil—that the power of Christ had again conquered the power of darkness—that in another heart the Saviour of the world had seen of the travail of His soul and was satisfied.

In the meantime, the events we have written of were transpiring in Harcourt Manor. Mr. Willoughby still lay on a bed of sickness, from which the doctor said he would never rise, although a slight rally made it possible that life might yet be spared for a few days or even weeks.

He was wonderfully patient, grieving only for the sorrow experienced by his wife, and the sad thought that his own unforgiving spirit was in great part the reason why now she would be left desolate without a child to comfort her.

Daily Mrs. Gower visited her friend, and often watched with her by the bed of death.

[136] Dr. Heinz, at Mrs. Willoughby's request, came to see Mr. Willoughby, and obtained from his lips a message of full forgiveness if either his daughter, her husband, or any child should be found after his death; and together they prayed that if it were God's will something might be heard of the lost ones ere Mr. Willoughby entered into rest. "'Nevertheless,'" added the dying man, "'not my will but thine be done.'"

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[137]

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DISCOVERY.

"All was ended now—the hope, and the fear, and the sorrow."

ONE day shortly after Dr. Heinz's visit, Mrs. Gower came to Harcourt Manor accompanied by Miss Drechsler, who had arrived from London the night before to remain with her for a couple of days.

"You will not likely see Mrs. Willoughby," she said as they neared the manor-house, "as she seldom leaves her husband's room; but if you do not object to waiting a few minutes in the drawing-room whilst I go to see her, I would be so much obliged to you, as I am desirous of knowing how Mr. Willoughby is to-day. He seemed so low when I last saw him."

"Oh, certainly," answered Miss Drechsler. "Don't trouble about me; I can easily wait. And don't hurry, please; I am sure to get some book to while away the time."

They parted in the hall, Mrs. Gower turning off to the sick-room, while Miss Drechsler was ushered by the butler into the drawing-room. The room was a very fine one, large and lofty. It
[138] had been little used for some weeks, and the venetian blinds were down, obscuring the light and shutting out the summer sunshine.

At first Miss Drechsler could hardly distinguish anything in the room, coming into it as she did from a blaze of light; but as her eyes became accustomed to the gloom, she made out first one object and then another clearly, and rising from the place where she had been seated, she began to look around her, turning to the pictures, which she had heard were considered very fine. She looked attentively at some of them. Then her eyes rested on a full-sized portrait of a beautiful girl, and with a start of astonishment Miss Drechsler uttered the word, "Frida! and with her curious necklace on, too. What does it mean?" she queried.

In a moment the whole truth flashed on her mind. That, she felt sure, must be a picture of Frida's mother, and she must have been the missing child of Harcourt Manor.

She sat down a moment, feeling almost stunned by the discovery she had made. What a secret she had to disclose! Oh, if Mrs. Gower would only come back quickly, that she might share it with her! Oh, if Frida had only been with her, and she could have presented her to her grandparents as the child of their lost daughter!

At last the door opened, and her friend appeared, but much agitated. "Excuse me, dear Miss Drechsler, for having kept you so long waiting; but I found Mr. Willoughby much worse, and I
[139] must ask you kindly to allow me to remain here for a short time longer. Perhaps you would like to take a stroll about the beautiful grounds, and—"

But Miss Drechsler could no longer keep silence. "O dear friend, do not distress yourself about me! Listen to me for a moment. I have made such a discovery. I know all about Mrs. Willoughby's daughter; but, alas, she is dead! She died some years ago; but her only child, the very image of that picture on the wall yonder, is living, and is now residing within a few hours of London. She is my *protégé*, my dearly-loved young violinist, Frida Heinz, the child I have told you of found in the Black Forest!"

"Is it possible?" replied Mrs. Gower. "What a discovery you have made! thank God for it. Can she be got at once, I wonder, ere the spirit of her grandfather passes away? Oh, this is indeed an answer to prayer! The cry of the poor man's heart for days has been, 'Oh, if God has indeed forgiven me, as I fully believe He has, I pray He may allow me to know ere I go hence if my child, or any child of hers, is alive to come and comfort my dear wife in the sorrow that is awaiting her!'"

"A telegram must be sent at once to Stanford Hall, where she is now living," said Miss Drechsler; "and another to Miss Warden, asking her to send off Frida, after she arrives at her house, at once to Harcourt Manor."

And without loss of time the telegram was dispatched which summoned Frida to London, and from thence to the manor-house.

[140] The first sense of surprise having passed, Mrs. Gower's thoughts involuntarily turned to Reginald. How would he like this discovery? But again the mother's partiality, which already had too often blinded her to his faults, suggested the impossibility that he would receive the news with aught but pleasure, though there might be a momentary feeling of disappointment as regarded his future prospects. But now she must return to the sick-room, and try to see her friend for a minute or two alone, and tell her the glad tidings; also, if possible, let her hear the particulars of the story from the lips of Miss Drechsler herself.

It was no easy matter now, under any pretence, to get Mrs. Willoughby to leave her husband's side even for a moment. The doctors had just told her that at most her husband had not more than two days to live, perhaps not so long, and every moment was precious; but Mrs. Grower's words, spoken with calm deliberation, "Dear friend, you must see me in another room for a few minutes about a matter of vital importance," had their effect. And she rose, and after leaving a few orders with the nurse, and telling her husband she would return immediately, she quietly followed Mrs. Gower into another room.

She listened as if in a dream to the story which Miss Drechsler told. Incident after incident proved that the child found in the Forest was indeed her grand-daughter; and as she heard that her own child, her loved Hilda, was indeed dead, the mother's tears fell fast.

[141] The necklace which Frida still possessed, the same as that worn by the girl in the picture, the small portrait which had been found in her bag the night that Wilhelm Hörstel had discovered her in the Black Forest, all confirmed the idea that she was indeed the grandchild of the Manor; but it was not until Mrs. Willoughby heard the story of the "brown German Bible" that she sobbed out the words, "Oh, thank God, thank God, she is the child of my darling Hilda. Now, dear friend, this discovery must be communicated by me to my husband, and he will know that his last prayer for me has been granted."

Mr. Willoughby was quite conscious, and evidently understood the fact that at last a child of his daughter's had been found. As regarded the death of the mother, he merely whispered the words, "I shall see her soon;" then said, "I thank thee, O my Father, that Thou hast answered prayer, and that now my sweet wife will not be left alone.—Give my fond love to the girl, wife, for I feel my eyes shall not see her. That is my punishment for so long cherishing an unforgiving spirit."

And if God could act as a man, such might have been the case; but our God is fully and for ever a promise-keeping God, and He has declared, "If any man confess his sins, He is faithful and just to forgive him, and to cleanse him from all iniquity." And so it came to pass that ere the spirit of Mr. Willoughby passed away, he had pressed more than one kiss on the lips of his grandchild, and whispered the words, "Full forgiveness through Christ—what a God we have! Comfort your grandmother, my child, and keep near to Jesus in your life. God bless the kind friends who have [142] protected and loved you when you were homeless.—And now, Lord, let Thy servant depart in peace.—Farewell, loved and faithful wife, who, by the reading to me God's word of life, hast led my soul to Christ." One deep-drawn breath, and his spirit fled, and his wife and grandchild were left alone to comfort each other.

"And now, Frida, my loved child, come and tell me all about those friends who were so kind to you in the Forest," said Mrs. Willoughby some days after Mr. Willoughby's funeral. "Ah, how little we thought that we had a grandchild living there, and that our darling Hilda was dead! When I look upon you, Frida, it almost seems as if all these long years of suffering had been a dream, and my daughter were again seated beside me, work in hand, as we so often sat in the years that have gone. You are wonderfully like her, and I believe that during the last four hours of his life, when his mind was a little clouded, my dear husband thought that Hilda really sat beside him, and that it was to her he said the words, 'I fully forgive, as I hope to be forgiven.' But comfort yourself, Frida; at the very last he knew all distinctly, and told us to console each other.—But now tell me what I asked you to do, and also if you ever met any one who recognized you as your mother's daughter."

"Not exactly," replied Frida. "Still, one or two people were struck with my likeness to some one whom they had seen, but whose name they could not recall. Miss Drechsler was one of those, and [143] now she says she wonders she did not remember that it was Miss Willoughby, although she had only seen her twice at the Wardens', and then amongst a number of people. And then a young man, a Mr. Gower (the same name as your friend), who had heard me play on the violin at the Stanfords' concert, told them that he was much struck with my resemblance to a picture he had seen. I wonder if he could be any relation to your Mrs. Gower?"

"Was his name Reginald?" Mrs. Willoughby asked hurriedly.

"Yes. Sir Richard Stanford used to call him Reginald Gower; but I seldom saw him. But, grandmother, is there anything the matter?" for as Frida spoke, Mrs. Willoughby's face had blanched. Was it possible, she asked herself, that Reginald Gower had known, or at least suspected, the existence of this child, and for very evident reasons concealed it from his friends? A terrible fear that it was so overcame her; for she liked the lad, and tenderly loved his mother. She felt she must betray herself, and so answered Frida's question by saying,—

"Oh, it is nothing, dear, only a passing faintness; but I shall lie on the sofa, and you shall finish your talk. Now tell me about the Forest."

And Frida, well pleased to speak of the friends she loved so well, told of her childhood's life in the Forest, and the kindness shown to her by Elsie and Wilhelm, not forgetting to speak of Hans and the little blind Anna so early called to glory. "And, O grandmother, all the wood-cutters and charcoal-burners were so kind to me, and many amongst them learned to love the words of this [144] little book;" and as she spoke she took from her pocket the little brown German Bible, her mother's parting legacy to her child. "It was no words of mine that opened their eyes (I was too young to have said them); but I could read the Word of God to them, and they did the deed."

Mrs. Willoughby took the little book in her hands and pressed it to her lips. "It was often in the hands of my darling Hilda, you say? and those words in a foreign language became as precious to her as did the English ones to her mother in the little Bible she gave her ere they parted? Blessed book, God's own inspired revelation of Himself, which alone can make us 'wise unto salvation.'"

Mrs. Willoughby listened with great pleasure to Frida's tale, glancing every now and again at

the fair girl face, which was lit up as with sunshine as she spoke of her happy days and dear friends in the Forest.

"I must write to a friend in Dringenstadt," she said, "to go to the Forest and tell them all the good news,—of how good God has been to me in restoring me to my mother's friends, and in letting me know that a brother of my father's was alive. But see, here comes the postman. I must run and get the letters."

In a minute she re-entered bearing a number of letters in her hand.

"Ah! here are quite a budget," she said. "See, grandmother, there is one for you bearing the New York mark, and another for myself from Frankfort. Ah! that must be from the uncle you
[145] spoke of, Dr. Heinz. You said he had gone there, did you not?"

Whilst Frida was talking thus, her grandmother had opened her American letter, and saw that it was from Reginald Gower. "He has heard, of course, of my dear husband's death, and writes to sympathize with me. But no; he could hardly have heard of that event, nor of the discovery of our grandchild, and replied to it. He must be writing about some other subject."

She then read as if in a dream the following words:—

> "Dear Friend—if indeed I may still dare to address you thus—I write to ask forgiveness for a sore wrong which I have done to you and Mr. Willoughby. I confess with deep shame that for some years I have had a suspicion, nay, almost a certainty, that a child of your daughter was alive. Miss Drechsler, now living with Miss Warden, can tell you all. I met the girl, who plays charmingly on the violin, at a concert in the house of Sir Richard Stanford. Her face reminded me of a picture I had seen somewhere, but at first I could not recall where, until the fact, told me by the Stanfords, of a peculiar necklace which the girl possessed, and which they described to me, brought to my remembrance the picture of your daughter at Harcourt Manor with a *fac-simile* of the necklace on. Added to this, I had heard that the girl had been found by a wood-cutter in the Black Forest, and that of her birth and parentage nothing was known. It is now with deep repentance that I confess to having concealed these facts (though I had no doubt as to
> [146] whose child she was), because I knew that by disclosing the secret my right to succeed to the property of Harcourt Manor would be done away with. I felt even then the shame and disgrace of so doing, and knew also the trouble and grief I was causing to you, whom (although you may find it difficult to believe) I really loved, and who had ever been such a kind friend to me. I now see that it was a love of self-indulgence which led me to commit so foul a sin. Conscience remonstrated, and the words of the Bible, so early instilled into my mind by my mother, constantly reproached me; but I turned from and stifled the voice of conscience, and deliberately chose the evil way. All these years I have experienced at times fits of the deepest remorse, but selfishness prevailed; and when I heard that Frida Heinz was coming to England, and that probably ere-long all might be disclosed, I resolved to leave my native land and begin a better life here. Ere I left I had reason to believe that she was unable to come to England, so even now I may be the first to reveal the secret of her existence. I do not know if even yet I would have gained strength to do this or not, had not God in His great mercy opened my eyes, during a fearful storm at sea, when it seemed as if any moment might be my last, to see what a sinner I was in His sight, and led me to seek forgiveness through the merits of Christ for all my past sins. *That* I believe I have obtained, and now I crave a like forgiveness from you whom I have so cruelly wronged. Should you withhold it, I dare not complain; but I have hopes that you, who are a follower of our Lord Jesus Christ,
> [147] will not do so. One more request, and I have done. Comfort, I beg of you, my mother when she has to bear the bitter sorrow of knowing how shamefully the son she loves so dearly has acted. By this post I write also to her. I trust to prove to both of you by my future life that my repentance is sincere.
>
> Reginald Gower."

Mrs. Willoughby's grief on reading this letter was profound. To think that the lad whom she had loved, and whom in many ways she had befriended, had acted such a base, selfish part, overwhelmed her; and the thought that if he had communicated even his suspicions to her so long ago the child would have been found, and probably have gladdened her grandfather's life and heart for several years ere he was taken hence, was bitter indeed. But not long could any unforgiving feeling linger in her heart, and ere many hours were over she was able fully to forgive.

Of Mrs. Gower's feelings we can hardly write. The shame and grief she experienced on reading the letter, which she received from her son by the same post as that by which Mrs. Willoughby received hers, cannot be expressed; but through it all there rang a joyful song, "This my son was dead, and is alive again." The prayers—believing prayers—of long years were answered, and the bond between mother and son was a doubly precious one, united as they now were in Christ. It was for her friend she felt so keenly, and to know how she had suffered at the hand of Reginald was a deep grief to her. Could she, she queried, as she set out letter in hand to Harcourt Manor—
[148] could she ever forgive him? That question was soon answered when she entered the room and met her friend. Ere then Mrs. Willoughby had been alone with her God in prayer, and had sought and obtained strength from her heart to say, "O Lord, as Thou hast blotted out my transgressions

as a thick cloud, and as a cloud my sins, so help me to blot out from my remembrance the sorrow which Reginald has caused to me, and entirely to forgive him." After two hours spent together the two friends separated, being more closely bound together than ever before; Mrs. Willoughby saying she would write to Reginald that very night, and let him know that he had her forgiveness, and that without his intervention God had restored her grandchild to her arms.

In the meantime letters had reached Dr. Heinz telling that the search for the missing ones was at an end. His short holiday was drawing to a close, and erelong Frida was embraced by the brother of the father she had loved so much and mourned so deeply.

And ere another summer had gone she was present at her uncle's marriage with Gertie Warden, and was one of the bridesmaids. And a few days after that event it was agreed, with her grandmother's full consent—nay, at her special request—that she should accompany them on their marriage jaunt, and that that should include a visit to Miss Drechsler and a sight of her friends in the Black Forest.

Many were the presents sent by Mrs. Willoughby to Elsie, Wilhelm, and others who had been kind to her grandchild in the Forest.

[149] "O grandmother," said Frida, as she was busy packing up the things, "do you know that I have just heard that my kind friend the German pastor has returned to Dringenstadt and settled there. He was so very kind to me when I was a little child, I should like to take him some small special remembrance—a handsome writing-case, or something of that kind."

"Certainly, Frida," was the answer. "You shall choose anything you think suitable. I am glad you will have an opportunity of thanking him in person for all his kindness to you, and, above all, for introducing you to Miss Drechsler. And look here, Frida. As you say that Wilhelm and Elsie can read, I have got two beautifully-printed German Bibles, one for each of them, as a remembrance from Frida's grandmother, who, through the reading of those precious words, has got blessing to her own soul. See, I have written on the first page the words, 'Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.'"

It was settled that during Frida's absence Mrs. Gower should live at Harcourt Manor, and together Mrs. Willoughby and she bid adieu to Frida as she set off three days after the marriage to meet her uncle and his bride at Dover, from whence they were to start for the Continent. Tears were in Frida's eyes—tears of gratitude—as she thought of the goodness of God in restoring her, a lonely orphan, to the care of kind relations since she had crossed the Channel rather more than a year before.

Frida endeared herself much to her uncle and his wife, and after a trip with them for some
[150] weeks, they left her with regret at Miss Drechsler's, promising to return soon and take her home with them after she had seen her friends in the Forest.

"Ah, Frida," said Miss Drechsler, when they were seated in the evening in the pretty little drawing-room, "does it not seem like olden days? Do you not remember the first time when Pastor Langen brought you here a shy, trembling little child, and asked me to see you from time to time?"

Ere Frida could reply, the door opened, and Pastor Langen entered, and Miss Drechsler introduced him to his *protégé*.

"Frida Heinz! Is it possible? I must indeed be getting *ein Alter* if this be the little girl who was found in the Black Forest."

He listened with interest whilst Miss Drechsler told him the history of her past years, much of which was new to him, although he had heard of Frida's gift as a violinist; but when she told of the wonderful way in which her relations had been discovered, he could refrain himself no longer, but exclaimed,—

"*Lobe Herrn*, He is good, very good, and answers prayer."

And ere they parted the three knelt at the throne of grace and gave thanks to God.

On the next day it was settled that Frida should go to the Forest and see her old friends, taking her grandmother's present with her.

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[151]

CHAPTER XVIII.

OLD SCENES.

"God's world is steeped in
beauty,

God's world is bathed in
light."

IT was in the leafy month of June that Frida found herself once more treading the Forest paths. The smaller trees were clothed in their bright, fresh, green lining—

"Greenness shining, not a
colour,
But a tender, living light;"

and to them the dark, gloomy pines acted as a noble background, and once again the song of birds was heard, and the gentle tinkle, tinkle of the forest streams.

Memory was very busy at work as the girl—nay, woman now—trod those familiar scenes. Yonder was the very tree under which Wilhelm found her, a lonely little one, waiting in vain for the father she would see no more on earth.

[152] There in the distance were the lonely huts of the wood-cutters who had so lovingly cared for the orphan child. And as she drew nearer the hut of the Hörstels, she recognized many a spot where she and Hans had played together as happy children, to whom the sighing of the wind amid the tall pines had seemed the most beautiful music in the world.

As she recalled all these things, her heart filled with love to God, who had cared for and protected her when her earthly friends had cast her off. The language of her heart might have been expressed in the words of the hymn so often sung in Scottish churches:—

"When all Thy mercies, O my
God!
My rising soul surveys,
Transported with the view, I'm
lost
In wonder, love, and
praise."

Words cannot depict the joy of Elsie and Wilhelm at the sight of their dear woodland child. They had already heard of her having found her English relations, and heartily they rejoiced at the good news, although well they knew that they would seldom see the child they loved so well.

Many were the questions asked on both sides. Frida, on her part, had to describe Harcourt Manor and her gentle grandmother and her father's brother, Dr. Heinz, and his beautiful bride. She told also of the full-sized picture (which hung on the walls of Harcourt Manor) of her mother, which had been the means of the discovery of her birth, from her extraordinary likeness to it.

[153] When the many useful presents sent by Mrs. Willoughby were displayed, the gratitude of those poor people knew no bounds, and even the little girl looked delighted at the bright-coloured, warm frocks and cloaks for winter wear which had been sent for her. Hans was by no means forgotten: some useful books fell to his share when he returned home in a few weeks from Leipsic for a short holiday.

It was with difficulty that Frida tore herself away from those kind friends, and went to the Dorf to see her friends there, and take them the gifts she had brought for them also. It was late ere she reached Dringenstadt, and there, seated by Miss Drechsler, related to her the doings of the day.

To Pastor Langen was entrusted a sum of money to be given to the Hörstels, and also so much to be spent every Christmas amongst the wood-cutters and charcoal-burners in the Dorf. The two Bibles Frida had herself given to the Hörstels, who had been delighted with them.

When, soon after that day, Dr. Heinz and his bride, accompanied by Frida, visited the Forest, they received a hearty welcome. Many of the wood-cutters recognized the resemblance Dr. Heinz bore to his brother who had died in the cottage in the Forest.

Many a story did Dr. Heinz hear of the woodland child and her brown book.

The marriage trip over, the Heinzes, accompanied by Frida, returned to their homes—they to carry on their work of love in the dark places of the great metropolis, taking with them not only comforts for the body, but conveying to them the great and only treasures of the human mind, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. And to many and many a sin-sick, weary soul the words of [154] Holy Scripture spoken by the lips of those two faithful ambassadors of the Lord Jesus Christ brought peace and rest and comfort. And Frida, on her part, found plenty of work to do for the Master in the cottages near Harcourt Manor, in which her grandmother helped her largely.

Three years had passed since Frida had become an inmate of her grandmother's home, and they had gone for the winter to London in order to be near Frida's relations the Heinzes, and at Frida's request Ada Stanford, who was now much stronger, had come to pay her a visit. Many a talk the two friends had about the past, recalling with pleasure the places they had visited together and the people they had seen. The beauties of Baden-Baden and the sunny Riviera were often dwelt on, and together they loved to review God's wonderful love as regarded them both. They spoke also of their visit to the dying woman in the Glen, whom Frida had long before found

out to have been a faithful nurse to her mother, and for whose little grand-daughter Mrs. Willoughby had provided since hearing from Frida of the old woman's death.

Then one day the girls spoke of a musical party which was to take place in Mrs. Willoughby's house that day, and in the arranging for which Ada and Frida had busied themselves even as they had done years before in Baden-Baden for the party at which Frida had played on the violin. A large party assembled that night, and Dr. Heinz and Frida played together; but the great musician of the night was a young German violinist who had begun to attract general attention in
[155] the London musical world. He was no other than Hans Hörstel, the playmate of Frida's childhood.

Very cordial was the meeting between those two who had last seen each other in such different circumstances.

And Sir Richard Stanford, who was also present, felt he was well repaid for what he had spent on young Hörstel's education by the result of it, and by the high moral character which the young man bore.

It was a happy night. Frida rejoiced in the musical success of the companion of her early years, and together they spoke of the days of the past, and of his parents, who had been as father and mother to her.

Long after the rest of the company had gone, Hans, by Mrs. Willoughby's invitation, remained on; and ere they parted they together gave thanks for all God's kindness towards them.

All hearts were full of gratitude, for Mrs. Gower was there rejoicing in the news she had that day received from Reginald, that he was about to be married to a niece of Sir Richard Stanford's, whom he had met whilst visiting friends in New York; and she was one who would help in the work for Christ which he carried on in the neighbourhood of his farm. He was prospering as regarded worldly matters, and he hoped soon to take a run home and introduce his bride to his loved mother and his kind friend Mrs. Willoughby. He added, "I need hardly say that ere I asked Edith to marry me I told her the whole story of my sin in concealing what I knew of the birth of
[156] Frida Heinz; but she said, what God had evidently forgiven, it became none to refuse to do so likewise."

So after prayer was ended, it was from their hearts that all joined in singing the doxology,—

"Praise God, from whom all blessings flow!"

And with this scene we end the story of the child found in the Black Forest, and the way in which her brown German Bible was used there for the glory of God.

THE END.

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