

THE
LOST RUBY

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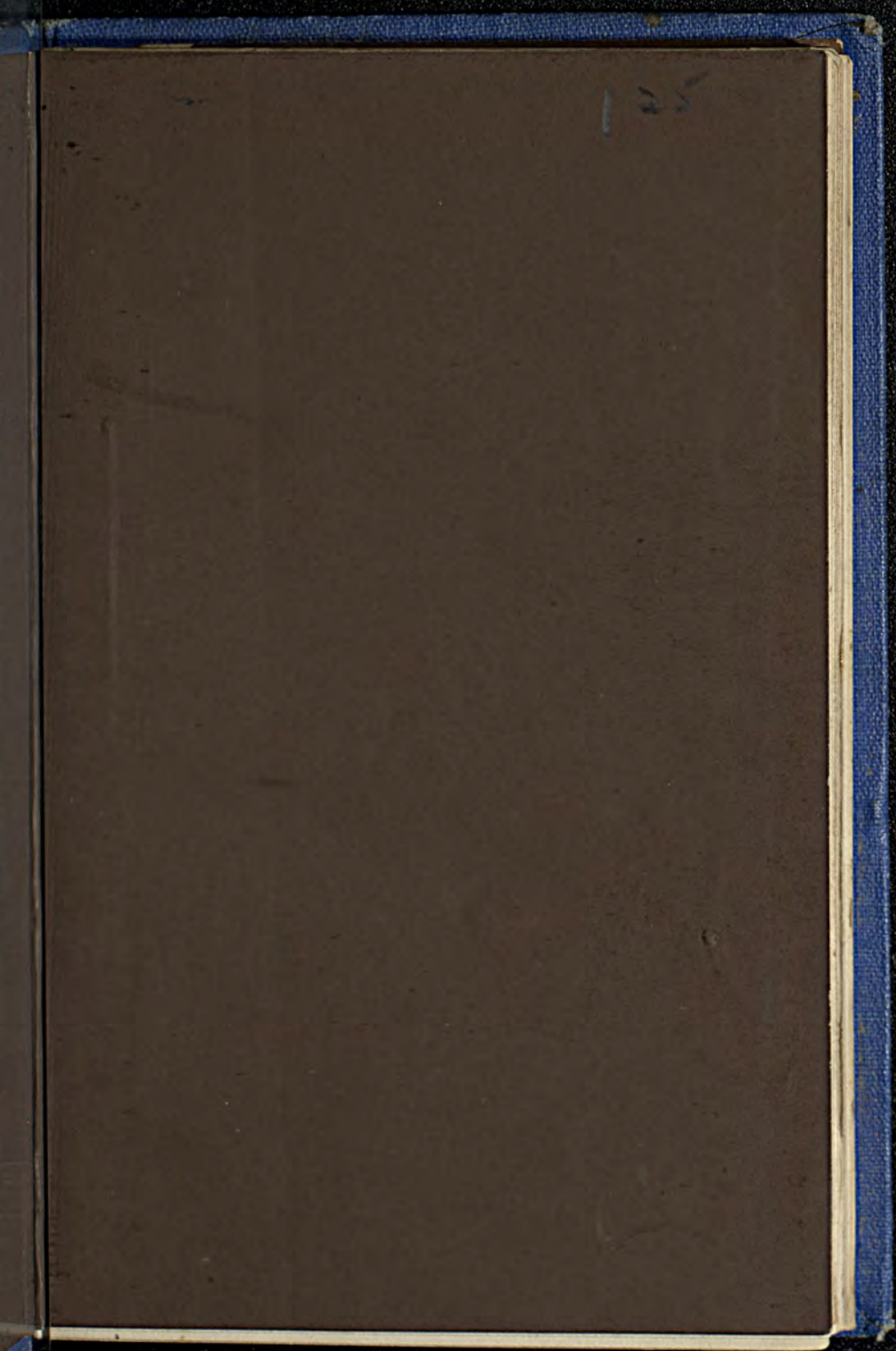
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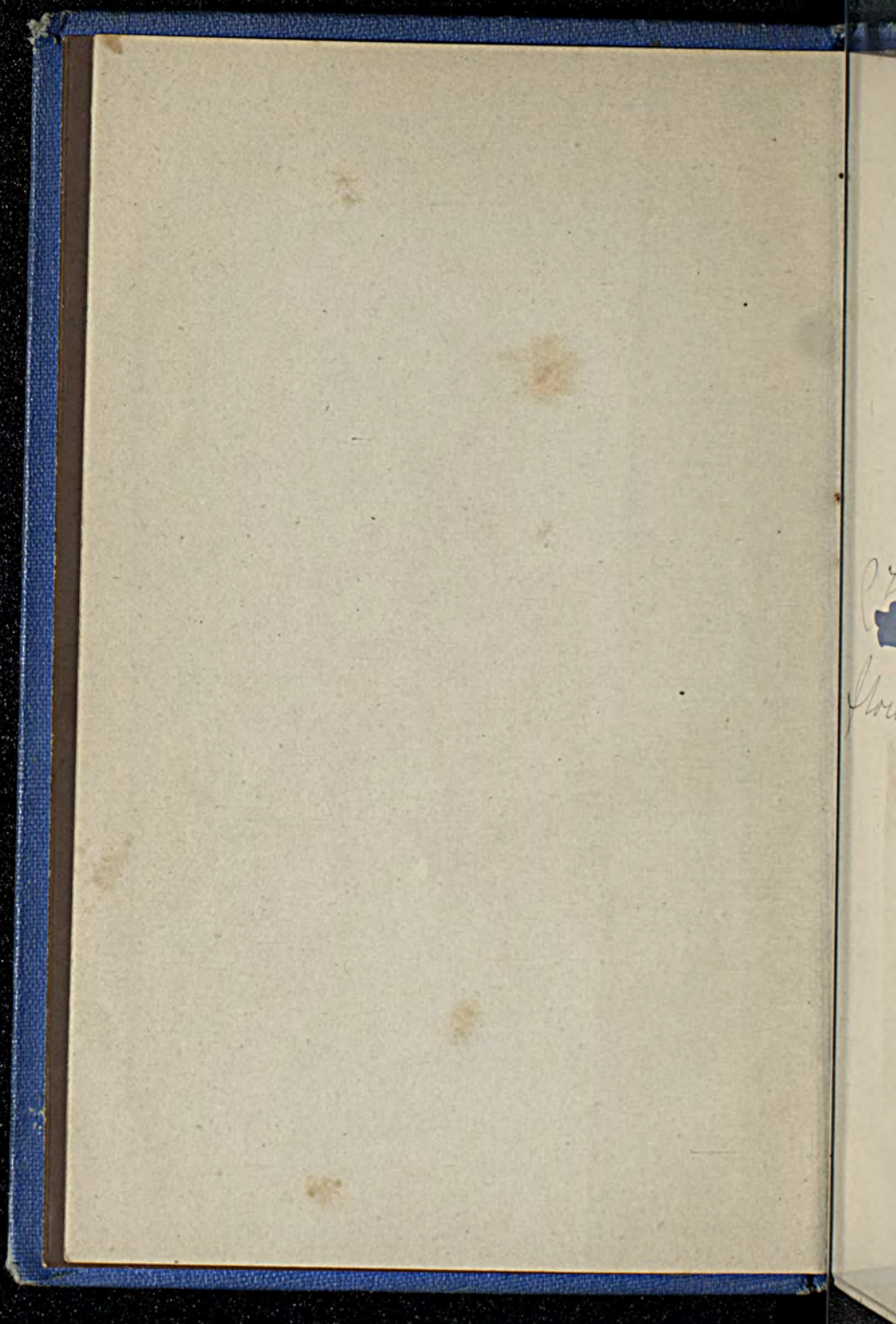
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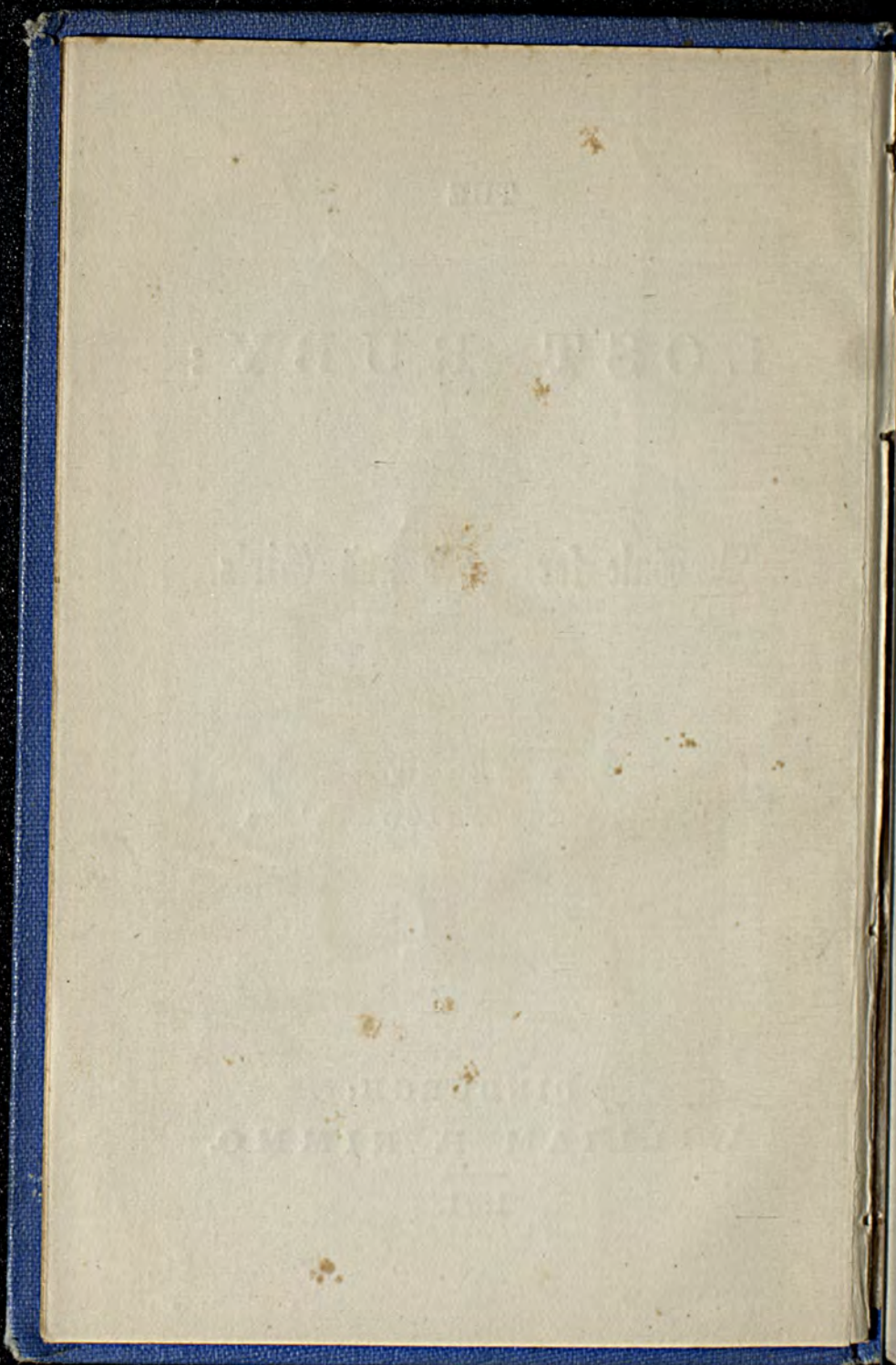


THE
LOST RUBY:

A Tale for Boys and Girls.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"THE BASKET OF FLOWERS," ETC.

EDINBURGH:
WILLIAM P. NIMMO.
1871.



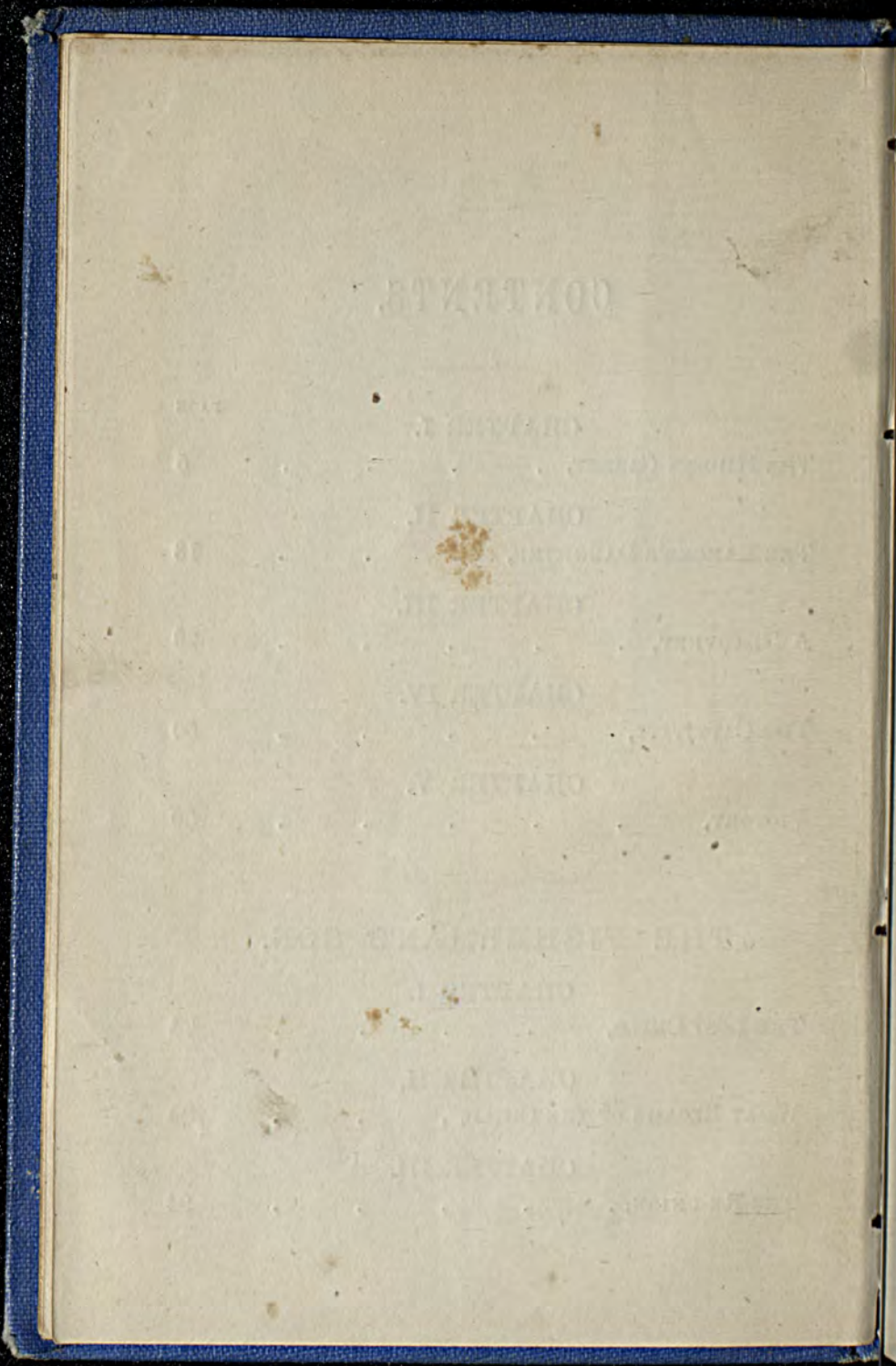
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CHAPTER I.

THE HIDDEN CASKET.

MARSHAL von Hainburg, after having served his country long and faithfully, retired from the service into private life. He bought an estate in the country, and went to reside upon it. He had lost his wife some years before; both of his sons had fallen bravely on the field of battle; and his only daughter had died on the eve of her marriage. Being thus left alone in the world, the gallant Marshal lost all taste for the pleasures and frivolities of fashionable life; and he determined to devote the remainder of his days to the service of God in rural retirement; and to benefit, so far as lay in his power, the poor and dependant people who resided round about him.

Although he had retired to the country, still he occasionally received visits from his town

and city friends, and from the nobility residing in his own neighbourhood. His castle, a stately and well-preserved edifice, occupied a splendid situation on the summit of a mountain in the midst of a beautiful country.

Deep in the valley, not far from the castle, lay the pretty village of Hainburg; and behind the castle there extended a magnificent and thickly-wooded forest, well stocked with every kind of game.

This forest was the favourite resort of all lovers of the chase; and as the Marshal was of a very generous and hospitable disposition, the castle was, during the sporting season, much frequented by visitors.

Early one autumn, almost before the trees had begun to lose their summer foliage, Marshal von Hainburg's nephew, Adolphus von Wildberg, a young officer, arrived at the castle. He was a special favourite with his uncle, who admired his spirit, vivacity, and generosity; perhaps none the less because the young man often solicited the benefit of his experience in military matters; and never failed to listen with the greatest attention to the stories, experiences, and observations of the gallant veteran.

One day, shortly after his arrival at the castle, just as the young man had returned from the forest with the old ranger, and was telling his uncle, with great earnestness, how fortunate he had been in killing the monstrous wild boar which had been making such fearful havoc in the country people's fields and poultry-yards—a hussar came galloping into the castle court, with an order for Lieutenant Wildberg to rejoin his regiment immediately, or, at the latest, upon a very early day named in the order. This unexpected recall was caused by the enemy having suddenly declared an end to a truce which had been made, and having already marched across the frontier. The hussar told him that he had been informed in all the villages which he had ridden through as he came along, that the enemy's cavalry were plundering the district which lay between the castle and the metropolis; but that he himself had not seen any trace of them.

Far from being discouraged at this intelligence, the young lieutenant was evidently much pleased; but his old uncle appeared to be very much dejected and cast down.

“To-morrow, at day-break,” said the Mar-

shal, "I shall set out along with you;" and he gave orders that his clothes, linen, jewels, and money, should be packed ready for removal at a moment's notice.

Adolphus assured him that there was not the slightest occasion for his doing so; there was no danger, as, even from the worst accounts, the enemy must still be a long way off. But the old soldier said—"No, no; I annoyed the enemy too much when I was in command. They would be glad to make a prisoner of me, and would certainly treat me with indignity."

He therefore repeated his orders for packing up; and the whole establishment, as well as himself, were soon busied in preparation.

The Marshal had been a brave soldier and a gallant general in his day; but age and debility had now made him a little timid and very nervous.

"I'm greatly troubled, Adolphus," said he, as he brought in a beautiful mahogany casket, "about this box. Tell me what I shall do with it? It contains the jewels and trinkets of my wife and daughter; and, what I value more than anything, the badge of my order. I am afraid to carry those precious articles with

me. We might be plundered by the enemy on the road; and I should ever regret the loss of my splendid star, which the Prince himself fastened on my breast. Yet it is not safe to hide those precious treasures in the castle, for it may be seized and searched by the enemy, and even burned to the ground in revenge against me. The best plan, I think, will be to hide the casket and jewels in the rocks of the forest. It is fortunate that Hubert, the ranger, who lives in the forest, is here now. Call him, Adolphus, I can thoroughly rely on him. To him and you I confide the whole affair. I shall not accompany you myself; for as I have not been in the forest for a long time, my going with you might excite suspicion."

The Marshal had prepared a written inventory of all the jewels in the casket. He examined and compared them with the list, placed it in his pocket-book, and gave the box into the hands and charge of Lieutenant Wildberg.

Adolphus placed it in his hunting-pouch, and went into the forest, accompanied by old Hubert the ranger. Deep in its recesses there rose, from the midst of a dense thicket, a mass

of high, craggy cliffs. At the foot of one of these precipitous walls of rock, stood an old moss-grown and decayed stone cross, which marked the spot where, a hundred years before, a valiant knight had been struck down by the arrow of an unseen enemy. In this cliff there were numberless rents and fissures; and in one of these, distinguished by an overhanging mountain-ash, they concealed the casket, carefully closing up the crevice. Having taken accurate observations of the exact position of the hiding-place, they returned home to communicate to the Marshal the result of their expedition.

On the following day, Marshal von Hainburg and Lieutenant Wildberg set out, one flying from danger, and the other to join the army; and they both arrived safely in the capital, without meeting any trace of the enemy. Both officers and men were busily engaged, and straining every nerve in preparing for the march. Adolphus also set to work, and was actively employed all day long. A few days afterwards he marched with his regiment in high spirits; and the Marshal occupied his old quarters in his beautiful town mansion,

where he continued to reside for several months.

The war then soon took another direction, and carried its devastating course into the more distant provinces of Germany. The roads between the city and Hainburg Castle were entirely free from the enemy, and perfectly safe, and the Marshal's heart began to yearn after his dear paternal halls, but his health did not permit of his undertaking such a journey. He was anxious, however, to get his casket and jewels once more into his own keeping, and despatched his valet with a letter to Hubert, in which he desired that it might be brought safely to him. After a few days, the servant returned, accompanied by the trusty old ranger, who was naturally anxious to deliver into his master's own hand the valuable charge which had been entrusted to him. The Marshal was overjoyed at once more having his treasure in his possession, and hastily opened it to see if his much prized cross of honour was still in its rich case; and was satisfied with a hasty glance at the other trinkets.

"Thank God!" he said, "that I have it once more; I was very uneasy about it."

He then asked Hubert to tell him all that had occurred while the enemy were in possession of Hainburg and its vicinity. The old man drew a melancholy picture of the misery to which the district had been reduced; and of the famine which was apprehended.

"Oh, then," said the generous and kind-hearted Marshal, "I am still more glad that I have recovered those jewels. I shall say to my steward, 'Order that these stones shall be made bread!' and I shall only reserve to myself the stone of my order-cross, which nothing on earth could induce me to part with."

During several months the old man had scarcely ever left the house, except on Sundays, when he attended service in the nearest church. The whole week through he seldom put off his dressing-gown, and his cross was never taken out of its case. One morning, however, he ordered his valet to lay out his full-dress uniform.

"This is my birth-day," said he, "and I am sure my kind old brother-officers will come in full uniform, as though it were for royal parade, to offer me their congratulations."

The valet assisted him to put on his rich

gold-laced scarlet uniform, and the old man took the cross of his order out of the case, to fasten it upon his breast. But when he looked at it, he cried out in a voice of astonishment, indeed, of alarm.

“What can this be? Is it that my eyes have grown dim, or has the splended stone in the centre lost its brilliancy, perhaps from the dampness of the place in which it lay concealed?”

Before, however, he had time to examine farther, his brother-officers came in to congratulate him on the return of his birth-day, and to wish him many more of them. They expressed their delight to see him, at his time of life, looking as well as he did, in his gorgeous uniform.

After the officers had withdrawn, an old General, an early friend of the Marshal's, made his appearance, supported on a crutch. They had been cadets together, and still retained the closest and most intimate friendship for each other.

“Guns and blunderbusses! my dear Marshal!” exclaimed the blunt old General, the moment his eye fell upon the cross; “what

have you been doing with your order-cross? Have you sold the centre ruby for the benefit of your poor relations, and stuck a false one in its place? Benevolence is a very good thing in its way, but that is carrying it too far. You should not have done so. We should hate everything false or fictitious, in deeds as well as in words. You never can wear your cross with honour again!"

The Marshal told him that it was only a few minutes before that he had himself noticed the change which had taken place in its appearance; for he could not bring himself to believe that the real brilliant had been exchanged for a false one.

"I have proved too well," said he, "the honesty of the man in whose charge this cross remained for some time, to have the slightest doubt of it. I am more inclined to believe that some unknown accident has dimmed the brilliancy of the stone."

"Very likely, indeed!" replied the General, "but rest assured you are deceived. Let us call in a jeweller at once."

The state jeweller was then called in.

"This stone is a false one," said he, in a

moment, on seeing it. "It has been substituted for the genuine one, which I know well. You did me the favour many years ago to show it to me, and among all the many precious stones which have passed through my hands, I have never seen a finer than that magnificent ruby. Its brilliancy was quite extraordinary—a bright, dazzling red, like a burning coal; it was a genuine carbuncle. I valued it, on account of its rare size and beauty, at a thousand florins—a collector would readily have given that sum for it. It is a shocking fraud, but very skilfully executed; no trifling dexterity would be required to polish the coloured glass, and insert it in the gold setting, without trace of injury."

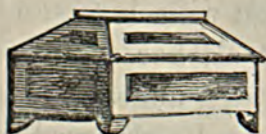
After some conversation on the genuine ruby and the false substitute, the General and the jeweller withdrew; and the Marshal sat down to think over the whole affair.

"Who could have been guilty of this disgraceful affair?" thought he. "Could it have been old Hubert the ranger? No: that is impossible. Were he still alive, I would have summoned him here; but it is nearly a month since I received intelligence of his death, and

of his dying message to me, thanking me for all the kindnesses he had experienced at my hands. But were it possible that this honest man could have stooped to rob me, would he not rather have taken some of the other trinkets: or would he not have taken the setting as well as the stone, or even the whole casket? Where could the old man, who passed his entire life in the woods, and who never was in any large city, have been able to find a workman so clever as to aid him in carrying out such a fraud? Simple as he was, he would yet have shrewdness enough to suspect that any jeweller would be surprised to find a poor forester in possession of so valuable a stone and cross, and would not fail to report the matter to the authorities. It could not have been my nephew Adolphus von Wildberg? That is equally impossible. He is too noble-minded for that; and besides, as soon as he and Hurbert had concealed it, he accompanied me directly to the city. He immediately took the field with his regiment, and has been ever since—and with great credit, too—engaged against the enemy.

“The whole affair is a mystery to me,” he

continued, standing up, and putting the cross aside. "I cannot for my life explain whether the beautiful ruby has been fraudulently exchanged, or whether it has naturally undergone some mysterious process of alteration. In vain I perplex my brains about it. There are many things here on earth, and in every-day life, which we see with our eyes, but cannot understand; however, heaven unravels every mystery some time or other, and I have no doubt we shall some day find out the mystery of my ruby. There is an old and simple, but a true saying,—‘It is a long lane that has no turning!’”





CHAPTER II.

THE RANGER'S DAUGHTER.

IN the summer following, old Count von Waldon, to whose son Marshal von Hainburg's lamented daughter had been betrothed, made a journey to Carlsbad, in order to recruit his health. At the magnificent *table d'hôte* of the great hotel in which he took up his quarters, he chanced to sit next to a young lady of extraordinary beauty and rare accomplishments. He entered into conversation with his amiable neighbour, and found that all her replies evinced a very clear and cultivated understanding; but, to his great amazement, he observed upon her finger the bridal ring of his son's deceased bride. He could not surely be in error about it?—a small, but beautiful light-green emerald, encircled with little diamonds, and exquisitely set in the purest gold, sparkled upon it. To relieve all

possibility of mistake, however, he asked permission to examine it more closely. The young lady at once took it from her finger, and handed it to him. It was the very ring; and even the initials of his son's name, "A. V. W." (Arthur von Waldon), were traced upon it.

"Where did you get this ring, miss, may I ask?" inquired the Count.

The young lady blushed, and gave an indirect reply.

"You need have no difficulty in telling me," said he; "I knew it long before it came into your possession. If I knew the person from whom you received it, it might, perhaps, lead to a very agreeable discovery."

The lady looked up joyfully.

"I received it," said she, "from my affianced husband, Adolphus Victor Weller, the son of an eminent merchant at Leipsic."

"That name is entirely unknown to me," said the Count. He asked no other question, and became absorbed in deep thought.

Next to the young lady sat an elderly matron, apparently her mother or her aunt. After dinner the Count asked one of the guests who the old lady was, and was told that she was the

widow of Colonel von Lilienthal, a most amiable lady, very rich, and good to the poor. The Count paid her a visit for the purpose of testifying his respect, telling her that he had known her husband, and sincerely deplored his death. He took occasion to congratulate her on her happiness in having so amiable a daughter.

"She is only my adopted daughter," said Madam Lilienthal. "She is an orphan. Her mother has been dead for a long time, and her father, Captain Hallmuth, fell gloriously fighting for his country."

At this moment a party of ladies, with whom Madam von Lilienthal had engaged to walk after dinner, came to call her away, and the conversation was interrupted.

The Count immediately hastened to his apartments, and wrote to the Marshal to the effect that he could not approve of his charity in selling all his useless trinkets for the benefit of the poor, as he supposed he had done; but that he felt very much hurt to see so precious a memorial as the well-known bridal ring of his own daughter pass into strange hands.

In due course, the Marshal received the letter, and was naturally very much surprised at it.

"I never sold this ring," he said to himself. "It must be still in the casket. Before I gave it in charge to my nephew and Hubert, I went carefully over the list of the trinkets, and marked out those which I took from it."

He examined the inventory again, and also the casket. It was marked as being in the box, but it was not there!

"This is surprising!" said he; "the disappearance of the ring is as strange and unaccountable as that of the ruby. It is evident, however, that the same thief must have stolen both. Yet he must be a very singular robber, to take precisely the *most* valuable and the *least* valuable among the jewels, and leave all the rest untouched. I trust I shall now be able to find some trace of him."

He wrote instantly to a mercantile house of his acquaintance in Leipsic, for some information about a merchant of the name of Weller; and as the physicians had just ordered him to visit the medicinal baths at Pyrmont, he directed the answer to be forwarded to that place. He received an immediate reply, that no such merchant was known in Leipsic, either father or son. The Marshal then wrote from Pyrmont

to the police authorities, to examine Miss Matilda Hallmuth, as to the present residence of the so-called merchant Weller, and also that of her own father and former connections.

As the value of the jewels now known to be stolen, amounted to more than a thousand florins, it was considered necessary to probe the matter to the very bottom. An officer of police came to Madam von Lilienthal's house. That lady, and Matilda, especially the latter, were thrown into consternation at his arrival. Matilda nearly fainted; she was not able to tell where the person to whom she alleged she was betrothed, and from whom she had received the ring, was then to be found; she could not even distinctly describe his appearance. Nay, she was unable to answer the first questions asked by the officer, as to where her father, the captain, had lived before the breaking out of the war; with what officers and families he had been on terms of intimacy; and what persons she herself was acquainted with there. At length, however, she was forced to admit that she was not the daughter of any captain, but of Hubert Hall the forest-ranger of Marshal von Hainburg, at the Castle of Hainburg!

Madam von Lilienthal, her adopted mother, who was present during the examination, turned pale at this acknowledgment.

"O Matilda!" she cried, "I never could have believed you capable of deceiving me so?"

"This is indeed, madam, a very serious business," said the officer. "The girl is an impostor; and now, since the name of the person from whom she pretends to have received the ring, is evidently false; since she has gained an entry into this family by an assumed name; since not only the ring (which is actually known to be in her possession) but also a very valuable ruby, have clearly been stolen out of the casket which her real father Hubert Hall, the ranger, had so long in his possession; and since the value of the property is so great, I am sorry to say that I have no alternative, but to take this girl, Matilda Hall, into custody, and subject her to a judicial examination."

Another officer, who had been waiting in the ante-chamber, was then called in, and the first one requested Madam von Lilienthal to accompany him into another room. He enquired how Matilda had behaved herself since she had

become a member of the family? The lady gave her a very high character.

"She was recommended to me," she said, "by a very respectable old man; but her own sweet face was to me a recommendation in itself."

The officer asked the name of this man, and was told that it was Dagobert, the old hermit of the mountains, whose cottage lay but a few miles distant from her property.

"Matilda," she repeated, "has fully justified the good opinion expressed by Dagobert. Since her coming to me, her conduct has been most exemplary—industrious, obedient, and trustworthy beyond precedent. The only thing with which I was not satisfied, was, that she did not like to speak of her alleged father Captain von Hellmuth, that she could scarcely tell anything about him; and always endeavoured to turn the conversation whenever he was spoken of. Be this, however, as it may, I have adopted her once for all; she is commonly reputed my daughter, and has appeared with me in the highest society. I trust, therefore, that the court will not have her placed in the common prison."

"O no," said the officer, "in consideration

of her adopted mother, the unhappy girl will be kept in a comfortable apartment in the court-house, where we usually confine citizens for the lighter and less disgraceful offences against the law."

He then returned to the room with the lady. Matilda had thrown herself despairingly upon a couch and was wringing her hands.

"You must now come with me, young lady," said the officer, ordering the other one to follow him at some distance. Matilda took leave of her foster-mother, assuring her, with tears, that she was innocent of the robbery of the ring. The poor lady herself was in tears, and Matilda accompanied the officer, casting a mournful look back at her kind benefactress, her eyes red with weeping.

As soon as Matilda had been placed in prison, and the heavy iron-bound door was closed and bolted upon her, she threw herself upon her knees and prayed that God would aid her in proving her innocence of the great crime with which she was charged, and of which she was entirely innocent; and that he would give her strength to go through the terrible ordeal waiting for her.

She repeatedly asserted her innocence ; but when she came to be examined before the court, the authorities did not give much credence to her asseverations. The robbery, being in the eyes of the law an extensive one, demanded a lengthy and careful investigation. A vast number of depositions were taken. The chief subject of inquiry regarded the character of the deceased ranger, Hubert, her father ; and the education which she had received. Not a word transpired which was not to their credit. Warrants were issued for the arrest of the so-called Adolphus Victor Weller, but no trace of him could be discovered. The local courts of police were directed to inquire at the goldsmiths and jewellers in their respective towns, whether a ruby of great brilliancy, and a certain weight, had been offered to them for sale ; but all was in vain. Even Madam von Lilienthal was summoned, and required to depose to what she knew of the old hermit, and what he had told her of Matilda. It was deeply regretted that the old man himself had died a short time previous to the discovery of the fatal ring. Inquiries, however, were made, whether he really was so pious and

Christian a man as he was represented and pretended to be. "Might he not," some said, "have been a crafty hypocrite, using his piety as a cloak to cover his crimes, and, at the same time, secretly in league with the old ranger, or even with banditti?" The result of the inquiry, however, was, that the good character of the old hermit was fully borne out in every particular.

Matilda herself was examined over and over again; but no prevarication could be detected in any of her replies. She persisted in declaring that her father had never told her a word of any casket having been intrusted to his care; that she could not have imagined that the ring was stolen; that she never would have thought of giving herself out as a captain's daughter—on the contrary, that her feelings revolted against it—had she not been urged to it by the old hermit, who had come to her father's house after his death, and whom she then saw for the first and last time in her life. "His tall, venerable figure," she said, "his grave and wrinkled features—his snow-white hair streaming over his shoulders—his long white beard—his brown habit which swept the ground

—his impressive and commanding words, so filled me with awe and reverence, that I trusted him. No doubt it was—as I now plainly see—very imprudent and inconsiderate in me to trust to the assurances of two strangers, the young man Weller and the hermit Dagobert, though I had not the slightest ground to suspect them or to distrust their integrity; but, on the contrary, being a poor friendless orphan, relied implicitly and confidently on both.”

Many a bitter tear did the poor girl shed. “Alas!” sobbed she, over and over again, “alas! in what a maze of sorrows may one youthful indiscretion involve us!”





CHAPTER III.

A DISCOVERY.

WEANWHILE Adolphus von Wildberg, the nephew of Marshal von Hainburg, still continued in the army. He had been wounded and taken prisoner; and no tidings being heard of him for a long time, it became doubtful if he was still alive. But one evening, after the conclusion of peace, he returned unexpectedly to Wildberg. Before proceeding to his father's castle, he went to the seneschal, and begged him to prepare his parents for the unexpected good news.

"Be careful how you do it," said he; "in half-an-hour I shall follow you with my dear college friend, your son Frederic."

The joy of his parents was unbounded. Adolphus was obliged to tell everything which had befallen him in the war, and every one listened to him with marked attention. His

mother invited the seneschal and his son to stay to supper, in order to hear the end of Adolphus's extraordinary adventures. They adjourned to the supper-room; but were all so much engaged in listening to the young warrior's story, that they nearly forgot eating altogether.

When Adolphus had concluded his narrative, he, in his turn, asked for the news of Wildberg and Hainburg during his absence.

"The most remarkable thing," said the old seneschal, "which has taken place, is the trial of the unfortunate Matilda Hall—a very perplexing case, which excites the greatest interest throughout the country." He then told the story, and added at the end:—

"The greatest curiosity is felt as to what the sentence will be. The prisoner obstinately denies the fact; but it will not avail her. Having confessed, when she could not avoid it, to one obvious falsehood—the changing of her name—she deserves no credit in any other statement, especially as the stolen ring was found in her possession. But the rack* will

* Young readers must understand that criminals were subjected to the torture of this horrible machine,

soon induce her to confess the truth; and then her head will surely fall under the axe of the headsman!"

"That would be frightful," said his son Frederic, "especially as it is yet probable that the girl may be innocent. The rack is not a sure means of testing a person's innocence. Many persons have confessed to crimes which they never committed, to escape its torture; and what although the stolen jewels amount to a thousand florins in value—what is that in comparison with the value of a human life! When I was a little boy, I once witnessed the execution of a woman for stealing a few florins to purchase food for herself and her children. The wretched creature's pallid face—her bandaged eyes, her bare neck, the flashing sword, the falling head, and the blood-stained trunk, are still before my eyes! I shudder when I think of it, even now!"

Adolphus rose up hastily. "I am ill," he cried, and ran out hurriedly, and without a light, to his room. He walked rapidly up and down in the dark.

in order to make them confess their guilt, in the time when the incidents of our story occurred.

"Horrible! horrible!" he repeated to himself, in an agonised voice. "A deadly anguish comes over me. I alone am guilty of this awful crime. The poor girl is innocent; and I have behaved most dishonourably towards her. The poor orphan, not yet eighteen years old, trusted to me, and I have betrayed her. I must save her—she shall not die! Sooner will I perish myself than permit her to suffer more!"

Just then his mother came in with a light, and to see what was the matter with him.

"What is the matter with you," she said, anxiously. "Your horror at this story is most extraordinary. I cannot comprehend it."

"Ah!" said her son, "Frederic's picture of the execution, which I witnessed along with him, horrified me so—!"

"No, no, Adolphus!" said his mother; "that is not the sole cause. You have seen too much bloodshed in the war, to be so deeply affected by an old tale like this. You must have some deeper interest in the forester's daughter. You grew pale the moment the seneschal mentioned her name, and began to speak of her. I observed you closely. If you

be in any manner connected with the misfortunes of this poor girl, Adolphus, confess it freely to your affectionate mother. We will then devise means for the girl's liberation; and even if you should have been guilty of so great a fault, I shall be a mediator with your father also."

"You are right, dearest mother," said Adolphus. "I *am* the cause of this unhappy affair. It was I who not only took the ring out of the casket, and gave it to Matilda, but also exchanged the ruby for the false stone!"

"The ruby, too!" cried his mother; "that magnificent and precious stone, upon which your uncle set such a value! How did such a wicked thought enter your head? You must have been mad, my son! I cannot imagine it. I almost faint when I think of it!"

She sank upon the sofa, and motioned to Adolphus to come to her side.

"Mother," said he, "I will confess the whole truth to you; and I must commence with the ruby, as it was the occasion of my taking the ring also. Although my indiscretion—to call it by no harsher term—cannot possibly be justified, yet I think I shall be able

to say something which may palliate my guilt to some extent. Black as my transgression must appear in the eyes of the world, still, the circumstances may give it a lighter colour.

“ While my uncle was living at court, and I with him, and when it was well known that he meant to retire, and live upon his estate, a French merchant, who dealt in pearls, jewels, and all kinds of trinkets, came to him, and said that a Russian Prince, whose young wife had taken an extraordinary fancy to this very ruby, was anxious to procure it at any price. As the Marshal would never be likely to appear at court again, much less at any military parade; and as the jewel therefore was, in a sense, useless to him, it seemed probable he might be inclined to sell it, if he could get a good price for it. My uncle got very angry at this proposal. ‘Are you mad?’ he said to the merchant; ‘that stone is my cross, and is beyond all price in my eyes!’

“ The day before I went to Hainburg, the last time, to visit my uncle, as I was making preparations for my journey, this same merchant, who, on his business tour, always spends a few weeks every year in the city, came to my

room, and told me in strict confidence, that he had a proposal to make to me, which, he was sure, I would not decline. This was—that the ruby could easily be exchanged for another fine red stone, which any person, seeing it in the cross, would take to be genuine, and that he would be able to make the substitution in such a way as would defy detection. I did not relish the proposal, and told him so in very plain terms; but a few days after, when my uncle gave me the casket to conceal, the demon of temptation overcame me. It occurred to me that it would not be a bad plan to sell the stone thus advantageously. The stone, thought I, might lie concealed in the crevice of the rock for many years, whereas the large sum of money which it would produce, could be put out at good interest. Again, I thought, who knows how long this war may last? Perhaps this invasion may deprive us, for a long time, of all returns from our estate, or even transfer it altogether into the hands of the enemy, so that we may never see it more. Many a time my uncle has said to me, ‘You, Adolphus, are my sole heir. All that I have is yours, for I cannot live long now, and henceforth I shall have but

few wants, yet you must employ it all for the good of the family.' Regarding the sale of the ruby as plainly for the benefit of the family, I allowed my conscientious scruples to be overcome, and secretly abstracted the cross. The next day I went to the capital with my uncle. I immediately sought out the merchant who had offered to purchase the stone, found him, and he inserted a false, but very brilliant stone in place of the genuine one, paying me at the same time the stipulated price of a thousand florins in gold. This sum I placed in the bank, and did not reserve a single franc of it for my own use."

"It was very wrong, and, indeed, criminal, Adolphus," said his mother, "in you to do this without your uncle's knowledge, more particularly when you were aware of the answer he gave to the merchant when the proposal to purchase it was made to himself. Beyond all doubt, it was a theft, even though you must, some time or other, inherit your uncle's property. But how came the ring into the hands of the ranger's daughter? Did you take it out of the casket at the same time that you took the cross?"

“No, mother,” said Adolphus, “that did not happen till after. During my last residence at Hainburg, I saw the ranger’s daughter, only for a moment, and that just a few days before my departure. I met her in the house of the headforester, where she was leaving a partridge which her father had shot, and was struck with her beauty and rustic simplicity, and the intelligence displayed in her conversation. I regretted that I could not speak longer with her, as she was hurrying home; but I compared her mind with many of the noble ladies of my acquaintance, and I could not but allow that the contrast was greatly in her favour. It was then that I saw fully the difference between unstudied nature and artificial accomplishments. Next day, as I was shooting with her father, I took occasion to say a few words in her favour, and congratulated him on the possession of such a daughter. But my commendations were not well received. ‘I am always afraid,’ said he to me, very bitterly, ‘of young noblemen who cast their eyes on maidens of humble rank. No such person shall ever enter my door, nor will I ever permit my daughter, during the shooting season, to set her foot within the castle. Would

that I could shoot down, without mercy, those birds of prey which pursue innocent doves to their destruction !'

"As he spoke, the old man cast a fierce and menacing look at me, but still I found ways to see and speak with his daughter. The next day he went to the city with some deer, and I ventured to go to the hunting lodge, pretending, however, that I did not know of his absence. I told Matilda that, as her father had not asked *me* to hunt that day, I had resolved to ask *him*. She appeared greatly abashed, and I at once perceived that her father had instilled into her mind great distrust, nay, even fear and horror of men of rank. By degrees, however, we got into conversation. I told her I was the son of a respectable merchant, and that I wished to marry her, but cautioned her not to speak of it to her father yet, as I still had some arrangements to make beforehand. She broke off the conversation, and begged me to leave the house before her father should return. I complied with her entreaty; but I repeated my desire to lead her to the altar as my affianced bride."

"What! you! a young Baron," said

Adolphus' mother, proudly and angrily, "to marry a woodcutter's daughter? This is even a more heinous crime than the stealing of the ruby! But tell me how the ring came into your possession, and then into this girl's?"

"It was some time later," replied her son. "I had not the ring then, and did not even know that it was in the casket. But let me go on. The very next day news came that the war had been resumed. I was ordered to join my regiment, and had scarcely time to conceal the casket with the aid of her father. In the course of the campaign, however, our regiment was ordered to escort a train of ammunition waggons to a distant fortress. Our route lay near Hainburg. I saw the castle in the distance, but as my uncle was not there, I had no wish to visit it. On the other hand, I had a strong desire to see Matilda once more; and I was also anxious to replace my uncle's cross, fearing that, if it were missed, old Hubert might be brought into suspicion and disgrace. I requested permission from the commanding officer for a few hours' leave to visit a particular friend in the imme-

diate neighbourhood. He granted it, and fixed an hour for my return. I found the casket all safe and untouched in its hiding-place ; and as I was moving the trinkets about with my hand, in order to make room for the case containing the cross, I observed the ring. I took it out as a mere trifle to give Matilda as an engagement ring. I failed, however, to see her on this occasion, and had to join my party. We returned by the same route, and I again got leave for a few hours. This time I saw Matilda, but found her in the deepest affliction. Her father had died a few days before. She informed me that he had just returned from a visit to my uncle when he was taken ill. She was now an orphan, destitute, and nearly in despair, and full of alarm at the idea of living alone in the time of war in such a remote and unprotected place as the hunting lodge was. She had no relatives, and the war made it almost impossible for her to seek advice or protection from my uncle, who had always been so good a master to her father. I consoled her as well as I could, and gave her hopes of obtaining a safe lodging in some respectable and pious family. I again promised to marry her, and

gave her the ring. It had the initials A.V.W., and I was delighted that these corresponded with my own name; but having previously told her that I was a merchant's son, I added to this falsehood another, and told her that my name, pointing at the same time to the letters on the ring, was Adolphus Victor Weller. I expressed my regret that I was compelled to leave her at present, as I had been called into service by the conscription, but I assured her that in a few days a worthy and respectable old man would come and convey her to a safe and comfortable home."

Adolphus' mother was very much displeased at the cupidity and baseness of her son's conduct. However, she only said,—

"Young Count Arthur von Waldon gave that ring, on his betrothal, to your cousin Emily, who is now dead." She did not further interrupt the story, as she was anxious to hear the end of it. Adolphus continued,—

"In the forest, not far from the road which our party had taken, lived an old hermit named Dagobert, a most singular man, nearly eighty years of age. He had been a soldier in his time, and by his courage and resolution, had

risen to be a sergeant ; but his wounds having disabled him for service, he secured a pension, and took up his residence in a solitary hermitage in the mountains which happened to be unoccupied. He was universally regarded as very pious and extremely prudent. It was to this man I resolved to confide my secret, and solicit advice as to what should be done with Matilda. When he heard it, he shook his head reproachfully, his brow contracted, and he said at last,—‘ We cannot alter what is past—that must now stand as it is. The question is, what is to be done now ? Our first care must be for the friendless, orphan girl. Luckily the present is a very favourable moment, I think, for getting her to a place of safety and comfort. The widow of Colonel von Lilienthal lives a few miles from here. She is a most charitable lady, and a true friend to the poor. She takes a special interest in the widows and orphans of officers who have fallen in battle. The moment I heard of her arrival—she only returned from town last week—I went to her ; and she told me she wished to take into her house, not so much as a servant, but rather as a companion, the orphan daughter of some officer. Knowing

that I had been acquainted with many officers while in the service, she said, that if I could procure her such a person who would be willing to perform the required duties, she would feel greatly obliged. It will be necessary, however, to say that Matilda is the orphan daughter of an officer. Now, I am sure that Matilda's father was once an officer of militia; and, for aught that I know, he *may* have been a captain; at all events, we must make him a captain; and to prevent people from remembering the old forest ranger too easily we must add a syllable to her name, Hall—and call her Hallmuth. But leave it to me,' said the hermit, 'and all shall be well.'

"I begged him not to mention my name in connection with the matter, but to write and let me know the result; and then I had to leave him.

"After some time, Dagobert informed me that Matilda objected very much to change her name, and to pass herself off as a lady; but that, at last, on his representing that in her sad and friendless condition there was no other resource, she had reluctantly consented. He had arranged with Madam von Lilienthal, and

Matilda had been received into her house with the greatest kindness and cordiality.

“All the rest of Matilda’s history—the dreadful suspicion which led to her imprisonment, and whatever may still befall her—all this, dearest mother, although you already know, I have only learned to-night. If the apprehensions expressed by the seneschal at supper should prove well founded, it would be frightful. We must prevent such a terrible calamity, and Matilda must be saved!”

“It is indeed a sad history, Adolphus,” said his mother, “and it is difficult to know what to do without thinking. However, one thing must be done; we must save her life, and endeavour to preserve your honour as far as possible. But hush! the seneschal and his son are going home, and your father is coming up stairs. Let me speak to him first. I shall do my best to lay the whole matter before him in the least painful way.”

His father came into the room, and asked Adolphus how he felt now.

“Alas!” said his mother, in reply, “poor Adolphus, whose return made us all so happy, is himself in the very extreme of misery.”

She then at once commenced the history, and introduced, with all a mother's tenderness, every circumstance she could think of, in extenuation of her unfortunate son's conduct. She concluded by saying,—“The sale of the ruby cannot but be considered a theft, even although Adolphus knew that he was to be sole heir to his uncle's property. The same remark applies to the fatal ring; but I am sure that the whole country will look upon the matter as merely the result of youthful indiscretion, and will excuse it accordingly. However, steps must be immediately taken to clear the character of Matilda and procure her release.”

“The world,” said Count von Wildberg, who had silently listened until now, with a very serious countenance, “will not look upon the affair so lightly. It will cause a great sensation at court and in the country, when it becomes known that the poor girl who is in prison for the robbery is entirely innocent, and that the young Baron von Wildberg stole not only the ring, but also the valuable ruby about which so much has been heard. What do you intend to do, Adolphus?”

“What *can* I do?” replied Adolphus; “I

feel unutterable remorse for my folly in acting so imprudently, and I cannot imagine how I could be guilty of such mad and dangerous conduct. But it is more fearful to think that I have been the means of bringing this poor girl into such unmerited disgrace. I have no choice but this,—either at the sacrifice of my honour (at least in the eyes of some men) to confess my guilt, or to leave Matilda to her fate. I have resolved to present myself before the court, to proclaim her innocence, and take all the ignominy upon myself!”

“That is a noble resolution,” said his father, “and atones, in my eyes, for all your past transgressions, grievous as they are. If we have done wrong, no effort should be regarded as too great to repair the error as far as possible. However, we cannot yet decide upon anything till we shall have heard what your uncle the Marshal will say to your story. He will doubtless be greatly incensed against you. For the present it will be sufficient to write provisionally to the city court.”

He rang the bell, and ordered his servant to go for the seneschal. He returned immediately, wondering what was the cause of this

late and—as he had just returned from the same house—unexpected summons.

“I am sorry to have had to trouble you at so late an hour, my friend,” said the Count, “but I have just received the clearest evidence of the innocence of Matilda Hall. The person who, under an assumed name, gave her the ring, has freely and voluntarily confessed himself as the perpetrator of the crimes for which she is imprisoned.”

“Innocent!” exclaimed the seneschal, “I never would have thought it. Yet God be praised that it has been discovered in time, and that the court will be freed from the guilt of an unjust sentence. But the fellow who gave her a stolen ring under an assumed name must be a thorough villain! I wish he may come before me! I will teach him how to steal!”

“Hush, hush,” said Adolphus’ father, who notwithstanding his seriousness, could hardly repress a smile at the earnestness of the seneschal; “he may hear you!”

“Yes!” cried the functionary, “I wish he could hear me! I would tell him to his face that he was a liar and a thief!”

“Well, well,—enough of this,” said the

Count. "I wish you to write, without delay, to the city magistrates, that facts have been discovered which place it beyond all doubt that Matilda Hall is free from any participation in the theft, and is perfectly innocent; that a more detailed statement, which it is not possible to furnish immediately, shall soon be forwarded; and that the court, as the case is urgent, must meanwhile rest satisfied with this provisional information, and stop all proceedings against the innocent prisoner. Say also that the Count von Wildberg will hold himself personally responsible for all expenses, and pledge himself to prove all set forth in your dispatch. Send off this message by express to the proper court this very night, drawn up in due form, and with your seal and signature."

The seneschal promised to comply, made his bow, and retired. Adolphus breathed more freely, though he still feared that the information would not arrive in time.

"I hope that all will yet be right," said his mother, greatly relieved also; "but as for the idea of Adolphus' marrying the girl, that is quite out of the question."

"The Marshal will be opposed to it, I dare

say," said her husband; "I am sure he will be extremely displeased at the entire conduct of Adolphus; and we shall have some unpleasant work with our hot-tempered and hasty old relative, whose military order of distinction our son has dishonoured."





CHAPTER IV.

THE CAPTIVITY.

 ATILDA HALL had now been confined several months in a little room in the highest part of the courthouse. At first she had found it very painful to exchange her tapestried chamber for four bare walls. An old-fashioned oak table, an equally old leather-bottomed chair, a clumsy press bed, and a dingy stove, constituted the entire furniture. The little round window was closely barred up with iron rails, and her only prospect of the distant landscape lay over the roofs of the city houses. The uninterrupted solitude made her feel more acutely her separation from all affectionate intercourse with her kind foster-mother and friends, and her isolation from all human society. From day to day she never saw a person. The old maid-servant of the

keeper of the court-house, who spoke so little that Matilda thought she was actually dumb, brought her every day her scanty dinner and supper, and a pitcher of water, but she never came into the room. The door was kept barred, and the provisions were handed in through a little opening in the wall, which was again immediately closed. It was a still greater privation to Matilda that she had neither books to read nor work to do; and for the first few days of her confinement she wept bitterly and prayed without ceasing. After a time, however, she became more reconciled and better accustomed to this quiet, solitary life, and discovered that it was not without its blessings for her. By-and-by she found courage to ask the maid-servant to bring her a book to read; and the old woman brought up her whole library. Not a very extensive one, certainly, as it only consisted of two volumes. An old prayer-book, and a volume of "The Epistles and Gospels for all the Sundays of the Year;" but still, amply sufficient for her requirements. In the prayer-book the poor prisoner found many psalms with which she had long been familiar; but now, in her afflic-

tion and deep depression, she felt as if she were reading them for the first time.

"It is only now that I rightly understand them," said she to herself, after she had had time to think over what she had read; "it is only now that they seem to go straight to my mind. No one who has not passed through trials and sorrows, can truly understand and sympathize with the agonies of a suffering but patient heart. Experience in these things teaches us to pray, and to understand the Holy Scriptures."

The words of instruction, also, which David addresses to the suffering and afflicted, went direct to her heart. How often did she repeat the words, "The Lord is nigh unto them who are of a contrite heart, and they that are of an afflicted spirit doth He help! Commend thy ways to the Lord, and trust in Him, and He will assist thee. He will bring forth thy innocence as the morning light, and make thy righteousness clear as the bright noontide. God is our refuge and our strength, our deliverer from all the sorrows which befall us; therefore will we not fear, even though the earth tremble, and the mountains sink down into the depths of the sea!"

Many a word of the Lord's was, to Matilda, in her unhappy condition, a pearl of inestimable price. With deep emotion she read, "Come unto Me, all ye who are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!" "O Lord!" she cried, "I am weary and heavy laden. Take me to Thee, and refresh me!"

One day the wife of the keeper of the court-house came to the opening in the wall of Matilda's chamber, and said to her, "Mary, my servant, tells me you are fond of reading. Here is a little book which I think will do you good. It is called 'The Imitation of Christ,' and is really a golden book."

Matilda thanked her for her kindness, and gladly took the book. She derived much consolation from it: many of its chapters accorded with her state of heart as perfectly as though they had been written expressly for her. The reading of it could not satisfy her: many a time the tears rushed to her eyes, and she looked up to heaven with thankfulness.

In accordance with another request, she was also supplied with work. Her warders gave her yarn and knitting needles, afterwards a spinning-wheel; and at last, on her stating that she

could do it, fine needle-work. They were not more surprised at the quantity of the work she performed than at its quality. At all times an expert and finished sewer, she surprised even herself by the able and dexterous manner in which she executed the tasks which were allotted to her.

Her little room, also, began to look more cheerful in her eyes than it did at first.

"The walls, it is true," she said, "are naked and bare; but they are clean. The prospect from my window is very fine; and what need have I for a looking-glass? My poor mother used to caution me against looking too often in the glass. 'It only makes girls vain,' she used to say."

The poor girl soon began to experience great comfort, and even happiness, in her sleep. Her heart was pure and innocent; her thoughts during the day were ever engaged in holy and pious subjects; her dreams were always pleasant; and she took pleasure in narrating the effects of these dreams upon her mind to the friends with whom she came in contact in after life.

One evening, however, she retired to rest

with her mind very much oppressed. She knew that she was to be re-examined on the following day, and those repeated examinations were always painful to her. The whole object of the artful and ingenious questions generally put to her was to endeavour to make her prove the utter wickedness of her father, Dagobert, Adolphus, and herself.

“Oh, merciful Father!” she sobbingly cried, over and over again, “how will this all end? What will be my fate, and how will this melancholy and perplexing affair terminate?”

She fell asleep full of anxious thoughts; but upon this occasion also she was soothed by a delightful dream. When she lived at her father's cottage in the forest, she was always waked in the morning by the singing of birds; and in order that this enjoyment might, at least to the extent of a single songster, be continued to her, Madam von Lilienthal permitted her to keep a lark in her bedroom. She dreamt that she was still sleeping in her comfortable and cheerful apartment at home; and lo! she fancied that her lark began to sing, as if with a human voice,—

“Cheer thee, cheer thee, hapless one !
Trust thy cause to God alone ;
Heaven-sent sorrows always tend,
To the wisest, happiest end !”

Matilda awoke. The bright morning sun was already beaming in at her little close-railed window. The song, which was ringing in her ears, had been familiar to her from her childhood, and she had sang it a hundred times ; but it gave her, on this occasion, more comfort and pleasure than ever she had experienced from it before. She went to the examination perfectly free from anxiety ; and the presiding magistrate expressed himself highly satisfied with her excellent and intelligent answers to his questions.

At length, “after many days,” the city authorities received the official document declaring the innocence of the unfortunate Matilda, and announcing that the person who had given her the stolen ring was discovered.

The judge who had so often examined her, proceeded with all haste to her room with the joyful intelligence. He told her, however, that although she had nothing to fear, she must in the meantime remain in custody, until the real

prisoner should be in their hands ; but that she should no longer be kept so closely. When the real culprit gave himself up, it would be necessary to examine him in her presence.

The poor girl was partly overjoyed, and partly deeply depressed, at the news.

“ Ah ! ” she thought, “ it is not possible that Adolphus can be a villain and a robber ! How kindly and gently he endeavoured to console me when I last saw him after my father’s death ; with what fervent piety he spoke of the delight of meeting again beyond the grave ! He cannot be a scoundrel and a thief ! ”

With mixed anxiety and emotion she lay down to rest, and once more she had a consoling dream. She dreamt that she saw distinctly upon her finger once more the ring which had caused all her troubles, and which had been taken from her when she was arrested. It was the same emerald, encircled with little diamonds. She thought that her good angel whispered in her ear, “ These little diamonds, like dew-drops, signify the many tears thou hast shed ; but the emerald, gleaming with hope’s own colour, proclaims to thee that thy sorrows shall bring thee joy. There is an in-

scription on the ring—look at it. It says that thy betrothed husband, though the cause of all thy sorrows, shall be purified as by fire, and will yet be an honourable man: the inscription contains a prophecy for thee and for him.”

And Matilda read, on the inner surface of the ring, in letters so minute, yet so distinct that no artist could hope to rival it, the lines—

HEAVEN'S WILL ADORE !
THY GRIEF IS O'ER
FOR EVERMORE !

She awoke, very much relieved by her pleasant dream; and though still a prisoner, yet she was full of hope.

“O merciful God!” she prayed, “Thou hast sent this dream to me, and I now hope that these sorrows of mine will be brought to a happy end; and that they will all be turned into joy at last!”



CHAPTER V.

VICTORY.

EANWHILE Adolphus von Wildberg, accompanied by his anxious parents, betook himself with a throbbing heart to his uncle the Marshal, who had again returned to reside at his Castle of Hainburg. The old man was very glad to see his nephew happily restored to his family; and now, not only a captain of horse, but also decorated with an order of great military distinction. He embraced him affectionately and congratulated him warmly upon his rapid rise in his profession.

“All this is very gratifying, my dear brother,” said his father and mother, “but there is a painful story yet to come.”

They then told him the whole story of the ruby and the ring. They were all afraid that the veteran would break out into a violent

passion on hearing the story; but were astonished and delighted to find that the manner in which he received the intelligence was quite the reverse.

“Well, well,” said the generous old man, “supposing that the ruby has been taken from the setting, what matters it? If I ever had any merit to entitle me to this distinction, at all events, the *merit* cannot be taken away from me! Thank God, however, that no suspicion of dishonesty lies at the door of the faithful Hubert. He was a man upon whom I relied more than on any man in this world; and I am heartily glad that his character has been purified to the end. Thank God, also, that Matilda, my dear wife’s godchild and namesake, is proved innocent in this matter. When we used to come here formerly in the spring and summer for a few weeks, she was always my dear daughter’s favourite playmate, and appeared to be a good, pious, innocent girl. I loved her as my own child; and in comparison with her innocence, the most precious jewel in the world is as nothing. As regards you, nephew, I cannot but view your conduct as highly criminal and reprehensible. You

deserve to be punished and disinherited. You have wandered far from the upright and honest course. You have caused the poor girl much suffering and many tears ; and were on the point of involving her in the most extreme misery, nay, even of imperilling her life itself. You see here, young man, the unhappy fruits which ever spring from falsehood. The most trivial lie is an evil seed, which may grow up into a poisonous weed, spread itself far and wide, and cause the misery and ruin of many. But I am glad to see that you are sensible of your faults, so let them pass. As regards the ruby, I do not place much value on such things, now that I have grown old, and am drawing near the grave. I cannot take my order with me to heaven, where I hope to go ; nor would it have been of much use to you for you could not have worn it ; it would have lain idle in the casket, except, perhaps, when it would be exhibited to a friend. It is true that I myself would not have parted with it for all treasures of earth ; but now that it has been done without my co-operation, I am indifferent. The price of it may be of use at this moment, as the war

has nearly impoverished you. I can only ratify what Adolphus has done, and I cheerfully do so. But, as regards the ring which he *stole* to give to Matilda, he must, if he hope to retain my inheritance, keep the faith and the promise which he plighted with it. The ring must be her bridal ring, and Adolphus must make Matilda his wife !”

Adolphus was delighted at his sentence ; and his parents, although not entirely satisfied with the arrangement, did not offer any objections : indeed, they were so pleased with the lenient view which the Marshal had taken of the conduct of Adolphus, and of the mildness of the strictures which he had passed upon him, that they would willingly have agreed to anything.

The Marshal immediately ordered a despatch to be prepared for the court, solemnly declaring Matilda's innocence of the theft, and revoking the entire charge, as having been grounded on false suspicion.

“I need not say,” my dear nephew, “what you are to do with this paper. Set off at once by the most expeditious means possible. You may communicate verbally to my friend, the President of the court, whatever is necessary to

add to my written explanation. It has nothing to do with the record, nor with the public proceedings of the court; for the whole case of the ring, as well as of the ruby, now reverts to my jurisdiction."

Meanwhile Matilda still remained in prison.

One day she was sitting at her spinning wheel, full of joyful expectation, yet not entirely free from anxiety and fear, when the door of her room suddenly opened, and an officer in a splendid uniform walked in. Matilda was greatly astonished, but in a moment, full of wonder and amazement, she cried out, "Adolphus!" It was he!

"Dearest Matilda!" he exclaimed, "forgive me! Not without my fault, but certainly directly contrary to my intention, I have placed you in serious jeopardy. But, behold this ring, the innocent cause of all your troubles, is still your bridal ring." He placed it upon her finger, and embraced her. His parents, who had followed him, stood by, though Matilda was not aware of their presence. "This is my father, Baron von Wildberg," said Adolphus; "this is my dear mother, and you are henceforth her daughter."

Nearly overcome with joy and astonishment, Matilda for some moments could not utter a word. At last she said, as she clasped her hands to her head,—

“O God, how good Thou art! Thou hast brought my innocence to light: Thou deliverest all who trust in Thee!”

The Baron and Baroness embraced her affectionately, and at this instant the venerable President of the court walked into the room.

“We owe you, my dear young lady,” said he, in a voice full of joy and emotion, “the justice of a public reparation. As appearances were very much against you, you have had a great deal to suffer. But I must do you the justice to say that you have borne your unmerited sufferings with great fortitude and Christian resignation. God, who, I am persuaded, has permitted these trials to fall upon you solely for your greater honour, will requite you richly; He sends joy after sorrow. Come with me, for I feel it to be my duty to conduct you personally out of this prison; your bridegroom must allow me to offer you my arm.”

The President led her into the public hall of the court-house in which all the Privy Coun-

cillors and a number of ladies and gentlemen were assembled. One of the councillors read in a loud voice the report of the Marshal, and the decision of the court thereupon. Every one present congratulated Matilda. As she walked out of court, leaning on the arm of the President, she saw a great crowd assembled. The whole street was full of people; for, as she was almost universally reputed as the daughter of Madam von Lilienthal, her imprisonment had created the greatest public interest and regret. Many had thought that she would be executed, and the news of innocence spread in a very short time through the whole city. Every one wished to see her. The porch of the court-house was a few steps higher than the street; she could thence see at a glance the immense multitude, and she herself could be seen by every person in the crowd. All eyes were fixed upon her, and many a cheek was wet with tears of pity for the poor girl, who, a living picture of suffering innocence and shrinking modesty, bore on her wasted features the traces of her long and sorrowful confinement. The President addressed a few words to the assembly, publicly attesting her innocence, and

briefly but forcibly eulogising her virtues, while the poor girl cast her eyes to the ground, and tears flowed plenteously down her pale cheeks.

Two magnificent open carriages drove up. In the first, Matilda and Adolphus took their places, the President seating himself opposite them in honour. In the second were the Baron and the Baroness, and two of the senior members of the council. They drove to the residence of Madam von Lilienthal, where Matilda had lived before her imprisonment—the President having taken the precaution to apprise her of Matilda's innocence, and of the intended proceedings of the court. That lady, therefore, stood ready at the door to receive Matilda, and, raising her in her arms out of the carriage, clasped her to her heart with tears of joy. She then cordially saluted Adolphus, and his parents, with whom she had been long acquainted, and invited them to stop a few days with her, and the friendly invitation was accepted on the condition that she should accompany them to Wilberg to honour the wedding feast with her presence, which she joyfully consented to do.

When she had accompanied her guests to

the apartments which had been prepared for them, she brought Matilda into the room which she had formerly occupied. The moment Matilda was alone with her beloved foster-mother, she threw herself on her knees before her.

"Dearest mother," she cried, with tears in her eyes, "forgive me for yielding to the representations of the old man whom I so much venerated, and of entering your family under a false name. Bitterly have I grieved you thereby, and heavy afflictions have I brought upon myself."

The lady raised her up and embraced her. "All is forgiven and forgotten now," she said. "I have even forgiven Dagobert for the deceit he practised upon me, though I found it somewhat difficult. He had many excellent and sterling qualities, and he was a universal lover of mankind. But from benevolence he seems to have adopted the principle, that when the object is to do a service to or assist another, it is lawful, or, at least, allowable, to use falsehood. But I do not think so, and we should never do evil that good may follow it. However, what the old man did is now irrevocably

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passed. God permitted it so. He wished by this, as we frequently read even in sacred history, to prepare you for the loftier sphere for which He destined you. Remember, therefore, as in your humiliation and misfortune you have been a model of patience, so now you should be, in your exaltation and success, a model of modesty and benevolence to the suffering and the oppressed."

When Adolphus, his bride, his father and mother, and Madam von Lilienthal arrived at Wildberg, they found a letter from the Marshal earnestly urging them to celebrate the marriage at Hainburg, as his illness and age would prevent his joining their party at Wildberg, so in order to gratify the wishes of the gallant old man, it was decided that the wedding should take place at his castle, and three days previous to the ceremony, they all repaired thither.

On the evening of the wedding, the Marshal told his valet he would wear his full-dress uniform, probably for the last time.

"But I am greatly embarrassed," said he, "about my order-cross. I do not well know what to do; if I do not put it on, the guests will miss it; and if I do, they will detect the

false stone at once. It was a bad thing for Adolphus to sell the real stone; I have never been able to look at the cross since. Instead of reminding me of my deeds of arms, it only calls to my mind the dishonourable conduct of my nephew, which I would gladly forget. Instead of proclaiming my honour, it only publishes the shame of Adolphus."

The valet produced the cross, nevertheless.

"Put it on, even as it is, sir," said he, smiling. "Look closely at it; it does not appear so spurious-looking after all."

"What!" cried the Marshal, in amazement, "is it possible? This is the real stone—my splendid ruby back again! Give it me; I can scarcely trust my eyes." He took the cross sharply out of his servant's hands, brought it to the window, and exclaimed with enthusiasm, "Yes! it is actually the same. It has the same fiery sparkle as of old. Tell me, Adelbert, how this has come about?"

"When Captain Adolphus," said Adelbert, the valet, "was in the city with his parents last time, for the purpose of bringing Miss Matilda home, he accidentally met with the very same jeweller to whom he had sold the

ruby, and who happened to have arrived there on his usual business tour. The captain expressed his regret at having parted with the stone, and narrated to him the awkward circumstances which had arisen from his indiscretion. 'For that part of it,' said the merchant, 'you may have the stone back again, if you wish it. The Russian prince, to whom I sold the ruby, has returned it to me. His wife, who is very capricious, cared only for the stone until she obtained possession of it, and then soon grew tired of it. Last month, when I was in St Petersburg, I showed her my jewels. She begged her husband to purchase for her a pair of elegant diamond bracelets, to which she took a great fancy, and to give the ruby, which she had got set in a brooch, and a sum of money in exchange for them. And now,' continued the jeweller, 'if you really wish to get the stone again, you may have it, gold setting and all, for the same money which I gave you for it.' Adolphus went at once to the bank and drew out the money, the merchant brought the stone and received it in exchange. When the captain arrived the other day at the castle, he requested me to get the jeweller, who

established himself at Hainburg lately, privately to substitute the genuine ruby for the false one in the star of your order; and he, being a very skilful workman, did it in a clever manner, and in my presence."

The old Marshal listened to Adelbert's statement with sincere delight; his countenance was lighted up with joy.

"That was very good of Adolphus," said he over and over again; "very good, indeed. I am delighted with my star. The exchange was very well done. It was most noble in him to give up, freely and voluntarily, this large sum of money, of which I had made him a present, for the mere purpose of affording his old uncle an agreeable surprise, and of remedying the wrong which he had done me. Would that every one thus repaired the wrongs they do! But Adolphus is really an admirable young man; from his very childhood he has been affectionately attached to me, and I have always loved him. How gratified I was when he distinguished himself so much in the field, and rose so rapidly in his regiment. I must confess, however, that the trick he practised on me in exchanging the stone rather damped my joy a

little; and, satisfied as I felt with him in regard to everything else, still there was always something in my breast towards him for it. But this unpleasant feeling is now gone, and he has my whole heart once more. With the false stone has disappeared all memory of the young man's errors; the real ruby only reminds me of this noble act of his."

Scarcely had the Marshal concluded these remarks when Adolphus, with his bride and his parents, came in to wish him good morning. He started up from his arm-chair, ran to Adolphus, and pressed him to his heart.

"You have got a noble-minded man in your husband," said he to Matilda; and then, pointing to his order, he asked the Baron and his sister what they thought of the stone.

"Why," said the Baron, "do you imagine this stone to be a false one? I'll stake my life that it is genuine."

"Never in my life," said the Baroness, "did I see a finer ruby. Such a deep, sparkling, beautiful colour! Surely, brother, you have been deceived in thinking this stone a false one?"

"I have not been deceived," replied the

Marshal. "Adolphus wished to deceive me. I never took this stone to be false. He substituted a false one for it, but he has now repaired his fault. He has removed the counterfeit stone, and restored the true one to its old position. And thus we ought always to do, when we feel that we have acted dishonestly. Far from us be all falsehood, dishonesty, deceit, hypocrisy, or affectation of piety! Let our hearts be filled with true, old, sterling honesty, unaffected and universal benevolence, true virtue, genuine piety, and sincere fear of God. These are 'MORE PRECIOUS THAN RUBIES,'—the most PRECIOUS OF ALL JEWELS, and their value is beyond all question in this world and in the next. They are more fire-proof than diamonds, for the diamond shall melt away when this earth shall perish in the end,—infinitely more precious than this cherished stone of mine, and than all the JEWELS IN THE WORLD!"



THE FISHERMAN'S SON.

CHAPTER I.

THE LOST CHILD.

HEODORA MULLER, the widow of a poor fisherman, resided in a little isolated cottage on the banks of the Danube. She had lost her husband, who was in the prime of life, but a short time before; and her only consolation in her premature widowhood was her son Augustus, a fair and handsome boy, about five years of age. Her only care was to bring him up in the strictest principles of probity and virtue, and her sole anxiety was that she might be able to preserve for him the cottage and fishing implements of his father, until he grew to man's estate.

After the death of her husband, Theodora did not endeavour to carry on the occupation

of fishing; and the nets which hung upon the walls, as well as the boat overturned near the cottage door, were to her objects of continual grief and sorrow. She earned a little money by making nets, at which she was very skilful; and often, while Augustus was fast asleep in bed, the morning surprised her, still working with ardour.

The boy, in his turn, had only one wish and one desire, and that was to please and comfort his mother; for, although only yet of tender years, he possessed fine feelings and great sense, and continually reminded Theodora of his poor dead father, particularly when he attempted to console her after his manner.

One day the brother of the widow, who was a fisherman in a neighbouring village, brought her a fine fish. Theodora wept as she looked at it. "Alas!" she said to her brother, "I rarely see such fish, now that my dear husband is dead and gone."

Augustus then said to her,—“Do not weep, mother. When I become a man I will bring you plenty.”

The sorrowful woman smiled, and said,—“Yes, my son, I hope you will some day be

my comfort and support; be as good and brave a man as your father was, and I shall be the happiest of mothers."

Upon another day—it was at the most beautiful period of the autumnal season—Theodora had been working ever since morning upon a net which she wished to finish that day; Augustus, on his part, was gathering wood in the forest. He was delighted every time he was able to bring to his mother his little basket filled with branches; and Theodora congratulated herself that he was, at so early an age, becoming useful, and accustoming himself to a life of industry and labour.

Noon was approaching, and the little fellow was fatigued and hungry. The clock in the steeple of the neighbouring village struck twelve, and Theodora called him to eat his dinner under the lofty beech-tree that grew not far from her cottage, in a lovely and verdant part of the forest. Their humble repast consisted of a bowl full of milk, and some crumbled bread.

When there was nothing left in the porringer, his mother said to Augustus, "Now, my son, lie down and sleep for a little in the shade of

that tree. For my part, I will go to my work, and when it is time I will come and wake you."

Some time afterwards she went to look at Augustus, who was still asleep under the tree. His little head, with flaxen curly hair, rested upon one of his arms. He smiled in his sleep; and the trembling foliage of the beech-tree shaded his rosy cheeks and face. Theodora hastened back to her net, and worked at it industriously until it was entirely finished.

The hours flew on as though they were so many minutes, and perceiving that it was late, she went to rouse little Augustus, but did not find him under the tree. "The poor boy has already gone back to his work with his basket," she exclaimed, with joy. Alas! she was far from suspecting the frightful misfortune that awaited her.

She returned to the cottage, and then went out to stretch her net upon the grass. After some time, as Augustus did not return, she began to feel uneasy, and she set out to search the forest, which was about a league in length, and half a league in width.

"Augustus! Augustus!" but echo alone

answered her cries. Her uneasiness then increased, and she became seriously alarmed.

"Can he have fallen into the water?" she said to herself. This thought made her tremble. She searched along the banks of the stream, but could find no trace of her son.

Weeping bitterly, she then ran to the village, and a crowd of inhabitants soon gathered around her. They all participated in her affliction; and her brother was as much distressed as herself. No one, however, had seen the child; but they all at once proceeded to assist in searching for him. Some spread themselves through the wood, others in the neighbourhood, some upon the banks of the river. Night came on, but no one had obtained any satisfactory information.

"If he is drowned in the Danube," said a fisherman of the village, "we shall recover his body, for we know the course of the stream. The body will certainly be thrown up on to the beach below there, at that spot of turf where the old willow grows."

Poor Theodora listened to all their remarks, and went back to her cottage with a broken heart. She passed the night in watching and

weeping; and, at day-break, she hastened to the river, expecting to find there, alas! the body of her beloved son. Days and weeks, however, passed away. Evening and morning she went, sorrowful and weeping, to the banks of the river, and always in vain. The fishermen, when they went to their work in the morning, and when they came back in the evening, always found her at the same spot, sitting at the river side weeping, and with her hands raised to heaven. She was heart-broken.

It was thus that years passed away. The body was not recovered—no trace of the child was discovered; and the afflicted mother could learn nothing respecting the fate of her poor son. It would be impossible to describe her grief and her sorrow.

“To lose my beloved husband and my dear son in so short a time,” she exclaimed, “is very hard to bear. I believe I shall die under it. But I have the consoling thought that Heaven does all things for the best.” She often reproached herself bitterly and severely, “I should have watched over him more attentively,” she would exclaim, weeping and wringing her hands.



CHAPTER II.

WHAT BECAME OF THE CHILD.

WHILE the sorrow-stricken mother and her neighbours were thus giving way to grief, and conjecturing all manner of things as to the disappearance of Augustus, let us follow him and unravel the mystery.

During the time that his mother was weeping at home, he, five years and a few months old, had arrived, after having travelled more than a hundred leagues, at the city of Vienna. He resided there, safe and whole, in a magnificent mansion. He was, moreover, dressed as well and as handsomely as if he had been born of a noble family; and, what was better still, he was brought up with the greatest care, and received, from the best masters, a solid and distinguished education. This wonderful

change in his position was brought about in the following manner.

When Augustus, whom we left sleeping under the beech-tree, awoke, he rubbed his eyes, and went into the wood in search of branches. He had soon filled his basket; and, thinking to take a near cut home, he lost his way, and came to the borders of the forest, on the bank of the river. He there found, moored to the bank, a vessel which had stopped, and which was waiting while the passengers landed. Among the passengers were some children who, while the grown-up persons were promenading backwards and forwards upon the fresh grass to relieve themselves of the fatigue of the voyage, settled themselves upon the greensward by the edge of the water, and began to play at marbles. They saw Augustus as he approached the boat, the sight of which, as he had never seen so large a one before, surprised him. They looked at him, and at what he had in his little basket. The pretty brown beech-nuts, of which he had some, and which they had never seen before, pleased them very much. "That is beautiful fruit," exclaimed one of the children,

who was rather younger than Augustus. "We never saw such chestnuts as these."

"They are not chestnuts," replied Augustus. "They are beech-nuts, and are not fit to eat." He then distributed them amongst the children. Augustus was delighted to find himself amongst so many joyful playfellows. It was a happiness that he had never had before; for he had seen very little of the children of the neighbouring village. He mixed among them with the freedom and ease of childhood, and they shared with him some fruit they had.

He then became curious to get a nearer sight of the vessel. He had seen fishing boats before, but this floating house, larger than his mother's cottage, seemed to him a very wonderful thing. The children took him on board; and the little girl who had taken notice of the beech-nuts, and who was named Antonia, led him into the beautifully-furnished saloon. "How!" exclaimed Augustus, thoroughly astonished, "there are handsomer rooms in this house than there are in ours."

Antonia and her companions showed him all their playthings, and Augustus was so absorbed

in the contemplation of these riches, that he never thought of going on shore; and during this time, and without the child being aware of it, the vessel was afloat again.

No one on board the vessel had paid any attention to the little boy; or at least those passengers who had been on board from the commencement of the voyage, thought he belonged to the new passengers who had just embarked; while these, on the contrary, thought that he was one of the children who had been there from the first. In the evening, however, Augustus began to cry, and to call for his mother; and it was then found that the vessel contained a strange child. One may imagine the astonishment and the confusion that his cries occasioned amongst the passengers. Some pitying him, lamented for the mother and the child. Others, on the contrary, laughed at the unexpected manner in which they had fallen in with a new travelling companion. But the sailors were furious, and were upon the point of stopping the vessel and putting him on shore where they were, and leaving him to find his road home the best way he could.

At length the captain of the vessel came and took Augustus aside. He spoke to him with a severe air, saying, "Tell me, boy, from what city or village you came."

"I am not from any city, or from any village," replied Augustus.

"That is strange," replied the captain. "You must have lived somewhere."

"Our house," said the child, "is in the wood, not far from the village."

"Very well," continued his questioner; "but what is the name of the village?"

"Ah!" replied Augustus, "the village is just called the village. My mother never calls it anything else. 'It is striking noon in the village,' she says; or, 'To-morrow I will go with you to the village to buy some bread.'"

"But what do they call your parents?" asked the captain, with vexation.

"My father is dead," replied Augustus; "and my mother is called Theodora."

"So her Christian name is Theodora," said the sailor; "but what is her surname?"

"She has no other name but Theodora," replied the child, for though his mother's surname was Muller, she was never called by it;

“and she often says one ought not to give names to other people, for then they would be nicknames.”

The captain saw that he must give up any hope of obtaining information from the innocent child, who did not even know his own surname. He became angry, and exclaimed, “I wish your ill-luck had brought you anywhere else but on board my vessel!”

Poor Augustus, whose eyes were filled with tears, replied, very sorrowfully, and without the least ill-will, “Ill-luck did not bring me here. I lost my way in the forest, and came into the ship merely to see it, and it sailed away without me being aware of it. My mother will be greatly distressed at my not coming home. Oh, I wish I was back to the cottage!”

All the passengers laughed at this answer, but the sailors found themselves in great difficulty; for unfortunately they were, at that time, upon a part of the Danube that traversed an uncultivated district, covered with wood, and uninhabited, and where they appeared to be very far from any village.

After a while, when the sun was nearly set-

ting, they saw a town in the distance, and the captain of the vessel wished to take the child there, that he might thence be sent back to his mother; but a gentleman on board, named Monsieur Wahl, the father of Antonia, objected to it. He was a rich merchant, and was carrying with him great sums of money and articles of value, and was, as well as many of the other passengers, flying for safety, Germany being at that time subjected to the disastrous influences of a severe war.

"I wish with all my heart," said Monsieur Wahl, "that his sorrowing mother had her poor son back again; but this is not a time when that can be done. The enemy are rapidly approaching the banks of the Danube. A delay of a few hours might be fatal to us. It might throw us into their power, and cause us to lose all that we possess. In the name of Heaven, captain, continue your journey, and I will see that this poor boy is properly taken care of, and that he be sent home safely again as soon as possible."

Monsieur Wahl, who, on account of the great wealth which he carried with him, was sub-

jected to great uneasiness, urgently insisted that the sailors should take advantage of the full moon, and sail all night; but they replied it was contrary to their custom. As the merchant, however, promised the captain and his crew a good sum of money, they at length consented, and continued their voyage.

When the sun rose, they had arrived at a little village. The captain requested the peasants to receive the child, and entreated them to seek information in the neighbourhood as to where his mother lived, and to take him back to her. He represented to them that it would be, on their part, a meritorious and charitable action; but the peasants replied, "Who knows to whom the little boy may belong? It may be impossible for us to find out to whom to return him, and then we shall be obliged to take care of him, and bring him up ourselves; and, as times now are, we have enough of our own miseries to bear, without charging ourselves with those of other people." The captain, therefore, had to keep Augustus on board, and continue on his voyage, Monsieur Wahl, in the meantime, agreeing to be responsible for all expenses incurred on the boy's account.

Soon afterwards, they perceived on the other side of the river a village not far from the bank, and which appeared to be large and rich. The captain wished to land there, and go to the mayor or the clergyman, and request one of them to take care of the child. He ordered the vessel to be stopped, and was about to go on shore, when Monsieur Wahl suddenly exclaimed, "Hark! Don't you hear the sound of canon? The enemy are near us. We must not lose an instant. Forward, captain! forward with the vessel, and leave the boy to me!"

Fearing that in the end, however, he should have the charge of the child thrown upon himself, the captain opposed Monsieur Wahl, and soon a serious quarrel would have broken out between them, if the wife of the latter, a good and gentle lady, had not interposed between them. She said to her husband in a low voice, and with all the benevolence and goodness of soul that she possessed, "Let us undertake to keep the pretty child ourselves altogether. We shall be doing a good action. The captain's mind will be set at rest, and he will be better able to look after the vessel, and hurry it forward, and bring us to our destination sooner."

Monsieur Wahl smiled at this conciliatory proposal, and immediately said to the captain in a loud voice, "Go on, then, I will take the child into my own hands, and will be responsible to his mother for him, and you push on with the vessel!" The captain was satisfied with the arrangement; and all who were on board praised highly the charitable resolution of Monsieur and Madame Wahl.

Without further hindrance the vessel arrived at Vienna. Monsieur Wahl immediately purchased a large and handsome house, and re-established himself in business. He also made every endeavour to find out the name of the mother of Augustus, or the name of the village in which she resided, but without avail. The poor boy could recollect neither; and as he was nearly a hundred leagues from home, there was no one who could give him any assistance. However, Monsieur Wahl, and his amiable wife, to their credit be it said, at once agreed to implement their promise to the captain of the vessel, and Augustus became a resident in their house.

He gave his only daughter, Antonia, a brilliant education, and accorded to Augus-

tus the favour of following her learning, and profiting by the lessons that she received. The little boy, however ignorant he might hitherto have been, showed so much intelligence, and made such rapid progress in his studies, that he excited the astonishment of his masters. Besides, he was so modest, so obliging, and so good, that Monsieur and Madame Wahl began to love him as if he were their own child. The principles that his mother had inculcated, and the fear of God with which she had filled his heart, had extended their roots deeply, and gained strength day by day.

Several years passed away, during which Monsieur Wahl saw with pleasure that Augustus showed great inclination and capacity for business. He procured him facilities for obtaining information in everything that relates to the business of a merchant; and after he thought that he had gained sufficient experience, he took him with him into his counting-house.

Augustus soon took part, with great success, in all the operations of the concern; and before he had attained his twentieth year, he found himself in a position to conduct, with

confidence and safety, the affairs of his adopted father. Monsieur Wahl extended his connections from day to day. He undertook to furnish extensive supplies to the army, and speedily acquired a considerable fortune. He saw how much he was indebted to the prudence, the industry, and the probity of his adopted son; and he felt that he ought to devise means to make him a worthy recompense. The little Antonia had grown up, and had become a virtuous, handsome, and graceful young lady. She was a perfect beauty. Augustus and her had become attached to each other at their very first meeting on board the vessel; their liking had turned to love, and their affection was completed by Monsieur Wahl sanctioning their marriage.

After the war, the Emperor, wishing to recompense the zeal and services of Monsieur Wahl and his son-in-law, granted them titles of nobility, and permitted them to take the title of Lord and Baron of Walheim. The adopted parents of Augustus did not long enjoy their happiness. They both died soon afterwards, but with the consolation of seeing their daughter thoroughly happy.

Augustus having arranged the affairs of his father-in-law, resolved to purchase, in Bavaria or in Swabia, one of those magnificent castles which the war had caused to be abandoned, and were then being offered for sale at a low price. Many were shown to him; and after having made a journey to inspect them, he bought the handsome lordship of Neurkirch, which, from its extent, and the beauty of the country, appeared, from its position and convenience, to merit the preference. He immediately had the necessary repairs made to make it habitable, and returned to bring his wife and children to their new abode.

When Antonia arrived with her husband in the new country, and when she saw the extensive ravages that had been caused by the war, she was filled with sorrow and commiseration. Great numbers of houses were in ruins, others were threatening to fall down, growing crops were completely destroyed, and extensive tracts of land were uncultivated and overgrown with weeds.

"Alas! poor people!" she exclaimed, with tears in her eyes, "we must come to their assistance."

Augustus rejoiced that his wife entertained the same feelings with himself, and he hastened to satisfy the most pressing wants of his neighbours round about. He gave them wood and other materials to build with, and advanced them money. He purchased seed and cattle and distributed them to those who were most in need of resources. Before long, this generous nobleman saw his castle surrounded by new and handsome cottages, and his rich fields well cultivated and in excellent condition.

The peasants could not find suitable words to give expression to their gratitude; and at length they proceeded in a body to the castle, to return thanks to Lord and Lady de Walheim. But Augustus said to them, "God has raised me from being the poor little boy that I was, to be a rich and powerful man, and He has blessed me in all my undertakings. I should be ungrateful to Him if I did not give others a share of these blessings. I rejoice that I am able to do something for your welfare; for there is not a greater pleasure in this world than that of being able to make one's fellow-creatures happy."



CHAPTER III.

THE RE-UNION.

WHILE Baron de Walheim was, as we have seen, becoming a rich and powerful lord, his poor mother, Theodora, had passed through many troubles, and had led a life of great hardship and anxiety, although she had always been sustained by her confidence in the goodness of God.

Soon after she had lost her little Augustus in the forest, the operations of war extended to that part of the Danube where she resided, and the country was invaded by soldiers and strangers. Theodora who now had not the slightest expectation of ever beholding her son again—having concluded that he had been either drowned or devoured by wild beasts—abandoned her cottage, and withdrew to the village, to live with her brother, and keep

house for him, as his wife was very ill. But she was not able to reside there long. At the close of a battle the village was reduced to ashes, and was abandoned by the greater part of the inhabitants. The house in which Theodora resided was not spared; and her brother, whom this disaster had ruined, was obliged to remove elsewhere, and take a situation as a journeyman fisherman.

As for herself, she went to live with her sister, who resided about fifteen leagues off, and who received her with the utmost affection. Theodora assisted her in bringing up her numerous family; and the two sisters lived together in the most perfect union, mutually solacing each other in the difficulties and privations which the war had brought upon them. Many years afterwards, they received a letter from their brother (who had returned to their native village), in which he told them that his wife was dead, and, as his two daughters had been married to foreigners during the war, he entreated Theodora to go back to him, to manage his household. As her sister's family had now grown up, there was not so much use for her now, and Theo-

dora was glad of the opportunity of being able to provide for herself, so she gladly accepted her brother's offer.

As soon as she arrived at her brother's house, she proceeded to the forest, that she might again see the beech-tree where she had last seen her poor boy asleep; but she found everything changed and overthrown. The road that led to her cottage was no longer discernible, so much was it covered with high grass and thick bushes. On the spot where formerly nothing but bushes grew, there were now large trees, with widely extended arms; and, on the contrary, large trees that Theodora had been formerly accustomed to see there, had completely disappeared. There had not remained for a long time the least trace of her poor wooden cabin, and she could not even find the place where it had formerly stood. All around was thickly grown with young trees.

The poor woman fatigued herself in searching for the beech-tree which formerly sheltered her cottage, and under which she had so often wept. She made her way through the thorns and thick underwood, and examined, for a

long time, the beech-trees she met with. "When shall I find *the* tree?" thought she.

"Do not give yourself so much trouble, good mother," said an old man, who was gathering dry sticks in the wood. "That tree has not been in existence for this long time. The same change that struck you on your return to the village, has taken place in the woods. The men that were children when we left it, have grown up and gone away. Those who were young are now old, and the old men are no more in this world. The young timber has replaced the old trees. Everything in this world passes rapidly away, men even more quickly than trees. With these words, the old man departed, and Theodora lost all hope of finding the tree or the remains of her cottage.

Lord de Walheim resided many leagues from this spot; but the forest, and also the village where Theodora lived, formed part of the vast domains that he had purchased. One day he proceeded to the forest, in order that he might distribute to the villagers their supply of wood for the winter. It was in a very disorderly state. None of the timber

had been felled for a long time, and there were a great many full-grown trees. Augustus, therefore, wished to superintend the distribution himself, so that it might be cut down properly and not wasted, as was often the case. He wished, also, to see for himself that every person received a just share. He had all the heads of families called together, and allotted their portions personally.

Theodora had come for her brother ; and it happened that, in the order of distribution, it had fallen to his lot to have the tree before which she found Lord de Walheim. She approached, and entreated his lordship to pardon her brother for not having come himself. He was ill, and was not able to leave his bed. The noble landlord little thought that the poor ill-clad woman, who was curtseying and apologizing before him, was his mother ; and she had not the slightest idea that the rich lord who stood before her, in the splendour of youth and beauty, clothed in a brown coat of fine cloth, and having his fingers covered with valuable rings, was the lost son for whom she had so often wept. He felt at once, without knowing her, great commiseration for the

woman, and immediately gave orders that the tree should be cut down for her.

The forest-keeper objected to it. "It is a great loss, your lordship, to cut down this beech-tree," he said. "The aspen and the birch are quite good enough for the poor people. The trees such as this ought to be kept for the manor and its officers."

Lord de Walheim cast a severe look on him, and said, "We ought not to give to the poor that only which we despise; but we ought, when they have need of them, to share with them the riches that we enjoy. This tree now belongs to the sister of the sick man. I have given it to her, and I desire, besides, that it may be cleft at my expense. Let the wood be corded, and taken to his cottage door. Put your hand to the work immediately, and let the wood be prepared before my own."

He immediately went away, that he might spare her thanks; and she, looking after him, with tears in her eyes, said, "God bless you, my good lord!" He, however, continued his way.

Thus the mother and son, who had last seen each other in the wood twenty-six

years before, met again ; and they might have been separated for ever, if God had not caused His good providence to shine out upon that occasion.

The woodcutters immediately applied their hatchets to the tree, which fell to the earth with a great crash ; and at that moment the two men suddenly exclaimed, " What can this be ? Have we come upon a robber's hiding place, or, is it a miracle ? " The trunk, in falling, had been broken at the lower part, where it was most fragile ; a portion of the bark was detached, and a picture which Theodora had placed in the tree many years before as a memorial of her lost son, and for which she had long sought in vain, was discovered. The colours of the little picture were still fresh and well-preserved. The gilt frame shone in the sun as fresh and untarnished as when it was first placed in the tree.

The woodcutters were young men, who knew nothing of the former history of the picture. " The manner in which that picture can have come into this tree, is beyond my comprehension," said one to the other.

"I saw no opening in the tree outside," said the other. "It was entirely surrounded with bark, and was covered over with moss, like all the other old trees in the forest. It is an extraordinary affair. It is wonderful;" and the people round about, hearing these remarks, began to gather together, and there was soon a little listening crowd collected, all eager to know what was going on.

On hearing the noisy exclamations of these people, Lord de Walheim came up. He had been scarcely two hundred paces off, and was still employed in superintending the distribution of the trees. He took the picture in his hands, and examined it attentively. "It is very beautiful," he said.

All at once, however, Monsieur de Walheim changed colour, and the hand in which he held the picture began to tremble violently. "Oh, yes!" he exclaimed, "it is wonderful!" So great was his emotion, he was obliged to seat himself on the trunk of the fallen tree. He had turned the frame of the picture, and on the back of it read these words:

"In the year —, on the tenth of October,

I saw, for the last time, under this tree my only son Augustus, aged five years and three months. If he still lives, may God be with him, and accompany him everywhere ; and may that Divine Master, who consoled Mary at the foot of the cross, vouchsafe also to grant some consolation to me, Theodora Muller, his desolate mother."

Like a flash of lightning, a thought crossed the mind of Monsieur de Walheim. "That lost child," he said, "is myself. The name, the year, and the day, are proofs enough that it was my mother who placed this picture in the tree!"

While he was examining the picture, Theodora ran up to him. She had just learned, from a neighbour who came back with her, the news of the finding of the picture,—news that immediately spread throughout the forest, and excited general surprise.

"My lord!" she exclaimed; "that picture belongs to me. I entreat you to restore it to me. My name, you see, is written upon it. Our good clergyman wrote it and the rest of the inscription for me at my request. Alas!" she continued, weeping, and looking down upon

the fallen tree, "well do I remember that awful day, when I missed my son from underneath the shadow of that tree—never can I forget the anguish which I felt, and the sorrows which I underwent at the loss of my dear boy. Even now, my lord, the sight of that picture makes me feel as if my heart would break. How many times, since my return to the village, have I passed that tree without recognising it! O my beloved Augustus! I now see once more the place where my eyes saw you for the last time. Alas! I shall never look upon you more. Could I but see you once before I die, I should be happy; as it is, I can only weep before your tomb!"

Tears hindered her from saying more. Lord de Walheim, who had already learned his own name from the picture that he held in his hands, was almost beside himself on ascertaining that this poor woman, who stood weeping before him, was his mother. His heart bounded within him, and he would have thrown himself into her arms, exclaiming, "My mother!" but he restrained himself; for the thought crossed his mind, that a joy so great

and so sudden might be a deathblow to her. He took her hand in a friendly manner, and wiped away her tears with his white handkerchief. He proffered her some consolation, and by degrees told her that her son was still living, that he knew him, and that she would soon see him. After all these precautions, and when he thought that she was sufficiently prepared to bear the intelligence, he said, "Mother, it is I myself that am your long lost child!" The mother clasped him in her arms, uttering the only cry of surprise and joy, "Thou!" The shock prevented her from saying another word.

They held each other in their embraces for a long time, and in silence. The affecting scene drew tears from all who were present.

"Dear mother!" said Lord de Walhiem at length, "God has granted the wish that you expressed for me, and that you inscribed upon this picture. He has accompanied me everywhere, and has blessed me in everything. He has also granted the wish you uttered for yourself. He has consoled you as He consoled Mary. He has restored to you your son, and

has caused you to see him still living here below. It was under this tree that we were separated, and it is at the same place that He has brought us together again. This picture has been preserved in order that it might become the means of recognition and our reunion. He has shown us that all He does is always for the best."

"Yes," exclaimed Theodora, "it is all true. He took you from the bosom of your mother, because, perhaps, I was not sufficiently attentive in the cares that I bestowed upon your childhood. He has restored you to me that you may be the support of my old age, and that you may be a source of happiness and consolation to the whole country. You will be our protector and benefactor. All that God does is in wisdom and in love. Blessed be His name!" Every one present concurred in the truth of her remarks, and the nobleman and the poor widow returned thanks to God for His great goodness and mercy towards them.

Lord de Walheim ordered his forester to go and inform the brother of Theodora that she would not return to his house until the

next day with her son. Theodora requested her neighbour to give, during her absence, all her attention to the invalid. After that, his lordship directed his carriage to be brought, and assisted his mother into it. He then placed himself by her side, and drove rapidly to the castle, where a new joy awaited the joyously bewildered fisherman's widow. She was quite ashamed to present herself to her daughter-in-law in her poor and humble garments; but Antonia entertained sentiments too elevated to pay attention to that. On learning that the poorly-clad woman was her husband's mother, she embraced her with affection, and esteemed herself happy to know at length that the mother of her well-beloved husband, whom they had often conversed about, and whom they had given up for lost, was found again. Theodora wept with joy; and when they had presented to her their two little children, Ferdinand and Theodora, she thought that she should have fainted with happiness.

"My sorrow was formerly inexpressible, and I thought that I should have died with grief," she said; "but now my joy is far greater."

