



THE FOREST FARM

Tales of the Austrian Tyrol

By
Peter Rosegger

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With an Appreciation by Maude Egerton King
And a Biographical Note by Dr. Julius Petersen



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Rosegger: An Appreciation

THE unmistakable trend of our time is the civilisation—which, in its modern form, is largely urbanisation—of the whole habitable globe. From its centres outwards it is thrusting itself upon places, men, processes—ultimate sanctuaries, never before reached by alien trespassing. Most men are looking on at its destruction of the old order with shrugging acceptance of the inevitable, or hailing the chaotic stuff of the new in its making with so far unjustified joy. With a wit worn somewhat threadbare with use they invariably counsel the few eccentrics who deny its inevitability and question its beneficence to quit the hopes and mops of Mrs. Partington for the discreet submission of the wiser Canute. Then they grow properly grave, and declare that this modern civilisation, for all its shortcomings, has been well described as a banquet, the like of which, for those below as for those above the salt, has never been spread before. However that may be, there is no question that here and there a guest is sometimes moved to look round on the company and scan its several types with a sudden sense of their significance. Some of these, good and bad, are common to all late civilisations, he perceives, others as hatefully peculiar to our own as certain diseases. Where, in God's name, were there ever till now men like these, who bend a complaisant spectacled gaze on a world going under, content if they may but first secure their museum sample (including one carefully chosen, perfectly embalmed, stuffed and catalogued peasant) of every species? Or their younger kindred—men whose intellect obeys no inspiration save curiosity nor law save its own limit, whose inventions, therefore, cannot foster good and beauty but only spoil these in Nature and men's souls? As for that splendid group beyond, one may question if Athens, Rome, or Byzantium, whose sumptuous culture of brain and body achieved an almost criminal comeliness by Christian standards, ever equalled them: question, too, whether their selfish perfection or the travesty of it in this mob of women dull with luxury, of men brutalised by the scramble of getting it for them—be less desirable for the race! Thankfully his eye passes from them to those who turn such a cold shoulder upon their vulgarity: a little company, fine-edged, polished and flexible with perpetual fence of wit and word, hardly peculiar to our day perhaps, but rather such as might have played their irresponsible game on the eve of any red revolution. Now and

again they lend an amused ear to various gassy gospels over the way, where, as he perceives, he is once more among the children of this latter day alone: notably certain insignificances who, because they have raised their self-indulgence to the dignity of a problem play, are solemnly mistaking themselves (as actors and audience too) for pioneers of social progress; and some earnest women who have slammed the front door on their nearest and dearest stay-at-home duties and privileges, to go questing after problematical rights. It looks, too, as if the same types, modified for worse and better by class conditions, were repeated below the salt; but there the multitude is so great that the individuals are soon lost in a far-off colourless mass—sometimes a menacing mass—by no means so content with stale bread as the others with caviare.

Is then this civilisation to become the universal order? he asks himself; and must the world it has laid waste be re-peopled from these? The very fear of it summons a shadowy memory of fathers' fathers among Sussex sheepfolds, Highland crofts, Tuscan vineyards, or German forests. After that the banquet grits in the teeth like husks, and there is nothing possible but to get up and go out from it, sick with longing for those simpler, saner people. To them, it is said, fatherhood, motherhood, home, were chiefest of prides and sanctities outside Heaven. They either kept or consciously broke the ten commandments, but they never set up the *Seven deadly Sins* in their place. They won life out of the earth, sometimes with difficulty enough, but the struggle bred a muscle and fortitude only now failing their descendants in hyper-civilisation. They laboured, and took their pleasures too, under open skies and in quiet places where the divine voice could clearly be heard at times, and unperplexedly obeyed.

Between fear and hope these famished feasters come at last to the ancestral places; only too often to find them ruined, or sheltering some sad survival unaware of his own splendid history. On the cold thresholds they stand, stricken with the sense of the world's irreparable loss in a virile and faithful race.

Just so far have many thinking people come to-day, and there remain, needing a leader who can turn regretful retrospect to rational hope. Such a one is Peter Rosegger, whose life is a type of our own day and a prophecy of better. He, too, left the land for the city, and now, because all his culture and experience do but confirm his faith that *Bauernthum* is as necessary for the world's soul as the bread which the peasant grows for its body, he has gone back to it. When he wants new vigour for daily life, or for his mission of protecting and pleading for a vanishing folk, he touches earth and gets it. Peasant-born, in most of his books he *is* Peasantry grown conscious and

articulate,—he gives us that life from within. But culture has enabled him to see the peasant in his true relation to the world as well, to measure the life he was born into with the civilisation whose guest he has been. And so in one invaluable book, *Erdsegen*, he writes of the folk life from without, and that with great truth and consistency. The story is given in a series of letters from a city journalist, who for a frivolous wager goes to live “the simple life” as a peasant among peasants for one year. Looking through the townsman’s eyes, we find there no stage-peasant’s Arcady, no rose-bowered cottages pleasantly ready for week-end lodgers; rather we stare aghast at the coarse food, rough work, some very unwholesome conditions, and obstinate superstitions. The journalist’s earlier letters treat of these things with humorous realism, and we respect his pluck for putting up with them. Gradually the tone of the letters changes, and we see the innate fineness—not the cultured refinement—of the townsman, responding to the strong faith behind the superstition, to the beauty of the traditional labours, the heroic endurance of their undoing by storm and bad fortune, and the acceptance of good and ill alike as from the hands of a good if sometimes incomprehensible Father. The faint sneer, even the amused smile, die from the townsman’s face; dirt and discomfort are lost sight of in the divine realities which draw him, humbly enough at last, to throw in his lot with these humble people.

Rosegger is a true prophet, he never disguises truth in defending it. His passion for essential Peasantry is too great for sentimentalities, too honest for whitewash; and so while he exhilarates us with its elemental force he does not fear to show where this merges into brutality, nor when its simplicity opens the door to superstition. And yet in the end we are one with his faith in *Bauernthum* and the world’s need of it. The land-folk who emigrate to cities, and their children there born, are fast losing and will soon quite lose what no money or experience can compensate them for. Age after age, great shaping influences from the forest, the mountain and the waters of the mountain, the solitudes, the mastery and love of beasts, the disciplinary tragedies and triumphs of agriculture, came and wrought upon the humanity in their midst, gradually creating the customs, traditions, lore and art—everything except religion in its *Church* sense—which is part of the collective soul of Peasantry. Whatever these uprooted land-folk gain in the city, though they gain the whole world, they certainly lose their own soul—the soul special to Peasantry and until now the fullest spring of the world’s imaginative life.

At times, perhaps when he has stayed too long in Graz, Rosegger writes of *Bauernthum* as of something irrevocably passing; at others he utters his faith—for it is deeper than hope—that it will come again. To him his own life is racially prophetic. He has had the best of civilisation, intellectual intercourse, fame, travel, wealth: but from these and all others of its benefits or lures, he

has again and again run back, mastered by a *Heimweh* which saved him. Sometimes, in terrible trouble, once at the point of death, he went back, and every time the touch of the earth renewed him, body and soul. Signs of this saving *Heimweh* he sees here and there among those who remain at the banquet, actually starving in satiety, some of them; and from the quiet valley where his genius, long since the consecrated champion of the ancient peasantry, does its best work, he calls upon these to come back and make possible a new. His loyal traditionalism does not hinder his belief that a new peasantry, not born, but becoming such from a choice inspired by heart's hunger and a surfeit of civilisation, must have a strong redemptive value of its own among the decadent nations.

Of the earth he writes as he wrote of the stern tender woman who bore him in the Forest Farm,—with a worship that makes a town-bred creature drag at his chain or break his heart to run home to her. She has never failed him, he says, in any need of spirit or flesh, nor will she ever fail her prodigals. When they come back in a hundred or a thousand years they will find her patiently waiting to teach them all the vital forgotten things over again: and, even if she take the gewgaws and lumber out of their hands, she will leave them whatever of learning she can with her ancient processes and gift of wonder transmute into wisdom.

M. E. K.



PETER ROSEGGER

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To face page 15 "The Forest Farm."

Peter Rosegger

A Biographical Note

By Dr. Julius Petersen

I

IN the heart of Austria lies Steiermark (Styria), a rough mountain country on the eastern slope of the Alps. Its inhabitants, protected from the levelling influences of modern civilisation and cut off from that mingling with other peoples which destroys racial character, have retained their old individuality and customs longer than any other German people. Rough though the climate is, the soil stony, the struggle for existence hard, these sons of the mountains have grown stubbornly inseparable from their home; it is with difficulty that they take root in other soil—they are evermore drawn back to the place where once their cradle stood. In former centuries the Swiss soldiers in French service could not hear the home-like chime of cow-bells without a temptation to desert their colours; and time after time sons of Steiermark have been driven back to their free hills by the constraint of garrison life. The deserters were always easily caught: the sergeant in pursuit had simply to look for the culprit in his father's house. The *Heimweh* (other languages can hardly express the meaning of this word) is the national sickness to which all natives of the Alps driven into foreign parts are subject, and it is but the other side of that impassioned joy in the home, which finds expression in jubilant songs and shouts rising for ever from the mountains to the sky.

Peter Rosegger is the national poet of Styria. If it can be said that all men on their way through life carry with them a clod of home-soil, as the pious pilgrim carries a handful of sacred earth, then one may say that this poet is home personified. "Styria on two legs," he is called by his own people. All that can move the soul of this people, from the lightest jest to the deepest longings and searchings, has found expression in his writings.

He has passed through many phases of life, from peasant to craftsman, to schoolmaster, to theologian, and all these phases are reflected in his life-work. The son of the peasant, who on his journey has attained the heights of

humanity, is always turning back to his starting-point. Like the old giant Antæus, he draws new strength from his mother Earth. Close touch with the home soil is for him a condition of life. When Rosegger was on a lecturing tour through the great German cities, where he was enthusiastically greeted by audiences of thousands, there never left him the longing for the silent peace of the mountains; and *Heimweh* drove him away even from the shining Gulf of Naples. Even Graz, the beautiful capital of Steiermark, where Rosegger has his vine-covered house, cannot take the place of home for him. In the summer months he escapes to Krieglach in the Mürztal; there he lives among his native people, and from his window he looks out to those heights where, out of sight, stands a deserted farm—his birthplace.

In Alpl, near Krieglach, a forest community which has now almost ceased to exist and even at the time of his birth consisted only of twenty-three farms, Rosegger came into the world on July 31st, 1843. It was almost by accident that he learnt to read and to write. An old schoolmaster, whom the Church had dismissed from his office because of his leanings towards freedom in 1848, wandered a beggar through the mountains, and when he came to the peasants of Alpl they said: "Beggars we have anyhow in plenty, but a schoolmaster we have not and never have had since the world began. He shall be schoolmaster here, and our children shall learn to read and to write; if it does no good, it can do no harm." And so the old schoolmaster went hawking his learning from house to house, and his school fees consisted of the right to eat as much as ever he liked.

Peter, the son of the *Wald-bauer* (forest peasant),^[1] was soon known for his learning. Once in the dead of winter he was taken to one of the highest-lying farms, where the old peasant owner wanted to make her will. There being neither paper nor ink, he wrote the will with charcoal inside a coffer lid, for the boy was gifted with a bright mother-wit which never left him at a loss. He read everything printed that he could lay hands on, but as he did not find enough to read, he began to write himself; stories of saints, sermons, works of devotion and calendars. These he illustrated with drawings of his own invention. A student who had spent his holidays in the mountains had left him a little box of watercolours. The boy cut a lock of hair from his own head, bound it to a little stick, and so made himself a brush with which to paint his pictures of his saints. This story is a symbol of all Rosegger's achievement of learning. However much outside help he may have received, he may thank himself for the best, after all. "My little saddle-horse," says he, "has never fed upon the dry hay of school-knowledge, but only on the green grass of life itself. The little that I know, Life has taught me, and the little that I can do, Necessity. The inability to express myself by word of mouth has taught me to write, and my desire to share that written word with others taught me to read.

As the father of a family, with a very uncertain income, I learnt arithmetic; as a herdsman on the pasture land, zoology; as farmer and stonecutter, mineralogy; as hay-maker and woodcutter, botany. Geography I learnt in travelling; history from events which followed one another as cause and consequence; folklore I learnt as a travelling journeyman; and astronomy in sleepless nights, when I lay and looked up at the stars. Thoughts about physiology, anatomy, medicine, and patience have come to me in illness; theology I have turned to in times of need and loneliness; and law has been learnt in self-examination. Music became dear to me from the birds of the woods and the sound of waterfalls. The telling of stories I never learnt at all. My first baby stammer—so says our old cousin—was a story in Styrian dialect; and my life, according to the belletristic newspapers, was a romance.”

His life, indeed, is rich in wonders, and the evolution of the peasant boy a sort of fairy tale. Rosegger has described for us his youth in the form of a novel, *Heidepeters Gabriel* (1872), in which it all reads like an impossible romance. Later he has published the story of his life in a series of autobiographical writings, *Waldheimat* (*The Forest Home*, 1875); *Als Ich jung noch war* (*When I was still young*, 1895); *Mein Weltleben* (*My Life in the World*, 1898); in these the same course of events is given with a wonderful truth to life. As documents of a rare human evolution they may stand on a level with Rousseau's *Confessions*; they are more lovable, though no less honest.

The boy very early saw something of the world. As a little fellow his father took him with him on a pilgrimage to Maria Zell; his godfather, on another pilgrimage, pointed out to him the first railway as an uncanny bit of devil's invention; and on one occasion the eleven-year-old boy set out alone for Vienna, reaching the Imperial city after a several days' tramp. His aim was to visit the Kaiser Josef II, of whose friendliness so many stories were going about among his people. As a matter of fact, Josef II had been lying in his grave for more than sixty years, and his visitor was conducted to his mausoleum. Later, as he was again wandering in the streets and casting about how to get home (for of his travelling money—the proceeds of the sale of a lamb—only just the equivalent of the little beast's tail was left), a bearded man came up to him and offered him five florins if he would pose for half an hour in his studio. And, wonder on wonder, the water-colour which the artist painted from this sketch now hangs in the Rosegger Room at Mürzzuschlag, which is the nucleus of a future Rosegger Museum! Here also is preserved the tailor's goose, which later the boy, then in his apprenticeship, had to carry after his master; and beside it is a peasant's waistcoat—the same apprentice's claim to journeymanhood! It appears that, though his brothers and sisters all became farm-workers, the Waldbauer's first-born proved to be too sickly for

the ancestral calling. He was to become a priest. The parish priest of Birkfeld offered to instruct him in Latin. Peter, as a candidate for holy orders, was entrusted to the care of a peasant in that parish. After three days he ran away in the night—home-sickness was too much for him. So in 1860 he became apprentice to a master-tailor of his own district, and played his part in his itinerant trade. He worked on more than sixty farms in the neighbourhood, and in this way learned to know the life of the people in Styria more intimately than would have been possible in any other calling. The inexhaustible wealth of strange character and peasant originality and the unique acquaintance with the most ancient and characteristic native customs which Rosegger displays in his later writings, are the fruit of those years of close observation.

With the passion for reading grew the desire to write. One day his master set out, leaving his carefully guarded paper-patterns lying about. He was accustomed to apprentices, anxious to become independent, making use of such an opportunity to copy the patterns for themselves. His apprentice Peter seized on them too, concerning himself with their shape not at all, but only with the contents of the cut-out newspapers whose stale news he devoured. This made his master almost despair of him. “Honesty’s a very fine thing, Peter,” he said, “but I can clearly see you’ll never be much of a credit to me. Here you are, waiting from week to week for the end of your time, and have never yet stolen one pattern from your master!”

Others, too, prophesied to the youth that he would never make a proper tailor. Once he had to share quarters with a shoemaker’s apprentice. Then it was that the little note-book in which he used to write songs of his own making was discovered. The song which made Rosegger celebrated, and which as a genuine folk-song is not only sung in Styria, but all over Germany, was amongst them: “Darf ih’s Dirndl liabe.” The beauty of this song, which is inseparable from its dialect, can scarcely be rendered in a translation: without the charming form the idea is almost too primitive. The boy goes in succession to priest, father, and mother, and puts the question to them, whether he may love the maid? Each puts him sharply off until at last he goes to the Lord God Himself, and there finds sympathy with his inquiry.

“Why yes, of course,” He smiled and said;
“Because of the boy I have made the maid.”

The shoemaker’s apprentice found this moral most enlightening and determined to send the song to his sweetheart, but could not believe that the young tailor could make such verses without having a sweetheart of his own. “Get along—and look here, you tell me of anyone else who can turn out verses like that!” he said admiringly. “And don’t be angry, tailor; I don’t understand much of your trade, but after looking at your father’s new jacket I

don't mind telling you that you'll never make a first-rate tailor. Your song now, *that's* a masterpiece if you like. Now, don't you forget, that down here on the plain and in the farmer's oat-straw I told you how it would be—you'll never remain a tailor. You'll go to the towns and become somebody; you'll be a bookbinder! Mark my word, in the end you'll become a bookbinder!"

That was the highest the shoemaker's apprentice could conceive of. But it soon happened otherwise. Passing tourists had come across the verses which the country folk had already set to music, and they encouraged the author to send certain of them to town. As a result, the editor of the *Graz Daily Post* took an interest in the people's poet, and asked him to send him all the poetry he had written and to give him an account of his life. Peter packed up, and, carrying a bundle of manuscripts weighing fifteen pounds, set off on his way to Graz. The postage for such a parcel would have been quite beyond his means.

II

At the end of 1864 an article appeared in the *Graz Daily Post*, entitled *A Styrian Poet of the People*, in which a larger public was called upon to assist the young talented writer. And now from all quarters sendings poured into the post office in Krieglach—congratulations, books, small sums of money, and provisions. A bookseller in Leibach offered him an apprenticeship. Rosegger accepted it, but after a few days *Heimweh* again drove him from the unfamiliar district. However, a free scholarship was found for him at the Graz Commercial Academy; friends and teachers were not wanting, and here, between the years 1865–9 the farmer's son, not yet able, when he entered it, to write correctly, received an intellectual training which left him no longer inferior to the well educated. In the same year that he left this institution his first book, a volume of poems in dialect, and entitled *Zither und Hackbrett* (*Zither and Dulcimer*), was published. A second collection, *Tannenharz und Fichtennadeln* (*Pine-resin and Fir-needles*), came out in the following year; and in 1870 also appeared his first picture of Styrian peasant life, *Sittenbilder aus dem Steierischen Oberlande*. These won him some fame; already publishers began to approach him with offers. And now once more miracle entered his life. In the summer of 1872 a young and beautiful Graz lady, accompanied by a friend, made a pilgrimage to the birthplace of her favourite poet; there by chance she and her poet met, and a year later they were married. Their happy life together lasted but a short time; after the birth of a second child the young wife died. Six years after his sad loss Rosegger made a second and equally happy marriage.

About his life since then there is not much to tell. One fact, however,

should be emphasised; namely, that Rosegger, who in his early years had become indebted to so many friends, very soon began to pay them back, and the account has long since been balanced in his favour and now shows a debit on the other side. Many a time has he introduced the work of young writers to the literary world with warm words of recommendation, just as the distinguished poet Robert Hammerling once did for his first collection of poems. The greater part of the profits of his extensive lecture tour have been used for the public good. Through him, a Catholic, Mürzzuschlag has got a Protestant church; his home-parish, Alpl, has for some years now had a school-house of its own for which it has to thank Rosegger. And only a short time ago it was his eloquent intervention that obtained a large contribution for the German School-Society—a society which aims at preserving race-characteristics and culture where they are threatened on the language frontiers. Were I to give data of his public life during the last ten years, they would consist of such services as these, and of the grateful homage which is rendered him by the many who love and honour him. But his inner development is revealed in the writings of his maturity; for Rosegger has written nothing but what in his inmost heart he has experienced. Since 1876 he has edited a monthly magazine, *Heimgarten*, which is his public diary. “Heimgarten,” he tells us, “is the name given in various districts to that house in the Alpine village in which of an evening the village folk come together, bringing in small handwork to do and enjoying one another’s company. Here are to be found the brightest of the inhabitants, those readiest in storytelling and description, those who are men of the world, or who would like to be such, assembled for educative and stimulating intercourse. In the Heimgarten, stories and legends, tragic and comic incidents from life are repeated; songs and ballads are sung; poems are improvised; farces and comedies are given, or incidents of the day and important events in the life of the village or the wide world are discussed by the village wiseacres. Intercourse in the Heimgarten enlightens and enriches the mind, quickens, warms, and ennobles the heart. This homely type from Alpine village life furnishes the title and programme for my monthly magazine.”

And to this programme the paper, which has become a home for true national education, has held faithfully for thirty-four years. Here all stories, articles, and poems of Rosegger’s first appeared, and in this paper he expresses his views on all vital questions of the day.

“All we poets are foresters and woodwards in the great forest of mankind,” said once Berthold Auerbach, another poet of the people, to Rosegger. Such a one the editor of the *Heimgarten* feels himself to be, expending, as he does, all his ripe experience and loving care upon the husbandry which has been entrusted to him. To protect the vanishing traditional customs of his

forefathers, their natural conceptions of right and wrong, the blessing of family life, their healthy contentment—the outcome of bodily toil and the love of the home—against the demoralisation of modern hyperculture, is his most earnest aim.

The principal heroes of his romances are by preference those whose calling involves the task of cherishing and teaching the people: schoolmasters and priests. The *Writings of the Forest Schoolmaster* (1878) is the name of Rosegger's most popular work, which already in 1908 appeared in its seventy-eighth edition, and which, let us hope, may within the author's lifetime still reach its hundredth edition. The theme is the gradual emergence of a forest parish from a group of demoralised and utterly uneducated men to a social organisation, to a lawful and religiously organised community. A similar *Kulturroman* is *Der Gottsucher* (*The God-seeker*, 1883), which leads us back into past centuries. A parish has been excommunicated by the Church for murdering its priest. The people cannot exist without religion, and, deprived of their old church, they create a new one, a religion of Nature, by means of which the leader of the community brings back order and industry to the village. The third novel belonging to this series, *Das Ewige Licht* (*The Light Eternal*, 1897), is a pessimistic counterpart to the *Waldschulmeister*. This treats of the dangers to religion which arise from modern civilisation. The faithful priest of a mountain parish has to look on helplessly while the modern world thrusts itself into the mountain idyll; while the atmosphere of the great cities, brought up by mountain climbers and summer visitors, and the smoke from the chimneys of the ever-spreading industrialism in the valleys below, poison the pure air, and, morally and economically, ruin the old inhabitants.

But the peasantry has yet another enemy: the love of sport among the nobility. As once Karl Marx, the theorist of collectivism, studied in Scotland the expropriation of man from the soil in favour of deer, and in his *Kapital* exposed the tragic consequences of such excessive sport, so now Rosegger in his home must look on at the depopulating of entire villages. By this means his own birthplace has been nearly ruined. In his first novel, *Heidepeters Gabriel*, he already shows the hopeless struggle of the peasant against the devastation of his fields by game, a struggle which leads to poaching and to prison. And in his novel *Jacob der Letzte* (1888), which, from an artistic point of view, is perhaps the most complete of his works, the principal character, the last descendant of an old peasant family, who clings tenaciously to the old soil, is beaten and goes under in the struggle. Such a single case becomes for Rosegger an alarming symptom of the universal decline of the free peasantry. "What will come of it?" he asks, when he receives from numerous parts of Germany letters all witnessing to the same facts: "I am no practical teacher of

political economy, I am only a poet; but they say that poets are seers, and I verily see that future generations will have to go home to the land again, that only on the land can the social question be peacefully and lastingly solved. Here master and man live on far more friendly footing than in the city, and come humanly nearer together. For twenty-five years I have been preaching in every way the return to natural living. I have built my little house in a peasant village and I live right among the peasants.—I am utterly dissatisfied with the leading spirits of our time: they don't teach us to live, they teach us only to think. One thing we have still to learn—to forget what they have taught us. Our true Mother is the Earth: from her spring our bread and our ideals.”

The return of the townspeople to nature forms the theme of two later novels, *Erdsegen (The Earth and the Fullness Thereof, 1900)* and *Weltgift (The Poison of the World, 1903)*. In the former the editor of a paper pledges himself to live a whole year as farm-labourer in the country. He not only earns his wager, but in the course of the year so richly experiences and realises the blessedness of life on the land that, cured of the fever of city life, he marries a village girl and starts his own farm. This thesis, with its obvious strong purpose, aroused opposition. The chief objection brought forward was that it would be impossible for a thoroughly town-bred person to take such deep root in the country. In reply to this, Rosegger points in the other novel to the fate of a townsman, who, unlike the character in the former book, is too full of the city virus for recovery. The poison of the world has eaten right into him, and he cannot escape his doom.

Rosegger can only compare town and country by the strongest contrast of light and shade. And in the talks which he collected in 1885 under the title of *Mountain Sermons, delivered in these latter days in the open air, and dedicated to the reviling and derision of our Enemies, the Weaknesses, the Vices and the Errors of Civilisation*, a fanatical anger is occasionally apparent: one misses the beatitudes which the title leads one to expect.

And yet love is the gospel which Rosegger proclaims at all times, and religious questions pervade his writings from first to last. He is himself, like the chief character in his book, a God-seeker. “Man creates for himself an ideal, an always nobler image of himself, calls it God and strives after it. So he climbs as if on a rope ladder, throwing the upper end higher and higher up the rugged wall of rocks towards the heaven of perfection. But who taught him to do this? Surely He who has put the power and spirit of growth in His creature's heart, God the Father, who from everlasting created the world and will create it to everlasting.”

These conceptions are not exactly canonical, and it has been Rosegger's experience to have an article of his, *How I picture to myself the personality of*

Christ, confiscated by the licensing authorities as blasphemous. This induced him twice afterwards openly to state his convictions; once in *Mein Himmelreich* (*My Kingdom of Heaven*, 1900), and again in *I.N.R.I: Frohe Botschaft eines armen Sünders* (*The Gospel of a poor Sinner*, 1904). These much-discussed writings give us an image of Christ as Rosegger made it, putting it together from the four gospels: a Christ rejoicing in God, intimate with man's heart, filled with joy of the earth, with mighty creative energy, with consuming wrath in due season; the Superman, the God-man in the highest sense.

Rosegger is as strongly opposed to all the violent "Missions" movements in the Church as to the faith-destroying tendency of the modern world's point of view. He holds piously by many an old belief, not because it is for him an article of faith, but because it is a piece of poetic childhood's remembrance; and he has saved many a dogma for himself by interpreting it symbolically and not literally. To the most poetic of his interpretations belongs that of the Cross: "The Cross has a foot rooted in Earth; that means 'Man, make use of the Earth.' The Cross has a head that towers up into the air of heaven; that means 'Man, remember thy ideals.' The Cross has two arms stretching out to right and left, not to chastise men, but to embrace all the world; that means 'Man, love thy brothers.' Love, Joy,—those are the two beams of our Cross. The world is not here as a penance, but a joy." In such sentences as these is contained Rosegger's whole Gospel of Joy, which looks for its fulfilment on this side. For him the highest aim of civilisation, as of religion, is the happiness of mankind.

This brings us to a conclusion. We have now seen Rosegger develop from peasant to craftsman, to teacher, to preacher. And now another question arises: Has he not possibly reached a greater height still—is he a prophet? Of that only late generations may judge; to them it is given to see whether the new birth of mankind, which Rosegger, like Tolstoy, looks for from a return to the simplicities of life on the land, will be realised. With Rosegger's prophecy, which we shall do well to consider, I close this paper. "The future generations will find peace and happiness again when they turn back to Nature and give themselves up to the healthy influences of the life of the soil. As yet, when the leaves turn yellow, the townsfolk hurry back into their walls; but there will come a time when the well-to-do citizens will buy land and farm it themselves like peasants, and when artisans will clear and reclaim such land from the wilderness itself. They will renounce hyper-intellectualism, and find pleasure and new vigour in bodily toil; and they will make laws under which a firm-rooted and honourable peasantry can once more thrive."

Footnote:

[1] *Wald-bauer*, one whose farm included forest-land.

I

My Father and I

ON the whole I had not a bad bringing up, rather I had none at all. When I was a good, devout, obedient, apt child, my parents praised me; when I was the reverse they gave me a downright scolding. Praise almost always did me good and made me feel inches taller; for some children like plants shoot up only in sunshine.

But my father was of opinion that I ought not to grow in height only, but also in breadth, and that to this end reserve and austerity were good.

My mother was love itself. My father may have been the same by nature, but he did not know how to express his warm and loving heart. With all his gentleness this care and labour-laden man had a taciturn, serious bearing: only later, when he judged me man enough to appreciate it, did he ever give his rich humour free play before me.

During those years when I was tearing my first dozen pairs of breeches, he concerned himself with me but little except when I had done something naughty; then he allowed his severity full play. His harshness and my punishment generally consisted in his standing over me, and in loud angry tones, holding up my sin before me and pointing out the punishment I deserved.

When such an outburst occurred, it was my habit to plant myself in front of my father and remain standing before him as if petrified, with my arms hanging down, and looking steadily in his angry face throughout the vehement rebuke. In my inmost heart I always repented my wrongdoing and had the clearest sense of guilt; but I also remember another feeling that used to come over me during those homilies: a strange trembling, a sense of charm and ecstasy when the storm burst over my head. Tears came to my eyes and trickled down my cheeks; but I stood rooted there like a little tree, gazing up at my father, and was filled with an inexplicable sense of wellbeing, that increased mightily the longer and louder he thundered.

When after such a scene weeks went by without my concocting mischief,

and my father, kind and silent as ever, went about his business without taking notice of me, the longing to devise something to put him in a rage gradually began and ripened in me again. This was not for the sake of vexing him, for I loved him passionately; nor yet from malice; but from another cause which I did not understand at the time.

Thus it once happened on the sacred eve of Christmas. In the previous summer in Maria Zell^[2] my father had bought a little black cross on which hung a Christus in cast lead, and all the instruments of the Passion in the same material. This treasure had been put safely away until Christmas Eve, when my father brought it out of his press and set it on the little house-altar. I profited by the time when my parents and the rest of our people were still busy on the farm outside and in the kitchen making ready for the great festival, and, not without endangering my sound limbs, I reached the crucifix down from the wall, and crouched down behind the stove with it, and began taking it to pieces. It was a rare joy to me when with the aid of my little pocket-knife I loosened first the ladder, then the pincers and hammer, then Peter's cock, and at last the dear Christ Himself from the cross. The separated parts seemed to me much more interesting now than before as a whole; but when I had finished and wanted to put the things together again and could not, I began to grow hot inside and thought I was choking. Would it stop at a mere scolding this time? To be sure, I told myself: the black cross is now much finer than before; there is a black cross with nothing on it in the chapel in Hohenwang too, and people go there to pray. Besides, who wants a crucified Lord at Christmas time? At that time He ought to be lying in the manger—the Priest said so; and I must see about that now.

I bent the legs of the leaden Christus back and the arms over the breast, then laid Him reverently in my mother's work-basket, and so set my crib upon the house-altar; while I hid the cross in the straw of my parents' bed—forgetting that the basket would betray the taking down from the cross.

Fate swiftly overtook me. My mother was first to observe how absurdly the work-basket had got up among the Saints to-day!

“Who can have found the crucifix in his way up there?” asked my father at the very same moment.

I was standing a little apart, and I felt like a creature thirsting for strong wine to drink. But at the same time a strange fear warned me to get still farther into the background if possible.

My father approached me, asking almost humbly if I did not know where the crucifix had got to? I stood bolt upright before him and looked him in the face. He repeated his question. I pointed towards the bed-straw; tears came,

but I believe there was no quiver of my lips.

My father searched for and found it, and was not angry, only surprised when he saw the mishandling of the sacred relic. My craving for the strong bitter wine grew apace. My father put the bare cross on the table.

“I can see,” he said, speaking with perfect calmness, and he took his hat down from the nail, “I can see he’ll have to be thoroughly punished at last. When even the Lord Christ Himself is not safe——! Mind you stay in the room, boy!” he bade me darkly, and then went out to the door.

“Run after him and beg for pardon!” cried my mother to me. “He’s gone to cut a birch-rod.”

I was as if welded to the floor. With horrible clearness I saw what would befall me, but was quite incapable of taking a single step in self-defence. My mother went about her work; I stood alone in the darkening room, the mutilated crucifix on the table before me. The least sound scared me. Inside the old case of the Black Forest clock standing there on the floor against the wall, the weights rattled as the clock struck five. At last I heard someone outside knocking the snow off his shoes; that was my father’s step. When he entered the room with the birch-rod I had vanished.

He went into the kitchen and demanded in abrupt and angry tones where the rascal was? Then began a search throughout the whole house; in the living-room the bed and the corner by the stove and the great coffer were rummaged through. I heard them moving about in the next room, in the loft overhead. I heard orders given to search through the very mangers in the byres and the hay and straw in the barns; they were to go out to the shed, too, and bring the fellow straight to his father—he should remember this Christmas Eve all the rest of his life! But they came back empty-handed. Two farm-hands were to be sent about among the neighbours; but my mother called out that if I had gone over the open and through the forest to a neighbour I should certainly be frozen to death, for my little coat and hat were still in the room. What grief and vexation children were!

They went away, the house was nearly empty and in the dark room there was nothing visible but the grey squares of the windows. I was hidden in the clock-case and could peep through the chinks. I had squeezed in through the little door meant for winding up the works and let myself down inside the panelling, so that I was now standing upright in the clock-case.

What anguish I suffered in my hiding-place! That no good could come of it all, and that the hourly increasing commotion was certainly working towards an hourly more dangerous conclusion, I clearly perceived. I bitterly blamed the work-basket which had betrayed me from the very beginning, and I

blamed the little crucifix; but I quite forgot to blame my own folly. Hours passed, I was still in my up-on-end coffin, already the icicles of the clock-weights touched the crown of my head, and I had to duck myself down as well as I could lest the stopping of the clock should lead to its winding up and thereby the discovery of myself. For my parents had at last come back into the room again and kindled a light and were beginning to quarrel about me.

“I don’t know anywhere else to look for him,” said my father, and he sank exhausted on a chair.

“Just think, if he’s gone astray in the forest, or if he’s lying under the snow!” cried my mother, and broke into audible weeping.

“Don’t say such things!” said my father, “I can’t bear to hear it.”

“You can’t bear to hear it, and yet you yourself have driven him away with your harshness!”

“I shouldn’t have broken any bones with these twigs,” he replied, and brought the birch-rod swishing down upon the table: “but if I catch him now, I’ll break a hedge-pole across his back!”

“Do it, do it!—perhaps it will never hurt him any more!” said my mother, and wept again. “Do you think that children were given you only to vent your anger on? In that case our dear Lord is quite right when He takes them again betimes to Himself. One must love little children if they’re to come to any good!”

Thereupon he said, “Who says that I don’t love the boy? I love him with my whole heart, God knows, but I don’t care to tell him so: I don’t care to, and what’s more I can’t. It doesn’t hurt him half as much as me when I have to punish him, that I *know!*”

“Well, I’m going out for another look!” sighed my mother.

“I can’t rest here, neither!” he said.

“You must just swallow a spoonful of warm soup, to please me—it’s supper-time,” she said.

“I couldn’t eat now, I’m fairly at my wits’ end,” said my father, and knelt down by the table and began to pray silently.

My mother went into the kitchen to get together my warm clothes for the fresh search in case they should find me anywhere, half frozen. The room was silent again, and I, in the clock-case, felt as if my heart must burst for sorrow and anguish. Suddenly, in the midst of his prayer, my father began to sob convulsively. His head fell on his arm and his whole body shook.

I gave a piercing cry.

A few seconds later I was lifted out of my shell by my parents, and I fell at my father's feet and clung whimpering to his knee.

"Father, father!" were the only words I could stammer out. He reached down to me with both his arms, lifted me up to his breast, and my hair was wet with his tears.

In that moment the eyes of my understanding were opened.

I saw how dreadful it was to anger and offend such a father. But I saw, too, why I had done so—from sheer longing to see my father's face before me, to be able to look into his eyes and hear his voice speaking to *me*. If he could not be cheery as others were with me, and as he, at that time so care-laden, seldom was, then I would at least look into his angry eyes, hear his harsh words. They went tingling deliciously all through me, and drew me to him with irresistible might. At least they were my father's eyes and words.

No further jar unhallowed our Christmas Eve, and from that day on things were very different. My father had become deeply aware of his love for me and my devotion to him; and, in many an hour of play, work, and rest, bestowed upon me his dear face and kindly conversation, so that I never again needed to get them by guile.

Footnote:

[\[2\]](#) A place of pilgrimage in Styria.

II

How I Gave God My Sunday Jacket

THE church of the Alpine village of Ratten contains a nearly life-size equestrian statue, standing to the left of the high altar. The horseman is a splendid warrior; he wears a crested helmet and moustaches black as ebony. He has drawn his broad and gleaming sword and is using it to cut his cloak in half. At the foot of the prancing steed cowers the figure of a ragged beggarman.

My mother used to take me to this church when I was still a little whippersnapper, hardly up to the height of an ordinary person's trousers. Near the church stands a lady-chapel, famed for its many graces; and here my mother loved to pray. Often, when there was not another soul remaining in the chapel and twelve o'clock struck and the steeple sent the midday Angelus clanging out across the summer Sunday, mother would still be kneeling on one of the chairs and sending up her plaint to Mary. The Blessed Virgin sat on the altar, with her hand in her lap, and moved not head, nor eyes, nor hands; and so, little by little, my mother was able to say what she wanted.

I preferred to stop in the church and gaze at the fine rider on his horse.

And once, when we were on our way home and mother leading me by the hand (and I had always to take three steps for every one of hers), I raised my little head to her kind face and asked:

"Why does the man on horseback keep on standing against the wall up there? Why does he not ride out through the window into the street?"

Then mother answered:

"Because you put such childish questions and because it is only a statue, the statue of St. Martin, who was a soldier and a very charitable and pious man and is now in Heaven."

"And is the horse in Heaven too?" I asked.

"I will tell you all about St. Martin," said mother, "when we come to a nice place where we can sit down and rest."

And she led me on and I skipped along beside her. But I was very anxious for the resting-place and constantly cried out:

“Mother, here’s a nice place!”

But she was not content until we came to the shady wood, where a flat, mossy stone stood; and then we sat down. Mother fastened her kerchief tighter round her head and was silent, as though she had forgotten her promise. I stared and stared at her lips and then peeped through the trees; and once or twice it appeared to me as though I had seen the grand horseman riding through the wood.

“Yes, true enough, laddie,” mother began, suddenly, “we must always help the poor, for the love of God. But you won’t find many fine gentlemen like St. Martin nowadays, trotting about on their tall horses. You know how the icy blast rushes over our sheep-walk, when winter is nigh—your own little paws were nearly frozen there last year! Well, it was just such a stretch of heath that St. Martin came riding over one evening late in autumn. The earth is frozen hard as stone; and it makes a fine noise each time the horse puts hoof to ground. The snowflakes dance all round about; not one of them melts away. Night is just beginning to fall; and the horse clatters over the heath and the rider draws his white cloak round him as close as ever he can. Well, as he rides on like that, suddenly he sees a little beggar-man squatting on a stone, with nothing to cover him but a torn jacket; and he shivering with cold and lifting his sad eyes to the tall horse. Whoa! When the horseman sees that, he pulls up his steed and bends over and says to the beggar, ‘Oh, my dear, poor man, what alms can I give you? Gold and silver I have none; and my sword you could never use. How can I help you?’ Then the beggar lets his white head fall on his half-naked breast and heaves a sigh. But the horseman draws his sword, takes his cloak from his shoulders and cuts it across the middle. One half of the garment he hands down to the poor shivering grey-beard: ‘Take this, my needy brother!’ he says. The other half of the cloak he flings round his own body, as best he can, and rides away.”

This was the story my mother told me; and, with those cold autumn evenings of hers, she made that lovely midsummer day feel so chilly that I shivered.

“But it’s not quite finished yet, my child,” mother continued. “You know now what the horseman with the beggar in the church means; but you have not heard what happened afterwards. When the rider, later on at night, lies sleeping peacefully on his hard bolster at home, the same beggar whom he met on the heath comes to his bedside, smiles and shows him the half cloak, shows him the marks of the nails in His hands and shows him His face, which is no longer old and sorrowful, but radiant as the sun. This same beggar from

the heath was Our Lord Himself.—There, laddie, and now we must be getting on.”

Then we stood up and climbed into the woods on the mountain-side.

On the way home, we met two beggar-men; I peered very closely into their faces; for I thought:

“Our Lord may be concealed behind one of them.”

On the evening of the same day, I was told to take off my Sunday suit—for father was a thrifty man—and was playing and skipping about in my shabby workaday breeches, with only the brand-new grey jacket, which I did not want to take off and had begged to be allowed to wear for the rest of the day. Mother was attending to her household duties and I ran out to the sheep-walk, for it was my business to bring the sheep home to the fold, including a little white lamb that was my own property.

As I hopped along, throwing stones into the air and trying to hit the golden evening clouds, suddenly I saw an old, white-headed and very poorly dressed man squatting on a rock a little way off. I stopped, greatly startled; dared not take another step; and thought to myself:

“Now this is most certainly Our Lord.”

I trembled with fear and joy and simply had no notion what to do.

“If it *is* Our Lord,” I said to myself, “then surely I must give Him something. If I go home now, so that mother comes and looks out and sees me and tells me how the matter stands, He might be gone in the meantime; and that would be disgraceful and ridiculous. I think it is He beyond a doubt: the one whom the horseman met looked just like that.”

I went a few steps back and began to tear at my grey jacket. It was no easy work: the coat fitted so tightly over my coarse linen shirt; and I did not want to be puffing and panting, lest the beggar-man should notice me too soon. I had a yellow-handled pocket-knife, brand-new and just lately sharpened. I took it out of my pocket, put the little coat under my knee and began to divide it down the middle.

It was soon done and I stole up to the beggar-man, who seemed to be half asleep, and put his part of my coat on his head:

“Take this, my needy brother!” I said, silently, in my thoughts.

Then I put my half of the coat under my arm, gazed at Our Lord a little longer and then drove the sheep from the walk.

“He is sure to come in the night,” I thought, “and then father and mother

will see Him and, if He wishes to stop with us, we can fit up the back room and the little altar for Him.”

I lay in the cupboard-bedstead, beside father and mother, and I could not sleep. The night passed and He Whom I was expecting did not come.

But, early in the morning, when the barn-door cock crowed the men and maids out of their beds and when the noisy working-day began in the yard outside, an old man—he was nicknamed Mushroom Moses—came to my father, brought him the piece of my jacket which I had given away and told how I had wantonly cut it the evening before and flung one half at his head as he was taking a rest on the sheep-walk after hunting for mushrooms.

Thereupon my father came up softly to my bed, with one hand hidden behind his back.

“Look here, lad, just you tell me what you’ve done with your new Sunday jacket!”

That soft slinking with his hand behind his back at once struck me as suspicious; and my face fell; and, bursting into tears, I cried:

“Oh, father, I thought I was giving it to God!”

“Lord, lad, what a duffer—what an idiot you are!” cried my father. “You’re much too good for this world and yet quite too silly to die! What you want is to have your soul thrashed out of your skin with a stout besom.”

And then, when the hand with the twisted birch-rod came in view, I raised a great hullabaloo.

Mother came rushing up at once. As a rule, she seldom interfered when father was correcting me; but, this time, she caught hold of his hand and said:

“I dare say I can sew the jacket together again, father. Come with me: I have something to tell you.”

They both went out into the kitchen; I think they must have discussed the story of St. Martin. Presently, they came back to the room.

Father said:

“All right now, be quiet; there’s nothing going to be done to you.”

And mother whispered in my ear:

“It’s all right, your wanting to give your jacket to Our Lord; but it’ll be better still if we give it to the poor boy down in the valley. Our Lord lies hidden in every poor man. St. Martin knew that too, you see. So there. And now, lad, jump out of bed and get your breeches on; father’s not so very far

off yet with that birch of his!”

III

Christmas Eve

YEAR in, year out, there stood by the grey clay-plastered wall of the stove in our living-room an oaken footstool. It was always smooth and clean, for, like the other furniture, it was rubbed every Saturday with fine river sand and a wisp of straw. In spring, summer, and autumn-time this stool stood empty and lonely in its corner, save when of an evening my grandmother pulled it a little forward to kneel on it and say her evening prayer. On Saturdays, too, while my father said the prayers for the end of the week, grandmother knelt upon the stool.

But when during the long evenings in late autumn the farm-hands were cutting small household torches from the resinous logs, and the maids, along with my mother and grandmother, spinning wool and flax, and all during Advent time, when old fairy tales were told and hymns were sung—then I always sat on the stool by the stove.

From out my corner I listened to the stories and songs, and if they became creepy and my little soul began to be moved with terror, I shoved the stool nearer to my mother and covertly held on by her dress; and could not possibly understand how the others still dared to laugh at me, or at the terrible stories. At last when bedtime came, and my mother pulled my little box-bed out for me, I simply could not go to bed alone, and my grandmother must lie beside me until the frightful visions had faded and I fell asleep.

But with us the long Advent nights were always short. Soon after two o'clock, the house began to grow restless. In the attics above one could hear the farm-lads dressing and moving about, and in the kitchen the maids broke up kindling wood and poked the fire. Then they all went out to the threshing floor to thresh.

My mother was also up and about, and had kindled a light in the living-room; soon after that my father rose, and they both put on somewhat better clothes than they wore on working-days and yet not their Sunday best. Then mother said a few words to grandmother, who still lay a-bed, and when I, wakened by the stir, made some sort of remark, she only answered, "You lie

nice and quiet and go to sleep again!” Then my parents lighted a lantern, extinguished the light in the room, and left the house. I heard the outer door close, and saw the gleam of light go glimmering past the window, and I heard the crunching of footsteps in the snow and the rattling of the house-dog’s chain. Then, save for the regular throb of the threshers at work, all was once more quiet and I fell asleep again.

My father and mother were going to the Rorate^[3] at the parish church, nearly three hours away. I followed them in my dream. I could hear the church bell, and the sound of the organ and the Advent song, “Hail Mary, thou bright morning star!” I saw, too, the lights on the high altar; and the little angels that stood above it spread out their golden wings and flew about the church, and the one with the trumpet, standing over the pulpit, passed out over the heath and into the forests and blew throughout the whole world that the coming of the Saviour was near at hand.

When I awoke the sun had long been shining into the windows; outside the snow glittered and shimmered, and indoors my mother went about again in workaday clothes and did her household tasks. Grandmother’s bed, next mine, was already made, and she herself now came in from the kitchen and helped me to put on my breeches, and washed my face with cold water, that stung me so that I was ready to laugh and cry at the same moment. That over I knelt on my stool and prayed with grandmother the morning prayer:

In Gottes Namen aufstehen
Gegen Gott gehen,
Gegen Gott treten,
Zum Himmlischen Vater beten,
Dass er uns verleih
Lieb Engelein drei:

Der erste, der uns weist,
Der Zweite, der uns speist,
Der dritt’ der uns behüt’ und bewahrt,
Dass uns an Leib und Seel’ nichts widerfahrt.^[4]

After these devotions I received my morning soup, and then came grandmother with a tub full of turnips which we were to peel together. I sat close beside it on my stool. But in the matter of peeling turnips I could never quite satisfy grandmother: I constantly cut the rind too thick, or here and there even left it whole upon the turnip. When, moreover, I cut my finger and instantly began to cry, my grandmother said, very crossly, “You’re a regular nuisance, it would be a good thing to pitch you right out into the snow!” All the while she was binding up my wound with unspeakable love and care.

So passed the Advent season, and grandmother and I talked more and more often about Christmas Eve and of the Christchild who would so soon be coming among men.

The nearer we came to the festival the greater the stir in the house. The men turned the cattle out of the stall and put fresh straw there and set the mangers and barriers in good order; the cowman rubbed the oxen till they looked quite smooth; the stockman mixed more hay than usual in the straw and prepared a great heap of it in the hayloft. The milkmaid did the same. Threshing had already ceased some days ago, because, according to our belief, the noise would have profaned the approaching Holy Day.

Through all the house there was washing and scrubbing; even into the living-room itself came the maids with their water-pails and straw wisps and brooms. I always looked forward to the cleaning, because I loved the turning topsy-turvy of everything, and because the glazed pictures in the corner where the table was, the brown clock from the Black Forest with its metal bell, and the various things which, at other times, I saw only at a distance high above me, were taken down and brought nearer to me, and I could observe them all much more closely and from all sides. To be sure, I was not allowed to handle such things, because I was still too clumsy and careless for that and might easily damage them. But there were moments in that eager scrubbing and rubbing when people did not notice me.

In one such moment I climbed from the stool to the bench, and from the bench to the table, which was pushed out of its place and on which lay the Black Forest clock. I made for the clock, whose weights hung over the edge of the table, looked through an open side-door into the very dusty brass works, tapped several times on the little cogs of the winding-wheel, and at last even laid my finger on the wheel itself to see if it would go; but it didn't. Eventually I gently pushed a small stick of wood, and as I did so the works began to rattle frightfully. Some of the wheels went slowly, others quicker, and the winding-wheel flew round so fast that one could hardly see it at all. I was indescribably frightened, and rolled from the table over bench and stool down on to the wet, dirty floor; then my mother gripped me by my little coat—and there, sure enough, was the birch-rod!^[5] The whirring inside the clock would not leave off, and finally my mother laid hold of me with both hands, carried me into the entrance, pushed me through the door and out into the snow, and shut the door behind me. There I stood like one undone; I could hear my mother—whom I must have offended badly—still scolding within doors, and the laughing and scrubbing of the maids, and through it all the whirring of the clock.

When I had stood there sobbing for a while and still nobody came to call me back into the house, I set off for the path that was trodden in the snow, and I went through the home meadow and across the open land towards the forest. I did not know whither I would go, I only conceived that a great wrong had

been done me and that I could never go home again.

But I had not reached the forest when I heard a shrill whistle behind me. That was the whistle my grandmother made when she put two fingers in her mouth, pointed her tongue, and blew. "Where are you going, you stupid child?" she cried. "Take care; if you run about in the forest like that, Moss-Maggie will catch you! Look out!"

At this word I instantly turned round, for I feared Moss-Maggie unspeakably. But I did not go home yet. I hung about in the farmyard, where my father and two of our men had just killed a pig. Watching them I forgot what had happened to myself, and when my father set about skinning it in the outhouse I stood by holding the ends of the skin, which with his big knife he gradually detached from the carcase. When later on the intestines had been taken out and my mother was pouring water into the basin, she said to me, "Run away or you'll get splashed."

From the way in which she spoke I could tell that my mother was once more reconciled with me and all was right again; and when I went into the dwelling-room to warm myself a bit, everything was back in its own place. Floor and walls were still moist, but scrubbed clean, and the Black Forest clock was once more hanging on the wall and ticking. And it ticked much louder and clearer than before through the freshly ordered room.

At last the washing and scrubbing and polishing came to an end, the house grew peacefuller, almost silent, and the Sacred Vigil was upon us. On Christmas Eve we used not to have our dinner in the living-room, but in the kitchen, where we made the large pastry-board our table, and sat round it and ate the simple fasting fare silently, but with uplifted hearts.

The table in the dwelling-room was covered with a snow-white cloth, and beside it stood my stool, upon which, when the twilight fell, my grandmother knelt and prayed silently.

The maids went quietly about the house and got their holiday clothes ready, and mother put pieces of meat in a big pot and poured water on them and set it on the open fire. I stole softly about the room on tiptoe and heard only the jolly crackling of the kitchen fire. I gazed at my Sunday breeches and coat and the little black felt hat which were ready hanging on a nail in the wall, and then I looked through the window out at the oncoming dusk. If no rough weather set in I was to be allowed to go with the head farm-servant, Sepp, to the midnight Mass. And the weather was quiet, and moreover, according to my father, it was not going to be very cold, because the mist lay upon the hills.

Just before the "censing," in which, following ancient custom, house and

farm were blessed with holy water and incense, my father and my mother fell out a little. Maggie the Moss-gatherer had been there to wish us all a blessed Christmastide, and my mother had presented her with a piece of meat for the feast-day. My father was somewhat vexed at this; in other ways, he was a good friend to the poor, and not seldom gave them more than we could well spare; but in his opinion one ought not to give Moss-Maggie any alms whatever. The Moss-gatherer was a woman not belonging to our neighbourhood, who went wandering around in the forests without permission, collecting moss and roots, making fires and sleeping in the half-ruined huts of charcoal-burners. Besides that, she went begging to the farmhouses, offering moss for sale, and if she did but poor business there she wept and railed at her life. Children at whom she looked were sore terrified, and many even became ill; and she could make cows give red milk. Whoever showed her kindness, she would follow for several minutes, saying, "May God reward you a thousand and a thousandfold right up into heaven!" But to anyone who mocked, or in any other way whatsoever offended her, she said, "I pray you down into the nethermost hell!"

Moss-Maggie often came to us, and she loved to sit before the house on the grass, or on the stile over the hedge, in spite of the loud barking and chain-clanking of our house-dog, who showed singular violence towards this woman. She would remain there until my mother took her out a cup of milk or a bit of bread. My mother was glad when Moss-Maggie thereupon gave her a thousandfold-right-up-to-heaven-may-God-reward-you; but my father considered the wish of this person worthless, whether as curse or blessing.

Some years earlier, when they were building the school-house in the village, this woman had come to the place with her husband and helped at the work, until one day the man was killed at stone-blasting. Since then she had worked no more, nor did she go away; but she just idled about, nobody knowing what she did nor what she wanted. She could never again be persuaded to do any work—she seemed to be crazed.

The magistrate had several times sent Moss-Maggie out of the district, but she always returned. "She wouldn't always be coming back," said my father, "if she got nothing by begging in the neighbourhood. As it is she'll just stay about here, and when she's old and ill, we shall have to nurse her as well: it's a cross that we ourselves have tied round our necks."

My mother said nothing in reply to such words, but when Moss-Maggie came she still gave the usual alms, and to-day in honour of the great feast a little more.

Hence then arose the little dispute between my father and mother, which however was at once silenced when two farm-hands bearing the incense and

holy water entered the house. After the censuring my father placed a lighted candle on the table; to-day pine-splinters might only be burned in the kitchen. Supper was once again eaten in the living-room. During supper the head farm-servant told us all manner of wonderful stories.

When we had finished my mother sang a shepherd's song. Rapturously as I listened to these songs at other times, to-day I could think of nothing but the churchgoing, and longed above everything to get at once into my Sunday clothes. They assured me there would be time enough for that later on; but at last my grandmother yielded to my urgent appeal and dressed me. The cowman dressed himself very carefully in his festal finery, because he was not going home after the midnight mass, but would stay in the village till morning. About nine o'clock the other farm-servants and the maids were also ready, and they kindled a torch at the candle flame. I held on to Sepp, the head servant; and my parents and grandmother, who stayed at home to take care of the house, sprinkled me with holy water that I might neither fall nor freeze to death. Then we started off.

It was very dark, and the torch, borne before us by the cowman, threw its red light in a great disk on the snow, and the hedge, the stone-heaps and the trees past which we went. This red illumination, which was broken too by the great shadows of our bodies, seemed very awful to me, and I clung fearfully to Sepp, until he remarked, "Look here, leave me my coat; what should I do if you tore it off my back?"

For a time the path was very narrow, so that we had to go one behind the other, and I was only thankful that I was not the last, for I imagined that he for certain must be exposed to endless dangers from ghosts.

There was a cutting wind and the glowing splinters of the torch flew far afield, and even when they fell on the hard snow-crust they still glowed for a while.

So far we had gone across open ground and down through thickets and forest; now we came to a brook which I knew well—it flowed through the meadow where we made hay in summer. Then the brook had been noisy enough; to-day one could only hear it murmur and gurgle, for it was frozen over. We passed along by a mill where I was badly scared because some sparks flew on to the roof; but there was snow lying upon it and the sparks were quenched. When we had gone some way along the valley, we left the brook and the way led upwards through a dark wood where the snow lay very shallow but had no such firm surface as out in the open.

At last we came to a wide road, where we could walk side by side, and now and again we heard sleigh-bells. The torch had already burned right down to

the cowman's hand, and he kindled another that he had with him. On the road were visible several other lights—great red torches that came flaring towards us as if they were swimming in the black air, behind which first one and then several more faces of the churchgoers gradually emerged, who now joined company with us. And we saw lights on other hills and heights, that were still so far off we could not be sure whether they were still or moving.

So we went on. The snow crunched under our feet, and wherever the wind had carried it away, there the black patch of bare ground was so hard that our shoes rang upon it. The people talked and laughed a great deal, but this seemed not a bit right to me in the holy night of Christmas. I could only think all the while about the church and what it must be like when there is music and High Mass in the dead of night.

When we had been going for a long time along the road and past isolated trees and houses, then again over fields and through a wood, I suddenly heard a faint ringing in the tree-tops. When I wanted to listen, I couldn't hear it; but soon after I heard it again, and clearer than the first time. It was the sound of the little bell in the church steeple. The lights which we saw on the hills and in the valley became more and more frequent, and we could now see that they were all hastening churchwards.

The little calm stars of the lanterns floated towards us, and the road was growing livelier all the time. The small bell was relieved by a greater, and this one went on ringing until we had almost reached the church. So it was true, what grandmother had said: at midnight the bells begin to ring, and they ring until the very last dweller in the farthest valleys has come to church.

The church stands on a hill covered with birches and firs, and round it lies the little God's-acre encircled by a low wall. The few houses of the village are down in the valley.

When the people came close to the church, they extinguished their torches by sticking them head downwards in the snow. Only one was fixed between two stones in the churchyard wall, and left burning.

And now from the steeple in slow, rhythmical swing, rang out the great bell. A clear light shone through the high, narrow windows. I longed to go into the church; but Sepp said there was still plenty of time, and stayed where he was, laughing and talking with other young fellows and filling himself a pipe.

At last all the bells pealed out together; the organ began to play inside the church, and then we all went in. There it looked quite different from what it did on Sundays. The candles burning on the altar were clear, white, beaming stars, and the gilded tabernacle reflected them most gloriously. The lamp of

the sanctuary light was red. The upper part of the church was so dark that one could not see the beautiful painting of the nave. Mysterious shapes of men were seated in the chairs, or standing beside them; the women were much wrapped up in shawls and were coughing. Many had candles burning in front of them, and they sang out of their books when the *Te Deum* rang out from the chancel.

Sepp led me between two rows of chairs towards a side altar, where several people were standing. There he lifted me up on to a stool before a glass case, which, lighted by two candles, was placed between two branches of fir trees, and which I had never seen before when I went to church with my parents. When Sepp had set me on the stool, he said softly in my ear, "There, now you can have a look at the crib." Then he left me standing, and I gazed in through the glass. Thereupon came a friendly little woman and whispered, "Look here, child, if you want to see that, somebody ought to explain it to you." And she told me who the little figures were. I looked at them. Save for the Mother Mary, who had a blue wrapped garment round her head which fell down to her very feet, all the figures represented mere human beings: the men were dressed just like our farm-servants or the elder peasants. Even St. Joseph wore green stockings and short chamois-leather breeches.

When the *Te Deum* was over, Sepp came back, lifted me from the stool, and we sat down on a bench. Then the sacristan went round lighting all the candles that were in the church, and every man, including Sepp, pulled a little candle out of his pouch, lighted it, and fastened it on to the desk in front of him. Now it was so bright in the church that one could see the paintings on the roof clearly enough.

Up in the choir they were tuning fiddles and trumpets and drums, and, just as the little bell on the door of the sacristy rang, and the priest in his glittering vestments, accompanied by acolytes and tall lantern-bearers, passed over the crimson carpet to the altar, the organ burst forth in all its strength, joined by a blast of trumpets and roll of drums.

The incense smoke was rising, and shrouding the shining high altar in a veil. Thus the High Mass began, and thus it shone and sounded and rang in the middle of the night. Throughout the offertory all the instruments were silent, only two clear voices sang a lovely shepherd-song; and during the Benedictus a clarionet and two horns slow and softly crooned the cradle-song. During the Gospel and the Elevation we heard the cuckoo and nightingale in the choir, just as in the midst of the sunny spring-time.

Deep down in my soul I understood it, the wonder and splendour of Christmas. But I did not exclaim with delight; I remained grave and silent, I felt the solemn glory of it all. But while the music was playing I could not

help thinking about father and mother and grandmother at home. They are kneeling by the table now in the light of the single candle, and praying; or they are even asleep, and the room is all dark—only the clock ticking—while a deep peace lies upon the forest-clad mountains, and the Eve of Christmas is spread abroad over all the earth.

The little candles in the seats were burning themselves out, one after another, as the service neared its close at last; and the sacristan went round again and extinguished the lights on the walls and altars and before the pictures with the little tin cap. Those on the high altar were still burning when a joyous march music sounded from the choir and the folk went crowding out of the incense-laden church.

When we came outside, in spite of the thick mist which had descended from the hills, it was no longer quite so dark as before midnight. The moon must have risen; no more torches were lighted. It struck one o'clock, but the schoolmaster was already ringing the prayer bell for Christmas morning.

I glanced once more at the church windows. All the festal shine was quenched, I saw only the dull red glimmer of the sanctuary lamp.

And now, when I wanted to renew my hold on Sepp's coat, he was no longer there: I found myself among strangers, who talked together for a little, and then immediately set out for their several homes. My guide must be already on ahead. I hurried after him, running quickly past several people, hoping soon to overtake him. I ran as hard as my little feet were able, going through a dark wood and across fields over which such a keen wind was blowing, that warm as I otherwise was I scarcely felt my nose and ears at all. I passed houses and clumps of trees; the people who were still on the road a short time before had dropped off little by little; I was all alone, and still I hadn't overtaken Sepp. I thought he might just as well be still behind me, but I determined to hurry straight home. Here and there I saw black spots on the road, the charcoal that folk had shaken down from their torches on their way to church. I made up my mind not to look at the bushes and little trees which stood beside the way and loomed eerily out of the mist, for they scared me. I was specially frightened whenever a path cut straight across the road, because that was a cross-road, where on Christmas Eve the Evil One loves to stand, and has chinking treasure with him with which he entices the hapless children of men to himself. It is true the cowman had said he did not believe it, but such things must be or people would not talk so much about them. I was very agitated; I turned my eyes in all directions, lest a ghost should be somewhere making for me. Then I determined to think no more of such nonsense; but the harder I made up my mind, the more I thought about it.

And now I had reached the path which should take me down through the

forest and into the valley. I turned aside and ran along under the long-branched trees. Their tops rustled loudly, and now and again a great lump of snow fell down beside me. Sometimes it was so dark that I did not see the trunks until I ran up against them; and then I lost the path. This I did not mind very much, for the snow was shallow and the ground nice and level. But gradually it began to grow steep and steeper, and there were a lot of brambles and heather under the snow. The tree-stems were no longer spaced so regularly, but were scattered about, many leaning all awry, many with torn-up roots resting against others, and many, in a wild confusion of up-reaching branches, lying prone upon the ground. I did not remember seeing all this on our outward journey. Sometimes I could hardly get on at all, but had to wriggle in and out through the bushes and branches. Often the snow-crust gave way under me, and then the stiff heather reached right up to my chest. I realised I had lost the right path, but told myself that when I was once in the valley and beside the brook I should follow that along and so was bound to come at last to the mill and our own meadows.

Lumps of snow fell into the pockets of my coat, snow clung to my little breeches and stockings, and the water ran down into my shoes. At first all that clambering over fallen trees and creeping through undergrowth had tired me, but now the weariness had vanished; I didn't heed the snow, and I didn't heed the heather, nor the boughs that so often scratched me roughly about the face, but I just hurried on. I was constantly falling, but as quickly picking myself up again. Then, too, all fear of ghosts was gone; I thought of nothing but the valley and our house. I had no notion how long I had been astray in the wilderness, but felt strong and nimble, terror spurring me on.

Suddenly I found myself standing on the brink of a precipice. Down in the abyss a grey fog lay, with here and there a tree-top rising out of it. The forest was sparser about me, it was bright overhead and the half-moon stood in the sky. Before me, and away beyond that, there was nothing but strange cone-shaped, forest-clad mountains.

Down there in the depths must be the valley and the mill. It seemed to me as if I heard the murmur of the brook; but it was only the sougling of the wind in the forest on the farther side.

I went to right and to left, searching for a footpath that might take me down, and I found a place where I thought I should be able to lower myself by the help of the loose rocks which lay about, and of the juniper bushes. In this I succeeded for a little, but only just in time I clutched hold of a root—I had nearly pitched over a perpendicular cliff. After that I could go no farther, but sank in sheer exhaustion to the ground. In the depths below lay the fog with the black tree-tops. Save for the sougling of the wind in the forest, I heard

nothing. I did not know where I was. If only a deer would come I would ask my way of it; quite probably it would be able to direct me, for everyone knows that on Christmas Eve the beasts can talk like men.

I got up to climb back again, but only loosened the rocks and made no progress. Hands and feet were aching. I stood still and called for Sepp as loud as ever I could. Lingering and faint, my voice fell back from the forests and cliffs. Then again I heard nothing but the sougning of the wind.

The frost was cutting right into my limbs. "Sepp! Sepp!" I shouted once more with all my might. Again nothing but the long-drawn-out echo. Then a fearful anguish took possession of me. I called quickly, one after another, my parents, my grandmother, all the farm-hands and maids of our household by name. It was all in vain.

I began to cry miserably.

There I stood trembling, my body throwing a long shadow aslant down the naked rock. I went to and fro along the ledge to warm myself a little, and I prayed aloud to the holy Christchild to save me.

The moon stood high in the dark heavens.

I could no longer cry or pray, I could scarcely move any more. I crouched down shivering on a stone and said to myself, "I shall go to sleep now; it's all only a dream, and when I wake up I shall either be at home or in heaven."

Then on a sudden I heard a rustling in the juniper bushes above me, and soon after I felt that something was touching me and lifting me up. I wanted to scream, but I couldn't—my voice was frozen within me. Fear and anguish kept my eyes fast shut. Hands and feet, too, were as if lamed, I could not move them. Then I felt warm, and it seemed to me as if all the mountain rocked with me.

When I came to myself and awoke it was still night; but I was standing at the door of my home and the house-dog was barking furiously. Somebody had let me slip down on the hard-trodden snow, and had then knocked loudly on the door and hurried away. I had recognised this somebody; it was the Moss-wife.

The door opened, and grandmother threw herself upon me with the words, "Jesus Christ, here he is!"

She carried me into the warm living-room, but from thence quickly back again into the entrance. There she set me on the bread-trough, and hastened outside and blew her most piercing whistle.

She was quite alone. When Sepp had come back from church and not found

me at home, and when, too, the others came and I was with none of them, they had all gone down into the forest and through the valley and up the other side to the high road, and in all directions. Even my mother had gone with them, and everywhere, all the time, had called out my name.

So soon as my grandmother believed it could no longer harm me, she carried me back into the warm room, and when she drew off my shoes and stockings they were quite frozen together and almost frozen to my feet. Thereupon she again hurried out of doors, whistled again, brought some snow in a pail, and set me barefoot down in it. Standing thus I felt such a violent pain in my toes that I groaned; but grandmother said, "That's all right; if it hurts, your feet aren't frozen."

Soon after that the red morning light shone in through the window, and one by one all the farm-hands came home. At length my father, and quite last of all—when the red disk of the sun was rising over the Wechselalpe, and after grandmother had whistled countless times—came my mother. She came to my little bed, where they had tucked me up, my father sitting beside me. She was quite hoarse.

She said I ought to go to sleep now, and she covered the window with a cloth so that the sun should not shine in my face. But my father seemed to think I ought not to go to sleep yet: he wanted to know how I had got away from the servant without his noticing it, and where I had been wandering. I at once related how I had lost the path, and how I got into the wilderness; and when I had told them about the moon and the black forests, and about the souging of the wind and the rocky precipice, my father said under his breath to my mother, "Wife, let us give God praise and thanks that he is here—he has been on the Troll's rock!"

At these words my mother gave me a kiss on the cheek, a thing she did but seldom, and then she put her apron before her face and went away.

"Well, you young scaramouch, and how did you get home after all?" asked my father. I said I didn't know; that after a prolonged sleeping and rocking, I found myself at our door, and that Moss-Maggie had stood beside me. My father asked me yet again about this circumstance, but I told him I hadn't got anything else to say about it.

My father then said he must be off to High Mass in the church, because to-day was Christmas Day; and he bade me go to sleep.

I must have slept many hours after that, for when I awoke it was twilight outside, and in the dwelling-room it was nearly dark. My grandmother sat nodding beside my bed, and from the kitchen I heard the crackling of the fire on the hearth.

Later, when the servants were all sitting at the evening meal, Moss-Maggie was with them at table. During the morning service she had been out in the churchyard, cowering on her husband's grave; and after High Mass my father went and found her there and brought her with him to our house.

They could get nothing out of her about the event of the night, save that she had been searching for the Christchild in the forest. Then she came over to my bed and looked at me, and I was scared at her eyes.

In the back part of our house was a room in which there were only old, useless things and a lot of cobwebs. This room my father gave Moss-Maggie for a dwelling, and put a stove and a bed and a table in it for her.

And she stayed with us. She would still very often go rambling about in the forest, and bring home moss, and then return and sit for hours upon her husband's grave; from which she could never more tear herself away to return to her own district—where, indeed, she would have been just as lonely and homeless as everywhere else. Of her circumstances we could learn nothing more definite: we could only conjecture that the woman had once been happy and certainly in her right mind; and that grief for the loss of her mate had robbed her of reason.

We all loved her, for she lived peacefully and contentedly with all and caused nobody the least trouble. The house-dog alone, it seemed, would never trust her, he barked and tore furiously at the chain whenever she came across the home meadow. But the creature was meaning something quite different than we thought, all the time; for once when the chain broke he rushed to the woman, leapt whining into her bosom and licked her cheeks.

At last in the late autumn, when Moss-Maggie was almost always in the graveyard, there came a time when, instead of barking cheerily, the dog howled by the hour together, so that my grandmother, herself very worn and weary by then, said, "You mark my words; there'll soon be somebody dying in our neighbourhood now, when the dog howls like that! God comfort the poor soul!"

And a little while after that Moss-Maggie fell ill, and when winter came she died.

In her last moments she held both my father and mother by the hand and uttered the words, "May God requite you a thousand and a thousandfold, right up into heaven itself!"

Footnotes:

[3] A morning service of the Catholic Church held during Advent.

[4]

In God's name let us arise
Towards God to go,
Towards God to take our way,
To the Heavenly Father to pray,
That He lend to us
Dear little angels three:

The first to guide us,
The second to feed us,
The third to shelter and protect us
That nothing mischance us in body or soul.

[5] The birchen Lizzie—*Die birkene Liesel*.

IV

A Last Will and Testament

WHEN of a Saturday evening my father sat at his shaving I had to creep under the table because it was dangerous above.

When my father sat shaving himself, and when he had lathered his cheek and lips to such a snowy whiteness that he looked like the herd-boy after he has been lapping cream behind the milkmaid's back; when, further, he sharpened his gleaming razor on his brown-leather braces and then passed it slowly over his cheek, he would straightway begin to twist mouth, cheeks, and nose—indeed, his whole countenance—in such a fashion as made his dear kind face quite unrecognisable. He drew both lips deep into his mouth, till he was like nothing so much as old neighbour Veit who had lost all his teeth; or he stretched his mouth crosswise, from left to right, like Köhler-Sani scolding his hens; and he screwed one eye up tight and blew out a cheek, for all the world like poor Tinili the tailor, after his virago wife had been caressing him. All the funniest faces in the whole neighbourhood came to my mind in turn when my father sat at his shaving. And that set me off.

At this point my father, still friendly, would say, "Do be quiet, laddie." But scarcely had he spoken when again there came such a wonderful face that I simply couldn't help laughing outright. He peered into the little looking-glass, and I fully expected to see his distorted features relax into a smile. Then he suddenly called out, "If you're not quiet, boy, I'll break the shaving-brush over your pate!"

It was now high time to creep under the table, where my smothered giggles kept me shaking like a wet poodle. After that he could shave peacefully and without danger of breaking out into untimely mirth over his own or my grimaces.

And so it came to pass one winter evening that my father was sitting before the soap-bowl and I under the table when I heard someone in the entrance stamping the snow from his boots. A moment later the door opened and in came a big man whose thick red beard had icicles hanging from it just like our shingle roof outside. He at once sat down on a bench, drew a big tobacco-pipe

from under his homespun cloak, gripped it between his front teeth, and, while striking a light, remarked, "Having a shave, Farmer?"

"Yes, I'm having a bit of a shave," answered my father, and went on scraping with the razor, and cut a really God-forsaken grimace.

"That's all right," said the stranger.

And later, when he was quite hidden in tobacco smoke and the icicles were dripping from his beard, he uttered himself thus:

"I don't know if so be you know me or not, Farmer. Five year agone I passed your place and took a drink of water at your spring. I come from Stanz; I'm Frau Drachenbinder's farm-hand, and I've come about the matter of that big lad of yours."

Under the table, I went hot to the tips of my toes at these words. My father had but one big lad at the time, and that was myself. I drew back into the darkest corner.

"Come about my boy?" returned my father. "You can have him if you want him—we can easily spare him; he's just too bad for anything!"

(Peasant folk are very fond of talking like that for the sake of teasing and overaweing their forward children.)

"Come, come, Farmer! Not so bad as all that! Frau Drachenbinder wants to get something written down—a will or some such matter—and she don't know anybody, far and wide, that's a good writing scholar. But now she's heard tell that the farmer at Vorderalpel has got an uncommon kind of boy that can do such things as that with his little finger alone! And so she's sent me off here, and I was to beg of you, Farmer, if you'd be so kind as to lend her the loan of the boy over there for a day. She'll soon pack him off back again, and give him something for his trouble as well."

When I heard him say that I rattled my shoe-tips against the table legs: that wouldn't come at all amiss, I thought.

"Go along with you!" said my father when he had scratched one cheek quite smooth. "However is my small boy to go to Stanz in the dead of winter? It must be at least a four hours' walk!"

"Just so," answered the big man, "and that's why I'm here. He's only got to climb up on my back and open his legs and shove 'em along past my ribs, both sides of me, towards the front, where I'll lay hold of them; and then he must hug me round the neck with his hands, like as if he was my sweetheart, so that he don't go falling off backwards."

"I see," replied my father; "you needn't make such a talk about a pig-a-

back ride!”

“Well, after that I’ll manage all right, and when Sunday comes I’ll bring him back home again.”

“I’m not afraid of your not bringing him back safe and sound,” said my father; “and if Frau Drachenbinder really wants to have something written down, and seeing that you’re her man, and if the lad will go with you—there’s no objection so far as I’m concerned.”

He uttered these words with a smooth, ordinary countenance.

A little later I was rigged out in my Sunday clothes. Elated with my so suddenly acquired importance I strutted up and down the room.

“You wandering Jew, you!” exclaimed my father. “Haven’t you got anything to sit upon?”

But there was no more peace for me. Better than anything I should have liked to settle myself there and then on the big man’s broad back, and ride straight away. But just then my mother came in bringing a steaming savoury dish, saying, “Eat that, you two, before you start off!”

Not in vain did she say it. I had never yet seen our biggest wooden spoon piled up so high as then when the strange big man plied it between the meat-platter and his bearded mouth. But I walked up and down all the while and thought about how I was going to become Frau Drachenbinder’s scrivener.

Presently, when matters had gone so far that my mother could turn the dish upside-down on the hearth without a crumb falling out, I hopped up on to the man’s back, held on hard by his beard, and rode away in the name of God.

The sun was already setting; the valleys were full of blue shadow; the far snow-heights of the Alps were a dull rose-colour.

So long as my nag was trotting uphill over the bare pastures the snow bore his weight well, but when he came in among the young larch and pine-woods the surface became treacherous and broke under him. He was prepared for that, however. When he came up to an old hollow larch with wild arms stretching out into the air, he pulled up, thrust his right hand into the dark cavity, and fished out a pair of snow-shoes of woven willow which he bound under his shoe-soles. Upon these wide things he began the pilgrimage anew. Progress was slow, for in order to manage the shoes he must keep them far apart; but with such duck’s feet there was no more breaking through.

Suddenly—it was already dark and the stars shining clear—my mount began to undo my shoes, pulled them clean off my feet and put them away in his turned-up apron. Then he said, “Now, laddie, stick your little hoofs in my

breeches pocket, so that your toes don't freeze off." He took my hands in his own and breathed warm breath upon them—and that was instead of gloves.

The cold bit my cheeks, the snow creaked under the snow-shoes; I rode on lonely through the forest and over the heights. I rode all along the ridge of the Hochbürstling, where even in summer I had never yet been. Now and again, when progress was too deliberate, I pressed my knees into the yielding flesh, and my horse took it all in good part, going on as well as ever he could—there was no doubt about his knowing the way! I rode past a post whereon, summer and winter, that holy patron of cattle, St. Erhardi, stood. I knew St. Erhardi at home, he and I between us had charge of my father's herd. He was always much carefuller than I: if a cow came to grief, I the herdboys was blamed; if the others throve, St. Erhardi got the credit for it.—It did my heart good he should see that I had become a horseman while he stood there nailed to his post for ever and ever.

At last our path took a turn and I began riding downwards over stumps and stones, making towards a little light that glimmered in the valley below. And just when all the trees and places had passed me by and I had nothing but the dark mass with the one little pane of shining light before me, my good Christopher came to a halt and said, "Now look here, my dear boy—seeing as how I'm a stranger to you and you've come with me like this without taking thought what you were doing—how d'you know that I mayn't have got a life-long grudge against your father and am just now going to carry you into a robbers' den?"

I listened a moment. Then, as he added nothing to these words, I answered in the same tone:

"Considering my father trusted me to Frau Drachenbinder's man and that I've come with him like this, it's not likely Drachenbinder's man has got a grudge against us, and he won't carry me into a robbers' den."

At these words of mine the man snorted into his beard, and soon after he lowered me on to the stump of a tree, saying, "And now here we are at Frau Drachenbinder's house."

He opened a door in the dark mass and went in.

The small living-room had a stove with glowing embers on it, a burning pine-splinter,^[6] and a straw bed with a child asleep on it. Near it stood a woman, very old and bent and with a face as pallid and creased as the coarse nightgown she was wearing. As we entered, this person uttered a strange cry, a sort of crowing, began to laugh violently, and then hid herself behind the stove.

“That’s Frau Drachenbinder,” remarked my guide. “She’ll soon come and speak to you, and meantime you sit down there on the stool near the bed and put on your shoes again.”

I did what he bade me, and he seated himself on a block of wood near by.

When the woman became composed, she moved lightly about the stove and soon brought us a steaming grey meal-soup in an earthenware pot, and two bone spoons with it. My man ate solemnly and steadily, but I couldn’t quite fancy it. Then he got up and said softly to me, “Sleep well, boy!” and went away. And when I found myself alone in the close room with the sleeping child and the old woman I began to feel downright creepy.

Frau Drachenbinder came up to me, laid her light, lean hand on my cheek, and said, “I thank the dear Lord God that you’ve come!—It’s barely six months since my daughter died. That there”—she pointed to the child—“is my young branch—such a dear mite— he’s my heir. And now I hear Death knocking at the door again. I’m very old. I’ve saved all my life—I’m going to beg my coffin from kind folks’ charity. My husband died long ago and left this little house to me. My illnesses have cost me the house—but they weren’t worth it. Whatever I leave behind me is for my grandchild’s very own. As yet he’s too young to take it into his heart, and I can’t give it into any man’s hand, and so I want to have it written down so that it’s kept. I won’t do it through the schoolmaster in Stanz, and the doctor can’t do it without the stamp-duty. And then people told me about the son of the farmer at Vorderalpel, and how he was such a scholar that he could write out people’s last wills without the stamp! That’s why I’ve had you brought all this long way. Do this favour for me to-morrow, and to-night go and get a good rest.”

She ushered me, by the light of the burning splinter, into the little room adjoining. It was made only of boards. A bed of hay, with a covering in the shape of the woman’s thick, best Sunday dress, was there, and in a corner stood a little brown church with two small towers in which little bells were set a-tinkling whenever one trod the shaky floor. Frau Drachenbinder stuck the burning pine-wood in the window of one of the towers, made the sign of the cross on me with her thumb, and then I was alone in the room. It was cold: I was shivering with the bitter winter, and with a fear of my hostess too, but, before ever I crept into my nest, curiosity impelled me to open the door of the little church. Out sprang a mouse who had just made her supper off the gold-paper altar and St. Joseph’s cardboard hand. Saints and angels were there within, and gay banners and wreaths—it was a lovely toy. I thought to myself that this must be Frau Drachenbinder’s parish church, for the little body was far too feeble to walk to Stanz for mass. I said my evening prayer before it, asking Our Lord to protect me during that night; then I extinguished the

splinter so that it should not burn right down to the window-frame, and after that laid myself down on the hay, in God's name.

It seemed to me as if I had been torn away from myself and were some learned clerk in a far-away cold house, while the real boy of the forest farm was sleeping at home in his own warm little nest. Just as I was falling asleep I heard the short, sharp cries of joy again in the living-room, and soon after that the loud laughter. Whatever was it that delighted her so much, and at whom was she laughing? I was terrified, and thought of running away. One of the boards could be easily shifted, but then—the snow!

Only towards morning did I fall asleep, and I dreamed and dreamed about a red mouse that had bitten off the right hand of all the saints in the church. And my father was looking out of the window of the tower with his lathered, distorted cheeks and holding a lighted pine-splinter in his mouth: and I sobbed and giggled together, and was hot with fear. When at last I awoke I thought I was in a cage with silver bars, for so the white daylight looked through the vertical cracks in the woodwork. And when I went outside the house door I was astonished to see how narrow the ravine was, and how high and wintry the mountains.

Within doors the child was screaming, and then Frau Drachenbinder broke out into her jubilant cries again.

At breakfast there was my horse again, but he hardly spoke at all, giving all his attention to his food; and when that was finished he got up, put on his huge hat, and went off to church at Stanz.

When the old woman had comforted the child, fed the fowls, and done other household work, she pushed the wooden bolt of the house door, went into the inner room, and began ringing the bells of the little church. She lighted two candles that stood on the altar, and then she made a prayer, and one more moving have I never heard. She knelt before the church, held out her hands, and murmured: "By the most sacred wound of Thy right hand, O my crucified Saviour, save my parents if they be still in torment. Though they have lain for half a century in the earth I can still hear my father in the dead of night crying out for help.—By the most sacred wound of Thy left hand I commend to Thee the soul of my daughter. She had hardly looked round upon the world and she was just going to lay her little one in her husband's arms, when up comes cruel Death and takes and buries her out of our sight!—By the most sacred wound of Thy right foot, I pray Thee from my very heart for my husband, and for my kindred and benefactors, and that Thou wilt not forget this little lad from the forest farm.—By the most sacred wound of Thy left foot, O crucified Saviour, in love and mercy remember also all my enemies, who have smitten me with their hands and trodden me with their

feet. Blinded men crucified Thee to death, and yet Thou hast forgiven them.—By the most holy wound of Thy sacred side, I invoke Thee a thousand and a thousand times.—O crucified God, take up my grandchild to Thy Divine Heart. His father is far away with the soldiers, and perhaps I have not long to live. Be Thou a guardian to the child, I beseech Thee.”

That was how she prayed. The little red candles burned devoutly. At that moment it seemed to me that if I were Our Lord I would come down from Heaven and take the child in my arms, and say, “See for yourself, Frau Drachenbinder, I am holding him close to My heart, and I will be his guardian.” I would let him grow white wings, so that he could fly away to the Better Land.

But then, I wasn’t Our Lord.

Presently Frau Drachenbinder said, “Now let’s get to the writing.” But when we wanted to begin there was no ink and no pen and no paper. We had forgotten every one of these things.

The old woman leant her head on her palm, murmuring, “What a misfortune!”

I had heard somewhere the story of the doctor who in default of the necessary things wrote his prescription on the door of the room with chalk. His example was worth following now; but there was no chalk to be found in the house. I didn’t know what else to suggest, and was unspeakably ashamed of being a scribe without a pen.

“My boy,” said the woman suddenly, “maybe you learned to write with charcoal too?”

Yes, yes—with the charcoal—just like that on the hearth there; that would do!

“And this, in God’s name, must be my writing-paper,” she went on, and lifted the lid of an old coffer standing near the stove. Inside the coffer I could see cuttings of cloth, a piece of linen, and a rusty spade. When she saw me looking at the spade, she looked sadly confused, covered her old face with her brown apron, muttering, “It’s a real disgrace!”

I was stricken, for I took this to be a reproach for my having no writing things about me.

“I expect you’ll be making fun of me,” she said. “But don’t you go and think badly of me—I can’t do more than I do, I really couldn’t do a thing more—I’m a fairly worn-out old body!”

Then I thought I understood: the poor old woman felt herself disgraced

because she could no longer handle the spade, and it had therefore gone rusty. I looked about on the hearth for a bit of soft charcoal. The pine-tree was obliging, and lent me the pen wherewith to write out Frau Drachenbinder's will, or whatever it might prove to be.

Just when the grey coffer was opened and I standing there ready to take down her words, that they might deliver their message to her grandchild in the years to come, the old woman beside me uttered a loud cry. She turned away quickly, crowed again, and then broke into hoarse laughter.

In terror I broke the charcoal in my fingers and glanced askance at the door.

When she had done laughing, she grew quiet, drew a deep breath, wiped the sweat from her face, and turning again to me, said, "Write this—it won't come to much altogether—still, you'd best begin up in the top corner, there."

I placed my hand on the topmost corner of the lid. Then the woman spoke as follows:

"One and one is God alone.—That, child of my child, is thy very own."

I wrote this on the wood.

"Two and two," she went on, "Two and two is man and wife.
Three and three the child of their life.
Four and five to eight and nine—
For griefs are countless, darling mine.
Pray as if thou hadst no hand,
Work as if thou knewest no God,
Carry fuel, and think the while,
God will cook the broth for me."

When I had written these things, Frau Drachenbinder let down the coffer lid, bolted it carefully, and said, "You've done me a great service—and there's a great stone lifted off my heart. That coffer there is my legacy to my grandchild.—And now you must tell me what I owe you for this."

I shook my head. I wouldn't ask for anything, not anything at all.

"What—learn to write so finely and then come all this long way and suffer cold the long night through and then in the end take nothing for it—that would be fine indeed!" she cried. "Why, my boy, I couldn't allow it!"

I glanced through the open door into the next room where the little church stood. It certainly would be heavenly company for my little bed at home. She guessed at once. "You're thinking of my little house-altar!" she said. "Then, in God's name, you shall have it. I can't shut it up in the chest—my dear little church—and the people would only steal it from me when I'm gone. With

you it will be respected, I know, and you'll think of old Frau Drachenbinder in sacred moments, when you're saying your prayers."

And she gave me the little church as it stood. And that was the greatest bliss of all my childhood.

I dearly wanted to take it on my shoulders at once and carry it away over the hills to my home. But she said, "You dear little goose, that's impossible. When the man's back, he'll contrive something for you."

And sure enough, when the man was back again and had eaten the midday meal with us, he knew what to do. He bound the little church on to my back with a string, then stooped down in front of the wood block, and said, "Now, boy, mount again!" So for the second time I got up on his back, thrust my feet in his breeches pockets, and clung with my hands round his neck. The old woman held the waking child so that it might put out its little hand to me, uttered more thanks, and then dived behind the stove and crowed as before.

I rode away from the place, and with every movement the saints in the church kept tapping behind my back and the bells in the towers kept tinkling.

When the man had climbed with me as far as the heights of the Bürstling, and there again bound the snow-shoes fast to his feet, I asked him why Frau Drachenbinder was continually screaming for joy and laughing.

"That's not screaming nor yet laughing neither," said my horse; "Frau Drachenbinder has a lot of suffering to bear. For some years she used to have a sort of catch in the breath—such as you may get through a chill or the like: she didn't take any notice of it, let it just go its own way, and so, little by little, the barber says, that cramp-crowling and cramp-laughing came on. Her inside just twists itself up together, and when she gets excited the fits come on strong. She can hardly touch any food, and she's face to face with death all the time."

I said nothing. I looked up at the snow-white heights, at the twilight forests, and saw we were gradually climbing down towards my home in the clear Sunday afternoon. I was thinking about the little church I had got as a legacy—how I would set it up in the living-room and hold a service in it, and how my father and mother would now no longer have to trudge all that long way to the parish church.

My good horse trotted patiently on, and behind me all the way the little bells in the towers kept on chiming. What were they saying?...

Old Frau Drachenbinder died soon after that.

Footnote:

[6] With these small torches the peasants light their rooms.

V

How Little Maxel's House was Burned Down

HOW well I remember that night!

A dull report, as if the trap-door of the hay-loft had slammed to, woke me up. And then someone rapped on the window and called into the living-room: whoever wanted to see little Maxel's house burning must get up and go and look.

My father sprang out of bed; I began to cry, and immediately thought about rescuing my rabbit. When other people lost their heads in moments of emergency it was always blind Julia, our old servant, who calmed us down again. So now, too, she remarked it wasn't our house that was burning, but little Maxel's, and that was half an hour away; that it was not even certain that little Maxel's house was burning; that a wag, passing by, had thrown the lie in through the window; and that quite possibly no one *had* done so at all, but it had only happened to us in a dream.

Meanwhile she pulled on my breeches and shoes, and we hurried out of the house to look.

"Oh dear! oh dear!" cried my father. "It's all gone already!"

Over the Waldrücken, which stretches like a wide-bowed saddle across our part of the country, dividing it into Highlands and Lowlands, the flame streamed steady and clear toward us. No hissing nor crackling was to be heard; the beautiful new house, only finished a few weeks before, was burning like oil. The air was damp, the stars were hidden; now and again there was a growl of thunder, but the storm was drawing gently away in the direction of Berkfeld and Weitz.

The lightning—so the man who had wakened us now said—had been darting hither and thither, had described a great cross in the sky, and then descended. The fiery point at its lower end had never died out, but had grown rapidly larger, and then he—the man—had thought to himself, "There now,

it's gone and struck little Maxel's!"

"We must go and see if we can't do something to help," said my father.

"Help, would you?" rejoined the other. "Where the thunderbolt falls, *I* shan't meddle! Man mustn't work against his Maker, and if He casts fire upon a house He certainly intends that house to burn. Besides, you know, anything struck by lightning can't be quenched!"

"Nor your idiocy neither!" cried my father; and then, angry as I had seldom seen him, he shouted in his face, "You've been struck silly!"

He left him standing there, and took me by the hand and quickly away. We descended into the Engtal and went along by the Fresenbach, where we could see the fire no longer, only the fiery clouds. My father carried a two-handled pail, and I advised him to fill it at the Fresen. My father didn't listen, but said several times to himself, "Maxel—to think of that happening to Maxel!"

I knew little Maxel quite well. He was an active, cheery little chap, somewhere in the forties; his face was full of pock-marks, and his hands were brown and rough as the bark of the forest trees. So long as I could remember he had been a woodcutter in Waldbach.

"If it was anyone else's house that was burning down," said my father, "well—it would just be his house burning down!"

"Isn't it the same with little Maxel?" I asked.

"With him it's his all that's being burnt: everything that he had yesterday, and has to-day, and might have had to-morrow."

"D'you mean the lightning has struck Maxel himself?"

"It were better so, boy! I don't grudge him his life—God knows I don't grudge it him—but if he might have confessed first, and not been in any mortal sin, I could say downright it were best for him if the lightning had struck him too."

"Then he would be already up there in Heaven," I remarked.

"Here, don't go paddling about in that wet grass. Keep close behind me and catch on by my coat-tail. About Maxel—I'll tell you something about him."

The path sloped gently upwards. My father said, "It must be about thirty years since Maxel came. Poor people's child. At first he went out as herdboyc among the peasants; later, when he'd grown up a bit, he went in for the woodcutting—a thorough workman, and always industrious and thrifty. When he became foreman, he asked the landlord to allow him to clear the Sour Meadow on the Gfarerhöhe and keep it for life, because he was so mighty set

upon having his own little bit of land. This was willingly granted, and so, every day, when his woodcutting hours were over, Maxel was up there on the Sour Meadow, cutting away the undergrowth and trenching it, and grubbing up stones and burning the roots of the weeds; and in two years the whole place was drained; and there's good grass growing there, and he's even sown a little patch of rye. When he'd got on so far that he had tried it with cabbage and seen how much the hares relished it, he set about getting some timber. They couldn't give him that, like the Sour Meadow—he must purchase it with labour. So he let his wages stand, and he felled the trees and hewed them square and cut them up for building timber, and all that in the free time when the other workmen were long since lying on their stomachs smoking their pipes! And the next thing was he began to get some of the other woodcutters to help him at such work as a man couldn't do single-handed, and this way he built his house on the Sour Meadow. Five years he laboured at it, but there—you've seen for yourself how it stood there with the golden-red walls, with the clear windows, and the decoration all round the roof—something grand to see! There's quite a fine little property been made of the Sour Meadow; and how long ago was it that our pastor in the catechism class held little Maxel up as an example of energy and industry? Next month he was meaning to get married: and to think he's risen from being a poor pauper lad to the brave householder and house-father!—Take off your cap to him, boy—And now suddenly there's an end of everything; all the industry and toil of years has gone for nothing; Maxel stands again to-day on the same spot as he did at the very beginning.”

At that time I derived all my piety from the Bible, and so I met my father's story with: “Our Heavenly Father has punished Maxel because he was set upon earthly things like the heathen, and has probably taken too little thought for Eternity. Look at the birds of the air, they sow not, neither do they reap _____”

“Hold your tongue!” interrupted my father angrily. “The man who said that was King Solomon—it's easy enough for *him* to say it: only let some of our sort try it! I wouldn't be sure of myself; if it happened to me like little Maxel, I should just lose all heart—I'd just turn idle and good for nothing. Why, if a man puts a match to a thatched roof he's put in prison, and quite right too—he doesn't deserve anything better. But when Someone throws fire down out of Heaven on a brand-new house that a poor, plucky working-man has built _____”

He stopped himself. We were now upon the height, and in front of us blazed the homestead of little Maxel. The house was just falling in. Several people were there with axes and pails, but there was nothing to be done but

just stand and look on as the last charred bits tumbled into ruins. The fire wasn't raging, it didn't roar nor crackle, it didn't flicker wildly in the air: the whole house was just one flame rising, hot and steady, towards the Heaven whence it had come.

A little way off from the conflagration lay the stone-heap where Maxel had carried the stones from the Sour Meadow. Thereon he was now sitting, the little brown, pock-marked man, and looking at the furnace, the heat of which was streaming towards him. He was half clad, had thrown his black Sunday coat, the only thing he had rescued, over him. The neighbours were holding a little aloof. My father greatly desired to utter a word of sympathy and comfort, but somehow he too didn't venture to go near him. Maxel went on sitting there in a way that made us think every moment, now, *now* he would leap up and utter some fearful curse against Heaven, and then throw himself into the flames!

And at last, when the fire was only licking the ground and the bare wall of the hearth was staring out of the ashes, Maxel got up. He walked over to the glowing mass, picked up an ember, and lighted his pipe with it.

I was still very small at that time and didn't think much. But this I remember: when I saw little Maxel in that dawn-twilight standing before the burnt ruin of his home, sucking the blue smoke from his pipe and blowing it away from him, my heart grew suddenly hot within me. As if I felt how mighty man is, how much greater than his fate, and how there was no finer scorning of it than calmly blowing tobacco-smoke in its face.

And when the pipe was well alight, he sat down again on the stone-heap and gazed away into the distance. You would like to know what he was thinking? So should I.

Later, little Maxel went rummaging among the ashes of his house, and drew from them his great wood-axe, and made it sharp again on a grindstone of the neighbourhood and set to work again. Since then many years have passed, and to-day on the Sour Meadow there lie beautiful fields, and on the place of the burnt-out farm a new one has arisen. It is lively with young folk, and the house-father, little Maxel, teaches his sons to work—but also allows them to smoke. Not too much, but just a pipe in due season.

VI

Three Hundred and Sixty-four Nights and a Night

THE white kid was gone.

But my father still had four big nanny-goats in the stable, just as he had four children, who always stood in close relationship to the goats. Each of the goats had her own little manger, out of which she ate hay or clover while we milked her. Not one of them would give milk at an empty manger. The goats were called Zitzerl, Zutzerl, Zeitzerl and Heitzerl, and were the property of us children—a welcome present which father had made us. Zitzerl and Zutzerl belonged to my two little sisters; Zeitzerl to my eight-year-old brother Jakoberle; Heitzerl was mine!

Each of us faithfully tended and looked after his allotted charge; but we put all the milk together in a pot, mother boiled it, father gave us the slices of bread that went with it—and the Lord God blessed the spoonful of soup for us.

And, when we had ladled up our suppers with our broad wooden spoons, which had been carved by our uncle and which, because of their size, would hardly go into our mouths in the first place or out of them in the second, we would each of us take our horsehair pillow and lie down, one and all, in the goats' mangers. These were our beds for a time; and the beloved animals used to fan our cheeks with their soft beards and lick our little noses with their tongues.

But, when we lay thus in our cribs, we did not always go to sleep at the very first lick. My head was crammed with a multitude of wonderful stories and fairy-tales of our grandfathers. I would tell these stories in those evening-hours; and my brothers and sisters revelled in them and even the goats were fond of listening to them too. Only now and again, when the thing struck them as too incredible, they would give a little bleat to themselves or bang at the mangers impatiently with their horns. Once, when I was telling of the

corn-wraith who blackens the oats when she cries at midnight in the fields, and eats nothing but the grey beards of old charcoal burners, my Heitzerl began to bleat so violently that the other three joined in until at last my brother and sisters burst into wild peals of laughter and I was shamefully obliged to hold my tongue like a convicted boaster.

For a long time after that, I told my sleeping-companions no more stories and I resolved never to speak another word to Heitzerl so long as I lived.

Then came Ascension Day, on which day mother made us the usual egg-cake, my favourite dish in all the world. That year, however, the hawks had taken our best laying-hens; the egg-basket would not fill; and, when the cake appeared on Ascension Day, it was only a tiny little loaf. I gave a woe-begone look at the wooden dish.

My little five-year-old sister peeped up at me; and, as though noticing my longing, she suddenly cried:

“I say, Peterle, look here! If you will tell us a short story every night for a whole year long, I will give you my share of the cake.”

Strange to say, the others all chimed in and echoed this noble renunciation on the little one's part; they clapped their hands; and—I entered into the bargain. So, suddenly, had I attained the object of my desire.

I tucked my cake under my jacket and went with it to the dairy, where no one could see or disturb me. I bolted the door, sat down on an overturned tub and allowed my ten fingers and the well-ordered host of my teeth to work their will on the poor cake.

But now came this anxiety. There could not be a doubt that my brother and sisters would insist strictly on their due. When I went out a-herding, I begged a story of every pitch-maker, every charcoal-burner, every keeper and every knowing little woman that I met in the wood and on the fields. They were productive sources, and I was able to meet my liabilities every evening. Meanwhile, of course, it was a daily misery until I hit upon something fresh; and, after a time, it happened not seldom that little sister would interrupt me and call out from her manger:

“Look here, we know that one! You have told it us before!”

I could see that I must think of new ways and I therefore struggled to improve my reading, so as to draw treasures from the many story-books which lay idling on the sooty shelves in our little house in the forest. Now I had new sources: the story of the Countess-palatine (Jakoberle always said, “The Countess-Gelatine”) Genovefa; the four sons of Aymon; the Fair Melusina; Wendelin von Höllenstein: wonderful things by the dozen. And my

brother would often say from his manger:

“I don’t mind going without my cake a bit! This is just *too* lovely. What do you say, Zeitzerl?”

Now the evenings grew too short; and I had to tell some of these stories in serials and sequels, a proceeding to which little sister refused point-blank to agree, for she stuck to it that a *whole* story every night was what we bargained for.

So the year went by. Little by little, I acquired a real skill in telling stories and even told them in High German, as they stood printed in the books! And it often happened that, during the telling, my listeners buried themselves in their coverlets and began to groan with fright at the stories of robbers and ghosts; but I was not allowed to stop, for all that!

Ascension Day was very nearly there again, and with it, the completion of my bargain. But—it was like my luck!—just before the last evening, my thread gave out entirely. All my recollections, all the books which I could get hold of, all the little men and women whom I met were exhausted, drained, pumped dry beyond all hope. I implored my brother and sisters:

“To-morrow is the last evening; make me a present of it!”

There was a general outcry:

“No, no, no presents! You got your Ascension cake!”

Even the goats bleated their approval.

The next day, I went about like a lost sheep. Then the thought suddenly came to me: “Deceive them! *Invent* something!”

But my conscience at once stepped in and cried aloud:

“What you tell must be real! You really had the cake!”

Nevertheless, an event occurred in the course of that day which made me hope that, in the heat of the excitement, it would release me from my duty.

My brother Jakoberle lost his Zeitzerl. He went this way and that over the heath, he went into the wood and, crying and calling, hunted for the goat. But, at last, he brought her home, late in the evening. We ate our porridge quietly and went to our cribs; and a story was expected of me.

All was silent. The listeners waited eagerly. The goats clashed their teeth together as they chewed the cud.

“Very well, they shall have their story,” said I.

I reflected. I began:

“There was once a great, great wood. And everything in the wood was dark. No little birds sang: only the screech-owl’s cry was heard. But, even though the other birds had sung, all the boughs and all the leaves on the trees wept thousands and thousands of tears. In the middle of this wood is a heath, silent as the graveyard; and he who goes over it and does not turn back is never seen again. Once upon a time, two knees went over this heath; and inside those knees was blood.”

“Jesus Mar...!” gasped the elder of my little sisters; and all three crept under their coverlets.

“Yes, two knees with blood inside them,” I continued, “and they passed over the heath towards the dark wood, like a lost soul. But, all at once, the two bloody knees....”

“I say, I’ll give you my blue trouser-belt if you stop!” whimpered my brother in his fear and hid still deeper in the coverlet.

“The two bloody knees stopped,” I continued, “and on the ground lay a stone as white as a winding-sheet. Then two flickering lights appeared between the trees; and thereupon four more knees, *all with blood*—hovered to the same place....”

“I’ll give you my new pair of shoes if you stop!” Jakoberle panted in his trough and, for sheer terror, drew Zeitzerl to him by her beard.

“And so they all six together passed through the dark wood and out upon the heath and over the oat-field to our house ... and here into the stable....”

Now they all three cried out and whimpered; and there was no end to their terror, and my little sister timidly promised me her share of to-morrow’s Ascension cake, which was expected this year too, if I would only stop. But I went on:

“Well, ah, yes, I forgot to begin by saying that the first two knees—with blood—belonged to our Jakoberle and the last four to his Zeitzerl ... as they went about in the wood to-day.”

Suddenly, they all burst out laughing.

“Why, everybody has two knees with blood in them!” cried little sister; and the goats bleated their share of the jubilation.

I had played my part right out. For three hundred and sixty-four nights long, I had shone as a wise and veracious story-teller; the three-hundred-and-sixty-fifth had unmasked me as a deceitful humbug. The promise of the second Ascension cake was withdrawn; little sister declared that her offer had been made in self-defence.

And I had shattered the confidence of my public for good and all; and, thereafter, whenever it wanted to express its doubts of anything I related, it cried, with one voice:

“Ah, that’s only one of your old knees again!”

VII

How the White Kid Died

THERE was yet another time when I just escaped the birch.

My father had a snow-white kid, my Cousin Jok had a snow-white head. The kid loved chewing stalks and twigs; my cousin loved chewing a short pipe. We—I and my younger brother and sisters—were ever so fond of the kid and of Cousin Jok too. And so we lighted upon the idea of bringing the kid and our cousin together.

One bright, sunny day in July, I took my brother and my two sisters out into the cabbage-patch and there put this question to them:

“Which of you has a hat without a hole in it?”

They examined their hats and caps, but the sun shone through all of them, making little flecks of light in the shadow on the ground. Only Jakoberle’s hat was without a flaw; so I took it in my hand and said:

“Cousin’s called Jok and to-morrow is St. Jokopi’s^[7] Day. Now what shall we give him for a present on his name-day? Why not the white kid?”

“The white kid belongs to father!” cried little sister Plonele, shocked at this arbitrary suggestion.

“That’s just why I am sending the hat round,” said I. “You, Jakoberle, sold your rabbit to Sepp, the Knierutscher, yesterday; you, Plonele, have had three groschen as a tip from your god-father; you, Mirzerle, got a present from father two days ago. Look, I’ll put in the five kreuzer which I’ve saved up; and we must manage to buy the kid from father between us. And then we’ll give it to cousin to-morrow. Now here goes for the collection!”

They looked into the hat for a moment and then began to feel in their pockets. Then Plonele said, “Mother’s got my money!” And Mirzerle cried, in alarm, “I don’t know wherever mine’s got to!” And Jakoberle stared at the ground and muttered, “There must be a hole in my pocket!”

And so my plan fell to pieces.

None the less, we petted and fondled the snow-white kid. It stood up and put its fore-feet on our knees and looked at us roguishly with its squinny eyes, as though it were mocking us for not being rich enough to buy it between the lot of us. It tittered and bleated at us like anything and showed us its snow-white teeth. It was hardly three months old and already had a beard; while I and Jakoberle were seven years old and more and had to make ourselves a beard of grey tree-moss when we wanted one. And the kid ate even that off our faces!

In spite of that, each one of us was much fonder of the little four-footed creature than of all the others put together! And so I cast about for some other means of rejoicing my cousin with the gift of the animal.

When father came home from the fields that afternoon, we all swarmed about him and tugged at his clothes.

“Father,” I asked, “is it true that ‘The early morn has gold in its mouth’?”

This being one of his own proverbs, he answered promptly:

“Indeed it *is* true.”

“Father!” the four of us immediately cried together. “How early must we get up every day for you to give us the white kid?”

Father did not seem to jump at this business view of the matter. But, when he heard of our proposal to give the kid to Cousin Jok, he bargained that we should get up half an hour earlier every morning and thereupon made the dear little beast over to us.

The kid was ours. We resolved with one accord to creep out of bed next morning before cousin’s time for getting up—and that was saying a great deal—to tie a red ribbon round the kid’s neck and to take it to old Jok’s bedside before he thrust his body into his long grey fur, which he wore winter and summer alike.

This was our sacred intention.

But, next day, when mother called us and we opened our eyelids, the sun shone so fiercely into our eyes that we had to shut them again until she covered the window with her kerchief.

Now there was no excuse left. But cousin had gone out long before, taking his fur with him. He had driven the sheep and goats to the meadow in the valley where he always tended them and where he sat all day smiling and chewing his pipe. And the little animals nibbled busily at the dewy grasses and shrubs and skipped and gambolled merrily on the sunny meadow.

The little kid was among them. And had nobody reminded Jok that this was

his name-day?

At the time of which I speak, lucifer-matches had not yet been invented and so the beloved fire was a precious thing. You could not carry it in your pocket as easily as to-day, without burning your trousers. It had to be knocked out of stones with hard blows; no sooner hatched, it must be fed with tinder, and it was long ere it derived strength enough from this to peck at coarser food and then become fledged. On every separate occasion, fire had to be formally brought into the service of man.

It was a toilsome and ticklish piece of work; my own mother, who was usually so gentle, could get quite cross over it.

The glowing embers, however carefully preserved overnight in the hearth, were generally dead by morning. Whatever pains mother might take to blow up the sparks in the ashes, it was all in vain: the fire had died during the night. And then the striking with flint and steel began, and we children were often quite hungry before mother produced the fire that was to cook the morning-porridge.

So it was on the morning of cousin's name-day. We had heard the bellows-blowing and fire-striking for some time out in the kitchen. Then our mother suddenly exclaimed:

"It's no good at all! One would think the devil had spat on the hearth! And the flint hasn't a spark of fire left in it, and the tinder's damp, and here's everybody waiting for their porridge!"

Then she came into the room and said:

"Come, Peterle, quick, and run across as fast as you can to the Knierutscher woman. Tell her that I beg her to send me a handful of embers from her hearth. And take her that loaf of bread over there for her kindness. Hurry up, Peterle, so that we can get our porridge quickly."

I had my little white linen breeches on in no time and, as I was, barefoot and bareheaded, I took the heavy round loaf under my arm and ran off to the Knierutschers' house.

"You old sunshine!" I said, as I went. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, that you can't even warm a mouthful of porridge, and here I've got to go running to the Knierutscher woman for fire—But just you wait: things will soon be bright and jolly on our hearth—the flames will leap over the sticks, the walls will light up red, the pots will bubble, the smoke will rush out of the hearth and the chimney and hide you from sight! And quite right too, for then we shall eat our porridge and our stew in the shadow, and the pancake, too, that's to be fried to-day for Cousin Jok, and you shall see

nothing of all these nice things!”

As I went down the hill after my lecture to the sun, I had a happy thought. My loaf was as round as a ball and as hard as if it had been turned out of larch-wood. In my part of the country, they let bread grow stale, because it makes it last twice as long; even though it has occasionally to be smashed up, at mealtimes, with a sledge-hammer.

Well, seeing that my loaf was so round that there was nothing rounder on the face of the earth, I let it run loose down the slope, raced nimbly after it and caught it up again.

That was a thoroughly jolly game; and I should have liked to call all my brothers and sisters to see it and share in it. But, as I was jumping up and down the slope in my delight, my loaf suddenly played me a trick and darted like the wind between my legs. Hurrying and hopping away it went, fleeter than a roe before the hounds—it bounded down the hill, leapt far over the edge into the valley below and vanished from my sight.

I stood there like a block, feeling as if I should drop with fright and go rolling into the valley in my turn. I went to and fro and up and down for a while; and, then as I could nowhere see the loaf, I slunk with hanging head into the Knierutschers' house.

There was a fine big fire burning on the hearth.

“What have you come for, Peterle?” asked Frau Knierutscher, kindly.

“Our fire's gone out,” I stammered, “we can't cook a thing and so my mother sent me to ask for a handful of embers and she will return them very soon.”

“You little silly, you! Who ever heard of returning a few embers?” cried she, as she took the tongs and raked some into an old pot. “Here, tell your mother to make up a good fire and cook you a nice stew. But take care, Peterle, don't you let the wind get at them, or it will blow the sparks up to the roof. There, go now, in God's name!”

So gentle was she with me, who had so lightly played away her loaf! It weighs upon my conscience to this day.

When, at last, I got back to the house with my pot of fire, I was greatly surprised to see blue smoke rising out of the chimney.

“You're one to send to fetch death and not fire!” cried mother, as I entered.

And she busied herself about the fire crackling in the hearth and did not so much as look at me.

My coals were now hardly flickering and looked wretched beside that fire. I put the pot down sadly in a corner of the hearth and slunk away. I had been gone much too long; then, by good fortune, Cousin Jok had come home from the meadow, and he had a burning-glass, which he held over a piece of tinder in the sun until it caught. And so the sun which I had slandered had stolen a march upon me and provided fire for the porridge before I did. I was heartily ashamed of myself and, to this day, am unable to look the benefactor straight in the face.

I slunk into the paddock. There I saw Cousin Jok squatting in his long grey, red-embroidered fur, with his white head. And, when I drew nigh, I saw why he was squatting here like that. The snow-white kid lay in front of him, with its head and its feet outstretched and Cousin Jok was stripping off its hide.

At that I burst into loud weeping. Cousin Jok stood up, took me by the hand, and said:

“There it lies and looks at you!”

And the kid really was staring into my face with its glassy eyes. And yet it was dead.

“Peterle!” whispered my cousin, gravely. “Mother sent the Knierutscher woman a loaf of bread.”

“Yes,” I sobbed, “and it ran away from me, right down over the edge.”

“Since you own up, laddie,” said Cousin Jok, “I will arrange things so that nothing happens to you. I have told mother that a stone or something came rolling down and killed the kid. (Somehow, I thought in my own mind that Peterle was at the back of it!) That loaf of bread came straight out of the air, down over the high edge, passed me and hit the kid right on the head. The poor little thing staggered and fell and was dead as a mouse at once. However, don’t be afraid, we’ll keep to the stone idea. I’ll make things all right with the Knierutscher woman too; and now be quiet, laddie, and don’t pull such dismal faces. To-night we’ll eat the poor beastie, and mother will cook us a horseradish-soup to go with it.”

In such wise died the little white kid. My brother and sisters told me it had been killed by a naughty, cruel stone.

To please me, mother added my coals to the fire on the hearth, and before this fire the kid was roasted. It was to have been a gift for Cousin Jok; and now he was to have roast kid instead. But he invited all of us to join him and gave us the best bits. I did not relish mine at all.

The next morning, Jakoberle armed himself with a cudgel, followed Cousin

Jok with it into the lower meadow and wanted to see the stone that killed the little kid.

“Child,” said Cousin Jok, chewing hard at his pipe, “it rolled further on and the water’s running over it now: it’s down in the glen.”

The dear, good old man! The stone that killed the little kid was lying on my heart.

Footnote:

[7] Jacob, Jacobus. The feast of St. James the Apostle is celebrated on the 25th of July.—*Translator’s Note.*

VIII

Children of the World in the Forest

FAR more intelligent must he be, the peasant of the isolated mountain farm, far more versatile and capable than the villager, and infinitely more so than the townsman—*must*, or he could not exist!

The townsman has an easy time of it: if he can write, or keep accounts; if, for instance, he has the knack of making leather, or keeps a grocer's shop; or even if he speculates and applies himself to cutting off his coupons, he has all that he requires; and all that a townsman requires everyone who is a townsman knows.

The things which, in the towns, are produced by the divided toil of thousands of heads, hands, and wheels, in other words, the necessaries of life, the peasant in the far-lying mountains must make for himself, in his narrow circle, with his small, unaided means. He is a provider of natural produce, manufacturer, middleman and consumer, all in one. The bread which he eats comes from the corn which he flung into the earth last year with his own hand; the bacon which he enjoys on its bed of cabbage is cut from the pig fattened with the turnips which he has planted in his own ground. The shoe which he wears is made of the cow-hide which he himself has stripped from the animal's body and himself has tanned; the wool that forms his coat he has shorn from his own sheep, spun, woven and milled. The shirt on his back he saw last summer shimmering in the sunny fields in the blue flax-blossom; and the milking-pail into which his cow sends her milk streaming was, but a year ago, hiding in a fir-trunk in his woods. And I could in like manner string out a long list of matters in which the farmer must be his own breeder, gardener, miller, baker, smith, saddler, carpenter, weaver, wheelwright and so on. And a household in which one and all of these trades are put in practice need not even be a very large one: it is the ordinary farmhouse in the mountain valleys to which the world of exchange and barter has not yet fully made its way.

Isn't it true, then, that such a peasant-farmer needs to have a head on his shoulders? This head, again, is of home production, and a good thing too; for the Jew pedlar, who is always prepared to bring any requisite from town for

cash, could hardly be expected to supply that.

But nowadays this, like most things, is changing; and, since gold and silver have taken to rolling to and fro, in such a momentous fashion, between the houses of town and country, the peasant no longer has the same joy in his farm, where he must always be labouring for others. Besides, he need not work out in the wilderness nowadays; he can do much better, they tell him, on rented land or in the factories; he sells or lets his property and goes after money. And there at last you have the stupid peasant!

I only speak of these things because my father's house, concerning which I have something to tell, was one of those farms in which we ourselves produced nearly everything that we wanted. And yet, even at that time, money played us a trick. My father was particularly clever at tanning hides, at weaving, at grinding corn and at pressing linseed-oil. In the last case, I assisted him to brave purpose, as a boy of ten, by dipping a slice of white bread into the oil that ran from the gutter of the press and then transferring the bright yellow slice to my mouth.

One day, while we were thus engaged, Clements, the timber-merchant, walked into the pressing-room. He had once been forest-ranger at Alpel; but he had made such a huge amount of money in the timber-trade that he lost all interest in our mountains and went down into the broad Mürzthal, where he displayed a restless activity in acquiring more and yet more money. He had grown quite lean at this unedifying occupation; but otherwise he continued in fairly good fettle.

Well, when Clements saw the oil bubbling in the wooden pail, he asked, was the cider sweet?

My father invited him to taste it; but, when Clements lifted the pail bodily and took a draught from it, he fell back as though someone had struck him in the face and lost no time in spitting out what he had swallowed.

"It can't hurt you," said my father, to console him. "It is pure linseed oil."

"Forest-farmer," said Clements, gradually recovering himself, "here I am, bringing all sorts of good things to your house; and this is the way you treat me!"

"You're the first I ever met that did not like flax-wine," replied my father. "It's just like a wine, so golden and clear. And you couldn't find anything better for one's precious health. I am in the doctor's debt to the price of a couple of oxen; and even then I should be under the sod to-day if Our Father in Heaven had not made linseed-oil to grow."

"And, as you, forest-farmer, are still, thank God, above the sod," drawled

Clements, “you’ll be needing money, I’m thinking. Look, it’s your guardian angel’s brought me here: I’m bringing you some.”

“Oh, my gracious!” replied my father, leaning his whole weight upon the lever, so that the oil-cake in the press had to yield its last drains, which, however, were received into a separate little pot, for these dregs are not quite so clear and mild as the first stream. “Oh, my gracious!” said he. “I could do with the money well enough; but you can just take it away again: I know what you want for it. You want the six old fir-trees that stand outside my house. Things are a sight worse with me than they were a year ago, when you came and asked to buy the trees, but I have no other answer for you than I gave you then: the six trees outside the house are a memory of the old days; and, if I had to sell field and meadow and the cattle in the stable, those trees shall stay where they are; and, if they have to lay me in the grave without a coffin, those old trees shall stay where they are until God’s lightning cracks them or the storm fells them.”

The last words were spoken with violence; and, with that, the last drop of oil left the press.

But Clements said:

“Forest-farmer, you shall not sell a field, nor a head of cattle from your stable; you shall have a coffin of good white ash-wood: God grant that you may not need it for a long time to come! You shall have good days yet in this world. You shall not sell the old fir-trees, but you shall sell the larch in your wood that are fit for felling. Have you your pocket-book on you? If so, just open it.”

I got a fright, when I saw the figure on the bank-note which the tempter had now drawn from his leather case and which, holding it between his fingertips, he sent fluttering to and fro, like a little flag, before my father’s blinking eyes. Misfortune had cleared the way in our house for the timber-merchant: we were no longer able to get all we wanted for our ten heads and stomachs out of that eighty yoke of mountain land; the doctor was sending us letters which I could not read soft and low enough to make them bearable to my father:

“The forest-farmer is hereby summoned within fourteen days to ... failing which....”

“As my patience is at last exhausted, I have placed the matter in the hands of the imperial and royal courts, and if, within eight days ... execution and distraint....”

Those were more or less the first sentences which I was given to read in our

dear High-German language. And there was a certain book, too, with its “date of debt” and “date of payment,” which gave me an idea of the force that lies concealed in the language of Schiller and Goethe.

It was a real live “hundred” which the timber-merchant held by the corner between his two fingers. Did not a chill shudder, at that moment, go over the tops of the larches that were dotted here and there in the pine-woods outside, I wonder? Nor any anxious foreboding trouble the hearts of the little birds that had built their nests there?

My father did not put out his hand for the money, but neither did he hide it in his pocket; he did not busy it with the lever of the oil-press; he just kept it, half-open, as nature had bent it, on his knee, while he sat exhausted with his labour. Clements dropped the rare bit of paper into it; then the lank fingers closed softly—instinctively—and held it tight.

The larch were sold.

“I have only one condition to make,” said the timber-merchant, when he saw that the poor small farmer lay duly under the spell of the money. “I shall have the trees felled late in the autumn, when the snow comes. You will be astonished, forest-farmer, when I tell you that the emperor will ride over your larch-trees! Yes, yes, we shall use them for building the railway. My condition is that my wood-cutters shall be allowed to cook their meals and sleep in your house as long as they are working in the woods.”

“Why not?” said father. “That’ll be all right, if it’s good enough for them under my roof.”

What mischief those good-natured words brought down upon our peaceful forest home!

Clements went away happy and contented, after presenting me with a bright new groschen for myself. I remember being surprised at this: it was obviously for us to be contented, seeing that we had the money! Father took his up to the loft and hid it in the clothes-press: it was very soon to come out again. Then the days passed, as usual, and the larch stood in the woods and rocked their long branches in the wind, as usual, and got ready their twigs for next spring, as usual.

“They don’t know how soon they are to die!” my father said to me once, as we were coming from the meadow through the woods.

But I comforted myself with the hope that Clements the timber-merchant, who lived out in the merry Mürzthal and never came back to our neighbourhood at all, would forget all about the larch. My mother, to whom I confided this view, said sharply:

“Oh, child, that fellow forgets about his soul, but he’ll never forget the larches!”

And, one day, when the earth had frozen hard and the moss cracked and broke underfoot, we heard the rasping of the saw in the woods. When we looked across the brown tops of the firs, we saw the yellow spire of a tall larch-tree soar high above them. The rasping of the saw died away, the blows of the axe rang out; then slowly the spire bent over, dipped; and thunder echoed through the forest.

That evening the wood-cutters came to our house. There were only two of them; and, at first sight, we were all pleased with them. One of them was already well on in years and had a long red beard, a bald pate and a sharp, crooked nose. The man’s little eyes looked smaller still because the red eyelashes and eyebrows were hardly visible against the colour of his skin; but the eyes were full of fun and devilment. The other was quite twenty years or so younger, had a little brown beard, but otherwise was rather pale and thin in the face. Anyone, however, seeing his powerful neck and his broad chest would take him to be much more of a wood-cutter than the red one, who only looked such a warrior because of his beard, but, in other respects, was much slighter in build than the pale one. Both wore stiff leather aprons and smelt of rosin and shavings.

Our cooking was soon done; so mother left the hearth to them. And, upon my word, they knew how to make use of it! What they cooked was not the regular wood-cutter’s game, such as stray foxes, sparrows and such-like dumplings as are prepared with flour and fat, but real meat and bacon and grill; and it all simmered and frizzled in the pans until our stomachs, which had to be satisfied with bread-soup and potatoes, were driven frantic. But the red one tore off a whole piece of bacon for us to taste. They had a wooden jar with them, wound round with straw, out of which one and the other took long draughts. The red one invited my father to try their wine. He did; and his experience was worse than that of Clements with the linseed-oil: the jar contained that hellish stuff, brandy.

The wood-cutters now feasted in our house day after day. We children lost all liking for our daily food, at the sight of luxury and abundance. We became discontented; and our household, consisting of two half-grown servant-girls and a half-blind woman, heaved many a deep sigh. But the red one knew how to amuse us. He talked of towns and other countries; for the two men had been about a good deal and had worked in large factories. Then he regaled us with funny stories and tricks; in the early days also with riddles and droll plays upon words, at which the maids tittered a good deal, while father and mother sat silent and I did not rightly know what to make of it all. Then came

songs, in which, to the great delight of our household, country courtship in all its forms found full expression. When this began, it was high time for us children to go to bed; but our straw bundles happened to be in the very room in which these merry things were going on. True, we closed our eyes, and I really had the firm intention to go to sleep; but my ears remained open, and the tighter I closed my eyes, the more I saw in my mind's eye.

The pale wood-cutter was quiet and proper in his behaviour and did not remain so long in the parlour, but always went betimes to his sleeping-place, which was outside in the hay-loft. But even the girls could not follow this decent example: they let the red one go on and were wholly absorbed in his chattering. My father once observed to the red fellow that the younger was more serious than the old one, whereupon the red one asked if the farmer disliked jolly songs: in that case, he would be pious and pray. And he began to recite comic sentences in the tone of the Lord's Prayer; got on to the hearth and, mimicking the preaching of a Capuchin, mocked at the holy apostles, martyrs, and virgins, until my mother went to my father with uplifted hands.

"I do beg and beseech you, Lenzel—throw that godless being out of the door, or I shall have to do it myself!"

"Do it yourself, little woman!" cried the red man and jumped off the hearthstone and tried to catch hold of mother and fondle her.

This was something unheard of. That this should suddenly happen in our house, where, year in, year out, no unseemly word was ever spoken! My father was downright paralysed with astonishment; but my mother seized the frivolous wood-cutter by the arm and cried:

"Now you get out of this, foul-mouth, and never enter my house again!"

The wood-cutter refused to budge an inch.

"If forest-farmer folk are so pious," he continued, still in his preaching tone, "as to forget what they have promised our employer, I shan't leave this roof for all that. Women and wet rags shan't drive me out."

"Perhaps men and dry logs will!" cried my father. And with a swiftness and determination which I had never before beheld in this mild-mannered man, he snatched a log of wood from the stack. The red one made a furious rush at his arms; and they wrestled. Mother tried to protect father; my brothers and sisters in their straw set up a cry of murder; I flew to the door, with nothing on me but my shirt, and called to the maids, who were already sleeping peacefully in their beds, to come and help. The blind one was the first to come hobbling safely across the yard, while one of the two who had the use of their eyes stumbled over the pigs' trough. And the youngest girl, terrified by my

cries and the uproar in the house, came clattering down the step-ladder that led from the hay-loft to the yard. Without considering, at the time, the far-reaching effects of this last incident, I rushed back into the house, where the two men were engaged in a violent struggle, panting and groaning and going from one wall of the room to the other. The wood-cutter's long beard was flung in wild strands around my father's head; but father seemed to be gaining the upper hand; then came the younger wood-cutter, clad, it is true, in nothing but his shirt and his blue drawers, but with the full weight of his body. The women did what is their office on such occasions: they wrung their hands and wailed. Only, my mother, when she saw that all was lost, snatched a blazing fire-brand from the hearth.

"I'll drive you out, you ruffians, that I do know!" she cried and flew, with the brand, to the wooden inner wall.

"The fury means to set fire to us! And to the house with us!" yelled the wood-cutters and rushed out at the door, through the curling smoke.

We were rid of the nasty fellows, but the flames were leaping merrily along the wall. In hot haste, we succeeded—I no longer remember by what means—in smothering the fire.

That evening—the most terrible in my life—passed into a still and fearsome night. We had barred and bolted the door of the house; and, when we put out the rushlight, father took a last look at the window, to see if they were still outside.

It remained quiet; and not till the next morning did the young wood-cutter come to fetch his tools and his mate's. Then they built themselves a hut in the woods out of planks and bark; and here they lived half through the winter, until they had finished their work on the larch-trunks.

We felt convinced, however, that they must be plotting some mischief against us, whereupon the youngest of the maids remarked, with an air of great wisdom, that it might be best always to keep on good terms with that kind of people.

"It's easy for you to talk, wench," retorted my father. "What do you know?"

After that ... she said no more.

I had a fresh fright at that time. Prompted by curiosity to see the godless fellows once more and to spy out whether the devil, in the guise of a wood-cutter, was helping them with their work, I peeped one day from the forest path and through the thicket at their work-place. Then I saw that they were making coffins.

I announced the fact at home and caused the greatest excitement in consequence.

“As I said, they have some fresh thing in their minds!” said my mother.

Father suggested:

“Boy, you have been dreaming again, in broad daylight. Still, I will go and see.”

We went into the woods. My father peered through the thicket at the wood-cutters; and then I saw him turn pale.

“You half-wit!”^[8] he said; and then he groaned. “They’re burying every peasant of us at Alpel!”

The coffins were stacked in great piles; and the men were still chopping and trimming new ones with their axes. We rushed away to inform the local magistrate, who, at that time, lived on the mountain on the other side of the Engthal, and tell him what we had seen. On the road to his house we met Michel the carpenter, to whom my father said that he had better have all his knives and choppers ready, for it looked as if we were in for bad times. The strangers who were working in his wood did nothing but make coffins.

“Yes,” said Michel, “I’ve noticed that too: it’s a good thing the coffins are not hollow!”

And the man of experience told us of the shape of the railway-sleepers, which were usually cut from the block in pairs, before being sawn asunder, and which, with their six corners, looked not unlike a coffin.

We turned back then and there, and as we went along the edge of the field, where the grass was nice and smooth, my father said to me:

“This gives us a good chance of laughing at ourselves, lest others should. That’s the way things go: when we’ve fallen out with a man, we put down everything that’s bad to him and are as blind as if Satan had stuck his horns into our eyes. When all is said, even those two wood-cutters are not so black as they appear to be. Still, I shall be glad when they have cleared out. And this much I do know: Clements buys no more larch of me.”

“Because you have none left,” was my wise comment on that.

Father did not seem to hear.

The wood-cutters went at last and the larch-wood sleepers with them. The red-brown stumps remained behind; and in their pores stood bright drops of rosin.

“It shows that they were not Christians,” I remember my father saying,

“that they did not cut a cross in a single stump.”

For, at that time, it was still the custom, in the forest, for the wood-cutters to carve a little cross with the axe into each stump as soon as the tree had fallen. Why, I was never quite able to discover: it was probably for the same reason that makes the blacksmith give two taps with his hammer on the anvil, after the red-hot iron is removed. These things are intended to thwart the devil, who, as everybody knows, is never idle and interferes in all the works of man.

My father, whose whole life was bound up with the cross, went afterwards and cut crosses in the larch-stumps. And so things in the forest were once more in order and peaceful, as they used to be.

And that is the story of the strange wood-cutters, the children of the world, who had penetrated into our far-away forest-nook like the first wave of the turbulent sea of the world. How small this wave was and what an amount of unrest, discontent, and vexation was washed up with it! Gradually, the strange elements were forgotten: even mother ended by overcoming her indignation. Only our little serving-maid remained restless and wistful, even after the wave had flowed back again, and her eyes were often red with crying.

Footnote:

[8] *Halbnarr*: half-fool. According to German folk-lore, it is only the half-idiots who are really dangerous.—*Translator's Note*.

IX

How Meisensepp Died

AT home we had a book called *The Lives of Jesus Christ, Our Lady, and of many of God's Saints: a spiritual treasure by Peter Cochem*. It was an old book, the leaves were grey, and each chapter began with wonderful big letters in black and red. The wooden cover was worm-eaten in many places, and a mouse had nibbled away one of the leathern flaps. Since my grandfather's death there was nobody in our house who could have read it; no wonder, then, that these creatures had taken possession of it, and thus gained their bodily sustenance from the spiritual treasure. Then came I, the little book-worm, chasing the little beasts out of the book and devouring it myself instead. I read out of it daily to the members of our household. The younger farm-lads and girls did not care much for this new custom, for they dared not joke and yodel during the reading; the older people, however, being rather more God-fearing, listened devoutly and said, "It's just as if the parson were preaching; so solemnly done and with such a loud voice!"

I got quite a reputation as an able reader, and was much sought after. Whenever anybody in the neighbourhood lay ill or dying, or was even dead already, and there was watch being kept by the corpse during the night, my father was asked to let me go and read. On such occasions I took the weighty book under my arm and set off. It was hard work carrying it, for at that time I was but a little shrimp of a fellow.

Once, late at night, when I was already asleep in the sweet-scented hay-loft where I sometimes had my bed in summer-time, I was awakened by one of our men tugging at my coverlet. "You must get up quickly, Peter, get up! Meisensepp has sent his daughter, and begs that you'll come and read to him—he's dying. Get up!"

Of course, I got up, dressed myself hastily, took the book, and went with the girl from our house up across the heath and through the forest. Meisensepp's hut stood quite alone in the midst of the forest.

Meisensepp had been gamekeeper and woodward in his younger years; latterly he occupied himself mostly with sharpening saws for the wood-

cutters. Then suddenly this severe illness overtook him.

While the girl and I were going through the wilderness in the still, starlit night neither of us spoke a word. Silently we went on together. Only once she whispered, "Let me have the book, Peter; I'll carry it for you."

"You couldn't do it," I answered; "you're even smaller than me."

After a two hours' tramp the girl said, "There's the light."

We saw a faint gleam coming from the window of Meisensepp's house. Going nearer, we met the priest who had administered the Last Sacrament to the dying man.

"Father, is he going to get well?" asked the girl, fearfully.

"He is not so very old," said the priest. "God's will be done, children; God's will be done."

And he went on, while we went into the house.

It was small, and, after the manner of forest huts, living-room and bedroom were all one with the kitchen. On the hearth in an iron holder a pine-torch was burning which veiled the ceiling in a cloud of smoke. Near by, on a bundle of straw, two little boys lay sleeping. I knew them well, for we had often gathered mushrooms and berries together in the woods and lost our herds while doing it: they were a few years younger than I. By the wall of the stove sat Sepp's wife, giving the breast to the baby and looking with wide-open eyes into the flame of the pine-torch; and behind the stove, on the only bed in the house, lay the sick man. He was sleeping; his face was wasted, the greyish hair and the beard round the chin had been cut short, which made the whole head appear smaller to me than formerly when I had seen Sepp on the way to church. Through his pale, half-open lips fluttered the broken breathing.

On our entrance his wife got up gently, made some apology for having had me disturbed in my sleep, and invited me to sit down and eat what the priest had left of a dish of eggs which still stood on the table.

And so, seated on the chair that was still warm from the holy man's sitting, I was soon actually eating with the same fork which he had carried to his mouth!

"Now he's sleeping fairly well," whispered the woman, indicating the sick man. "A little while ago he was constantly pulling threads from the coverlet."

I knew it was looked upon as a bad omen when a sick person pulled at and dug into the coverlet: "He's digging his grave," they say with us. I therefore answered, "Yes, that's what my father did, too, when he had typhoid fever; still, he got well again."

“I think so, too,” she said; “and the priest was saying the same thing. I am so glad my Sepp has always gone to confession so regular, and I feel quite hopeful about his getting well again. Only,” she added very low, “the light keeps flickering to and fro the whole time.”

According to popular belief, when the light flickers, it is an omen that someone’s candle is burning low in the socket. I believed in this sign myself, but to reassure the poor woman I said, “There’s such a draught coming through the window, I can feel it too.” She laid the sleeping baby upon the straw—the girl who had fetched me had already gone to rest there—and we stopped the cracks of the window with tow.

Then the woman said, “You’ll stay with me overnight, won’t you, Peter? I shouldn’t know how to get along otherwise; and when he awakes you will read to us? I am sure you’ll do us this kindness, won’t you?”

I opened the book and looked for a suitable piece, but Father Cochem has not written much that would be of consolation to poor suffering mankind. Father Cochem’s opinion is that God is infinitely just and that men are unutterably bad, and nine-tenths of them are bound straight for hell.

Maybe it is so, I used to think to myself; but even if it is one ought not to say so, because people would only worry, and for the rest would most likely remain as bad as ever. If they had wanted to mend, they would have done so long ago.

Terrifying thoughts went like a hissing adder through Cochem’s book. Whenever I had to do with indifferent people, who only listened to me on account of my fine loud preaching voice, I thundered forth all the horrors and the eternal damnation of mankind with real pleasure; but when by a sick-bed I used to exert my imagination to the utmost while reading out of the book, in order to soften the hard sayings, to moderate the hideous representations of the Four Last Things, and to give a friendlier tone to the whole thought of the zealous Father.

And now again I planned how, while apparently reading from the book, I would speak to Meisensepp words from another Book about poverty, patience, and love towards our fellows, and how the true imitation of Christ consisted in the practice of these, and how—when the last hour should strike—this would lead us by way of a gentle death right into heaven.

At last Sepp awoke. He turned his head, looked at his wife and sleeping children, then, seeing me, he said in a loud, clear voice, “So you’ve come, Peter? God reward you for it! But we shall hardly have time for reading to-day. Anne, please wake the children up.”

The woman shuddered, her hand went to her heart, but she said quietly, "Are you worse again, Seppel? You've been sleeping so nicely."

He saw at once that her calmness was not genuine.

"Don't you fret, wife," he said, "it must be so in this world. Wake the children up now, but gently, so that you don't scare them."

The poor woman went to the bed of straw, and with trembling hand shook the bundle, and the little ones started up only half awake.

"Anne, I beg you don't pull the children about so," the sick man reproached her, with a weaker voice, "and let little Martha sleep, she doesn't understand things yet."

I remained seated by the table, and my heart burned within me. The little family gathered round the bed, sobbing aloud.

"Quietly now," said Sepp to the children; "mother will let you sleep all the longer to-morrow morning. Josefa, draw the shirt together over your breast or you will get cold.—Now then, children, you must always be brave and good and obedient to your mother, and when you are grown up you must stand by her and don't leave her. All my days I've toiled and moiled, but for all that I've nothing else to leave you beyond this house, with the little garden and the ridge-acre with the stacks. If you want to divide it up, do so in a brotherly way; but it is better to keep the little property together, and keep the home going, somehow, and till the ground. Beyond that I make no will. I love you all alike. Don't forget me, and now and then say an Our Father for me. And you four boys, I beg from my very heart, don't start poaching—it leads to no good. Give me your hand on it. There, that's right! If one of you would like to learn saw-sharpening— I have earned many a penny with it and the tools are all there. And then, as you know already, if you plant potatoes on the ridge-acre, you must do so in May. It's quite true, what my father always used to say, 'Of potatoes it is said: "Plant me in April, I come when I will; plant me in May, I'm there in a day."' Bear that saying in mind! There, now go to bed again, or you will catch cold; always take care of your health; health is everything. Go to sleep, children."

The sick man became silent and fell to plucking at his covering again.

Turning to me the woman whispered, "I don't like it, he's talking too much." When a very sick person becomes suddenly talkative that too is looked upon as a bad omen with us.

Then he lay quite exhausted. The woman lit a death-taper.

"Not yet, Anne, not yet," he murmured, "a little later; but give me a drop of

water, will you?"

After drinking he said, "Ah, fresh water is a good thing after all! Take good care of the well. Yes, and don't let me forget, the black breeches and the blue jacket—you know—and outside behind the door, where the saws hang, there leans the planing board; lay it across the grindstone and the bench—it will serve for the three days. To-morrow early, when Woodman Josel comes, he'll help to lay me out. But mind that the cat isn't about; cats are attracted and know at once when there is a corpse anywhere. It's all arranged what they'll do with me down at the Parish Church.—My brown coat and the big hat, give them to the poor. And to Peter you must give something because of his coming up here. Perhaps he will be good enough to read to-morrow. It will be a fine day to-morrow, but don't go far from home, for fear an accident might happen, when there's candles left burning in the entrance. Later on, Anne, look in the bedstraw and you will find an old stocking with a few gold pieces in it."

"Seppel, don't exert yourself with talking so much," sobbed the wife.

"Well, well, Anne—but I must tell you everything. We'll not be much longer together now. We have had twenty years, Anne. You have been everything to me; no one can repay you for what you have been to me. I shall never forget it, not in death, nor in heaven neither. I am only glad that in my last hour I am still able to talk to you, and that I am clear in my head to the last."

"Don't fret yourself, Seppel," murmured the wife, bending over him.

"No," he answered quietly, "with me it's just as it was with my father: content in life, content in death. You be the same, and don't take it too much to heart. Even though each of us must go as we came, alone, still we belong to each other and I shall keep you a place in heaven, Anne, close by my side. Only, for God's sake, bring the children up well."

The children lay quiet. It was very still, and it seemed to me as if, somewhere in the room, I could hear a slight whirring and humming.

Suddenly, Seppel called out, "Now, Anne, light the candle, quick!"

The woman ran about the room looking for matches, and yet the torch was still burning. "Now he is going to die!" she moaned.

When at last the red wax-taper was alight, and she had given it him and he held it clasped with both his hands, and she had taken the vessel of holy water from the shelf, she became apparently quite calm and prayed aloud: "Jesus, Mary, help him! Oh, Saints of God, stand by him in his direst need, do not let his soul be lost! Jesus, I pray by Thy holiest suffering! Mary, I call upon Thy

seven Sacred Dolours! And Thou, his guardian angel, when the soul must quit the body, lead it at last to heavenly joy!”

And she prayed long. She neither sobbed nor cried now; not a single tear stood in her eye, she was wholly the devout petitioner and intercessor.

At length she became silent, bent over her husband’s face, watched his weak breathing and whispered, “God be with you, Seppel; greet my parents for me and all our kinsfolk there in Eternity. God bless and keep you, my dearest man! May the holy angels attend you, and the Lord Jesus in His mercy await you at the heavenly door.”

Perhaps he no longer heard her. His pale, half-open lips gave no answer. His eyes stared at the ceiling. The wax candle, held upright in the folded hands, was burning; it did not flicker. The flame was still and bright as a snow-white bud, his breath moved it no more.

“Now it’s over—he’s dead and gone from me!” cried his wife in a shrill, heartrending voice; then sank down upon a stool and began to weep bitterly. The children, now again wakened, wept with her, all except the baby, who was smiling.

The hour weighed upon us heavy as a stone. At last the poor woman—the widow—rose, dried her tears and laid two fingers on the eyes of the dead. The wax candle burned until the morning dawned.

A messenger had passed through the forest. Then came the Woodman Josel. He sprinkled the dead with holy water, murmuring, “So they go, one after the other.”

Then they dressed Meisensepp out in his best clothes, carried him into the porch, and laid him on the board.

I left the book on the table for the vigil of the following nights at which I had promised the poor woman to read. When I was ready to go, she brought a green hat on which was fastened a spreading “Gemsbart.”^[9]

“Will you take the hat with you for your father?” she asked; “my Seppel has always been so fond of your father. The Gemsbart you may keep yourself as a remembrance. Say an Our Father for him now and then.”

I uttered my thanks and cast one more timid look at the bier. There lay Sepp stretched at full length, and his hands folded across his breast. And I went away down through the forest. How bright and fresh with dew, how full of the song of birds, full of the scent of flowers—how full of life the forest was! And in the hut, stretched on the bier, lay a dead man.

I can never forget that night and that morning—that death amidst the

forest's infinite source of life.

To this day I keep the Gemsbart in memory of Meisensepp. And whenever a desire for the pleasures of this world gets hold of me, or when doubts of God's grace to man, or fear of my own possibly far-off, possibly quite near end assail me, I just stick Sepp's Gemsbart in my hat.

Footnote:

[\[9\]](#) Gemsbart: a little tuft of hair on the chamois' breast.

X

The Corpus Christi Altar

WHEN the triumphant Saviour passes through the village in the shape of bread, they greet Him with palms. The palm of the alps is the birch. Even as the little fir-trees are doomed to lose their lives at Christmas-time, so do the birches at Corpus Christi. They are dragged to the village by the hundred, on great drays, and planted in rows on both sides of the streets through which the procession is intended to go. And, as they stand there in the fresh-turned earth, with their graceful branches rustling in the soft wind, it is as though they were still leading the young and happy lives of their brothers and sisters in the woods. And no one notices that the trunk stands in the earth without its roots, chopped off by the axe, that the sap no longer courses through its veins, that, in a few days, the pretty little notched and heart-shaped leaves will turn yellow; nor does the caterpillar on a yielding branch, as it dreams of its coming butterfly existence, suspect that it is rocking upon a corpse.

Life is fulfilled: lo, the Lord cometh.

At the Corpus Christi procession, the gospels are read in the open air at four different spots. For this purpose, the people set up four altars, so that "the Lord God may rest on His journey." By ancient custom, it falls to him upon whose ground the altar is to stand to erect this altar. Its several parts, all nicely carved and painted, have rested during the year in a dark corner of the loft and are now brought forth, cleansed of their dust and cobwebs and put together in the open. The result is often a noble building of the chapel order, with altar-table, tabernacle, worshipping angels, candlesticks and all. Farm-labourers, who but yesterday were digging manure, to-day prove themselves accomplished architects, building the altar before the sun-down and surrounding it with a little wood of birch or larch. The head of the house places all the images of the saints which he possesses on the altar, or fastens them high up on the pillars. The farmer's wife brings gaudy pots of crimson peonies to adorn the altar; and the little girls strew flowers and rose-leaves as a carpet for the steps.

The bells begin to ring, the mortars boom, music swells far and wide over

the roofs, lights burn in every window; and the time has come for the farmer to light the candles on his altar too. Soon the first pennants come in sight, the hum is heard of the men's prayers and the echo of the women's singing; and the long lines of children approach, the girls in white, carrying gaily-coloured banners above their heads. Finally, the band, with shrill trumpets and rumbling drums, and then the *baldachino*, the red canopy upheld by four men, and, under it, surrounded by ministrants and acolytes, the priest, carrying the gleaming monstrance high before his face.

The monstrance, as we all know, is the house in which the Host resides surrounded by a wreath of golden rays, resting on a crescent-shaped holder and protected by a crystal glass.

The most important factor in this procession is faith; and that is present in abundance. They worship not the bread, but the symbolic mystery in whose lap rests our eternal destiny. It is really incorrect to speak of the worship of images, or of the idolatry of the heathen: they all mean one and the same thing, the symbolic divine mystery which each represents to himself after his own fashion and feels according to his nature. And the power to transfer the intangible, endless mystery to a substance which our senses can apprehend and thus to enter into more intimate relations with it: that power is the gift of faith.

The files of people reach the open-air altar and the foremost have to pass along until the priest arrives at the spot. When there, he places the Sacrament in the tabernacle and reads some verses from one of the four gospels. Then, to the booming of the cannon, he lifts the monstrance, turns with it to the four points of the compass and blesses the meadows, the fields and the air, that the summer may be fruitful and no storm destroy the husbandman's labour. And the procession moves on.

This is in the larger villages. In the small mountain districts, the feast is celebrated more simply, but no less solemnly. As, in such places, all the lanes and streets are formed of live trees and shrubs, there is no need to set up birches, except at the wayside crucifixes, where they keep holy guard, one on the right and one on the left. As the people of small places have not four altars to erect, there is a small, portable altar, a little four-legged table with a white cloth to cover it and a tabernacle with angels painted on a blue ground kneeling before the "Holy Name." Above this is a little canopy with gold tassels. Behind are straps by means of which a boy can take the altar on his back and carry it, during the procession, from one gospel-place to the other.

They have one of these little altars at Kathrein am Hauenstein. Should you care to see it, it stands, in summer, in the church, in front of the great picture

of the Fourteen Helpers.^[10] It has stood there as long as I can remember; and, in my young days, it was the duty and the privilege of Kaunigl, him with the hare-lip, to carry it from gospel-place to gospel-place. As soon as one gospel was read and the procession starting on its way again, he strapped the altar to his back, took the candlesticks and the hassock in his hands and hurried over the hill by the short cut through the woods, so as to obtain a lead and set up the altar in the next place. He would fix a stone or two under the feet of the little table to prevent any rocking, put the hassock in position and light the candles; and, by that time, the first banner was once more in sight.

Now it happened, one day, that this was the occasion of my being mixed up in a business that threatened the destruction of my immortal soul. I had just reached the age when nobody knows how a young scamp is going to turn out. He may develop into a more or less decent fellow, or else into a lout of the first water: who can tell? None but God really; and even He leaves the choice to the lanky, pale-faced lad himself. On the day in question, I had either overslept myself in my forest home or had more trouble than usual in getting my lace-boots on; or perhaps breakfast was not ready in time. Anyhow, by the time I reached Kathrein church, everything was in full swing, with the red banners waving and the candles twinkling between the trees. I stole round to the back, for I was mortally ashamed to do the right thing and simply go straight up to the procession and mix with the people. Here again God left the choice to me, to join the worshippers or slink away through the bushes like a gaol-bird. I slunk like a gaol-bird through the bushes and there met Kaunigl with the altar. He at once asked me to help him carry it. This suited me perfectly, for it justified the roundabout road which I had taken. I relieved Kaunigl of the hassock and candlesticks; and we hurried through the young trees up to the Föhrenriegel, behind the church, where the last gospel was to be read. We worked together loyally; and soon the little altar was fixed against the rock, with the candles burning upon it. The procession was not yet in sight, for it had taken a longer road through the green fields; but this Kaunigl boy was not the fellow to let time slip by and be wasted. He thrust his hand in his trousers-pocket, produced a pack of cards and flung it on the altar so that the candles flickered before the fluttering bits of pasteboard. Silently, as though what he was doing were a matter of course, he dealt himself and me a hand at *Brandel*. It was not the first time that he and I had “taken each other on”; so I picked up the cards and we played a strict game on the Corpus Christi altar, by the light of the wax candles burning solemnly. There was time for a second “bout”; and then, while Kaunigl was dealing the cards again, the men at the head of the procession appeared round the corner, praying aloud with heads uncovered. No cat could have pounced upon nimble mouse quicker than Kaunigl gathered up those cards and shoved them in his pocket.

Then we took up our positions on either side, in all innocence, and pulled off our caps.

Soon the musicians hove in sight: Eggbauer with the bugle-horn, his son with the first trumpet, Naz the tailor (who afterwards became my master) with the second, Erhard's boy with the clarionet, Zenz the smith with the kettle-drum, while long-nosed Franz carried the big drum on his back, to be pounded with might and main by the Haustein innkeeper. Ferdl the huntsman handled the "tinklers."

Behind this loud music came the *baldachino*. The old white-haired parish priest carried the Most Holy high in front of him and held his head bowed low, partly in veneration and partly because age had already greatly bent his neck. He walked up to the little altar to place the monstrance on it. He was on the point of doing so when suddenly he stopped and stood for a moment with a stare upon his face. He had caught sight of the ten of clubs peeping from between the folds of the white altar-cloth! The confounded card had remained there hidden and unperceived! To decorate the Corpus Christi altar with "green" of this kind^[11] could hardly seem correct in the eyes of his reverence. Without a word, without a sign of displeasure, he turned to the rock and placed the monstrance on a projecting stone.

Only a very few people had realised why this was done. The gospel was read and the benediction given without further incident, but I peeped through the hazel-bushes and saw that the old priest was white to the lips. Had he shown anger at his discovery on the altar, had he stormed and ordered the culprit to be taken by the ears, I should have thought it no more than just; but his humble silence, his look of sorrow, and the fact that he had to place the Saviour, rendered homeless by that sacrilegious game at cards, upon the bare rock: these were things that cut into me as with a knife. He cannot have known who the accomplice was, but he could easily have found out by my conscience-stricken face, however much it might try to hide itself behind the hazel-bushes.

Afterwards, when high mass began in church, Kaunigl pulled me by the skirt of my jacket and invited me to climb into the tower with him, where we could toll the bell at the Sanctus and the elevation and play cards in between. He had recovered possession of the ten of clubs. True, I did not accept; but I remained lost, for all that. From that day forward I no longer ventured into the confessional. Kaunigl did venture in; but it was not quite so simple as he imagined, as he himself told me afterwards.

"I have played cards," he confessed. "Once."

"Well," said the priest, "card-playing is no sin in itself, as long as you do

not play for money.”

“No, I didn’t play for money.”

“Where did it happen?”

“On a table.”

“What sort of a table?”

“A wooden one.”

“Was it on the Corpus Christi table, by any chance?” asked the priest.

“Oh, no!” said Kaunigl.

And then he received absolution.

“Then you lied in your confession!” I said to Kaunigl, reproachfully.

“That doesn’t matter,” Kaunigl replied, promptly. “I can easily mention the lie next time: I’ll get that through the grating right enough. The thing is to have the card-playing off my chest. Hang it all, though, I was nearly caught: Old Nick might have grabbed me finely!”

I based my own inferences upon this experience. If card-playing was no sin in itself—and we did not play for money—then there was no need to confess the story. Nor is it stated in either the Lesser or the Greater Catechism that man shall not play cards on altars. However, this subtle interpretation helped me not at all. When I thought of that Corpus Christi sacrilege, in which I had so foolishly taken part, I often felt quite ill. I dreamt of it at nights, in the most uncomfortable way, and, sitting in church on Sundays, I dared not look at that little altar-table, which stood there so oddly, as though at any moment it might burst into speech and betray me. Moreover, about this time, I read in an old devotional book the story of a blasphemous shoemaker’s assistant who had mimicked the elevation of the Host in a public-house and how his upraised arms had stiffened in the act, so that he could not bend them back again and had to go about with his arms sticking up in the air, until he was released by receiving absolution from a pious father. It was much as though I were doomed to go about with arm uplifted, holding the best trump in my hand, while the people laughed at me: “Now then, Peter, play! Why don’t you play?” and as though I played the card, at last, and, in so doing, played my poor soul to perdition. That was the sort of thing; and a nice thing too!

I could never manage to settle it by myself: that was quite clear. So, one evening, after working-hours, I went to see the parish-priest at St. Catherine’s. He was standing just outside the house, beside his fish-pond, which was covered over with a rusty wire netting, while a fine spring bubbled away in the middle. The priest no doubt thought that I was merely passing by accident,

for he beckoned to me with his black straw hat to come to him.

“What do you say, Peter?” he cried to me, in his soft voice. “Nine and five and seven: doesn’t that make twenty-one?”

I was never much good at mental arithmetic; however, this time, I hazarded, on the off-chance:

“Yes, that should be about right. Twenty-one.”

“Now then,” he said, “just look here.” And he pointed to the fish-pond. “A fortnight ago, the Blasler boy sold me nine live trout and I put them in the pond. A week ago, he sold me five more and I put them in too; and, to-day, he sold me seven and I put them in as well. And how many are there now, all told? Eight, eight; and not one more! And I know all about it: they are the same which he brought me a fortnight ago; and it must be so: the scoundrel, I was almost saying, stole the fish each time out of the pond and sold them to me over again. It’s a ... a ...”

And he shook his fist in the air.

The fact was that the Blasler boy must have stolen the trout to begin with, before he sold them for the first time, for Blasler had no fishing licence. This, I dare say, hardly occurred to the good priest’s mind: he was thinking only of his fast-days. The commandments of the Church allow fish on Fridays and Saturdays,^[12] but do not say whether the fish may be stolen or not.

It was not a favourable opportunity to confess one’s sins. So I forbore for the present, kissed the sleeve of his coat, because the clenched fist did not look inviting for a kiss of the hand, and passed on. On the way, I pondered the question at length, which was the greater sin, the Blasler boy’s or mine. His appeared to me in the light of a piece of roguery, whereas mine might easily be a sin against the Holy Ghost; and those sins are not remitted.

A few days later, Cap Casimir, of Kressbachgraben, was driving a grey nanny-goat with two kids along the road. The old goat had a full udder; and the young ones skipped around her and wanted to have a drink. But Cap Casimir hissed, in his sloppy brogue:

“Sshh, shtop that now! We musht bring the full udder to hish reverensh!”

I was at once curious to know what it meant; and Casimir, who was an immigrant Tyrolese and still wore his pointed “star-pricker,”^[13] said:

“It’sh like thish, you shee, my wife’sh dead. ‘The goat,’ said she, ‘and the kidsh,’ said she, ‘I leave to the parish-priesht of Kathrein. For prayers and masshes.’ That was her will; and then she died. Sho now I’m driving the animalsh to the reverend gentleman’sh.”

“All right,” thought I to myself. “And I’ll follow in an hour’s time. He’ll be in a good humour to-day; and I shall never find a better opportunity.”

So far, the thing was well thought out. I went off that same afternoon. The old gentleman was quite jolly and invited me to have a cup of coffee with him, telling me that there was fresh milk in it from Kressbachgraben.

And it was in the midst of the coffee that I suddenly said:

“I’ve had something on my mind for ever so long, your reverence!”

“You, something on your mind?” he laughed. “Well, that’s a nice state of affairs, when even little boys have things on their minds!”

I stirred my cup of coffee vigorously with my spoon, so as not to have to look his reverence in the face, and told him the story of the game of cards on the altar.

Contrary to all my expectations, the priest remained quite calm. Then he asked:

“Did you do it wilfully? Did you intend to mock the holy altar?”

“Good God, no, your reverence!” I replied, thoroughly shocked at the mere thought.

“Very well,” said the old man.

Then he was silent for a little while and finished his coffee, after which he spoke as follows:

“It was not a proper thing to do; let me tell you that at once. And I will let Kaunigl know also that what people take to church is prayer-books and not playing-cards! But, if you had no bad intention in doing this silly trick, we will say no more about it this time. At any rate, you did quite right to tell me. Would you like a drop more?”

As the Corpus Christi incident was now closed in the best possible way, the second cup of coffee tasted twice as good as the first. When, presently, I got up to go, the old man laid his hand on my shoulder and said, kindly:

“I feel easier now that I know exactly what happened on that Corpus Christi Day. But you must never do it again, Peterkin. Just think,—our dear Lord!...”

Footnotes:

[10] *Die vierzehn Nothelfer*, often mentioned in the German hagiology. “Emergency saints” has been suggested as an equivalent rendering.—[Translator’s Note.]

[11] The clubs are printed in green, in the cheap packs of cards used in the Tyrol, and the ten of this suit is called *der Grünzehner*: the ten of greens.—[Translator’s Note.]

[12] In some parts of Southern Austria, the practice prevails of abstaining from flesh-meat on Saturdays, as well as on Fridays, in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary.—[*Translator's Note.*]

[13] The popular nickname for the pointed Tyrolese, “sugar-loaf” hat.—[*Translator's Note.*]

XI

About Kickel, who went to Prison

YOU were on for a bit of gipsying, were you, Peterkin? Home, everlastingly home, isn't very cheerful—always having the green-glazed mug to drink from, always having your face wiped over by the mother with a wet rag, always having to sleep in the little box-bed by the stove—it's no fun! One can't help wanting sometimes to gather a dinner from the whortleberry plants and drink from the brook, to roll on the ground sometimes, and even to walk about in mud; and now and again one wants to sleep in an old hay barn, with water never seen before rushing along outside, in an unknown gorge, with quite strange trees standing in the red sunshine when you wake up in the morning, and unknown people mowing the grass in the meadows.

Suppose you long for this, and then your father forbids it! "Children belong at home!" And, "After school, you will come home by the shortest way!" The shortest way! There isn't such a thing in our high lands, especially if Zutrum Simmerl is in school, and if Zutrum Simmerl says, "Peterl, come with me; at home, in Zutrumshaus, there are all sorts of jolly things; a spotted white yard-dog, who's got puppies; cherry-trees, which are all just red and black; and behind the house is a charcoal-burner's hut with straw that one can lie on, and in the stream you can catch trout and crayfish with your hand, which your mother can bake and cook afterwards."

The Zutrum family were far-away cousins of ours, so that when young Cousin Simmerl said "Come with me," one naturally went. It was a whole hour's walk from my parents' house there, and as the school where we, from Alpel and Trabachgraben, met together, lay just half-way, the world became stranger and stranger to me with each step of my way to Zutrum. And when the sun sank down over the black saddle of the wooded range, and the sycamores threw long shadows across the newly mown meadows, I felt very strange. The hay smelt, the grasshoppers chirped, the frogs quacked as they did at home, but all else was different, the mountains much steeper, the coombs much deeper. I was oppressed. We looked down at last on the grey shingled roofs of the farm, from whose whitewashed chimneys thin smoke

was going up. It was already dusk, and the homely smell of charcoal-burning, which I knew so well, came from among the tall pines. On the road we made many halts by ant-heaps, foxes' holes, hedge-stiles, little streams and puddles; but now Simmerl hurried up. I did not want to go on, I wanted to turn back. I should be going into a strange house for the first time in my life—my courage gave way. But Simmerl gripped me quickly by the arm and led me into the farmyard and through the great door into the house.

The air was cool in the entrance and scented with fruit; the kitchen was plastered and had nearly white walls, like an inn. At the open hearth women were busy with pots and kettles, and to one of them, who had a pale, pretty, kind face, went Simmerl, gave her his hand and said, "God greet you, mother!" It was in this house that I first heard children reverently greeting their parents at coming in and going out, just as if they were going to a distant country or were coming back from one. In our district at home we ran out like a calf from its stall, and the most that I ever said in the morning when I was off to school was, "I'm going now," and the mother answered, "Well, go, in God's name." That was certainly something, but it was not so cordial and fine as when the Zutrum children said "God greet you!" or "God keep you!" and clasped their parents' hands. In short, this entrance into the Zutrum's house appeared very splendid to me.

"And that is my school-friend, Peterl, from the Forest farm," so Simmerl introduced me to his mother.

"Now, that's nice!" she said; wiped her right hand on her blue apron and held it out to me. I was not quite sure if my little paw ought to be stretched out too, hesitated, but finally did it.

"Mother," called Simmerl, "we are running down to the brook."

"Not too far—it will soon be supper-time."

We were in the open air again, and it had all gone off very smoothly. We did not get to the brook that evening, for there was the white, spotted yard-dog with puppies! These last were all together in mottled heap, which constantly surged and twisted, while every now and then a tiny creature hardly bigger than a rat got loose and rolled clumsily away. These things were absolutely all head, and the head again was all muzzle, and the muzzles burrowed to the teats which the old white dapple placed ready for use. All that, and the anxious growling of the old dog and the frightened whimpering of the young ones, and the doggy smell which came out of the kennel, nearly stupefied me with sheer delight.

"Does she bite?" I asked Simmerl; for I wanted to stroke the puppies.

“Not now, so we have taken the chain off her. My father says, ‘She has no enemies now, she is just a mother now.’” But still, when he wanted to lift one of the young ones, she snapped at his finger.

“Have you got a church?” I asked, for a little bell rang. Simmerl laughed, for it was the house-bell, and it was calling people to supper.

In the room, where it was already nearly dark, stood two great square tables. When grace had been said out loud by everybody and all together, and the great big soup-tureens were sending up their warm, savoury clouds, about twelve young men, older men, young girls and old women sat themselves down to the one table. At the other table right in the corner the house-father took his place, a stout, comfortable, cheerful man with a smooth-shaven face and a double chin; then came his children, from the merry grown-up Sennerl right down to Simmerl, and still further down to two quite tiny babies, who had their milk-soup spooned into their little mouths by the servant-maid. I was allowed to sit by Simmerl, and, because the common bowl was rather a long way from us, we received a little special basin, out of which we ladled the pieces. It was wheaten bread, which was not every day to be had at home with us! The house-mother went to and fro, looking after the tables, and now and then she sat down with us for a short time, just to eat a morsel as she passed by. Ah, yes, that was like my mother at home. “Who cooks needs nothing to eat,” say otherwise people.

I was obliged to keep thinking of home, where just then they would be waiting for me with supper, and wondering why that boy didn’t come home and where he could possibly be. Then, probably, it would occur to one or other of them, “Oh, he has gone home with his school-friend to Zutrum.”

After the milk-soup came a bowl of salad in vinegar. That again was something new for me; at my home there was only salad in butter-milk, which is acid and wet and can therefore well take the place of expensive vinegar. At home we ate the greenstuff with a spoon, here one did it with a fork. I several times stabbed my mouth with the strange tool, but dared make no noise; whereas at home if such a thing happened there would have been a fine outcry.

After the salad came the largest dish of all, and this contained stewed cherries in their own juice. Now I might use the spoon again. If only it had been a bit bigger—for this black cherry stew was delicious! The company was very ceremonious. They squeezed the stones out of their mouths and put them back either on to a plate or into their fists. At home we ate the stones with the cherries.

I do not know what was talked about at table, and I was certainly quite

indifferent to it, because mere talk is nothing to eat. They were louder and gayer at the servants' table than we were over at the house-father's table, because there was an old man amongst them who said the strangest things in the gravest manner at which they all laughed, until a maid said, "No, no; one must not laugh so at Kickel. It isn't right that Kickel should be laughed at."

"Who's laughing at *him*?" laughed a boy. "We're only laughing because we please to."

I must have overheard that, as otherwise I should not have known it. I know also that suddenly the old Kickel jumped up from his place, and with his shirt-sleeve fluttering from his wide, strong arm, chucked a cherry-stone at the door opposite, which fell back again into the middle of the room. At that he cried "Bang!" and shouted with laughter. He did this several times, whereupon the others said, "It was quite right, and he must make a hole in the door so that one could look out into the kitchen to see whether or no stew was being cooked to-day." Then Kickel raised his other arm, and "Bang!"—he threw the entire handful at the door, so that it rattled like a hail-storm. At the same moment the old man wrinkled up his wizened face and shouted out an angry curse.

Then the house-father got up from our table, went to the infuriated old fellow and said soothingly, "Now, now, Kickel, don't be so vexed. Sowing so many cherry-trees in the rooms! None of them will grow, you know. Be sensible, Kickel." At my home the father would have talked very differently if such a person had strewn the room full of cherry-stones!

Then the old servant stood before the house-father with folded hands, and in a voice of groaning anxiety he cried, "Zutrum, Zutrum, I don't know how to help myself, it's coming on again!"

"Michel! Natzel!" said the house-father to the other two men, "take Kickel to bed. It is time for him to go to sleep."

Then they led Kickel away. Whatever did it mean?

"It's time for the children to go to sleep also," added the house-father. "The Forest-farm boy must sleep in the top room."

The disappointment was bitter. I had thought that Simmerl and I would have been able to lie near each other on a pile of hay, and this was actually the reason that I had come with him into this strange house. Tears came into my eyes in proportion to the anguish of finding out that it was all up with the hay, and that I had to sleep by myself in a dark little room. The house-mother must have noticed something, for she said, "He can very well sleep in the little room with Simmerl; there's a bed empty there."

“Well and good, but don’t talk long, boys.” So the house-father, after which Simmerl went to his parents, kissed their hands and said “Good night.”

This custom pleased me mightily, and I resolved to introduce it also into my home. I never got so far as that; I had always been ashamed of being entirely naughty to my parents, but also of being quite good, and in particular it had been impossible to me to show certain courtesies, much as I liked them.

I gathered from the order “not to talk long” that we had permission to talk, and as we lay, each in his little bed, having put out the light, so that nothing more was to be seen than the two faintly lighted square windows, I asked Simmerl, “What was wrong with that fellow Kickel?”

“Cherry-stones,” answered the lad.

“Why did he get so wild?”

“Oh, poor old Kickel!” said my comrade. “Don’t you know that he was in prison for ten years? Last year they let him out.”

“Why?”

“Because the Kaiser was married.”

“What, they locked him up for that?”

“No, that’s why they let him out.”

“But, good Lord, I want to know why they put him in prison,” I cried.

“If you shout like that father will come with the strap. He killed his son.”

This was horrible. I did not know whether Kickel or House-father Zutrum had killed his son. I dared question no farther, and when I did try it later Simmerl gave no answer, for he was asleep.

Next morning we were awakened by a clear voice, “Schoolboys, it’s time!” A bough of elder swayed about in front of the heart-shaped opening in the shutter, and through it the sun shone hot and bright on to our snow-white beds, and the house-spring splashed outside. I should have liked to dress at the same time as Simmerl, but was shy about drawing my legs from under the coverlet. With a long arm I drew my trousers from the bench into bed, and slipped them on to my limbs with a suggestive slickness, and so out to the spring. After the washing the morning prayers. Simmerl, out of consideration for his guest, would have gone out during these, suggesting that he would then take me to the grey horse in the stable; but his mother said, “He will see enough grey horses during his life; you need the Holy Spirit in school. Now say your morning prayer. Both kneel together.”

We knelt on the bench before the table, and each said an Our Father to

himself, while it occurred to me, "We are not so strict at home." Certainly, our mother said one ought to say one's prayers, but she did not order one straight away on to the bench.

Now I was to see too what came of the prayers. We had hardly raised our elbows from the table when it was spread with a white cloth, and set with white platters and with white bread, and a brown soup was poured out of the spout of a bright tin pot. At home it was just the other way round, everything else brown and the soup white. There was no milk-soup for breakfast here, but coffee! I had already heard about it, that the grand people ate coffee, but that an old charcoal-burner had said, "My dear people, I am certainly black. Look at me and see if I'm black or no! But I'm not so black and bad as the black broth from Morocco. The devil has invented it, and the peasant will come to an end if he eats it."

I do not know if the charcoal-burner knew how wisely he had spoken, and I do not know if they had believed him. I only know that everyone was crazy for coffee, and that I could not help putting my spoon into the black soup—Ugh! that isn't good, that is as bitter as gall! The devil has certainly invented it——

"You haven't put any sugar," laughed Simmerl, and threw some pieces out of a cup into my bowl. Now it was a little different. Simmerl looked at me and grinned to himself. I should have liked to know why.

After breakfast it was "God keep you!" to the Zutrum people and off to school. I had become quite brave and held out my right hand when saying "Good-bye and thank you," just like a well-mannered, grown-up man, and it occurred to me, "How easy it is to be good when one is not at home!"

As we went along the hill-meadow old Kickel was to be seen with a wooden fork spreading haycocks out so that they should dry better in the new sunshine. To-day I saw, for the first time, that he was very decrepit, bent double almost to cracking-point, and swaying and limping at every step. His knee-breeches had certainly once been leather, but now they had many, many patches of other stuffs stuck on with large, ungainly stitches. His feet and very brown ankles were bare. Breast and arms were covered by a coarse brown shirt; the old felt hat sat like a battered inverted kettle on the little grey head, but all the same it was decorated by an eagle's feather, which stood up high into the air. Knees, elbows and fingers were all so terribly bony that one felt as if the old man would never be able to do anything properly for the rest of his life; he was like a deformed and twisted oak tree up on the high land where the storm-wind cripples everything. When he caught sight of us he raised his hat politely and then he went on working.

“Oh, I say,” I questioned my schoolfellow, “what is the matter with Kickel?”

“When we are higher up I’ll tell you,” answered Simmerl, and when we came into the wood, where the ground became more level, he put his arm in mine, and said, “He had a son, and he shot him.”

“By accident? On purpose?” I asked, horrified.

“On purpose—quite on purpose.”

“What had he done then—the son?”

“Nothing; he was a thorough good fellow, my father said.”

“Good God! And did he hate his son so dreadfully then?”

“He loved his son ever so much; much too much.”

“And therefore shot him down?”

“Well, I don’t know myself how it was,” acknowledged Simmerl.

“So Kickel is mad?” I put in.

“Not mad, but a bit crazy, certainly; a bit crazy all his life, and people say one can’t imagine how sharp he used to be, and what a fine keeper he was up there, and how well educated! But the people say that the many books he read must have sent him silly.”

I quickened my steps.

“Why do you hurry so, Peter?”

“Supposing he runs after us!”

“Oh, Kickel won’t do anything to us. People say he would not have killed his son if he hadn’t been so fond of him.”

“Oh, Simmerl, supposing he is fond of us?”

“Oh, not so fond as he was of his son!”

“But, Simmerl, I don’t understand.”

“Some time I’ll ask father just how it all was.”

Nothing more. On that particular day I was not much use in school. Just think!—My father is very fond of *me*. He certainly has never told me so, but mother has said it to me. If things are like this, one will never trust oneself again with people who are fond of one.

“What is the matter with Peter?” asked the schoolmaster, “he is so absent-minded to-day.”

In the afternoon I came back to my parents' house. I stood awhile rooted to the sandy ground behind the pines. What was going to happen next? My father came towards me with a clacking wheelbarrow. "Go in and eat," he called to me, "and afterwards come out into the wood. We must cut down some wood for firing."

"Did you sleep at Zutrum last night?" asked my mother, as she set before me the dinner which had been saved for me.

"Mother, Simmerl wouldn't let go of me until I went home with him."

"It's quite right, child. Just lately Mistress Zutrum was complaining to your father that you did not come to see your cousins and aunt and uncle. My mother and the mother of Mistress Zutrum were sisters."

The danger was quite over. Out in the forest I asked my father whether he knew the Zutrums' old servant, Kickel, and what was the matter with him.

"It isn't the time for gossip now, it's the time for cutting firewood,"—that was his answer.

A few weeks later I was with my father in the cattle pasture. It was already dusk, and the oxen, who had been yoked to the plough all day, thrust their muzzles into the food and grazed busily. We stood by and waited until they were satisfied. It occurred to me that now was the time for gossip, and I asked him again about Kickel.

"Child, let Kickel be," answered my father. "He's never harmed you—and may God Almighty preserve from all craziness! See—they won't eat the grass—they're not hungry any more."

Soon after, we led the oxen into the farmyard. If I had died at that time, reader, you would hardly ever have learnt anything about Kickel. Meanwhile, I grew into a thin, but sadly tall lad, too narrow for a peasant, but long enough for a town gentleman—well, you know all about that!

And once on a time, in summer, as I was going to visit far-away Alpel again, in the forest on the way I overtook a peasant lad—a young, handsome but earnest fellow, in Sunday clothes although it was a work-day. He had an upright carriage, and moved his legs lightly and regularly in walking, so that I thought, "He has been a soldier, or is one still." His auburn hair, too, was cut short and shaved behind in such fashion that his round, fresh-coloured neck was bare for a couple of inches down to his shirt-collar. The long face, with the somewhat thinly modelled nose, the very fair little moustache and the open, shrewd eyes, suggested that he was by no means one of the most foolish and simple of people. In those days I was as glad to have company on such a road as now I am to go alone. So I tried it on with him. My question was,

where he went? He was going home to his wood-cutting in Fischbacherwald. "Where had he been?" In Krieglach, in the churchyard. "What had so lively a young fellow to do with the churchyard?"

"Well, it's just what happens often enough," answered he. "It was on account of old Kickel."

Old Kickel! I had often heard the name mentioned. Ah, yes! it was the old servant at Zutrum, who—— "We'll go together, so that it will be more entertaining. I am Peter from the Forest farm." That was my introduction.

"I've known you before," was his answer. "I have often met you in Graz when I was with the soldiers, but you have never recognised me."

"And why have you never made yourself known since you were from home?"

"I wanted to speak to you once, but I thought, 'A common soldier! Who knows if he'd like it?'"

"Naturally—you a common soldier—and I absolutely nothing."

"Ah—not that," he rejoined. "You are already somebody. I know it well."

"So they have buried Kickel to-day! And where are the others, then?"

"The few people have already gone on. Not many of them followed him. He was only a poor pauper."

"You have surely been one of the bearers?"

"No," said he; "I have only followed on after. There has been no praying even, because they said he had been a heathen. I thought to myself that he wasn't any worse than most other people, and that he had had bad luck—it was certainly his fate. Now in God's name he has rest."

"What bad luck did he have, then?" was my question. I believed that I was at last near to the satisfaction of my old and now re-awakened curiosity.

"You will have heard of the story before," said my road companion.

"Yes, just rumours; but never knew where they came from. Do you know anything exactly?"

"I know all about it," said he.

And I had led him on so far that he began to tell me everything. It is again many years since then, but one never forgets such things, and now I will tell the story of Kickel.

"Isidor Kickel was the only son of a steward at the Schloss of Prince

Schwarzenberg, in Muran. He had to study, and wanted to also, but suddenly dropped it all in his seventeenth year, just when he should have repeated his annual course. After that he tried an agricultural school, learnt forestry and became a forester. But he only got as far as being a forester's assistant or huntsman, and as this he was placed in the Imperial forests at Neuberg. He ought, perhaps, to have been a scholar, for there was something speculative in him, and he read many books in his spare time. He was much too much in books. He said such things oftentimes, and kept so away from church, that the people said: 'Huntsman Kickel has fallen away from the Christian faith.' That often happens to-day," commented my travelling companion. "At that time it was something novel. No one knew how he felt about it himself inside; the people said it could not feel quite right. Otherwise he was not a bad man. Once when he was in the church during a feast, he took money out of his purse and wanted to give it to the bell-pocket man, but the man passed by him as if to say, 'You monster, your money is too bad for me.' Whereupon Kickel gave the coins to a poor little old woman; they were not too bad for her, and the people laughed no end! Once a swallow flew into the church and could not get out again, because the windows have wire-netting and the door was at the far end. And no one could catch her, either. So Kickel went into the church every day and the sacristan thought he had been converted. Kickel, however, was only taking in bird's food so that the swallow should not starve. And as to conversion, there was nothing of that sort at all. In spite of everything, people liked him well, and nobody could accuse him of anything wrong. Then he married a schoolmaster's daughter from the Veitsch, and had seven children; and of these he lost six by death while they were quite little, three at one time, and his wife also through consumption. Only one single child remained to him, a boy called Oswald. One often sees that people who are unable to believe in a future life are all the more thirsty for life here, and for love too. It was just that way with Kickel. His love for this only child became an overwhelming passion, and all and everything which lay in his power that could make life lovely for the handsome, merry young Oswald, he gave him. He had him taught, and when he was twelve years old wanted to send him to an Institute in Vienna; but, on the other hand, Oswald wanted to stay among his home mountains, and the huntsman had to force himself to thrust him out. A few years later he secured him a clerkship in the State Forestry Office at Neuberg, and a few years after that there was a wedding.

"Oswald's choice was a pretty daughter of a burgher of Mürzzuschlag. The love-story apparently was just like other love-stories, and went much the same road as they. Oswald became master-woodman in the Hochschlag, behind Mürzsteg, on the high Veitsch. After barely a year, naturally enough, the 'little lad' was there, and Oswald could say to his father, 'I can wish

nothing better for myself, and only fear lest things should become worse!’ So he must have been a much more contented man than his father, and no one ever heard how he stood with regard to religion. His wife,” continued my lad, “has often told me since, that he laid his arm round her neck and said, ‘God be praised and thanked that I have you!’ So he must have believed *something*. And his father, Kickel, just revelled in joy because all went so well for his Oswald.

“Huntsman Kickel lived in an old dismantled farm-house, in the only room which was still habitable. At that time he was suffering with a wound in his foot, which he had got by leaping from a rock, and for months he had been unable to go into the coverts. As Oswald on Sundays went up to his mountain-hut from the valley, his way led him past, and he spoke to his father to ask him how the sick leg was, and to bring him this thing or the other and to chat with him about his wife and his dear boy. He often brought the boy with him, too, and then Huntsman Kickel would throw his boxes and cupboards open and invite son and grandson to take with them anything that particularly pleased them.

“‘Take—just take them all,’ he would always say; ‘they’re mere nothings. The little bit of pleasure in this world! I’ve had my share, and there’s nothing beyond. And if things get worse—end it!’

“Then that Sunday came. It was in August, and so hot in the morning that the young master-woodman Oswald begged a glass of water of his father on his way to church.

“‘When I come back after noon,’ he said to his father, ‘I will pay you for the well with St. John’s blessing.’ He meant by that he would bring wine with him. The old man answered that he ought to take it up to the little wife and the laddie. But they were in want of nothing; the little wife sang from dawn onwards like a lark, and little Anderl had laughed in his sleep as he, Oswald, before going out, had kissed him.

“‘Ah, you poor burdened fellow!’ Huntsman Kickel said again, and clapped his son on the shoulder and then ‘Good-bye till this afternoon.’

“About midday a storm arose over the Hochschwab Mountain. It did not rain much, but the thunder crashed heavily several times. An hour later a woodman came down from the hill, who called into the open windows, ‘Huntsman Kickel, look up if you want to see the smoke!’

“‘What’s the matter? What are you shouting for?’ asked Kickel, who was quite alone in the house.

“‘The mountain-hut is burning—the lightning struck it.’

“‘What do you say, woodman?’

“‘When the master-woodman comes home he will find nothing left. Everything has gone!’

“‘The wife? The child?’

“‘Everything’s gone. If your son goes home, prepare him for it. I must go to Niederalpel.’

“That was what the woodman said—and then he was off.”

I cannot repeat as my fellow-wayfarer told it; it went straight into my heart like a knife. But the young fellow remained unmoved, and went on telling:

“No one knows what Huntsman Kickel thought of this message. At first he wanted to go up to the heights where the black smoke was making the whole heavens dark. But he was unable, because of the bad foot. ‘His wife and his child! His wife and his child! His wife and his child!’ The whole time just that. ‘End it!’ Kickel went into the parlour and stared out of the window. ‘Now he’s coming—and now he’s coming.’ He took the gun from the wall and stood in the middle of the parlour and looked out through the window to the path outside. At last he came, Oswald, out from the green wood; he did not look up, and still did not know anything about it, and came so quickly and gaily to the house where his father lived. And Huntsman Kickel aimed through the window and shot him down.”

“Jesus Christ!” I cried. “Had he gone mad?”

“One cannot say that,” answered the lad. “When his old housekeeper came home, he sent her at once for a cart, went to the police, and when examined he said he could not endure that his Oswald should have trouble and go on living, and he had thought to himself, ‘He knows nothing, and needs to know nothing. That useless grieving for many a day and year is quite unnecessary. A quick death, and you are after them, you are set free from everything—and I, your father, can do you no better service than that.’ He said, ‘I did not aim badly; and now, your honours, please make an end of me.’ I believe they gave him fifteen years, but when the Kaiser married in fifty-four they let him off the rest.”

I went thoughtfully along the woodland path, and said:

“It’s almost beyond belief.”

“It was best,” continued my companion, “that they fetched him away at once and took him to Loeben. He couldn’t have lived after knowing the worst of all.”

“What the woodman said—was it not true, then?” I asked it with my breath

stopping.

“Yes, the lightning had certainly struck the hill-hut and it was burnt down, but nothing had happened to Oswald’s family.”

It’s awful to think of the fate of some men!

We went on together for a while; neither said a word.

At last I stood still and asked, “When did he learn it?”

“When after nine years he had been free for half a year, and he came home and was always laughing in the air, then I told it him myself.”

“How did you say it to him?”

“‘Father Kickel, your daughter-in-law and your grandson Anderl are still alive, and all is well with them.’”

“And what did he say to that?”

“‘So,’ said he, ‘they are still alive? And I had always dreamt that they were all dead, all! God, what tales the young people tell!’ And then he laughed again.”

“Ah—mad then!”

“It must have been so,” said my companion. “For a while after that he tried to earn his bread as a farm-servant, but later on, as he couldn’t succeed in that, he came on the parish. As a rule, one saw nothing amiss with him, but many a time one did—many a time one did.”

“You knew him quite well?” I asked the young fellow.

“Well, naturally,” was his answer; “he was my grandfather.”

XII

How I Came to the Plough

THIS is one of the very shortest, but also one of the most important chapters in my story. It takes me out of my first childish youth and my herding time, and brings me to the days of my young manhood and of work filled with conscious purpose.

It needed many an artful trick before I managed to get promoted from cowherd to ploughman. I had to sprain my foot, so that I could not run after the cattle properly; I had to find birds' nests in the meadow, which inclined my younger brother to take over my herdsman's duties in my stead; lastly, I had to coax Markus the farm-hand, who had driven the plough till then, into declaring that it was an easy-going implement, as simple to handle as a pocket-knife, and that I—the callow lad—was fairly strong enough and fit to guide the plough.

And I stood there and drew myself up until I reached at least as high as long Markus's shoulders, and I shook one of the fence-posts until it groaned—as a proof of my fitness for the plough. But my father laughed and said:

“Get out, you're a little swaggerer! What you need is a good breeches-dusting given you every day. And now he's pretending to be grown up. Very well, take hold; it won't last long!”

We were in the fields when he spoke. Markus stood back; and I took the plough by the horns.

The plough in the neighbourhood of my home is different, certainly, from the bent bough of the savage, but it remains a clumsy, imperfect implement. The farmer puts it together himself out of birch-wood, fetching only the iron portions from the smith and the wheels from the cartwright. The chief parts of the plough are the coulter, or plough-iron, which cuts the turf vertically, and the share, which slices it horizontally, thus creating a grassy sod which has four sides to it, and is about a span wide and half a span thick. Then there is the mould-board, which lifts the cut sod out of the furrow and turns it over, so that the grassy side comes to lie at the bottom. Further portions, by means of

which these chief parts are fastened to the body of the plough, are called the coulter-beam, the sill-beam, the “cat.” All these appliances have to be in duplicate, as required by the progress up and down the hilly field, turn and turn about. In front is the beam, lying on the axle-tree, to which a pair of oxen are usually harnessed. At the back of the plough, three “horns” or tails stick out; these are the handles by which the plough is driven by a powerful man. It depends upon the driving of this ploughman whether the sod be made wide or narrow and the furrow deep or shallow; it is this man’s duty to fix and lift the plough at the edge of the field; he must also be able, on stony ground, to pull the plough out of the way of any larger stone than usual, for the oxen cannot be brought suddenly to a standstill; and the plough, if left to itself, would soon go to wreck and ruin.

Over and above this ploughman, the vehicle also needs a driver, who leads the oxen in such a way that one of the pair is always stepping in the furrow and the other on the sod. Then, lastly, there has to be a “follower.” This is usually a girl, who comes after the plough with a hoe, presses down the sods that have not been well turned, cuts out faulty furrows, and, in short, acts as the corrector of the plough.

You see that the thing is far from simple. It means a long day’s work to dig an acre and a half of sloping land with one plough. Well, how did the young ploughman fare?

I had taken the bull firmly by the horns. But it really was a bull. The apparatus had allowed Markus to handle it like a toy; it looked as though he only held on to the handles for fun. It was quite a different business with me. The cattle pulled. I was plunged to right and left by the handles; the plough tried to jump out of the rut; and my little bare feet got caught now and then under the clods.

“He’s too short in the buttocks!” I heard father and the labourer say, laughing.

This speech roused me. My honour, my manhood were at stake. I no longer wanted to be the duffer who had to sit at the bottom corner of the table, who dared not put a word in edgewise, who, if he knew of anything that had happened, was free to go and talk it over with the sheep and calves outside. I had the most ambitious views; I wanted to be big and strong and independent, like the farm-labourer. And behold, the higher a man aims, the taller he grows! I drove the plough and cut a passable furrow. The earth-worms, disturbed by the plough, lifted their heads in surprise and looked up to see who was ploughing to-day!

My father’s fields had tough, yellowish-red earth, interwoven with grass-

roots; and the sods formed an endless gut, and were hardly once in a way interrupted throughout the tract of land to be ploughed. I was glad of that, for it made the plough remain always evenly in position, and the furrow became more regular than any pond-digger's work. But my father was not so glad; he would rather have had black, soft sods:

“Black earth, white bread!” says the proverb.

When I was driving the plough across the field for the third time, I took a peep to see how high the sun stood in the sky. Alas, that clock had stopped! There were clouds in front of it. Suppose God should be angry and refuse to let it become noon to-day!...

It seemed a long time before mother, when dinner was ready, appeared in the loft at the top of the house, as my grandmother had done before her, put two fingers to her mouth, and sent forth the shrill, peculiar whistle which I knew so well. I let go the handles and confessed that mother had never whistled so musically before.

Then came dinner. I took good care not to wipe the earth from my hands, for even this crust gave me a certain air; I was no longer the duffer, I was the ploughman, I enjoyed equal rights with the labourers. I sat down beside the head man and did my best to talk in a weighty fashion. They spoke of my performance; then I was silent, for my performance spoke for itself.

It is a small incident in one's youth, it is hardly big enough to be worth mentioning; but, for the farmer, it is a great and momentous day when he puts his hand to the plough for the first time—it is a sacred act. The sword, the Cross, are objects of respect; and I look upon the plough also as a symbol of the redemption of the world. The grey earth-dust which clung to my hands that time, and with which I went in to dinner—I have not wiped it off to this day—was to me what the golden pollen-dust is to the bee.

And so I may be permitted to add that, in that same year, I tilled the whole of that field; that my father sowed the seed there with a pious hand; and that, next spring, the corn stood glad and green and glorious.

“I haven't seen such a field of corn these ten years past,” said my father, when he saw it.

XIII

The Recruit

NEVER in my life shall I forget that February morning. It was only to be expected; and yet it took us by surprise.

I was a little over twenty years of age. Though I already felt a regular young man and did my very best to act as such, still I always looked upon myself as a child, for I was ever so considered by my parents and to a certain extent so treated by my teacher. I had to stoop nowadays, when I entered the house through the door; and, when I stood by the table-corner in the parlour, my head reached up to the Holy Trinity on the wall, to espy whose mystery I had so often, as a boy, scrambled up chair and table. But people still always called me by my short pet name; and I still answered to it. And so, silently, that February morning came upon us.

It was a Sunday. I had come back from a long job,^[14] and meant to have a pleasant rest. When I awoke, my father was standing by the bed and said it was high time for me to get up, he wanted to speak to me.

“Do you owe any money to Bürscher the innkeeper at Krieglach?” he asked, and waited anxiously for my answer.

I asked him why he put such a question to me: what I had drunk at Bürscher’s I had always paid for.

“So I should have thought. It’s only because Bürscher has sent me a paper to-day, which belongs to you, I’m thinking.”

He gave me the paper: it was grey; and I turned red. Father noticed this and said:

“Seems to me there’s some disgrace about it, for all that!”

“Not a disgrace,” said I, with my eyes fixed on the lines, which were part in print and part in writing. “An honour rather. *Present myself*, that’s what I have to do.”

The paper ran:

“MILITARY SUMMONS

“Take note that you, Peter Rosegger, living at house No. 18 at Alpel, born in the year 1843, in the parish of Krieglach, are hereby called upon to fulfil your military obligations by presenting yourself for inspection, at 8 o’clock in the morning on the 14th of March, 1864, at the appointed place at Bruck, clean-washed and in clean linen, failing which you will be treated as a deserter and undergo the usual consequences prescribed by law.

“KINDBERG, 15 February, 1864.

“For the Town Council,

“WESTREICHER,

“Chairman.

“Lot No. 67.

Age-class I.”

By this time, my mother was there too. She could not believe it. Why, it wasn’t so long since I was just a little bit of a chap! And now, all at once, a soldier!

“He’s not that yet,” said father.

“Give them time. And look at him. They won’t send *him* home in a hurry. Jesu, Mary! And the chest is spreading, too, now! That narrow little chest of yours was always my comfort. And to think that you have grown so broad all in a year!”

I had jumped out of bed, but did not know how to defend myself against my disconsolate mother’s reproaches.

My father said to her:

“Thank your stars that he’s healthy. Do you want a cripple for a son? Would you rather have had that than a fine, well-set-up soldier?”

“You’re right, of course, Lenzel:^[15] if only I could keep him with me, though. Sooner or later, he’ll have to go to the front; and I simply can’t bear to think of that.”

She wept.

“Get back into bed again,” said father to me. “You could have stayed in bed, if you’d wanted to.”

I didn’t care about bed now. I was glowing in every limb. True, I had been secretly awaiting this summons, in fear and trembling; but, now that it had come, I had an ever so pleasant and cheerful feeling inside me. I was filled with joy and pride. The Emperor had sent for me! I rushed to the door; I could have shouted from house to house, from hill to hill:

“I’m a recruit!”

There were many weeks yet before the 14th of March. Mother wanted me

not to go on any more jobs, but to stay at home so that she could have me with her for that short time. My master, indulgent as ever, yielded to her. She gave herself up to thinking and planning how to make this time, the last that I should spend with her, pleasant to me. She called to mind all my pet dishes. She asked the market-woman to get beetroot for her and dried cherries, two things which my palate specially relished at the time. She scattered more and more oats before the hens and tried to explain to them that they would be dispensed from duty the whole of next summer if only they would lay eggs now, at this great time; otherwise there would be nothing for it but to cut off their heads; for a soldier, if he got no eggs to eat, was not averse to roast fowls, however old and tough—they never saw such teeth as a young fellow had who was just going for a soldier!

Dear mother-heart, once so warm and true, can it be possible that you are now but a cold bit of clay? How I yearn for you these days! How I pray that you will let me love you, as you once prayed to me! You are almost colder to me now than I was then to you. I never thought what endless loving-kindness and cheerfulness and self-sacrifice lay hidden in the little gifts and pleasures which you prepared for me! I took you, O my mother's heart, as a man takes the breath of the morning and the sunshine, without so much as a "Thank you"!

So, at that time, with the conscription near at hand, I accepted my mother's tenderness rather casually and, instead of staying at home with her, went about the neighbourhood and forgathered with the lads who had received their summons like myself. True, there were some among them for whom I had but little fellow-feeling—I did not care much for the lads of my neighbourhood, our tastes lay too far asunder—but the common lot now united us, we consorted together, we drank together in the taverns; and, full of esprit de corps as I was, I behaved just as wildly as the rest.

Everybody smoked; and it was no longer pipes, but cigars, to make people think that the Emperor already had sent army tobacco on ahead for his young recruits. Everybody strove to walk grand and straight and upright, though, as I presently found, this resulted rather in a sort of strut or swagger. Whether everybody had a sweetheart I can't quite say; but this much is certain, that everybody sang about his sweetheart. There are songs about the pretty and the ugly, the faithless and the deserted, the cold and the warm-hearted; songs for daily use and songs for special occasions. I joined boldly in every ditty, as though I owned girls of all sorts and descriptions. And yet, all the while, I was secretly afraid because of my recruiting-favour.

Here let me explain that every lad who is called upon for conscription gets a many-coloured bunch of ribbons pinned to his hat by his sweetheart. The

ribbons are mostly red and wave in the breeze——when their wearers bluster as they should——like flags. The rose or bud-shaped favours are generally cut out of coloured linen or paper and have the advantage of always keeping bright and fresh and not drooping, as real flowers do;—for a drooping air won't do for recruits. Only, there is just one green sprig of rosemary with it, forming the heart of the favour; and in this green spray the beloved talks to her lover, saying I know not what sweet and good things! So long as the beloved has to do with rosemary, it is the May-time of love.

Now where was *I* to get my favour from? A sweetheart! I knew of one, but I had none: I had never reflected how indispensable the sweetheart is to the recruit.

Must I, while all the others marched away with fluttering top-knots, trot favourless behind? And what was the good of marching and what the good of going for a soldier, if I left no sobbing girl behind me?

The day arrived.

My mother made as if she were calm, at times even cheerful, but she had always red eyes. Once she went to my master and wept and was surprised that he did not cry too. But he only laughed and said that he did not see what there was to grieve about: Peter need not be afraid of soldiering; he would have a good time; he had learnt tailoring; he might even become a cutter in the army tailors' department; and then he could laugh at all of them. But my dear mother wouldn't hear about laughing, for the time being; she remained disconsolate: under the circumstances she felt better so. She got ready for me the finest linen she could lay hold of and marked each garment with a little cross; but nothing further was said about the recruiting, until the last moment, when I was starting and mother wished to go with me as far as Krieglach.

“For God's sake, don't!” I cried; for how would it have gone off if I had marched with mother by my side and the lads in front of us with their wild songs and chaff! Pretty badly: such young devils are lads that there are times when the gentlest mother's son of them all blushes for his parents.

“Nay, nay, mother,” said father to her, “you can't go; you're no good at that; and they would only poke fun at the boy.”

My mother did not say another word. She did not even come as far as the front door with me, for fear of getting me laughed at by the passers-by. Inside, in the parlour, she dipped her finger in the holy-water stoup and made a cross with it over my face and then hurried into the next room, to let her tears flow freely. I felt just a queer sort of choking at the throat, but did not let it master me. And I won't warrant that, when, in the dark passage, I made a quick movement over my eyes, I did not at the same time wipe off the wet mark of

the cross.

We all met at Stocker's inn on the bridle-path. Everyone, as I expected, had his hat full of finery; my head alone was smooth as that of a poor little ram that has grown no horns yet and has just to be content with its long ears. Therefore I was still mortally unhappy at the first glass; at the second, however, I thought of the shako with the flaunting imperial eagle on it, which I was as certain of wearing as any of the rest.

There were pretty fellows among them, but also wretched pigmies who needed their streaming ribbons to hide their humps, their goitres, and even—if I may be allowed a little exaggeration—their weedy spindle-shanks. Now where had *they* got their sweethearts from, that they sported such fine favours? They all had their hats on; I alone had flung mine into a corner, to avoid the scorn with which, for that matter, they had already overwhelmed me.

When we broke up at last and I was obliged to fish out my hat again, I could not find it. For in its place was another, with a splendid rosette and two ribbons, one red and the other white; and I now saw that it *was* my hat which had been so gloriously favoured by an unknown hand. Perhaps I had a sweetheart after all! I reflected, but could hit upon none whom I thought capable of liking such a "Marry-me-not" as myself. Stocker, the innkeeper, had nice-looking daughters, but they were all married. His old wife was reported to have once been young herself, but the ribbons and that wonderful, dainty sprig of rosemary could not possibly date back to that period. And the old woman played no other part in the business than to whisper to me that someone had been past the house and secretly priggged a rosette for me.

Anyway, I had it—that was the great thing—and it looked finer and grander than all the rest. Goodness, how I racked my brains under that favour! To the others, however, I behaved as if I knew right well from whom it came, and I even carried this plan to such a pitch that I myself began to fix on a definite person and believed and was soon convinced that it was she I loved. It's inconceivable how soon a certainty of this sort makes a man of one! I was now the liveliest of them all as we went along; and more than one of them said they never knew that Lenzel's son was such a devil of a fellow. Which made me feel not a trifle flattered.

One of our numberless jokes was to "make the railway-train stop." We posted ourselves outside the station and, as the train came up, yelled and shouted:

"Hi! Stop!"

Then the train stopped and we laughed.

But things did not always end so harmlessly. We were seated in the railway-carriage—the Krieglach Town Council had given us our fares, which, as we believed, were sent direct by the Emperor—when one of us, Zedel-Zenz, proposed that we should all examine our tufts of rosemary: he whose spray was beginning to fade had lain oftenest in his sweetheart’s arms. And then it turned out that the green sprig in my hat was clinging a little wearily and languidly to the red linen flowers. This, of course, caused me a fresh inward alarm. Could this sprig of rosemary know more about her and more about me than I myself did? Had I really been favoured already?

“Yes, that goes without saying!” I laughed, swaggering like anything.

But instead of impressing the others, I only brought down ridicule upon myself. They spoke of rocking the cradle and drew all sorts of conclusions from the fading of the rosemary, until at last I protested angrily. What had it to do with them? I asked. If anybody had anything to complain of, let him come on! For it at once occurred to me, a real recruit must put up with nothing, must know how to be rude and raise a brawl in due season. And so I blustered away until I had blustered myself into a regular, genuine rage, stamping my feet, waving my arms and actually managing to shatter a window-pane.

The guard at once appeared. Who had broken the glass?

“Lenzel’s son!” crowed one. “The tailor!”

But the others shouted that it wasn’t true and that we mustn’t tell who had done it.

“I want no hushing up from any of you!” I broke in. “I smashed the pane. What’s the damage?”

“We’ll see to that at Bruck,” answered the guard. “I’ll speak to the captain; the army’ll soon tame you, my lad!”

“Now you’ve done it,” thought I to myself; “now you’re a soldier, Lenzel’s son.”

And I became quite quiet, as if the wintry air, rushing in through the broken window, had cooled me to good purpose.

At the station at Bruck there was no more said about that pane of glass; and, when we went shouting through the town, I slung my arms round the necks of my companions on either side of me and felt grateful to them for their willingness to screen the felon that I was.

From the windows of the houses, the town misses looked down upon our mad doings; and we were convinced that they must all be in love with us and that, the more rudely we behaved and the more wildly the ribbons streamed

from our hats, the more ardent their love must grow. We had a lurking suspicion that even a farmer's lad from the mountains, bawling with brag and arrogance and marching away as the champion of his country, may, when all is said, possess some little interest for the city dame.

Now escorted by corporals, we marched back into the town by the other side and up to a building standing by itself. Then we went indoors. All of us were a little flurried; none knew in what condition he would leave this house again. And here, in the town, the soldier's life no longer looked so glorious as at home in the still woods. Most of us—even though we were not the most pious—sighed an "In God's name!" as we blundered up the steps.

We went into a large hall which was almost like a barn and in which over a hundred young men were already gathered. There was a tremendous buzzing and pushing; and it was a very curious sight. Some, filled with the gaiety of despair, were jumping up and down on their stocking-feet or barefoot; others tied up their clothes and sat down on the bundles and were sad as death. Others again leant or stood against the walls, like carved saints, with the cold sweat on their foreheads. One might say even of the dwarfs and cripples that their hearts sank into their trousers, had they still had their trousers on!

I walked round the hall, meaning well by everybody, but caring to talk to none. They were surprised that I could keep so indifferent; of the great excitement bubbling inside me I gave no sign.

Suddenly the entrance-door was locked, which made one of us whisper:

"Look, the trap's snapped to!"

On the other hand, a door opposite opened; and a couple of soldiers—but these were full-blown soldiers—walked about among us and pushed one after the other into the inner room. I then saw some of the palest faces I ever beheld in my life. Most of them, however, strode quite bravely through the fateful gate. But we were numbered. To prevent unfairness in any given age-class, the order of the muster—for it is usually to the recruit's advantage to be one of the last—the order is always arranged, a few weeks beforehand, by lot, which every man liable to military service can draw in person or allow to be drawn by such persons as he pleases. My number had been drawn by the Krieglach Town Council; and it bore the favourable number of 67.

Nearly half of the numbers up to 30 did not come back. A sergeant fetched their clothes. But those who did come back wore an all the gladder look, dressed themselves as quickly as they could, or, for fear lest the gentleman inside should repent of having let them go, bundled their clothes under their arms and slipped out through some hole or other.

Numbers 51 to 65 all came back. Number 66 did not reappear. The sergeant came for his things. Then, at last, Number 67 was called. I walked with the utmost composure—rather too fast than too slow—into the lions’ den.

What was there so extraordinary? Three or four gentlemen in black coats, with shiny buttons, silver collars, clattering swords and warlike moustaches. The blades were smoking cigars. My first thought was, could they be bribed with a civil “Good morning”? But I had heard from the men before me that the gentlemen had not said so much as “Thank you” to this greeting. We were just “things.” And who is going to exchange greetings with a *Number 67*? So I bit my teeth together and held my tongue and sported my most defiant air.

I was at once put against an upright post. One of the officers, with a soft pressure of the hand, pushed my chest out and my knees in and said:

“Sixty-four and a half!”

Another seemed to write it down.

“Chest sound. Muscles might be more developed.”

“Give him another year to run about in,” said a third.

“Go and dress yourself!”

That was the whole proceeding. I hardly know how I got back to the front room. As I went out by the steps, the soldiers on duty stuck their bayonets in my way: that means a request to the lucky ones for a tip. It did not need the bayonets: everyone gives, for it is the moment when he is free to leave the fatal building, with its often harsh consequences, and return to his dear home.

Those who are “kept” are mostly also allowed to go home once more and there await the muster-call; but they remain in custody on the day itself, until the gentlemen are finished with the inspection. Then they are drafted into the regiments and made to take the military oath; and then they are—soldiers.

We waited for them in the Bruck taverns. They were received with loud shouts and cheered with wine and song; and, if many a “kept” one felt like falling in the dumps because his glad young life in the green mountains was over to-day and because he had to march away, perhaps to a foreign country, perhaps to the distant battle-field, and because he, who was as fond of life as another, had to risk his young blood, the hurrahs of his boon companions soon roused him to fresh tavern joys; and, at last, all began to feel as though this were but one long day, without an end to it, sinking into the night and the night into wine.

But hours come and pass away; and so do drinking-bouts. The next day we separated; and to Krieglach-Alpel went what from Krieglach-Alpel came. Of

our lot, two men had become soldiers: a bloodless, but very good-looking charcoal-burner's son; and a labourer. The labourer put on a jovial and almost wild air and tried to pick a quarrel with more than one stranger who greeted us in the street. The charcoal-burner's son was steeped in melancholy. We did not know what he was losing through a military life, nor he either: he just gazed at the great mountains and the glorious forest trees....

We others and the inns on the road took all the greater care to keep the mad recruiting-spirit alive. By the custom of our fathers, the rosette and ribbons are worn on the hat by the recruit who goes home a soldier and by no other. But we acted differently that day: we all kept our rosettes, so as to create a greater sensation and compel respect.

“Look, look! Expect we'll be having war soon,” said many a little peasant, “for they're keeping them all now, every man jack of them. It'll be true what the old folks say, that the women will fight for the chair on which a he once sat.”

Beyond the village of Fressnitz we came up with a beggar-man carrying a hurdy-gurdy on his back. One of us at once demanded the use of it; and, while a second led the old man like a bridle-horse, a third ground out on the beggar-man's back all the tunes which the organ contained; and we others danced and jumped about on the frozen road. In this array, we arrived at Krieglach, where we took our musical team to the tavern with us. The old man was in fine fettle and assured us that we were angels of recruits compared with those of his day. He had been one himself; and once they took a peasant who was sitting in a cart, letting his donkey pull him uphill, and harnessed him between the shafts and put the donkey in the cart instead; and they had done saucier things than that. He drank our healths and praised the days of old.

There was lots of singing as we crossed the mountain by the bridle-path. I should be sorry to repeat the songs. We sang ourselves warm, we sang ourselves hoarse. On the upper ridge, a hawker, known as Egg Mary, met us, carrying to Mürzzuschlag her baskets filled with those little things of which the songs says:

It's an oval fortress,
Has no towers, no portress
But lordly food inside.

And the words came to my mouth:

“Raw eggs are good for hoarseness!”

“We'll make sure of that at once!” cried the others, took the woman's basket and sucked out all her eggs—the charcoal-burner's son with the rest of them—and I too.

All that Egg Mary could get out in her wrath was:

“You’re a pack of scoundrels!”

“Never mind,” answered Zedel-Zenz. “We’ll pay as soon as we have any money.”

Then she went back with an empty basket, grumbling and uttering her various views of us and our behaviour. We started singing again, and the eggs did their duty.

At Stocker’s inn we once more gave rein to our spirits. I did not fail to renew my inquiries about my benefactress with the ribbons and was firmly determined, if ever I came across the girl, to love her with all my heart and soul. The old hostess blinked significantly with her little grey eyes, but I got nothing more out of her.

We lads parted outside the inn in the steadfast belief that, after these days spent in one another’s company, we would remain the firmest of mutual friends. A farewell feast was ordered of the innkeeper for the day when the two who had been kept were to join the colours.

When the spree was over, I felt a sinking inside, as I wended my way home. A laughing face looked out at me from every window. My father walked slowly up to me and knocked the hat off my head with his arm, so that the ribbons rustled against the frozen snow. For the moment I did not know what this meant; but my father did not leave me long in ignorance.

“Is it all the same to you,” he said, “that you come home with a blazing lie on your hat? As to *who* gave you that besom, we’ll talk about that later. All I ask you now is, how can you do a thing like that to your mother? I dare say you don’t know—you blackguard young puppy you!—how her heart is torn with anxiety at the thought of losing a child. But that you could give her such a fright! I wouldn’t have thought it of you! If Egg Mary hadn’t happened to come and tell us that you had a lucky escape this time, you might have had a nice business to answer for, with that damned rosette of yours. And your mother so poorly this long while past and all!”

I trembled in every limb. My recruiting giddiness was gone; I suddenly saw my whole baseness. My heart cried out for my mother. And that same Egg Mary, whom we—not to mince matters—had robbed on the high-road, had gone on ahead, in her good nature, to tell my people, to whom she owed many a little kindness, that they must not be frightened at the soldier’s favour with which I should most likely come home, and that I had come out of it with luck.

My mother’s joyful, loving grip of my hand only deepened my contrition.

But father was wagging the rosette under my nose:

“And now, boy, perhaps you’ll be good enough to tell me where you got those fine feathers from! Are you walking out with somebody, young as you are? That’s what I want to know!”

Many and sweet as were the thoughts of pretty girls that filled my mind, fond as I was of talking of it to fellows like myself, the thing looked very different in my father’s presence. I assured him that I was walking out with nobody and that I did not know who had given me the favour. He laughed out loud and then flew at me angrily because of “the silly impudence of trying to make him believe a fib like that.”

My mother interposed and said that they could rejoice that I was home again, and that they must not begin by scolding me so hard.

“Now you’re backing him in his wickedness,” he cried, “when he’s lying straight in my face! But did you ever see such a booby as not to know from whom he got the ribbons in his hat?”

“Now it’s my turn to laugh,” said my mother. “This time the boy really can’t tell, for *I* had the favour stuck in his hat on the sly, so that he might have a bit of colour about him, as good as the rest of them.”

She had done it secretly, because she suspected that her son was longing for a rosette from strange hands, and could easily have despised his mother’s gift. She had prevented his ingratitude beforehand. And her home-coming son might have smitten her to the heart with that same rosette!...

The murder was out; father said nothing; and I ... I also did my share of thinking....

That children must always be striving after strange and far-away joys, hungering for love and yearning for love, which they will never find so pure and rich and endless as at home, in that perennial spring of tenderness, their mother’s heart!

Footnotes:

[14] Peter Rosegger was at that time a travelling tailor’s apprentice.

[15] Lorenz, Lawrence.

XIV

A Forgotten Land

I ALWAYS say that the world is becoming too small. There is no room left for hermits.

I frequently receive enquiries, from correspondents abroad, for cool summer resorts,—for nature resorts. Would I please—so runs the request—suggest a corner in the Alps where they will find clean rooms and good food in a farm-house kept by simple, kindly people. Added conditions: no railway, no telegraph, no post, no newspapers. A place where they can feel safe from meeting English people or people from Berlin and—forgive the imputation—Vienna. They want to have nothing but woods and fields around them, and, oblivious of all town luxuries and refinements, at least for a few weeks to bathe body and soul in the dew of a primitive life. This is the wish which—O curious sign of the times!—grows ever louder and louder. Is the return to nature, yearned for by the poets, at last beginning in earnest?

If only the company-promoters do not seize upon this need and found a colony for hermits! It is not so easy to recover nature once wantonly deserted. Our alps contain no valley, however secluded, into which artificial wines and brandy and American meat-extracts and cigars have not by this time made their way, in which the fences are bare of railway timetables and mineral-water posters and upon which some *News of the Day* or other does not force its huge weekly doses of “culture” and information.

This is the case by now even in those districts whose “unfavourable” situation has hitherto for the most part spared them the two well-known “blessings” of civilisation. The floodgates are opened; and even those parts cannot be spared the deluge....

My forgotten land! He who would still bathe for a little in “the dew of a primitive life” may do so! I hasten to draw a fleeting picture of the land and its people before the floods of the world come and inundate it.

The region is locally and colloquially known as Sanct-Jakobs-Land, or “the Jackelland.” It lies in Styria, between the Mürzthal and the Wechsel

mountain-chain. Its river is the clear-running Feistritz, rich in trout, with its countless tributaries. When one crosses the top of the watershed over the Wechsel, or the Pfaffen, or from the Mürzthal, everything at once wears a different look. The mountains are lower, the forests more scattered, because they are broken up on every hand by cornfields. The farms lie isolated in the fields, on the skirts of the forests, often very high in the mountains. In the valley are the bright green pastures, with running brooks and corn-mills. The air is calm and peaceful, disturbed by the whistle of no locomotive, the chimney of no factory. The old farm-houses are humbly built; and the kitchen, living-room, hen-house and so on often form but one general room. This makes the new sort of houses, which are springing up on every side, look all the grander, with their sundry apartments and numerous windows,—from which many a pretty, fair-haired face peeps out at us, for it is an event when a stranger comes that way.

The farm premises are, for the most part, extensive, built of wood, straw-thatched and enclosed within a plank fence. Every farm has its open-air crucifix, often artistically carved, sometimes, I admit, adorned with a figure of Christ which faith alone can save from ridicule. On the spreading mountain-heights lie wide forests, such as Teufelstein, Fischbacherwald, Vorauerwald, Feistritzwald, Rabenwald. There are no work-houses, except the few on the Wechsel. For the rest, the region is well-populated and rich in compact villages and beautiful churches. The mountain-village of St. Jakob im Walde, which gives the Jakobsland its name, lies on a spur of the Wechsel, some four thousand feet above the level of the sea.

The inhabitants do not call themselves Jacklers: they are only so-called by the people in the districts round about; for the name does not stand for anything very fine, though it has grown old in honour. They simply call themselves after their parishes: the Rattners, the St. Jakobers, the Miesenbachers and so on. Almost every village has its own peculiarity. The Kathreiner goes in for finery, the Rattner for disputes and litigation; the Wenigzeller is a great man for backbiting and quarrelling; the Fischbacher is a notorious brawler.

The people are powerfully built and have tall and slender figures; they are mostly fair-haired. The men wear clothes of dark stuff, in the summer, and, in winter, the so-called *Wilfling*, a mixture of thread and sheep's wool; on workdays they tie on long blue aprons, a practice which prevails even among the schoolboys. The women favour a bunched style of dress; and when one of them wants to look particularly smart (and this applies to many), she puts on three, or five, or more petticoats, one over the other. Many villages are already infected with the fashion of dress introduced from the Mürzthal.

A peculiarity of the Jackler is his love for flax, which he cultivates in great quantities; and the hackling, in autumn, gives rise to regular popular festivals. *During the winter, both men and women occupy themselves in spinning, and do so until late at night, passing the time as they work in telling stories, asking and guessing conundrums, and singing.* Only there is no spinning after supper on Thursdays: from flax spun at such a time the weaver weaves shrouds.

Their food is simple and consists mainly of milk, flour, pulse, potatoes and linseed-oil. The everyday beverage is new cider. In some places they grind dried pears, and from the flour thus produced, which is mixed into a pulp with milk, they make the so-called *Dalken*. Apples are also dried; and so are plums and cherries: these are all made into soup in the winter. The cattle are reared, fattened and sold; sheep or pigs are slaughtered for holiday needs. The fare is very rich on feast-days; and there is a tradition that, on Twelfth Night, nine different kinds of stews should be consumed in every house: formerly the Jacklers used to eat no fewer than three meals on that night, so that “Three Kings’ Night”^[16] is known as “Three Meal Night” to this day.

The population, which reminds one, in its habits and customs, of the inhabitants of the Böhmerwald, is descended from Bajuvar stock and immigrated in the sixth and seventh centuries. It is German by origin and German by nature. Settled here for over a thousand years, the individual members of this race have become so rooted to the soil that they never leave it, and only with difficulty admit anything foreign to the land. The cell of the first German monk who began to convert the heathen is said to have stood in the desert where the little village of Mönichwald now stands. The mission was afterwards continued by the monasteries of Vörlau and Pöllau. The living is in the possession of the population to this day; in many places, the parish-priest fills at the same time the offices of parish-councillor, guardian of the poor and district school-inspector.

One can easily, therefore, picture the peace that reigns between church, school and municipality. Generally speaking, the clergy—in the absence of any defiant antagonism—are more liberal-minded here than in those outlying districts where they feel called upon to defend their compromised rule by the exercise of intolerance and severity.

The Jackler is favourably distinguished in one particular from the agricultural population of some other parts: he is not neutral. In the surrounding districts the peasant is apt to be indifferent towards matters of religious practice and equally indifferent towards other ideals and spiritual things. The Jackler is not like that. Gorgeous festivals, which he loves to celebrate in his stately village-churches, festivals which remind one of the

Tyrol in their splendour, their often dramatic form, their mediæval love of God and veneration of the saints, delight him, stimulate him, give sustenance and substance to his spiritual life. A priest who is not prepared to celebrate the anniversaries of the church's patrons with due pomp and ceremony and to invite half a dozen neighbouring priests to read Mass and preach (and he must provide them with a good dinner into the bargain) would soon find himself at loggerheads with his flock.

The district is often visited by fanatical missionaries, who promptly arouse excitement for miles around. The parish-priest is not always filled with the friendliest feelings towards these hunters of souls, but he has to invite them for fear of offending his superiors. The costs of the mission are more than gladly covered by the parishioners.

The Jackler is notable not only for his pious tendencies, but also for his business subtlety; and he will swindle his parish-priest over a deal in oxen, to-day, after being moved to tears by his sermon yesterday—and this without the least prejudice to his own religious sentiments.

“If I can't cheat my best friend,” says the Wenigzeller, “whom *can* I cheat? My enemy doesn't trust me!”

The so-called lesser “holidays,” of which there are over thirty in the year, are also conscientiously kept: in the morning, by a sung Mass in church; in the afternoon, in the tavern or on the bowling-green. Many servants work on those days on their own account; and, if their employer needs their services, he must pay them a special wage.

The Jackler is quick in his work and moderate and discreet in his pleasures. There are rich and poor in this region as in others, but not in the ordinary sense. The householder is “rich” who is not in debt in respect of his real or movable estate; “rich” is applied to the carrier who has saved a little silver, to a farm-girl who has flax and linen in her trunk and perhaps hides a savings-bank book beneath it, with the amount of her reaping pay. “Poor” are the debt-ridden cottager, the landlord whose property is mortgaged up to the hilt, the incompetent salter or pickler. No one is ruined by privation: people, it is true, are often harsh to the poor man, but they help him.

Nearly everything that the peasant needs is produced by his industry; there is little ready-money in the district; but, for that reason, it has two or three times the value as compared with the prices ruling in the railway districts.

“A thousand gulden!”

That expresses their utmost conception of wealth. The occasional stranger who happens to have strayed into this region is surprised when he finds

himself charged no more than eighty kreuzer for a good night's lodging and an excellent supper and breakfast. On the other hand, when a Jackler, for once in a way, travels on the railway, his wonder never ceases at the high fares which he is called upon to pay; and he considers that the shorter time the train takes to cover a distance, the less the charge should be.

The inhabitants of the Feistritz district supply the Mürzthal with poultry, eggs and fruit at a very cheap rate; and the women who carry and deliver them earn barely twenty kreuzer a day. Wood and coal also find their way into that ravenous and industrious valley; and the Jackler artisans make their bit of money there. They have the making of good masons, carpenters, shoemakers, tailors, smiths, watchmakers, gunsmiths and so on. These workmen from the Jackland are greatly appreciated in the Mürzthal and round about; they work hard, well and cheaply, and are not particular in the matter of board and lodging.

Many maid-servants, who enter a farmer's service for a year at Christmas, do so for a trifling annual wage of fifteen or twenty gulden. On the other hand, they stipulate with their employers that, in summer, when there is hardly any pressing work to be done at home, they shall be allowed to follow their own business for a few weeks. The lasses then go reaping. In the month of June they wander away, with bundle and sickle, to the lowlands or the Mürzthal, where the corn is ripe early; and they find plenty of work and amaze everybody by their eager and indefatigable diligence. This done, they cheerfully come home again with their reaping wages and once more apply themselves briskly to the needs of field and garden. It is very seldom that one of them, lured by love or other worldly advantages, remains away; they like home best, where they form part, so to speak, of the family of their employer, with whom maid and man alike live on fraternal terms.

A fine characteristic of this little land is the cohesion that reigns among neighbours. If one of them is visited with misfortune, the others stand by him fairly and squarely; do his urgent work for him, if he be ill; come to his aid with building materials, carpenters and masons, if fire or water have destroyed his house; send in food as well; and generally put the sorely-trying one on his legs once more. Again, in certain forms of labour, such as copse-cutting, flax-scutching, corn-mowing, they gladly work for the common cause—on this farm to-day, on that to-morrow—with the result that everything goes sociably and cheerfully. One for all and all for one!

The young lads stick together for their particular objects. They form clubs—each district according to its own requirements—through which they mutually support one another in their feuds and love-adventures. They help and protect one another in “window-haunting” and “street-strolling,” as the

nocturnal love-walks are called; they humbug the father, when one of them is after the pretty daughter; they help to defeat the rivals; and, in addition, they play all sorts of practical jokes, which their brains are very quick at inventing. The youth of one parish will often hatch deliberate plots against that of another; and bloody fights take place on many a Sunday and holiday.

Amorous relations between unengaged couples do not, as yet, occur to the same extent in the Jackelland as elsewhere; morals are stricter, opportunities fewer and frivolity less marked. Manners, upon the whole, are more serious and sober, a fact which is in no way detrimental to the pleasure of living, but, on the contrary, increases it and keeps it fresh and clean.

The lover of a healthy and intelligent people must needs feel himself at home and stimulated in the Jackelland. When, on a Sunday, he sits among the peasants in the Tafés, or inns run by the church, he will not be bored; he will rather be soon inclined to join in the conversation. But the stranger—if he think for a moment that he is ruling the talk—must be on his guard lest he be made a butt of! They have at their command an exceedingly witty and subtle form of ridicule, which often is understood only by the natives themselves. Many a townsman who has tried to preach wisdom to the Jacklers has been delightfully hoaxed by them and ultimately laughed out of court.

Place-hunting, party-hatred, pessimism and such-like flowers of our time have not yet blossomed in the Jackelland. The people there are people in whom hard bodily labour rouses no complaint, in whom pleasure is not marred by a subsequent reaction, people whose life, usually a long one, is spent peacefully, rich in great toils and small sins. Thanks to their moderation and contentment, they are free lords, who can easily make fun of others who have fettered themselves in the chains of worldly advancement.

The only sinister inhabitants are the civil engineers, who for years have been exploring the length and breadth of the little land, in the hope of sooner or later turning the iron horse to graze in those green pastures.

Footnote:

[16] *Dreikönigsnacht*, the German name for Twelfth Night.—*Translator's Note.*

XV

The Schoolmaster

It was getting dark; the autumn mists were sinking over the wooded mountains. The herdsman was trudging his way home to the tinkling bells of his cattle. For some time longer the farm-hand was heard beating the oat-stalks over a beam that lay on the threshing-floor, until the last grain was separated. The barn door closed at last; and the little houseful of people gathered in the parlour to eat their rye soup and potato mash. Then they betook themselves to their straw beds.

The children were soon asleep.

A rushlight burnt in the room, and the farmer's wife kept putting it straight on its spike. Peter wound up the smoke-browned clock on the wall.

Just as husband and wife were about to get into bed, the watch-dog in the yard began to bark. There came a light tapping at the window-pane.

"Who's that?" cried the farmer.

And his wife added crossly:

"There's no peace for us to-day!"

"It's someone begging for a night's shelter," said a hoarse voice outside.

"I expect it's a poor man," said the farmer's wife. "That's quite a different thing. Go and unbolt the door, Peter."

Soon after a man stumbled into the room, weary and bent, grasping a long stick in his right hand and carrying a little bundle in his left. A wide-brimmed, discoloured, crushed felt hat was on his head, and under the brim hung snow-white strands of hair.

Peter took the rush in his hand and threw a light upon the stranger's face. Then he exclaimed:

"Heavens! It can't be possible——! Why, it's the schoolmaster of Rattenstein!"

“Aye, aye, my dear Heath—Peter,” said the old man, recovering his breath, “that’s so. With your permission, I will sit down at once.”

The farmer’s wife pulled on her dress again and hurried into the kitchen to warm some soup; then she called back into the parlour:

“Go and light a candle, Peter. The rush won’t burn properly, and the smoke makes one’s eyes fairly smart.”

Then, when a tallow candle was burning on the table and the old man had wiped the sweat from his careworn face, Heath Peter almost shyly offered him his hand and said:

“Well, how do you come wandering into the Wilderness like this, Schoolmaster?”

“It had to be,” replied the old man. “It’s a case, with me, of ‘Forsaken and beat, like the stones in the street.’ I just turned up a footpath and went on over hill and dale as the Lord willed. And so, in the end, I came to you people in the Wilderness.”

“And, if I may ask, where do you mean to go, Schoolmaster?”

The old man made no reply. His head sank down upon his chest. His fingers clutched at his blue handkerchief; but, before he could raise it with trembling hand to his face, he burst into heavy sobs.

“Lord Jesus! Schoolmaster!” cried Peter, springing to support him, for the old man threatened to collapse.

“Never would I have thought,” he sobbed at last, “that such an hour as this would come to me in my old days. God above, Thou knowest, that I have not deserved it!”

“There must have been some great misfortune,” the farmer said. “But Schoolmaster must not take it too much to heart. And if there is anything I can do he must let me know.”

“God bless you, Heath Peter! You are a good soul, and I’ve known you this many a long day: why, it must be nigh on five-and-thirty years. It was I pushed back your little bonnet when the priest christened you. Ah me, if the same priest were only still alive! He was a good man, indeed, and would not have discharged me like a day-labourer at the end of his day’s work, no, not though I *did* ring ten bells for Louis the herdsman. True, I’m old now, and can’t look after the school as I used to. Also I can’t get accustomed to the new church government. You know how the new provisor called me a prophet of Beelzebub? I knew that I had done nothing wrong, for all that, and went on holding my extra classes. Lastly, you also must have heard that poor crazy

Louis the herdsman took his own life lately. The provisor refused to have the passing-bell tolled for the poor wretch; and then the dead man's mother came to me—for I am sacristan as well—and begged me, for God's sake, to toll the bell for her son. Louis had always been an upright man; the old woman had all her life long thought the world of a Christian burial-bell; and my soul was filled with pity for her when she cried so bitterly. Then thought I to myself, 'The provisor has gone to see a colleague at Grosshöfen, so I will take it upon myself and, as she asks me to do it for God's sake, I will ring the bells: surely it's the best consolation we can offer the poor woman in her distress.' Louis was buried in the ditch where they found him; and, when the bells rang out, the mother ran to the grave and said an Our Father for his soul. The provisor did not hear the bells nor the prayer, and he didn't feel the sorrow nor the joy of that mother's heart either; but folks' tongues told him all about the bell-ringing. Yesterday, as I was helping him on with his chasuble, he gave me a smile, and I thought, 'Aye, the provisor is a good enough gentleman, after all; and I shall get on with him well enough!' Thereupon I went off to collect my corn dues from the farmers. (The people are well disposed toward me, and look after me finely: I did not have to buy a single slice of bread for myself all last winter!) It's a couple of hard days' work for one like me; but that's nothing—who wouldn't willingly cart away a heap of stones if he knew there was a treasure underneath? It had begun to grow dusk when I reached the village with my last load. Then, as I stood outside my door and was taking the key from my pocket and looking forward to my rest, I said to myself, 'Goodness, what's that? Who's been having a game with me?' The lock was sealed up. I put down my load to have a closer look at the thing. Yes, Peter, I was quite right, the school-house was sealed against me with the parish seal. 'Well,' I thought to myself, 'this is a pretty business!' I threw down my carrier and ran to the presbytery, which is now also the municipal offices. I called out for the provisor. 'Not at home,' cries the housekeeper, tells me to look under the stone-heap if I have lost anything, and slams the door in my face. Then the blood rushed to my heart."

The old man was nearly choking, and the words came half stifled from his throat.

"But I did not remain standing outside the presbytery door, and I did not knock either. I ran down to the stone-heap, and there I found my Sunday washing, my black coat, and my fiddle. And in between the strings was a little tiny bit of paper. Well, here it is; you can read it, Heath Peter."

"So I would, and gladly," said Heath Peter civilly, "but there's just this about it, that I don't know one letter from another."

"Well, well, in that case reading would certainly be a miracle," said the

schoolmaster. "However, sometimes it's better not to know how to read. Here's what the note says to the old man that I am: 'We sincerely regret to have to make the following communication to you in the name of the honourable Consistory and of the local parish. Whereas you, Michel Bieder, school teacher in the aforesaid parish, have repeatedly, in the instruction of the youth entrusted to your care, acted contrary to the regulations, and whereas, but recently, you took it upon yourself, in an unprecedented manner, on your own responsibility, to perform an ecclesiastical function, and this, moreover, in favour of a suicide, so now take note and be it known to you that we have relieved you of your post. Given at the presbytery at Rattenstein.'"

The old man ceased.

Peter snuffed the candle in great perplexity, and then said:

"Yes, Mr. Schoolmaster, you might have known that it does not do to toll everyone promiscuous-like into the grave. That much would have occurred even to me, Heath Peter."

"And so there I sat upon the stone-heap, and I wanted nothing to make me a complete beggar but a stick and wallet. The stars were out by this time, and an owl hooting in the forest was hooting at me it seemed. Then I did not know what to do. There I was cast out, a poor old man, that had buried a parish and christened one. So I lay down upon the stone-heap and my white hairs were wet with dew. And the church clock ticked just like a bird pecking the naked grains in a field in autumn, that clock ticked away second after second from the little bit left of my life. 'Tick on, tick on, you honest pendulum,' thought I. 'It's late.' And then, suddenly, I wondered, 'Who will ring the vesper-bell to-night?' I darted up and on, over the mound, to the church, and into the belfry, took hold of the ropes, and rang all the bells at once. And that was my farewell to my dear church and to the congregation. I should have liked to wake the dead in their graves and tell them all about my unfair treatment. But they slept on in peace, while I rang in my beggarhood. Then I cut myself a stick from the bushes by the churchyard walls and went on and on. Oh, I can walk right enough still! It took me barely three hours here to the Wilderness."

The old man bent his head and held his hand before his eyes.

"What nonsense!" said the farmer's wife, who had been standing some time by the table with the soup-plate in her hand. "And you are going up to the wilds next, Schoolmaster?"

"Must I go to the wilds?" cried the old schoolmaster. "God! what should I do in that stony place?"

He hid his face again.

“‘It’s a proper cross, and no Lord upon it,’ says the old proverb. And the old proverb’s right,” said the wife. “Only eat your soup now, in Heaven’s name, Schoolmaster, and get some warmth into your poor body. God will put things straight; don’t let that fret you. I say, Peter, come into the kitchen for a minute; I want you to shut the chimney-slide; I can’t quite manage it.”

But it was nothing to do with the chimney-slide, really.

When the pair were in the kitchen the wife said:

“You must see, Peter, that we can’t let the schoolmaster go like this. I went to him for schooling, and he taught me to use my Prayer Book. As long as I live I should never relish a morsel of bread again if I had to say to myself, ‘Your old teacher’s had to go a-begging!’—What would you say to having the top room fitted up for him? He could cut the rushes for us in the winter; and he could look after the children in the summer, when we were out in the fields; and he could teach them a bit too. You see, it would be just as well if they knew how to read a little, and the boy would love it so and writing too; and I shan’t rest content till he can write his name.”

“There’s no need for that, Klara,” answered Peter. “Who is there in the Wilderness that knows how to write his name? Not a soul. Besides, working men’s hands are too rough for that kind of thing; and, if it comes to a pinch, we can always make our cross.”

Whereupon his wife:

“After that, I don’t wonder that we have so many crosses to bear in the Wilderness! But I don’t hold with it, and I think that with the schoolmaster’s help we might rise a bit.”

“You’re looking at only one side of the question. You know quite well that we only grow enough corn to make a bushel and a half, and that we have no milk and no bacon in the winter; you know that we have no meat in the larder, that we have no proper bedding, and that we are poor all round, in every nook and corner. And now you want to take the schoolmaster in as well! There can’t be any question of it, good wife.”

And she:

“Well, if you’re beginning to grieve about the bit of bread and the morsel of bacon which the schoolmaster would eat, I’ll save it out of my own mouth, and lie on the bare straw, in Heaven’s name, and think it an honour if I can have the old teacher under my roof.”

And he:

“Yes; and by the time you’ve done you’ll sew a beggar’s sack for him and

one for me and one for yourself, and we'll fasten the children on to each other's backs."

"Because you have no trust in the Lord!" answered the farmer's wife, a little nettled. "My mother always used to say, 'Every good action done on earth is engraved by the angels in heaven on God's golden throne.' But I am beginning to think that you can't want to see *your* name there."

"Who *has* nothing can *give* nothing," said Peter resignedly. "How can it help a beggar-man if I offer him an empty hand?"

"Well, he can take hold of it and have a support."

"Go on! One *must* look to one's own children first and not to strangers. And, lastly, we should most likely get into trouble with the priest; and how would that suit you?"

"You're a regular old silly, that's what you are!" cried the wife, and banged a saucepan on the stove till it rang again. "It wants a special grace of God to argue with you. How glad you would be if one day your guardian angel came and said to God, 'Here is Heath Peter, who was good to the poor; and he also took the unfortunate schoolmaster of Rattenstein into his house and looked after him and cared for him in his old age, but he did it for love of Thee, O God our Father, and therefore do Thou mercifully forgive him, if he had other faults, and lead him into Thy heaven, and his children with him and his wife as well!' Wouldn't you be glad, Peter, if that ever happened?"

Peter had been scratching his head a little, and, at last, he answered in a softer voice:

"You're shouting so loud you'll wake the children, and the schoolmaster himself will hear.—You can keep him for all that I care; I say no more."

There was not much to be done with Peter with arguments based on worldly logic; you could say white or black, but he invariably followed his own nose. But his wife knew him inside and out, as well as she knew her own nightcap; she took a higher standpoint, and when, in her clever way of talking, she held up heaven and God before him, he came kneeling, as people say, to the cross—to the matrimonial cross.

When the couple returned to the parlour Klara said:

"One would think that chimney-slide wasn't meant to be reached; one has to stand on tip-toe to get at it. Well, don't you like your soup, Schoolmaster? I did my best to make it good, and I put plenty of caraway seeds in it, against the cramp. Ah! and now there's something else to discuss. I don't know what's come into my Peter's head, but he wants to keep you in the house, here

and now, Schoolmaster, so that you can teach our children a bit of reading! What I said was, ‘Schoolmaster won’t stay with us. A man like that,’ said I, ‘has something better to do. Even if we were to fit up the top room for him and wait upon him as an honoured guest, he wouldn’t stay with us.—And then we can’t give him any school fees,’ I said, ‘and only such poor fare as we have ourselves.—If that’s enough for him, I shall be delighted if he will stay.’”

The old man rose from his seat and, in a voice of deep emotion, said:

“Oh, you dear, good people! As you yourselves were the first to suggest it, I now venture to implore you. I have nowhere to go, and I hardly dare risk myself in the wilds. Only give me a roof over my head and a spoonful of soup for a few days and I will go back again to Rattenstein and start my entreaties. The people will take pity on me; and surely the parish provisor will not be stony-hearted.”

“I wouldn’t throw myself on his mercy exactly, that I wouldn’t,” said the farmer’s wife. “And Heath Peter here was thinking that it would be all right, and that you had better make the house on the heath your home, Schoolmaster, as long as the Lord does not order things differently.”

Then little Gabriel suddenly called out something in his sleep.

“There, the child’s got the nightmare!” said Klara.

And she went to the little bed and, with her thumb, made the sign of the cross on the boy’s forehead.

Peter fixed up a bed in the barn for his guest to sleep in that night; and soon all was dark and silent in the house on the heath.

XVI

The Stag on the Wall^[17]

HEIDEPETER'S^[18] house was the very last in the Wilderness. It stood on the heath where the forests began, lying very high on a piece of almost level ground. The grey stones showed through the grass in many places before the house.

Upon the heath lay numberless rocks patched and traceried with moss. Here and there on the sandy ground between the rocks stood a silver-birch tree whose leaves were for ever whispering and trembling, until in late autumn they were blown away and lost over the moor.

This moorland house bore upon the king-post of the big living-room the date 1744; it was the first house ever built in the Wilderness.

Peter's forefathers must have been well-to-do, for they possessed much forest and were cattle-breeders as well. The trees had all been cut down and had grown up again, but now Count Frohn—who possessed a fine castle, the Frohnburg, on the other side of the hill, and, neighbouring the heath, a great deal of forest and its hunting, and hitherto a feudal right to the peasants' service—was gradually possessing himself of the squatters' forest as well; so that it had now come to this—that without his permission no tree might be felled nor branch broken. The poor outlying folk of the Wilderness were neglected by all the authorities and courts of justice—indeed, almost forgotten. So they clung to their grain-growing—to the scanty husbandry possible to the place.

To the moorland house was now left only the steep fields sloping down to the ravine, and a narrow strip of meadow. Everything else, such as rights of wood and pasture, was heavily burdened with taxation and feudal duty.

On the weather-stained wooden wall of the house, facing north, and beneath the deep, overhanging roof, was the figure of an animal, carved out of wood. Any stranger, when now and again such a one passed by the house on his wanderings among the mountains, came to a halt before this thing and gazed at it. Pedlars with their packs, Carniolas with sieves and all manner of

wooden wares, glass-cutters, old-clothes men, who were always glad to go about the Wilderness in summer-time, would prop their back burdens against their sticks and have a good look at the figure before they entered the house. Even the beggars did the same, with a benevolent expression on their faces, as if admiring the man who had carved it.

But as to what the object represented opinions were very various. One said it was a cow, another a donkey, another a chamois; some, however, said it must be a stag. This last supposition was well founded. From the creature's head protruded two little bits of wood, notched saw-like on top, which just conceivably stood for the antlers. Heidepeter was very decided about the matter: the animal really was a stag.

All sorts of sayings and proverbs about the stag had become bound up with the household life inside the walls.

When Peter said to his little son Gabriel, "Laddie, we must hunt the red stag to-morrow!" he meant nothing else than that the child must get up at sunrise next morning. The stag was always glowing red at that hour.

When the wind blew from the north the figure beat its feet upon the wall, and the people inside would say, "The stag is knocking again; there'll be a change in the weather."

Through one whole summer Gabriel had been watching how two sparrows built their nest between the wooden antlers. (At that time a new bird's nest was the greatest joy on earth to Gabriel.) He could no longer resist the temptation, leant a ladder against the wall, and was going to climb up. Then, by chance, his father came along, and he, usually so mild, gave the boy quite unmistakably to understand that he must, once and for all, leave the stag in peace.

About this carved figure there clung a curious memory for Heidepeter.

While still in the early days of his married life there came some bad years, and there in the Wilderness nothing would grow or ripen save turnips and cabbage. Rye and oats started hopefully enough in the spring, greening and gathering strength for an output of ears. Then, in the heart of summer, came rain and cold, and the mists hung about the hills for weeks. The corn grew pale and stooped, as if it would rather creep back into the sheltering soil. There followed a few weeks of sunshine after that, but before even the grain could mature the snow had fallen. And so it happened several years running.

The people lost heart and hardly cared to sow in the following spring, or had no seed to sow with.

And Peter's grain-chest became empty, and he was unable to lend his

neighbours seed, as he used to; indeed, he was barely able to provide for his own household. But he was not discouraged, for he had a young, careful, industrious wife in the house—a happy state of things which will always render bad years more bearable.

His wife had proposed that they should grow more turnips than usual, and a big plot of cabbages, to make up to some extent for the lack of grain. Peter followed her counsel, and by June new beautiful seedlings were set out. In July down came the rain and mist on the Wilderness again, but the garden stuff went on slowly, steadily growing.

During the raw days Clara stayed a good deal within doors, because Peter, mindful of her condition, would not have her out in the cold. But one day he came to her room, saying:

“I don’t know what it means, Clara; there must have been some animal about—a whole row of the best cabbages has been eaten.”

The farm-hand said he had that morning seen a stag running from the kitchen-garden towards the forest.

Heidepeter set to work and heightened the wooden paling round the garden. When, very soon after, he saw Count Frohn crossing the field with his gun and gilded powder-horn and proudly curving cock’s feather, he called to him, “Your honour, I humbly beg pardon—but there’s a stag that’s always coming out of the forest, and he’ll eat up all our cabbages.”

“Indeed?” answered the huntsman, laughing, and whistled to his dogs and went on.

A night or two later the beast came again and ate a whole row of cabbages. And so the next time Peter met the Count he said, for the second time, and with his hat under his arm, “I hope your honour won’t be angry with me—but I’ve no help for it, save this. There’s been so many bad seasons, and we’ve hardly anything left to eat. Please rid us of that stag, for he’s eating up our food-stuff, leaf and root and all.”

“Aha!” remarked the Count facetiously. “You’d prefer eating the stag with your cabbages to that, wouldn’t you, eh?”

He whistled to his dog and went on.

Quite downhearted, Peter went home, sat down on the bench, and for some time did not say anything. Suddenly he struck his fist upon the table and sprang up. Before he went out again, however, he went to his wife and said quietly:

“Clara, I’m the sort of man that people can twist round their finger—they

call me a milksop; but it may be I'm going to pick a quarrel for once. Don't you take on about it. I thought it'd never have to come to this, but now I see quite plain that it must."

Then he went out and made the garden fence higher still, and plaited thorns in and out, and chained the house-dog at the corner of the garden.

But the stag still came and ate the cabbages.

Then Heidepeter got up, and took the road under his feet, and climbed over the steep slope until he came to Castle Frohnburg on the other side of the mountain. There a great shooting party were assembled, noblemen and gentlemen, and all drinking out of foaming beakers "Good luck to the sportsman!"

Peter strode through the midst of them and right up to his master. He seemed like another man than himself to-day. "I must defend my bread, sir," he said in a stifled voice; "but so that I mayn't do any wrong, I've come all this way to tell you I'm going to shoot the stag."

Then the Count roared with laughter and called out:

"You little fool! why do you put yourself to the trouble?" He whistled for his two bulldogs. Heidepeter said never another word, but went away. And that night he shot the stag.

Early next morning the huntsmen came to his house and clapped irons on his hands. He suffered this quietly, and said to his inconsolable wife:

"Don't you take on about it—don't you take on. The Lord will come and do justice yet!" And so Peter was taken away and thrown into prison as a poacher.

Week after week he sat there. He was thinking neither about his cabbages, nor the stag, nor the Count, but only about his wife. "Perhaps her hour will come to-morrow, perhaps even to-day, and thy wife is giving thee thy first-born. She is holding him out to thee, but thou dost not hold out thy arms to take him! Or there may be some difficulty about the sponsors, and thou art not by her side to help her in her great need; and when thou returnest to thy house thou wilt find a mother without her child, or an orphan—or perhaps neither mother nor child"——

In his anguish he could have dashed his head against the wall, but he remained quiet, only constantly murmuring to himself as he stared at the brick floor:

"The life of a man is a wheel. To-day I'm down and you're up; to-morrow it's the other way about. Yes, Count Frohn, round and rolling—that's how

God has made this world!”

At last, when his time was up, Heidepeter was set free. He hurried to his home, and found his wife and child both doing well.

The very next day he went into his workshop and planed and carved a stag out of some boards. And this he nailed to the weather-stained grey wooden wall of his house in everlasting remembrance.

The dwellers of the Wilderness had by now come to respect the determined Heidepeter, because he had been brave enough to tackle the old devil—as they called the Count under their breath; they had never expected this of the good-natured man. It was, however, the first and last time it happened: Peter saw there was nothing to be gained that way, and the burden of years and oppression took the heart out of him. He came to the conclusion this world is a valley of sorrow, and who can better it? The reasonablest thing is to endure. He no longer opposed himself to the Count; indeed, he used to say it was better to suffer wrong than do wrong. And he went on in his own quiet way, and the people, because of his gentle, submissive bearing, called him a milksop.^[19]

Footnotes:

[17] This is a chapter out of Rosegger’s *Heidepeter’s Gabriel*: a book which is largely autobiographical —Heidepeter being undoubtedly the author’s father—and which gives a picture of the small peasant community in a poor mountain district called, from its bare and lonely character, the Wilderness.

[18] Heide-Peter means literally Moor-Peter, or Peter of the Moor.

[19] *Dalkerd*: a South German word, evidently meaning milksop.

XVII

Forest-Lily in the Snow

(A chapter from *The Forest Schoolmaster*)

A LOAD is off our hearts. The storm has fallen. A soft wind came and gently relieved the trees of their burdens. There were a few mild days; then the snow settled and we can now go where we will with snow-shoes.

Nevertheless, something has happened lately over in the Karwässer. Berthold, whose family increases from year to year, and from year to year has less to eat—Berthold has turned poacher. A wood-cutter is a better hand at this than any of us, who remain faint-hearted humbugs all our lives long.—Poor people need not marry, says the wood-cutter. Well, according to custom and practice, they have not married, but they have kneeled before me in the forest ... and ... and now they are all starving together.

So Berthold has turned poacher. Wood-cutting brings in far too little for a roomful of children. I send them all the food I can, but it is not enough. He must have good, strong soup for the ailing wife and a piece of meat for the children; so he shoots the roe that comes his way. To this, then, has passion brought him, until Berthold, who once, as a herd, was such a good and jolly fellow, has, through poverty, pride, and the love of his own, grown into a pretty criminal.

I have once already pleaded with the gamekeeper for God's sake to be a little, just a little lenient with the poor husband and father: he was sure to mend his ways, I said, and I would go bail for him. Up to the present he has not mended his ways; but the events of these wild winter days have made him weep aloud, for he loves his Lily-of-the-Forest above everything.

It happened on a murky winter evening. The little windows are walled up with moss; outside new flakes are falling on the old snow. Berthold is sitting up with the children and with his sick Aga, only waiting until the eldest girl, Lily, comes back with the milk which she has gone to beg of a neighbouring hermit on the Hinterkar. For the goats at home have been killed and eaten; and, if only Lily would return, Berthold means to go into the forest with his

gun. For the roe cannot be far to seek in this weather.

But it grows dark and Lily does not return. The snow falls thicker and heavier, night draws in and Lily does not come. The children by now are crying for their milk; the father is eager to be after his game; the mother sits up in bed:

“Lily!” she calls. “Wherever are you, child, trotting about in that pitch-dark forest? Come home!”

How can the sick woman’s weak voice reach the wanderer through the fierce snowstorm?

As the night grows darker and stormier, Berthold’s craving to go poaching grows deeper, while his fears for his Lily-of-the-Forest rise higher and higher. She is a frail little twelve-year-old girl. True, she knows the precipices and the wooded mountain-paths; but the paths are hidden by the snow and the precipices by the darkness.

At last, the man leaves his house to go in search of his child. For hours he roams and shouts through the storm-swept wilderness; the wind fills his eyes and mouth with snow; he has to put forth all his strength to get back to his hut.

And now two days pass. The snow keeps on falling; Berthold’s hut is almost snowed in. They do their noisy best to console themselves: Lily is sure to be at the hermit’s. This hope is destroyed on the third day, when Berthold, after struggling for hours over the snow-clad landscape, succeeds in reaching the hermitage. True, Lily was at the hermit’s three days ago, but left early on her way home with the milk-pot.

“Then my Lily-of-the-Forest lies buried in the snow,” says Berthold.

Whereupon he goes to other wood-cutters and begs, as no one has ever seen this man beg before, that they will come and help him look for his dead child.

They find Lily-of-the-Forest on the evening of the same day.

Down a lonely forest-glen, in a dark and tangled thicket of young pines and larches, through which no snowflake can make its way and upon which the loads of snow lie heaped and arched till the young branches groan again, in this thicket Forest-Lily is found sitting on the ground, on the dry pine-needles, amid a family of six roe-deer.

It is a very wonderful story. The child, returning home, lost her way in the forest-glen; and, as she was no longer able to cope with the masses of snow, she crept into the dry thicket to rest. She did not long remain alone. Hardly

had her eyes begun to close, when a herd of deer, old and young together, came up to her and sniffed at the little girl and looked at her with gentle eyes of pity and understanding, and were not the least afraid of this human thing, but stayed and lay down and gnawed the little trees and licked one another and were quite tame: the thicket was their winter home.

The next day everything was muffled up in snow. Forest-Lily sat in the dark, which was only tempered by a faint twilight, and refreshed herself with the milk which she was taking to her people, and nestled up against the kind animals so as not to become quite numb with cold.

Thus passed the grim hours while she was lost. And, when Lily-of-the-Forest had already laid her down to die and, with her simple fancy, asked the animals to stay with her faithfully in her last dying hour, suddenly the roe-deer began to snuffle very strangely, and lifted their heads, and pricked up their ears, and broke through the thicket with wild bounds, and darted away with shrill cries.

And now the men work their way through the snow and underwood and see the little maiden and hurrah for joy; and old Rüpel, who is among them, shouts:

“Didn’t I tell you to come and look in here with me,—that perhaps she was with the deer?”

And so it was; and when Berthold heard that the beasts of the forest had saved his child from being frozen to death, he yelled like a madman:

“Never again! As long as I live, never again!”

And he took the rifle with which for many years he had killed the beasts of the forest and smashed it on a stone.

I saw it myself; for I and the parish priest were in the Karwässer to help look for Lily-of-the-Forest.

This Lily-of-the-Forest is almost as soft and white as snow and has the eyes of a roe-deer in her little head.

XVIII

The Sacred Cornfield

(The translation of a chapter from "Jakob der Letzte," in which tragic story Rosegger tells how a rich man comes to a poor upland community, and gradually bribes and tricks all the peasants except Jacob—who after a dignified and then desperate effort to save the place, breaks his heart and goes mad—to part with their homes and holdings to him for deer-forest.)

GAIN and again Jacob sought refuge in his work. It was a good thing for him that it was pressing, and left little time for his heartache. The field must be tilled, the garden manured, and the meadows watered. In the early part of the year the melted snow rushes wildly down, often tearing up the earth as it goes; then comes the hot sunshine on the slopes: so that to-day there is too much moisture and to-morrow too little. Hardly had the first blades sprouted when the cattle were driven to the higher pastures, for the winter's supply of fodder was nearly all devoured before the spring gave its new green. Living through the winter on moss and brushwood, the beasts were in such poor condition when at last they came out into the open that they could hardly climb the slopes, and many a one would slip and break a leg.

And yet there was a new motto in Altenmoos: up with cattle-breeding and down with agriculture! Jacob could not make up his mind to alter his method of farming: he loved his fields, all his heart was in them, and their tending was a ritual to him.

When, as sower, he trod the long furrows, casting the seed abroad in the earth, it was in an earnest, almost solemn manner, as if he were about some sacred business; and then before his eyes the miracle of the divine love began to fulfil itself. This man, with all his anxiety, his hope, his silent grief, knew nothing better than to watch the resurrection of the buried grain. In the peaceful time, after his working day was over and he sat alone, utterly alone on his stone-heap, he would give himself up to blessed contemplation. Before him the brown fields stretch away, the larks blow trumpets, and in tender, reddish blades the dead arise and look up to heaven. Then gradually everything begins to grow green, the tiny leaves curl and bend earthwards

again as if they are listening for any good counsels about life that the Mother may have to give them. Then they aspire upwards, rolling themselves into sheaths, out of which, little by little, emerges the stalk and the inmost being of the corn. By the time Ascension Day is there the corn is looking skywards even in the mountain districts, as if gazing in loving gratitude after Him who called it to life, and who will come again to waken the human seeds that are sown in all the churchyards. In the young summer breeze the cornfield ripples like a blue-green lake, with the cloud-shadows gliding graciously over it. And the single blade is now in its full glory. The four-sided ear, in which the still tender grains lie scale-like over each other, hangs its blossom out like tiny flags wherever a grainlet lies in its cradle, which flutter and tremble without ceasing, while the high stalk rocks thoughtfully to and fro.

God keep us from storms in this blessed season! From rain, too, with the sun shining through it, for that breeds mildew. Wet seasons cause a growth upon the ears, for which the local name of Mother-grain is far too pretty for truth. The sky-climbing youth of the corn soon comes to an end, the hot summer whitens its hair; then, still conscious of its strength and its virtue, it yet bows its head in humility before Him who has given it virtue and strength.

Deeper within this forest of grain, thistles and the parasitical couch grass, the fair-seeming darnel, and every sort of tangled rubble and lawless company thrive rankly enough in the shadow of the corn and are nourished upon its roots. There, also, the wanton corn-cockle is to be found, whose seed later makes the flour—if not already red with shame—such a dirty bluish colour; there the will-o'-the-wisp poppy, and the kindly, patriarchal cornflower, whose crown is made of many little crowns.

Many a time, while a thunderstorm was raging over Altenmoos, Jacob would stand under the heavy eaves over his door, looking out quiet and resigned. Man cannot alter things, God is almighty; what is the good, then, of trembling or complaining? When it grows light, he sees his whole cornfield, now nearly ripe, beaten down. Jacob says, “Thanks and praise be to God that there was no ice in it—all the stalks lie in order and flat on the ground, not one lifts so much as a knee! The heavy rain has laid the corn low, the wind will dry it—lift it up again.” But there are years when it does not get up, when the rain beats it down again and again; then it is that the alien, lawless rabble get the upper hand—they rise up from between the prone stalks, and weave a trellis overhead, and begin a godless blooming and bragging above the poor imprisoned corn.

When, however, God does give rain and sunshine in due season (just as the folks who go pilgrimages pray to have it), the fields are glorious. Strong and slender the stalks grow up from joint to joint. The lance-shaped, dark green

leaves that lorded it at first, have nearly vanished, the stalks droop their heavy heads, which give back the sown grain thirty or forty-fold, one stalk laying its golden head on the shoulder of another. In the sun's heat by day, at night in the light of the moon and the stars and the glimmer of glow-worms, they are ripening towards harvest.

At last come the reapers. Every grain is armed with a sharp spear for defence or offence, but the reaper does not flinch before the fine-toothed saws that allow no hand to glide downwards, but only upwards from below,—only from lowly to lofty.

When Jacob, always first and last in the heat and burden of the day, rests in late evening beneath a corn-stook in the harvest-field, his dreaming begins again. The breath of grass and flowers makes him drowsy: he watches the antics of a jolly grasshopper, hears the chirp of a cricket—then it all fades away. He is looking out over a country where there is no blue forest, no green meadows, no mountain crags, and no clear streams. So far as ever the eye can reach is one great golden sea, an immeasurable field of corn. Above it, a cloudless sky presses hot and heavy on his heart. Then it comes to his mind: “Say thy grace, Jacob, for this place is the table of a mighty people. Those who live in the mountains must tend their poultry and their cattle, and fetch the bread of corn from this table.”

Then Jacob awakes, pulls himself up by the stook, and says into the night, “It'll have to come to that. And yet the cornfield is beautiful—more beautiful than anyhow else—when it lies between the forest and meadow! And a home, if it's a real home, should yield its children everything that they need.”

Besides, the soil in Altenmoos is not less rich than elsewhere! When the last wagon-load of sheaves has gone swaying home to the barn, there's always something for the poor woman who comes gleaning the scattered ears among the stubble. Then the cattle are pastured there, and a fine grass springs up; only the beasts must not mind a stubble-prick in the nose for every mouthful they get. At last, it may be, the plough comes again, still unwilling as ever to grant the fields a rest; but then comes Winter, and says, “Enough!” and covers the tired earth with its white mantle.

Even under that cover there is no peace. A little grain fell out of the sheaf at harvest-time; the earth takes it to herself, lets it silently decay, and gives it back again, all new-made, in the sunshine of the following spring.

With such dreams, whereby, as on Jacob's ladder, he climbed up and down between earth and heaven, this lonely man pleased and edified himself; and when the shadow came over his spirit, he would say to himself, “In God's name, Jacob, if it must be, thou mayst well entrust thyself willingly to the

faithful and undying earth. Perhaps thou wilt rise up again, and find better days in Altenmoos.”

XIX

About my Mother

I

It was high carnival in Gratz city. In the evenings, a mad thronging in the streets, a well-nigh deafening rattling of carriages, a yelling and shouting, a flaring and glaring from the shops and stalls and from the hundreds of lamps and numberless transparencies in the windows. Gold and silver, silks and damasks gleamed in the shop-fronts. Masks of every hue and shape grinned beside them. Ha, what a mad thing life can be!

I hurried through the crowd. The clock on the castle hill struck six: six strokes so clear that they outrang all the din and re-echoed from the tall, light-pierced walls of the houses. The summons of the clock is a stern admonisher: let man play as childishly as he will with tinsel pleasures and light dalliance, it counts the hours out to him and gives him not a minute's grace.

I went home to my quiet room and was soon in bed.

Next morning, the winter sun lay shining on the snow-clad roofs; and I was jotting down the fairy-tale of the Lost Child, when someone knocked at my door. A man entered and handed me a telegram:

"Dear son, yesterday evening, at six o'clock, our dear mother passed away. Come home, we are expecting you in the greatest affliction. Your father."

Last evening it had happened, in the poor cottage, while I was striding through the worldly turmoil. And at six o'clock!

Early next morning, I was in the parish village. I entered on the road alone, over hills glittering with snow and through long woods, far into the lonely mountain valley. I had walked that road endless times before, had always delighted in the glistening snow, in the sparkling icicles, in the snowy mantles of the boughs, or, if it was summer, in the green leaves and the blossoms and the fragrance, in the song of the birds, in the drops of light that trickled through the branches, in the profound peace and loneliness. How often had I gone that way with mother, when she was still well and in her prime, and,

later, when, crippled through illness, she tottered along on my arm! And, on this forest road, I thought of my parents' life.

He had come to the forest farm a young man.

People called him Lenz, not because he was young and blooming and joyful as the *Lenz*, or spring, but because his name was Lorenz.

His father had been severely wounded in a brawl, lain ill for but a little while and died an early death.

So now Lenz was the owner of the forest farm. To recover in a measure from his sadness for his father's sake, he did a capital thing: he looked about him for a wife. He took almost the poorest and the most disregarded that the forest valley contained: a girl who was frightfully black all through the week, but had quite a nice little white face on Sundays. She was the daughter of a charcoal-burning woman and worked for her aged mother, but had never seen her father.

One year after the wedding, in the summer, the young woodman's wife presented her Lenz with a first-born. He received the name of Peter and now runs all over the world with it, an everlasting child.

Her life was so peculiar, her life was so good, her life had a crown of thorns.

Our farm was no small one and its days were well-ordered; but my mother did not play the grand farmer's wife: she was housewife and servant-maid in one.

My mother was an educated woman: she could "read print"; she had learnt that from a charcoal-burner. She knew the story of the Bible by heart; and she had no end of legends, fairy-tales and songs from her mother. Moreover, she was always ready with help in word and deed and never lost her head in any mishap and always knew the right thing to do.

"That's how my mother used to do, that's what my mother used to say," she was constantly remarking; and this continued her rule and precept, long after her mother was laid to rest in the churchyard.

No doubt, there was at times a little bigotry, what we call "charcoal-burner's faith," mixed up with it, yet in such a way that it did no harm, but rather spread a gentle poetry over the poor life in the houses in the wood.

The poor knew my mother from far and wide: none knocked at her door in vain; none was sent hungry away. To him whom she considered really poor and who asked her for a piece of bread she gave half a loaf; and, if he begged for a gill of flour, she handed him a lump of lard with it. And "God bless

you!” she said, in addition: that she always said.

“What will be the end of us, if you give everything away wholesale?” my father often said to her, almost angrily.

“Heaven, perhaps,” she answered. “My mother often used to say that the angels register every ‘God reward you’ of the poor before God’s holy throne. How glad we shall be one day, when we have the poor to intercede for us with Our Lord!”

My father believed in fasting on Saturdays and often did not take a morsel of food before the shadows began to lengthen. He did this in honour of the Blessed Virgin.^[20]

“I tell you, Lenz, that sort of fasting serves no useful purpose!” my mother would sometimes say, in protest. “What you go without to-day, you simply eat to-morrow. My mother always used to say, ‘What you have through fasting left, give to the poor so sore bereft.’ I somehow think it does no good otherwise.”

My father used to pray in the evenings, especially at “rosary-time,” and on Saturdays prayed long and loud, but often did odd jobs at the same time, such as nailing his shoes, patching his trousers or even shaving himself. In so doing, he not seldom lost the thread of his prayers, until my mother would snatch the things from his hands and cry:

“Heavens alive, what manner of praying is this! Kneeling beside the table and saying three Our Fathers with application is better than three rosaries during which the evil one steals away your good thoughts while you’re playing about!”

At times of hard work, my mother was fond of a good table:

“Who works with a will may eat with a will,” she said. “My mother used always to say, ‘Who dares not risk to lose a tittle, dares not either win a little.’”

My father was content with scanty fare; he was always fearing that the home would be ruined.

These were the only differences in their married life; and even those did not go deep. They uttered them only to each other: when father talked to strangers, he praised mother; when mother talked to strangers, she praised father.

They were of one mind as regarded the bringing-up of children. Work and prayer, thrift and honesty, were our main precepts.

I only once received a proper thrashing. In front of the house was a young copse of larch—and fir-trees, which gradually grew up so high that it shut out the view of the mountains on that side. Now I loved this view and I thought that father would be sure to thank me if I—who was an enterprising lad in those days—cut down the little trees. And, true enough, one afternoon, when everyone was in the fields, I stole into the little wood with an axe and began to cut down young trees. Before long, my father appeared upon the scene; but the thanks which he gave me had a very queer look.

“Lend me the hatchet, boy!” he said, quietly.

I thought, “Now he’ll tackle to himself: so much the better”; and I passed him the axe.

He used it to chop off a birch-switch and flattened it across my back.

“Wait a bit!” he cried. “Do you want to do for the young wood? It has more rods for you, where this came from!”

I had a thrashing just once from my mother too. I liked sitting by the hearth when mother was cooking; and, one day, I knocked over the stock-pot full of soup, half putting out the fire and nearly burning my little bare feet. My mother was not there at the moment; and, when she came running in at the sound of the mighty hissing, I cried out, crimson in the face:

“The cat, the cat has upset the stock-pot!”

“Yes, that same cat has two legs and tells lies!” mother retorted.

And she took me and thrashed me for a long time with the rod.

“If ever you tell me a lie again,” she cried, when she had done, “I’ll cut you to pieces with the flue-rake!”

A serious threat! Thank goodness, it never had to be fulfilled.

On the other hand, when I was good and obedient, I was rewarded. My reward took the form of songs which she sang to me, tales which she told me, when we walked through the forest together or when she sat by my bedside in the evening. All that is best in me I have from her. She had a worldful of poetry within her.

When my brothers and sisters came one after the other, mother loved us all alike and favoured none. Afterwards, when two died in their childhood, I saw mother for the first time crying. We others cried with her and thenceforth always cried whenever we saw mother shedding tears.

And this was quite often, from that time onwards. Father lay sick for two years on end. We had ill-luck in the farm and in the fields; hail and murrain

came; our corn-mill was burnt down.

Then mother wept in secret, lest we children should see her. And she worked without ceasing, fretted, and ended by falling ill. The doctors of the whole neighbourhood around were called in to advise: they could do nothing but charge fat fees; only one of them said:

“I won’t take payment from such poor people.”

Yes, in spite of all our jollity, we had become poor people. The goods and chattels were all gone; of the once big property nothing remained to us but the taxes. My father now resolved to sell the encumbered farm as well as he could. But mother would not have it: she worked on, ill as she was, with trouble and zeal, and never gave up hope. She could not bear to think of giving up her home, the house where her children were born. She denied her illness, said that she had never felt better in her life and that she would work for three.

My brothers and sisters also considered that they could not leave the homestead; besides, none of them had one good pair of shoes left to put on. And mother, when, once in a way, she wished to go to the parish church, had to borrow a jacket free from patches from some journeyman-woodman’s wife or other. And the greatest pain of all was people’s arrogance and their scorn if ever they did lend any assistance. They had forgotten the kindnesses which my mother had once shown to one and all according to her power. At that time, she was the most honoured farmer’s wife in all the houses in the forest. But—misfortune destroys friendship! As, indeed, her mother, the charcoal-burner, had often said.

I will relate an experience of that sad time, when my mother was ailing. It begins with a bright and sunny Whitsuntide.

That bright and sunny Whit Monday was her thirty-ninth birthday. It was a gladsome day. The crops were green in the fields; and the herds grazed in the high meadow: true, they did not belong to us, but to our neighbour; and yet we delighted in them, because they were fat and jolly. My father had already paid last year’s taxes; the financial position, which had been disturbed during father’s long illness, seemed gradually coming to rights; and consequently we were once more rising in people’s opinions. On this day, we walked through the meadows together; and the little ones picked flowers and the grown-ups praised God’s works with a cheerful word or a song. Then mother sat down on a stone and was like to die.

We dragged her home, we put her to bed, where she lay for long: weeks long, months long. All the neighbours came and brought their well-meant sympathy; all the doctors from near and far came and brought their well-

meant medicine. The patient, as they admitted behind her back, had had a stroke; she was languishing. But, when the cool autumn came, she grew better: she now no longer lay in bed by day, but sat on the bench by the fire or at the table, where the children played, or by the hearth, where she instructed clumsy father in the art of cooking. She was not cheerful, nor was she cast down; she took things as they came and did not complain: only, between whiles, when she was alone, she heaved a deep sigh. Thus winter passed. The delightful Whitsuntide came again and mother was ill.

At this festival, the old woman from the Riegelberg came to see us and brought a few rolls with her. She suggested all sorts of household remedies and reckoned up a number of hale and hearty people who had become hale and hearty through taking the aforesaid remedies. And at last she asked, hadn't we been to Stegthomerl—Tom of the Footpath—yet?

No, we confessed, we had not been to him as yet.

Then how could we have been so remiss and however could we have neglected to go to Tom of the Footpath? He was the very first to whom one ought to send in that sort of illness!

But it was such a distance to get there, father objected. "And, if it was a three days' journey, it is not too far for health's sake."

"That's very true, I grant you: it would not be too far for health," said father. "And think you, Riegelbergerin, that he could cure her?"

"Curing, my dear woodman, is in God's hands," answered the woman from the Riegelberg, with her wonted superiority. "Even the best doctors cannot work miracles. But he knows, does Tom of the Footpath, and he'll tell you whether a cure is still possible or not." The very next day, a messenger was sent over the mountains to the valley where Tom of the Footpath lived. He went off early and he came home late and he brought the answer that Tom of the Footpath had said he could say nothing at all as long as he did not see the invalid for himself.

The next day, another messenger went off (for the first had gone lame on the long road) to fetch Tom of the Footpath. He came back late at night alone and brought the news that Tom of the Footpath didn't visit patients: Thomas himself was not as young as he had been; also he did not wish to be locked up again because the qualified doctors suffered from an infernal professional jealousy and wanted to bury everybody themselves. If the sick woodman's wife cared to come to him, there might be something to be done. But he did not go running after sick people.

This was manfully spoken, after all, and we all of us understood that a man

who knows his own value does not exactly care to make himself cheap. But now came a great embarrassment. The weather, to be sure, was fine and warm; the days were long, and mother was quite ready to go. But how were we to carry her on that many-hours' road to Tom of the Footpath? It was impossible. Drive? We had no cart; and the last pair of draught-oxen had been taken from us by the creditors to whom we had had to apply once more during mother's illness. The neighbours were using their oxen just now for ploughing the fields. The jobbing farmer had two horses: he was willing to let them out to us, but his charge for the day—father struck his hands together at the thought—was five florins and their oats.

And, as we were all sitting in deep distress around our sick mother, seeking for a way out of the difficulty and finding none, the door opened and the lad from the road-side tavern walked in.

“What do you want, my boy?” asked my father.

The boy stood dangling his arms.

“Ay,” he said, “it's this way: Samersteffel sends word to say that, if the woodman likes to have his horse and cart, he can have them.”

Samersteffel was what Stephen, the local carrier, was called.

“Where is Carrier Steve?”

“He's with us and he's put up his horse and cart at our place.”

My father thought over what he had better say; then he said:

“Steve is sure to want a good price; tell him from me, no, but I'm obliged to him.”

The boy went away; and, in an hour's time, Carrier Steve came round in person. He was a little fat man, who, in the old days, before the road was made, used to carry all sorts of things over the mountain-path with a pack-horse. Now that the road was there, he had set up a little light cart, in which he conveyed corn, salt, cider and so on, but all for money, of course, as that was what he lived by; and not only that, but he wanted to get rich, so as to build a big inn on the new road. To be an innkeeper was the dream of his life; and he had the making of one in him, for he was always in a good temper and would certainly know how to entertain his visitors.

But to-day, when he walked into our parlour, he was in anything but a good temper.

“You're making a lot of useless trouble for one of us,” he said, and sat down puffing and panting on the bench against the wall. “Have you ever heard, woodman, that I have pressed myself on anyone for the sake of gain?”

You can't have heard such a thing said about me, for, thank God, I don't need it. Once I myself propose to carry anything, I carry it gratis. I heard that your wife wanted to go to Tom of the Footpath and that she had no trap of any kind. My mother, God rest her soul, was also ill for a long time; I know what it means: it's a misery. If you like, woodman, I'll drive your wife over to Tom of the Footpath to-morrow."

Then we all felt really glad. We did not give a further thought to the question whether the long drive would do good or harm, or whether the new physic would take effect, or how the illness would turn out afterwards. To Tom of the Footpath, just to Tom of the Footpath: that would put everything right.

I was awakened early next day, when the morning star peeped through the great black ash-trees. Father had to stay behind to look after the farm; and I, the thirteen-year-old lad, must go with mother to see that nothing happened to her. Mother was already at her breakfast and did as if she thoroughly relished the milk-porridge. Carrier Steve and I ate a bowl of curds and whey and then we drove off. Steve sat on the little driver's seat and talked out loud to his nag, telling it to be a good horse and trot over the mountains briskly "so that we can bring woodman's wife home again before the day is out." My mother sat, wrapped up in all her clothes, and my father's storm-cloak into the bargain, on a leather cushion, with straw at her feet and a heavy blanket over all, allowing only a part of her head to show above it. I sat beside this sick-bed and was heavy at heart.

It was still chilly night; the sky began to turn a little pale over the Wechselberg. The road led across the meadows. Now the birds woke; now the glory of the dawn commenced; now the great sun rose in the heavens. My mother drew back the blanket a little and gazed up at the sun:

"I feel full of hope," she whispered and felt for my hand, "if only the summer helps a bit and Tom of the Footpath too. After all, I'm not so old yet. What do you think, my child? Shall I be able to look at the world again a hale woman?"

I was as confident as she; I felt quite relieved. The morning sun! The dear warm morning sun!

Mother became chatty.

"It's silly, when you come to think of it," she said, suddenly, and laughed almost aloud, "how fond a body is of being in the world. Of course, I should be sorry to leave my folk. And it would be a pity for my Lenzel, your father, to be left all alone; the children are so small yet."

“But I’m getting pretty big now,” I protested.

Then mother turned her face right round to me and said:

“It’s just you, my Peter, it’s just you about whom I’m most anxious. You see, you appear to me quite different from other boys of your age. You’ve no real mind for work, that is to say, you have the mind, perhaps, but you take no honest pleasure in it. Yes, yes, deny it as you may, I know you, you don’t care about farming, you hang around and you want something else, you yourself don’t know what. You see, that’s really the worst of it. And so I should like to pray to God and ask Him to leave me with you, so that I can keep a hold on you until I know what’s to become of you.”

“Will you be a carrier? How would that suit you, boy?” cried Steve, over his shoulder, to us in the cart.

“A good carrier, who takes poor people driving: I wouldn’t mind that,” remarked my mother, whereupon Steve gave a little smirk.

The road led straight up and became stony; Steve and I got down and walked beside the creaking cart. The sun had become hot. It was a tiring drive and we only got on slowly.

When we were up at the top and driving along through the almost level, but dark woods of the Fischbacheralpe, we no longer heard the cart-wheels, for the ground was thickly strewn with pine-needles, save that, every now and again, the wheels struck against a root. The birds had become silent, for the hot day lay over the tree-tops. My mother had fallen asleep. I looked at her pale face and thought:

“Tom of the Footpath is sure to know of something that will do her good; it’s a lucky thing that we were able to drive to Tom of the Footpath.”

“Like a bit of bread, Peter?” asked Steve.

“I should be glad of a bit.”

And, when I got my piece of bread, there was a piece of bacon on it; and now my distress began. I held the thing in my hand for ever so long and looked at it and looked up at my mother: she was asleep. I did not want to offend Steve, who meant so well by us. As, however, I could not leave the thing as it was, lying in my hand, I at last began, first quite softly, but gradually louder, to call out:

“Steve!”

“What do you want?” he asked, at last.

“I should only like to beg as a favour,” I said, quite despondently, “just as a

favour, that I need not eat the bacon. For indeed I don't like bacon."

"You don't know what's good," said the driver, laughing, and relieved me of my difficulty.

At last, we began to go downhill; and now the cart jolted over the burning stones and shook the invalid out of her sleep; and the sun burnt into her marrow; and she felt chilled all the same.

Steve muttered:

"Tom of the Footpath must be the devil of a good doctor to make a drive like this worth while. Hold up, Sorrel: we've not much further to go."

It was late in the afternoon when we reached the valley and stopped at the little house where Tom of the Footpath lived.

We carried mother into the musty, stuffy parlour, in which all the little windows were tight shut. There we let her down on the bench and asked for Tom.

A grumpy old woman answered that Tom was not there.

"We can see that," said Steve, "but might we ask where he is?"

"Can't say."

"When's he coming in?"

"Maybe he won't stay out long, maybe he won't be back till night, maybe he's gone to the ale-house."

The old woman left the room; and there we sat. My mother drew a deep breath.

Steve went after the old woman and asked her for a spoonful of hot soup for the invalid.

"Where should I get hot soup from at this time of day? The fire's been out on the hearth this long since."

That was the answer. Thereupon the driver himself set to and lit the fire, looked for milk and boiled it.

Mother ate only a little of the soup and pushed the bowl to us, so that we should have some warm food too.

When that was done, Steve gave the woman a silver ten-kreuzer for the milk and for the hay which the sorrel ate.

After a time, during which it turned quite dark in the parlour, once or twice, because clouds were passing in front of the sun outside, Tom of the Footpath

walked into the room. He was a short, spindle-shanked man, but had a big head, broad shoulders, a very high chest and a great hump on his back. And his head was sunk into his shoulders, so that the mannikin had to turn right round, with his whole body, whenever he wanted to turn his head. I can see him plainly to this day, as he stepped in through the door and looked at us, first sharply and then smilingly, with his wandering, vacant face.

My mother at once became fidgety and tried to rise from her seat, in order to put her request to him in a respectful fashion.

Tom made a sign with his hand that she need not trouble and presently said, in a rather sing-song voice:

“I know, I know, you’re the woodman’s wife from the Alpel; you had a stroke a year ago.”

“I had a stroke?” asked the invalid, in dismay.

“You’ve been doctoring all round the place, far and wide; and now, because no one else can do you any good, you come to me. They’re all alike: they come to me when they’re dying; and if, after that, Tom of the Footpath’s physic doesn’t work a miracle and the patient goes the way of all flesh, then they say that Tom of the Footpath has been the cause of his death.”

These words were terrible to listen to, in themselves, but still they were bearable because they were spoken with a smiling face and because Tom went on to add:

“Hope it’ll prove an exception in your case, woodman’s wife. I’ll just examine you now.”

First of all, of course, he felt her pulse:

“It hops,” he muttered, “it hops.”

Then, with his broad fingers, he pushed her eyebrows apart and looked into the whites—and said nothing. Next, she had to bare her neck and he put his ear to it—and said nothing. Furthermore, he attentively studied the lines of her hand, then asked after the sick woman’s actual state of health and went on to examine the arteries and the respiration, so that I at once conceived a high opinion of the man’s conscientiousness.

And, when he had finished his examination, he sat down on a chair opposite my mother, who was slowly wrapping herself up again in her clothes, spread out his legs, sank his chin into his body and, with his arms crossed over his chest, said:

“Yes, my dear woodman’s wife, you’ve got to die.”

My mother gave a light start, I sprang to my feet. Steve, however, remained sitting quite calmly in his seat, looked hard at Tom of the Footpath for a while and then said, suddenly:

“And you haven’t, I suppose? No, you old camel, your day’s coming too, God damn it all!”

It was now high time to go. We hurriedly packed up and drove off homeward.

It was sultry and shady; the sky was covered with clouds; there was not a living thing in sight; not a tree-top stirred; our cart rattled heavily along. My mother lay silently in her corner and gazed at the darkling world with her great, black eyes.

Steve sat fuming on his box, but gradually became quieter; and he now grunted:

“To think of a man being as drunk as all that!”

“Who?” I asked.

“Such a drunken bout is really worth making a day’s journey to go and have a look at,” Steve continued. “True enough, I’d heard tell that the old camel was seldom sober; and he’d come straight from the ale-house to-day.”

“I dare say it was just as well,” my mother said. “If he had been sober, perhaps he would not have told me the truth.”

And so we drove away in great sadness. The thunder rolled over the mountains, quite hoarse and dull; the Fischbach storm-bell rang in the distance. Then my mother sat upright and said:

“You must do something to please me, Peter; and I’ll ask Steve as well: it’s no use telling father, my husband, what Tom of the Footpath said.”

“Indeed, it would never do to repeat such fool’s talk,” cried the driver, very loudly, “but I’m going to the magistrate! I shall inform against him! That’s what I shall do!”

“I beg of you, Steve, let it be,” my mother asked. “You mustn’t think that I take it so much to heart. I myself have often thought that the thing will end with me as it ends with all ailing people. What can Tom of the Footpath do against that! We did not go to him to get him to tell us lies. I’m only sorry that we never once asked what we owed him for his straightforwardness.”

Now Steve burst out laughing and sent the whip whizzing once or twice through the air, notwithstanding that the horse was doing its best.

When we drove along over the heights, the threatening storm had dispersed

entirely; the setting sun shone with a faint golden gleam over the wide landscape, over wood and meadows; and a cool breeze blew in our faces.

A bright tear lay on my mother's pale cheeks.

As, silent and tired, we drove through our home meadows, the stars appeared in the sky. On every side, the song of the crickets purred and chirped in the grass. By the fence, where our hillside began, stood a black figure that accosted us and asked if it was we.

It was my father, who had come to meet us. My mother called him by name; her voice was weak and trembling.

Father took us indoors, without asking a question.

Not until we were in the parlour and the rushlight was burning did he ask how we had fared.

“Not badly,” said Steve, “not at all badly: we have been very cheerful.”

“And Tom of the Footpath: what did he say?”

“He said that, like other people, woodman's wife wouldn't live for ever, but that she has plenty of time before her, oh, plenty of time. Only you're to take care: give her lots of good air in the summer, not too much work and no excitement, good food and drink and no physic, no physic at all, he said. And then she'll get all right again.”

A time elapsed after that. My father tried to nurse mother according to Steve's dictum, which he believed to be Tom of the Footpath's dictum; and, when winter came, she sat at the spinning-wheel and span. The mouse had not bitten the thread in two.

That same winter brought the news that Tom of the Footpath had been found frozen to death in the snow, not far from the ale-house on the Fischbacheralpe. We said an Our Father for his soul.

Carrier Steve, who came to see us now and then and always remained the good, cheerful man he was, had also forgiven Thomas: true, it was wholly and solely because he had proved wrong that time.

II

I failed—to return to our other circumstances—to take any pleasure in the peasant's life and also I really lacked the strength for it. I then took up a trade, but was not able to help my parents; I wanted to pay my father for my Sunday board, which I had at home, but he would take nothing from me, said that I was just as much his child as before, only I must not burn so many rushes

when I was home on Saturday nights.

“Oh, goodness me, let him have that pleasure: he hasn’t so many!” my mother would say and intercede for me.

Then things altered with me. I went into the world. It was hard parting with my mother; but, in a short time, she was able to see that my life had become happier.

And, now that happiness had come, envy soon came hobbling along—or was it stupidity? A rumour passed through the forest hills:

“So far, it’s all right with Peter; but, as always happens in town, he is sure to fall away from the Christian faith.”

And soon the talk grew:

“A nice story that! All of a sudden, he finds honest work too hard for him and righteous fare not good enough, goes to town and eats flesh-meat on Our Lady’s day and falls away from the faith.”

My mother laughed at first, when she heard that, for she knew her child. But then the thought came to her: suppose it were true after all! Suppose her dear child were forgetting God and going astray!

She knew no peace. She went and borrowed clothes from blind Julia and borrowed three florins from a good-natured huckstress and travelled—sick and infirm as she was, leaning with either hand on a stick—to the capital. She wanted to see for herself what was true in people’s talk. She found her child a poor student in a black coat, which he had had given him, and with his hair combed off his forehead. None of this pleased her greatly, it is true; it succeeded, however, in appeasing her. But, in the two days of her stay in town, she saw the mad, frivolous doings on every side, saw the neglect of old customs which she revered and the mocking of things that were sacred to her, and she said to me:

“You will never be able to stay among people like those, child; they would drag you down with them and ruin your soul.”

“No, mother,” I answered, “a man can think as he wishes; and people can’t take away good thoughts.”

She said no more. But, when she returned to the forest hills and heard the talk again, she was more dejected than ever.

It was all up now with the homestead. House and farm were sold, made over to the creditors; my brothers and sisters engaged as servants with strange farmers. The destitute parents were given a cottage that, until then, had belonged to the property. My youngest brother, who was not yet able to earn

his bread, and one sister remained with them and nursed poor mother. Father kept on going over the mountains to the doctors', and all but promised them his own life, if they could save the life of his wife.

In the cottage, things looked very wretched. The ailing woman suffered in silence. The light of her eyes threatened to fail her, her mental faculties appeared to fade. Death knocked at her heart with repeated strokes. She often seemed to endure severe pain, but said nothing; she no longer took any interest in the world, asked only after her husband, after her children. And she lay years a-dying.

I often came to see her during that time. She hardly knew me, when I stood by her bedside; but then again she would say, as in a dream:

“Is that you, Peterl? Praise and thanks be to God that you are here again!”

During midsummer, we would carry her, once in a way, with bed and all, out of the stuffy room into the air, so that she might see the sunshine once more. I do not know if she saw it: she kept her eyes open and looked up at the sun; her optic nerves seemed dead.

Then, suddenly, days came when she was different. She was cheerful and longed to go out into the open.

“Do get quite well again, Maria,” said her husband, “and we shall remain together a long while yet.”

“Yes,” she answered.

I thought of all this on my way through the forest—and now it was all over with this poor rich life.

When, at last, after walking for hours through the woods along the mountain-path, I saw the thatched cottage on the hill-side, then it was as though a misty shadow covered woods and plains and all; and yet the sunlight hung over it. A puff of grey smoke rose from the little chimney. Does she suspect my coming? thought I. Is she cooking my favourite dish? No, strangers are preparing a funeral feast.

You stood long, Peterl, outside the half-open door; and your hand trembled when at last it touched the latch. The door opened, you walked in, it was dark in the narrow passage, with only a dim little oil-lamp flickering in a glass, and yet you saw it clearly: against the wall, under the smoky stairs, on a plank lay the bier, covered entirely with a big white cloth. At the head stood a crucifix and the holy-water stoup, with a sprig of fir in it....

You fell upon your knees.... And the tears came at last. The tears which the mother's heart once gave us to take with us into this world for our relief in

sorrow and for our only consolation in the hour when no other comfort reaches the soul, when strangers cannot understand us and when the mother's heart has ceased to beat. Hail, O rich and eternal legacy!

Now the door of the parlour opened softly and Maria, the younger sister, stepped out. The girl at once began to cry when she saw the brother of whom they had all spoken so often, for whom mother's last glance had asked and who was far away when she closed her eyes. Now he lay there on his knees and cried over the memory of her life.

Even her children here at home had slept through the night of the death. Not till the glow of early morning lit up the little windows did father go to the girls in the bedroom and say:

“Open your eyes and look out. The sun is already rising over the Wechsel; and the Blessed Virgin is sitting on the mountain-top, with the Child Jesus on her knee; and your mother is sitting on the stool at her feet, with a spinning-wheel before her, weaving her heavenly garment.”

Then they knew at once that mother was dead.

“Would you like to look at her?” my sister now asked.

And she went to the head of the bier and slowly raised the shroud.

I saw my mother. Heaven's bliss still lay on the stiff, stark visage. The load was gone from my heart, relieved and comforted; I looked upon the dear features as though I were contemplating a white flower. It was no longer the poor, sick, weary woman that lay before me: it was the face lit up with a ray from the youthful days long past. She lay there slumbering and was strong and well. She was young again and white and gentle; she wore a little smile, as she often did when she looked at the merry little fellow playing about with his toys at her feet. The dark and glossy hair (she had no grey hairs yet) was carefully braided and peeped out a little at the temples from under the brown kerchief, the one which she loved best to wear upon her head when she went to church on holidays. She held her hands folded over her breast, with the rosary and the wax candle between them. She lay there just as though she had fallen asleep in church on Whit Sunday, during the solemn High Mass; and thus, even in death, she comforted her child. But the rough hands clearly showed that the slumberer had led a hard and toilful life.

And so you stood before this sacred image, nearly as still and motionless as the sleeper.

At last, you whispered to your little sister, who stood softly weeping by your side:

“Who closed her eyes?”

A sound of hammering came from the parlour. The carpenter was knocking together the last dwelling-house.

After a while, Maria drew the shroud over the head again, as softly and carefully as when she used to cover up our little mother, hundreds and hundreds of times, in the long period of sickness.

Then I went into the small, warm parlour. Father, my elder sister, my two brothers, of whom the younger was still a boy, came up to me with mournful looks. They hardly spoke a word, they gave me their hands, all but the little fellow, who hid himself in the chimney-corner, where we could hear his sobbing.

Joseph the carpenter was calmly planing away at the coffin, which he had now finished joining, and smoked his pipe as he did so.

Later, when the afternoon shadows had lengthened outside, far over the glittering snow-clad meadow-land, when, in the parlour, Joseph was painting the black cross on the coffin-lid, father sat down beside it and said, softly:

“Please God, after all, she has a house of her own again.”

On the first day after mother’s death, no fire had been lit on the cottage-hearth. One and all had forgotten that a mortal man wants a basin of hot soup in the morning and at mid-day. On the other hand, a blazing fire had been kindled on the field behind the little house, to burn the straw bedding on which she had died, even as, long ago, the forefathers had fanned their Odin fires, commending the beloved dead to the Goddess Hella, the great concealer.^[21]

I had sat down on the bench and lifted my little brother up to me. The little man glanced at me quite fearsomely: I had a black coat on and a white scarf round my neck and I looked very grand in his eyes. I held his little hand, which already had horny blisters on it, in mine. Then I asked father to tell us something of mother’s life.

“Wait a little,” answered father and looked on at the drawing of the cross, as in a dream.

At last, he heaved a deep sigh and said:

“So it’s finished now. Her cross and suffering lasted long, that’s true; but her life was short. Children, I tell you, not everyone has a mother like yours. For you, Peter, she nearly gave up her life, when you came into the world. And so they followed one after the other: joys and sorrows, care and want, poverty and wretchedness! And, when I was sick unto death and the doctors

agreed that I must go the way of all flesh, that there was no remedy for it, my wife never gave up hope, never abandoned me. Day and night she stayed by my side, forgetting to sleep, forgetting to eat a bit of bread. She almost poured life back into me with her own breath—my dear, good wife.”

His voice seemed about to break; he wiped the moisture from his eyes with his coat-sleeve.

“No one would believe what good nursing can do,” he continued. “I became quite hale again. We lived on, faithfully and fondly; and that you, Peter, found success and happiness away from home, that was your mother’s greatest joy. You yourselves know how she lay sick and dying for seven years and more, how they turned us out of house and home, how spitefully people talked and how, nevertheless, we had the greatest trust in you children. For fully thirty years, we lived together in wedlock. I always prayed that God might take *me* first; now He has chosen rather to take *her*. You mustn’t cry like that, children: you were always a help and a comfort to your mother.”

He said no more.

When the carpentering of the coffin was done, father put shavings inside it as a pillow. He had always had the habit, when he had done his work, of going to his wife and saying:

“I’ve finished now.”

And so, when he had put the shavings straight and made the other preparations, he went out to the bier in the passage and said:

“I’ve finished now.”

Late in the evening, when the crescent moon stood in the dark, clear sky and shed its twilight over the woods and gleaming, snow-clad meadows and over the little house in the forest on the hill-side, the snow creaked continually on the roads and people came up from farmsteads and distant cottages. Even though they had carried on loud and cheerful conversations with one another on the paths by which they had come, they became silent now that they were nearing the cottage and we heard only the crackling of their footsteps on the snow.

In the small front passage, which was dimly lit by the little lamp, everyone knelt on the cold clay floor and prayed silently before the bier and then sprinkled it with holy water. After that, he went into the parlour to the others, who sat round the table and the fireplace, singing hymns and uttering pious reflections. They were all there to accompany the poor woman of the house to her last resting-place.

I would have kept on standing by the bier, if the people had not been there, so that I might look at my mother. I read my childhood and my youth in her features. I thought that the bright eyes must open once more and smile to me, that the word must once more come from those lips which, in her loving-kindness, had been so soft and tender. But, though I was her dear son and however long I might stand beside her—she now slept the eternal sleep.

I went into the low-ceilinged kitchen, where the neighbours' wives were cooking the funeral meal; I looked round in the smoke for my brothers and sisters, that I might comfort them.

Inside, in the parlour, all were now as still as mice and in great tension. Mathias, the old chamois-hunter, who wore a brown shirt and a white beard, sat at the table and told a story:

“There was once a farmer,” he began, “who had a wife, just a poor sick wife. And, one day, one holy Easter morning, the wife died. The soul departed from her body and stood there all alone in dark Eternity. No angel was willing to come and lead her and show her in to the heavenly Paradise. ‘They are celebrating Christ’s resurrection in Heaven’—so the story ran—‘and, at such times, no saint or angel has time to show a poor soul the way.’ But the poor soul was in inexpressible fear and terror, for she reflected that, because of her illness, it was long since she had been to church. And she already heard the devil whining and whimpering and whistling and she thought that she was lost. ‘O my holy guardian angel and patron saint!’ she cried. ‘Come to my help in this my need, or I must depart into hell-fire!’ But they were all in Heaven together, celebrating Our Lord’s resurrection. Thereupon the poor woman was nigh to fainting away, without comfort or support; but suddenly Our Lady stood by her side, draped in a snow-white garment with a wreath of roses as a beautiful ornament in her hand. ‘Hail to thee and comfort, thou poor woman!’ she said, gently, to the departed soul. ‘Thou hast been a pious sufferer all thy life long and every Saturday thou hast fasted, for my sake, and what thou hadst left over through the fasting thou hast given to the poor, for my sake. This I will never forget to thee; and, though my dear Son is commemorating His glorious resurrection this day, yet will I think of thee and carry thee to His golden throne and to thy joyful place in the rose-garden by the angels, which I have prepared for thy sake and where thou canst wait for thy husband and thy children.’ And then Our Lady took the poor woman by the hand and carried her up to Heaven. That is why I say that fasting and alms-giving in honour of Our Lady are a right good work.”

So spake Mathias in his brown shirt.

“Our dear woodman’s wife, whom we are burying to-morrow, was also fond of fasting,” said one little woman, “and very fond of giving.”

Father sobbed for emotion. The thought that his wife was now in Heaven lit a very welcome light in his sad heart.

The hands of the old soot-browned clock upon the wall—the same which had faithfully told the hours, the joyful hours and the sorrowful, since the woodman's glad wedding-day; which pointed to the hour of one, early on Sunday morning, when the little boy was born; which, after many years, showed the hour of six, when the delivering angel passed through the room and pressed his kiss on the sufferer's forehead—the hands now met at twelve o'clock.

And, when that departed life was thus measured, like a single day, from sunrise to sunset, my father said:

“Boy, go outside to the cow-shed and lie down for a while in the straw and rest a bit. I will wake you when the time comes.”

I went outside, took a last look at the bier in the passage and then stepped out into the free, cold, starry night. The sickle of the moon had sunk behind the woods; it had sent its last beam gliding through the crevice of the door on the shroud that covered the bier: to-morrow, when it rose again, the poor creature would be lying in the dark earth.

So now I lay in the shed on the straw, where my two brothers generally slept. The three chained oxen stood or lay beside me, grinding their teeth as they chewed the cud. It was warm and damp in the stable; and the moisture trickled from the half-rotten ceiling down on my straw couch.

There was once a time—ay, the drops came quivering down as now—the dew-drops from the trees, when mother was taking you to make your first communion. I see you now, Peter! You have a new jacket on, with a sprig of rosemary in your hat. Your little snow-white shirt shows round your neck above the waistcoat; and your cheeks are rosy red with scrubbing. Mother is wearing a bright-coloured dress, a brown apron and a black, tight-fitting jacket. Her broad neckerchief is of red silk and shines like fire and flame. A white-and-green spray of flowers sticks out of her bosom. On her head, she wears a high and costly golden cap, as was the fashion thenadays throughout the country; and the curls peep out on either side of the forehead, gleaming black like the two great pupils of her eyes and soft and dainty like the lashes on her lids. Her cheeks are tinged with the pink of the dawn; her chin is white and daintily curved. Her red lips wear a little smile and, at the same time, scold you, my little man, because you are skipping so pertly over the stones and roots and knocking the nails out of your shoes. No child alive has ever seen his mother in the full flower of her beauty; and yet how splendid it is, boy, even now! All's aglow in the wood and alight in the young larches; and

the blooms are fragrant and the birds singing in every tree-top.

Ah, child-time is May-time!

A dull, heavy knocking roused me from my dream; I started up. Now they are laying my mother in the coffin; now they are nailing down the lid.

I rushed out of the shed and into the house. There, in the passage, stood the narrow, white, closed coffin; and the dimly-flickering oil-lamp now lit up only the empty, desolate plank on which the bier had stood.

I should have liked to see her once more....

The people were preparing the litter. Father knelt behind the door and prayed; the sisters wept in their pinafores; and my little brother sobbed terribly. The poor little fellow tried to keep in his tears, for he had heard that all was for the best with mother and that she was now enjoying peace in Heaven: he had smiled a little at that; but now, when the people were making ready to carry mother away for good and all, there was no comfort left in his sorely-afflicted little heart.

I took little brother by the hand and we went into the furthest dark corner of the room, where no one else was and where only our sick mother had cared to sit. There we sat down on the bench. And there we sat while everything was being prepared outside, while the people sat down to table and shared the funeral repast.

They had come to show us sympathy; now they were eating, now they were laughing and then again they acted as was customary; and they actually rejoiced that one more person had died and, in so doing, brought variety into their everyday lives.

Suddenly, loud words were heard outside:

“Where is the *Überthan*? We can’t find the *Überthan*.”

The *Überthan* is a thin linen pall which is wrapped round the coffin like a veil and, in the popular belief, serves him or her who has risen from the dead as a garment on the Day of Judgment.

Father was roused from his prayers by the shouting; he now staggered around and looked for the linen sheet in his press, on the shelves and in every nook and corner. Why, he had brought it home only yesterday; and now it was nowhere to be found! He had really lost his head: he had to see that all got something to eat; he had to change into his Sunday clothes to go to church; he had to comfort his children; he had to fetch a new candle, because the old one was burnt down to its socket and the people were like to find themselves in the dark; he had to go to the shed and give the cattle fodder enough to last

them all day, for there would be no one at home; and now he was expected to say where he had put the pall yesterday, in his confusion. And, in the next few minutes, they would be carrying his wife out of the house!

It was one great excitement.

“So the old man has no pall!” they grumbled. “Such a thing has never been known: carrying out a dead person all naked and bare. But it must be true with the poor woodman’s wife: a pauper she lived and a pauper she died!”

My two sisters began to hunt in their turn; and Maria exclaimed, plaintively:

“Dear Jesus, my mother mustn’t be buried without a pall; she would do better than that to stay at home here; and I will give my christening-money and buy her her last dress. Who was it put away the linen sheet? O God, they want to deny her the last thing of all, as well as all the rest!”

I tried to calm the girl and said we should be sure to get a linen sheet out in the village and, if not, then she must rest in peace under the bare deal boards.

“How can you speak like that!” she cried. “Didn’t mother in her time buy your clothes for you out of her hard-saved kreuzers? And now you want her to rise on the Day of Judgment in her shabby clothes, when all the others are wearing a white garment!”

She burst into loud crying and leant her glowing forehead against the wall.

But, soon after, the people breathed again: they had found the pall.

And, when they had eaten—we others did not take a bite—and everything was ready, they opened the door of the front passage and knelt down before the coffin and prayed aloud, saying Our Lord’s Five Wounds.

Then four men placed the coffin on the litter and lifted it up and carried it out of the poor dwelling into the wood and thence over the commons and fields and through mountain forests.

And round about was the winter night and over all hung the starry sky.

One more look at the empty bier-plank and then I quickly drew my little brother out with me; and father and sisters also hurried after; and the elder brother locked the door; and then the cottage in the wood lay there in the dark and in the deepest stillness. Life had left it—and death had left it: there is no greater loneliness possible.

We heard the hum of the praying funeral procession, we saw the flicker of the two or three lanterns among the trunks of the trees. The bearers walked at a quick pace; those who followed and prayed could hardly keep up with them

on the rough, snow-covered paths. I was a long way behind with my little brother: the boy could not walk so fast. Mother would never have left us behind like that, when living: she would have waited, laughing a little and chiding a little, and led the child by the hand. Now, however, she only longed for rest.

Outside the parish village stands a tall cross, with a life-size figure of the Saviour. Here, after a many-hours' progress up and down hill, they set the coffin on the ground and waited for the doctor, who came from the village to view the corpse and give the death-certificate. But, by the time that we two, who had lagged behind, came up, the coffin-lid was hammered down again. And so I was never able to see you again on earth, my mother!

They entered the parish church in the morning twilight.

The clear bells rang out together. A great catafalque was set up in the middle of the dark church; many candles gleamed; and a solemn funeral service began. The parish priest, an old, blind man, with snow-white hair, a venerable figure, intoned the requiem, surrounded by priests in rich vestments. His voice was clear and solemn; a choir chanted the responses; and trumpets and sackbuts echoed through the church.

I looked at father and he at me; we knew not who had ordered all this so. To-day I know that it was my friends at Krieglach who gave us this beautiful token of their love.

When the funeral service was over, the catafalque was removed, all the festal candles on the high-altar were lit and three priests, no longer clad in the hue of mourning, but in red, gold-stitched chasubles, climbed the steps of the altar and a grand High Mass was celebrated, with gay bell-ringing and joyous music.

"That is because she is released from her suffering," said I to the boy.

At last, the coffin, richly decked with flowers, swayed out of the parish church, where, in the old days, the woodman's wife had been baptised and married, on its way to the cemetery. The priests and the choir sang the loud, clear requiem, the bells tolled over the village far out into the woods and the candles flickered in the sunlight. A long train of men and women passed through the broad village street. We walked behind the coffin, carrying lighted candles in our hands and praying as we went.

The cemetery lies outside the village, on a gentle eminence, between fields and meadows. It is far from small, for the parish stretches to a great distance over hill and dale. It is enclosed with a plank fence and contains many crosses of wood and rusty iron; and in the middle rises the image of Christ crucified.

Before this image, on the right, was the deep grave, at the exact spot where, years ago, they had buried our mother's two children who had died. A mound of freshly-dug earth lay on either side of the grave.

Here the bearers let the coffin down to the ground and stripped it of all its finery; and it slid down into the pit as poor as it had left the cottage in the wood.

"Thou to-day, I to-morrow; and so I am content," murmured father.

And the priest said:

"May she rest in the Lord!"

Then they cast clods of earth into the grave and went away, went to the inn, tasted bread and wine and talked of everyday things. When it was twelve o'clock and, according to custom, the bells began to toll once more, as a last farewell to the departed, the men and women of the forest set out to return to their mountain valley.

We who belonged to one another sat together for a while longer and spoke sadly of the time that must now come and how to arrange for it. Then we took leave of one another: my father and brothers and sisters went home to the cottage in the wood, to live and die where mother had lived and died.

Footnotes:

[20] Fasting or abstaining from flesh-meat on Saturdays, in honour of Our Lady, is a custom, an act of voluntary discipline, prevailing almost exclusively in the German and Austrian Highlands.—*Translator's Note.*

[21] Hella, daughter of Laki and goddess of the dead, is the Persephone of Norse mythology.—*Translator's Note.*

THE END