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STICK TO THE RAFT.

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STICK TO THE RAFT.

CHAPTER I.

THE RAFT.

THE Fichtel-Gebirge, or Fir Mountains, in Bavaria, have been compared to the garden of Eden, because four rivers rise in their midst, which were once supposed to be rich in gold, and to abound in precious stones. Some of the poor people in this region have been known to search diligently, hoping to find treasures concealed in the beds of the

Eger, Saale, or Naab, which would enrich them, so that they might dispense with hard labour and dwell in luxury for the remainder of their days. But only a few peasants indulged in such dreams. For the most part, the people were, and are, employed in felling the forest trees, laying out new plantations, and burning charcoal.

Hans Richter was a wood-cutter and charcoal-burner; he was but a poor man, as far as this world's goods were concerned, but he was rich towards God, for he had a large store of faith and earnest trust in his Heavenly Father; in fact, in his simple way, he scarcely knew what care meant, just because he realised these words in their full meaning, and not in a half-hearted manner—"Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you." He had but little book knowledge, and could with difficulty spell out the words of his Bible, but he could pray: he could talk to his God as he went about his daily work, or as he watched the charcoal smouldering; and he learnt so easily, and had such a good memory, that he made many of the rich promises contained in God's Word his own.

Richter was a widower with one son, a lad of fifteen, who was a great solace to him. Young Hans was a tolerable scholar, for dur-

ing the winter months the forest life was exchanged for a cottage in a little village, and then he went to school, and applied himself to study so eagerly that he acquired more information in the five winter months than his fellow-companions who attended the classes regularly all the year round.

When our story opens Hans Richter was suffering from a severe cold. The winter had been a trying one, and money so scarce that very often he could not afford to heat his stove. The long illness of his wife, and her subsequent death, exhausted his resources, and incurred some debts which he had only just paid off. In spite of these trials, he did not lose his faith in God, but hoped that the spring and summer work would be plentiful, and that the united efforts of himself and son would enable him once more to accumulate a little hoard for future needs.

The snow had disappeared, and the firs looked green and fresh when Richter and his son gave up their room in the village, removed to the forest, and erected their hut. It did not take them long to build up their summer dwelling-house, it was so simply constructed. The shape of it was conical, and the poles with which it was made were covered with the bark of the fir-tree. This rude hut served to shelter them

from storm and wind. It stood about two miles from the village to which they had to go in order to buy bread and other necessaries.

Richter did not remove all his household goods, though they were few enough, to his hut. He left some of his furniture in the care of the poor woman with whom he lodged during the cold weather, and only carried to the forest such articles as were absolutely needed.

"Father," said young Hans, some three weeks after the hut was completed, "you look very tired this afternoon, and seem so weak; lie down and rest, while I go to work. Carl and Wilhelm will come when they have finished their dinners, and we can get along quite well without your help."

"I am very tired, my boy," answered Richter. "I cannot tell you exactly why, but I have never been the same since your mother died, and I think the cold of last winter injured me. Your young bones are not so tender as mine, for you can run about and warm yourself; my cough prevents me from taking sharp exercise, and lately it has hurt my chest. But don't look so sad, Hans; if my Heavenly Father wants me home, I am ready to go; and I am not afraid of leaving you alone, for He will not forsake the orphan, but care for you as He has cared for me. I'll have a sleep while

you cut down the branches of your fir; you'll manage to do that easily when Carl and Wilhelm come; but wait for me before you set to work on the trunk."

"Is it to go to Kösen, father?"

"Yes; it is the last one we have to fell to complete the order sent by the Burgomaster. I shall take you with me to Kösen so soon as the raft is ready. When your mother was living I did not like to leave her alone for so many days, but now I shall be glad of your help. One pair of hands cannot guide a large raft through the twists and turns of the Saale. You've had good practice in your time, my boy, and I think are as clever as your father."

"I want to see Kösen," answered Hans. "I've never been so far; and I've heard it's such a pretty little village."

"It is a town, lad; the people were anxious enough to have it made into one, thinking they would have more privileges, but all they seem to have gained is having to pay heavier taxes and support a Burgomaster, to whom they give a regular annual income."

"There is more to be seen and learnt in a town than in our tiny village, or among these fir-trees," said Hans.

"Perhaps, for you, but not for me. I spent

of my early years at Leipzic, yet I was glad when my father accepted the post of head-forester, and we came to our quiet little village for the winter, and lived in the forest during the fine weather."

"But then, father, you had good reason to be glad; you have often told me about your early life."

"Yes, lad; I never grow weary of telling you how I learnt to know the Lord. I was a stranger to Him before, and so was your grandfather. Your mother first taught us there was a better world to live for than this. But I needed sorrow to make me think. It was on the day that your darling sister died I prayed my first prayer, and promised to give myself to my Master's service. Ah, lad, such a world of care has been moved off my shoulders since then! How well I remember starting on a raft down the Saale some few days after that blessed hour when I cried, 'I am not my own, Lord, for Thou hast redeemed me with Thy precious blood, and I give myself to Thee.' Your mother came to see me off, holding you, who were a baby about a year old, in her arms. Before I unchained the raft I kissed her, and said, 'Good-bye! take care of yourself, and our only little one.' 'Good-bye, my dear husband,' she replied; to the raft, and mind how you pass the

weir at Kösen. How glad I am to think that there's another Raft you'll stick to besides this one; a Raft which cannot come to any harm, but which will support you in the deepest waters and amid the fiercest storms, when the sun shines, and when the rain falls.' I looked at her in astonishment, for I didn't catch her meaning, but she soon cleared up the mystery, for she added, 'I mean the Lord Jesus Christ; stick to that Raft, and pray for His Spirit to guide you.' It was a good saying of hers, Hans; I've never forgotten it, and I have ever called out to any one who was guiding a raft, 'Stick to it;' and what's more, if I have an opportunity, I tell them there is a heavenly Raft to stick to as well as fir-stems, and I say, 'Hold on to the Saviour, forget self, and cling to God's promises in Christ.' Hans, lad, as a sinking man would hug his raft if any accident upset him in the river, so I beseech you cling to Jesus. Don't forget my words. Now go to your work, and I will rest."

Richter closed his eyes wearily when his son left him. "Some day soon I shall fall into the sleep that knows no waking; but when my summons comes I shall go gladly, and without fear," he murmured. "O Father, for Christ's sake, make my boy true to Thee."

The sun set, and yet the sick man slept

heavily, nor did he rouse up to take his supper. After young Hans had finished his day's work he watched his father for some time, and then he too fell into a sound slumber. The morning was breaking when the lad was awakened by hearing his name called. He was in time to catch his father's last words.

"I am dying," gasped Richter; "the end has been coming for some time, but I have fast hold of the Raft, Hans; I am not afraid of crossing the river; I hold my Saviour's hand, and He holds mine. I can say truly, 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.' Stick to the Raft, my boy; stick to the Raft."

CHAPTER II.

KÖSEN.

KÖSEN is a charming little city on the Saale. It lies in a valley surrounded by hills, which are well-cultivated and finely wooded. During the summer the river is thickly studded with rafts made of the trunks of fir-trees, principally cut from the forests

about the Fichtel-Gebirge. These rafts are formed by boring holes at the top and bottom of each stem, and fastening them together with twigs. When completed they are launched on to the river, and the stream carries them down to their destination.

"So help me God, I will stick to the Raft," said Hans Richter, when he left the village cemetery about a month after his father's funeral. He had been there to plant forest-flowers on his parent's grave, and to pray; and with a firm step he took the road which led to his old landlady's house.

"I have called to bid you good-bye," he said as he entered her cottage and shook her warmly by the hand. "I expect not to return to this part again for at least some years to come."

"So I hear," she replied. "You must take a cup of coffee with me this afternoon, and tell me why you are so anxious to leave your old home. The last time I saw you I thought you were inclined to stay in these parts."

"I am so lonely without my father, and feel I had rather go to some place where I can learn more and see more. I mean to try and get some work to do at Kösen."

"That is a long way off; over seventy miles as the crow flies, and perhaps double the distance

by the river. It's my native place; I was born there."

"I know it is a good distance, but I can't help that, for business takes me to Kösen; I am going to help Wilhelm Andrea. He is appointed to take the wood to the Burgomaster, now father's dead. The head forester has written to a friend of his who keeps the toll-house, and asked him to give me some employment. He says lads are often wanted to help the rafts over the weir."

"That's true enough, for the weir is full four feet high; I can tell you it needs a good rush of water to enable them to pass it at all."

"I can't quite understand how they get over," said Hans.

"You know what a weir is, I suppose?"

"Oh yes."

"Explain it to me."

"Wherever there's a great mill to be worked there's a weir. It's only a dam in the river to collect enough water behind it so as to turn the mill-wheel."

"Quite right. You'll soon see the old flour-mill; it is a very large one, and grinds nearly all the wheat needed in Kösen for bread. Now I will tell you how the rafts go over. Every raft, as you know, has a man and a boy on it, who steer with a fir pole, to which is attached

a boat-hook. So soon as the weir is reached, the master of the toll-house, or his assistant, wades through the water from the shore, and stands on the weir. He also holds a long fir pole in his hands, with which he pushes the raft, so as to prevent it from drifting out of the middle of the stream and missing the best point to shoot the fall. The two on the raft have to stand perfectly still, and balance themselves carefully while they glide down the rapid, and they very often get a good shower-bath. I have watched many hundred rafts over the weir at Kösen, and also under the bridge; for the little town boasts a long and very handsome old bridge over the Saale. The moment the raft crosses the weir there is a deal of steering wanted, for the water is often very shallow under the archways, and it needs some skill to escape the buttresses."

"I like to hear all this," said Hans; "but I thought the Saale had always plenty of water in it."

"Not always; I have known it almost dry in some places after a long drought, and I have sometimes seen the river so full in the early spring, and the current so rapid, that it tore the rafts apart, and dashed the stems of the trees against the bridge."

"Father used to say the rafts made a noise when they passed over the weir."

"And he was right. I know that I often thought it thundered when several went over in succession."

"I must be leaving now; we start away early to-morrow morning."

"I only wish I had some friends at Kösen, for I would speak a good word for you, my dear," said the kind landlady; "but I've been away so long that all my acquaintances have forgotten me. I, like you, Hans, have no relations, for I was an only child."

"Thank you all the same," answered the lad. "I don't feel so lonely as I thought I should, for I have been so used to hear father talk to God, that since he's been dead, I've begun to talk to Him myself much more than I used to do."

"That's well. Your father was a good man, Hans; do you follow in his footsteps. I am glad Wilhelm is to be your companion; though I hear he does not remain at Kösen, but is going on to Halle. You'll not be long without finding new friends; only choose those who will raise you higher, and not sink you lower, for we've plenty to pull us down here. We need to have the constant presence of God's Spirit

in our hearts if we would live upright and noble lives. Farewell; may God go with you."

Hans Richter and his companion arrived at Kösen on a beautiful evening in June. The moon was at its full, and shone directly over the weir, giving the rapid a silvery appearance; so exquisite was the scene that many of the townspeople and visitors gathered on the old bridge to watch the effect of the moonlight on the water.

Kösen is one of the smallest towns in Germany; it is not thickly populated, save in the summer months, when its saline waters attract many strangers, as they are considered to be especially beneficial for children.

"We will not go so far as the toll-house," said Wilhelm Andrea; "it is too late to pay duty to-night; we will just moor our raft to a stake."

The raft was soon securely fastened to one of the many stakes which are placed at intervals along the banks of the Saale; and then Hans and his companion went off in search of a night's lodging.

They slept soundly in the small double-bedded room which they secured at a little inn, nor did they awake until the sun was high in the heavens. Hans was the first to rouse up, but Wilhelm was too tired to think of the day's

work which lay before him; so the lad determined to go at once to the forester's friend at the toll-house, and ask if he could find him any employment, for he did not wish to lose time; he had to win his bread by his own exertions. The bundle which lay on his bed contained his best suit of clothes, a pair of boots, two shirts, and his father's Bible; all besides he had disposed of, and after meeting outstanding expenses with the results of the sale he had one thaler, or three shillings, left.

Before the boy set out he read the twenty-third Psalm, and thought of his father's dying words; then he knelt in prayer to God, and asked for a blessing to rest on him, and that he might find friends and employment, and be honest, and not afraid of holding on to the right in time of temptation. When he had ended his prayer, he rolled his Bible carefully up in his clothes, then tied the bundle in a large silk pocket-handkerchief, and went in search of the forester's friend, who was known in Kösen as Karl Schmidt the toll-master.

CHAPTER III.

KARL SCHMIDT.

EVERY raft which passes through Kösen has to pay duty, and therefore the little four-roomed cottage built on the banks of the Saale just above the weir is inhabited by the toll-master.

Karl Schmidt had served in this capacity at Kösen for many years. He was a quaint, queer, strange-looking man, rough in his manners, but with a good honest heart beneath a rather unpleasing exterior. He had no wife, nor had he ever been married; his neighbours often wondered that he was a single man. He and his God, and one other, knew why he chose a bachelor's life, for Karl never talked about his own affairs. Many townspeople and strangers were admitted into the pretty parlour, which commanded a view of the river, where Schmidt transacted his business when the weather was too wet or the days too cold to admit of his taking his chair outside the door; but only a few of these were his friends.

He was known to some in Kösen as "Old Karl," and yet he was neither grey nor infirm. It is true he had stray white hairs mingling with his brown locks, but he was still in the prime

of manhood, so perhaps he earned his name because he was quiet in manner and naturally grave in disposition; he was rarely found at a fête, and certainly never seen in the public-house. Yet he filled a great place in Kösen, for he was regarded by many as a friend in need, and his advice was sought after and given cheerfully. By a few he was thought proud; but they were among the prosperous people in his own class, who had never asked for his sympathy.

On the morning when Hans Richter sought him he was up betimes, and busy about household matters. First he lighted the stove and put the kettle on; then he swept out the little kitchen and dusted and arranged the parlour; afterwards he went up-stairs again and made his bed and set his room in order. This done, he tapped at the door which faced his own. A feeble voice answered, "Come in."

Karl entered. On a clean bed lay a sickly woman, his mother, who had been partially paralysed for some years. She was his great duty in life; for her sake he had never thought of marriage. She had always been an invalid, and needed many luxuries; and when she grew so ill as to be unable to move without assistance, he was doubly thankful to God that he could keep her in tolerable comfort. He loved

intensely; to her he showed the gentle nature which lay concealed beneath the rough exterior.

"How have you slept, mother dear?" he asked, coming to her side and kissing her.

"Much better than usual, Karl," she answered, smiling at him fondly. "I mean to get up when Maria comes."

Maria was an old woman employed by Karl for a few hours every day to attend upon his mother.

"I am so glad to hear this," he answered. "I'll make coffee at once, and then I must go to business, for I hear the Burgomaster's wood arrived late last night, and I know he is in a great hurry to begin building; besides, that boy will come on the raft who has been recommended to me. I really think I shall try him, for I have been obliged to dismiss Robert."

"I am glad he is gone, for your sake, but sorry for his own. He has too indulgent a father, and a bad companion in Paul Ebhardt, so that he has no one to influence him for good. I did hope he would have turned over a new leaf. I like the boy, with all his faults, though I fear he will be a constant source of trouble to the miller. You'll read with me as usual, Karl, before you go out?"

"Certainly, mother. I shouldn't expect a

blessing on my day's work if we neglected to read the Bible and pray together morning and night."

"Our daily services have been a great joy and a pleasant duty, my son, for many years. I never understand how people like to go out into the turmoil of this world's work without first seeking strength to struggle with any difficulty, danger, or temptation that may arise. I should as soon think of going without food as going without prayer; even in my quiet life, Karl, I have my battles to fight. I often feel cross and irritable, and, but for God's help, I should tire you with my grumbling."

"Never, mother. I love you too well. I can't fancy you cross or irritable. I rarely leave the room but what I say, 'God help me to endure trouble as she does.'"

"And He will help you when trouble comes, Karl; the back is made to fit the burden. I used to wonder how people who were afflicted could be so patient; but I wonder no longer now, if they are the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, for I have found that as I have grown weaker, and my bodily ailments more severe, God has come nearer and nearer. You may depend upon it, the sick ones whom Jesus loves have a closer union with Him than those who bustle about the world. When we are ill we

are kept quiet by God; His Spirit holds communion with our spirit, and we hail the communion all the more because we have no hope, no help, but in Him."

"Oh, mother! how I like to hear you talk! —and it's not mere talk with you. I am ashamed of myself when I see you suffer, for I would fain keep you here, in spite of it all; and yet I know you must long to be at rest."

"My son, I am at rest now. This is the rest of faith; the rest of heaven will follow in God's good time."

The morning meal was over, and the morning reading and prayer, when Hans Richter arrived at the toll-house. Karl Schmidt was standing outside the door smoking his pipe.

"If you please, sir," said Hans, "I am the boy that you had a note about. Please can you give me employment?"

"What can you do?"

"Anything."

"Anything sometimes means nothing. I'd rather know what you are able to do."

"I can cut down trees, sir, make rafts, and since mother died I've cooked for father and tidied the room; and I'm a bit of a carpenter; and I want so much to stay here that I'll try

very hard and learn to do any work you set me."

"I must think over all your qualifications. You seem to me to know a little about many things, but I hope that does not mean that you are steady to nothing."

"No, sir; I don't think that's a bad fault of mine. But may I tell you what I want to do most of all?"

"Certainly."

"I want to help the rafts over the weir. I heard you always employed a lad for that, and I do so wish you would take me."

"Why do you so particularly wish to help the rafts over the weir?"

Hans hesitated, and Karl noted his hesitation.

"Speak out, boy," he said, somewhat sternly. "If you and I are to come to terms you must tell the truth."

"I never told a lie in my life, sir, and I hope I shall never be tempted to tell one. I was only wondering if I dare just talk to you as I used to do to my father."

"Try me," answered Karl.

"What I'm going to say has to do with my dead father, sir. The last conversation we had was about the rafts, and the last words he said were, 'Stick to the raft.' And I mean to stick

to the raft, and that's why I want to stand on the weir."

"But I don't yet see what standing on the weir has to do with sticking to the raft. You only stand on the weir to guide the rafts into the right channel."

"I know that, sir; but don't you see I can say to all the lads and men as they come over, 'Stick to the raft,' and that'll, maybe, lead to further conversation?"

"What further conversation?"

"It's my dead mother's idea, sir. Soon after father gave himself to the Lord he had to take a raft to a neighbouring village, and when he started mother told him to stick to it, and explained that she wanted him to hold on to a Raft which would bear him at all times. She meant the Lord Jesus Christ."

"I like that idea. 'There is a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother.' I'm not a man of many words, but I think I could say to strangers, 'Stick to the raft,' and maybe in some case I could explain my words, and bid them stick to the raft in a spiritual sense. Boy, you have taught me something to-day. I'm a little too much inclined to let people come and go without trying to do them good. But now tell me why you have left your forest life."

"Because I've no parents living, sir, and

I'm very lonely. I had to come to Kösen with the Burgomaster's wood, and I thought I'd rather remain than go back, if I could find employment; and I want to get a better education, for I'm at the top of the village school."

"You'll meet with many temptations here, and with boys who have no principle to guide them, who will try and lead you into sin. Are you strong enough to refuse to be led away?"

Hans thought for a moment before he answered, "I hope I am."

"In whose strength shall you resist? Your own?"

"No, sir; from a baby I've been taught this, 'Cast all your care on God; He careth for you, and will not suffer you to be tempted beyond what you are able to bear.' Father had a habit of talking to God about everything, and I try to follow his example."

"That's well, Hans. I like the look of you, and my friend gave you a good character, so I'll engage you to help men and boys stick to the raft in both senses. But mind, if I find you have only talked fairly, and are untrue or dishonest, I shall dismiss you."

"I'm quite ready to serve you on those terms, sir. When may I come?"

"To-day; this morning, if you like. Where did you sleep last night?"

Hans explained that he and Wilhelm Andrea had found accommodation at a little inn, and that his companion would soon be coming to pay duty on his raft.

"I know he wants to start again in good time," he added, "for some of the wood we brought down last night is going on to Halle. It is not all for the Burgomaster. May I go back and help him?"

"Certainly. I have only one more question to ask, Where are you going to lodge?"

"Can't I be with you, sir? It will be so handy for me to be near in case you want my services late at night or early in the morning."

"I've no place for you; but you will have little difficulty in finding a room in one of the cottages. I will arrange that matter for you."

Hans left Karl Schmidt with a light heart, and spent the rest of the morning in assisting Wilhelm. There was plenty to do, for the raft was an unusually large and heavy one, and it took some time to break it in pieces. Then the stems for the Burgomaster had to be dragged up the bank, and the rest tied together again, so that it was late in the afternoon before Wilhelm was ready to leave Kösen. His raft was now so small he was quite able to manage it by himself.

Hans was waiting, pole in hand, on the weir

when Andrea came, and Karl was close behind, ready to give the lad his first lesson. He proved an apt scholar, and guided the raft skilfully on to the lowest part of the weir, crying, "Stick to it, Wilhelm!" as it passed over.

Wilhelm called back, "I will stick to the raft, Hans, and I'll remember all you mean by those words. Good-bye. I hope you'll be happy at Kösen."

CHAPTER IV.

THE MILLER'S SON.

HERR KLEIN, to whom the mill at Kösen belonged, was a hard-working man, who had a wife and eight children to support; morning, noon, and sometimes far into the night, he was at his business. He was a good husband and an indulgent father; perhaps it was the easy manner he had of dealing with the faults of his young ones that made his eldest and only son Robert so determined to lead an idle life. He was a lad of sixteen, who had no particular principle to guide him, and liked to do nothing that gave him any trouble. The only thing he excelled in was archery; he had carried off the Burgomaster's

prize for two years in succession at the Schutzen Fest (shooting festival), and they were about the only prizes he had ever won, or tried after, in his life.

Finding that his son was so averse to work in his mill, Herr Klein asked Karl Schmidt to allow him to try his hand at helping the rafts over the weir, and as the toll-master was just then without a boy he engaged Robert; but the latter, instead of helping, so often nearly brought both men and rafts into dangerous positions, that at last Schmidt was compelled to dismiss him, and, as we know, Hans was engaged in his stead. In all probability Robert would have seen his place filled without being at all troubled had it not been for a very bad companion of his, the closest and dearest friend he had, one Paul Ebhardt, the son of the master tailor in Kösen, who considered that it was an infringement upon the rights of the town for a stranger to come and, as he termed it, "turn out a fellow who was born and bred close to the weir."

It was evident that Herr Klein admired the look and bearing of Hans, for he said to his son, soon after the lad came to live with the toll-master, "I do wish, Robert, you were as steady as Schmidt's new boy; I very much dislike seeing you constantly idling about."

But the miller did not enforce obedience; and truly he had no confidence in his first-born, and was afraid of giving him any position of trust connected with the mill. He hoped that as he grew older he would be wiser; nevertheless he did not set before him the miseries which must accrue from laziness, nor that "Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do." He was proud of his son, who was a well-grown, handsome, good-natured lad, but beyond this had nothing much to commend him.

Hans had been in his situation for several weeks, and had given the toll-master so much satisfaction that the latter proposed to his mother that a bed should be placed in the kitchen to accommodate him. "He is so handy at accounts, I shall be glad to have him to help me with the books," said Karl. Frau Schmidt gave her hearty consent to the arrangement, and added, "He will be a companion for you during the winter. I like the boy very much, and I think if he is in the house you can carry on his education during the long evenings."

So a bed was bought, and Hans was installed in his new quarters. The orphan was very happy to be there, and thankful to God that the influences of his home were such that he would be helped forward in the pilgrimage of life. He already loved patient Frau Schmidt,

and hailed the days when she was well enough to sit up in her easy-chair and chat to him.

Hans was in the habit of taking off his boots and socks when he stood in the water to help the rafts over the weir. He removed them as usual one morning, and left them on the shore, without giving a thought as to their safety, while he went, pole in hand, to assist four rafts, which had been waiting for a good supply of water to pass over the weir.

Robert and his friend Paul were sauntering along the banks of the river when they observed Hans take off his boots and socks.

"Let's hide them," suggested Paul. "I hate that boy, and should like to make Kösen too hot for him."

"It's not worth while," answered Robert. "If any one owes him a grudge, I do, for he turned me out of my situation. But he's not worth a thought."

"That's one reason why I dislike him so much," said Paul; and he might have added, "the chief reasons are, that he rather avoids me than seeks to know me; and on several occasions when I've invited him to go for a walk he has refused to accompany me, and one evening when I was drinking at a public-house he turned away."

This was true, for Hans had been warned

by his master to have no companionship with Robert or Paul. "One is idle, and the other bad," added Karl Schmidt; "therefore you had better try to keep clear of them."

Hans knew this was sound advice, for he had seen Paul behave in such a manner that his own good sense would have told him to avoid Ebhardt if he would cling to the good.

"Now do let's pay him off," urged Paul.

"Well, just as you like. We'll put his boots and socks under that rubbish."

Accordingly they were pushed under a nasty heap of refuse, and then the boys hid behind the trunk of an old tree, and waited to see how Hans would behave.

In the meantime the latter was fully employed. The first raft had only one man in it, who was accompanied by a favourite dog. The creature whined piteously, and was evidently frightened by the noise of the rushing water.

"Stick to the raft, and mind your dog," shouted Hans.

The stranger, thus admonished, took the animal into his arms, and planting his feet down firmly, passed the weir in safety.

"Give me a help with your pole until I'm under the bridge," called the man; "I'm not strong enough to keep clear of it single-handed, my cough is so bad."

Hans sprang on to the raft, and gave a few vigorous thrusts with his pole.

"It's all right now," he said. "I'm afraid you are very ill. It seems to me you are not fit to come down alone on this raft."

"I know that as well as you can tell me," answered the stranger, curtly; "but a man must live; mine will be a short life, and by no means a merry one."

"You managed to stick well to the raft as you passed over the weir," replied Hans; "and if you'll stick to another kind of Raft, you'll be able to meet any sickness that comes."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, the Bible tells us that Jesus Christ came into the world to save us from sin; and if we cling to Him in all our troubles we shall be able to bear them."

"What stuff are you talking to me, boy?" exclaimed the man, angrily; "I want no more help, now we are safely under the bridge. Thank you for what you've done; but let me give you a word of advice: if you use that sort of talk to strangers you'll get a thrashing one of these days. The idea of a child like you setting up to teach grown men!"

Hans felt very sore as he walked quickly back to the weir; he was more than sore, quite cross, and indignant that his words had been received

in such an uncourteous spirit. But he had no time then to indulge his vexation, for the three remaining rafts had to be helped over. He did his best, save only that no words escaped him beyond what he was compelled to say; he did not cry out cheerily, "Stick to the raft; take care; keep in the current!"

So soon as he had completed his morning's work he prepared to go home, but, to his dismay, he found that his boots and socks were gone.

Hans looked about in every direction in vain, and at last relinquished the search, fearing his master would be waiting dinner for him. Paul had no mind to allow his victim to escape thus easily, so he broke into a derisive laugh. Then, for the first time, Hans discovered that Robert and his friend were watching his movements, and he felt sure they had played him a trick.

"Where are my boots? you've taken them away," he called out.

"That's like your impudence, young fellow," said Paul, coming toward him, followed by Robert; "it's as good as calling us thieves. Take that for being so impertinent!" and he struck Hans a violent blow across the mouth.

As we know, Hans was out of temper, not only annoyed at the stranger, but vexed at losing his boots. He sprang on to Paul, and

before the latter could defend himself he was stretched full length on the grass.

"You coward! how dare you hit me?" he cried; "you're in my power now. Tell me where are my boots, or I will thrash you."

"Help me, help me!" screamed Paul. "Robert, he'll kill me."

"No, I shall not," answered Hans. "Give me your hand; I'm sorry I was in such a temper:" for a still small voice whispered, "Is that sticking to the Raft?"

"I really call that first-rate behaviour," said easy Robert, roused for once to have an opinion of his own. "He had you down, and no mistake, Paul. You'll find your boots under the rubbish heap, Hans."

"You shall answer for this," muttered Paul, slowly rising from the ground. "I will be revenged on you, Hans Richter. Paul Ebhardt generally remembers to pay off any grudge he owes. Come along, Robert."

Hans found his boots and socks, but it took him some minutes to shake off the dust and dirt with which they were covered; and thus he was fully a quarter of an hour late for dinner. The toll-master was busy with a customer, so that he made no comment on his want of punctuality.

The meal passed almost in silence, for the

lad was so busy with himself, and though his master addressed him once or twice he only replied in monosyllables.

It was Karl Schmidt's habit to spend half-an-hour with his mother after dinner, and latterly Hans had been admitted to the conference, and very much he valued the advice and counsel he received from the sick woman. On this day a friend came to see Karl, so Hans went up alone to the invalid.

"Oh, Frau Schmidt, may I tell you all—everything?" he asked, kneeling down by the side of her arm-chair.

"What have you to tell me?" she asked, passing her hands over the upturned face. "There has been something amiss to-day; you have been crying."

"And I'm sure you will say I ought to cry, dear frau, for I have been so very wicked. I am a regular hypocrite;" and Hans poured into her ears the history of the morning's adventures.

"Poor boy!" she said, kindly. "Yes, you have failed to stick to the Raft; you have forgotten to cling to the One who is mighty to save, and have allowed self to gain a victory. The hardest battle we have to fight in our Christian course is the battle with ourselves. We think we are doing great things, and then perhaps a rebuff comes, and, instead of searching into

motives and crying out for the Spirit of the living God to show us ourselves and bring us anew to Jesus, we grow angry and vexed that we are despised and misunderstood."

"Yes, yes; you are right, dear frau," said Hans, the tears coming afresh at the words he heard. "I was so angry with the stranger, and wounded because he scolded me."

"The next time you receive a rebuff contrast your trials with His who endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself—who was tempted in all points, and yet without sin. Pray for the indwelling of His Spirit when you try to do His work, and ever remember that when He was reviled, He reviled not again, but was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, and we hid as it were our faces from Him. We have many lessons to learn, which will only be learnt through tears; but they will be blessed tears, for 'they that sow in tears shall reap in joy.'"

Karl entered the room at this moment, and Hans made his escape, and left Frau Schmidt to explain to his master why he went away so abruptly.

"I am sorry all this has happened," remarked Karl, when he had heard the particulars. "I do not mean that I am sorry

Hans received a scolding from the man on the raft, for in the Master's service he must not expect all sunshine; but I am sorry he has provoked Paul Ebhardt, for that boy will not easily forget that he has for once been conquered."

CHAPTER V.

THE MARTYR SPIRIT.

HANS never found his days too long; he had lessons to learn when his master did not require his services, and besides this he practised shooting at the target. The festival was to be held in August, when the Burgomaster invited all the boys of Kösen to enter their names among the lists of competitors for his prize, and Karl Schmidt advised him to try for it, promising to give him instruction in archery.

The toll-keeper's cottage stood alone in a quiet nook, and behind it a pathway ran up a slope—which was richly carpeted with flowers and furze, with here and there an old tree standing—on to higher ground, where was a pretty pine-wood, with rustic seats placed in all directions for the accommodation of visitors. This

spot commanded a delightful view of the town of Kösen and its winding river.

Hans was able to set up his target behind the toll-house, and practise there under the superintendence of his master, who had shot well in his youthful days, and who not only gave him lessons in the art, but furnished his pupil with his own bow and arrows. No sort of teaching came amiss to Hans; he was naturally so clever that he soon mastered difficulties, for he gave his whole attention to whatever he undertook.

"They say that Hans Richter has entered his name on the list of competitors for the Burgomaster's prize," said Paul Ebhardt to his friend Robert. "Do you mean to let him win it away from you?"

"He is not likely to get it," answered Robert. "He is only a raw fellow from the forest who has had no practice; I'm not afraid of him."

"I say he means to win," said Paul. "I am told he has put his target on the low ground by the toll-house, and that he practises there every evening, and Karl Schmidt helps him. My father says Karl knows what he is about; some years ago he was the best shot in Kösen."

"For all that, I'm not afraid," replied Robert.

"Don't be such a dolt!" exclaimed his friend,

angrily. "I detest Hans, and I can't think what you mean by being so careless over your prize. I suppose if he wins it away from you, you will say, Thank you."

"No, indeed I shan't," answered Robert, with some spirit; "but," he added, more quietly, "he'll stand no chance, never fear."

"You don't know how well he shoots. Come with me this evening, and let us watch him, and then you will better understand that you will be beaten if you don't take care."

Accordingly that evening Paul and his friend secreted themselves behind a tree which stood very near to the target, where they could see, yet not be seen, without running any risk of being struck by a stray arrow.

It was well that Karl Schmidt was present, otherwise Paul would have done his best to excite his friend to pick a quarrel with Hans. Robert found that the arrows went near the bull's-eye, and even into its centre now and then—showing that Hans had a correct eye, and only needed to persevere in order to equal if not excel him. Every time he shot an arrow Paul whispered triumphantly, "I told you he would be a match for you." Yes, certainly Robert had a rival to fear.

When Hans and his master went into the cottage, the friends emerged from their hiding-

place. Paul's face expressed his gladness, for he saw that Robert was more annoyed and vexed than he had ever seen him before. So, instead of deriding his companion, he changed his tactics and began to pity him.

"Old fellow," he said, laying his hand on Robert's shoulder, "I'm sorry for you. He is sure to win, and you'll lose. It is a great shame that this fellow, who is a stranger in Kösen, should put himself forward and gain a prize from our Burgomaster, over one who belongs to our town."

"But he has not won it yet; and what is more, he shall not win it," said Robert—"that is, if I can beat him."

"You may try; but as sure as my name is Paul Ebhardt, so sure am I he'll win; so make up your mind to lose. His hand is more steady and his eye more correct than yours; he only wants practice."

"He will not win the prize," said Robert, confidently.

"He ought not to; but I am afraid he will succeed. I wish, with all my heart, we could contrive some means of preventing him from shooting in the match."

"Shall we go to the Burgomaster and say that he is a stranger here, and that we pray he will only permit our Kösen boys to compete?"

"No; that won't do exactly. The Burgomaster will tell you that he can make no rules of the kind. Perhaps I shall think of some other plan. I have to pay the rascal off for insulting me."

Paul felt he had a right to annoy Hans, and he wanted to be revenged on him,—forgetting he had in the first instance thrown down the gauntlet, and that, before that unfortunate encounter by the river-side, he had no real reason to dislike him.

It was on Saturday evening when the friends watched Hans Richter shoot; we will see in what spirit they awoke on Sunday morning.

Robert's first thoughts were these: "I'll lose no time, but practise hard, so that I may enter into fair competition with Richter—for, after all, he has as much right to try for the Burgomaster's prize as I have; but he is not going to succeed." Away from his friend he was more inclined to act fairly towards Hans.

Paul Ebhardt's waking thoughts were these: "That fellow, Richter, shall not have the prize if I can make him lose it. This shall be my revenge for his behaviour to me. I must try and work out some plan to prevent him from winning, for I see he is very anxious to be first; but how it's to be done I don't exactly know.

There are, fortunately, some days before the festival."

To Hans, this Sunday morning brought very different feelings. When he awoke, he remembered it was God's own day, and that he would hear the gospel of Jesus Christ preached in the old church; he would go to a Bible-class in the afternoon; and the remainder of the day would be spent with Frau Schmidt and his master.

The hours sped along only too quickly for him; and, as soon as he had taken afternoon coffee to the invalid and his master, he joined them, Bible in hand.

Frau Schmidt had been unusually well, and had enjoyed the beautiful summer day from her open window; the air was so still, the sun so bright, and the peace and rest of the scene without harmonised so well with the abiding sense of peace and rest which filled her own soul. Though she was unable to go beyond her bedroom, she was thankful to be able to sit in her comfortable arm-chair and enjoy the pretty landscape.

"I have something very interesting to read to you," said Karl Schmidt, as Hans entered the room; "you will be surprised to hear that it has to do with a fête and that I mean to give you a holiday to attend it."

"Thank you, sir; but please tell me some-

thing about the fête before you begin to read."

"It is called a 'cherry feast.' The reason why this name is given to it I will explain later."

"Where is it held, sir?"

"At Naumburg, a town about five miles from here. Thither many young men and maidens, as well as old folks and children, repair on the 28th of July. The name of John Huss, the great reformer, is associated with this fête. Do you know who he was?"

"No, sir."

"I thought, if you approved, mother, I would read Hans an account of this good man, because he will learn from it how much a true Christian can endure, who rests entirely on his Saviour."

"Do, Karl; I shall enjoy listening to it," answered Frau Schmidt. "John Huss was a very great man, and above all, great in his abounding love towards God. He cared not for prison, nor chains, nor mockings. His persecutors could not hurt his soul, however much they might inflict pain on his body. Read on, Karl."

"John Huss was born at Hussinecz, a town on the borders of Bavaria, in July, 1369. His parents were poor, and he was early accustomed to do hard work and take very sparingly of food. At the age of twenty-seven he entered the university of Prague, and at the close of the 14th

century became confessor to Sophia, Queen of Bohemia, and preacher in what was called the Bethlehem Chapel, attached to the university.

"Wycliffe, who has been justly styled the greatest of all reformers before the Reformation, was at this time creating a formidable revolution in the religious life of England and Scotland by his preaching and writing; nor was it long before this new teaching penetrated to the Continent, and spread even into Bohemia, where it stirred the spirits of some good men. Among the number was John Huss, who said, when speaking of the effect of these writings of Wycliffe on his mind, 'I am drawn to them by the manner in which they strive to lead all men back to Christ.'

"In the year 1414 Huss was charged with teaching heresy, and summoned by the Emperor Sigismund to appear before the Council of Constance. He obeyed the summons, and went in the strength of God, having besought of his Heavenly Father wisdom to answer his accusers and strength to remain firm to his Saviour. The Emperor furnished him with a letter to ensure his safe-conduct; and, accompanied by several friends, he set out to Constance, and reached that town on the 3rd of November.

"He was permitted to remain unmolested during four weeks; and that time he employed

in freely explaining his opinions and entreating to be heard publicly. But such was not the intention of his enemies, for on the 28th of November he was thrown into a dungeon; nor did the Emperor interfere, in spite of his promise, beyond procuring poor Huss a more airy prison.

"For seven months he remained in confinement, and during this period his health became greatly impaired from the rigorous treatment he received at the hands of his tormentors. In the month of June he was brought before the Council, and ordered to abjure errors which he had never believed. Nor was it only on one occasion, for four times did Huss appear before these cruel men. 'How can I abjure what I never held?' he asked repeatedly.

"After his fourth appearance the Council gave him a choice of two things—recantation or death; and sent him back to prison to deliberate as to which of the two he would accept.

"But Huss needed no time for deliberation; he made his choice when he determined to know only Christ, and Him crucified; and he never proved false to his Master, though his friends entreated him to save his life at any cost. 'I write in prison and chains,' he says in a letter to some friends, 'expecting tomorrow to receive sentence of death, but full of

hope in God that I shall not swerve from the truth, nor abjure errors imputed to me by false witnesses.'

"The sentence of death was soon passed upon John Huss. It was read to him in the presence of the Emperor and Council. The persecuted man fell on his knees, and cried, 'Lord Jesus, forgive my enemies. Thou knowest I have been falsely accused by them; forgive them for the sake of Thy great mercy.'

"His persecutors answered this prayer with loud laughter and shouts of derision, which followed him even to the place of execution. When he was heavily laden with chains and led to the stake, he exclaimed, 'I willingly wear these for Christ's sake, who bore still more grievous ones."

"Before the fire was kindled he was again besought to recant. 'What error should I recant,' he cried, 'when I am conscious of none? The chief aim of my preaching has been to teach men repentance and the forgiveness of sins, according to the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ.'

"So the fire was kindled, and the smoke and flames rose around him; but in the midst of it all his voice was heard, and these were his words: 'Jesus, Son of the living God, have mercy on me.'"

Hans drew a deep sigh when Karl closed the little book from which he had been reading.

"What a grand death to die!" he said; "it reminds me of the martyr Stephen. I've been reading about him to-day. He fell asleep in Jesus after he had cried with a loud voice, 'Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.' I wonder if I could forgive my enemies like that!"

"Yes, my dear boy, you could, if you were sticking to the Raft," said Frau Schmidt. "The law of forgiveness was taught these good men by their blessed Master, and they were His followers. Methinks that Master's words were yet ringing in the ears of Stephen, 'Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.' He found it no hard task to pray, as did his Lord, that his cruel tormentors might be forgiven."

"I see it all," answered Hans; "mother's words must be felt in my heart if I mean them to come out in my life. I must really 'stick to the Raft' so tightly that God's promises will be mine. But, sir, I don't quite understand what the death of John Huss has to do with the fête."

"I am going to tell you now," answered Karl; "I only waited until my mother had spoken. In the year 1482, Procopius, the wild

leader of the Hussites, came with his army to Naumburg, and besieged the city, because Bishop Gerhard of that town, who was a member of the Council of Constance, was one of the men who condemned the noble Huss to be burnt at the stake. He was induced to raise the siege by the entreaties of the children, who flocked to his camp, and prayed him to depart and leave them in peace. So earnestly did these young ones plead, that Procopius heard them, and promised to withdraw his army. Nor did he send the children away empty, for he gave them a liberal supply of cherries; hence this event is commemorated by what is called 'the cherry feast.'"

"How much I shall like to go! I suppose it is very gay at Naumburg. What do the people do?" said Hans.

"You shall see for yourself," replied his master. "And now come, my boy, let us stroll along the river-side this beautiful summer evening."

CHAPTER VI.

THE PROMISED HOLIDAY.

THE 28th of July came on the following Thursday. Hans counted the days, nay, almost the hours, which must intervene; he longed so much to see what the cherry feast was like. The special train which left Kösen at mid-day was not to return until late in the evening; for fireworks were to conclude the entertainment, and they could not be let off until after nine o'clock.

Hans was dressed in a new suit of clothes, a present from his master. Karl was growing increasingly fond of him; he had never met his equal before, and was fast forgetting the relations they bore to one another. The lad was growing to be more like an adopted son than a hired servant.

"I have come to show myself in my new suit," said Hans, after tapping at Frau Schmidt's door to ascertain if he might enter. "Isn't it a nice one? it fits capitally. Oh, I am so happy, dear frau, I have such a kind master; and I love you so much—you seem to help me on my way."

The invalid smiled kindly on the boy. "I'm glad I help you, my dear," she replied; "it's

HANS IN HIS NEW SUIT.

pleasant for a sick woman to know she is some use in God's world. Yes, Hans, even I have my work to do, or my Master would call me hence. Perhaps it is to cheer and strengthen you on in your pilgrimage; but I will not sermonise to-day, but wish that you may enjoy yourself, and remember you can do so and yet stick to the Raft."

Hans reached the railway-station in good time, and before the train started some hundred and fifty young people and children, with a sprinkling of old folks, were gathered on the platform. Among the number were Paul Ebhardt and Robert Klein. Hans had not spoken to the former since their quarrel by the river-side, and the latter had only addressed him once, and then it was to say, "How could you attack Paul? He hates you now, and will not forgive you in a hurry."

Naumburg is pleasantly situated in the valley of the Saale; it lies in the midst of vine-covered hills: for this is one of the most northerly places in Europe where the vine is cultivated, though the wine it produces is little better than vinegar. An old wall runs round part of the town, which contains some fine streets and handsome public buildings. Just without the wall is a meadow in which the Friedens Hügel, or Hill of Peace, stands,

where Procopius pitched his camp, and where the children flocked to entreat him to spare their beloved city.

The fête was unusually well attended. There were sports of all kinds, which lasted through the day, and into which the young people entered heartily, while their parents sat under the trees and looked on.

Hans enjoyed the fun intensely. It was quite a new scene for this forest boy. He came across Paul and Robert several times, but they seemed quite as anxious as he was to avoid any intercourse; indeed, only Robert returned the nod which Hans gave when he recognised them on the platform. Nor were refreshments forgotten; various places were established in different parts of the meadow where a good supper could be had, and cherries abounded. It seemed as if all the old women in Naumburg had turned out, so many were there, with baskets full of cherries, from which they filled plates and offered them for sale at the rate of an English halfpenny per plate.

Hans had money given to him by his master for refreshment, and he very soon settled what he should eat. There was an old man who had taken up his position in a quiet corner, just within the wooden paling that ran on one side of the meadow; he sold hot sausages,

and to him the lad repaired when he felt hungry.

The old man was bent with age, but looked shrewd and quite competent to execute the work he had undertaken. He had a strange sort of cooking-stove; he put twelve bricks side by side, on to a wooden table, and made a fire on them, so that the gridiron could stand on the hot embers and thus keep the sausages simmering; while some rolls and half-a-dozen plates were ranged round the bricks to be in readiness for customers.

Hans entered into conversation with him, for it so happened no other customer was waiting to be served; thus he learnt that the old man earned his living by going about the country selling sausages.

"It's a hard life, young master," he said, "and sometimes I long for a room where I may end my days; but the money doesn't come in fast enough for that. I can just manage to get a living, and that's all. But I thank my God for His great mercy to me. If I grow down-hearted I think of my dear Jesus, who said, 'Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head,' and that comforts me."

"You stick to the Raft, I can see," answered

Hans, and then he explained what he meant by these words. Afterwards they chatted about the different fêtes the old man had in prospect, and the latter said he expected to be at the Schutzen Fest, and that he went to it every year because he always did a brisk trade after the match was over. "The exercise seems to give them all an appetite," he added; "and even those who don't take any part in the shooting, but only look on, get very hungry. Sometimes I stay at Kösen for several days."

On hearing this Hans told his new friend his name, where he lived, what a good master he had, and that he was practising at the target every day, for he meant to try and win the Burgomaster's prize. "I shall be sure to find you out at the festival," continued the boy, "and I will recommend all the people I know to buy sausages of you, for I've taken a great liking to you."

"So have I to you," replied the old man, shaking the hand that Richter held out to him. "Good-bye."

Just as Hans was saying the last words, Robert and his friend came up.

"Has that fellow been eating sausages?" asked Paul, pointing to Hans, and addressing the old man.

"Yes; and a nice, civil-spoken young lad he is."

"Smooth-tongued enough, I dare say," sneered Paul. "Give me three sausages, and my friend wants three."

The old man was so accustomed to hear rough words that he made no reply, but busied himself in preparing the sausages, while the boys sat down and watched him.

"Robert, I've a splendid idea just come into my head—how odd that I never thought of it before! I see how we can pay Hans off," said Paul. "I've been worrying and worrying to no purpose; but now I've got it, and no mistake. When the fireworks are let off, in the darkness we may thrust a squib which is fired into his hand, and that'll give him such a dose that he won't be able to shoot at the festival."

"But it will hurt him," answered Robert; "and though I want the prize, I should be ashamed to be such a coward as to injure another to gain my own end. Richter has as good a right to try and win as I have. No, no, Paul; I'm not quite such a bad fellow as that."

"I've no patience with you!" exclaimed Paul, angrily. "You may go your own way,

and lose the prize. Here come the sausages; let us eat them while they are hot."

The old man had not been too much engrossed with his cooking to listen to what Paul and Robert said; he noted every word that passed, and resolved to look out for Hans and warn him to be careful not to go near any boys who had squibs, and also to tell him of the conversation he had overheard. But the customers came so fast that he was too full of business to carry out his kind intention, for the shades of evening were falling before the last one was served, and then the fireworks began, and the old man dared not venture into the crowd which had gathered at the lower end of the meadow.

When Paul found Robert so averse to his plan of revenge, he determined to part company with him, and carry out his scheme alone; so he made the excuse of wishing to see some particular friends, and promised to meet him at the station when the fireworks were over. He had been so accustomed all his life to do just what pleased him best, without heeding if it were right or wrong, that he gloried in the cleverness of his plot, only regretting that he had mentioned it to Robert.

There was a great concourse of people round

the ring from whence the rockets, wheels, and other pretty devices were let off; and at the same time a few boys began letting off squibs, though it had been strictly forbidden by the authorities.

Hans was standing at the edge of the crowd lost in wonder, for he had never seen such a display before, when he felt something thrust into his left hand which exploded almost instantaneously; but in the explosion he was severely burnt. Just at this moment came the grand finale, which closed the evening's entertainment; and the shouting and clapping was so noisy that the report of the squib was not noticed, and it fortunately harmed no one else.

In the first few moments Hans was bewildered, and scarcely realised what had happened; he was only conscious of sharp pain in his hand. The crowd dispersed quickly, and he knew the train would start almost immediately, so he wrapped it in his handkerchief, and, trying to bear the pain as he best could, walked to the station and jumped into the first carriage. His condition excited the attention of his fellow-travellers, and induced many questions; every one had some particular remedy to recommend, but poor Hans paid little heed to their words; he sat still, holding

his wounded left hand with his right, and suffering too much to be able to enter into conversation. At last he reached home, and found his master standing outside the toll-house awaiting his arrival.

"I've had an accident, sir," he said, trying to speak cheerfully. "I'm afraid my hand is very much burnt;" and then he remembered no more until he returned to consciousness, and found himself stretched on his bed, for thither Karl Schmidt had carried him in a fainting condition.

"You'll soon be better, my boy. You're a brave fellow to come home alone after such an accident," said his master. "I expect the pain was too much for you to bear. You have a nasty burn. How did it happen? But perhaps you had better not tell me until to-morrow, you look so pale. I've wrapped your hand in cotton wool; let it stay on until you see the doctor, and be very careful that the air does not get to it."

"I feel quite comfortable now, sir, and able to talk. I wish I could tell you how it happened. I only know I felt as if some one forced a squib into my hand which went off directly."

"It must have been a pure accident. I don't think any boy would be so cruel as to harm

another for amusement," remarked Karl. "The authorities ought to punish the rascals who dare to let off squibs. I know this is not the first time some one has been hurt. You must show your hand to the doctor early to-morrow morning. I am afraid you will have no more shooting for many days to come."

"Won't it soon be well, sir? I did not think that I should lose the chance of the prize because of this burn."

"And don't think of it now; but go to sleep, and try to forget you have been hurt."

Next day Hans paid an early visit to the doctor, who pronounced that the hand must be put into a sling, it was so much injured, and would require care for some weeks.

The boy went slowly home, feeling thoroughly depressed and ill. The world and his prospects looked very gloomy; he could not work—for how could he push rafts over the weir with one hand? and perhaps his master would dismiss him if he did not get well quickly; and last, though not least, there was the shooting match coming on, and he would be unable to join in it, and that was a sore disappointment. In the short walk from the doctor's house to the toll-master's cottage, Hans managed to conjure up all kinds of dismal

things: so is it that we often make troubles before they really exist.

Karl was in his mother's room when Richter appeared in sight. He called him from the window to come up, for Frau Schmidt was anxious to hear the doctor's opinion.

"You look as if you had all the cares of the world on your shoulders, Hans," he exclaimed, when he saw the boy's face. "What's the matter?"

Hans tried to speak in a clear, unconcerned tone, but his voice failed, and he burst into tears instead.

"Come, don't be so downhearted," said Karl. "It will only be a matter of a few weeks; you will not learn idle habits in that time. In fact, you can work all the same; we shall only change places: you must take the tolls, and I will look after the rafts. Why, I used to do both in former days—levy the duty on the raft, and afterwards help it over the weir!"

"Then you will keep me on, sir, even if my hand is a long time getting well?"

"Certainly. This explains why you look so dismal; you thought I should turn you away because you could not work. Why, Hans, I hoped you knew me better."

"His faith in you has only failed for the moment," said Frau Schmidt. "Hans feels ill,

and his depression of body dims his trust in you. My dear boy, it is an old, old fault—this want of faith; would that it did not run through our lives. In your walk home from the doctor's you have lost the Raft, and in losing the Raft you have conjured up doubts and difficulties which have no foundation."

"Mother, mother, you are in a higher world than we are," replied Karl. "Poor Hans has not reached it, and I am sure I have not; nevertheless, would that we were as patient and trustful as you are. You see the boy has another cause of disappointment which you have not thought of, perhaps: he will be unable to shoot at the match."

"And I lose my lessons from you, sir," added Hans, in a doleful voice; "and I did so enjoy having them every evening."

"I hope they will be renewed some day. My dear boy, I am a stern teacher when I bid you rouse up to see your mercies, and be thankful for your many blessings," answered Frau Schmidt. "Are you only going to stick to the Raft when the sun is high and the water smooth? You must take all your disappointments in life as part of the education which is to fit you for a higher and better world."

Hans smiled through his tears as the invalid

spoke. He felt ashamed of murmuring over his temporary sickness when he contrasted it with her days, weeks, months, nay, years of continuous suffering. He had only time to say, "Thank you, dear frau, for your advice," for his master exclaimed, "There are a couple of rafts in sight. We had better go down, Hans; the men are pushing along as if they are in a hurry to pay toll and pass over the weir. Can you take the money?"

"Oh yes, sir, quite well," replied the lad, hurrying away after his master.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SECRET.

After Paul had shaken off his companion, he accomplished, as we know, his cruel purpose, and according to appointment joined Robert after the fireworks were over. He was careful not to run across Hans, as he did not wish to tell his friend what he had done until the following morning; for Paul was sure that he *was* revenged on Hans when he heard the exclamation of intense pain which escaped him before he had time to glide away.

"Let me see you first thing to-morrow," said Paul, when he parted from Robert, just after they had passed the bridge. "I've some work to finish off, but shall be ready by ten o'clock; I want to tell you something."

"Tell me now."

"I'm afraid there are too many people about. It's a great secret. To-morrow is time enough. Good night."

Robert wondered for a few moments what secret Paul could have to tell him; but he forgot all about it when he reached home, for he had to give an account of his day spent at Naumberg to his mother and sisters, who had not ventured to the fête.

The next morning Robert was taking his coffee in the kitchen with the rest of the family, except his father, who came in before the meal was ended.

"I've been talking to Karl Schmidt," he said, "and didn't know it was so late. Did you hear of an accident which happened to young Hans last night?" he asked his son.

"No, father."

"He managed to get his left hand badly burnt by a squib; and what is very odd about the accident is, that he felt the squib was pushed into his hand, and then it exploded."

Robert turned pale, and red. No one was

observing him, for all eyes were fixed on the miller, so he had time to regain his self-possession; and right glad was he that a customer came to see his father on business, and he was able to make his escape.

Robert was not a bad boy at heart, nor would he ever have injured another in the cruel manner in which Paul had injured Hans. He was appalled at what he had heard, and all that was noble in his character rose up for the moment in judgment against Paul. He walked quickly away from the mill, and took the back road into the town, nor did he slacken his pace until he reached Herr Ebhardt's house. He found his friend stitching away diligently in a little parlour at the back of his father's shop.

"You're early, old fellow," said Paul, scarcely looking up from his work; "but I've nearly done, and then we'll go as far as the Hümmel-reich, for I've to take this coat home to a customer who lives on the way."

"All right; I'll wait outside until you're ready," replied Robert.

As he passed into the street again, he found himself face to face with Hans, who was going to the doctor. He looked pale and ill, very different to the bright lad of the previous day.

Robert could not help stopping him, and

asking, in a concerned tone, "Is your hand very bad? I heard from my father that you met with an accident last night."

"It's very bad," answered Hans; "dreadfully burnt. Good-bye, I'm going to see the doctor."

Robert was thoroughly unhinged; though he was really innocent, he felt in some degree guilty, and he was glad when Paul joined him, for he was most anxious to hear his secret, and was sure that it had some connection with the accident that had befallen Hans.

"Now for your secret," he said to Paul.

"Wait a bit; let's get up the Hümmelreich."

"It will take us a good half-hour to walk there, and I want to hear what you've got to say," urged Robert, impatiently.

"Gently, old fellow; we've plenty of time before us; it's a jolly morning for an outing. Let us get rid of the coat, and then we'll enjoy ourselves. You will be right glad to hear what I've got to tell you."

"I know what it is before you speak, and I call it a wicked shame of you to hurt a fellow as you've hurt Hans. I've a great mind to tell of you, that I have!" burst out Robert.

The boys were out of the village and walking through a field when he spoke thus angrily.

"What do you mean?" asked Paul, scowling at his companion.

"Why, I mean that I've a great mind to tell every one in Kösen that it was you who put the squib into the hand of poor Hans, and that you did it out of revenge."

There was something so resolute in Robert's face, and so different from the idle, careless expression it usually wore, that Paul felt a little afraid, for he was a coward at heart.

"Oh, Robert, how can you be so unkind! it was all for you I did it; and now you find fault with me;" and his voice trembled as if he were about to cry.

"It wasn't all for me, and you know that, Paul; you hate Hans, and you made up your mind to pay him off after he tripped you up; but you've gone too far this time, and what's more, I think you've put me in such a corner that I can't shoot for the prize this year."

"Not shoot, Robert!" answered Paul, standing still in his astonishment; "you don't mean what you say. Why, I've made it an easy matter for you. Now, old fellow, shake hands, and tell me you're glad I got rid of your rival thus. He would certainly have come off conqueror, so you must thank me, for I'm a true friend to you; and, really, if I hadn't been so

fond of you I shouldn't have interfered, but suffered Hans to win."

"I'm not so sure he would have won; and I declare I'd rather he had beaten than see him look so ill."

"When did you see him?"

"A few minutes ago; he was on his way to the doctor's."

"Then he is really hurt?"

"How can you ask me that question? you know he is, Paul. It was nothing but revenge that made you push the squib into his hand; I see it in your face, you look so spiteful."

"What's come to you to-day, Robert? I tell you what it is, you may try me too far. You're my friend, and I'm your friend, but I can't stand being preached at. Now, let's forget this little difference; what is done can't be undone; and, remember, if I have acted unkindly to Hans, it was all for you, so don't blame me. I'll just run in, and leave this coat at yonder house, and then we'll go on to the Hümmel-reich, as we are so near, and be jolly for the rest of the way."

This pretty spot derives its name from the great beauty of its situation. It merely consists of a little hotel built on a flat hill-top, which commands the valley of the Saale at a point where the river makes a bend in the shape of

a horse-shoe. On the opposite side are the ruins of two old castles, the Rudolsburg and the Saalech; while, as far as the eye can reach, little villages with their quaint old churches lie nestling among the trees of this highly-cultivated valley, and thus add to the picturesqueness of the scene.

Robert was not convinced, but he nevertheless accompanied Paul on to the Hümmel-reich, which was not thronged with visitors so early in the day. The friends spent a couple of hours pleasantly, for there was a target, so that Robert was able to practise for the festival, and Paul stood by and praised him. They only left off in time to reach home by one o'clock, and, as Paul was going out with his father, they parted at Herr Ebhardt's door, and made no plans for the evening.

"Ain't we just as good friends as ever?" Paul asked Robert, as they entered the village.

"Oh yes," he replied.

But though Robert answered Paul in the affirmative, he was oppressed and out of spirit, and could not resist taking a stroll in the direction of the toll-house after dinner; he had no definite object in view beyond a sort of restless feeling to see Hans.

The latter was sitting outside the door with a book on his knee, looking very pale, and

with his left arm in a sling. He was so absorbed in the contents of his volume that he started when Robert addressed him in these words: "I'm so sorry you're hurt. I am alone this afternoon, and thought I would come and see if I could do anything for you."

Hans was very much surprised, but Robert seemed so thoroughly in earnest, that he answered: "Thank you; no one can help me bear the pain, but it is very kind of you to think of me. My master does not mind my being idle until I am better. It would be much worse if I were thrown out of my place."

"What are you reading out of? you seem to have got a queer old book there," asked Robert, by way of continuing the conversation.

"Queer outside, perhaps," replied Hans, "but the inside is all gold."

"Let me see it."

Hans opened his father's old Bible.

"Why, it's a Bible!" exclaimed Robert, in a tone of disappointment. "I thought it was something very particular."

"So it is," answered Hans; "if you will sit down I will read you a few verses that are worth more than thousands of sovereigns."

At another time Robert would have laughed, and jeered, and perhaps run away, but he was softened towards Hans, and wanted to show

him some attention, so he quietly sat down on the door-step by his side.

Hans felt sure his master would not be angry at his speaking to Robert when he told him that he had an opportunity of bidding him stick to the Raft; so he turned over the pages of his Bible to find a suitable passage to read, and in that moment he asked God to help him for Christ's sake to say something to Robert that would make him think.

"I declare it is difficult to settle what to read to you, there are so many beautiful things in this book; but, of course, you know your Bible?" said Hans.

"I can't say I'm much up to it," replied his companion.

"But you read it, or hear it read, every day, don't you?"

"No, I don't; please go on where you were reading when I came up."

"I had just got to these words: 'A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.' I will read the chapter through."

"You read splendidly," said Robert, at its conclusion; "where did you learn?"

"In our village, and in the forest. My mother was a very good scholar, and I'm so . of learning. My master gives me lessons

every evening. Are not those grand words, 'A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another'? Oddly enough, you were in my thoughts when I first read them—I mean just before you spoke to me."

"I! how?"

"I will tell you. I have been practising hard at the target, and meant to try for the Burgomaster's prize, which you have won for the last two years. My master said that you had no rival to fear in Kösen, and that the Burgomaster wished to find another who would compete with you; for though many boys usually entered their names on the list, it was only for the pleasure of being mixed up with the fête, but with no chance of success. My master found I had a steady hand and a correct eye, so he lent me his bow and arrows, and I have been practising regularly with him every evening; and I think I had a fair chance of winning the prize; but this morning the doctor said that I should be unable to use my hand for at least three weeks, and, as you know, the Schutzen Fest comes off in eight days. I was very jealous of you this morning, and inclined to murmur and rebel because I could not use my hand; but, thank God, the feeling is passing away, for it came into my mind that if I were to encourage it I should break Christ's

commandment, and shut out love, for love and jealousy cannot live together; and, Robert, I had rather stick to the Raft than win the prize."

Robert looked his astonishment, and Hans explained his meaning, and added: "Christ gave Himself for us—that was His love; and He asks us in return to give ourselves to Him. Will you give yourself to Him? I shall bear my pain and disappointment without murmuring if any words which I have read out of God's book make you think about Him, for I shall remember that you would not have spoken to me if you had not been sorry for my accident, and that it was because you knew I was in pain that you took the trouble to come here to see me."

Robert could scarcely bear these words, they made him inclined to tell Hans the whole truth, but the fear of Paul kept him silent, and right glad was he to see Karl Schmidt walking towards them.

"Your master is coming," he said; "I had better be off; I know he will not care to see me here, so good-bye. I dare say I shall come again soon to hear how you are getting on."

And Robert walked away in a more thoughtful mood than usual; there was something so manly and noble about Hans, he was so differ-

ent to his chosen friend Paul. He felt a few pricks of conscience too when he recalled the words which Hans had spoken about the Burgomaster's prize. "I wish Paul hadn't interfered," he muttered, "that I do, with all my heart; I would rather have been beaten fairly than win and carry about the secret knowledge that if it hadn't been for Ebhardt's cowardly behaviour to Hans we should have tried our luck together. And to think of his saying that he didn't mind the pain if it made me stick to the Raft; that beat's all."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SCHUTZEN FEST.

ROBERT could not shake off the impression which Hans had produced upon him, and he did not awake in a very good humour with himself next morning. When he met Paul he entered at once upon the subject which engrossed his thoughts, and ended by saying: "I've almost made up my mind not to shoot. I feel as if I were a great rascal to stand up before the people of Kösen and carry away the prize, knowing what I do."

Paul was very angry. "I tell you what it is, Robert," he replied, "I've had enough of this sort of thing. If you don't shoot, I declare I'll go to Hans and tell him you pushed the squib into his hand because you didn't want him to shoot against you."

"You dare not, Paul; but if you were to be so wicked it would be easy for me to tell the truth about you."

"One against the other, my boy. My word is as good as yours; we are known as close friends in Kösen. But now, Robert, don't be stupid; I shall be all right if you will just shoot for the prize, and win it, and that will make an end of the matter; and to show you that I am sorry I have vexed you, I promise I will never tease Hans again. Don't let us fall out; we are old chums, and Kösen boys, and it wouldn't sound well if we were to give evidence against one another; nor would your parents, or even mine, care to have this affair made a matter of talk in the town."

Robert was afraid to refuse Paul's terms; and so he tried to forget that Hans had been ill-used, nor did he call on him again before the Schutzen Fest. Paul felt secretly thankful he had constrained his friend to keep silence; for, bad as he was, he did not relish the affair being sifted, so certain was he that if the truth were

made public even he would feel uncomfortable and cowed by the black looks which he knew his companions and acquaintances would cast upon him. His fear was for himself; he was not ashamed of his sin.

The market-place in Kösen consists of a clump of green trees which stand in the high street, and this was the meeting-place of those who competed for the Burgomaster's prize.

Kösen put on its gayest appearance for the fête; the day was exquisite, the sky blue, and the air still; flags were flying in all directions, and parents and children appeared in their holiday attire.

The shooting began at four o'clock. Long before that hour there was quite a crowd in the market-place waiting for the band to come and strike up the national air, which was a signal for the twenty boys who competed for the prize to form themselves into a double column. Each of the boys carried his own bow and arrows and wore a scarlet cap wreathed with oak-leaves.

The marker led the way, dressed in a scarlet tunic, white trousers, and a cap with a plume of many colours; the band came next, then banners carried by boys, and lastly the twenty competitors for the prize. In this order they proceeded to the Burgomaster's house. He

awaiting their arrival arrayed in his robes of office; and now he took the lead, and marched away in the direction of the bridge. Instead of crossing it, the procession turned off to the right, passed the mill, and onwards until it reached the Katze—a pretty, elevated spot covered with green trees, with the Saale running a few feet below. Here many chairs and tables were ranged; and there were temporary tents erected where refreshments could be had, for most of the company remained to supper after the shooting was over.

Every one of the twenty competitors shot twelve arrows, and if the bull's-eye were hit the marker signified the fact by dancing in front of the target, flag in hand, while at the same moment a gun fired.

Robert was quite himself; the excitement of the scene made him forget everything but his own enjoyment and importance. He did not meet Hans on the way, so he had nothing to damp his pleasure.

Paul was as close to his friend as the rules permitted, for only those who competed for the prize were allowed to enter the ring.

The boys shot better than on the previous year, but Robert shot the best, and so to him the prize was awarded. He had to come before the Burgomaster, who complimented him on

ROBERT WINS THE PRIZE.

his skill, and crowned him with a wreath of laurel-leaves; afterwards he presented a drinking-cup to him mounted in silver. When this ceremony was concluded the Burgomaster returned home, and Robert became the hero of the evening. At ten o'clock the band left the orchestra in order to conduct him home, and a large concourse of young friends and acquaintances accompanied him, lighting the way with their many coloured lanterns, and shouting, "Hoch, Hoch" (Hurrah).

The music ceased when the mill was reached, and amid renewed shouts Robert entered his father's house, and the rest of his friends dispersed to their several homes, save Paul, for Robert could not spare him; he wanted to chat over the events of the day with his friend, and to express his surprise at not seeing Hans Richter. But even Paul bade him "Good night" as soon as he found there was company in the kitchen, for he did not care to face kind Pastor Hahn, who was chatting with the miller and his wife. When he caught sight of him through the open door he whispered to Robert: "Good night, old fellow. I shall slip off, for I don't care to have a lecture from the minister to-night. Come to me in the morning."

"All hail to the conqueror!" exclaimed the pastor, as Robert entered the kitchen.

"You shot well, my boy," said his father; "better than usual, I thought."

"And you had an easy victory," added Pastor Hahn; "you had no competitor. I think you would have found your match if Hans Richter had been able to try his skill. Poor fellow! I have been so sorry for him; he set his heart on shooting for the prize. At the same time, I must say I never saw a lad take his disappointment so well. Ah, Robert, would that you had the same strong principle to guide you that Hans has. It is such a mystery how that lad met with his accident; I confess from his account it seems to me as if some one had thrust the squib into his hand out of sheer mischief, or even revenge; and—"

"Hold up your cup, Robert," called out the miller; "you will drop your prize. My boy, you are tired out, you look deadly pale. Now your colour is returning: I thought you were going to faint. Get your supper, and go to bed at once."

"I've had enough to eat, thank you, father," answered Robert; "but I will go to bed, for I am very tired; so good night all. Good night, Pastor Hahn."

"Good night," said the pastor, taking the hand Robert stretched out to him, and holding it in his own. "You have won an earthly prize

to-day; how I wish you would be as eager in striving to win a heavenly prize. God has given us many prizes, but the greatest and best is His Son, and I fear you despise this prize. The day will come when your Father in heaven will ask why you have neglected your Saviour; what answer will you give then?"

"The lad is too tired to think to-night, good pastor," said the miller; "don't damp his pleasure by a long sermon."

"It seems to me as if it were never the right moment to speak to you of those things which make for our everlasting salvation," answered the pastor, sadly: for he was rarely permitted to enlarge on the theme he loved so well within those walls; and yet he did not cease his visits, hoping that the seed he dropped from time to time would, by the Spirit's blessing, bear fruit at last.

Robert went to bed, but not to sleep; now that the excitement was over, and Paul away from him, he began to be uncomfortable again. He would willingly have relinquished his prize if he could have undone the cruel injury which Paul had inflicted on Hans. He tossed about his bed, wondering why he could not sleep, for he never remembered lying awake for five before; but turn as he might he got

no real rest, for if he fell asleep he dreamed of terrible things, and was thankful to awake and find them unreal. He was very glad to see morning dawn, and watch the sun rise, for he did not feel quite so miserable as during the long hours of the night.

Hans was not present at the Schutzen Fest, for a very good reason. He and his master had fully determined to go, but at the last moment several rafts came along, and the men were anxious to pay duty on their wood and start forward at once. As soon as they had been attended to another delay came: a friend from Naumburg called to see Karl; so, as his master was engaged, Hans went quietly upstairs to chat with Frau Schmidt.

"Not gone!" she said, when he entered her room; "surely, dear boy, you are not smarting so much under your disappointment that you cannot see another win!"

"No, dear frau, but we've been so busy, and now my master's engaged, and I feel very tired. There is really no other reason why I do not go. I could see Robert win, and not be one bit jealous of him. I have had a battle to fight, nevertheless," he added, smiling, "so don't think me better than I am. It's sticking to the Raft, dear frau, that enabled me to think quietly of Robert's carrying off a prize

that might have been mine. I seem to understand better since this struggle has passed away how easily those who have no Raft to cling to may commit any sin to gain their ends."

"You are quite right, Hans; had you encouraged the feeling of jealousy, it might have grown so fast that it would have mastered you at last. Christ's new commandment carried out into daily life is the best cure for the indulgence of sin."

"There is an old man coming to the fest to-day," Hans said, after a pause, "in whom I am much interested; he is such a fine, manly Christian, and yet so poor. I cannot forget my talk with him, though I have never told you about it;" and Hans gave Frau Schmidt an account of his conversation with the old man who sold sausages, adding, "I must try and find him out to-morrow; he told me he intended to spend a few days at Kösen."

"There is a sort of freemasonry between Christians," answered Frau Schmidt. "I hope you may find him; I should like to see him if I am tolerably well."

Hans little thought when he spoke about the old man how much he was engrossing the thoughts of the latter. Among the spectators who watched the shooting was Franz Nieper, the seller of sausages. He arranged his ap-

paratus some little distance from the ring, but in a good position for trade, and when the attention of all was directed to the competitors for the Burgomaster's prize he also joined the crowd and watched the progress of the match. He recognised one face inside the ring, and one just without. He would have known Robert and Paul anywhere; their countenances were impressed on his memory. He looked about in vain for another face he expected to see—a pleasant one, which had smiled on him, and given him cheery words; but though he looked again and again at the twenty boys wearing scarlet caps he could not find it. At length he ventured to make a remark to a pretty, bright-looking girl who stood beside him looking on:

"I thought the lad who lives with the toll-master was going to try his luck," he said.

"So he was," replied the maiden, who happened to be one of the miller's daughters; "but he has had an accident and burnt his hand."

"How did it happen?"

"He was at the cherry feast at Naumburg, and some of the rough boys of the town began letting off squibs, though it is forbidden by the authorities; and in some way, I don't know how, Hans Richter got hold of a squib, which went off in his hand and hurt him dreadfully. He's

getting better now, but is not well enough to shoot."

"Who's likely to win the day?"

"I don't know for certain, but I think my brother, for he's the best shot in Kösen. They do say that if Hans had been able to shoot Robert might have lost the prize."

"Where is your brother Robert?"

"There, standing close to that large tree," replied the girl, pointing to one of the faces Franz had recognised.

"And the boy talking to him, who is he?"

"That's Paul Ebhardt, his greatest friend."

"Where do you live?"

"At the mill."

"And where does Paul Ebhardt live?"

"In the town; his father is a master tailor. But why do you ask so many questions, do you want any help? you look so very old, and seem very poor."

"Yes, young girl, I am both old and poor," replied Franz; "but I don't require help, for my Master never forgets me, and He can send me all the help I want. Thank you for answering my questions;" and the old man turned away.

He walked slowly back to his wooden table, and attended to his fire, muttering, "Poor lad, poor lad, I'm so sorry for him! I wish I'd

left my sausages and found him. Well, well, it can't be helped now, but old Franz must try and set wrong right."

He seated himself on his wooden stool, nor did he rise when a great noise of shouting announced that the prize was won. He made no comment when he heard Robert Klein was the victor, he merely stamped on the ground impatiently, and then he seemed to remember that such a feeling was wrong, for he said aloud: "That won't do, Franz; that's not the way to set wrong right; be a Christian, and just do the Master's work, and copy Him. Did He ever grow impatient?"

When customers came, the old man was calm as before, and served them with the care he generally exercised; but all the time he was thinking, and the results of his meditations were comprised in these words, which fell from his lips before he lay down upon a heap of straw in an out-house: "To-morrow morning, the first thing you do, Franz, must be to go to the toll-house and ask to see the toll-master."

CHAPTER IX.

WRONG SET RIGHT.

THE next morning Hans started off early to make some purchases in the town, and find out if the old man who sold sausages had arrived on the previous day. He had been absent more than an hour when Franz Nieper reached the toll-keeper's house.

"Is Hans Richter at home?" he asked of Karl Schmidt, who was sitting in the parlour making up his books.

"No; he is gone over to the town. I expect him back every minute; in fact, I can't think why he is so long away. Do you want him?"

"I presume my business is with you as much as with him," answered Franz. "Did he tell you he bought sausages at Naumburg of an old man?"

"Yes, to be sure he did; and one of his errands this morning is to try and find him, for he expects he came to Kösen yesterday."

"I am that old man. I want to greet the lad once more; and I have something important to say to him, and to you too, for I suppose I'm speaking to the toll-master."

"Yes, I am Karl Schmidt; but I do not quite understand what you have of importance to say

to me, seeing we are strangers to one another, and Hans only knows you because he bought your sausages and had a chat with you while he ate them."

"I wish to set wrong right, master," replied old Franz, emphatically. "The lad has been cruelly wronged."

"How?" asked Karl, feeling and looking sorely puzzled.

"It's a long story, master, and I am an old man. I can only tell it my own way. Will you listen to all I have to say?"

"Certainly I will. Sit down, my friend, for you look tired, and don't hurry yourself."

Old Franz took the chair that Karl offered him, and began his story by speaking first of his interview with Hans, and how much he liked the boy; then he repeated the substance of the conversation which passed between Paul and Robert, and alluded to his own determination of trying to find Hans out in order to tell him to take care of himself; and how his customers came and prevented him from carrying out his intention. He further spoke of missing Hans among the twenty boys with scarlet caps on the previous day, and that he made inquiry of the miller's daughter, and learnt the sad truth. "It needs no words of mine to tell you," he said, in conclusion, "how that lad met with

his accident, and I really think the boy, or boys, who had to do with it ought to be punished, or some one else will be served in like manner."

Karl was extremely angry. "I thought Paul was a very bad fellow," he replied, "but scarcely so bad as this proves him to be. I wonder if Robert was persuaded to be a party to the cowardly action, or whether he maintained his refusal; at any rate, he knew when Hans was hurt that it was no accident, but foul play, and certainly he should have refused to accept the Burgomaster's prize; an honourable boy would have quietly withdrawn from the contest. I scarcely know how to move in this matter."

"Try and set the wrong right, master," reiterated old Franz. "The prize is given now, so I suppose it can't be taken away, but the miller's son has not won it fairly."

"No; for I am almost sure Hans would have come off conqueror had he been able to take his place. The grave question to be settled now is, how to prove that Paul deliberately thrust the squib into Richter's hand. But here comes Hans; he is the one who has the best right to decide what steps we should take. Let us consult with him."

"I'm so glad to see you once more!" ex-

claimed the boy, shaking old Franz warmly by the hand. "I've just come from the town, and I looked about for you everywhere. I was sorry to miss seeing you yesterday. I have had an accident, and that prevented me from shooting; but I'm getting better, and I hope very soon to be able to use my hand again and do all my work."

"Your old friend came to see me about your so-called accident," said Karl. "I think we have found out how it happened."

"Yes, young lad. I ought to have saved you from it, but my customers came so quickly I could not leave them to find you. I overheard the tailor's son propose to the miller's boy that you should have a fired squib pushed into your hand. I must give credit where credit is due, and say that the miller's boy was up in arms when his friend proposed this; but one or both of them did the deed, or your hand would not have been hurt."

"Paul fired the squib, and thrust it into my hand," answered Hans, quietly; "Robert had nothing to do with it."

"How do you know this?" asked Karl.

"Because I left Robert half-an-hour ago, and he gave me a full account of the whole thing."

"Robert told you all about it!" exclaimed

Karl, I wonder he was not too ashamed for that."

"It is because he is so repentant, master; and he has promised me to give up Paul's friendship and turn over a new leaf."

"He has promised that a hundred times before," said Karl.

"But I believe he is in earnest this time. I am sure if he will keep away from Paul's influence he will be a better fellow."

"Still, I fear it is all talk with him; he is not to be trusted."

"Let us try him once more, master."

"But what did he say to you?"

"I should like to tell you, if you will agree not to let his confession go further until we have decided what it is best to do," said Hans, looking first at Karl Schmidt and then at the old man.

"Certainly, I will keep my counsel," replied his master.

"And so will I; indeed, I only want to set wrong right, my boy; and if you, who are injured, are satisfied, I ought to be," remarked Franz.

"I crossed the river in your boat, master," said Hans, smiling at the old man, "and went directly to the mill to order the flour. As I came out I met Robert, so I stopped and asked

him how he enjoyed himself yesterday, and I congratulated him on winning the prize, adding, 'I was not miserable about it, for I lived down my first feelings of vexation; they were nearly gone when you came to see me the day after my accident, so I was able to be glad that the sun shone, and it was so still and bright.' To my astonishment, Robert burst out:

"'Oh, Hans, don't talk to me like that; I'm the most unhappy fellow living.'

"'What's the matter?' I asked; and seeing that he looked ready to cry, I said, 'Come along with me and have a talk.'

"So we walked by the side of the river until we found a nook where we could sit down and be quite out of the way of any one who chanced to pass by.

"'Now, tell me why you are unhappy,' I asked, 'for I must confess you look wretched and ill; let me be your friend.'

"When I said this, he gave a great sob, and then he began to laugh, and then he cried, and it was some time before I could get him to speak out. At last he told me what it was that weighed on his mind. He said that Paul Ebhardt had disliked me from the very first time he saw me, but since the day we had quarrelled by the river-side he had hated me, and watched for an opportunity of paying me

off. Then he spoke of the conversation that my old friend there overheard, and he assured me he had no idea Paul would carry out his cruel purpose.

"'I give you my word,' he continued, 'that, careless as I am, I should never have been such a dastard as to hurt you. I have been wretched ever since I heard that you were injured. I went home miserable after you had spoken to me about sticking to the Raft, and had read to me out of the Bible. The next morning I fell out with Paul about you, but we made it up again, and I tried to forget you, because I was afraid of him; but last night I could not sleep for thinking, so I made up my mind to tell you all about it, and I want you to show that you forgive me by taking the prize I won yesterday.'

"'I am glad you have told me this; but I don't want your prize,' I answered. 'You may be happy again, Robert, for I forgive you entirely, though I scarcely know what I have to forgive; and, now, will you do me a very great favour?'

"'What is it?' he asked; 'I will do anything to prove to you that I would not have had you injured; and if only you would take my prize I should think we were quits.'

"'I don't want to be quits with you in that

manner,' I replied; 'we shall be quits, and true friends, if you will "stick to the Raft," for then you will learn to love good company, and work, and study. Oh, will you come to Jesus?'

"'I wish I could, if it would make me as happy as you are, Hans,' he answered; 'but I am bound to Paul, for I am afraid of him. I hardly dare think how angry he will be with me when he learns what I have done.'

"'Avoid him for the present, or at least until I have consulted my master,' I said. 'Will you begin a new life at once by asking your father to give you work at the mill, and will you pray to God, Robert, to help you?'

"'I never prayed in my life, Hans,' he replied.

"'Then begin at once, to-day,' I urged. 'There will be no real change in you unless you change towards God. He says to you, "My son, give Me thine heart." Oh! do not withhold it from Him.'

"We parted then. Robert went to the mill, and I made my way to the village; and all the way I've been thinking how it will be best to act; and really, master, if you do not object, I should like to go and see Paul and try and win him over."

"Well done, my boy!" exclaimed Franz

Nieper. "That's the way to set wrong right; and depend upon it you are showing the same mercy to Paul that God shows to us. You have hit the nail on the head. It's the Raft that has done this; it is your faith and trust in your Saviour, and clinging fast to His teaching, that enables you to love your enemy."

"Yes, Hans," remarked his master, "you have found the best way of taking your revenge on Paul; but whether he will receive your advances cordially, and be sorry for what he has done, is more than I can tell; at any rate, I wish you God speed on your errand. Go to him at once, my boy—that is, if you are not too tired—for it is better for you to see him before he meets Robert; but remember, if you come back and tell me that Paul has refused to hear you, and added insult to injury, I must act for you."

"I'll accompany you as far as the village," said Franz Nieper, "for I ought not to lose a day's trade."

"You must have something to eat first, and then see my mother," exclaimed Schmidt, adding, "she will like to thank you for coming here when I tell her why you paid us a visit."

So Franz Nieper remained at the toll-house, and Hans Richter went alone to the master tailor's house in search of Paul.

CHAPTER X.

THE INTERVIEW.

PAUL wondered why Robert did not come, and he was on the point of going in search of his friend when he saw Hans standing in the doorway of his father's shop. His was the last face in the world he wished to see, and to have him there boded no good. Paul would have liked to make his escape, but he could not do this very well, for Hans came up close to him and said, "I want to speak to you."

"What do you want? What have you to say to me?" he stammered out.

"A great deal. Let us go into some room where we can talk quietly."

"There's no place in this house. Father has only gone on an errand into the village; he will be back in a few minutes, and then he'll want the parlour for his work. People may come in here at any moment to give orders, so I can't say that we shall be quite alone; but I'm sure mother doesn't want us upstairs, so if you have anything to say you must say it at once, and take the chance of being interrupted."

"Let us go into the fields, or by the river-side beyond the town. I don't mind where we go, so that I can talk to you quietly."

"I suppose you want to fight me again. No, I'm not going into the fields or anywhere with you."

"I mean to speak to you, Paul," said Hans, firmly; "and if you will not give me an opportunity of saying what I have to say to you alone, why, you must listen to it in your father's shop, and it's not my fault if any one overhears our conversation."

Paul began to quake. He felt sure that Richter had something important to communicate, for he showed it in his determined manner; but as he would not appear to be afraid, he exclaimed, in a loud, coarse voice, "I can't think what you want with me; I hate you, and you hate me, so the less we have to say to one another the better."

Hans touched his arm, and replied, "This hurt of mine was no accident; the squib was pushed into my hand deliberately. You know the name of the boy who did it, and so do I. Let me have a quiet talk with you; if you refuse me my master will be very angry, and I fear he will tell your father. I am sure it is better for us to be friends than enemies; but if you won't hear me, and persist in treating me so rudely, I shall have to go back home, and I don't know what turn matters will take."

"Let your master come to my father and

talk to him, if he likes; I don't care. If Robert has been telling lies of me he shall be well paid off for it, that he shall! I suppose you mean me to understand that I hurt your hand?"

"Yes, you did. But oh, Paul, I really am not here to blame you, but to forgive you. Don't go on being so wicked, but do remember you must stand before God one day, and answer to Him if you persist in living in sin. Stop before it is too late, and give up your bad habits, and try and live a nobler life."

"What stuff you are talking! Just leave off preaching, and give up the name of the fellow who told you I hurt your hand. Do you know I will make you answer for accusing me falsely, for neither you nor any one else can prove that I did it! Name the fellow, I say."

"I shall not," answered Hans.

"Because you dare not. But, just to show you how wrong you are in suspecting me, I will tell you who did the deed. Robert hurt you because he was afraid you would win the prize away from him."

"Robert did not hurt me, and did not know that you intended to carry out your wicked thought; when you proposed to injure me he refused to be a party to such a cowardly act."

"Robert has told of me," said Paul, forget-

ting in his passion that he betrayed the truth and confessed his guilt. "He shall smart for this, he shall rue the day that he turned tell-tale; and as for you, I detest you. I can't think of any name to call you which is bad enough to show how much I hate you. Go and tell everybody in Kösen that I hurt you for the purpose; I don't care. I only wish your hand had been blown off, or so bad that you could not use it again."

What more Paul would have added it is hard to say; he stopped suddenly, for he saw his father. Herr Ebhardt had listened to nearly all the conversation between his son and Hans. He had entered the parlour by the back of the house, and hearing voices in the shop had opened the door softly, and thus overheard what passed. He now came forward, and asked Hans, "What is all this ado about? Tell me of what you accuse my son."

"I had much rather have spoken to Paul alone," answered Hans, respectfully. "I came to him in the spirit of love, and hoped he would have received me more kindly."

"The spirit of love!" echoed the master tailor, scornfully. "None of that cant here, please. What has my son done to you? It sounded to me very much as if he had hurt

your hand on purpose. Is that what you accuse him of? Answer me at once, yes or no."

"Yes," said Hans.

"And you are guilty, Paul. I know it by the last words I heard you speak; your passion got the better of you, young gentleman. You shall be well punished for this. And you, young fellow, had better go home, and if you meet any acquaintances by the way, and ask for their pity by telling them how badly you have been treated, say to them that Ebhardt, the master tailor of Kösen, condemns his son for committing such a cowardly act as to stab you in the dark. I go in for fair play, and not foul play. Will it satisfy you to know that that boy of mine has had his reward in the shape of a punishment he will remember as long as he lives?"

"No, it will not, Herr Ebhardt," answered Hans, boldly. "I did not come here to provoke you to be hard upon your son. I came to forgive him, and I ask you to unsay what you have said. I do not wish him to be punished; and, what is more, if I can help it he shall go free."

"How can you help it?"

"Not by force, because you are stronger than either Paul or I; and you can thrash us

both if you like. But will you hear me out without sneering at me?"

"Yes; speak up, lad. I don't think you are quite such a sneak as I took you for at first."

"I came here to forgive Paul, because I am a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, and as He forgave His enemies so I wish to forgive mine. If I forgive him of my own free will I don't think you need punish him. But there is one thing I will ask you to obtain for me, that is, his promise not to abuse Robert Klein, nor fight him, nor serve him out in any way."

Paul had stood by in sullen silence, and now his father turned to him, and said, "Do you hear what Hans asks? Give me your word that you will not touch Robert, and I will let you go free."

There was only one person in the world whom Paul feared, that was his father, and he had good reason to be afraid of him. He was a powerful man, with a violent temper, who was very often partially intoxicated, and then he cared for no one, but dealt out his blows freely on whoever ventured to contradict or offend him.

"I will promise not to touch Robert, father," answered Paul, in a very different way to what he had spoken when addressing Hans. He was so glad to escape punishment that he would

have pledged his word to anything that was required of him.

"And mind," added his father, "you will keep your promise this time, or my name is not Ebhardt. Do you hear me, sir?"

"Yes, I do," whimpered Paul.

"And now I hope you are satisfied. I wish you good morning," said the master tailor, waving his hand as if to dismiss his visitor. So Hans was obliged to leave the shop, for he was afraid to make another effort to soften Paul's heart, lest his father should grow impatient and visit his anger on his son in a summary manner.

He was glad to reach home without meeting any of his acquaintances, for he was in no mood to indulge in every-day chat; he was chafed in spirit and disappointed at the rebuff he had received at the hands of Paul, and also annoyed at the rough manner in which he had been addressed by the master tailor.

Old Franz had not left the toll-keeper's cottage, he had just come downstairs after seeing Frau Schmidt.

"Well, what success have you had?" asked Karl.

"Poor enough," answered Hans, sighing. "Oh, master, I had such a beautiful plan in my head. Paul was to be so sorry, he was to

turn over a new leaf, and promise to reform; but it has all gone to the winds. I have gained nothing by my visit to him, except a promise that he will not fight Robert;" and Hans gave an account of his interview with Herr Ebhardt and Paul.

"Well, well, you've done all you could; you've tried to carry out the Master's new commandment," said old Franz. "You can't make him sorry, you can't change his heart, my boy; but there is One who can. While there is life there is hope; so hope on, and pray that something will happen that will induce the lad to arise and go to his Father and say, 'I have sinned against heaven, and before Thee.'"

"And in the meantime let Robert be your care," added Karl; "for if he will no longer idle his time away I do not mind his coming here. There seems better material to work upon in him, and you may be sure that he and Paul will never be friends again. The master tailor will take care of that. Depend upon it, this affair will be known in Kösen; indeed, it ought to be, and I think I should do well if I went to the Burgomaster, for he is certain to hear a garbled account from some one."

"No, no, sir; please don't do that. Let it rest now," said Richter. "My hand will be

quite well in another week, and then the affair will die out. I shall be so sorry to keep up ill-will between Paul and Robert."

"Then you do not wish me to go and see Herr Ebhardt?"

"No, no, sir; it will only make Paul hate me the more; and I do want to win him over to be my friend at last."

"I don't think you will do that, but at any rate the less said the soonest mended. I think you have right on your side," replied Karl; "but you must be prepared to hear more about it, for the miller is not a man to keep a secret, and he is sure to be told all the facts of the case by Robert. Must you go?" he added, addressing Franz Nieper, who made a movement towards the door.

"Yes, I have to say good-bye. I leave Kösen first thing to-morrow. There is a great fair in Halle soon, and as the weather is warm I mean to take my time, and move along slowly, for I did a good trade yesterday. I intended to stay longer; but somehow I feel unhinged, and more inclined to push on than to linger here."

"Good-bye," said Hans; "I hope we shall meet again one of these days."

"If we don't meet here we shall meet yonder," replied the old man, pointing up to

the blue sky, "for we all three have our faces turned in one direction. May it be our greatest joy so long as God spares our lives to do as yon man is doing who is just coming in sight—you see I have not forgotten our first conversation —'stick to the Raft.' Farewell."

CHAPTER XI.

THE POOL OF BETHESDA.

ROBERT went directly to his father after he left Hans. The miller was writing a letter in his counting-house; he looked up with a troubled expression on his face when he saw his son enter, for Robert rarely came there unless he wanted to borrow or beg money, or to tell him of some mischief he had done.

"What is the matter now?" he said, impatiently.

"I am come to ask you to give me some work to do," stammered out Robert. "Father, I know you will say that I only bring you into trouble, and lose the business if I have anything to do with it; but I really am in earnest this time; I will tell you why;" and the boy gave a detailed account of all that had occurred.

"Hans Richter is a noble fellow," exclaimed the miller. "I liked that boy from the first: he has a fine face, and looks as if he could not do a mean trick; and if he makes you a better lad, Robert, I shall indeed owe him a debt of gratitude."

"I think I've got hold of the secret of his goodness. Father, I'm beginning to believe there is something true in religion, and that it is because Hans loves God he is such a noble fellow. I mean to try and see if I can follow his example, and serve my God, too. Why should we not all turn over a new leaf, and go and hear Pastor Hahn preach on Sunday?"

"I can't quite do that, my boy, for I'm satisfied with the life I lead, and I don't care to be made gloomy by too much religion. I often think Pastor Hahn calls me to account without good reason, for I harm no one, pay my debts, don't drink, and am a good husband and father."

"I fancy Hans would say that was not enough; he told me the other day that I must give myself to Christ, and cling to Him as the men do to the raft when it shoots the weir, for that Christ died on the cross to save us from our sins. But I can't remember all he said, for I know so little about these things; I will soon know more, though, for Hans will teach me;

and I mean to go with him to Pastor Hahn's Bible-class. I do very much wish I had read my Bible before this."

The miller felt uncomfortable; he could not but remember that if he had been a God-fearing man the Bible would have been an honoured book. As it was, neither he nor his wife nor his children cared for its sacred pages.

"I'm not going to stop you from going to the Bible-class, or church," he answered, hurriedly; "you may do just as you like. And now tell me, Robert," he added, more quietly, "are you really anxious to give up your idle habits, and work?"

"Yes, father. I dare say it will be hard at first, but you must bear with me. I don't think really I'm such a very bad fellow at heart; but I've been under Paul; he has managed me, and I have not had pluck enough to shake him off."

"This is good hearing for me, and will make your mother very happy. You see, lad to go back to what you said about our going to hear Pastor Hahn—we've been very comfortable all these years, and enjoyed our Sunday holidays right merrily, and I think it would make our neighbours chatter if we took to church-going now. As to the Bible, I don't so much mind hearing it read."

"Let me learn a little more from Hans first, father, and then by degrees we'll begin to read together; now tell me how I can help you."

"There's no lack of work, my boy. Trade has never been better. I wish you would keep my books for me; you write a good hand. But can I depend upon your being correct?"

"Try me, father. It's no use for me to talk about what I want to do; just see if I do it."

So Robert was installed as his father's book-keeper; and he applied himself so diligently to the task that the miller hoped he really was going to reform and be a man of business at last. When the rest of the men left off work, Robert made himself neat and clean and set out to the toll-keeper's cottage, for he wanted to know if Hans had seen or heard anything of Paul.

He received a kind welcome from Karl Schmidt, who told him he hoped he would yet be a great comfort to his father. "But don't trust in yourself, Robert," he said; "'trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.'"

When Hans and Robert were left alone, the former made light of his interview with Herr Ebhardt and his son, save when he spoke of

the promise Paul had given him. "Mind, Robert," he said, "that you never come to an open quarrel with your former friend. If Paul breaks his word, his father will treat him so violently that I do not like to think of what the consequences might be; avoid crossing his path, if possible, for the present."

"I will; indeed, I will, Hans. It shall not be my fault if we fall out; but it will be rather difficult to avoid Paul."

"Not so difficult as you think. It is some little distance from the mill to the master tailor's house at the far end of the village. If you become a man of business you will have no time to idle away, and be less likely to meet Paul."

"Hans, I want to ask you a question," said Robert: "is it enough for us to live good lives—I mean, is that what you call 'sticking to the Raft'?"

"No, no, Robert, 'sticking to the Raft' is quite another sort of life. Instead of depending on yourself, you depend on the finished work of your Saviour, who shed His most precious blood on the cross for sinners. You feel how utterly impossible it is to do, or to say, or to think anything that is right, so you cast your care on Christ, and believe in Him as the only Saviour, and you yield yourself to Him broken-

hearted for your sin, and say, 'Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.'"

"Oh, Hans, how I wish I had not wasted my life; I am so ignorant, compared with you."

"There is time for you to learn, and to repent; thank God for life and health, and come to Him at once. Cry to Him for the guidance of the Holy Spirit before you lie down to rest."

"When you pray what do you say, Hans? I don't believe I ever said a prayer in all these years!"

"Did you ever ask your father for anything that you wanted very much?"

"Yes, very often."

"Then just ask God in the same way to forgive your sins for Christ's sake. Don't pray with your lips only, for that is no prayer, but let your words come straight from your heart. Now, Robert, I must not stay here any longer, for it is just the time the master and I go to read with Frau Schmidt."

"Do you think I might come too?"

"I don't know, but I will ask." And Hans ran upstairs to prefer his request.

"By all means let Robert join us," answered the frau. Accordingly Hans went to fetch his companion.

"I like to have you here," said the invalid

to Robert, when he entered her room; "and I rejoice to know that you come here of your own free will; and I rejoice still more in learning from Hans that you mean, God helping you, to become a respectable member of society. I always felt, my dear boy, that Paul Ebhardt was a very unfortunate friend for you to have chosen. Poor Paul! I only wish we could lead him to pause in his unhappy course, and come to Christ."

"I am afraid, mother, he has nothing in his home surroundings to influence him for good," said Karl.

"Perhaps not; but I always hope on, for with God nothing is impossible. I never forget that that mighty Spirit which comes like the wind can soften the heart of stone and turn it into a heart of flesh. And now let us proceed with our evening reading. We are going through St. John's Gospel, Robert, and our subject to-night is the healing of the infirm man at the Pool of Bethesda. Give Robert a Bible, Hans, that he may follow my son."

Karl Schmidt read the first twenty verses of the fifth chapter of St. John's Gospel in a clear voice. When he closed his Bible, his mother, as was her wont, made her comments on the passage he had just finished.

"It is evident," she said, "that this Pool of Bethesda was endowed with a miraculous virtue; and what a boon it must have been to the sick ones! I can picture those five porches filled with the lame, the halt, and the maimed; and I know better than any of you here how eagerly they would wait for the troubling of the water. Health was within their reach again, and we only understand what a precious gift it is when we lose it. Thirty-eight years is a long time to be crippled. It may be the poor man had come to the pool time after time, hoping he would be fortunate enough to move the hearts of some strong ones to help him into the water—for evidently he had no power of his own to crawl there. How many times he had come to this pool and gone away disappointed we are not told. No one was found to take pity on his infirmities, until the Saviour passed by. The Man of Sorrows marked that wan, care-worn face, which He had seen lit up with anxious hope when the angel troubled the pool, and then the hope was darkened with despair, for again another had stepped in before him. 'Wilt thou be made whole?' asked the Master. Would he be made whole? ay, that he would; but how was this to be? 'Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth

down before me.' Jesus said unto him, 'Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.' There was no questioning, no doubting, no waiting. The infirm man believed that this God-Physician had almighty power to grant what He offered; so he forgot his infirmity of thirty-eight years' standing, and arose, rolled up the mat on which he had been lying, and walked. He had faith in the Lord's healing power, else he never had obeyed. Would he have tried to do what he did if one of us had said, 'Rise up'? No; he would have replied, 'You mock me, friend. I am helpless; I have been diseased for more than half my life.' Now tell me, Robert, what was the first thing this poor man did after he was healed. Read the fourteenth verse of the chapter."

Robert read: "Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee."

"Yes; his first step seems to have been to go to the temple. Jesus found him there; perhaps in the fulness of his heart he longed to thank God for His great mercy to him, in His own house. Ah, Robert, the day may come when you, too, will be stricken down with disease, as this poor man was, and then you may long in vain to frequent God's temple, and sigh that

you neglected His service while your limbs were lissom, and you could move about at will. I used to pine to hear the Gospel preached once more; and the sound of the church bells made me sad, because I knew they did not ring to summon me to the house of prayer and praise; but now I thank my God through Christ that the longing to do aught but what He wills has passed away. I realise increasingly that my disease brings my Saviour very near; and the nearer He is to me the more I am sustained by His almighty power.

"'Lord Jesus, as Thou wilt!
Oh, may Thy will be mine.
Into Thy hand of love
I would my all resign.
Through sorrow, or through joy,
Conduct me as Thine own,
And help me still to say,
"My Lord, Thy will be done."

'Lord Jesus, as Thou wilt!
All shall be well for me;
Each changing future scene
I gladly trust with Thee.
Straight to my home above
I travel calmly on,
And sing in life or death,
"My Lord, Thy will be done."'

"Now, Karl, will you offer up prayer?"
Robert took leave of the little party as

as the evening prayer was ended. He returned to the mill deeply touched with the simple, earnest words he had listened to. Religion felt very real to him when he thought over Frau Schmidt's remarks, and the account of the sick man being healed by the Master. He felt very sick, sin-sick, weary, and troubled. Oh, if he could but hear the Master's voice speaking to him! he would rise up and obey. When he found himself alone in his room, he knelt in prayer; yes, and there were sobs mingling with his words. It was the cry of a broken spirit going up to heaven and pleading for mercy at the throne of grace.

CHAPTER XII

SAVED BY THE RAFT.

HERR EBHARDT'S relations towards his son did not improve after the scene which took place in his shop with Hans. He grew increasingly stern and angry with Paul—found fault with his work, and constantly watched him; thus the boy's heart hardened towards his father, and towards Robert too, for

he looked upon him as the author of all his misery.

What provoked the master tailor still more was that the affair oozed out in Kösen, and became the common talk of the townspeople for some days. Hans was exalted up to the skies—and it was well that he knew his own shortcomings, else he might have been spoilt by the flattery—while Paul came in for his full share of disgrace. In the meantime Robert had his part of the odium to endure. Some said he was as much to blame in the business as Paul, and that he ought to have confessed to the Burgomaster and refused his prize. Robert was better able to bear these remarks because he had Hans for his friend, and this fact disarmed the outside chatterers, who argued that if Richter associated with Robert Klein he must be satisfied with the part the latter had played.

Robert offered his prize many, many times to Hans, without being able to persuade him to accept it, and at last Frau Schmidt settled the question by saying, "Do not ask Hans again to take your prize, Robert; he will never consent to what you wish, and it is foolish to waste more words over it. Keep it where you can see it constantly, for it may prevent you from indulging in boastful feelings, and help

you to walk softly by recalling the events connected with an important period in your life."

Paul was very angry that Hans and Robert were friends, and he would have liked to quarrel with his former companion, but he dare not, for even he was cowed by his father's violent temper. A crisis came at last, which made him take a desperate step. Herr Ebhardt returned home earlier than he was expected one afternoon, and found Paul idling instead of completing some work which had to be done at a given time. A stormy scene ensued, and the next morning the lad was missing, and no one knew in which direction he had gone. His mother wept for him, his father cursed him; but neither of them made any effort to reclaim the wanderer.

"God grant that he may be spared long enough to see the error of his ways!" said Hans, when Robert told him of Paul's flight. "Oh, Robert, I wish I'd tried more earnestly to win him to Christ."

Many days sped along, and Hans became quite well and strong again. These were happy days for Robert, who kept steadily to his business, and tried hard to undo the bad habits of the past. It must not be supposed that he became suddenly changed from a godless, careless boy to an earnest, God-fearing boy; no, it

was the work of days, weeks, and months of struggle with himself against old inclinations and lazy feelings. But he struggled in no strength of his own, but found help for daily needs by seeking aid from heaven. Pastor Hahn became one of his best friends; whereas he formerly tried to run away, he now sought to profit by what the good man said, and delighted in attending his Sunday class and hearing him preach in the old church of Kösen. Robert's influence told on his sisters by degrees, and at last on the miller and his wife, who in the end became too much interested in the truths of the Gospel to think of how their movements would be canvassed by their neighbours, for they were more anxious to find peace with God through Christ than to stand well with man.

The summer was ended, and autumn set in. It was a very rainy season, and the Saale became so full that the rafts had not to wait before shooting the weir, for the water fell over in a body and turned the old mill wheel merrily. At one time the current ran so swiftly that some of the foresters were afraid to bring their wood down, and Hans required all his strength to keep those who ventured over the weir in the right current, lest they should be swept across too rapidly. He found himself

repeatedly crying, "Stick well to the raft; stick on; the current runs faster than usual."

At length the rain ceased, and the last day of October was ushered in with brilliant sunshine. The river presented a busy scene. Karl Schmidt and Hans had more business to do than they could well manage, and were glad when the shades of evening fell, and thus prevented the raftsmen from going on their way, and obliged them to rest at Kösen until the following morning. So it came to pass that many rafts were moored above and below the old bridge.

Schmidt had gone into the town on business, and Hans was sitting in the toll-house parlour, feeling very weary and sleepy, when Robert entered. "I didn't mean to call in this evening," he said, "because I knew you would be tired; but I was obliged to come and tell you the good news. See what I've got!" and he pointed to a long narrow parcel.

"What is it?" asked Hans.

"Something for you."

"For me?"

"Yes, for you, and it's from father. But before you take off the paper you must let me tell you all about it. You know, Hans, I've never been quite happy about the Burgomaster's prize, and though I've said nothing

about it for a long time I always wanted to make up for it. The other day father offered me money as a reward for being so steady at business, and then I told him what I would rather have than all the money he could give me; and here is what I wanted. Undo it."

Hans unfastened the long unwieldy parcel, wondering what it contained; but when it was free from its covering, and he lifted up the lid of the narrow box, his eyes sparkled with pleasure, for there was such a bow and such arrows as he had never seen the like of before.

"They are for you," exclaimed Robert. "Your hand is quite well now, and next year we'll shoot as friends for the prize; or I will shoot, and you shall win as easily as I did last time."

"This for me, Robert? How kind of you! It must have cost a lot of money; why, it's much better than my master's."

"Never mind what it cost, Hans; that's father's business. He ordered it from Halle, for we have an uncle there who understands what's what. Then you really like it?"

"Like it, Robert! why how can I help liking such a splendid present? But I don't think I ought to take it, for you've denied yourself a good deal to give it me."

"And I wish you would tell me who in the

world I should deny myself for like you? I owe you almost everything, Hans, for you taught me to love and serve God, and made me first think. You saved me."

"Not I, Robert, but Christ in me," answered Hans, reverently. "If I had not found the treasure first I should not have known its worth."

"You're right, as you always are. Oh, I'm so happy! But I mustn't stay too late, for I promised father to cast up some bills we've been too busy to look after during the day. I shall go home as I came, over the bridge. It was too dark and foggy and the current too strong to bring out the boat."

"Is it foggy?" exclaimed Hans, moving towards the door. "I'd no idea of it. How suddenly it must have come on; and after such a glorious day too. The fact is, I'm so tired that unless you'd come in I should have fallen asleep. Why, the mist is so thick you cannot see a few yards before you," he added, looking out. "You'd better not venture into it, you'll be walking into the river."

"Don't be afraid," laughed Robert. "I know every inch of the road."

"So you may, but in a fog like this it's very easy to make a mistake; I only wish my master was safe at home," said Hans, anxiously.

Robert walked away from the toll-house, but he soon had to slacken his pace. He managed to reach the weir, and now he had a little distance to traverse by the river-side before he came to a narrow pathway which led him to the foot of the bridge. He had to grope his way carefully along, for at every step he took the fog grew denser. At last he stood still and wished he had a torch; he would gladly have returned to the toll-house, but it was as difficult to make his way back as to go forward.

"Courage, courage," he said to himself. "I won't be a coward, after boasting to Hans that I was not afraid."

But with all his care and knowledge of "every inch of the road," he crept so close to the river's bank, which is steep at this point, that he lost his footing, and though he made a tremendous effort to save himself from falling, he could not regain his balance.

Robert could swim; he was paralysed for a few moments by feeling the waters close round him; then he knew that he was being hurried along by the stream. He tried to struggle into smoother water, but failed; so all he could do was to cry, "Help, help!" and keep away from the bridge. This he just managed to accomplish, but he grew weaker every minute. When

he was past the bridge he made a last effort to get clear of the current, and this time he succeeded, for as he struck out he clasped something with his hands. It was a raft, which had swung round at its moorings. He had only strength enough left to crawl on to it; but he was saved from a watery grave.

Hans longed for his master to return; he looked out of the door again and again, but he heard no sound of approaching footsteps. He felt very uneasy, too, on Robert's account, and debated whether it would be well to take a light with him and go out, but then he could not leave Frau Schmidt alone in the house. At last he carried a wooden table outside the door and set a lamp upon it, then he went up to the frau's room and chatted with her, she meanwhile wondering why her son was so late.

Hans did not tell her that he was uneasy at his master's absence because there was a thick mist over the river; though while he tried to amuse her he was straining every nerve to discover if Herr Schmidt were coming.

At last they heard his well-known step, and a few moments afterwards he entered the room.

"I'm sorry to have kept you awake so much over your usual hour, mother," he said; "but when you know why I have been detained you will not be surprised. It was clever of you,

Hans, to put the lamp outside to guide me home. Did you suggest it, mother?"

"The frau doesn't know about the fog," interrupted Hans.

"Well done, my boy; it was thoughtful of you to save her the anxiety. Now, mother, let me explain everything: you may well look as if we were speaking in an unknown tongue. The heavy rains and the hot sun have brought about such a dense mist as I have only seen twice before in my life; it is so dense that if I had not borrowed a torch I could not have found my way. That good lad kept his anxiety to himself, but set up a beacon outside the house for me; he lighted the great lamp and put it on a table, or I might have groped about for some time longer, or perhaps have done as Robert did, walked into the river; but he's quite safe, now," added Karl, "though he has had a great shock."

"What has happened?" asked Hans, eagerly. "He was here this evening, and I wanted him so much not to go out in the fog."

"On his way from here, then, it must have been, that he fell in the river. As I was nearing the bridge I heard cries for help, so I made my way to the spot from whence they came as well as I could, and two or three others with torches joined me; we had a hard matter to

find the lad, and but for the mist lifting just at the right moment Robert might have laid on the raft until morning. I carried him home and waited until he became conscious."

"Poor fellow!" said Frau Schmidt; "he must have missed his way. I thank God he is saved."

"I do thank God," added Hans. "And was he really saved by a raft?"

"Yes, saved by a raft," reiterated Karl. "Now, mother, let us have our evening reading."

Robert was so much shaken by his accident, that two days passed before he was permitted to see Hans.

The friends were delighted to meet again, and had a long and serious conversation together, for Robert's heart was full of gratitude to God for his deliverance from death.

"We have been talking so hard," said Hans, just before he left, "that I have not yet asked you how you managed to hold on to the raft as you did, until help came."

"I don't think I held on; I had just enough strength to crawl on to the top, and then I suppose I became unconscious."

"Still you were saved by a raft!"

"Yes," answered Robert; "the raft in its

double meaning has been my best friend. There is the raft of wood which saved me when strength was fast failing; there is that almighty Raft which upholds me day by day, and which I can cling to at all times—even the Lord Jesus Christ."

"Old fellow, my mother's words will have a deeper meaning than ever to us both after this," said Hans, earnestly. "You and I will indeed feel the truth of what we say when we cry on behalf of ourselves and all men, 'STICK TO THE RAFT.'"