

'What you say is true, Katherine,' replied the forester—that is, if it should all come to pass. But how many are there who have bad sons who disgrace them and break their hearts! Perhaps it is better so.'

'O Franz, no son of ours would have done that!' cried his wife. 'How could such a thing be possible?'

'It has happened often before,' the forester answered gravely. 'Let us be thankful for the blessings we possess, for they are many.'

With these words he lit his pipe, took his stick, and went forth for a stroll, according to his daily custom.

At the same moment the pastor of the village issued from his garden, also for a little walk. Both men, from an opposite direction, entered the fringe of woods which skirted the village. Not far from the spot where the pastor was slowly walking stood a ruined cottage, which, however, had been recently occupied by a woodcutter and his little boy, a child about eight years of age. The poor man had died of a fever the week before, leaving the request that his child be sent to a brother of his wife who lived in the city. After the funeral, having satisfied himself that the brother-in-law was respectable, the priest sent the child, with his few belongings, to the home of his uncle, in care of a neighbor who was going to the city. The family were absent at the time; but a woman who lived in the house said the child might remain in her room until evening, when they would return. The villager had reported this fact, and it was supposed that everything would be right.

As the priest approached the ruined cottage, he thought he saw a face at the window. It disappeared, and when he arrived at the gate a little boy ran out to meet him.

'Why, George!' exclaimed the pastor. 'What has brought you here? I thought you were with your uncle.'

'The woman turned me out,' said the boy, beginning to cry. 'My uncle was absent, working on the river, and she said there was no room for me. So I came back here.'

'Did she turn you into the street?' asked the pastor.

'Yes, Father—the next morning.'

'And how did you get here?'

'I walked, Father.'

'Fifty miles?'

'Yes, Father. Good people gave me bread, and I slept sometimes under a tree, sometimes close to a hedge. Once a policeman wanted to put me in gaol; but I told him I was coming to you, and he let me go.'

'To me? But what shall I do with you, my boy?'

'I don't know, Father.'

'When did you arrive?'

'A few minutes ago, Father. I was so tired, I thought I would rest here awhile before going to you.'

The kind priest looked down at the innocent face, with its great blue eyes upturned to his, and his heart ached for the poor orphan, who stood so trustfully regarding him, his cap in one hand, all his worldly goods tied in a red handkerchief, in the other. Something would have to be done.

Presently the forester was seen advancing from the other side of the forest. The priest went to meet him, engaging him in conversation, while the boy stood patiently waiting at a distance. At length the two men came toward him.

'George dear,' said the priest, 'how would you like to go and live with Mr. Busch?'

'I think it would be very nice, Father,' replied the boy.

'Very well. Let us try it, in God's name,' said the forester. 'Come along, my little fellow. We will go home.'

'You will be a very good boy, George?' asked the priest.

'A very good boy, Father,' echoed the child.

Half an hour later the forester entered the living room of his own comfortable home, where his wife and two daughters were seated. The mother spinning, one of the girls sewing, and the other engaged in knitting a pair of stockings—for this, though not so very long ago, was before the days of machine work, at least in the Black Forest.

'See here what I have brought you!' exclaimed the big, burly forester, in a cheerful voice, as the child pulled the cap from his curly head and remained uncovered in the presence of the three women.

'Oh, what a pretty boy!' said the forester's wife. 'Who is he?'

'An orphan who has neither friend nor home,' rejoined the forester. 'I have brought him to you,

mother, for a son; and now, girls, you will have what you have always desired—a little brother.'

With one accord these good people arose and embraced the boy. Little Georgie had found a home and hearts to love him.

He proved to be all they had thought him. He was no trouble to anyone; on the contrary, he filled the house with sunshine, always willing to oblige and eager to learn. What he liked best, after the household work was done, was to sit on a stool at the feet of his adopted mother and her daughters, quite close to Lena, the younger girl, who had taken a great liking to him. He could already read well, and he delighted in taking up a children's Bible History, which Lena had won at a school contest, and reading aloud the beautiful narratives it contained. He also became quite proficient in drawing, never tiring of making pictures on his slate, and later, when he grew older, on paper.

'Georgie, you will never be a farmer or a forester. I see that already,' said his adopted mother to him one day, as he sat contentedly among them, his head bent over his drawing-book.

'No, indeed,' said Lena, pulling his curly hair. 'For my part I believe Georgie is going to be something great—perhaps a priest.'

'A priest!' cried the boy. 'I could never be good enough for that, but maybe I can learn enough to be a teacher some day.'

'If George continues to be an industrious boy, I shall not mind spending something on his education,' said the Forester. 'He may learn Latin if he wishes. I am going to speak to the priest about it.'

So it came to pass that at last Georgie went to the seminary, and, after the requisite studies, was ordained priest. It seemed to the good couple who had adopted him, and to their daughters—one of whom was now married—that the day on which they assisted at the celebration of his first Mass, in the village church, was the happiest of their lives. Their joy was moderated, however, when they learned that the young priest had offered himself as a missionary to the Chinese—something which would remove him from them forever. But, good Christians as they were, they made the sacrifices; and for several years they heard only at long intervals from their adopted son.

In the meantime misfortune had fallen upon this good family. Mr. Busch had grown old; he had been removed from his position as forester, and was thus obliged to give up the comfortable, pleasant house where all his married life had been spent. The husband of Martha, the elder girl, had a mania for inventions; he persuaded his father-in-law to lend him all his savings, in order that he might perfect a wheel on which he had been engaged for many years. It proved a failure, and the money was lost. The young man began to drink, and soon died. His wife did not long survive him, and a little later Lena, the younger girl, died of a fever.

The old people were left alone, their only subsistence being whatever Mr. Busch could earn by an occasional day's work. Farmers do not like to employ old men; thus their poverty became extreme. Their good friend the pastor was long dead. They had not heard from George for more than two years, and in their letters to him they carefully refrained from speaking of the change in their circumstances, as they did not wish to cause him pain, when they knew he could not assist them.

At last they realised that there was no refuge for them but the almshouse. The day came. Without saying a word of their purpose to their neighbors, they set out, hand in hand, for the town where henceforth they were to reside. Age and sorrow had dimmed their sight. With bent shoulders and feeble limbs they entered the forest which lay between the village they were leaving and the town to which they were going. Pausing beside a heap of stones, the old man said:

'Here, wife, once stood the cottage from which I led our Georgie by the hand.'

'I fear he is dead. He must have been murdered by the heathens, or he would not have been so long without writing to us,' replied his wife.

Just then a tall, slender man came out of the brushwood. He stated when he observed the old people, but saw that they did not recognise him, as he wore a beard, after the custom of missionaries in some parts of the Orient.

'Franz, he is dressed like a priest,' whispered the old woman.

'Yes, he is a priest,' answered Franz, glancing at the Roman collar.

'Father, your blessing!' said the old woman, falling on her knees, followed by her husband.