

A VIOLIN RECITAL

It all happened on a warm summer day in the year 1822. In one of the gardens in Wiesbaden, where many fashionable people are in the habit of congregating in order to drink and bathe in the health-giving waters of the famous springs, things went on pleasantly. In front of the bath-houses, at a number of little tables, sat different groups of women in dainty, immaculate gowns, and well-groomed men in befitting evening dress. Their loud, glad laughter stole to the very entrance gate of the garden, where a poor musician, in his old military uniform, mechanically ran his bow across the strings of his faithful violin. Beside this picture of suffering stood a small blonde-haired boy about eight years old, who held out an old felt hat to the passing crowds for their petty donations.

To-day, however, no one seemed to hear the sad voice of the poor invalid's violin. Not a single penny fell into the boy's hat.

'Grandpa,' at last broke forth the boy, in tears, 'no one has given me anything; and oh, I am so hungry—'

The old man interrupted nervously:

'Have patience, child! God will soon send a kind-hearted soul as His angel of mercy, George!'

Thereupon a few hot tears fell out of the old man's sightless eyes upon the green grass.

'Grandpa, you must not cry. I will not murmur any more. I would rather suffer hunger. See, here comes a fine-looking man! Play hard, grandpa! He just looks as if he was going to give us something.'

And the old man played as loudly as the delicate strings would permit.

The stranger, who had been noticed in the garden by many during the past few days, was dressed in a heavy black suit. A pair of clever, good-natured eyes beamed brightly out of his round, comfortable-looking face. As he passed the fiddler, the boy held up his hat to him, but without avail. Then the lad ran a few steps after him, but returned again in tears and complained:

He did not hear you, grandpa. He walks around like a wild man. Ah, he is coming back again!

In the meantime the stranger had returned. He pulled out his pocketbook somewhat nervously, and, muttering a few words in an undertone, his eyes and fingers wandered through it. Presently the little hand holding the beggar's hat was thrust up beseechingly to him. For the first time the stranger heard peals of music very close to his ears. But the sound of the violin did not seem to appeal to him; for a look of disgust crept into his face, and he motioned the fiddler to stop playing.

The boy, however, interposed:

'Grandfather is blind, sir; he does not see you signing to him to stop.'

'Blind? O great God! And who are you?'

'I am George Werner, grandchild of this old man.'

The stranger sighed deeply and threw some money into the boy's hat. Then he walked over to the blind musician and asked:

'What is your name, my poor man?'

The invalid had in the meantime stopped playing, and with his acute sense of hearing had taken in every word of the conversation between the boy and the stranger. At last he answered feebly:

'I am Conrad Zimmerman.'

'You are an invalid, are you not?'

'I served in the Russian army with the Rhine troops.'

The stranger seated himself upon one of the rocks that stood near the little footpath, and said:

'Tell me your story.'

Then the old man began:

'When, in 1812, Napoleon led his army across the Rhine towards Russia, the Rhine troops were also called upon to assist him. I came from Baden. With the promise of victory, we entered Russia, and we reached Moscow, amid great rejoicing. But what a day! Before long a mighty conflagration swept over the city, and then the misery and suffering began. After four years, I returned to Germany. In the meantime my wife had died of poverty and despair. My only daughter had married the noted sculptor, Werner. I went to live with my children. Werner was a talented fellow. But at the birth of little George here, who is my trusty companion, my daughter passed away beyond life's gray shadows, leaving Werner behind. The latter loved his wife dearly; the parting was too much for his sensitive heart, and he followed her soon after, to be united in heaven. I was a lithographer, and made good money at that time. Then a great misfortune came upon me. It was all brought on, my physicians said, by overwork, and those previous hardships and exposures in Russia. In a short time I grew blind; and this, sir, in short, is how I became a beggar on life's highway.'

'And where did you learn to play the violin?'

'At home. My father was a musician, and he taught me.'

The stranger sighed deeply and whispered to himself:

'Oh, if there were only some one who could help, soften and bear all this misery!'

Just then a crowd of guests passed by, laughing and chatting briskly, men and women whose outward bearing showed that they were people of culture and wealth. Instantly an idea shot through the stranger's mind.

'Give me your violin!' he exclaimed.

And, taking it on his arm, he tuned the strings, clear as a bell.

'Now watch me, child,' he spoke authoritatively, 'and pass your hat quickly through the crowds.'

Then the bow flew over the strings, so that the poor old violin sounded like a human voice, calling out pitifully and sweetly to the children of earth, gathered around. Even the blind musician was beside himself with admiration. Wondering, he inquired:

'What! Is that my violin?'

But the stranger did not hear him. His soul was wrapped up in the music that he drew out of the humble instrument. It was a beautiful march theme, interlaced here and there with many artistic and intricate variations.

A large crowd of noted men and fashionable women had, in the meantime, gathered in response to the pleading cry of the singing violin. Everyone present seemed to know that the stranger was playing for the poor old man and the little boy, and silver—yes, even gold—pieces dropped carelessly into the hat.

As he ceased, a tall, earnest-looking man, with a strong physique, was seen making his way through the crowd of interested spectators. He was dressed in the striking military uniform of a Prussian general.

'What has happened here?' the general asked inquisitively.

As he spoke, all the men present bared their heads.

'Frederick William II. of Prussia!' was the whisper that stole from lip to lip.

'Your Majesty,' answered the director of the sanatorium, 'a stranger, a violinist of the first rank, is playing there for a poor old invalid.'

'Invalid? Send him to the hotel director at once. I will give you a hundred dollars for your trouble. Adieu!'

Thereupon Frederick William II. turned and left with his attendant, remarking thoughtfully:

'Since Louise died I do not care to listen to any music.'

The talented violinist had, meanwhile, handed the instrument back to the old man, and was disappearing in the crowd when the director of the sanatorium walked up to him and said:

'Sir! His Imperial Majesty, the Elector of Hessen, begs you to give him your name.'

'I am Ludwig Spohr, born in Brunswick.'

And already it was whispered through the throng.

'Spohr—it is the illustrious Spohr!'

The great violinist had come to assist at a concert at Wiesbaden.

That evening as Spohr sat at his supper table, an electoral hunter came in upon him suddenly and handed him a letter in his Majesty's own handwriting. The letter read:

'My Dear Herr Spohr,—We have been witness to-day of your noble deed and have admired your remarkable musical talent. The invalid and the child whom you assisted so kindly will hereafter be well taken care of; and you we elect to the high position of Hofkapellmeister. Your salary, rest assured, will be worthy of your high art. Affectionately,

WILLIAM II.

Thereupon the new Kapellmeister, in the fulness of new-born joy, folded his hands and exclaimed thoughtfully:

'And yet there are people who do not believe in Divine Providence!—Ave Maria.'

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