

The Storyteller.

THE CHAINS THAT BIND THE WORLD.

I. A TALK.

THE crops looked well: green and yellow, with streaks of brown, covered the fields. But every farmer knew what it meant, and was not joyful. It had rained, rained, rained for many weeks, and beneath all this show of color there was nothing but rottenness.

May Gartland read in the newspaper that the incessant rain had ruined the crops in Bavaria, but she thought that it made no difference to her, and she was heartily glad that the crops were good at home, for that meant to her and her sisters a trip to France and Germany in the spring. May had not been graduated from school yet, but she and Alice and Margaret had done so well that their father had promised them six months abroad, if matters were propitious.

And so May, who always read the foreign news to her father every night, merely shrugged her shoulders. Mr. Gartland smiled. 'Too bad,' he said; 'but it will bring up the price of our corn. You needn't worry about the trip, May.'

May laughed, and said: 'You dear old papa!'

Alice and Margaret were pleased too. They had made a great album of photographs of foreign places, and they were practising French and German verbs with a will. They, too, smiled. Bavaria was so far off, and the failure of the crops there would only give them additional pleasure. Their mother, who was sewing at the table, shook her head.

'I would rather stay at home than profit by the misfortunes of others,' she said. 'I feel sure that no evil can happen to our brethren anywhere without its affecting us in some way. We are all "bound by golden chains about the feet of God."'

Mr. Gartland laughed.

'You always were sentimental, Peggy,' he said. 'I must say I am more glad that corn will go up in price than sorry for the Bavarians.'

Mrs. Gartland sighed.

'You do not realise what poverty means. I was once very poor myself, after my father's failure in business, and I know.'

'What's the use of talking about that, mother?' said May, rather pettishly. 'I am awfully ashamed—'

'Awfully, May? I thought you prided yourself on your good English,' said her mother.

'I was very much ashamed when you said before Laura Wells, of all people!—the most conceited, snobbish thing in our school!—that you and grandmamma had often done your own washing. I could have sunk through the floor.'

'I have never been ashamed of it, dear. And your grandmamma's roughened hands were more precious to me than if they had been loaded with diamonds.'

'I was not at all ashamed,' said Alice, hotly. 'I thought it was a good lesson for Laura Wells—she is always talking about her ancestors. I'm sure they did their own washing.'

'Your mother is always right,' said Mr. Gartland.

May raised her head haughtily.

'In our position in life, we can't talk about such things, they are unpleasant. Why, the other day, Laura Wells asked me if mamma hadn't made dresses before she married papa. I was that mortified!'

'Poor, tender violet!' said her father, smiling indulgently. He admired even the haughtiness of his eldest daughter.

'It is true, my dear,' said Mrs. Gartland. 'It is true—and if I had not been skilful with my needle, my dear mother would have lacked many little comforts, and I,' she added with a smile, 'might not have been able to wear the pretty pink dress in which your father first saw me as I was coming out of church.'

May's cheeks flushed. She tapped her foot against the carpet.

'I hate poverty,' she said. 'I wish we had always been rich. And I think proper pride is a good thing.'

'Self-respect, my dear, is a good thing—but not pride. May, you ought to remember how poor Our Dear Lord was—and I shall never be ashamed of that poverty which taught me so many lessons of patience, endurance, and gratitude.'

Alice and Margaret dropped their photographs, and each pressed a cheek against their mother's. But May went out of the room. Her mother looked after her.

'Ah, poor May,' she said, 'she will have many lessons to learn—many. She is a good, sweet child, and after a while she will get rid of these false notions.'

Mrs. Gartland went on with her work, and Mr. Gartland, who inconvenienced himself very often to make home pleasant, read aloud the description of St. Mark's in Ruskin's 'Stories of Venice,' while the girls looked at the photographs.

May, in the meantime, sulked upstairs. She felt aggrieved. Why couldn't her mother be more like other people? It was just horrid to have those old, hateful things talked of. Other girls' mothers had probably been poor, but they didn't talk about it. 'I am always tender with the poor because I was poor myself,' her mother often said. Such nonsense! May herself always found both the poor and poverty very disagreeable. 'There was one consolation,' she said to herself, 'that the trip was assured.'

II.

MAY'S PRIDE.

Karl shivered. His mother took her shawl and wrapped him closely in it.

'Ah, dear mother,' he said, 'I have never been warm since we left the little house. If father would come back and take me in his arms again I should be warm. When shall we see father?'

Frau Wiener choked down a sob as she led her little boy along the windy street. It was in February, and really cold and blustering. Karl looked very quaint and funny with his gold head and blue eyes above the dark blue shawl, and with its fringe dragging behind him, people turned to look at him and his mother. They had just come from the steamer, driven from their home by the failure of the crops. Karl, the father, had died of overwork and exposure in the fields, and his wife Gretchen and little Karl were left with almost nothing.

But somehow Gretchen felt more hopeful every time she looked at Karl's curly head. Surely the dear Child Jesus would help this little one! And so she took her little boy and embarked on the cold, wide sea, trusting in God.

She could speak no English, and, after she had reached Boston, she became afraid for the first time. After all, she said, perhaps she and Karl had better have remained among the ruined crops at home than to have come among these strange people, who hurried so, who were not Christians—for she saw nowhere images of the dear Lord or the saints. It was Sunday, and yet the people hurried. She had been directed to a German boarding-house, and there she had left her mattress and her little box, so that she might go to Mass. She carried her basket, in which she kept her own shoes and Karl's when they did not wear them, for Gretchen looked on shoes as very precious. They were to be worn only on Sundays and in the town. In the country they were to be carried in the basket. After Mass she would try to find work as a servant. Karl and she tramped on, Karl feeling very uncomfortable in his stiff shoes.

'Oh, mother,' he said, 'I must take them off. They hurt!'

'But we are going to Mass,' she said, 'and we must be well dressed before our Lord.'

Karl hobbled along, and many eyes were turned to the poorly-clad woman and the curly-headed little boy. The wind caught Gretchen's usually smooth locks and turned and twisted them in most unruly fashion. At last Gretchen caught sight of a gilded cross. She was heartily glad. Here were rest and hope at last. She gave Karl the holy water and piously crossed herself. The candles were lit for High Mass. She entered the beautiful vestibule. It was warm and bright with the soft glow from the stained windows.

'Oh, little mother,' whispered little Karl, 'let me take off my shoes. They hurt so!'

The church was empty, so Gretchen took off the little fellow's shoes and put them carefully into her basket.

'Oh, how good it is to be warm,' he said, 'and in God's house!'

Gretchen pressed him close to her heart. She looked at the red light before the Blessed Sacrament.

'We are at home, Karl,' she said—'we are at home as much as if we were in our own little house.'

'Let us go in.'

Some people, in fine clothes, had entered, and Gretchen followed them. She had no fear. In the house of God poor and rich were alike. The pews puzzled her; there were no pews in the little church at home. She drew aside the soft red silk cord that hung there and walked into one. People passing up the aisle did not notice her. Remembering her basket, she hastily left Karl in the pew and put it under the bench in the vestibule. Karl was alarmed.

'Are you sure, little mother,' he asked in a whisper, 'that the good God will take care of my shoes?'

She did not answer; she had taken out her rosary and had lost herself in prayer. She was in her Father's house. She began to be warm again. She did not shiver now, and poor little Karl raised his chubby hands and began to pray for his dear father with all his might.

Up the aisle—by this time the Mass had begun—came May Gartland and her schoolmate, Laura Wells. Behind them was Mr. Gartland. His wife and Margaret and Alice had gone to early Mass.

May was conscious of her well-fitting dress, her new hat, and her fashionable air. And Laura Wells had flattered her by whispering as they entered:

'Dear me! quite respectable—no poor people—just like an Episcopalian church.'

Laura herself was an Episcopalian, and she had come with her Catholic friend just to have a look at things.

May walked up the aisle with her head in the air. It was so lucky that all the pews were filled with well-dressed people. It was lucky, too, she thought, that those horrid, dowdy Smiths, who occupied the pew next to theirs, were not at church. Mr. Gartland had quietly slipped into the last pew; he had no desire to be disturbed by Laura's restlessness and questions. May made her most graceful genuflection, with her mind entirely taken up with Laura. As she rose she caught sight of the woman with the old shawl, the tangled, wind-blown flaxen hair, and the shabby little boy. They did not see her. Karl's little hands were clasped, his eyes fixed devoutly on the altar, and his mother had forgotten all earthly things.

May touched her on the shoulder.

'Will you please leave this pew?' she asked in a sharp whisper. People like you ought to go to early Mass.'

'Fraulein!' exclaimed Gretchen, awakened from her vision of the angels.

May dropped into her German. She knew enough to give the command:

'Leave at once, this seat is mine.'

Gretchen arose, bewildered. It was a new thing to be driven out of church. She drew Karl by the hand and walked quickly down the aisle. Mr. Gartland, absorbed in his devotions, did not notice this.