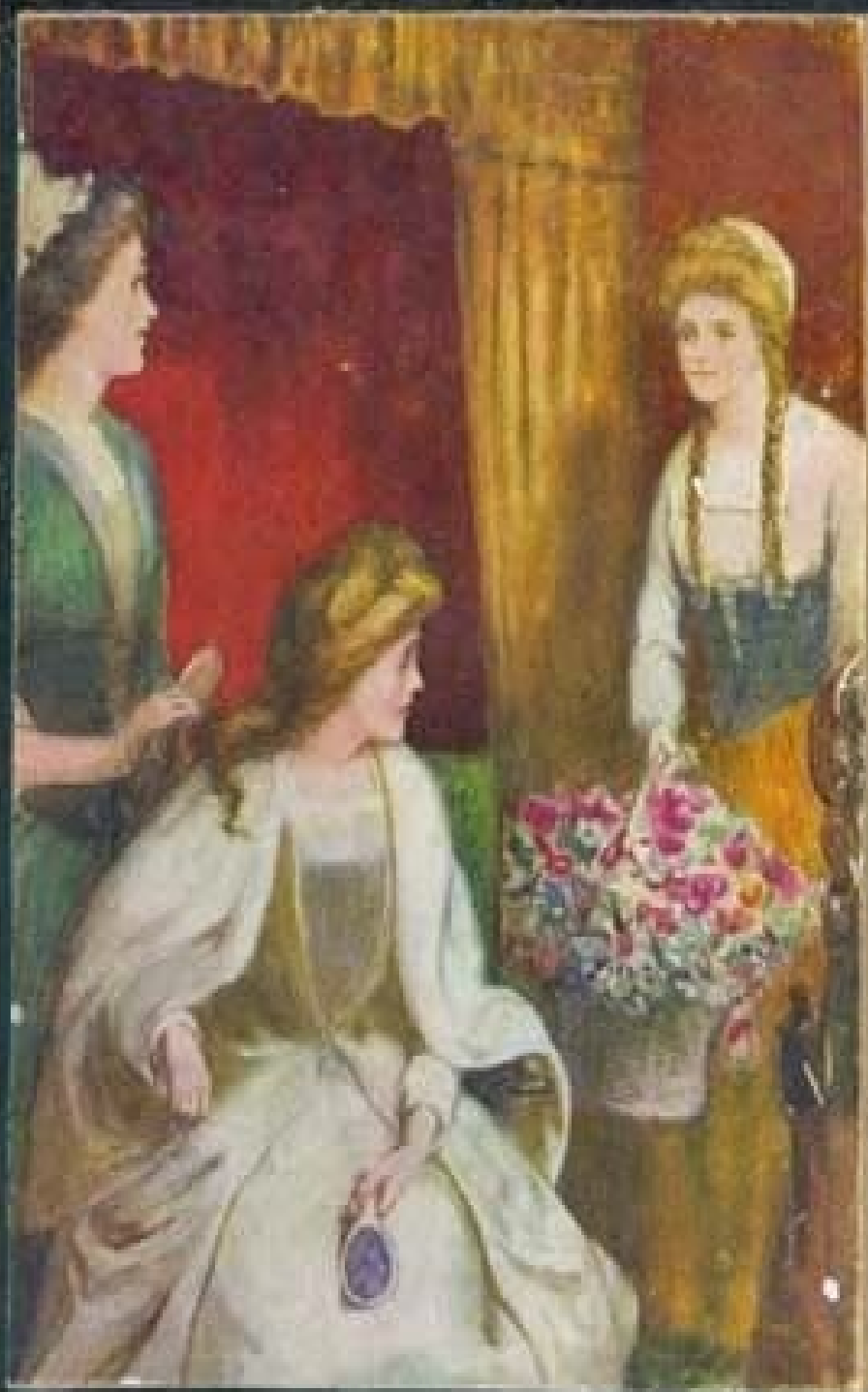


THE
BASKET
OF
FLOWERS

THE BASKET OF FLOWERS



TELL ME A STORY

SHAW

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by Christoph von Schmid

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FLOWERS ***

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THE BASKET OF FLOWERS

By

CHRISTOPH VON SCHMID

With Illustrations

By

WATSON CHARLTON and W. E. EVANS.

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

In putting forward a new edition of *The Basket of Flowers*

no apology is needed. This charming story is now something of a children's classic, and the only merits that the publisher can claim for the present edition are variety in the manner of the illustration and the outward design of the book. To these may be added, perhaps, the further claim that in the present English version, which is copyright, some of the more glaring faults that mar the original translation are avoided. For the rest, it is hoped that the charm of the original has been maintained.

CONTENTS

CHAP.		Page
I.	THE GARDENER'S DAUGHTER	<u>1</u>
II.	THE BASKET OF FLOWERS	<u>12</u>
III.	THE MISSING RING	<u>21</u>
IV.	MARY IN PRISON	<u>30</u>
V.	THE TRIAL	<u>36</u>
VI.	A PAINFUL MEETING	<u>42</u>

VII. SENTENCED	49
VIII. FINDING NEW FRIENDS	58
IX. A NEW HOME	65
X. A FATHER'S LAST WORDS	72
XI. MARY'S GREAT LOSS	82
XII. CHANGES AT PINE FARM	90
XIII. AGAIN A WANDERER	97
XIV. A STRANGE MEETING	104
XV. THE YOUNG COUNTESS'S STORY	108
XVI. HOW THE RING WAS FOUND	115
XVII. REPARATION	123
XVIII. PINE FARM REVISITED	127
XIX. RETRIBUTION	134
XX. FORGIVING AN ENEMY	140
XXI. CONCLUSION	145

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

AN OFFICER CAME TO MARY'S
CELL

Frontispiece

Facing p.

MARY SHYLY OFFERED HER
PRESENT

[16](#)

"OH, MY FATHER, BE SURE
THAT I HAVE NOT THE RING"

[32](#)

SHE RAISED HERSELF HASTILY,
FORGETTING HER CHAINS

[48](#)

SHE THREW THE BASKET AT
MARY'S FEET

[64](#)

LOOKING UP SHE SAW THE
BEAUTIFUL FACE AND FIGURE
OF A WOMAN

[96](#)

MARY WAS AFFECTED TO THE
HEART WHEN SHE HEARD
JULIETTE'S STORY

[144](#)

THE BASKET OF FLOWERS

CHAPTER I.

THE GARDENER'S DAUGHTER.

The simple story which is told in this little book treats of things which happened a long time ago in a foreign country, where the manners and customs are widely different from our own. It is necessary to explain this at the beginning, because the reader will meet with incidents in the narrative which would otherwise seem strange and inconsistent. Two lessons which the story teaches, however, may be learned in all countries. The first is that the human heart has from the beginning been full of sin, producing, for the most part, evil fruit, which results in misery; and in the second place, that there is only one remedy for this state of the soul, the remedy of God's Holy Spirit, which, wherever it enters, produces the fruits of righteousness and perfect peace. It is because we believe that the study of these opposing principles as

exhibited in the experience of others may be profitable to young readers, that the story of the Basket of Flowers is now presented.

James Rode, who, with his daughter Mary, forms the subject of our tale, lived over one hundred years ago in the village of Eichbourg, in Germany. When he was very young his parents sent him to be trained as a gardener in the beautiful grounds of the Count of Eichbourg. James was a bright, intelligent lad, fond of work, and of an amiable disposition, and he soon made himself a favourite with the people among whom he associated. His happy genial disposition and his readiness to oblige endeared him to all with whom he came in contact. The secret of James' character lay deeper than mere disposition. He had early given his heart to the Lord Jesus Christ, and the amiable qualities which he now displayed were the fruits of the Holy Spirit which had been implanted in him. But it was not only among his companions that James was well liked. He was a favourite with the Count's children, and so modest and unassuming was his behaviour that he was sometimes allowed to be in the Castle with them, and to share in the lessons which they got.

Being of an intelligent turn of mind, James profited by all

the advantages which his position gave him, and, after his engagement was completed, the Count offered him a well-paid position in his large household at Vienna. It was a temptation for James, who had the ambition common to young men, and, but for one thing, he would have gladly accepted his master's offer. The Count was a kind man, but he was not a Christian, and God was not honoured in his household. James knew that if he took the place in his house, he might be asked to do things which as a Christian he believed to be wrong; and so he decided to refuse the offer, tempting as it was, and to remain in the humble position in which he had been born. The Count was not offended with James for his decision; and to show his respect for him he gave him an easy lease of a little property, consisting of a cottage, a well-stocked orchard, and a kitchen garden.

By and by James married a young woman, whose principles, like his own, were deeply religious, and together they lived in comfort and harmony many years. Then children came to brighten their life, but one after another was taken away, and at last only Mary remained, whose history this story is mainly occupied in telling.

When James Rode was a little over sixty years of age his

wife died. Mary was now five years old, and a fine, beautiful girl. The neighbours were foolish enough sometimes to call her pretty to her face, and, although this was a dangerous thing to do, it had not the effect of spoiling her. Besides being beautiful in face, Mary had a beautiful character, and was modest and obedient, and possessed unbounded love for her father. When she came to be fifteen years of age, she became her father's housekeeper, and so thorough and constant were her habits of cleanliness that the kitchen utensils shone brightly enough to be easily mistaken for new.

We have already informed our readers that her father, James Rode, earned his living as a gardener. Twice a week he carried the vegetables and fruit which he cultivated to the nearest market-town. But, while the growing of fruits and vegetables had to be looked after in order to secure his subsistence, his greatest delight was in the cultivation of flowers; and in this pleasant task Mary assisted him every hour which she could spare from the work of the house. She counted the hours devoted to this task among the happiest of her life, for her father had the art of turning labour into pleasure by his interesting and entertaining conversation. To Mary, who had grown up, as it were, in the midst of plants, there had come a natural

taste for flowers, and the garden was to her a little world. She was never at a loss for a delightful occupation, for every hour which she had at her disposal was spent in cultivating the young plants with the utmost care.

Specially did she find pleasure in studying the buds of every strange species. Her young imagination delighted in picturing what kind of flowers they would become; and so impatient was she to see her expectations fulfilled, that she was hardly able to wait until the flowers had unfolded. When the flower for which she had waited long appeared in all its beauty, the sight filled her with a strange joy. In truth, there was not a day which did not bring some new pleasure to Mary's heart. Sometimes it was by a stranger passing the garden and stopping to admire the beauty of the flowers. The children of the neighbourhood, as they passed on their way to school, never failed to peep through the hedge, and were generally rewarded by Mary with some little present of flowers as a token of her goodwill.

James, as a wise father, knew how to direct the taste of his daughter towards the most noble ends. Often he used to say, "Let others spend their money for jewels and silks and other adornments; I will spend mine for flower-seeds.

Silks and satins and jewels cannot procure for our children so pure a pleasure as these beautiful exhibitions of the wisdom and benevolence of God."

In the beauty of the various flowers which adorned their garden, in the charming variety of their shapes, in the perfection of their proportions, in the glory of their colours, and in the sweetness of their perfumes, he taught Mary to see and admire the power and wisdom and goodness of God. It was his custom to begin each day with God by spending the first hours of the morning in prayer; and, in order to accomplish this without neglecting his work, it was his habit to rise early. In the beautiful days of spring and summer, James would lead Mary to an arbour in the garden, and, while the birds sang their joyous songs, and the dew sparkled on the grass and flowers, he delighted to talk with his daughter of God, whose bounty sent the sun and the dew, and brought forth the beauty and life of the world. It was here that he first instilled into Mary's mind the idea of God as the tender Father of mankind, whose love was manifested not only in all the beautiful works of nature, which were round them, but above all in the gift of Jesus Christ. It was in this arbour that James had the happiness of seeing Mary's heart gradually unfold to the reception of the truth.

Once in the early part of March, when with shining eyes and bounding feet she brought him the first violet, he said, "Let this beautiful flower serve to you as an emblem of humility and sweetness, by its modest colour, its disposition to flourish in hidden places, and the delicate perfume which it sends forth. May you, my dear child, be like the violet, modest in your demeanour, careless of gaudy clothing, and seeking to do good without making any fuss about it."

At the time when the lilies and roses were in full bloom and when the garden was resplendent with beautiful flowers, the old man, seeing his daughter filled with joy, pointed to a lily unfolding in the rays of the morning sun. "See, in this lily, my daughter, the symbol of innocence. Its leaves are finer than richest satin, and its whiteness equals that of the driven snow. Happy is the daughter whose heart also is pure, for remember the words, 'The pure in heart shall see God.' The more pure the colour, the more difficult to preserve its purity. The slightest spot can spoil the flower of the lily, and so one word can rob the mind of its purity. Let the rose," said he, pointing to that flower, "be the image of modesty. The blush of a modest girl is more beautiful than that of the rose."

Mary's father then made a bouquet of lilies and roses, and, giving it to Mary, he said, "These are brothers and sisters, whose beauty no other flowers can equal. Innocence and modesty are twin sisters, which cannot be separated. Yes, my dear child, God in His goodness has given to modesty, innocence for a sister and companion, in order that she might be warned of the approach of danger. Be always modest, and you will be always virtuous. Oh, if the will of God be so, I pray that you may be enabled to preserve in your heart the purity of the lily!"

One ornament of their garden, which James and his daughter most dearly prized, was a dwarf apple-tree little higher than a rose-bush, which grew in a small round bed in the middle of the garden. The old man had planted it on his daughter's birthday, and every year it gave them a harvest of beautiful golden yellow apples spotted with red. One season it seemed specially promising, and its blossom was more luxurious than ever. Every morning Mary examined it with new delight. One morning she came as usual, but what a change had taken place! The frost had withered all the flowers, which were now brown and yellow and fast being shrivelled up by the sun. Poor Mary's sensitive feelings were so affected that she burst into tears, but her father turned the incident to good

account.

"Look, my child," said he, "as the frost spoils the apple-blossoms, so wicked pleasures spoil the beauty of youth. Oh, my dear Mary, tremble at the thought of going aside from the path of right. If the time should ever come when the delightful hopes which I have had for your future should vanish, I should shed tears more bitter than you do now. I should not enjoy another hour of pleasure, and my grey hairs would be brought with sorrow to the grave." At the mere thought of such a calamity the old man could not keep back his tears, and his words of tender solicitude made a deep impression on Mary's heart.

Brought up under the care of a father so wise and loving, Mary grew up like the flowers of her garden, fresh as the rose, pure like the lily, modest as the violet, and full of promise for the future, as a beautiful shrub in the time of flourishing.

When James viewed his beautiful garden, with its luxuriant flowers and its prolific fruits, which so well repaid his constant care, it was with a feeling of satisfaction and gratitude. But this feeling was nothing compared with the joy he felt when he saw his daughter,

as the reward of his pious efforts to train her in the love of God, bringing forth the most precious fruits of the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER II.

THE BASKET OF FLOWERS.

One day, early in the charming month of May, Mary went into a wood near her home to get some branches and twigs of the willow and hazel. When her father was not busily engaged in the garden, he occupied his time in making baskets of all sorts, and particularly lady's work-baskets. While he busied himself in this way, Mary read to him from the Bible or some good book, or, as her father worked, he talked to her about the highest matters.

While Mary was gathering the materials for her father's basket-work, she found some beautiful specimens of lily-of-the-valley; and, gathering sufficient of the flowers, she made two bunches, one for her father and the other for herself. After she had finished her work, and when she was returning home through a meadow, she met the Countess of Eichbourg and her daughter Amelia who

were taking an afternoon walk. The ladies spent the greater part of their time in the city, but occasionally they lived for a few days at the Castle.

Some of the most important circumstances of life spring from apparently trifling events. In the case of Mary, this accidental meeting with the Countess and her daughter proved the beginning of the painful circumstances of this story. But God overrules all events, and this tale gives abundant proof that all things work together for good to them that love God.

As the ladies came near Mary, she stood a little on one side to let them pass; but when they saw the beautiful bunches of lilies in her hand they stopped to admire them, and wanted to buy one. Mary respectfully declined to sell her flowers, but she begged that the ladies would each accept a bunch. They were so struck with the girl's unaffected grace and modesty, that they gladly took her little offering, and Amelia requested her to gather more and bring them to the Castle every day for the rest of the season.

Mary faithfully performed this duty, and every morning while the flowers were in bloom she carried a bunch of

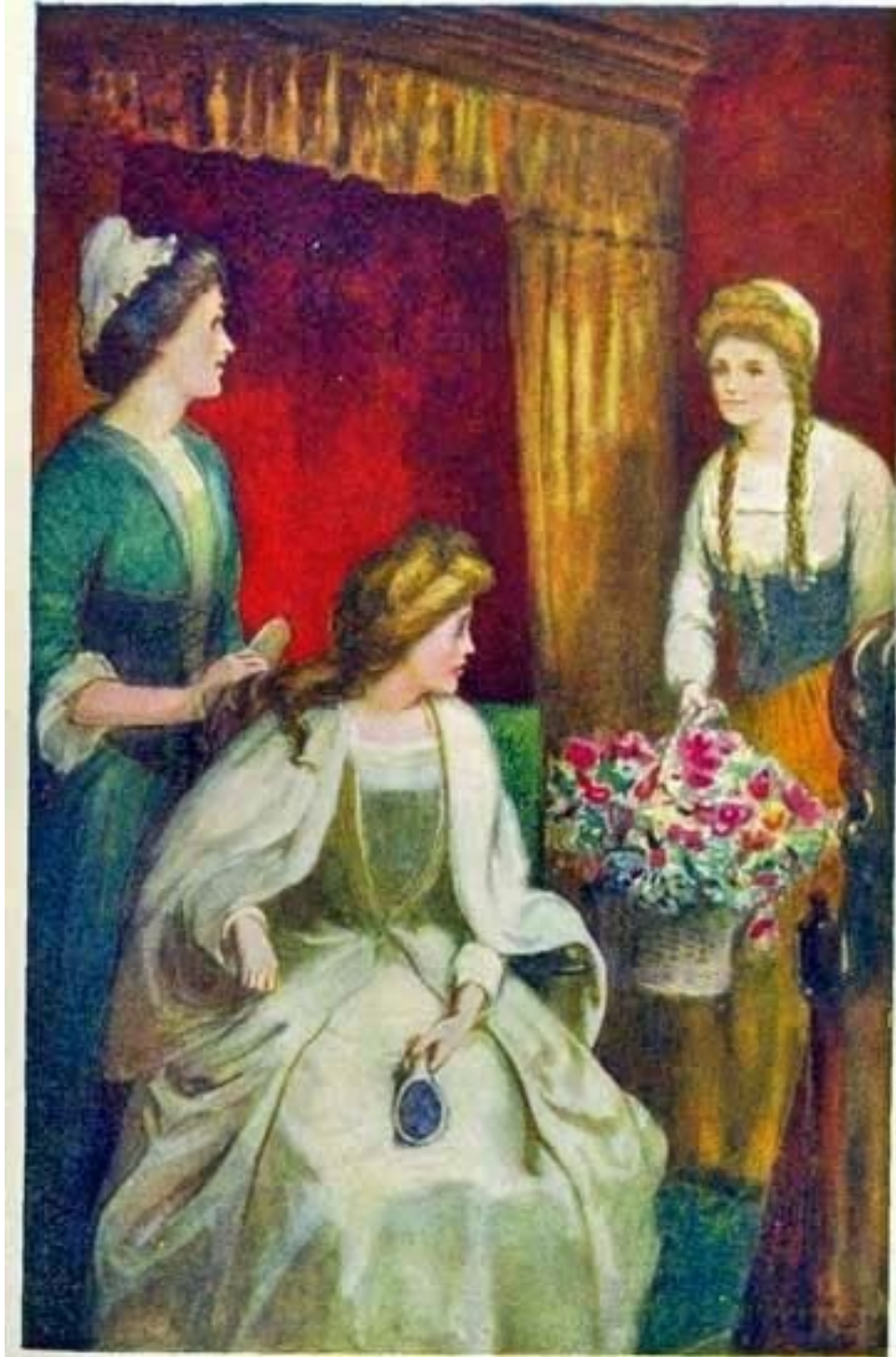
lilies to the young lady. By and by an intimacy, which was something more than ordinary between two girls of such widely different positions, sprang up between Mary and Amelia. They were nearly of the same age, their tastes were similar, and it is not surprising that the acquaintance begun in a chance manner developed into a sincere friendship.

The anniversary of Amelia's birthday drew near, and Mary determined to make her some little present. She had given her so many bunches of flowers, that she puzzled her brain to think of some new gift. During the winter her father had been making a beautiful basket, which he intended to give to Mary herself. It was the most finished piece of work he had ever done, and he had worked on it a design of the village in which they lived. Mary's idea now was to fill this basket with flowers, and to offer it to the young Countess as her birthday present. Her father readily fell in with the plan, and added a finishing touch to it by weaving Amelia's name in on one side of the basket and the Count's coat-of-arms on the other.

The long-expected day arrived, and early in the morning Mary gathered the freshest and most beautiful roses, the richest pinks, and other flowers of beautiful colours. She

picked out some green branches full of leaves, and arranged them in the basket, so that all the colours, though perfectly distinct, were sweetly and delicately blended. A light garland composed of rosebuds and moss was passed around the basket, and Amelia's name could be distinctly read enclosed in a coronet of forget-me-nots. The basket when completed was a thing of uncommon beauty.

When Mary went to the Castle with her basket-present, the young Countess Amelia was sitting at her toilet. Her maid was with her busily engaged on making her young mistress's head-dress for the birthday feast. Mary shyly offered her present, adding the best wishes of her heart for the young Countess's happiness. Amelia received the present with unaffected pleasure, and in an impulsive manner she warmly expressed her delight, as she viewed first of all the charming flowers with which the basket was filled, and examined more carefully the beautiful design of the basket itself.



**"Mary shyly offered her present."
*See page 15.***

"Dear Mary," she said, "why, you have robbed your garden to make me this present. As for the basket, I have never seen anything so beautiful in all my life. Come, we will go and show it to my mother." Taking Mary affectionately by the hand, the girls went together to the apartments of the Countess. "See, mother," cried Amelia, "of all my birthday presents, surely nothing can equal the one I have received from Mary. Never have I seen so beautiful a basket, and nowhere can you find such beautiful flowers." The Countess was equally pleased with Mary's present, although she expressed herself more moderately. "What a charming basket!" she said, "and its flowers, how beautiful! They are yet wet with dew. The basket of flowers does credit to the taste of Mary but more to the kindness of her heart." Asking Mary to remain in the room, she made a sign to Amelia to follow her into another apartment.

"Amelia," said the Countess, "Mary must not be permitted to go away without some suitable return. What have you to give her?"

Amelia paused for a moment's reflection. "I think," she replied, "one of my dresses would be a most acceptable gift. For instance, if you will permit me, my dear mother,

that one with the red and white flowers on the deep green ground. It is almost new; I have worn it but once. It is a little too short for me, but it will almost fit Mary, and she can arrange it herself. She is so handy with her needle. If, therefore, you do not think the present too valuable——"

The Countess interrupted her. "Too valuable! certainly not. When you wish to give anything it ought to be something good and serviceable. The green robe with the flowers will be very appropriate for Mary."

"Go now, my dear children," said the Countess, when they returned to the room where Mary was, "take good care of the flowers, that they may not fade before dinner. I want the guests to admire the basket also, which will be the most beautiful ornament on our table."

Amelia ran to her room with Mary, and told Juliette, her maid, to bring the dress with the white and red flowers.

"Do you wish to wear that dress to-day, miss?" said her maid.

"No," said Amelia, "I intend to make a present of it to Mary."

"Give that dress away!" replied Juliette hastily. "Does the Countess know?"

"You forget yourself, I think, Juliette," said Amelia with dignity. "Bring me the dress, and give yourself no trouble about the rest."

Juliette turned away hastily, her face burning with anger, and her heart full of spite. Pulling the door of the wardrobe open, she took from it the young Countess's dress. "Oh, I could tear it to pieces," she said passionately. "This sly Mary has already wormed her way into the affections of my young mistress, and now she steals from me this dress which ought to have been mine when the Countess had done with it. I could tear the eyes out of this little flower-girl; but some day I will be revenged." For the time being, however, she had to suppress her anger, and, taking the dress on her arm, she returned to her mistress and gave her the dress with a pleasant air.

"Dear Mary," said Amelia, "many of the presents which I have had to-day have cost more money than your basket, but none of them have given me so much pleasure. Will you take this dress from me as a token of my affection, and carry my best wishes to your good old father?"

Mary was not a vain girl, but her eyes sparkled at the sight of the beautiful dress, which surpassed anything she had ever dreamed of possessing. After warm thanks, she kissed the hand of the young Countess and left the Castle.

Amelia's maid continued her work in silence, but with jealous fury burning at her heart. The many tugs which she gave to the head-dress she was preparing made Amelia at length inquire—

"Are you angry, Juliette?"

"I should be silly indeed, miss," answered Juliette; "to be angry because you choose to be generous."

"That is a very sensible answer, Juliette," replied Amelia, "I hope you may feel just as sensible."

Meantime Mary ran home to her father to show her new dress. The good old man, while pleased at his daughter's pleasure, could not help feeling a little anxiety when he saw the present. "I would much rather, my child," he said, "that you had not taken the basket to the young Countess, but it cannot be helped now. I fear that this valuable present will but rouse the jealousy of some of our neighbours, and, what would be still worse, that it may

make you vain. Take care, my dear Mary, that you fall not into this great evil. No costly and beautiful garments so much adorn a young girl as modesty and good manners. It is the Bible that says the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit is in the sight of God of great price."

CHAPTER III.

THE MISSING RING.

Shortly after Mary had left the Castle the Countess missed a valuable diamond ring. No one had been in the room where she had left it but Mary, and it is not surprising that suspicion fell upon the humble flower-girl. Calling Amelia to her, the Countess told her of her loss and of her suspicions, and bade her go to the cottage in order that she might induce Mary to restore the ring before the theft became known.

When Amelia arrived at Mary's home, the young girl was busily engaged trying on her beautiful dress. She was frightened to see the young Countess enter her little room, pale and trembling, and out of breath with her haste.

"Dear Mary," said Amelia, "what have you been doing? My mother's diamond ring, which she left lying in the

room where you were, is lost. No one has been in the chamber but you. Do give it up at once, and no harm will be done."

The unexpected charge of theft stunned and frightened Mary. Earnestly she declared her innocence. She had never seen the ring, nor had she moved from the place where she stood when she entered the room. But Amelia found it impossible to believe her, and continued to urge her to give up the ring, which she said was worth a large sum of money. To be suspected of theft was bad enough, but to have her friend Amelia unwilling to believe her, made Mary burst into tears.

"Truly," she cried, "I have no ring. Never in all my life have I ventured to touch anything which did not belong to me, much less to steal. My dear father has always taught me better."

Her father, who had been at work in his garden, now came in to learn the young Countess's errand, and to him Amelia told the story. Shocked beyond measure at the charge, the old man was so overcome that he was obliged to sink into a chair.

"My dear child," he said to Mary solemnly, "to steal a ring of this price is a crime which in this country is punished with death. But this is not all. Your action is not only one for which you must account to men, but to that God who reads the heart and with whom all false denials amount to nothing. Have you forgotten His holy commandment, 'Thou shalt not steal?' Have you forgotten all the advice that I have given you? Were you tempted with the gold and the precious stones? Alas, do not deny the fact, but give back the ring to the Countess. It is the only return you can make for your crime."

"My father, oh, my father," cried Mary, weeping bitterly, "be sure, be very sure that I have not the ring. If I had even found such a ring on the road I could not have rested till I had restored it to its owner. Indeed, believe me, I have it not."

"Look at this dear young lady," said the old man, without replying to Mary's protestations, "her affection for you is so great that she wishes to save you from the hands of justice. Mary, be frank, and do not add falsehood to the crime of theft."

"My father," cried Mary, "well do you know that never in

my life have I stolen even the smallest coin, and how should I take anything so valuable as the Countess's ring? I pray you, believe me; I have never in my life told you a lie."

"Mary," again said her father, "see my grey hairs. Do not bring them down with sorrow to the grave. Spare me so great an affliction. Before that God who made you, into whose presence there can come no thief, tell me if you have the ring?"

Thus adjured, Mary raised her eyes, and once more assured her father in the most solemn manner that she was innocent of the charge. The old man had put his daughter to a severe test, and now he was satisfied of her innocence.

"My child," he cried, "I do believe you. You would not dare to tell a lie in the presence of God and before this young Countess and your father. You are innocent, and therefore you may take comfort and fear nothing. There is nothing to fear on earth but sin. Prison and death are not to be compared to it. Whatever happens, we will put our trust in God. All will yet come right, for He says, 'I will make thy righteousness as the light and thy just dealings

as the noonday."

Touched to the heart by the old man's faith, Amelia's suspicions also vanished. "Truly," she said, "when I hear you speak in this way, I believe that you have not the ring; but when I examine all the circumstances how can I help believing? My mother says she knows exactly the place where she laid it down. Not a living soul has been in the room but Mary, and as soon as she left the Castle my mother missed the ring. Who else, then, can have taken it?"

"It is impossible for me to say," replied Mary's father. "May God prepare us for a severe trial, but whatever happens," said he, turning his eyes to heaven, "I am ready. Give me but Thy grace, O Lord; it is all I ask."

"Truly," said Amelia, "I came here with a heavy heart. It will be for me the saddest birthday I have ever had. My mother has not yet spoken to any one of her loss but myself, but it will not be possible to keep the secret much longer. My father returns to the Castle at noon, and he will certainly ask her where the ring is. It was a gift to her on the day when I was born, and on every succeeding birthday she has worn it. Farewell," said Amelia, turning

to Mary, "I will tell my mother that I consider you are innocent, but who will believe me?" Her eyes filled with tears, and she left the cottage with a sad heart.

After the young Countess had gone, Mary's father sat for a long time resting his head on his hand and with his eyes fixed on the ground. The tears fell down his wrinkled cheeks, and Mary, touched by his grief, threw herself at his knees and besought him to believe in her innocence.

The old man raised himself and looked for a long time in her eyes, and then said—

"Yes, Mary, you are innocent. That look, where integrity and truth are painted, cannot be the look of guilt."

"But, my father," asked Mary, "what will be the end of it? What will they do to us? I do not fear what they may do to me, but the idea that you may have to suffer on my account is intolerable."

"Have faith in God," answered her father. "Take courage. Not one hair of our heads can fall to the ground without His permission. All that happens to us is the will of God, and what more can we wish? Do not be frightened into saying anything but what is strictly true. If they threaten

you, or if they hold out promises, do not depart a hair's-breadth from the truth. Keep your conscience free from offence, for a clear conscience is a soft pillow. Perhaps they will separate us, and I shall no longer be with you to console; but if this should happen cling more closely to your heavenly Father. He is a powerful protector to innocence, and no earthly power can deprive you of His strength."

Suddenly the door opened with a noise, and an officer entered, followed by two constables. Mary uttered a piercing shriek, and fell into her father's arms.

"Separate them," cried the officer angrily; "let her father also be put in custody. Set a watch on the house and garden. Make a strict search everywhere, and allow no one to enter until the sheriff has made an inventory."

Mary clung to her father with all her force, but the officers tore her from the old man's arms. In a fainting state she was carried off to prison.

The story of the lost ring had spread through the whole village of Eichbourg, and when Mary and her father were taken through the streets, the crowd pressed round them

filled with curiosity. It was curious to notice how diverse were the opinions which were pronounced on the old man and his daughter. They had been kind to all, but there were some who repaid their kindness by rejoicing in their present affliction. Although they had accepted the old man's gifts, their jealousy and envy had been excited by the thought of his superior position.

"Now," they exclaimed maliciously, "we know how it is that James had always so many good things to give away. If this is what the old man and his daughter have been doing, it was easy to live in abundance and be better clothed than their honest neighbours."

It is true that most of the inhabitants of Eichbourg were sincerely sorry for James and his daughter, although many of them felt compelled to believe in Mary's guilt. Fathers and mothers were heard to say, "Who would have believed this thing of these good people? Truly it proves that the best of us are liable to fall." But there were others who were persuaded of Mary's innocence, and said, "Perhaps it is not so bad as it appears. May their innocence be brought out when the trial comes, and may God help them to escape the terrible fate which now hangs over them."

Groups of children, to whom Mary had given fruit and flowers, stood weeping as they saw their kind friend being carried off to prison.

CHAPTER IV.

MARY IN PRISON.

We have already said that Mary was in a faint when she was carried off to prison. When she recovered to realise her condition, she burst into passionate sobbing, but at length, clasping her hands together, she fell down on her knees in prayer. Overcome with terror at her surroundings, filled with sadness at the thought of being separated from her old father, and wearied with the excitement of the day, she threw herself upon her hard straw couch and fell into a heavy sleep.

When she awoke it was so dark that she could hardly distinguish a single object. At first she could not remember where she was. The story of the lost ring came back to her as a dream, and her first idea was that she was sleeping in her own little bed. Suddenly she felt that her hands were chained. Instantly all the sad reality of the past

day flashed upon her mind, and, jumping from her bed, she cried out, "What can I do but raise my heart to God?"

Falling upon her knees, Mary then engaged in prayer. She prayed for herself, that she might be delivered, but especially she prayed for her dear father, that in the trouble which had now come upon him the Lord might support him. The thought of her father brought a torrent of tears from her eyes and stopped her prayer.

Suddenly the moon, which had been covered with thick clouds, now shone in a clear sky, and, its rays coming through the iron grating in the prison wall, threw a silvery light on the floor of Mary's cell. By the light thus afforded, Mary could make out the large bricks of which the walls of her prison were built, the white mortar which united them, the place in the wall serving as a table on which her meals were placed. Although her surroundings were so miserable, Mary felt that the moonlight had soothed her heart.

To her astonishment, she became conscious of a sweet perfume filling her cell. Suddenly she remembered that in the morning she had placed in her bosom a bouquet of roses and other sweet flowers which remained from the

basket. Taking it in her hand she untied it, and looked at the flowers in the moonlight. "Alas," said she mournfully, "when I gathered these rosebuds and forget-me-nots from my garden this morning, who would have thought that I should be confined in this gloomy prison in the evening? When I wore garlands of flowers, who would have imagined that on the same day I should be doomed to wear iron chains?" Then she thought of her father, and tears fell from her eyes and moistened the flowers which she held in her hand.



**"Oh, my father, be sure that I have not the ring."
*See page 23.***

"Oh, my dear father," she said, "how this bouquet reminds me of the advice which you have given me. From the midst of thorns, I plucked these rosebuds; and thus I know that joy will come to me from the very troubles which now cause me pain. If I had attempted with my own hands to unfold the leaves of these rosebuds, they would have perished; but God with a delicate finger had gradually unfolded their purple cups and shed over them the sweet perfume of His breath. He can disperse the evils which surround me, and make them turn to my good which seemed all evil. Let me then patiently wait His time. These flowers remind me of Him who created them. I will remember Him as He remembers me.

"These tender forget-me-nots, as blue as the heavens, may even be my silent consolation in all the sufferings of earth. Here are some sweet-peas with small delicate leaves, half white, half red. The plant grows and winds itself around a support, that it may not grope in the dust. And while it balances itself above the earth it displays its flowers, which might be taken for butterflies' wings. In this way I will cling to God and by His help raise myself above the miseries of this earth. This mignonette is the chief source of the perfume which fills my cell. Sweet plant, you cheer by your perfume the one who plucked

you from your home in the earth. I will try to imitate you and to do good even to those who without cause have torn me from my garden and thrown me into this prison. Here is a little sprig of peppermint, the emblem of hope. I also will preserve hope now that the time of suffering is come. Here again are two leaves of laurel. They remind me of that crown incorruptible, which is reserved in heaven for all who love the Lord and have submitted to His will upon the earth. Already I think I see it, surrounded with golden rays. Flowers of the earth, you are shortlived, as are its joys. You fade and wither in an instant, but in heaven, after our short suffering on the earth, an unchangeable joy awaits us and an eternal glory in Christ Jesus."

Talking thus to herself, Mary found her heart gradually grow consoled. Suddenly a dark cloud covered the moon; darkness filled the prison. Her flowers were blotted out from her sight, and grief again took possession of her heart. But the cloud was merely temporary, and in a little while the moon reappeared more beautiful than ever. "Thus," reflected Mary, "clouds can be cast over us, but it is only for a little, and at the end we shine clearly again. If a dark suspicion hangs over my character, God will make me triumphant over every false accusation." The thought brought comfort to her; and Mary, stretching herself upon

her bed of straw, slept as tranquilly as a little child.

In her sleep she dreamed a beautiful dream. It seemed to her that she was walking by moonlight in a garden which was quite new to her, situated in a wilderness surrounded by a dark forest of oak trees. By the light of the moon, which had never appeared to her so brilliant or so beautiful before, she saw hundreds of flowers in this garden, displaying their charms and filling the air with sweet perfume. Best of all, she dreamed that her father was with her in this beautiful place. The moon shining on his face showed his venerable countenance lighted by a gracious smile. Running to him, she fell on his bosom and shed tears of joy, with which her cheeks were wet when suddenly she awoke. It had only been a dream, but it comforted her heart, and she slept again.

CHAPTER V.

THE TRIAL.

Early in the morning, and almost before she was awake, an officer came to Mary's cell to bring her forth for trial. At the sight of the room in which the court was held she trembled, and her fears returned. Sitting in a large scarlet chair was the judge. Before him a clerk stood at an enormous table covered with papers.

A number of questions were put to Mary, to all of which she answered truthfully. She found it impossible to keep back her tears, but persisted in declaring her innocence of the crime.

"It is useless to try to make me believe this," said the judge. "You were the only one to enter the room where the ring was. No one but you could have taken it. You had better acknowledge the truth."

"It is the truth I speak now," replied Mary. "I cannot speak anything else. I have not seen the ring, indeed I have not."

"The ring was seen in your hands," continued the judge; "have you anything to say now?"

Mary declared that this was impossible. Turning to his side, the judge rang a little bell, and Amelia's maid, Juliette, was brought in. In the fit of jealousy which she had felt because of the dress given to Mary, and in her anxiety to deprive Mary of her mistress's favour, Juliette had said to one or two people that she had seen Mary take the ring. In consequence of this statement Juliette was now summoned as a witness, and, fearful to be caught in a lie, she determined to maintain it even in a court of justice. When the judge warned her to declare the truth before God, she felt her heart beat quickly and her knees tremble; but this wicked girl obeyed neither the voice of the judge nor the voice of her own conscience. "If," said she to herself, "I acknowledge now that I told a lie, then I shall be driven away. Perhaps I may even be imprisoned." Determined to carry out her part, she turned to Mary and said insultingly—

"You have the ring; I saw you with it."

Mary heard this false charge with horror, but she did not allow passion to get the upper hand. Her only reply was, and her tears almost choked her while she said it—

"It is not true. You did not see me with the ring. How can you tell so terrible a falsehood for the sake of ruining me, when I never have injured you?"

At the sight of Mary, Juliette's feelings of hatred and jealousy revived. She repeated the falsehood, with new circumstances and details, after which she was dismissed by the judge.

"Mary, you are convicted," said he. "All the circumstances are against you. The chamber-maid of the young Countess saw the ring in your hand. Tell me now, what you have done with it?"

In vain Mary protested her innocence. According to the cruel custom of those days, the judge now sent her to be whipped until the blood came, in the effort to make her confess her guilt. The punishment made poor Mary scream with pain, but she continued to declare her innocence. Suffering great agony, she was finally thrown

into her prison again. Her bed of straw was hard, her wounds gave her great pain, and half the night she spent without sleeping, groaning and praying to God.

The next day she was brought again before the court. The severity of the law had failed to wring any confession from her. The judge now tried to make her confess by adopting a mild tone, and by holding out promises.

"You have incurred the penalty of death," said he, "but if you confess where the ring is, nothing will be done to you. Think well before you answer, for your choice is between life and death."

Still Mary protested that she had nothing more to confess. The judge now tried to move her by her love for her father.

"If you persist in concealing the truth," he said, "if you are careless of your own life, you will at least spare that of your old father. Would you see his head, whitened by age, cut off by the sword of justice? Who but he could have induced you to tell a falsehood so obstinately? Are you ignorant that his life as well as yours is at stake?"

This was a new thought to Mary, and, terrified at the

threat, she nearly fainted.

"Confess," said the judge, "that you have taken the ring. A single word—say yes, and your life and that of your father are saved."

It was a great temptation and a terrible trial to Mary. Satan suggested that she should say, "I took the ring, but I lost it on the road." "No," she thought again, "no, I must stick to the truth. Let it cost what it will, not even to save my own or my father's life will I depart from the truth. I will obey God rather than man, and trust Him for the rest."

In a clear but tremulous voice she then answered—

"If I say I had the ring, it would be a lie; and, though this falsehood would save my life, I cannot utter it. But," she entreated, "if life is demanded, spare at least the white hairs of my loved father. I should be glad to shed my blood for him."

Her words touched the hearts of all the people in the court. Even the judge, for all his severity, was deeply moved; but he remained silent, and, giving the signal, Mary was taken back to prison.

CHAPTER VI.

A PAINFUL MEETING.

Not for a long time had the judge been so perplexed as he was over Mary's case.

"For three days," he said, "it has been before us, and we have not made the least advance towards the solution of the mystery. If I could see any possibility of the ring having been taken by any one else, I should certainly believe this girl innocent, but the evidence is so clear against her, that it is impossible to believe anything else."

The Countess was again examined and questioned thoroughly; the minutest circumstances being inquired into. Juliette was also examined again.

A whole day was spent by the judge in going over their testimony, and weighing against it the words that Mary

had uttered in her examination. It was late at night when the judge sent to the prison for Mary's father to be brought to his house.

"James," said he kindly, "I am known perhaps as a strict man, but I do not think that you can reproach me with ever having intentionally injured any one. I do not need to tell you that I do not desire the death of your daughter. All the details of the case, however, prove that she must have committed the theft, and, under these circumstances, you are aware that the penalty which the law requires is death. But your daughter is young, and, notwithstanding the serious nature of the crime, if she were to return the ring even now, a pardon might be granted to her. To persist so obstinately in denying her guilt will most certainly end in her death. Go to her, James; insist upon her returning the ring, and I give you my word that the penalty of death will not be visited upon her, but a mere trifling punishment substituted. As her father you have great power over her. If you cannot obtain a confession, most people will think that you have been an accomplice with your daughter in the crime. Once more, I repeat, if the ring is not found, I pity your case."

"My daughter has not stolen the ring," replied James

sadly; "of that I am sure. That she will not therefore acknowledge her guilt, I know beforehand. But I will speak to her as you desire. I will employ every means to find it out, and if it be that she is to perish, notwithstanding her innocence, it is a comfort to know that I can see her once again before the terrible event."

Accompanied by an officer, the old man went to the prison where Mary was confined. The officer set a lamp upon a projection of the wall in a corner of the cell, on which also stood an earthen pitcher of water. Mary was lying on her straw bed, with her face turned towards the wall, partially asleep. The light of the lamp woke her from her troubled slumber, and, turning over and seeing her father, she uttered a cry of joy and raised herself hastily, forgetting her chains. Almost fainting, she threw herself upon her father's neck, and the old man sat down with her upon her bed and pressed her in his arms. For some time they both remained silent and mingled their tears together. At length James broke the silence and began to speak as the judge had instructed him.



**"She raised herself hastily, forgetting her chains."
*See page 44.***

"Oh, my father," said Mary, in a reproachful voice, interrupting him, "surely you at least do not doubt my innocence. Alas," she continued, weeping bitterly, "is there no one who believes me innocent, no one, not even my father! Oh, my dear father, believe me that I am innocent."

"Calm yourself, my dear child; I believe you entirely. I am only doing now what I have been instructed to do by the judge."

There was a silence for a little while in the cell. The old man looked at his daughter and saw her cheeks pale and hollow with grief, her eyes red and swollen with weeping, and her hair hanging dishevelled about her.

"My dear child," he said, "God has suffered you to be tried very severely; but I fear lest there should be a worse trial to come, more painful sufferings than any you have yet undergone. Alas, perhaps even my dear child's head may fall by the hands of the executioner!"

"My father," said Mary soothingly, "I care but little for myself. But for you——"

"Fear nothing for me, my dear Mary," said her father, "I

run no risk——"

"Oh," cried Mary, "thank God! If that is the case, a great load is taken off my heart. For myself, all is well. Be sure, my dear father, I fear not to die. I shall go to God; I shall find my Saviour. I shall also see my mother in heaven. That will be a great happiness."

Deeply moved at his daughter's words, the old man wept like a child.

"Well, God be praised," said he, clasping his aged hands together, "God be praised for your submissive spirit. It is very hard for a man stricken in years, for a tender father to lose his only child, the child of his love, his only consolation, the joy of his old age, and his last support, but," he continued, "may the will of the Lord be done."

"One word," said he, a moment afterwards; "Juliette has sworn falsely against you. On her oath she has declared that she saw the ring in your hands. If you perish, you will perish by her testimony. But you will pardon her, my Mary—is it not so? You do not take with you any feeling of hatred towards her. Alas, even upon this bed of straw, and loaded with chains, you are still more happy than she

is, living in the Countess's palace and dressed in fine clothes, and with everything that her heart can desire. It is better to die innocent than to live dishonoured. Pardon her, my child, as thy Saviour pardoned His enemies on the cross. Do you pardon her?" the old man asked anxiously.

Mary assured her father that she did. And now the officer was heard coming to separate them.

"Well," said her father, "I commend you to God and His grace. If I should not see you again, if this is the last time that I am permitted to talk with you, my daughter, at least be sure that I will not be long in following you to heaven. You may depend upon it that I shall not long survive this parting."

The time was now up, and, warned by the officer, the old man prepared to take his departure. Mary clung to him with all her strength, but her father was obliged to disengage himself as gently as he could, and Mary fell insensible upon her bed.

As soon as James was brought before the judge, he raised his hands to heaven, and cried out, almost beside himself

"My daughter is innocent!"

The judge was deeply moved.

"I am disposed," he said, "for my own part to believe it. Unfortunately, I must judge the case from the nature of the testimony, with impartiality and even to the utmost rigour of the law."

CHAPTER VII.

SENTENCED.

In the village of Eichbourg the case of Mary and the missing ring were the only subjects of conversation, and many were the speculations as to what the result of the case would be. At the period when Mary lived, the crime of theft was always visited with severe punishment, and in many cases the sentence of death was carried out when the theft was of a much less valuable article than the Countess's ring.

The Count himself wished for nothing so much as to find Mary innocent. In his anxiety to give her the advantage of any doubt there might be, he himself read all the testimony and conversed with the judge for hours at a time, but, after all had been done, he was unable to persuade himself of Mary's innocence. Amelia and her mother were, as may be imagined, in deep distress, and

begged with tears that Mary's life might be spared. As for the old man, Mary's father, he spent his days and nights in unceasing prayer that God would be pleased to prove to the world the innocence of his daughter.

All this time the preparations for the execution were being rapidly pushed forward, and whenever Mary heard an officer enter her cell, she thought it was to announce to her that her hour had come to die.

But if Mary was thus distressed at the preparations for the execution, there was another person for whom the thought had infinite terror. Amelia's maid, Juliette, for the first time realised the crime of which she had been guilty, and when she saw the executioner at his work, horror seemed to deprive her of her reason. When she sat down to eat she could not swallow a bite, and her spirits became so low that she was an object of general remark. When she retired to rest, her sleep was disturbed by ghastly dreams, in which she saw Mary's head severed from her body. But in spite of the remorse which gnawed her day and night, the heart of the unhappy woman was hardened against the idea of confessing her falsehood, and so Mary remained guilty in the eyes of the law.

After much anxious deliberation the judge pronounced sentence upon Mary. In consideration of her extreme youth and the unblemished character which, up till now, she had enjoyed, the sentence of death was not to be carried out; but instead, Mary and her father were to be banished from the country, and all their furniture and possessions were to be sold to make up, as far as possible, for the value of the ring, and to pay the expenses of the trial.

Next morning at break of day the sentence was carried into execution, and Mary and her father were conducted from the prison. Their road lay past the Castle gate, and just then Juliette came out. Since the publication of the news that the sentence of death was not to be carried out, this wicked girl had recovered her spirits, and once more allowed all her evil feelings against Mary to revive. So far from being sorry for the banishment that was now inflicted upon Mary, she rejoiced in the thought that Mary could no longer be feared as a rival in her mistress's favour. After the trial was over, the Countess, seeing Mary's basket of flowers on the sideboard, had said to Juliette, "Take away that basket, that I may never have it before my eyes. The recollections which it arouses in me are so painful that I cannot endure the sight of it."

Now, as Mary and her father were passing the Castle gate, Juliette called out to them, "Stop a minute. Here is your fine present; my mistress would keep nothing from such people as you. Your glory has passed away with the flowers for which you were paid so well." So saying, she threw the basket at Mary's feet, re-entered the Castle, and banged the door with great violence after her. Mary took the basket in silence, and, with tears in her eyes, continued her way, while her father dragged his aged limbs alongside of her.



**"She threw the basket at Mary's feet."
*See page 52.***

Many a time on the journey Mary turned back to look, with tear-dimmed eyes, towards the cottage where they had spent so many happy years, until the roof of the Castle and even the church steeple disappeared from her sight. At last they came to the limits of the country beyond which their exile was to be; and, having conducted them thus far, the officer left them. They were now in the heart of a forest, and the old man, though overwhelmed with grief and anxiety for the future, seated himself upon the grass under the shade of an oak tree and comforted his daughter.

"Come, my child," said he, taking Mary's hands in his own and raising them to heaven, "before we go on let us thank God who has taken us out of the gloomy prison, and allowed us to enjoy once more the sight of heaven and the freshness of the air; who has saved our lives, and who has returned you, my dear daughter, to your father's arms." The old man then fell upon his knees, and out of a thankful heart commended himself and his daughter to the protection of their heavenly Father.

With the prayer of faith, which was thus offered up, feelings of joy and courage began to fill their hearts. And now it was seen that God's providence had not left them.

An old huntsman—Anthony by name—with whom James had been in service when he accompanied the Count on his travels, had set out before daybreak to hunt a stag, and now came upon James and his daughter seated under the oak.

"God bless you, James," said Anthony. "It does me good to hear your voice. Is it then true that they have banished you? Truly it is hard to see a man obliged, in his old age, to quit his country."

"As far as the reach of heaven extends," answered James, "the earth is the Lord's, and His kindness is extended to all. Our country—our real country—is in heaven."

"Tell me," said the huntsman, with sympathy in his face, "if they have banished you just as you are, without food or clothing necessary for the journey."

"He who clothes the flowers of the field will know how to provide for us also!"

"That is so; but you are provided at least with money?" insisted Anthony, whose kind heart was filled with sympathy and indignation.

"We have a good conscience," replied the old man, "and with that we are richer than if the stone upon which I sit was gold. My father was a basket-maker. He taught me his trade besides that of gardening, in order that, during the dark winter months, I might have a useful occupation. This has done more for me, and has been better for my prosperity, than if he had left me a fortune. A good conscience, health of body, and an honourable trade, are the best and surest fortunes we can have on earth."

"God be praised," answered the huntsman, "that you bear your misfortunes so well. I am forced to confess that you are right, and that you have still a good resource in gardening. But I cannot see where you expect to get employment."

"Far from here," answered James; "in places where we are not known. Wherever, in short, God will conduct us."

"James," said the huntsman, "take this stout stick in your hand. I have used it to assist me in climbing up the mountains, but I can easily get another. And here," he added, drawing from his pocket a little leather purse, "is some money that I received in payment for some wood in the village where I passed the night."

"I gladly accept the cane," replied James, "and I will cherish it in remembrance of a generous man; but it is impossible for me to accept the money, as it is payment for wood that belongs to the Count."

"Good old James," the huntsman replied, "if that is your fear, you may take the money with an easy mind. Some years ago a poor old man, who had lost his cow, could not pay for the wood which he had bought from the Count. I advanced him the sum, which he paid to the Count, and thought no more about it. Now he has got out of his difficulties, and yesterday, when I had forgotten all about it, he returned it to me with hearty thanks. So you see it is truly a present which God sends you."

"I accept it," said James, "with thanks, and may God return it to you. See, Mary," he said, turning to his daughter, "with what goodness God provides for us at the very commencement of our banishment, here almost before we have passed the limits of the country, and sends us our good old friend who has given us money. Courage, my daughter; our heavenly Father will watch over us." The huntsman then took leave of them with tears in his eyes.

"Farewell, honest James," said he, "farewell, my good Mary," extending his hands to both. "I always thought you innocent, and I still think so. Do not despair. Do not surrender your honesty because you are suspected. Yes, yes; whosoever does well and has confidence in God, may be assured of His protection. May God be with you."

Hand in hand Mary and her father now continued their way through the forest, not knowing at what spot they would rest, and without a friend in the world but God.

CHAPTER VIII.

FINDING NEW FRIENDS.

Although their hearts were thus sustained by faith in God, the journey on which Mary and her father now started was a long and painful one. For days they were unable to find a lodging, and the little money with which they had started was at last exhausted, and they had no prospect of earning more. Although it was sorely against their will, they were at last compelled to ask for bread at the hands of charity. Here again they were made to feel the humiliation of their position; for in going from door to door, seeking for help which they so sorely needed, they met with scarcely anything but rebuffs, and sometimes indeed with abuse. Often their meal consisted only of a small piece of dry bread, washed down by water from the nearest fountain. A luxury would occasionally come their way in the shape of a little soup or some vegetables, and

here and there, some scraps of meat or pastry, given to them by some kind-hearted housekeeper. After days spent in this way, they were thankful at night to be allowed to sleep in a barn.

Up till now Mary's father had borne up with wonderful courage. One day, however, the distance which they had travelled was longer than usual, and the road which stretched before them seemed endless, unbroken by the sight of any village or human habitation. Suddenly the old man began to feel very weak. His limbs tottered under him, and he fell, pale and speechless, on a heap of dry leaves at the foot of a hill covered with pine trees.

In great alarm for her father's safety, and overwhelmed with grief, Mary ran hither and thither trying to find water, but in vain. Thinking that her voice might be heard by some one in the neighbourhood she cried for help, but the echo alone answered her. As far as she could see, in every direction the country was without human habitation. Almost worn out with fatigue, she at last climbed to the top of the hill in order that she might more readily discover any dwelling-place where help might be obtained. It was then that she saw just behind the hill a small farmhouse surrounded by green meadows, and shut

in on every side by forest. Hastily running down the hill, she arrived at the cottage out of breath, and with tears in her eyes asked assistance for her old father. The farmer and his wife were kind-hearted people, and were deeply touched at the sight of Mary's agony.

"Put the horse in the little waggon," said the farmer's wife to her husband, "and we will bring this sick old man here."

When the horse was harnessed the farmer's wife put two mattresses, an earthen pitcher of water, and a bottle of vinegar into the waggon. But when Mary heard that the waggon would require to go round the hill, and could not reach her father within half an hour, she took the water and vinegar in her hand, and went by the short road across the hill in order that she might the sooner minister to her father's needs. Greatly to her joy, she found that her father had recovered a little and was now sitting at the foot of a pine tree. The old man was greatly relieved to see his daughter, whose absence had caused him deep anxiety.

In a short time the waggon arrived with the farmer and his wife. Placing James in the waggon they carried him to their home, where they gave him a clean little room, and a

closet and a kitchen which were then unoccupied.

The old man's illness had been caused solely by insufficient food, want of rest, and the fatigue of the journey. With great kindness, the good farmer and his wife, who were poor people, sacrificed some of their usual luxuries in order that they might have more money to spend on the things which James required to restore him to his usual health. For instance, they had been in the habit of taking a trip every year to a fair in a neighbouring village; but when the time came round they agreed to remain at home that they might save the cost of the journey, and spend the money thus saved in procuring some delicacies to tempt the old man's appetite. At this fresh proof of their kindness, Mary thanked them with tears of gratitude in her eyes.

"Oh," said she, "truly there are kind people everywhere, and in the most unlikely places we find compassionate hearts."

During the days when the old man was gradually recovering, Mary watched constantly at his bedside. But with the habit of industry which she had practised, she filled up these hours with working for the farmer's wife by

knitting or sewing, and as may be imagined, this anxiety to help her benefactors, added to her modest and winning manner, gave great pleasure to the kind-hearted peasants.

By and by the care which had been bestowed upon James, and the nourishing food which he had got, began to tell upon him, and soon he was so far restored as to be able to get up out of bed. As soon as he felt returning strength, he was desirous of doing something. Resuming their old habits, Mary gathered for him branches of willow and hazel, and with these her father made a pretty little basket, which he offered to the farmer's wife as a small token of gratitude.

When he felt himself quite recovered, he said to his hosts

"We have been long enough a burden to you. It is time we should go and seek our fortunes elsewhere."

"Why should you leave us, my good James?" said the farmer, taking the old man by the hand. "I hope we have not offended you in any way? The year is now far advanced; the winter is at the door. If you have any hardship again you will certainly be sick."

James warmly assured them that the only motive he had for desiring to leave them was the fear that he and his daughter were burdensome.

"If that is all," said the farmer heartily, "pray do not distress yourself further. The spare room which you occupy prevents you from being burdensome to us in the smallest degree, and you gain enough to supply your wants."

"Yes, that is true," added the farmer's wife. "Mary alone earns enough with her needle to support you; and as for you, James, if you wish to exercise your trade of basket-maker, you will have your hands full. Not long since I took your pretty basket with me to the market, and all the countrywomen who saw it wished to have one like it. If you like I will procure customers, and I promise that you will not soon be in want of work."

The old man and his daughter were only too glad to remain with their kind-hearted friends, who expressed themselves as thoroughly pleased with the new arrangement.

CHAPTER IX.

A NEW HOME.

James and his daughter were now settled down in a place which they could call home; they furnished their rooms in a simple style, with nothing more than they needed for everyday wants. It gave Mary great pleasure in again being able to prepare her father's meals, and to look after his comforts in every way; and together they led a life of quiet happiness. The good friends with whom they lived had a large garden attached to the house, but as the farmer and his wife had their time too much taken up in the field to give much care to the garden, it was of little or no use to them. James saw that it could be made a profitable source of income by devoting it to the growing of flowers and fruit, and when he proposed to put this plan into execution the farmer's consent was willingly granted.

During the autumn time, James had made his

preparations, and when the warmth of spring had melted the winter snows, he began his work, assisted by Mary; and together they laboured from morning to night. The garden was divided into beds planted with all sorts of vegetables and flowers, and bordered with gravel walks. The old man was anxious to see the completion of his idea, and allowed neither himself nor his daughter rest until he had stocked the garden with their favourite flowers, rose trees, tulip and lily roots, and various kinds of shrubbery.

Mary made a special study of cultivating some rare flowers, among which were some which had never before been seen in this part of the country. When the summer came, the garden showed such a burst of verdure and blossom, that the valley, which was overshadowed by dark trees, now assumed quite a smiling appearance. An orchard belonging to the farmer, which had also been taken in hand by James, soon bore evidence to his gardening skill in the shape of an abundant harvest of fruit. Indeed, it seemed as if the blessing of God was upon everything that James undertook.

Settled in a comfortable home, and occupied in his favourite calling, the old gardener began to forget the

troubles of the past, and to regain the cheerful humour which had made his conversation such a delight in the past. Once more he began to reflect upon the lessons which the flowers taught, and day by day he taught to Mary some new lesson which he had learned from them.

One day a woman from the neighbouring village came to buy some flax from the farmer, and brought her little boy with her. While she was occupied in bargaining for the flax, her little child, finding the garden-gate open, had gone in and begun to plunder a full-blown rose bush, with the result that he scratched himself terribly with the sharp thorns. His mother and the farmer's wife, as well as James and his daughter, hearing his screams of pain, ran to him. The child, with his little hands all covered with blood, cried out against the naughty rose bush for having attracted him by its pretty flowers and then cruelly torn his hands.

The occasion was seized by James for drawing a lesson. "It is sometimes thus with us older children also," he said to Mary. "Like this rose tree, every pleasure in life has its thorns. We run towards them, and would fain seize them with both hands. Some are led away by a taste for the dance and theatre, others by a taste for strong drink, or

still more shameful vices. But the thorns make themselves felt by and by, and then there comes lament for wasted youth, and a distaste for the pleasures once so eagerly sought. Do not let us be foolishly dazzled by the beauty of the world. The chief end which man has to care for is the saving of his soul, and it is folly to give ourselves up to the enjoyment of passion. Our unceasing effort should be to use all diligence to gain eternal life."

One day James was employed in placing young plants in a part of the garden, while Mary was weeding at a little distance from him. "This double labour, my child," said her father, "represents what should be the occupation of our life. Our heart is a garden which the good God has given to us to cultivate. It is necessary that we should constantly apply ourselves to cultivate the good and to extract the evil, which is too apt to take root. That we may fulfil faithfully these two duties, let us implore God's assistance and blessing, which makes the sun to shine out and the rain to fall, the plants to grow, and the fruit to ripen. Then will our hearts be delightful gardens. We shall then have heaven within ourselves." In this way the old man and his daughter passed through life, active and industrious in their calling, and mingling innocent pleasures and instructive conversation with their daily

pursuits.

Three years passed swiftly away, and the happy days they had spent at Pine Cottage had almost blotted out the memory of their past misfortunes. It was now autumn time, and the chrysanthemums, the last ornaments of the garden, were glorious in red and yellow flowers. The leaves of the trees had become of varied tints, and everything showed that the garden was preparing for the winter's repose. James had lately begun to feel his strength failing, and the thought of his daughter's future gave him considerable uneasiness. He concealed his feelings from her for fear of distressing her, but Mary observed that her father's remarks upon the flowers were now mostly of a melancholy kind. One day she observed a rose-bud which had never blossomed. In attempting to gather it the leaves of the flower fell off in her hand. "It is the same with men," said her father, who had been watching her. "In youth we resemble the rose newly opened, but our life fades like the rose. Almost before it is matured, it passes away. Do not pride yourself, my dear child, upon the beauty of the body. It is vain and fragile. Aim rather at beauty of soul and true piety, which will never wither."

One day towards evening time the old man climbed a ladder to pluck some apples, while Mary stood below with a basket to hold them.

"How cold," said James, "this autumn wind is as it whistles over the stubble fields and plays with the yellow leaves and my white hairs. I am in my autumn, my dear child, as you will also be some day. Try to grow like this excellent apple tree, which produces beautiful fruit and in great abundance. Try to please the Master of the great garden which is called the world."

On another day Mary was sowing seed for the following spring. "The day will come," said her father, "when we shall be put in the ground, as you are putting these seeds. But let us console ourselves, my dear Mary. As soon as the corn is enfolded in the earth, it is animated. It springs from the earth in the form of a beautiful flower, and rises thus triumphantly from the place where it was buried. So also shall we rise one day from our tombs with splendour and magnificence. When you follow me to the tomb, my dear child, do not mourn for me, but think of the future. In the flowers which you will plant on my grave, try to see the image of the resurrection and immortal life."

CHAPTER X.

A FATHER'S LAST WORDS.

The winter had now set in with threatenings of severity. Already the mountain and valley round about the farm were covered with deep snow. The weakness which old James had been feeling for some time now culminated in a severe illness. Obtaining her father's consent, Mary asked a physician from a neighbouring village to visit him. The doctor came to see James and prescribed for him. Full of foreboding, Mary followed him to the door to ask him if he had any hope of her father's recovery. To this the physician replied that the old man was in no immediate danger, but that he suffered from a disease which would make his recovery as an old man very improbable. It was with difficulty that Mary bore up under the news, and, after the physician had gone, she had a fit of passionate sobbing. For the sake of her father,

however, she wiped away her tears, and endeavoured to appear calm before she went to him.

During the succeeding days Mary attended her father with the utmost devotion and loving care. Rarely had he to make his requests known, for his daughter could read in his eyes all that he wanted. Mary spent whole nights by his bedside. If at any time she consented to be relieved for a little rest, it was but rarely that she could close her eyes. If her father coughed, she trembled with apprehension; if he made the least stir, she immediately approached him softly and on tiptoe to know how he was. She prepared and brought to him in the most delicate forms the food which best suited his condition. She arranged his pillows from time to time, read to him, and prayed for him continually. Even when he dozed for a little she would stand by his bed with her hands clasped and her tearful eyes raised to heaven.

Mary had a little money which she had saved from her hard-won earnings. To scrape together this small sum she had often spent half the night in sewing and knitting articles for sale. Now, in her father's illness, she made use of this little store to procure for him everything which she thought would be of any service. Good old James,

although occasionally he felt himself a little stronger, was never deceived about his condition, but felt only too sure that he was on his deathbed. The thought had no power to disturb him, and he spoke to his daughter of his approaching death with the greatest serenity.

"Oh," said Mary, crying bitterly, "do not speak thus, my dear father. I cannot bear the thought. What will become of me? Alas, your poor Mary will no longer have any one upon the earth!"

"Do not cry, my dear child," said her father affectionately, holding out his hand to her. "You have a kind Father in heaven who will never forsake you, although your earthly father be taken away from you. I do not feel anxious about the manner in which you will gain a livelihood when I am dead, for the birds easily find their food, and you will find enough to nourish you. God provides for the smallest sparrow; will He not also provide for you? The thought that distresses me," he continued, "is that you will be left alone. Alas, my dear child, you have little idea of the wickedness that is in the world! There will be moments perhaps when you will feel inclined to do evil; moments when you will perhaps yourself be persuaded that sin is not so very wrong. Listen to the advice which I

now give you, and let the last words of your dying father be for ever deeply impressed on your heart. Forbid every action, every speech, every thought for which you would have to blush if your father knew. Soon my eyes will be for ever closed, I shall not longer be here to watch over you, but remember you have in heaven a Father whose eye sees everything and reads the secrets of your heart."

After a little while, when he had recovered breath, he continued: "You would not wish by an act of disobedience to hurt the father whom you have on earth; how much more then should you fear to offend your Father which is in heaven? Look at me once more, Mary. Oh, if you ever feel the least inclination to do wrong, think of my pale face and of the tears which wet these sunken cheeks. Come to me, put your hand into mine which will soon fall into dust. Promise me never to forget my words. In the hour of temptation, imagine that you feel this cold hand which you now hold on the border of the grave. My poor child, you cannot see without weeping, my pale and hollow cheeks. But know that everything passes away in this world. There was a time when I had the bloom of health and the fresh colour which you now have. The time will come when you too will be stretched on the bed of death, pale and emaciated,

as you now see me, if God does not sooner take you to Himself. The friends of my youth have disappeared like the flowers which have passed away with the spring, and for whose places you seek in vain, like the dew which sparkles for a moment on the flowers and is gone."

The next day James, feeling that his end was near, felt it his duty and delight, though weak in body, to continue his advice to his daughter.

"I have seen the world," said he, "as well as other people, in the day when I accompanied the young Count on his travels. If there was anything in the large cities superb or magnificent, I went there. I spent whole weeks in pleasure. If there was a brilliant assembly or a lively conversation, I saw and heard as well as my young master. I shared in the most exquisite meals, and of the scarcest wines, and always had more than I wished for. But all these worldly pleasures left me with an empty heart. I assure you solemnly, my dear Mary, that a few moments of peaceful thought and fervent prayer in our arbour in Eichbourg, or under this roof that covers us now, gave me more real joy than all the vain pleasures of the world. Seek then your happiness in a life of service of our blessed Saviour. You will find Him and He will bless

you.

"Too well you know, my child, that I have not been without misfortune in this life. When I lost your dear mother my heart was for a long time like a dry and barren garden, whose soil, burned by the sun, cracks open, and seems to sigh for rain. In this way I languished, thirsting for consolation, and at last I found it in the Lord. Oh, my dear daughter, there will be days in your life when your heart also will be like dry and barren ground; but let it not dishearten you. As the thirsty ground calls not for rain in vain, but God sends the refreshing showers, so if you seek your consolation from God, He will refresh your heart as the sweet rain refreshes the thirsty parched earth. Let your confidence in your heavenly Father be unshaken. Firmly believe that there is nothing He will not do for those He loves. Sometimes He may lead us by paths of grief, but be sure that these paths lead to unmingled happiness. Do you recollect, my good Mary, all the grief you felt when, after our painful walk, I fell down with fatigue in the middle of the road? Now you can see that this accident was the means which God made use of to procure for us the comforts which we have enjoyed for three years with the good people of this house. Had I not taken ill that day then we should not have come before their door, or their

hearts would not have been touched with compassion for us. All the pleasures which we have enjoyed here, all the good which we may have been enabled to do, are so many benefits which sprang from the sickness which at first so sorely distressed you.

"But you will always find, my dear Mary, that in the troubles of life there are proofs of the Divine goodness, to those who will look for them. If the liberal hand of the Lord has scattered with flowers the mountains and valleys, forests and river-banks, and even the muddy marshes, to give us everywhere the opportunity of admiring the tenderness and beauty of nature, He has also imprinted on all the events of our life the evident traces of His great wisdom, and all His passionate love to man in order that the attentive man may learn by them to love and adore Him.

"In all our life, we have never had to suffer more than when you were accused of a theft, when you were chained and likely to be doomed to death. We were weeping together in prison and lamenting our affliction. Well, even this trial has been a source of great good to us. Looking back upon it we can see that, when the young Countess favoured you above other young girls, honoured you by

admitting you to her company, made you a present of a beautiful gown, and expressed a wish that you should always be near her, there was a danger that these great advantages of life would render you vain and trifling, fond of the things of this world, and apt to forget God. Doubtless the Lord consulted our highest interests when He changed our condition, and banished us from happiness into despair. In the misery of our state, in prison and in poverty of circumstances, we have been enabled to live nearer to Him. He has brought us far from the corrupt influences of large towns into this lonely country where He has prepared for us a better home. Here you are like a flower flourishing in solitude, where, if it has not the admiration of man, it has nothing to fear from his hand.

"The good and faithful God who has done all these things for us will give a still more happy turn to your life. For I firmly believe that He has answered my prayer, that He will one day show to the world your innocence. When that time shall come I shall be no more, but I can die in peace without seeing it, for I am convinced of your innocence. Yes, my daughter, the pain which you have suffered will yet be the means of leading you to much happiness on earth, though this kind of happiness is the

least, and you will see that God's great design in afflicting us was to sanctify our hearts, and to prepare us for that home to which we can arrive only through tribulation and suffering.

"Believing this, let not your heart be troubled that you are in misfortune. Believe firmly that God's tenderness watches over you, that His care will be sufficient for you in whatever place He chooses to take you. In whatever painful situation you may be placed, say, 'It is the best place for me. Notwithstanding all that, I am safe, for He has brought me here.'"

CHAPTER XI.

MARY'S GREAT LOSS.

When at last Mary could no longer hide from herself the seriousness of her father's illness, she went to the minister of the parish in which Pine Cottage was situated and asked him to come and visit him. The minister, who was a kind-hearted and godly man, gladly availed himself of the opportunity. Besides conversing with James on spiritual matters, he was of great comfort to Mary by the kindly affection with which he treated her. One afternoon when the old man's weakness was sensibly increased, James requested Mary to leave the room for a moment that he might have private conversation with the minister. After a little while, he called her in again, and said—

"My dear child, I have settled all my worldly affairs, and am now ready to depart and be with Christ."

Mary was deeply distressed, and had great difficulty in keeping back her tears, for she saw that the end was rapidly approaching. But out of consideration for her father, and after a great effort, she recovered herself, and remained calm.

The rest of the day was spent by James in silent prayer, and next day he received the Lord's Supper at the hands of the minister, by partaking of the bread and wine which are the symbols of the body and blood of Christ. Faith in the power of God, love to Christ who had redeemed him, and hope of eternal life, had made his venerable countenance radiant with happiness.

Mary remained on her knees beside his bed, weeping and praying. The farmer and his wife and their household looked on in wonder at the rapture of the aged saint, and tears of sympathy were in every eye because of Mary's grief.

It gave the old man pleasure to have Mary read to him in her sweet and clear voice. During the latter part of his illness he desired to hear nothing else than the last words and prayer of Jesus. One night, after all the household had gone to bed, Mary was sitting beside her father. The moon

was shining so brightly into the room that the light of the candle was scarcely seen.

"Mary," said the dying man, "read me once again that beautiful prayer of our Saviour."

Mary began to read. "Now," said the old man, "give me the book." Mary gave him the book, and carried the light nearer to him. "This will be the last prayer," said her father, "that I shall make for you," as he marked the passage with his finger, then in a trembling voice he uttered the following prayer: "O Father, I have not long to remain in this world. I am going—I dare hope it—I am going to Thee, my heavenly Father. Oh, preserve this my child from sin, for Thy Name's sake. While I have lived on the earth, I have endeavoured in Thy name to preserve her from it. But, O Lord, I am now going to Thee. I do not ask Thee to take her to Thyself, but only to preserve her from harm. Let Thy holy truth preserve her. Thy word is truth. Grant, O heavenly Father, that the child whom Thou hast given me may at last be admitted to the place where I hope to go. Through Jesus Christ my Saviour. Amen."

Mary repeated, as well as her sobs would allow her, her father's *Amen*. "Yes," continued the old man, "yes, my

daughter, in the kingdom which Jesus had from the beginning of the world, we shall see Him, and we shall see each other." He again lay down on his pillow to rest a little. His hands continued to hold the New Testament, which he had bought with his first money saved from the purchase of food after he left Eichbourg.

"Dear daughter," he said, some minutes afterwards, "I am grateful for all the affection and tenderness which you have shown me since my illness commenced. Trust in your heavenly Father, Mary, and you will receive of Him your reward. Poor and forsaken as I am, I can give you nothing, when I leave you, but my blessing and this book. Live in the ways of righteousness, and this blessing will not be without effect. The blessing of a father with the confidence of the Lord is better for a virtuous child than the richest inheritance. This book, which I wish you to take in remembrance of your father, cost me, it is true, but a few shillings, but if it be faithfully read and its precepts put in practice, I shall have left you the richest treasure. If I had left you as many pieces of gold as the spring produces leaves and flowers, with all that money you could not buy anything so valuable as this book. It is the Word of God. Read it every day, no matter how much work presses upon you; read at least one passage.

Preserve it and meditate upon it in your heart during the day."

About three o'clock the next morning James said, in a faint voice, "I feel very ill. Open the window a little." Mary opened it. The moon had disappeared, but the sky was brilliant with stars, and presented a magnificent sight.

"See how beautiful the sky is!" said the dying man. "What are the flowers of earth whose beauty I have so often admired compared with these stars, whose glory suffers no fading? It is there I am going. What joy! Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly."

With these words James fell back upon his pillow, and passed peacefully away. Mary had never seen any one die before, and she thought her father had only fainted. In her fright she awoke all the family. They ran to her father's bed, and there she heard them say to each other that he was dead. Abandoning herself to her grief, she threw herself upon her father's body, embraced it, and wept passionately.

"Oh, my father, my good father," said she, "how shall I discharge all my obligations to you? Alas, I cannot now. I

can only thank you for all the words, for all good advice I received from your dear lips, now sealed in death. Your hand, which is now cold and stiff, I kiss with gratitude, and remember that that hand has bestowed upon me many benefits, and has all my life laboured for my good. Oh, if I could at this moment follow you into the heavenly kingdom, how gladly would I do so. Oh, let me die the death of the righteous. My only consolation now is that I shall one day enter upon the happiness and everlasting life of heaven."

During this heart-rending scene the farmer's family had been much affected. At last they prevailed upon Mary to lie down and rest, hoping that sleep would ease her grief. During the following day nothing would induce her to leave her father's body. Before the coffin lid was nailed down, Mary took one more look at her father. "Alas," said she, "it is the last time that I shall ever look upon your dear face! How beautiful it was when you smiled, and it shone with the glory into which you were so shortly to enter. Farewell, farewell, my father," said she, sobbing aloud, "may your body rest peacefully in the earth now, while angels of God are, as I hope, bearing your soul to eternal rest."

When the funeral took place, Mary, dressed in mourning which one of the girls of the village had kindly given her, followed close to the body of her father. She was as pale as death, and every one pitied the poor girl who now was without a relative in the world. As Mary's father was a stranger at Erlenbrunn, they dug a grave for him in a corner of the cemetery beside the wall. Two large pine trees shaded the humble grave. The minister who had attended James during his illness spoke of James's patience and of the resignation with which he had borne all his misfortunes, and the good example he had set for those who knew him. With tender words he consoled Mary, who was overwhelmed with grief. In the name of her father, the minister thanked the farmer and his wife for all their kindness to Mary and her father. He begged of them to be father and mother to her who had no longer any parents.

CHAPTER XII.

CHANGES AT PINE FARM.

After her father's death, Mary was no longer the bright happy girl she had been before. Even her favourite flowers seemed to have lost all their beauty, and the pine trees near the farm looked as though they were clothed in mourning. From time to time she attended the church at Erlenbrunn; and when here she never failed to visit her father's grave. On every opportunity she went to this sacred spot to weep for her departed parent, and she never left the grave without having made fresh resolutions to ignore the pleasures of the world, and to live only to God. As time went on her grief gradually moderated, but she soon had new trials to undergo.

Great changes took place in Pine Farm. The good farmer had given the farm to his only son, an amiable, good-tempered young man, but unhappy in his choice of a wife,

whom he had married a short time before. She was a handsome woman, and possessed of considerable means; but she was vain to a degree, and cared for nothing but money. Pride and greed had gradually imprinted on her features an expression of harshness so striking that, with all her beauty, her looks were repellent. She was violently opposed to religion, and was thus without any restraint on her conduct. By every means in her power she sought to make the lives of her husband's parents miserable. If she knew that anything would give them pleasure, she delighted in doing the contrary, and when she gave them the food which was their due, according to the contract they had made with their son, it was always with a bad grace, and in a grudging spirit.

The good old man and his wife lived the greater part of their time in a little back room, seldom appearing outside. As for their son, he led a miserable life; for his wife overwhelmed him with constant abuse, and was constantly reminding him of the money she had brought him. Being of a peaceable disposition, and averse to quarrelling and disputing, he bore his sufferings in silence. His wife would never quietly allow him to visit his parents, for fear, as she said, he would give them something secretly. In the evening, after he had finished

his work, he used to try to find an opportunity to visit them, when he would complain to them of his hard lot.

"Well," said his father, "so it is. You suffered yourself to be dazzled by the thought of her gold, and to be fascinated by her good looks. I yielded too easily to your wishes, and thus we are punished. We should have taken the advice of old James, who was an experienced man and never approved of this match when it was talked of. I well remember every word he said on the subject, and I have thought of it many a time. Do you remember," said he to his wife, "our having said that ten thousand florins make a handsome sum. 'A handsome sum!' said James, 'no; for the flowers you see in your garden are a thousand times more beautiful. Perhaps you mean to say it is a large and heavy sum. I will acknowledge that. He must have good shoulders to bear it without being bowed down to the earth, and without becoming a poor wretch, unable to lift his head to heaven. Why then do you wish for so much money? You have never wanted anything; you have always had more than sufficient. Believe me, too much money produces pride. Rain is a useful and necessary thing, but when too much falls there is danger of it destroying the most healthy plants of the garden.'

"These were exactly the old friend's words we have lost," said the farmer, "and I think I still hear him. And you, my son, once said to him of your wife, 'She has a charming person, and is beautiful and fresh as a rose.' 'Flowers,' answered James, 'have not beauty only; they are good and pretty at the same time. They make so many rich presents. The bee sucks in pure wax and delicious honey. Without piety, a beautiful face is merely a rose upon paper, a miserable trifle without life or perfume. It produces neither wax nor honey.' Such were the reflections that James frankly made before us. We would not listen to him—now we know how to appreciate his advice. That which appeared then to us so great a happiness is now to us the height of misfortune. May God give us grace to bear our misfortunes with patience!" Thus the old couple and their son used to talk together.

Poor Mary had much to suffer also. The back room which she and her father had occupied was given up to the old couple, and, although there were two empty rooms in the farmhouse, the young farmer's wife, who disliked Mary, gave her the most miserable apartment in the house; beside which, she ill-treated her in every possible way, and loaded her with abuse and fault-finding from morning to night. According to her, Mary did not work enough and

did not know how to do anything as it ought to be done. In short, she made it very plain to the poor orphan that she was despised and considered troublesome.

The old man and his wife were keenly conscious of the miserable life that Mary led, but they were not in a position to interfere. They had enough to do with their own griefs.

Mary thought often of going away from Pine Farm, but where to go was the question. After some consideration she asked the minister's advice. "My dear Mary," said the old minister, "it is impossible for you to think of remaining longer at Pine Farm. They expect you to do more than a strong man could accomplish. Still, I do not advise you to leave immediately. Although your father gave you an excellent education, and taught you all that it was necessary for a village housekeeper to know, my advice would be to remain where you are for the present; to work as faithfully as you can, and to wait patiently until the Lord delivers you from your present hard circumstances. I will endeavour to get you a place in an honest Christian family. Have confidence in God; pray constantly, bear with this trial, and God will arrange all." Mary thanked the good old minister and promised to

follow his advice.

Mary's favourite place of meditation was her father's tomb, where she had planted a rose tree. "Alas," said she, "if I could remain here always, I would water you with my tears!" The rose tree was already green, and the buds began to open their purple cups. "My father was right," said Mary, "when he compared human life to the rose tree. It offers nothing but thorns; but wait a little and the season will come when it shall be decked anew in foliage and robed in the most beautiful flowers. For me, this is now the time of thorns; but God help me not to be cast down! I believe your word, best of fathers. Perhaps I may see in my life the truth of your favourite maxim —'Patience produces roses.'" Thus poor Mary consoled herself in her distress.

"Thou art, O Lord, my only trust,
When friends are mingled with the dust,
 And all my loves are gone.
When earth has nothing to bestow,
And every flower is dead below,
 I look to Thee alone."

CHAPTER XIII.

AGAIN A WANDERER.

The months sped on, and now the anniversary of her father's birthday arrived. Until then it had always been to Mary a day of great joy, but this time, when the day dawned, she was bathed in tears. Previously she had had the pleasure and excitement of preparing something which she knew would please her father, but now, alas, this delightful occupation was rendered useless!

The country people round about their home used to beg flowers from her for the purpose of decorating the graves of their friends. It had always been a pleasure to Mary to give her flowers for this purpose, and she now determined to decorate her father's tomb in the same manner. Taking from a cupboard the beautiful basket which had been the first cause of all her unhappiness, she filled it with choice flowers of all colours, artistically interspersed with fresh

green leaves, and carried it to Erlenbrunn before the hour of divine service, and laid it on her father's tomb, watering it at the same time with tears that could not be repressed.

"Oh, best and dearest of fathers," said she, "you have strewn with flowers the path of life for me. Let me at least ornament your grave with them."

Mary left the basket on the grave, and went back to the misery of Pine Farm. She had no fear that any one would dare to steal either the basket or the flowers. Many of the country people who saw her offering were moved to tears, and, blessing the old gardener's pious daughter, they prayed for her prosperity.

The next day the labourers at the farm were busy taking in the hay from a large meadow just beyond the forest. The farmer's wife had a large piece of fine linen spread out on the grass a few steps from the house, and in the evening this was found to have disappeared. Unfortunately the young farmer's wife had heard the story of Mary and the ring from her husband, to whom it had been told by his father and mother. Instantly then she connected Mary with the disappearance of the linen, and saw in the circumstance a means of venting her spite upon the girl

whom she had always disliked.

When Mary was returning from her work in the evening with a rake on her shoulder and a pitcher in her hand, along with the other servants, this passionate woman came out of the kitchen and met her with a torrent of abuse, and ordered her to give up the linen immediately. At first Mary was too stunned to reply, but when she understood the charge, she answered meekly that it was impossible she could have taken the linen, as she had passed the whole day in the hay-field with the other servants; that a stranger might easily have taken advantage of a moment when there was no one in the kitchen to commit the theft. This conjecture turned out to be the true one, but the farmer's wife was not to be turned from her conviction.

"Thief," she cried coarsely, "do you think I am ignorant of the theft of the ring, and what difficulty you had to escape the executioner's sword? Begone as soon as possible. There is no room in my house for creatures like you."

"It is too late," said her husband, "to send Mary away now. Let her sup with us, as she has worked all day in the great heat. Let her but remain this one night."

"Not even one hour," cried his wife passionately; and her husband, seeing that advice would only irritate her more, remained silent.

Mary made no further attempt to defend herself against the unjust accusation. She immediately made her simple preparations for her departure, wrapping up all that she had in a clean napkin. When she had put the little bundle under her arm, thanked the servants of Pine Farm for their kindness to her and protested once more her innocence, she asked permission to take leave of her friends, the old farmer and his wife.

"You may do that," said the young farmer's wife, with a scornful smile; "indeed, if you wish to take with you these two old people, it will give me great pleasure. It is evident death does not mean to rid me of them for some time."

The good old people, who had heard the altercation, wept when Mary came to bid them good-bye. However, they consoled her as well as they could, and gave her a little money to assist her on her journey. "Go, good girl," said they to her, "and may God take care of you."

It was towards the close of the day when Mary set out

with her little bundle under her arm, and began to climb up the mountain, following the narrow road to the woods. She wished before leaving the neighbourhood to visit her father's grave once more. When she came out of the forest the village clock struck seven, and before she arrived at the graveyard it was nearly dark; but she was not afraid, and went up to her father's grave, where she sat down and gave way to a burst of grief. The full moon was shining through the trees, illumining with a silver light the roses on the grave and the basket of flowers. The soft evening breeze murmured among the branches, making the rose trees planted on her father's grave tremble.

"Oh, my father," cried Mary, "would that you were still here, that I might pour my trouble into your ears! But yet I know that it is better that you are gone, and I thank the Lord that you did not live to witness this last affliction. You are now happy, and beyond the reach of grief. Oh, that I were with you! Alas, never have I been so much to be pitied as now. When the moon shone into the prison which confined me you were then alive; when I was driven from the home which I loved so much you were left me. I had in you a good father and protector and faithful friend. Now I have no one. Poor, forsaken, suspected of crime, I am alone in the world, a stranger,

not knowing where to lay my head. The only little corner that remained to me on the earth I am driven from, and now I shall no longer have the consolation of coming here to weep by your grave!" At these words the tears rushed forth afresh.

"Alas," said she, "I dare not at this hour beg a lodging for the night. Indeed, if I tell why I was turned out of doors, no one perhaps will consent to receive me."

She looked around. Against the wall, near her father's tomb, was a gravestone, very old and covered with moss. As the inscription had been effaced by time, it was left there to be used as a seat. "I will sit down on this stone," said she, "and pass the night by my father's grave. It is perhaps the last time I shall ever be here. To-morrow at daybreak, if it be God's will, I shall continue my journey, going wherever His hand may direct me."

CHAPTER XIV.

A STRANGE MEETING.

Mary sat down on the stone near the wall shaded by the thick foliage of a tree which covered her with its dark branches. Here she poured out her soul in fervent prayer to God. Suddenly she heard a sweet voice calling her familiarly by her name, "Mary, Mary!"

The late hour of night and the solitude of the graveyard and her loneliness made Mary start with fear. Looking up she saw the beautiful face and figure of a woman, dressed in a long flowing robe. Frightened and trembling, Mary was about to fly.



"Looking up she saw the beautiful face and figure of a woman."

See page 104.

"Dear Mary," said the lady, with tenderness in her voice, "do not be alarmed; I am not a spirit, but a human being like yourself. God has heard your fervent prayers, and I have come to help you. Look at me; is it possible you do not know me?"

The moon was shining brightly upon her face, and with an exclamation of surprise, Mary cried out, "Is it you, the Countess Amelia? Oh, how did you get here—here in so lonely a place at this hour of the night, so far from your home?"

The Countess raised Mary gently from the ground, pressed her to her heart, and kissed her tenderly.

"Dear Mary," said she, "we have done you great injustice. You have been ill rewarded for the pleasure which you gave me with the basket of flowers, but at last your innocence has been made known. Can you ever forgive my parents and me? We are ready to make amends as far as it lies in our power. Forgive us, dear Mary."

Mary was distressed at these words, and begged the Countess not to talk of forgiveness. "Considering the circumstances," she said, "you showed great indulgence

towards me, and it never entered my mind to nourish the least resentment towards you. I had grateful thoughts of all your kindness, and my only sorrow was that you and your dear parents should regard me as ungrateful enough to be guilty of stealing your ring. My great desire was that you might one day be convinced of my innocence, and God has granted this desire. May His name be praised!"

The Countess pressed Mary to her heart, and bathed her face in tears. Afterwards she looked at James's grave and, clasping her hands, she cried out passionately, "Oh, noble man, whose body lies here, whom I learned to love in my tender youth, whose affectionate counsels I have often received, and whose fervent prayers I have so often listened to, why cannot I see your face to ask pardon for all the injustice done you? Oh, if we had only taken more precaution, if we had placed more confidence in an old servant who had always shown unimpeachable honesty and faithfulness, perhaps thou hadst still been living with us!"

"Believe me, good Countess," said Mary, "my father was far from feeling the least resentment towards you. He prayed for you daily, as he was accustomed to do when he lived at Eichbourg, and at the hour of his death he blessed

you all.

"'Mary,' said he to me, a little before he died, 'I feel confident that those whom we once served will one day recognise your innocence, and recall you from exile. When that day comes, assure the Countess and Count and Amelia that my heart was full of respect and love and gratitude towards them till my last breath.' These, my dear Countess, were his last words."

The tears of the good Amelia flowed copiously. "Come, Mary," said she, "and sit down here with me on the stone. We are safe here in the sanctuary of the Lord. Let me tell you of all the strange events that have happened."

CHAPTER XV.

THE YOUNG COUNTESS'S STORY.

Having made Mary sit down beside her, the young Countess began her story.

"God is surely with you, dear Mary," said she, "and has taken you under His protection. I see now that He has guided my steps here in order that I might find you for whom we have sought so long. Simple as are the events which I am about to relate to you, we can see in them a chain of truly providential circumstances.

"From the time that your innocence was discovered I had no more rest. You and your father were always pressing on my mind, wandering without home and friends. Believe me, my dear Mary, I have shed many bitter tears on your account. My parents were also deeply distressed at the injustice they had unwittingly done you, and sought

for you everywhere; but, as you know, without being able to obtain any trace of you.

"Two days ago we came to a hunting-lodge of the Prince in the forest, not far from this village. For twenty years at least this castle has not been visited, the only occupant being a gamekeeper. My father had gone on business, and had spent the whole day in the forest in company with two noblemen whose wives were staying at the castle. It had been a very warm day, and the evening was very fresh. The setting sun, the mountain covered with pines interspersed with picturesque rocks offered such a beautiful spectacle that I begged permission to take a walk. Accompanied by the gamekeeper's daughter I set out, and as we passed along we found the graveyard gate open, and the tombstones gilded by the light of the setting sun.

"Since my childhood I have always had a pleasure in reading inscriptions and epitaphs on tombstones. I am moved when one tells of a young man or woman carried off in the bloom of youth, and I feel a sort of melancholy pleasure if it concerns a person who had reached advanced age. The verses themselves, poor as they may be from a poetical point of view, stir serious feelings

within me, and I never fail to carry away with me from a graveyard good thoughts and pious resolutions.

"Entering the graveyard with the gamekeeper's daughter, I began as usual to read the inscriptions. After a little while the girl said to me, 'Come, I will show you something very beautiful. It is the grave of an old man, who has neither tombstone nor epitaph, but it has been ornamented with taste and beauty by the tender piety of his daughter. See, you can just distinguish it through the thick leaves of these pines—the beautiful rose tree and the basket of flowers.'

"You can imagine, dear Mary, the shock I received, when at the first glance I recognised the basket of flowers which had never been out of my mind since that sad day when you left Eichbourg. If there had been any doubts in my mind as to it being the same basket, the initials of my name and the coat-of-arms of my family would have dispelled them. Turning to my companion, I asked if she knew anything of you and your father. She told me all about your life at Pine Farm, your father's sickness and death, and your great grief. After hearing all that the gamekeeper's daughter could tell me, I went to the minister, only to hear the same story with very much

praise of yourself added. I would have gone off to Pine Farm immediately, but while the story was being told me, time had passed rapidly, and it was now already quite dark. 'What shall I do,' said I; 'it is now too late to go to the farm, but to-morrow at daybreak we will set out.' Your good friend the minister sent for the schoolmaster to charge him to go and bring you without delay to the castle.

"My dear young friend,' said the schoolmaster, 'you need not go far to look for her. She has gone to her father's grave to weep there. Alas, poor child!' he continued, 'I saw her sitting there from an opening in the steeple when I went this afternoon to wind up the clock.'

"I at once determined to find you, and the minister wanted to accompany me, but I begged to be allowed to come to you alone, that my first meeting with you might be as affectionate as I desired. While I came here the old minister went to tell my parents where I was, and to prepare them for your arrival. This accounts, my dear Mary, for my sudden appearance before you. You can now see, through God's providence, this basket of flowers which separated us has reunited us by your father's grave—that father who is now inhabiting the home above."

"Yes," said Mary, clasping her hands and raising her grateful eyes to heaven, "God has done it all. He has had pity on my tears and on my needs. How can I thank Him for His goodness and His boundless tenderness?"

"I have still one thing to tell you yet," answered the Countess Amelia, interrupting her, "and it is one which seems to me singularly touching, and inspires me with an awe for the justice of God who directs our lot even when we are unconscious of it. My maid, Juliette, had but one thought, one desire. It was to banish you from my heart and to take your place in my affections. It was with that design that she made up her terrible falsehood, and her wicked plan succeeded too well. But that very falsehood was the means of her afterwards losing her place and our confidence, and that made you dearer than ever to our hearts. Juliette endeavoured to estrange you from me for ever, and your banishment was a constant subject of triumph to her.

"You know how that, in her wickedness, she threw this basket at your feet with an insulting laugh. Well, it was exactly this event which was afterwards, although she little thought it then, to reunite us for ever. For was it not indeed through this basket on your father's grave that I

discovered you to-day? Truly, those who have the love of God have nothing to fear from any enemies. God knows how to turn to our advantage all the ill that wicked people do to us; and our most cruel enemies, although for a while they may bring us to unhappiness, can do nothing but contribute to our real and lasting happiness. We may say in this case that our safety comes from our enemies.

"But now, dear Mary," said the Countess, "tell me what brought you so late to your father's grave, and why, when I found you, you were weeping so bitterly."

When Mary had told her story, of how they had driven her from the Pine Farm on a false charge, the Countess was astonished still more at the providence which had brought her and Mary together.

"Yes, indeed," said the Countess to Mary, "it is by God's will that I have found you to-day, just when you were again plunged into the deepest distress. You were imploring His assistance with burning tears running down your cheeks. This is another proof of what we have been speaking, that God knows how to turn to our advantage the ill which our enemies design to do us. The farmer's wicked wife, who drove you from her house, thought she

would make you unhappy. Without knowing it she has brought you to my arms and those of my parents, who, as well as myself, are desirous of making your life happy.

"But it is now time to set out," said Amelia. "My parents will be anxious at my long absence. Come, dear Mary, I will never leave you any more. Let us go to my parents."

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW THE RING WAS FOUND.

The road to the castle towards which the Countess now led Mary, lay through a long and dark walk of tall old linden trees. For a while they walked in silence together, each wrapped in her own thoughts, but at last the Countess said to Mary—

"Oh, I must now tell you how the ring was found. My father's affairs requiring his presence at Eichbourg, we left Court earlier than usual this year—in the beginning of March. When we arrived at the Castle, the weather was very boisterous, and one night in particular we had a tremendous storm. You remember the great pear tree we had in our garden at Eichbourg? It was very old, and bore scarcely any fruit. That night the wind, which blew with great violence, had shaken it so much that it threatened every moment to fall, and my father ordered it to be cut

down.

"My father, and mother, the children, and servants, and indeed all of the people in the Castle, came into the garden to see it fall. As soon as it was cut down, my two little brothers ran immediately towards a magpie's nest in the tree, which had for a long time been a coveted object, but had hitherto been out of their reach. Now they seized upon the nest and busied themselves examining its contents.

"Look, Albert!" said Augustus, 'what is that shining among the twigs? How bright it is!'

"It sparkles like gold,' said Albert.

"My maid, Juliette, ran forward to look at it, and immediately uttered a scream.

"Oh,' she cried, 'it is the ring!' and became as pale as death.

"The children extricated the ring from among the twigs, and carried it in great glee to my mother.

"Yes, indeed it is my ring,' said my mother, with deep

emotion. 'Oh, good and honest James! oh, poor Mary, what injustice we have done you! I am glad enough to find my ring again, but if I could find James and Mary, I would gladly sacrifice the ring to repair the wrong which we have done them.'

"I was curious to know by what chance the ring was carried into the magpie's nest at the top of the tree, and the old huntsman, Anthony, gave a ready explanation.

"Neither the gardener James nor his daughter could have hidden the ring in this place, that is very clear,' said he. 'The tree was too high, and it would have been impossible to climb up so far. Besides which, they had not time to do so. Mary had scarcely returned to the house when she and her father were both arrested. Magpies are greatly attracted by anything that shines, and if they can find anything sparkling, they carry it off immediately to their nests. One of these birds must have stolen the ring, and carried it to the tree. That is all the mystery. The only thing that astonishes me is that an old hunter, as I am, should not have thought sooner of this explanation.'

"The old man spoke with deep feeling and with tears in his eyes, but they were tears of joy at seeing your

innocence proved.

"'Anthony,' said my mother, 'I believe you are perfectly right, and now I remember quite distinctly that very often these birds came from the top of this tree to my window, that the sash was open when the ring disappeared, that the table on which I put the ring was close to the window, and that, after having shut the door and bolted it, I went into the next room, where I stayed for some time. No doubt one of these mischievous birds saw the ring from his nest, and, while I was in the other room, he must have darted in and carried it off.'

"My father was deeply troubled at the conviction, which he could not resist, that you and your father had been unjustly condemned.

"'My heart is almost broken,' said he, 'for having done these good people so much injury. My only consolation is that it was not done from ill-will, but in ignorance and error.'

"My father now turned to Juliette, who in the universal rejoicing at the discovery of the ring remained silent and pale.

"False woman,' said he, 'deceitful servant! How could you have the hardihood to lie to me and to the judge, and to compel us to commit an action unwillingly, the iniquity of which now calls for vengeance? What tempted you to plunge into suffering an old and honest man, and his poor and virtuous daughter?'

"Officers, do your duty,' he said to two constables, who had assisted in cutting down the tree, and who now approached the unhappy Juliette to carry out my father's orders. 'Let her be put in chains,' he added, in a grave tone,—'the same chains that Mary wore,—and let her be thrown into the same prison in which she caused Mary to languish. She must suffer all that Mary suffered, only that, unlike Mary, she has deserved it. What she has been able to hoard of money or clothes shall be taken from her, to compensate, if it be possible, the unhappy old man and his daughter who have had to suffer an unjust sentence. The officer who conducted Mary out of my dominions shall also conduct Juliette, just as she is, to the same place.'

"No one had ever seen my father so exasperated, never had any one heard him speak in such passionate tones. For a while every one was silent, but at last the officers and servants gave voice to their sentiments and thoughts.

"'It is well done,' said one of the officers, seizing Juliette by the arm; 'when one digs another's grave he must fill it himself.'

"'That is what is gained by telling falsehoods,' said the other officer. 'It is true that no thread is so fine that it cannot be seen in the sunshine.'

"'It was a pretty dress which the young Countess gave to Mary,' said the cook in her turn, 'that made Juliette angry. In her rage, and not knowing well what she was about, she began to tell lies, and then it was impossible to retract without acknowledging her guilt. The proverb is true which says that, once the devil has us by the hair, he will hold fast to us afterwards.'

"'It is well, it is well,' said the coachman, who had just finished cutting the tree, and who still had the axe over his shoulder. 'Let us hope she will mend her ways, if she does not wish to be worse off in the next world. The tree that bears not good fruit,' said he, shaking his axe, 'shall be cut down, and cast into the fire.'

"The news of the finding of the ring spread through Eichbourg in a very short time, and every one ran to the

place, so that in a little while a great crowd had gathered. The judge who condemned you came also, and every witness of the discovery was as eager as possible to tell him all about it.

"You cannot imagine, my dear Mary," the Countess proceeded, "the effect that the story produced on the good man. Notwithstanding his severity respecting you, he is a man of great probity, and one who has all his life tried to administer justice with strict fidelity.

"'I would give half of my goods,' said he, in a tone that went to the heart of every one who heard him—'yes, I would willingly have given everything I possess if this misfortune had not happened. To have condemned innocence is a frightful thought.' Then, looking round him at the people, he said, in a solemn voice, 'God is the only infallible judge, the only one that cannot be deceived. He knows everything. He alone knew the hiding-place in which the ring had remained until now. The judges of the earth are near-sighted and prone to be deceived. It is rare here below that innocence suffers and vice triumphs. The invisible Judge, who will recompense one day all good actions and punish all bad ones, has decreed that even here innocence shall not always suffer from suspicion, nor

hidden crime remain always concealed.'" "

While Amelia had been relating this interesting narrative, Mary had been lifting up her heart in silent thanksgiving to God for clearing her character from every stain of suspicion and establishing her innocence in the minds of her friends. By the time Amelia had finished her story, they had arrived at the door of the castle.

CHAPTER XVII.

REPARATION.

The Count, the Countess, and the guests who were at the castle, were assembled in the drawing-room when Amelia and Mary entered. The worthy minister had arrived before them, and had been reciting to a deeply-interested audience, the story of James and Mary and their life at Pine Cottage. He had painted in a touching manner the conduct of the good old man during his residence at Pine Farm, emphasising the love and respect which he bore to the Count and his family. He told of Mary's activity, of her filial piety, and her patience and modesty, until tears streamed from the eyes of his hearers.

At this moment the Countess Amelia, holding Mary by one hand and in the other the basket of flowers, entered the brilliantly-lighted room. Mary was welcomed by all, and loaded with congratulations. The Count himself took

her kindly by the hand, and said, "Poor child, how pale and thin you look. It was our hasty judgment that brought your misery upon you, and we must now spare nothing, that happiness may once more be restored to you, and that the faded flowers may once more bloom on your young cheeks. You were driven from your father's house, but in future you shall have it for your own property."

The Countess kissed Mary, pressed her to her heart, called her her daughter, and, taking from her finger the ring which had caused so many misfortunes, she said, "Here, my dear child, although your piety is a great deal more precious than the large diamond which sparkles in this ring, you must accept this present as a feeble compensation for the wrong you have suffered, and as a token of the sincere attachment and maternal tenderness I feel towards you."

With these words she held out the ring to Mary, who was almost overcome with so much kindness and ready to sink under the weight of the benefits she had received. Her tears flowed freely, but they were tears of joy.

"Poor child," said one of the guests, "take what the Countess offers you. God has given the Count and his

wife fortune, but He has given them something more precious—hearts which know how to make the best use of riches."

"Why do you flatter us?" said the Countess. "This is not a *generous* action, it is an act of *justice*."

Still Mary hesitated about accepting the valuable gift, and turned with streaming eyes towards the minister, as if to ask his advice.

"Yes, Mary," said the venerable man, "you must keep the ring. You see, my good child, how God is blessing your filial piety; for whosoever sincerely honours his parents shall be better for it. Take the valuable present with gratitude, and as adversity found you resigned to the Divine will, so in prosperity show yourself grateful to your heavenly Father—grateful to His dear name, benevolent and kind."

Mary put the ring on her finger and attempted to express her thanks, but tears checked her utterance, and were thus the best expression of her gratitude. Amelia, who sat by her with the basket of flowers in her hand, was delighted with the generous proceedings of her parents. Her eyes

shone with affection for Mary; and the minister, who had often observed how envious children generally are when their parents exercise their benevolence towards other people, was deeply touched by this disinterested love of Amelia. "May God," said he, "reward the generosity of the Count and Countess. May all that they have done for the poor orphan be rendered to them a hundredfold in the person of their own dear daughter!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

PINE FARM REVISITED.

The Count and his family were just on the eve of leaving for Eichbourg, and next morning at break of day all was bustle in the castle, preparing for their departure. In the midst of all the preparations, however, Mary was not forgotten, and each one vied with the other in the attentions they paid to her.

Mary's clothes, which she had bought during her residence at Pine Farm, were made of the coarsest material and of the plainest cut. But one of Amelia's friends, a young lady of the same age and size as Mary, at Amelia's request presented Mary with a complete outfit, which, without being extravagant, was more in keeping with her new situation. In answer to Mary's modest protest against donning what seemed to her, extravagantly grand garments, Amelia said, "You are my friend; you are

henceforth to be my companion; you are also to live with me. You ought therefore to dress yourself differently from a farm servant."

After breakfast they started on their journey homeward, and Mary sat beside Amelia in the carriage, with the Count and Countess opposite. First of all, however, the Count gave orders for the coachman to drive them to Pine Farm, that he might become acquainted with the people who had entertained Mary and her father so kindly. It was not long before they gathered from Mary's answers that the old people at Pine Farm were far from being comfortable, and that their declining years were not so peaceful as they had a right to expect.

The arrival of a nobleman's carriage at Pine Farm caused no little excitement. No sooner had the young farmer's wife seen the carriage stop at the door than she hastened towards it.

"Sir," said she to the Count, "allow me to assist you and also the ladies, your daughters, I presume."

So saying, she presented her hand to one of the young ladies, when, recognising her to be Mary herself, she

uttered an exclamation of surprise, let go her hand as if she had touched a serpent, and drew back in great confusion.

The old farmer was working in his garden when the Count with his family and Mary alighted; and when they went to the good old man, took him by the hand, and thanked him for his kindness towards Mary and her father, the worthy farmer was deeply moved.

"Oh," said he, "I owe that good man more than ever he owed me. The blessing of heaven came with him into our home, and if I had followed his advice in everything, I should have been much better for it at this moment. Since his death I have no pleasure in anything but this garden, which I began to cultivate at his suggestion. Since I have not had strength to follow the plough, I have occupied myself here, and I seek among the herbs and flowers the peace which I can no longer find in my own house."

In the meantime Mary had gone to look for the old farmer's wife in her little room, and she now came forward leading her by the hand. The worthy woman was quite overcome by the strange circumstances in which she found Mary, and the excitement of the moment; and when

she came forward to meet the Count and Countess, it was with a timid air, and in evident distress at finding herself the object of so much attention. By and by, however, she and her husband heard the story of the finding of the ring, and so great was their affection for Mary that they cried for joy like children.

"Did I not tell you," said the farmer, addressing Mary, "that your filial piety would receive its reward? You see, my prophecy is already fulfilled," and his wife, who had recovered her self-possession, said, "Yes, yes; your father was right when he said, 'He who clothes the flowers, well knows how to take care of you.'"

While this conversation had been going on, the young farmer's wife stood at some distance, consumed with jealousy and anger.

"Well, well," she said to herself, "there is no saying what will happen in this life. That miserable beggar whom I turned out of my house—look at her now, dressed like a young lady of high rank. Who would have thought of such a thing! Every one, however, knows who she is, so she cannot impose on any one in this town. They know that yesterday she was sent from here with a little package

under her arm, to go into the country."

The Count had not heard this abusive language, but a glance at the woman's face was enough to show him that she was nursing angry passions. "She is a wicked creature," he said to himself, as he walked round the garden in a very thoughtful mood.

At last he stopped before the old farmer. "Listen, my good old friend," said he, "while I make a proposition to you. I have given Mary a piece of ground on my estate, which was rented and cultivated by her father. But Mary is not ready to take up housekeeping. What should prevent you from retiring there? It will suit you, I am certain, and the owner will not exact any rent from you. You can cultivate the herbs and flowers in which you find your pleasure, and you will find, in the pretty cottage which is attached to the ground, rest and peace in your old age."

The Count's wife, Amelia and Mary joined in urging the old man to accept this generous offer. But there was no need for persuasion. The old people were happy to be taken from their uncomfortable surroundings, and gladly agreed to the proposal.

At this moment the young farmer came home from the fields. His surprise was as great as his wife's when he saw the carriage at his door drawn by four white horses; for never in the history of the farm had a carriage stopped there before. When he heard of the proposal which the Count had made to his father and mother, he gladly consented to it, although he was deeply grieved to part from his old parents. His consolation was found, however, in thinking that they were going to be happier than they could possibly be with his wife.

As for his wife herself, the only remark she made was to say in a spiteful way to the Count—

"It is a great favour you are doing us in ridding us of two old people who are nothing but a burden!"

Promising to send for the old farmer and his wife as soon as everything was ready, the Count and his family, accompanied by Mary, now stepped into the carriage and drove off. Here for a time we will leave Mary and follow the fortunes of the occupants of Pine Farm.

CHAPTER XIX.

RETRIBUTION.

In course of time, when arrangements had been made for their reception, a carriage was sent from Eichbourg to bring away the old farmer and his wife. Their son was grieved to the heart when the time came for them to go, but their daughter-in-law had counted the days and hours until the time of their departure, and felt nothing but vindictive pleasure at being rid of them. Her joy, however, received a severe check from a note which the coachman presented to her, in which the Count informed her that she and her husband should pay all that had been stipulated for the support of her father and mother-in-law; and that the price of their living valued in money, according to the current market price, should be paid to them every quarter. Realising her helplessness, she became violently angry and turned round to her husband,

saying, "We are over-reached. If they had stayed here, it would not have cost us half as much." Her husband was secretly pleased to think that he was still permitted to help his parents in their old age, but he took good care not to show his joy before his wife.

The old people set off in the carriage the next morning, followed by the blessings of their son and the secret ill-wishes of their daughter-in-law.

But the unnatural conduct of this wicked woman was visited with the trouble which is always the lot of avarice and inhumanity. Her secretly-cherished god was gold, and she had lent the bulk of her money to a merchant to use in his business, on his promise to pay her a large interest for the loan. Her greatest pleasure was in making calculations, as to how much her money would amount to after a certain number of years, with all the interest and compound interest added. Suddenly, however, these golden dreams received a rude awakening. The manufacturer's speculations proved unfortunate, and he shortly afterwards failed in business, and his goods were sold by order of the sheriff.

The news came as a thunder-stroke for the farmer's wife,

and from the moment that she heard of the catastrophe she had no repose. Every day she kept running to the lawyers, or to her neighbours to complain of her hard lot, and the nights she spent in weeping and scolding her husband. From the wreck of her fortune of ten thousand florins she received only a paltry hundred or two, and so deeply did she feel the loss of her money that she openly declared her wish to die. The result of the continual worrying induced a fever which never left her. When her husband wished to send for a physician she would not consent to it, and when, in spite of her objections, he at last sent for one, his wife in a passion threw the medicine he prescribed out of the window.

At last her husband saw that she was seriously ill, and he requested the minister of Erlenbrunn to come and see her. The good old man visited her frequently and talked to her affectionately, in order to induce her to repent of her sins, and to detach her heart from the things of this earth, that she might turn to God.

But this advice made her very angry. She looked at the good man with utter astonishment. "I do not know," she said, "for what purpose the minister comes to preach repentance to me. He should have delivered such a

sermon to the merchant who stole our money. Yes, there would have been some sense in that. As for me, I do not see that I have any reason for repentance. As long as I was able to go out I always went to church, and I have never failed to say my prayers. I have not ceased all my life to do my duty and to behave myself like a virtuous housewife. I defy any living soul to slander me. And of all the poor people who have come to my door, not one can complain that I sent them away without giving them something. Now, I should like to know how any one can behave better!"

The venerable pastor saw that she was justifying herself before God, and he tried by adopting a more direct tone to lead her to contrition. He showed to her that she loved money more than anything else in the world, and that the love of money was idolatry. He showed her that the bursts of anger in which she had indulged were heinous sins before God, that she had totally failed in the most beautiful of all Christian virtues—filial affection; that by her greed of money she had made her husband unhappy, cruelly driven away the poor orphan Mary, and even turned away her husband's parents, those whom she ought to have cherished as if they were her own.

He showed her also that, with a fortune like hers, a little piece of bread given to a poor man to get rid of him did not fulfil the duties which God expected of her, that in spite of all her boasting of going to church she was none the better of it, for her prayers had come from a heart unwarmed by love, and could not ascend to the throne of God. In this faithful way did he talk to her, but only with the result of making her burst into a fit of passionate sobbing.

The illness from which she suffered was a long and trying one. She spent whole nights in coughing, and yet the ruling passion of avarice was so strong that she would scarcely take sufficient nourishment to sustain her. No consoling thought came to her to mitigate her suffering. She was utterly unwilling to resign herself to God and to submit to His will.

The good minister tried in every imaginable way to bring her to a better frame of mind. During the last days of her life she was occasionally a little softened in her manners, but she never evinced any true repentance. In the flower of her age she died, a sad instance of the effects of avarice, passion, and love of the world.

CHAPTER XX.

FORGIVING AN ENEMY.

And now we must return to Mary whom we left in her new surroundings.

Immediately after leaving Pine Farm, Mary went with the Count's family to the city, in which they spent part of every year. While they were there, a clergyman came one morning to their residence and asked to see Mary. He told her that he was charged with a message for her from a person who was very ill and probably near death, and who desired anxiously to speak to her. The clergyman said that the person was not willing to give her message to any one but to Mary herself.

Mary could not imagine what the woman could want with her, and she consulted the Countess as to what she ought to do. The Countess, knowing the clergyman to be a pious

and prudent man, advised Mary to go with him, and at the minister's request old Anthony the huntsman accompanied them. After a long walk to the outskirts of the town, they arrived at last at a house situated in a side street, which presented a most gloomy aspect. "Here is the house," said the clergyman, knocking at the door, "but wait a little."

After a few moments he returned for Mary, who then entered with him into a most miserable room. The window was narrow and dark, and some broken panes were patched with paper. The only furniture which the room contained was a miserable truckle-bed, covered with a more miserable mattress, and a broken chair, on which stood a stone pitcher, with neither handle nor cover.

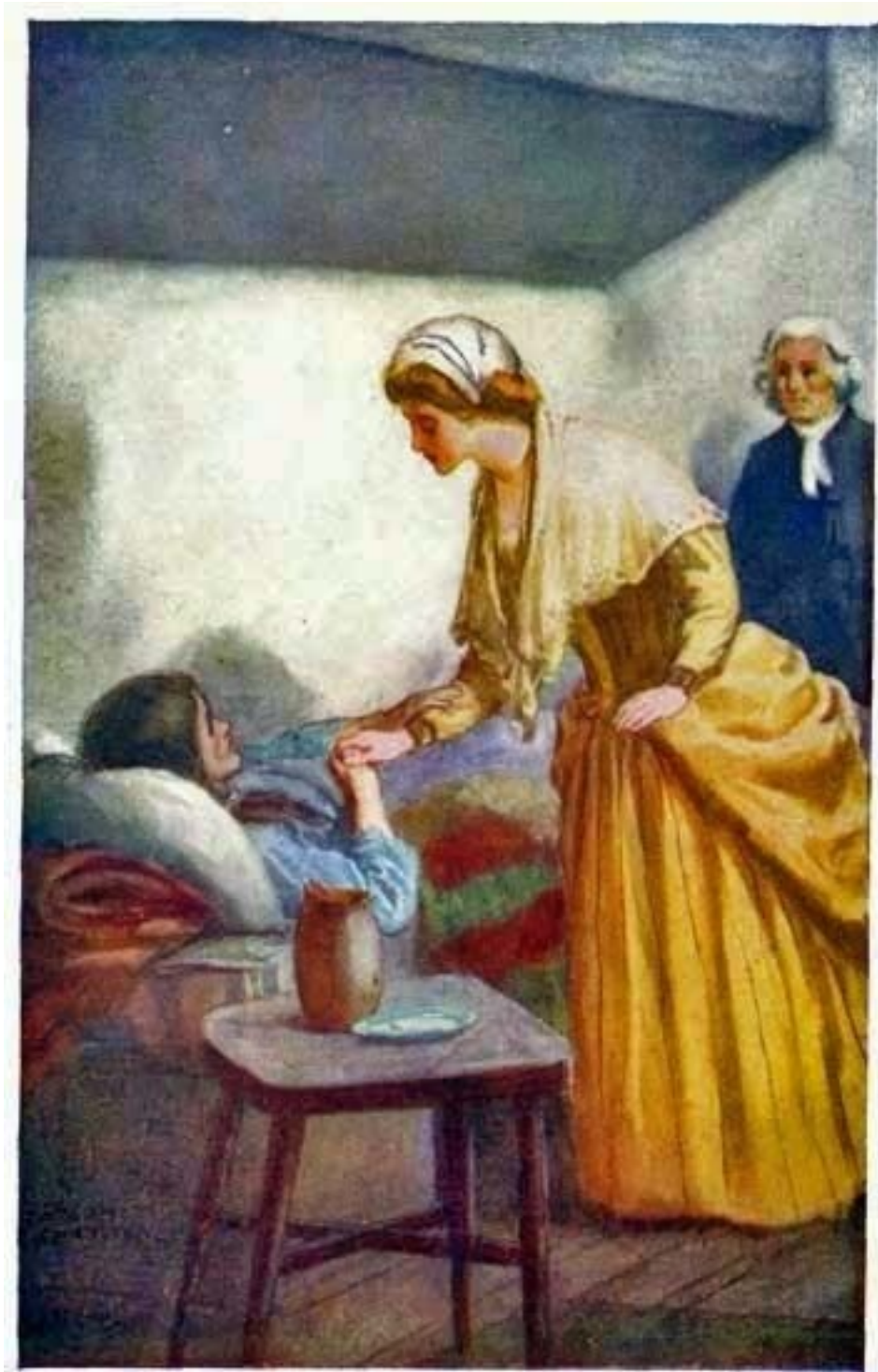
On the miserable bed lay stretched a figure which to Mary's eyes seemed more like a skeleton, but which she gradually made out was the form of a woman, in the last stages of illness.

In a voice which resembled the rattle of death, this miserable creature sought to speak with Mary, who trembled in every limb. It was with the utmost difficulty that she could make out what the poor woman said, but at last she learned, to her horror, that the frightful phantom

was Juliette, who at the Castle of Eichbourg had been the beginning and cause of all her distress. After being turned away from the Castle, she had gone from bad to worse, until she had sunk into her present state.

Lying upon her miserable bed, death staring her in the face, remorse had overtaken her, and her one wish was to have Mary's forgiveness. Learning in some way, that the Count and his family were in the city, she begged of the clergyman who was visiting her to ask Mary to come to see her. The poor woman, judging Mary by herself, had entreated the clergyman not to mention her name in case Mary would not come.

Mary was affected to the heart when she heard Juliette's story, and she shed tears of sympathy with her old enemy. She assured her that she had forgiven her long ago, and that the only feeling she experienced was that of the deepest pity for her.



"Mary was affected to the heart when she heard Juliette's story."

See page 142.

"Alas," said Juliette, "I am a great sinner; I have deserved my fate. Forgetfulness of God, contempt of good advice, love of dress, flattery, and pleasure were the first causes of misery, and these have brought me to my present state. Oh," cried she, raising her voice to a shriek, and weeping bitterly, "that is nothing to the fate which I fear awaits me in the world to come. You have pardoned me, it is true, but I feel the weight of God's anger now settling on my soul."

Mary conversed long and earnestly with her, endeavouring to point her to the Saviour of the world, who would receive her if she truly repented. At last she was obliged to leave her without being satisfied as to her state of mind, but the idea of the unhappy Juliette dying without hope continually pressed on her mind and weighed down her spirits. She recollected her little apple tree in blossom, withered by the frost, and what her father had said on that occasion. The most consoling words he had said on his deathbed presented themselves to her mind, and she renewed the promise she had made to God to live entirely to His glory.

To the Countess she related her discovery, and that generous lady sent the unhappy Juliette medicine, food,

and linen, and everything which might tend to relieve her illness. But it was too late, and at the age of twenty-three the once beautiful Juliette, reduced to a mere skeleton and disfigured by disease, died without having given evidence of a changed heart towards God.

CHAPTER XXI.

CONCLUSION.

The next spring, when the country was covered with verdure and flowers, the Count, accompanied by his wife, and daughter, and Mary, went to his home at Eichbourg. Towards evening they approached the village, and when Mary saw in the light of the setting sun the familiar church steeple, the Castle, and the cottage where she had spent so many happy years with her father, she was so deeply touched that tears started to her eyes.

But in the midst of the sorrowful memories which the scene called up in her mind, there came to her a devout feeling of thankfulness for the wonderful way in which God had led her back.

"When I left Eichbourg," she said, "it was in disgrace, and without ever expecting to come back again. The ways of

Providence are mysterious, but God is good."

When the carriage stopped at the Castle, the servants and officers belonging to the Count's household were waiting to receive them. Mary had a warm welcome from them all. Every one showed the greatest joy at seeing her again, and their congratulations on her innocence having been proved were manifestly sincere. The old judge who had sent her into banishment was among those who welcomed her most cordially. Taking her hand in the presence of all the servants, he asked her pardon for the mistake he had made. He expressed his gratitude to the Count and Countess for having so nobly repaired the injustice, assured them that he reproached himself for the misfortune, and that he was willing to do everything in his power to discharge his debt.

The exciting day came to an end, and Mary was glad to escape to her chamber. Next morning, the sun shining brightly into her room woke her early. As soon as she was dressed she ran to visit her father's cottage, and to walk once more round the old familiar garden. On her way she met numbers of the villagers, and all of them showed great happiness at seeing her.

The old farmer and his wife, who had now been settled some time in the cottage, were delighted to meet her again. They kissed her affectionately and assured her of the happiness of their new life.

"When you were without a home," said the farmer, with tears in his eyes, "we received you and your father into our own, and now that we are old and had no place that we could call our own, you give us this charming cottage in which we might spend our declining years."

"Yes," said his wife, "it is always well to be generous and hospitable. We never know how soon we shall receive it again."

"Well, well," said her husband, "I am glad we did not think of that then. We took Mary and her father in without hope of reward. However, the maxim is not the less true, 'Do good to others and you will always find some one to do good to you.'"

When Mary entered the cottage, the sight of the place where her father used to sit raised a host of sad but sweet recollections in her mind. She walked round the garden and kissed every tree planted by his hand, seeing in each

an old acquaintance. The little apple tree which had been their favourite, was just now covered with blossom, and before it she stopped to meditate for a little on man's brief life, which fades away before the tree which he has planted. In the arbour where she had passed so many happy hours with her father, she rested a little, and gave herself up to reflection. Looking around on the garden, which he had cultivated so diligently by the sweat of his brow, she fancied that she could still see him, and tears streamed from her eyes, when she remembered that he had gone from her for ever. But one thought soothed her heart and made her calm, the thought that he had gone to a better world, and was now reaping the reward of his beautiful life.

As long as Mary lived she spent some weeks every spring at the Castle, cherished and honoured by every one there, and endearing herself to the people of the village, and particularly to the children, among whom she was a great favourite. Her delight was to take them apart and to talk to them of the Saviour, and she had the happiness of believing that many of them under her instructions gave their hearts to God.

A monument had been erected to her father in fulfilment

of a promise which Amelia had made to Mary that evening when she found her sitting on her father's grave. It was an elegant monument of white marble, ornamented with an epitaph in gold letters. Besides the name of the deceased, his age and occupation, nothing in the way of epitaph was added but these words of Jesus—

"I am the Resurrection and the Life:
He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he
live."

Underneath these words a beautiful basket of flowers had been cut from a design drawn by Amelia herself. Underneath the basket was written—

*"All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof
as the flowers of the field. The grass withereth,
the flower fadeth, but the word of the Lord
endureth for ever."*

The erection of this monument gave great satisfaction to the good old minister of Erlenbrunn. The dark background of the fir trees threw the monument into relief, and gave it a very beautiful appearance; and when the rose tree planted by his grave was in bloom, and its

branches covered with roses bent over the marble, which was of dazzling whiteness, the sight was a striking one. The humble old man's monument was the most beautiful ornament of the rural churchyard, and the good minister never allowed strangers to leave the church without taking them to see it.

When some people observed that it was a good idea to have put a basket of flowers on the tomb of a man who was at the same time a gardener and a basket-maker, the old minister would say—

"But it is something better than a good idea. The basket of flowers tells more than you know, and it is not without reason that our villagers look upon it as the symbol of a touching story. The ground on which we tread has been bathed with a daughter's tears."

Then he would pour into the attentive ears of strangers the familiar story of the basket of flowers, concluding his recital with the assurance which this whole story is intended to illustrate: That piety towards God and truth towards men will never fail to triumph over the malice of the worst of foes.

Let our readers who have followed this touching story be assured that under all circumstances it is best to do as Mary did—walk in the fear of God, love and obey their earthly parents, stand fast by the truth, and under all circumstances trust fully in God. Thus they will live happy and die with a sure prospect of eternal glory.

THE END

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