

When old Jehan Daas had reached his full eighty, his daughter had died in the Ardennes, hard by Stavelot,¹ and had left him in legacy her two-year-old son. The old man could ill contrive to support himself, but he took up the additional burden uncomplainingly, and it soon became welcome and precious to him. Little Nello — which was but a pet diminutive for Nicolas — throve with him, and the old man and the little child lived in the poor little hut contentedly.

It was a very humble little mud-hut indeed, but it was clean and white as a sea-shell, and stood in a small plot of garden-ground that yielded beans and herbs and pumpkins. They were very poor, terribly poor, — many a day they had nothing at all to eat. They never by any chance had enough; to have had enough to eat would have been to have reached paradise at once. But the old man was very gentle and good to the boy, and the boy was a beautiful, innocent, truthful, tender-natured creature; and they were happy on a crust and a few leaves of cabbage, and asked no more of earth or Heaven; save indeed that Patrasche should be always with them, since without Patrasche where would they have been?

For Patrasche was their alpha and omega;² their treasury and granary; their store of gold and wand of wealth; their bread-winner and minister; their only friend and comforter. Patrasche dead or gone from them, they must have laid themselves down and

¹ **Stavelot.** A town in Belgium, about 25 miles south-east of Liège.

² **Alpha and omega.** The names of the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. The meaning is "first and last".