

dear, dear son, do you not know me? I am, indeed, old John."

A smile played over the lips of the youth. "Father John," said he, faintly, "and Mohr, my good dog. God be thanked, for I may yet be saved."

It was too much for the poor lad, he was quite overcome. Father John saw that no time must be lost in attempting to save his darling's life. He quickly formed his determination, and, ordering the dog to remain beside his master, went with hasty steps to call for help. Fortunately this was at hand. Scarcely had he run a hundred yards, when he met one of the huntsmen of Count Hohen-thal, who gladly promised to render any assistance in his power. They returned to Max, and, using the upper cape or cloak of the huntsman as a support, they carried the poor boy quickly to the castle, being the nearest shelter. On entering the courtyard, they found it full of people, armed with scythes and flails. In the midst of them was the Count, mounted on horseback, addressing the men whom he had called together. He felt that no time must be lost in searching for those evil-doers, who had, for long, been a terror to the neighbourhood, and had, in the past night, made such a daring attempt on his property.

Old John approached bareheaded, and asked permission to carry the wounded boy into the castle. The Count turned immediately, and graciously granted the request, while at the same time he asked what had happened to him.

"God only knows," answered John; "but—"

"Blessings on him," interrupted the Count. "Can this be the brave youth who roused us from our sleep, and to whom we owe so much? Where is he?"

"Here," rejoined old John, and beckoned to the man to bring him forward.

Max had in the meantime recovered consciousness, and was looking with some interest at the armed peasants who surrounded him. The Count, on seeing him, seized his hand, and said sympathisingly, "Poor boy, who has treated thee so cruelly? Was it thou who gave the alarm last night? and is this the reward thou hast received?"

Max nodded in answer, for he was faint, and not able to speak.

"So I have to thank thee, my lad, that great part of my property has, through thy courage, been saved. What is thy name? Truly this service shall not go unrewarded."

Max felt too weak to answer, so old John spoke for him.

"He is Max Berninger, my lord," said he; "you will remember the boy in behalf of whom I petitioned your Grace."

"Right, right; I recollect," interrupted the Count. "I did not know the lad then; but it is not too late. The wound, I trust, will not be dangerous. Carry him into the castle, children, and take good care of him till I return. I must away to put an end to the daring of these rascals. The whole forest must be searched. I will not rest till they are discovered and brought to justice."

"Stop, most gracious lord," said John, as the Count turned to his peasants. "Max will be better able to tell you of their haunts. They have had him imprisoned for weeks. Wait awhile and allow me to question him, when he has recovered himself a little."

Max was, meanwhile, carried into the castle, and put under the hand of the village doctor, a clever and sensible man, who immediately began to examine the wound. The poor boy lay in bed, and opened his eyes when his old friend came in. Sitting down beside him, old John said,—

"Canst thou tell me, my son, where these robbers are most in the habit of hiding? The Count desires to know."

"In the underground vaults and cellars of the old ruined castle," replied Max.

"Indeed!" replied the old man; and then, addressing the Doctor, "how stands the wound?"

"Not dangerous, Father John; only a flesh wound—bone quite whole—ball already out, and I hope in a fortnight he will be well and sound again."

"That is comforting," said the other, full of joy, and ran quickly to deliver his message. The Count and his people started immediately; and John, after sending tidings to Max's mother, returned. He still found him weak and exhausted, but the patient received his old friend with the same smile. It was not long ere the mother, too arrived; and, embracing her dear boy with tears, sat by his side, assuring him that she would not leave him again till he would be quite recovered. The physician seconded her wish, and assured her all would go well, if he only were kept quiet and carefully nursed. The faithful Mohr, who had never left his master's side since he was removed from the pit, laid himself down at the foot of the bed; and Father John, seeing Max in a quiet sleep, took his place on the window seat, and looked toward the forest for the return of the Count.

Some hours elapsed; it was mid-day, and still no sign of their coming. He was beginning to fear that the search might again be fruitless, when he saw the Count riding rapidly towards the castle, followed by the whole troop. John crept quietly out, and arrived in the court-yard just in time to meet him.

"All right—the whole gang taken!" he cried, "And will be here immediately. How is the boy?"

"Going on well, thank God," answered old John. "Were any of the men armed?"

"One of them (Bernard they call him) fired, but happily without doing any harm; the rest threw down their weapons and begged for mercy. That Bernard struggled most desperately, but he was at last obliged to give in. He is an audacious fellow, and must certainly be the one who shot our brave boy."

"Without doubt," said old John; "he richly deserves the punishment that awaits him."

It was not long before they entered. They were well secured against escape, and appeared sorrowful and downcast. Bernard alone looked boldly around.

"Thou seest now, Bernard, to what thy evil deeds have brought thee," cried the old man. "As the deed so the reward. Thou shouldst have thought of that, man, while it was yet time. What has Max done, that thou hast treated the poor lad so cruelly?"

"What do I know of him?" said Bernard spitefully.

"Thou knowest nothing of him, and yet hast tried to put him to death?" said John. "The poor boy has told me of thy cruelty."

"Told thee? the boy?" cried Bernard, terrified and confounded. "Nonsense! The dead come not to life again; and he of whom thou speakest lies by some evil hand dead in a pit."

"Yes; and had it been thy will, he would have been there still," answered John; "but the good God has frustrated your wicked designs. The boy lives, in order to be a witness against thee. Thy hour of justice has come, Bernard."

Deadly pale was the wretched criminal. He had still hoped that his assault on Max might have remained concealed; but with the breaking of this last prop his spirit of defiance and courage gave place to one of despair. At his trial he acknowledged all the evil he had done, and placed, in consequence, the goodness of the brave Max in the brightest light. The statements of his companions only confirmed his confession, which was listened to by the Count with amazement and wonder. The sentence was passed. Imprisonment for life was to be his doom. His companions atoned for their crimes in the house of correction.

A happier fate awaited the faithful, conscientious Max. He rapidly recovered; and, before fourteen days had elapsed, was allowed to leave his bed, and was able to relate to his mother, old John, and the Count, the sad sufferings he had undergone during his imprisonment. His dearest wish was fulfilled. One morning, soon after he was able to walk about, the Count sent for him, and, after expressing himself in terms of hearty approval, gave him the joyful intelligence and surprise that he was forthwith to be apprenticed to the same man who had accompanied them in the first search for the smugglers. He then presented the happy boy with two handsome guns, and promised that all else requisite should be done for him. With a beaming face, he hastened back to his mother to tell her of the Count's goodness. But he had also other causes of joy; for then he also learnt, with an overflowing heart, that the noble Count had so provided for her that she might live the remainder of her days in rest and comfort. With tears of gratitude he embraced his beloved parent, and thanked and praised God for His wonderful kindness. No less rejoiced was old John. He pressed the happy Max to his breast, and said, deeply moved, "Well is it for thee, my son, that thou didst resist that temptation. Wonderfully has the promise been fulfilled to thee."

"What promise, Father John?" asked Max. "That in the words of the Psalmist," replied the old man; "'Keep innocency, and take heed unto the thing that is right, for that shall bring a man peace at the last.'"

"Yes, God be thanked," answered Max joyfully. "I can never forget what He has done for me, a poor weak boy. He was ever with me in the hour of danger, spreading over me His protecting hand; and I shall try as long as I live to serve Him, and prove my gratitude for His great mercy."

"So be it," said Father John. "Well would it be if others would follow thine example in times of great temptation, and swerve not from the path of duty, looking for help from above in all the storms of life."

THE END.

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