

THE COOK AND THE CAPTIVE;
OR,
ATTALUS THE HOSTAGE.

BY CHARLOTTE M. YONGE.

CHAPTER XII.

GILCHRIST'S VENTURE.

GILCHRIST, the Irish pilgrim, had been detained much against his will at Langres by repeated outbreaks of the disease in his wounded foot, and the fever and weakness that accompanied them; but at last recovery had set in, and he could walk, so that he would already have set forth if he had not been assured that he would find it absolutely impossible to cross the Alps in the coming winter, and that if he set out now it would only be to leave his bones upon the mountains.

Native of warm, damp Ireland, he hardly believed what he was told, even on the word of the Bishop and of Tetricus, who had both made the journey, and described to him the precipices, the glaciers, the avalanches, and the impossibility of finding his way without the guides whom he could not pay, so that his only chance was by joining some company of pilgrims who were certain to be crossing in the summer, and were sure to allow him to accompany them and share their food.

However, he had been detained, much against his will, so long that he seemed like a regular inmate of Gregory's house, and shared many of its interests, besides having become tolerably familiar both with the Gallic form of Latin and the broken Frankish that passed for the vernacular.

He spent the night in one long vigil. He preferred to do such watchings up to his neck in water, but as the river was too far off for this, he prostrated himself on the pavement. He always did the like, only not for so long a time, on Fridays, and seemed able to exist without food or sleep, or with the smallest possible amount, much longer than the household, who inherited habits of Roman ease, though kept in check by Christian self-denial. Indeed there was very little of him save a frame of bones covered by a freckled skin, with an eager soul looking out of a pair of vivid dark eyes.

No sooner was the house astir, and the morning daily Eucharist over, than he stood forth and said, "I go to find the boy, the grandson of the holy Bishop."

There was a general outcry:

He knew not where to go, the ways were forest; he would be eaten by the wolves; he would be starved himself; he would be lost in the woods; he would meet with mere barbarians; he did not know which road to take; it was mere madness. To all he had but one

answer: "God would lead him. The boy was the lamb of God's own. He would go to seek him. As to starving, he could live on little; as to the wolves, if it were Heaven's will, he was as willing to go to paradise by their teeth as by any other way."

What was the use of trying to persuade a man who had no fears, no shrinking from pain or discomfort? Besides, no one present possessed that authority of the Bishop to which alone he would give way, and he was absolutely determined. He knew that he must pass through Treves, and there he meant to put himself under the protection of the memory of the great St. Athanasius, the champion of the faith, as he well knew; but beyond this all was uncertain. Philetus insisted on writing a letter to bespeak kindness and protection from the clergy or the monks of Treves for the crazy pilgrim, and Leo filled his wallet with the food likely to last longest, and, moreover, walked out a mile or two from the town with him to prevent him from giving it all away to beggars.

"Would that I were going with thee!" said Leo as they parted; "I could succor the boy more effectively than thou art like to do."

"Come, then," said Gilchrist.

"I cannot—I am a slave."

"I had forgotten," said Gilchrist. "Yet aid me by thy prayers."

So the little worn figure in brown frock and hood disappeared from sight, and no word was heard of him.

"No doubt," said some of the more irreligious of the household, "the wolves had had him."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HOLLOW TREE.

The winter was not a very severe one. If it had been the less promising colts would have had to be slaughtered, so as to leave food enough for the rest; and the family of Hunderik would have eaten them with as little scruple as they had in devouring the swine or cattle, of whom, as a matter of course, all the young progeny were eaten, and only the parents left to keep up the stock.

The horses were always spared to the last, though they could not at times be turned out, but a good deal of the labor of their herds was spent in collecting the ferns and reeds, and anything that would serve for fodder, to help out the small amount of hay and straw that had been stored in the early autumn. Whenever it was tolerably fine and free from snow the horses were taken out to pick up what they could in some of the more sheltered valleys, where springs resisted the less violent frosts and kept the grass tolerably moist.

Milo and Attalus with him, had gone out with a favorite mare and her foal, to take them, apart from the others, to a place in the forest