

had any doubt, he had better go to Bernard's house and see for himself.

The old man cast a searching look on the boy, whose confusion he had not failed to observe, and knit his brow. "Max, thou lookest as if thou hadst been going in the way of evil," said he, earnestly. "Tell me frankly, how thou camest to have such an accurate knowledge of Bernard's movements."

"No, Father John, I dare not, for I have given my word to silence," answered Max, and looked the old man openly in the face. "If I have another opportunity, I will not pledge my word again, but now, as it has so happened, I must stand to it; 'an honest man is as good as his word,' Father John; however, so much can I say, that Bernard is not on smuggling pranks to-night."

The old man shook his head suspiciously, but the cloud of mistrust vanished, and he answered, "Well, I believe thee, youth, because I have never found thee out in a lie. Still, it is a strange story, and I would rather thou hadst told me the plain truth, but I must overlook it for this time. However, beware, Max, of keeping company with that man; no good will come of it. I have observed him for a long time; take thou care of him, my boy."

"I have nothing to do with him, indeed, Father John," protested Max; "if you have the least doubt, I could soon entirely dispel it. In the solitary wood, one sees and hears many things, and if it were my business, I think I could speedily enough find out the smugglers' haunts."

"Thy business, boy!" cried old John, "it is the business of every upright person faithfully to serve his sovereign, and uphold the authority of the law; how should it not be thy duty? But, patience, I can no longer wait at present, for I have much to look after; to-morrow I will speak further with thee. Good night, Max. Good night, Mother Berninger. God take you under His protection and give you quiet sleep."

The old man, after these words, hastened out of the little room to join his companion, who was waiting with some impatience outside. Max listened at the window as the footsteps of the two men died away in the distance, and then sat down by his mother; but he remained the whole evening still and silent, and retired to rest earlier than usual. The suspicion which honest old John, though even but for a moment, had entertained, made him sick at heart. He considered various ways by which he might clear himself, without breaking his word to Bernard, and before he slept, had come to a determination, which he was resolved to carry out, if possible.

"Mother, I would rather not look after the goats to-day," said Max, early next morning.

"And why wouldst thou not, my son?" asked the mother.

"Well, seest thou," said he, "that is a secret, but to-morrow evening I think I can give thee my reasons."

"Max," said the mother, seizing the hand of her boy, "I can imagine what thou hast in thy mind, for I overheard what thou didst say to old John last night. I know not if it be right to mix thyself up in this business. It is, certainly, the duty of every good and brave man, to help to uphold the laws; but thou art so young, a mere boy, Max, and canst do little or nothing in setting matters right. What is not thy business, be not forward to undertake; and truly it seems to

me not to belong to thee to interfere with these smugglers. Now I am but a simple woman, and must leave it to thyself to decide how thou shouldst act; however, trouble thyself not about the goats, they can for once remain at home, without giving a reason."

The simple, sensible words of the mother made a deep impression upon Max. He had himself thought, that he had no right to trace out Bernard and his companions, so long as they left him in peace; although, again, on the other hand, he thought if it must be every man's duty, as it was, to try and prevent wickedness and crime, it must be his also. He knew not exactly how to solve this riddle, but determined to consider over it himself, till he should have an opportunity of asking old John's advice.

"Thou art right, mother," said he, "I will drive out the goats, and what I ought further to do, the good God will show me."

"That is excellent, Max. Go now, in the Lord's name, and remain not out so long to-day."

Max called his dog, let his own goat out of its stall, took his shepherd's staff from the corner, and the horn from the nail on the wall, and tooted cheerfully through the village. At this Mohr barked, till it resounded through all the streets, and the other goats, who understood the well-known sound, were restless and impetuous in their longing to get into the fresh air. Then were to be seen everywhere the doors opening, and from right and left they came springing along, till the same little flock was gathered that Max had yesterday led into the village. Dappled, white, spotted, brown, and black, they all came capering merrily around, as if they rejoiced in the prospect of another beautiful day in the fresh air on the green meadows and rocky mountain slopes. Mohr had truly enough to do to restrain the exuberance of their joy; the merry little kids, especially, wished, without any oversight, to frolic about as they liked; but he sagaciously checked them, and placed himself so as to turn back the most refractory ones. So wild and wicked, too, were some of the older goats, that they would butt at him with their horns, and stamp on the ground with their forefeet. When once, however he had got them into the wood, he allowed them more play room. His watchful look was over them all, and he seemed to control them into perfect order by his bark.

It was a happy thing that Mohr had so much intelligence, for Max appeared to-day not at all disposed to support the eager pains of his faithful dog. He was continually thinking of what old John had said, that it was his duty faithfully to serve his sovereign, and to uphold the laws of the country. Then he again reflected on his mother's words, "What is not thy business, be not forward to undertake," and was quite undecided as to which advice he should follow. Under this tumult of thought and feeling, it was excusable if he was a little remiss in his accustomed care of the flock.

When the herd came to the place where they had grazed yesterday, Mohr looked at his young master, as if he would ask, "Well, shall we not remain here where we were so comfortable before?" but Max pretended not to observe the glances of the honest dog—he walked further and further up the valley. The goats went slowly before him, Mohr assiduously attending to his duty. After this, he took a small footpath leading to the heights, which was so overgrown with birches,

hazel-nuts, and young beeches, that it was quite like an arbour. In the midst of all his dreaming, he never once observed that Mohr was sagacious enough to keep the goats at the foot of the mountain, and prevent them ascending to the summit, where the old ruined castle stood. Fodder, indeed, they would have found there, but how could he have held that petulant herd in check in the cross-paths and among the archways of the great castle yard, with its tumble-down walls. No doubt they would think it good frolic to clamber among these. But the animal judged prudently of his own capacities, his legs being better fitted for running than climbing. No, Mohr, sensible dog as he was, remained below in the valley, and the expression of his face, as he looked after his young master, seemed to say, "You may go in peace, beloved, but I intend to remain here, and the flock shall not be ill cared for while you are away."

Max ascended higher and higher up the mountain, with his eyes ever fixed on the ground. He was so lost in thought as to be all unconscious of the shady bower over his head, and of the songs which the finches and blackbirds warbled. He heard only the conversation between his own opposing thoughts and feelings. At length, after half-an-hour's toilsome walking, he came to the top of the hill. There lay before him the old knight's castle, whose ruined battlements and towers had well-nigh a hundred years been looked upon from the valley below. In the window niches, from whence formerly noble dames looked out on the green woods, or far away to the distant mountains, falcons and jays were now perched. In the half-ruined cellar vaults, where once upon a time stood butts full of rare wines, a fox had established his den. Where youths and men had formerly amused themselves in feats of strength and agility, grass was growing a yard high. Several stately shade trees spread their branches across the court, their thousand leaves telling, as with thousand tongues, of the transient nature of all earthly rank and glory.

On reaching this stately old ruin, Max did not so much as once raise his eyes. He knew every stone, every shrub, every little blade of grass. He hastened through the court-yard, clambered over the fragments of the ruined walls, and ascended the old tower to where a noted birch-tree stood. Under its shadow he stretched himself out full length. He had got what he wanted—some quiet place, where he would neither be disturbed by the goats, nor by Mohr barking. Well, and still enough truly it was there, save when a raven cawed, or a falcon shrieked, or the wind murmured among the trees of the wood. A death-like stillness reigned in the old ruin. It was just what Max wished.

He had sat about an hour there leaning on his elbow, when, suddenly thrusting his head forward, he seemed as if he had heard men's voices. Cautiously drawing the drooping branches of the birch a little on one side, in order that he might observe who those could be who had come to visit the lonely ruin, he as suddenly drew it back. Astonishment was pictured on his countenance, and no wonder, for, below in the court yard, he saw—but no, I will relate in the next chapter what Max observed in this lonely retreat, for he saw and heard many things, which enabled him at once to end the long struggle he had had in his mind.

(To be continued.)

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