

THE COOK AND THE CAPTIVE ;

OR,

ATTALUS THE HOSTAGE.

BY CHARLOTTE M. YONGE.

CHAPTER XV.—*Continued.*

"I will, I will," she cried, "if only he may live! But oh," as the hermit turned toward the stream below them, "he may not brook the water! Man, it will go ill with thee if thou art the death of Hunderik's only son and heir."

"Wilt thou have his soul saved unto everlasting life?" demanded Gilchrist, sternly.

"Oh, let him live!" cried the mother, somewhat cowed by the tone, and amazed by seeing that Hundbert lay in her arms smiling, and murmured something faintly that sounded like content.

She let the hermit take him from her, and the strong arm seemed to please him, for he murmured, "Good!"

Descending the path to the stream, Gilchrist, with Roswitha's help, for the mother stood passive and awed, divested the child of his wrappings. They were hot, heavy, and stifling, and Hundbert cast them from him, enjoying the soft May breeze on his limbs; but when Gilchrist entered the shallow stream, and pronouncing the holy words, dipped him once, twice, thrice, in the clear limpid water, the first time he gave a gurgling scream, and his mother started forward, but before she could snatch him away, the three immersions had been made, the latter two only with the renewed exclamation of "Good, good man!"

"He is the servant now of God the Christ for this life, and for that which is to come," said Gilchrist, beginning to repeat the Lord's Prayer in his strange Latin, in which Attalus and Roswitha joined. The mother was drying the boy's limbs but not interrupting, though to her it sounded like an incantation; but the child was manifestly no worse, and only showed himself impatient at being wrapped up again. Presently he tried to sit up in his mother's arms and noticed the fawn, and though he was so weak as to fall back again immediately, there were evident signs of the great oppression having left him. He asked for food, and Attalus brought the only things at hand, a few wild strawberries from the bank, which he ate with great enjoyment, the fell asleep, and so was carried home. He woke to eat, slept again, and insisted on being carried out into the open air. There he gained strength every day, and his recovery was owned by all the household as a miracle.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN UNWILLING MISSIONARY.

Gilchrist's fame was established in Hundingsburg, and there was a resort to him, not only of the various people of the household, but those from a distance, most of them expecting him to cure their children, and offering him gifts of all kinds—calves, kids, young horses, baskets of wood-strawberries, even collars and bracelets of gold.

He would accept none of the gifts, hardly even food for the day; yet his two deer had deserted him, whether driven away by the concourse, or invited by the blandishments of their own kind, for a great stag had appeared on the opposite side of the valley. Gilchrist consented to pray over the sick, and the mothers held that they recovered; but he was more willing to teach and to answer questions, though even that was very reluctantly done. His real delight was in solitude and in higher communings, and he wandered farther and farther into the depths of the forest, to avoid these interviews, as his lame foot was, at last, thoroughly healing. One morning Milo, who had thought to be so early that he could not escape, found no sign of him; and repeated visits from Attalus, Roswitha, and others of his newer admirers failed to find him. He had vanished as strangely as he had come, but the effect of his presence had not been entirely thrown away. Attalus had returned to the endeavor to keep up his better habits, and Roswitha and Milo equally desired to do so. They regularly said with him the prayers and Creed that he had taught them, and when it was possible he told them the sacred history of the gospel as it came back to his memory.

Nor was there any more obstruction from Bernhild. She did not listen, but she never interfered to separate the children, except that, as summer advanced, Attalus had to be out with the horses all day as before. It was Valhild who most disturbed them. She held that there was much more amusement in the stories of Odin and Thor than in theirs. She liked to think of Frey flying over the grass and scattering the shining gossamer; and she believed when it thundered that Thor was wielding his hammer, and often threatened Roswitha that it would descend on her in anger for forsaking the gods of her fathers. She was constantly teasing her sister for loving the gods of the serfs and slaves, instead of the gods of the free conquerors; and there were a good many quarrels in consequence, for Roswitha had not learned forbearance as a Christian duty, though she was naturally more gentle than her sister. The rest of the household were little affected, except Bodo, who scorned it all. He held Hundbert's cure to be