

By early morn, as we have said everything was prepared for the departure of Walter and his father as soon as Ludwig should make his appearance. In a state of agitation, Margaret would one moment run out to see if the towing-horses were yet in sight at the nearest turn of the river, and the next she would rush into the cottage and again busy herself about Walter and his bundle, saying to him a thousand things which she had said over and over again before.

At length, about seven o'clock, the cracking of whips and the noise of horses was heard. "Here they are at last!" exclaimed every one. Walter seized his bundle with one hand, and with the other led Margaret down the bank to the side of the Rhine, their hearts too full to speak. The anxious moment of departure had arrived. Hans, who had signalled his old acquaintance Ludwig to draw nigh, was already speaking to him of his proposed journey to Strasburg. The bargain was a-tied in a moment, for the raft-pilot had made a more than usually good excursion, and was in the best possible humour. Besides, he was glad to have a fresh companion to talk about his adventures on the river, and was quite happy to welcome Hans and Walter to a lift in the barge.—They accordingly stepped on board, Walter's brothers giving him a hearty cheer, and his mother her blessing, as they left the shore. Margaret was the last they saw, as she stood on a bank near straining her eyes through her fast-falling tears, to catch the last glimpse of Walter as they turned a bend in the Rhine.

Walter, who had never been but a few miles up and down the Rhine from Rosenthal, was enraptured with every new feature of the scenery which came into view, and he was equally delighted with the stories and anecdotes of Ludwig, who had something to say over every old castle and crag which they passed in their journey. Although a man of rough manners, he was kind to Walter, and gave him a place in which to sleep at night, under a little deck mounted near the stern of the vessel.

The first night Walter was on board the barge he had little inclination to sleep, his mind being too much agitated with the novelty of his situation to allow repose.

"Since you do not seem to wish to lie down," said old Ludwig to him, as he sat looking out upon the broad river glittering in the moonlight, "if you like I will tell you a story about that curious old tower which we are going to pass on our right?"

"What tower?" asked Walter; "I do not see any one on the banks just now."

"It does not stand on the banks at all, my young friend; it is situated on a rock which rises from the middle of the Rhine—a kind of island; and a strongly fortified place it must have been in the times of the old German wars. Do you not see it now, almost right ahead, like a green giant rising from the bosom of the stream?"

"Now, I think I see it," replied Walter. "Do tell me the story about it if you please. I am sure it must be something very terrible."

"Terrible, it is, if all be true, though of that one cannot be certain. Like all the Rhine stories, it is no doubt a mixture of truth and invention, and we must just take it as we find it. At all events, here it is as the people round about tell it." And Ludwig related the following legend;—

"Once on a time, ages ago, when the castles on the Rhine were inhabited by barons and their men-at-arms, this tower in the midst of the river was erected by a wicked and powerful chief named Graaf, for the purpose of exacting tolls from every one who passed up or down the Rhine. If a boat or barge dared to go by without drawing up to the tower to pay a certain toll, the warders on the top of the battlements had orders to shoot with cross-bows at the voyager, and either oblige him to draw nigh, or kill him for daring to pass without paying. You must understand that the baron who exacted this toll had done nothing to deserve it, and had no law in his favour. It was solely

from his own will and pleasure that he demanded a duty on passing boats: a means of supporting himself, and of acquiring wealth without working for it.

Everybody far and near feared this domineering rascal. He kept a band of men in another castle which he had at some distance, and with these he defied any one to challenge his assumed rights. Often he had battles with neighboring barons, but he was generally victorious, and on such occasions he never made any prisoners. All who were taken he put to death with shocking barbarism and ignominy.

Among other ways by which he gathered money was that of occasionally buying up, or rather taking for a small price which he put on it, the corn grown by the peasants in his neighbourhood. Graaf was a very cunning man in this respect.—He could very easily have taken all the crops for ten mill s round for nothing; but the consequence would have been, that no one would have tilled any more land in that quarter, and so he could not have taken more than the corn of a single season. He was, as I say, too cunning for this; his plan was to make a show of kindness to the peasantry, but to take advantage of their necessities. Sometimes he sent the corn which he thus got at a trifling expense to Mayence, and procured large sums for it; but more frequently he kept the corn up till there was a dearth, and then he could get for it any money he liked to name.

Year after year Count Graaf grew richer and richer with spoils of one kind and another; and every one said that he could not pass out of the world without some sharp and signal punishment for his greed and manifold oppressions. This, however, seemed long of coming about. Yet the time of vengeance arrived at last. He had become old and more hard-hearted than ever, when one year there arose a dreadful famine in the land. The summer and autumn were so wet that the grain did not ripen, and it continued still green when the snows of winter fell on the ground. In every town and village the cry of distress was heard; the husbandman saw his little ones fainting and perishing for lack of food, and the wealthy becoming poor, from being obliged to purchase at enormous prices small supplies of bread. Every one was suffering except the cunning old baron whom I am telling you of. While everybody else cried, he laughed and chuckled over the rare high prices he should get for his great store of grain, which, for security, he transferred to the rooms and vaults of the tower in the river.

Things during that awful winter became daily worse throughout the country. The poor of the villages flocked to the towns for assistance; but the towns being as badly off as the villages and hamlets, the famishing crowds were refused admittance, and they perished in thousands at the gateways. All animals fit for food were killed and eaten up, as I have heard; cows, oxen, horses, dogs, and other creatures. A very curious thing was now observed. Large numbers of rats now began to roam about the country in quest of food; and so bold and ferocious did they become, that people fled before them. When accounts of these distresses were taken to old Count Graaf at the tower, he did not in the smallest degree commiserate the woes of the poor. Instead of opening his granaries and selling his corn at a reasonable cost, he declared that he should not dispose of a particle till the price of the loaf in Mayence reached as high as ten guilders.* "If the people are starving," said he jocularly, "why do not they eat rats, rather than allow so much good food to go to waste throughout the country?" This was a bitter saying, and was afterwards remembered against him. One night, when he was sitting there, congratulating himself on soon getting the price he demanded—for the loaf was now selling for nine and a half guilders—the warder from the top of the castle rushed suddenly into his apartment, and declared that the river was covered with armies of rats swimming boldly to the tower, and that some had already gained a land-

* Sixteen shillings and eightpence sterling.

ing, and were climbing up the loopholes and walls. Scarcely had this intelligence been communicated by the terrified man-at-arms, when thousands of famishing rats poured in at the doors, windows, and passages, in search, no doubt, of something to eat, whether corn or human beings mattered not to them. Flight and defence were equally impossible. While host after host attacked the granaries, bands fell upon the wicked old baron, and he was worried to death where he lay, and almost immediately torn in pieces and devoured. The warder and one or two of the attendants alone escaped, by throwing themselves into a boat and making with all speed for the nearest bank of the river. I need scarcely tell you that, when the news of Count Graaf's death was spread abroad, nobody mourned his fate, which indeed was looked upon as a just punishment for his great covetousness and cruelty. No one ventured near the tower for several months afterwards. When at length the heirs of the Count visited it, they found that all the grain had been eaten up, and that nothing remained of its former owner but a skeleton stretched on the cold floor of one of the apartments. Such was the end of the wicked Count Graaf; and although such famines may never take place in our times, his fate is not the less a warning to those who would sinfully, and for their own ends, prevent the poor from having a proper supply of bread."

With stories such as this, Ludwig made the long passage up the river seem short to Walter, who, when the barge arrived at Strasburg on the fourth day after leaving Rosenthal, was surprised to find that he was at the end of his journey.—Bidding adieu to Ludwig and his companions, Hans and his son now arrived at the fortifications of Strasburg, and entered the crowded city. The streets, the houses, the shops, all seemed like a scene of enchantment before the eyes of the country boy; and as the great clock of the cathedral struck eight, he listened with wonder and delight to its fine deep tones, which led to a reverie on clocks and watches, and clockmakers and watchmakers, till he was roused by his father stopping at the small door of a tall, dismal looking house in a narrow, dark, dirty little street. He now made Walter follow him up a long staircase, which seemed almost endless to the boy, till they stopped at the door of a room in one of the upper stories, and knocked with his hand. The door was opened by his brother, who had just returned from his work, and gave them a hearty reception, leading them in to his wife, a tall, bony-looking woman, not very clean in her person, who was preparing the supper of onion broth and salad. There was a strong smell of onions and tobacco in the room; but to this Walter was accustomed at home; though his aunt's untidy appearance, and the gloomy discomfort of the small room, were not so like home, and for a moment his heart sank within him. However, a kind reception, and some warm soup, which, as he was very hungry, he was glad of, cheered him; and he was soon asleep on the straw mattress of the little wooden bed prepared for him in a recess in the next room. He slept soundly, and dreamed that his was a watchmaker, and had made the clock of the cathedral; but just as his father and mother and Margaret and his brothers, and all the village, were assembled, and admiring his work, the whole steeply fell down with such a crash that he awoke; and, starting up in bed, saw his father who had upset the only chair in the room in his hurry to call. Walter to bid him good-bye, as he was returning home. He kissed the boy affectionately, bade him be good and obedient to his master and his uncle, and not forget his duty to God, or all that his mother and he had taught him, and left the room. Walter was alone for the first time in his life, and he sat up in his bed and cried bitterly.

That morning his uncle introduced him to his new master, a quiet old man, with a mild benevolent countenance, and a gentle manner. He spoke kindly, and seemed sorry for the little pale boy who was separated for the first time from his family and home. Walter felt his kindness, and