

could with difficulty breathe. His heart seemed as if it must burst. He made a desperate effort to loosen the string that bound his hands, but it was in vain. Benard had tied them so tightly with a new piece of rope, that the more eagerly he attempted to free himself, the deeper it cut into the flesh. He must give it up, he thought; and, leaning his head sorrowfully against the damp wall, he sunk into a sort of painful stupor, during which he was conscious of but one feeling, that of supreme unhappiness.

Thus an hour elapsed, when suddenly he came to himself. He remembered words of comfort that his clergyman had taught him and which ran thus, "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me, saith the Lord." They fell as a bright lustrous ray on his broken, comfortless spirit. "Lord, Lord, my God! help me," stammered the boy. Raising himself from his damp, cold seat on the stones, he fell on his knees, and lifted his eyes and his heart to the Lord of all who is the alone Saviour and helper of those who trust in Him. "Help me, merciful Father," prayed he silently, but with a trusting, hopeful soul. "Behold, evil men have had power over me to my destruction, and if Thou dost not send Thine angel to help me, that the door of my prison may be opened, and my fetters loosened, I know not how I can escape from my misery."

Whether the boy in his agony had hoped that an angel from heaven would really appear to him we cannot tell. The angel appeared not; but there stole over his heart a calm, quite joy, which comforted and strengthened him. He raised himself from his knees, in the assurance that his faithful Father above would certainly not forsake him. As he sat down again on the stone steps, consoled and quieted in spirit, there came a sudden thought into his mind. He thought he saw a way by which he might free himself from the rope which bound him, and which he had hitherto sought in vain to tear asunder. This bright suggestion—came it not from God, to whom he had called in his distress? and was it not in truth the angel whom he had hoped would set him free? So, indeed, Max believed; for he cried out joyfully, "This comes from above," and began, without delay, to convert the thought into reality. Numberless stones with sharp edges and corners, as has already been noted, lay scattered about the cellar. One of the largest of these he sought out, and, leaning against the wall of his prison, rubbed the rope on its sharp edge, patiently continuing the friction. After much painful effort, which brought the sweat-drops to his brow, he felt to his unspeakable joy his fetters gradually becoming looser and looser. At last the rope gave way, and his arms, which had been so long and painfully bound, were once more free. Another moment, and the gag which had caused him so much discomfort was removed, and from his opened mouth resounded a loud, triumphant shout of joy.

"I thank and praise Thee, O God," cried the boy, folding his hands over his breast. "I called upon thee in my trouble, and truly, truly Thou hast delivered me, according to Thy word unto Thy child."

It seemed to Max as if he were free, and that he need fear nothing more, now that he had, with God's help, overcome the worst difficulty. His breast, which an hour before

had beat convulsively, was now glad and light as the heart of a little bird that had escaped from the snare, and soars aloft in the blue ether. What had he now to fear, when his heavenly Father had so evidently come to his assistance? No; never should the shadow of a care oppress his heart, now that his hands were made free. He would, with joyful courage, make an effort to secure final escape. Vehemently he shook the closed door, once, twice and yet again, hoping it would at last give way and yield. But no; it was neither rotten nor old, but newly made, of good oak timber, with iron bars securely fixed in the strong, square stones of the old walls. With all the strength he could command, he found it was impossible to shake, far less to burst, it open.

"This is bad," said he to himself, and gave up for the moment the attempt, not exactly despairing, but certainly disappointed. "There must surely," he continued, "be some other way, for free I must at all risks become. The good God would never have made me feel so sure of freedom, if I were doomed to pine away miserably and at length starve to death in this place. Old John, too, must also be warned. The plans of these wicked men must not be accomplished, spite of all their deceit and artfulness. God will not suffer that sin and wickedness should triumph over uprightness, and he will show me a way to escape."

The boy had become accustomed, meanwhile, to the darkness of his prison, and was able distinctly to discern what lay around. Again and again his eyes wandered up and down the walls to discover some opening, or decayed place which he might widen, and by this means force a passage out. But his careful searching was without result. Whichever way he turned, wherever his groping hands touched the walls, there was nothing to be felt but the strong, immovable stones. They were so firmly compacted together, that to have hoped that he, with his poor strength, could break them, would have been folly. Again he sat down on the steps and considered, but no better thoughts suggested themselves than before. These walls and this door seemed to shut him away completely from the world, unless help should come from without. To his fancy he seemed like an imprisoned bird, who flutters its wings, and beats its head against the iron bars of its cage, in order that he may be free and soar aloft. The old feeling of anguish again almost overcame him, and yet he prayed in his heart, and tried to rise above his fears. A hundred times must he have said to himself, "Now peace, peace, trembling heart, God's will be done, and if it is His will to set thee free, so might these walls be twice as strong, and this door twice as fast, He will lead thee out, but if not, He can make thy imprisonment as happy as the longed-for freedom."

After indulging in these comforting thoughts there fell from a crevice above, like a silver thread, another of these bright sunbeams which had already cheered him. It played for a few moments on the floor of the building, and then vanished again, almost as quickly as it had appeared.

"H'm, the vaulted roof appears to be not so strong as the walls," said Max to himself, "who knows, but that if I could reach it and widen the gap, I might get through from above. But how could I manage to climb up there. The wall is eight or nine feet high. It is impossible!"

But impossible as it appeared to the boy, he considered, and re-considered, repeating often to himself, "If I only were up there," when suddenly it occurred to him, "What if I piled the stones that are lying about one upon the other, till the heap become high enough for my arms to reach the rift?" No sooner thought than done. Even should it not succeed, it would at least draw him from his sorrowful thoughts, and beguile the time. Out of every corner, and from all sides, he drew the stones, and mounted them carefully one above the other. The pile was nearly high enough, yet one more, and he could reach the roof. Anxiously he groped about, but the result of his search was only two crumbling bricks that were of no use. A little discouraged, he raised himself from the ground, and sat down again on the steps. The steps! he had never thought of them; and yet they were exactly suited to complete what he wanted. He went to his work anew, and shook the undermost one with all his might—it began to give way, he felt it move, but his strength was not sufficient to detach it. The poor boy had worked, indeed, so hard, that he was tired—more tired than, in his excitement, he had believed himself to be. Moreover, since the early morning, when he had eaten his small portion of black bread, not a morsel had he tasted, and the sense of hunger came painfully over him. He must have sat for nearly half-an-hour doing nothing, his hands trembled from the unusual exertion, and his arms and legs were as if he had been beaten. However, with the little rest, he was refreshed, the gnawing feeling of want had so far gone, and he went to work with fresh ardour. This time, however, instead of trying in his blind eagerness to move the stone by shaking it, he hit upon another device, and thought it might be loosened by scraping out the earth from below. He worked away assiduously, as if his life hung on each moment, when suddenly he uttered a loud cry, drew his left hand quickly back, and held it in the air; he had cut his finger on some hard, sharp object perhaps the point of a small stone that lay under the step. The finger bled, and was very painful, but Max heeded it not. He was too anxious to discover what had come in his way. The right hand, after cautious searching, drew it from the damp earth, he found it was no stone, but an old iron chisel. The work-people must have lost it in the building of the vaults, and a hundred years had it lain there rusting, in order at length to serve as a tool to save a poor imprisoned boy.

What joy for Max!

"God be thanked and praised," he cried aloud, "for now am I as good as free."

Hastily he went to work, sought out of the heaps of stones a suitable one on which to sharpen his newly-found treasure, freed it from rust on the sandstone of the arches, and then set himself powerfully to hew and break where the bars of the strong castle were fixed into the wall. The pieces flew hither and thither. After a few minutes, the door gave way, then two powerful strokes, a push, and it sprang open. With a cry of ecstasy, Max rushed out of his gloomy prison into the open air.

(To be continued.)

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