

tall as they were themselves. The creatures swept headlong down their side of the ravine, through the brook, then up again.

But there, behold, they did not fall on the white fawn, which had shrunk close up to the hermit. One hand was on her head, the other raised. The dogs crouched at his feet and did no hurt!

Their master raised his hunting-cry, "Hie on!" The dogs pricked their ears, but the only move was that one came toward Roswitha to caress her, as she threw her arms around him and called him good Fest, then held out her hand to Swift.

The question might be asked, did the hounds abstain because of her presence? Or was it that they were really wolf-hounds, not deer-hounds? Or was it that the entirely undaunted attitude and bearing of the hermit had a strange effect in cowing them?

Such things have often been in those days of contention between utter savagery and the gentle and holy, if still wild, representatives of Christianity. Were they miracles, or a divine control of natural causes?

Hunderik called across the gorge, "What dost thou here on my land?"

"I serve the only God of heaven and earth, and call on others to serve Him," returned Gilchrist.

In spite of Hunderik's shout, there was an awe upon him. If his dogs would have fallen on the deer he would have been encouraged, but the strangeness of the thing impressed him with something like fear. Nor did he wish to slay or use violence toward the hermit. He knew that such doings might bring him into disgrace or trouble with one or other of the kings, whose attitude toward the Christians could never quite be calculated. If Theudebert heard that he had chased away and slain a Christian hermit, it might be looked on as if he had killed a fox, or it might be met by a cast of his battle-ax. So he only blustered out, "By my sufferance alone thou lurkest here." Then he shouted to his dogs, which came dashing after him at full speed, and he did not hear the reply of Gilchrist:

"By the permission of my God."

He was gone, and all his rabble rout followed, while the hermit and the two children fell on their knees and gave thanks.

CHAPTER XV.

HUNDBERT'S RECOVERY.

When Attalus and Roswitha returned home they found Hundingburg in a state of commotion. A messenger had arrived from King Theudebert to summon Hunderik to Treves, where a council was to be held to decide whether there was to be a raid into the Gothic kingdom of Aquitani.

The messenger was installed on a seat by the hearth, and Bernhild had been called off from her attendance on her sick child to prepare a banquet for him, and likewise to put in order her husband's best array, both peaceful and warlike, for the expedition, so that he and his followers might start early the next morning.

Little Hundbert was fretting in the arms of his foster-mother, and insisting by turns that his mother should come to him or that Valhild should play with him, and poor Valhild was far too wretched and miserable to do so with any animation, in spite of an occasional slap or shake from her mother in passing for not exerting herself to amuse the child. When Roswitha came in she was greeted with a few sharp words and a blow for being always out of the way when wanted, and ordered to go and do what Valhild failed in, to attend to her brother while her mother was occupied. Roswitha sat down on a low wooden stool and held out her arms. Hundbert nestled into them, refreshed by the change. He pulled out all her long hair, entangled it with his own, tied it round his own neck, and made her endure a good deal; but she did so in silence, or only with friendly, cheerful little mutterings to him; and when he began to moan again and grow restless, she sang to him in a low, crooning voice, till finally he fell asleep in her lap, as she leaned against a big cask, and kept her position, stiff and cramped as she was, while murmuring over St. Patrick's Breastplate.

The bustle went on vehemently meantime—furbishing of armour, sharpening of swords and axes, packing of wallets with dried food, spreading and folding of garments and the like. The night's rest only lasted as long as darkness made it needful, and by break of day the whole camp was astir, horses being caught, and the goods being packed on the backs of the more sturdy and less spirited, and all being set to eat a good meal, in which the riders followed their example.

The sun had scarcely peeped over the fir-trees before all were in the saddle, Hunderik's gilded wings glancing at the head of them, and the breastplate, Gola's price, shining on his bosom.

About twenty men followed him. Bodo was left with half the number for the protection of the household, for though there was little probability of an attack, no one could tell what enemies might be in store. However, there was no great danger. Bernhild and her women could fight in defense of hearth and children almost as well as the men, and at the worst, if the timber-built houses were burned, they could retreat into the woods. So that it was not with much fear that they were left, as indeed was usually the case in the summer; but Hunderik's last words to his wife were, "See that thou hast the boy well and strong for me when I return; an heir I must have."