

round with a thong, he felt a great disgust with himself and all his surroundings. He gazed away over the hills and woods, and wondered whether Gilchrist had come with the expectation of helping him to escape. But of this nothing had been said, nor did it appear that Gilchrist could move, besides, he supposed he was still a hostage; and as he lay on his bed of fern, among the horses, he wept bitterly, and prayed as he had never prayed since the earlier days when hope had not faded away from him.

Milo had a good deal more liberty than Attalus, since no one thought of his escape being possible. Gilchrist's lair was at no great distance, and as soon as the first dawn of the March morning began to come in he was stirring, and was soon on his way, while the cattle's dull champing sounds of chewing the cud, the cock's occasional clarion, and the early twitters of the sparrows were alone to be heard around. With a hard, dried griddle-cake, saved from what had been thrown to him for his supper, he was on his way, while the sky above the trees grew lighter, and presently he heard another sound—at first he thought that of a fox stealing home, but it really was that of Attalus's bare feet, and a hand was thrust into his, as almost fearfully the boy looked about on the world in this unaccustomed light. He, too, had brought a share of his supper. He was drawn by the longing to see the good man again, with all of home that the contact with him brought.

The sun had not risen, only the tender shoots on the tops of the pine-trees were gaining a brighter, redder hue, when the two came in sight of the little brown figure kneeling, and could hear his lowly murmured prayer, while his two deer were feeding on the frosty grass around. He looked much more congenial there amid the pine woods than ever he had done in the great Roman palace, and both his visitors were struck with a strange feeling of new reverence, such as Attalus had scarcely felt even in church.

Milo threw himself at the hermit's feet and cried aloud, "Oh, pray for me, win pardon for me! I am a sinful man!"

Gilchrist laid a hand on him and prayed with him, and promised to join constantly in prayer with him and with Attalus, whose boyish indifference and childish faults were now recollected with shame and pain.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HIND AND THE HOUNDS.

No one could have supposed that a wild and lame Irish hermit, living in a hollow tree, could have made such a difference to Attalus as did the presence of Gilchrist, and not merely to Attalus and Milo but to others besides them.

Attalus was roused from his dreary indifferent state, in which he had been fast falling into the heathen and ungodly ways of the Franks around. To hear his dead old Gola was safe and had carried tidings of him to Langres was great joy, and gave him hopes of his grandfather being able to do something for him; but above all the renewal of prayer and all good influences woke him up to the consciousness that had been passing away from him.

It was the same with Milo, and one or other of them tried to visit the hermit constantly in the lengthening mornings and evenings. There were others who followed their example, creeping out to see what strange resort they had. Some thought that the little russet man was a sort of wizard, and shrank back from him; but others came near, drawn by an irresistible sort of attraction, and listened while he told them of the One Allfather and of His Son the Redeemer.

Roswitha had not been so entirely kept apart from Attalus after the winter began, though he was seldom admitted within the family dwelling; but she had met him on the snowy days when the cattle cannot be turned out, and there had been little conversations, not much more than gossip, about the horses, cows, and goats; but he somehow fell into the habit of bringing her home the first signs of spring—a willow catkin, a primrose flower, or a buttercup—and she watched for him.

"What makes thee go off to the fir-wood cave so often?" she asked. "Is it true that there is an old wizard there who bewitches thee?"

"Oh, nay, nay, Roswitha. He is a good old man, who tells me those holy words thy mother cut me short in saying to thee."

"I thought thou knewest them well before?"

"Ah! but I had forgotten in this godless place. Come Roswitha, and see him some morn."

Roswitha had more liberty just now, for both Valhild and Hundbert were unwell. Probably it was from the feverish forms of illness that often beset the dwellers in conditions that might be very healthy in the summer, when life was spent in the open air, but in wet winters like the past were apt to be very unwholesome. Frau Bernhild never cared much for her daughters, and Valhild might peak and pine, fret or rage, without much notice; but little Hundbert was quite another affair—the only son, and the pride of the family as well as the darling. Indeed, Bernhild could never be sure that, if her boy died, his father might not take another wife; for Christianity sat very lightly on him, as on others of the Franks, and he would only have been following the example of the royal line of the Meeywing.

(To be Continued.)

This tale may be had in book form from Thomas Whittaker, publisher, New York.