

THE COOK AND THE CAPTIVE;

OR,

ATTALUS THE HOSTAGE.

BY CHARLOTTE M. YONGE.

CHAPTER XIV.—*Continued.*

ROSWITHA was a good deal let alone, since both the sick children preferred the tendance of their mother, and of their foster-mothers, to her more fitful attentions.

So she joined Milo and Attalus one morning when they went in quest of Gilchrist, and she stood with hands clasped and face raised in wonder as he sang forth his early morning hymn, and they both chimed in with responses at the appropriate intervals.

When it was over she sprang forward and cried, "Oh, sir, is it Attalus's god?"

Perhaps, as the child stood before him, with her fair flaxen hair glinting in the light of the rising sun, the hermit thought of Ethne and Fedlima, the pupils of St. Patrick, as he laid his hand on the shining head and answered her that he did, indeed, serve the God of Attalus, to Whom she had been dedicated in the waters of the stream.

Thus, day after day, did Roswitha come and listen to the words, given in an uncouth form, indeed, and rendered and explained by Attalus, who was more and more alive to such thoughts under this contact. Milo, too, was wondrously attracted, as he had never been in his civilized Gallo-Roman life. More than one of the household followed them. The boys began by throwing stones, but somehow they fell short, and the way in which the hermit stood under his tree, with his hands lifted in blessing, gradually awed them, and whispers went through Hundingburg that it was a mighty wizard who lived under the blasted fir. Yet others said that it was one who came in the name of the God Who had given Clovis the victory, and Who was to be worshiped in Gaul instead of Odin and Frey.

Hunderik growled, and when he heard of the wise man living alone within the tree with the two deer, which some affirmed to be his familiar spirits, he declared that he would put it to the proof. Roswitha threw herself before him, crying, "O father, father, hurt not the holy man!"

"By Thor's hammer, thou art bewitched too!" he cried, and thrust her aside so roughly that she fell on the hearth, while her father strode out, calling after him his two great shaggy hounds, Fest and Swift, and with his Frankish battle-ax over his shoulder.

She rose upon her knees, with outstretched hands, calling aloud on God to shield the good man. It was the first prayer that had found voice under Hunderik's roof.

Then, unable to bear the suspense, she rushed out, and found Attalus trying to force his way through the crowd that were looking at their master, hesitating a little to follow.

"Atli!" she exclaimed in a hasty, breathless whisper, "I know the short cut over the hillock and marsh. Let us run on and warn him. He may get away into the woods and save the dear hind and fawn."

The children slipped over the rude fence on the farther side, and made their way, hand in hand, down a rocky slope, much impeded with broom brushes and thorns, down to the broad expanse of boggy ground now waving with growing grass and reeds, and full of golden king-cups which traced the streams to be avoided. Roswitha leaped and sprang from one tuft of rushes and willows to another, Attalus following her; but, haste as they would, speed was impossible on that uncertain ground, and they were still hardly among the stunted holly and beech which bordered the bog when they heard the baying of the hounds.

Up they rushed, breathless, and forced to rest and to gasp at times in their journey up the slope, regardless of briers and bushes, and at last they fairly dropped at the feet of Gilchrist, who was returning with his bowl of water from the brook.

"Oh, fly, fly! get into the wood with the deer," panted out Roswitha. "He is coming—father, with the dogs—"

"Thanks, my child; but why should I fly? The God Whom I serve can protect me, or else take me to His glory."

"But the deer?" sighed Roswitha, with her arms around the pretty white neck of the fawn.

"His they are too," said Gilchrist.

The hind was out of sight. The scent and sound of the pursuers had given her the alarm, and she had bounded away into the depths of the forest; but the fawn, still very lame, though nearly full grown, kept close by his master.

On came the sound. From the farther side of the gorge, with only the brook between, there burst the two great tawny dogs, baying in loud echoing notes, and close behind them followed Hunderik, tall and fierce, his long hair flowing from his winged helmet, and his ax in hand. A crowd of followers could be seen in the thicket behind him, not very solicitous to advance, for, however brave they might be in battle, they were quite uncertain what the mysterious hermit might do to them. There he stood on the other side, the small rusty-brown figure, with the white fawn by his side, in front of his hollow tree, the sweeping branches of the other pines closing him in.

He had thrust the children a little back with authority that they were too awe-struck to resist, and perhaps, too, neither could entirely conquer the recoil at the bounding forward of the two huge hounds Fest and Swift, both as