

through the leaves of the birch he could distinctly perceive what was going on in the courtyard below. There stood, or rather lay, stretched on the soft grass at the foot of the tower, Bernard, together with some of his wild companions. It was not long ere two or three more arrived, and threw themselves down near them, beguiling their time with smoking a short pipe. To see these men so peacefully reclining on the green sward, one could scarcely fail to conclude that they were enjoying the rest which is the reward of honest labour. But Max knew well enough that no hard-working sons of toil were they. Bernard was one who would refuse to put his arms to any handicraft, and those who were with him were not otherwise disposed. The boy pricked up his ears, that he might not lose a word of their conversation, which, it may be added, he heard quite distinctly.

"All safe, Hans?" asked Bernard of one of the men who had been the last to arrive.

"All safe," was the answer. "Who could you think would seek us out in this old nest? Here we are as secure and hidden as if we were in a fortress."

"I am not quite so sure," said Bernard with harsh voice, "that cursed boy, Max Berninger, sneaks too often hereabouts when he has nothing better to do, and more than once have I already met him face to face. If I found out that the sly toad came to watch, I would give him a thrashing such as he would not soon forget."

"Such a child," said another; "he is scarcely fourteen years old; what could he do to harm us?"

"Of his bodily strength we have of course no cause to fear, blind Mole," cried Bernard sneeringly; "but there is no doubt the knowing lad acts as spy to his old friend John, who has already lost us many a good stroke."

"I fear him not, Bernard," shrieked out a rough voice. "Let him once come my way, I will shoot him down like a crow, and show you what we must do with such fellows."

Max, whose courage had begun to fail when he heard his own name pronounced, was still more agitated—now cold, now hot with fear—when he listened to the threatening manner in which they spoke of his friend. He hesitated no longer as to the course he should pursue. Meanwhile he continued to hold his breath, and leant as far forward as caution would allow, in order that no syllable of their conversation might be lost.

"Thou wilt show us what must be done with such fellows!" cried Bernard, answering with scornful contempt the boasting of his companion. "Thou, Friede, who eight days ago ran off, leaving bales and bundles behind when the searchers were at our heels. Pitiful creature! When thou art in safety thou canst speak boastfully, and talk of thy courage; but let danger come in the way, then the big Friede is never to be found. Silence, churl! and when the occasion comes give proof of thy bravery, if thou hast it."

The big Friede, as Bernard called him, sprang up in fury like a tiger, his countenance full of wrath, and it seemed (as Max in his hiding-place above could clearly see) as if he would throw his opponent to the ground.

"Now, now; not so hot, Friede. Thou art better than I represented thee, and I now see that thou art not without courage. Let be; and if old John should come across thee, keep thy word."

Friede grumbled a little; but on the whole was appeased, and settled himself in his reclining posture.

"And where shall we go to-night? and what shall we do?" asked the man whom Bernard had before addressed as Hans.

"That must remain a secret," was the reply, "till we set ourselves to the work. And yet I may as well tell thee now as afterwards."

Max at these words lent forward again, in order that the important plan which was now enveloped in mystery might not escape him. He listened intently, and heard Bernard say, "Five waggons laden with costly goods have been ready on the other side waiting an opportunity to convey them across. They are worth many thousands, for one waggon alone is filled with bales of French silks and velvets."

After these words there was a deep silence. Each seemed busy with his own thoughts. A few of the smugglers again composed themselves on the grass, and went to sleep. Max felt rather uncomfortable in his tower; he not only feared lest by some accident he might be discovered, but, above all, he longed to communicate to old John what he had heard from the lips of these abandoned and desperate men. From the balcony there was but one way to escape to the court-yard, and this he could not take, for it would bring him into the midst of the smugglers. There remained nothing then, in spite of his burning impatience, but to wait till they should leave the place. If only this would occur soon, he could reach old John in time to impart to him the secret of the gang, and enable the old man to thwart their wicked purposes.

Max counted the minutes, which seemed very tedious, placed as he was in such painful circumstances. From the position of the sun he knew it could not be far from mid-day.

At length, it seemed as if the band were about to disperse, for there was a loud call from Bernard to arouse the sleepers. At the same time he said, unwillingly, "It is useless to wait longer for Daniel; he would certainly have been here long ago had there not been some extraordinary detention. My advice would be, that some of us should go and seek him, and the rest to set out for Bretterode, that they may be ready for future action. I will keep to the first division, and the rest of you must undertake something, before news of our being here gets abroad."

Most of them entered readily into this proposal, sprang from the grass, and were just beginning to disappear in different directions, when suddenly the loud exclamation, "Daniel," turned all their thoughts into another channel. Poor Max, who had already believed himself saved, felt his hopes sink considerably, and there came over him anew the anxiety lest he should be discovered; especially when he heard the man, in answer to Bernard's question from which direction he had come, say, "Up the valley the nearest way from the village."

Max was terrified when he heard Daniel's voice, for it was no stranger to him. He quickly thrust his head forward, and saw below, a fellow-villager who had always passed for an honest and respectable person; but now was revealed in his true character as a spy and criminal. He had occasionally learnt that this Daniel had brought information to old John regarding the plans of the smugglers. The old man had been led to

place the greatest confidence in him; but now it was evident that the knave had acted for their interests alone; whilst the old man had been thoroughly deceived in his supposed confidential adviser and ally.

"When I tell him this, how he will wonder," thought Max. "Who could have believed that the world contained such faithless, wicked men."

"How stands it, Daniel?" asked Bernard, "will it succeed, or —"

"I have no doubt of it," answered Daniel, "the knowing way it is contrived will ensure success. Old John, clever as he is, has been deceived for once by my smooth words, and every thing has been arranged as I desired. Whilst we are talking here the searchers are concealed in Hallinger valley, and John sits quietly at home in his cottage, in the firm conviction that I am his friend and ally. We are therefore quite safe, and may depart in broad daylight."

"At all events, we will not delay unnecessarily," said Bernard, after heaping praises upon Daniel for his skilful management. "Let us take the nearest way through the valley."

"Wait, not that," rejoined Daniel, quickly. "I saw the flock of that sharp-eyed youth Max grazing below. If he happened to descrier a troop of us it would create suspicion, and he would immediately report to old John. He must on no account know that I have had any communication with you, for his confidence in me would then be gone."

Bernard shook his head, and seemed to be turning over in his mind what was best to be done.

"Did you see the boy on the way up?" said he at last.

"I think not," answered Daniel. "The dog only was with the herd. He will be roving about somewhere seeking berries."

"Who knows?" said Bernard. "I have no trust in him. At all events, I will see myself that he is with the goats, and if not, find out where he hides. Go thou on with the people, Daniel, and thou, Hans, accompany me to the valley. If all is safe, we will join you again."

No one had any objection to this arrangement. The greater number of the men took the path to the left, and Bernard, with Hans, began the descent to the valley.

Max hastily considered what was to be done. If he was not found with the flock, Bernard's suspicion would be aroused, and the wily leader would not rest till he had discovered his prey.

The mind of Max was soon made up. Scarcely had the men vanished from the court-yard, then he came down from his hiding-place, glided with light step over the ruins, and hastened as quick as his feet would carry him down the steepest part of the mountain. Running, leaping, sliding over the loose stones, often in danger of a fall, which he avoided only by clinging to the trees and bushes, he was only a few minutes in reaching the grazing ground.

Mohr sprang joyfully towards him when he discovered his young master, but Max had no mind to play with his four-footed companion just now. He had but one thought in his mind, how he was to evade Bernard, who could not be far off. Still breathless from his quick run, he threw himself under the shade of an oak, laid his head on its knotted roots, and shut his eyes. Bernard, on coming up, would find him sleeping,