

now he is badly off, and must go hungry, poor boy! He is clever and honest. I've not seen him for eight years. He doesn't come home, because he doesn't find the happiness there that he seeks. For us there is no reward.'

'Because you live without God. Seek Christ's kingdom, man! Press the cross to your heart—'

'I've done that already,' said the old man; and he rummaged under his red waistcoat, and presently brought to light a silver crucifix, scarcely the length of a finger, hanging on a narrow band. 'You see, Father, I've got a cross, and there's something written on it, but I can't read it. It is in a foreign language.'

He handed the Father the cross, which bore the inscription, 'Deo fidelis.'

'What does that say?'

'It says: "True to God." And you have been living all your life untrue to Him. How do you come to have that cross?'

'I've had it these thirty years—since I left the army. The day I was discharged, as I was going with my box from the barracks through the town, on my way to the station, I saw three big fellows attack a young gentleman and ill-treat him as if they wished to murder him on the spot. He was crying, "My book! my book!" His clothing was torn to rags. It was night, and there was no one to help; so I put down my box, and brought down my stick on one of the rogue's back. They ran as hard as they could, and disappeared. When I turned to take up my box, I could see nothing of the lad. Perhaps he had feared the rascals would come back again. As I stooped to pick up my box, I saw this little cross lying between the stones. At once I thought that he had lost it; but he did not return, and I had no time to lose, so I took it and hung it round my neck. I might often have sold it when I was hard up, for it's silver; but I've not let it go. I've often thought that the devil is waiting to take everything from me, if only he could make me give it up.'

The priest returned the cross, saying in a tone full of significance:

'If only you would pray instead of cursing! Prayer is work for God, and He never leaves it unrewarded. You must carry the cross not only on, but also in your heart, and be true to Him who died upon it. But remember that even where God does not give earthly good things, He grants His peace. Pray, Bodsteifer, and curse no more; and the reward will not fail you.'

He gave the old man a friendly nod, and walked on up the mountain path.

The old man scratched his head in a puzzled manner, and looked downward toward the little village church. 'The reward?' he murmured. 'And He gives at least His peace? I have no peace, and I can never pray. But to go in there does one good. And He helps everyone else—perhaps He will help me.' And, leaving his sledge to its fate, he hobbled on, with strange feelings in his heart, almost rapidly, down to the village—and to the church.

There stood Bodsteifer before the high altar, clutching his fur cap in his brown, horny hands. He saw the Tabernacle in front of him, but did not know how he should speak to Him who dwelt therein. He had never prayed, he could not pray now. But deep within his breast, full as it was of sadness and anger, he felt something incomprehensible, mysterious, almost terrifying, and yet peace-bestowing. 'My God! Jesus! Redeemer!' He could think of these words, nothing more.

Then he took out the little silver cross, and sank on his knees. With voiceless prayer he held it up toward the Tabernacle. Perhaps He who was there understood, and would help him. He gazed fixedly upon the cross that surmounted the Tabernacle, and thought: 'Lord, I am not Thy servant; I have done no work for Thee; I can do none. Thou canst not reward me for anything I have done; but, since Thou art rich, Thou canst bestow on alms upon me. Give me Thy peace; and then I will learn to work for Thee, that I may receive a reward.' The unspoken prayer rose earnestly, but with a hard effort, in Bodsteifer's heart, and he held up the cross still higher.

A half-uttered cry of astonishment sounded behind him; there was a hasty whisper, and presently a hand rested softly on his shoulder. Turning round, he saw a footman in livery, who whispered that his master, who had been seated in a pew near at hand, wished to speak with the old man, and would wait for him outside the church.

As he came out of the porch, a man, evidently of high rank, stepped up to him and said:

'On my journey I went for a few moments into the church; I saw you kneeling and lifting up the little cross. Tell me, my man, where did you get it?'

'A young gentleman, I believe, lost it in the city when three rascals set upon him one night long years ago. I interfered with my stick, and the thieves ran away, I after them. When I turned back, the young gentleman was nowhere to be seen; only this little cross lay on the ground. Ever since then I've kept it—'

'My deliverer!' the stranger interrupted him joyfully and warmly pressed his hand. 'I was that lad; and the little cross, a family heirloom, I then wore, as you do now, on my breast, whence it was torn during the fight with my assailants.'

Bodsteifer shook his head. 'Was it only that, then, which the rascals wanted?'

'You have earned the right to know,' answered the stranger. 'Listen, then. It was about six months after the death of my grandfather, who was known to be an eccentric man, but who was universally loved on account of his deeds of charity, which corresponded to his wealth. One day before his death he presented me—I was always his darling—with an old, worn Bible, and said: "Take it, Edward; and if ever you find yourself disinherited by Destiny, read often and diligently therein; for in this book, which contains God's testament, every man may find his rightful inheritance, since it contains the very truth of God." I took the book, and laid it, unread, on my book shelf, secretly amused at the old man's whim, as I called his exhortation. I knew better than to read an old Bible! When my grandfather died, a will was found which, contrary to all expectation and to his own promises, excluded myself and all his relations from sharing in his property, and appointed three former servants as his sole heirs.

'This will was disputed by us, who were the rightful heirs, and the matter came into court. One night I could not sleep, and for the first time, out of very weariness, took my grandfather's Bible into my hand. There I found, on five leaves which had been stuck into the book, a will in his own handwriting, appointing myself and our kindred as his sole heirs, and also leaving large sums in charity. There was no doubt; here was the true will; the other was false and unauthentic. Though it was the middle of the night, I hastened with the Bible to my brother, who lived not far away, to share my discovery with him. On the way the three rascals who had forged the false will met me; they recognised me and began to jeer at me. I flared up, and with boyish thoughtlessness shouted out, waving the Bible, "You are lying cheats! Here is the truth—the real will!" Then they fell upon me, to tear the book away from me; and if you had not come up they would have gained their end. I did not wait for your return from pursuing them, but hastened to my brother with my treasure. I have never seen you since until to-day. You then secured for me and ten poor families a life free from anxiety; and yourself, whom I have sought so long in vain, must now be free from all care. If you are in poverty, I will supply your need; and if you have children I will secure their future; in a word, I will—'

He would have continued speaking, but the old man, pressing his cap to his breast, cried, half laughing and half in tears, as he joyfully lifted his eyes to heaven:

'The reward!—the reward!'

The next day the old man presented himself, with a transfigured face, at the door of the priest's sitting-room. To the priest's question as to what he desired, he answered in a trembling voice:

'The reward has come, Father—the reward is here! We keep our cottage; it will become a good house, and our old age will be bright and happy. Our boy has his future secured, and the dear Lord God—'

In the excess of his joy he began to weep. Then he related to the priest, who listened joyfully, what had happened to him the day before, and concluded:

'And now, your reverence, I pray you, make me a good servant of the Lord, that I may work diligently and only for heaven. Father, teach me God's work—teach me to pray.'

'That I will, indeed!' cried the priest, much moved, as he seized the old man's hands. 'See, here is the way clearly marked. Prayer gives man's honest work value in God's sight—a value that merits a reward in heaven. Every man strives for an earthly inheritance, but it is only the heirs of eternal life that the good God gathers into His kingdom. Let him who is oppressed by the riddle of the cross he has to bear ask of the Church, and she will solve it for him. And happy is he if he follows her counsel. He will seek peace and find his salvation.'

'Your reverence is right,' nodded the old countryman. 'On every cross that comes to us there is inscribed in homely script, "True to God!" But to read it one must carry it to the church, and by prayer work for Him who carried the whole world's cross. At once we find His mercy; He helps us to bear the cross; He even takes it altogether away, and reckons with true human joy the work of His servant as meriting a heavenly reward—our loving, all-good Lord, Jesus Christ!'—Translated from the German for the *Ave Maria*.

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