

The child looked at the present with much delight, but still kept hold of the traveller's hand.

The mother drew near and made a motion to the child, and said, 'Peterkin, you must not be rude; thank the gentleman and kiss his hand.'

The child kissed his hand, made a bow to him, and said, with a clear voice, 'Best thanks, Long Jan!'

A stroke of lightning could not have confounded the traveller more than to hear his name thus pronounced from the mouth of the innocent child. Tears involuntarily rolled down his cheeks; he took the child on his knee, and looked him steadfastly in the face.

'So you know me, do you, you little cherub? And yet you never saw me before! How is this? Who taught you my name?'

'Blind Rosa,' was the reply.

'But how is it possible that you could know me? God Himself must have taught your childish mind.'

'Oh, I knew you immediately,' cried Peterkin; 'for, when I led Rosa out begging, she was always speaking about you, and said you were so tall, and had black sparkling eyes, and that you would be sure to come back and bring us all many pretty things. I was not, therefore, afraid of you, for Rosa had taught me to love you, and had said that you would give me a large bow and arrows.'

These simple stories and disclosures on the part of the child transported the traveller with delight. He suddenly lifted the boy from the ground, kissed him affectionately, and said to his parents, with great emotion:

'This child, my good friends, will be taken care of. I will take charge of his up-bringing and education, and I trust it will prove a blessing for him to have recognised me.'

The parents were quite stupefied with delight and astonishment. The husband replied in a confused manner:

'You are by far too good. We also thought we recognised you, but were not so sure of it, because Rosa had not told us that you were so rich.'

'My good friends,' replied the stranger, 'and so you know me! Hitherto, as the reward of all my inquiries here, I have met only with death and forgetfulness; but here, among you, I have found friends, relations, and a family.'

The woman pointed to an image of the Blessed Virgin that stood on the mantelpiece, and said, 'Every Saturday evening a candle was lit here for the safe return or for the repose of the soul of Jan Slaets.'

The traveller devoutly lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said:

'Almighty God, I thank Thee that Thou hast given greater might to love than to hatred! My enemy has concealed his name within his bosom, associated with the gloomy remembrance of his ill-will; my loving friend has lived in my remembrance, and, with all around her animated by her love, she has kept me, as it were, ever present in this family, and made me even a favorite of the children, while yet between us there was a distance of more than a thousand miles! My God! I am sufficiently rewarded.'

Chapter IV.

A NARRATIVE OF ROSA—MEETING OF JAN AND ROSA.

A long silence ensued on this before Jan could overcome his emotion, at seeing which the people of the house were filled with deep reverence for him. The husband had betaken himself again to his work, but was always ready, at the slightest signal, to render any service to his guest, who had taken Peterkin again on his knee, and now asked the good woman quite composedly if Rosa had lived long with her. The woman, as if preparing to enter on a long explanation, came nearer with her spinning-wheel, and, sitting down, said:

'I will tell you, dear sir, how that happened. You must know that when Rosa's parents died the children separated. Rosa, whom all the gold in the world would not have induced to marry—the reason why I need not tell you—Rosa ceded her whole share to her brother, only stipulating to reside in his house during her lifetime. She then took to millinery, and made a good deal of money by it, and, having no occasion to give the money to her brother, she spent all her earnings in good works, visited the sick, and paid for the doctor when it was necessary.'

'She was always ready to comfort the sorrowful, and had ever something nice at hand in case of illness. When my husband and I had been married only six months, he came home one day with a very bad cold, of which you hear the remains in the cough that he still has about him. We have to thank God and the good Rosa that he is not now lying in the churchyard. Oh, could you only have seen, dear sir, what she did for us out of pure love and kindness! She brought us coverlets—for it was cold—and we were in the most extreme poverty; she brought two doctors from other parishes, who consulted with our own doctor about the case of the sick man; she sat up with him, alleviated his sufferings and my grief by her affectionate conversation, and gave us all the money that was needed to pay for food and doctors' stuff—for Rosa was a favorite with everybody; and when she went to the lady at the mansion, or the farmer, to beg something for the poor, she was never refused a small contribution. For six weeks

my husband kept his bed, and Rosa never ceased protecting and assisting us until he by degrees was able to return to his work.'

'How glad I should be to see poor blind Rosa!' said the traveller.

The husband raised his head from his work. Tears stood in his eyes, and he exclaimed, with enthusiasm: 'If I could give my heart's blood to restore her sight, I would willingly do it, to the last drop.'

This burst of feeling affected Jan exceedingly. The good woman remarked it, and made a sign to her husband to be more moderate in his remarks. She then continued:

'Three months afterward God gave us a child—the same that sits on your knee. Rosa wished to stand god-mother to it, and Peter—my husband's brother—was to be godfather. On the day of the baptism inquiry was made as to the child's name. Rosa wished that it should be called John; but the godfather, a worthy man, but rather obstinate and self-willed, insisted that its name should be Peter. After long discussion the child was baptised John Peter. We call him Peterkin, because his godfather has a right to decide about that, and he will have it so, and we should be sorry if it were otherwise. Rosa, however, will not hear a word about Peter, and always calls the child Johnny. The child is accustomed to it, and knows that it is so called because, dear sir, it is your name.'

The traveller pressed the boy fondly to his breast and kissed him warmly. With silent wonder he looked in the child's friendly eyes, and his heart was deeply affected.

The woman went on to say:

'Rosa's brother had engaged with people in Antwerp to buy all kinds of provisions and to take them over to England. It was said that by such a trade he would become rich, for every week he took ten cartful of provisions to Antwerp. At first all went on quite well; but the bankruptcy of a man in Antwerp for whom he was security deprived him of all his gains, and he could scarcely pay half his debts. From grief occasioned by this he soon after died, and we trust that God Almighty took him to a better world. Rosa then went to live with Flink, the grocer, in a little room in his house. In the same year Charles, the grocer's son, who had been a soldier, came home with bad eyes, and in two weeks afterwards the young man became quite blind. Rosa, who felt for him and listened only to the feelings of her heart, tended him during his illness, and took him out on her arm in order to amuse him. Unfortunately, she caught the same disease in her eyes, and since then she has never seen the light of the sun. Flink, the grocer, is dead, and his children are scattered about in the world. Poor blind Charles lives at a farmhouse in Lierre. We then begged Rosa, poor girl! to come and live with us, and told her how glad we should be to have her in our house and to work for her as long as we lived. She complied with our request. Since then six years have passed, and she has never heard from us but friendly words, thank God! for she is herself all love and goodness; and if there is any service to render to Rosa, the children fight about it who shall do it first.'

'And yet she begs,' replied the traveller.

'Yes, dear sir,' said the woman, with somewhat of pride in her manner, 'but that is not our fault. Do not think that we have forgotten what Rosa did for us. Even if we had been suffering from hunger and were in the greatest straits, we never would have imposed it on her to beg. When our family increased so quickly, Rosa thought—the good creature—that she would prove a burden to us, and wanted to assist us. She could not be persuaded to the contrary, and actually fell ill in consequence; and we were obliged to yield.'

'It is, however, no disgrace for a poor blind creature to beg. But we don't need it, although we are poor. Of what she obtains by begging she presses a little upon us, for we cannot always be disputing with her; but we give her back double as much for it. Without knowing it she is better clad than we are, and the food we give her is also much better. The remainder of the money got by her, I think I have understood from her own words that she puts it by in a savings-bank until the children are grown up. Her affection deserves thanks, and we cannot act contrary to her wishes.'

The traveller listened to all this account in silence; but a happy smile about his mouth, and his eyes suffused with tears, showed how deeply his feelings were affected by all that the woman told him.

The woman ceased speaking and applied herself to her task of spinning. The traveller remained sunk in thought for a while. All at once, he set down the child on the ground, went up to the husband, and said in an authoritative tone, 'Leave off working!'

The broom-maker did not comprehend rightly what was said to him, and was startled by the peculiar tone in which it was uttered.

'Give over work, and give me your hand, Farmer Nelis!'

'Farmer!' muttered the besom-maker, astonished.

'Yes,' said the traveller, throwing the besoms out of the door; 'I will give you a farm-yard, four milk-cows, a calf, two horses, and everything necessary for husbandry. You do not believe me,' he continued, showing the broom-maker a handful of money, 'but I tell you the truth. I might give you money—I esteem and love you too much to