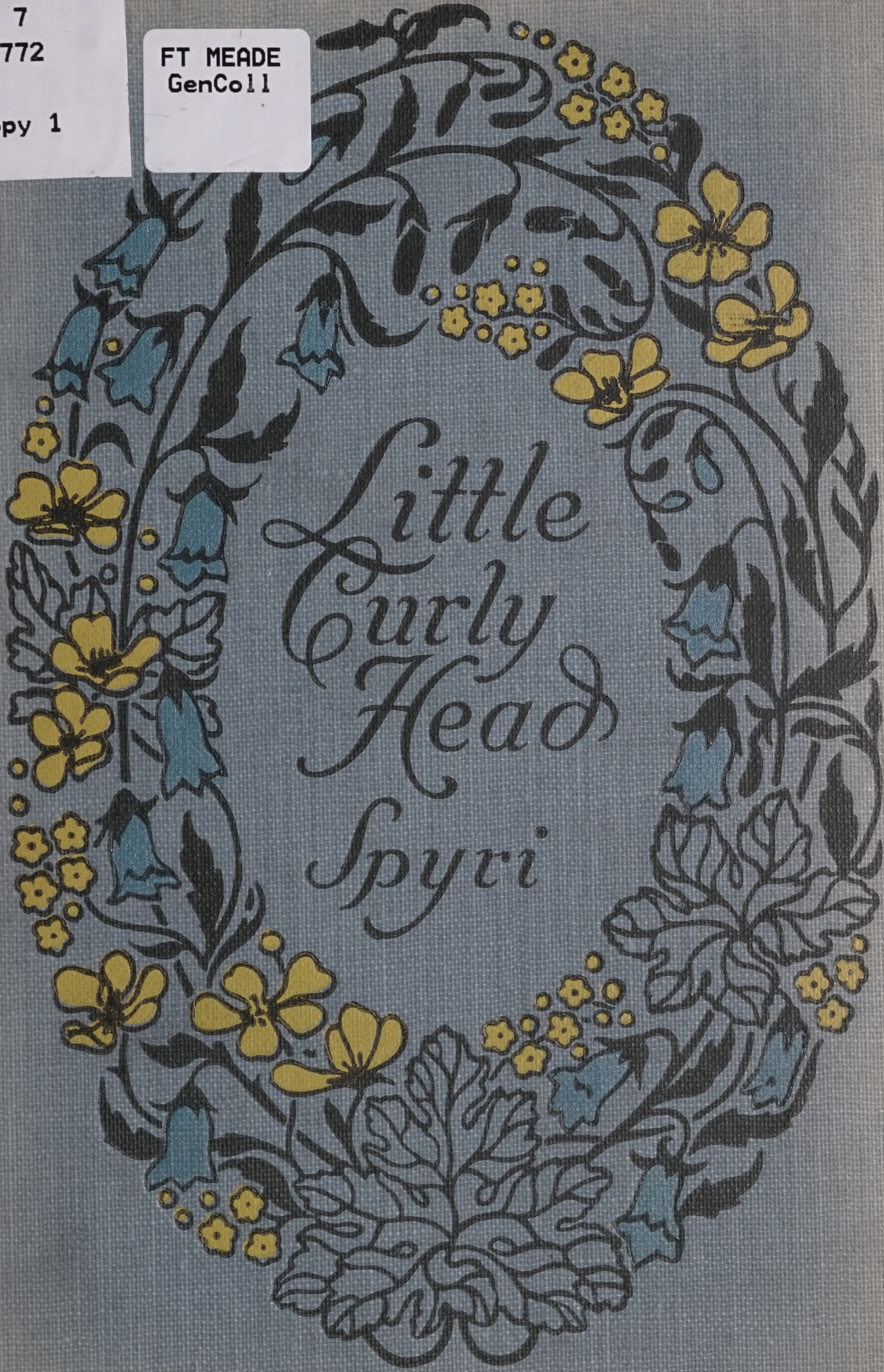


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LITTLE
CURLY HEAD
THE PET LAMB

by JOHANNA SPYRI
Author of Heidi

Translated by
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CHAPTER FIRST

AT WILLOW-JOSEPH'S HOUSE

WHERE lovely, green willow-clad hills rise, one after another, and the intersecting valleys are covered with gleaming red and blue Summer flowers, there lies the little village of Altkirch. The neat, white church with the red tower, and the wooden houses round about, lie protected from every wind, in the green vale, for at the back of the village and from both sides, rise steep hills, and only the front side is free and open. This looks across towards the green height of Rechberg, on the wood-crowned summit of which another village with its white stone houses, shines afar, and like the mountain bears the name of Rechberg.

Between the hills the wild Ziller brook rushes along, bringing on its journey down from the mountains, much wood and stone, in its troubled waters.

A highway leads from Altkirch to Rechberg, but it makes a long journey. First it zigzags down the mountain to the Ziller brook, then over

the old covered bridge, and on the other side it again zigzags up to the village of Rechberg, in all good five miles long. A shorter and much pleasanter way is by the narrow foot-path, which leads straight over the mountain down to the brook, and straight across the narrow wooden bridge which spans the rushing torrent. The bridge is so narrow only one person at a time can go over it, and it is well that there is a railing on both sides, by which one can hold on firmly, for it is so lightly built it trembles and yields so much with every step, that the traveler feels quite unsafe as he crosses it.

Not a house is to be seen in any direction on all the green hills around, except on the last where the steep foot-path goes down to the brook, there stands a lonely chapel, looking down upon the rushing water from ancient times, and the bridge so often carried away and newly built again.

There are many poor people in Altkirch, for there is very little work there. Most of the men go as day-laborers to the farms in the neighborhood; a few own a bit of land which they cultivate. Only two or three peasants in the village have enough land to keep a few cows.

One of the poorest families was that of Willow-Joseph, in the old tumble-down cottage, standing

opposite the chapel on the foot-path and quite alone. The cottage is almost covered with the long overhanging branches of an ancient willow-tree, which had spread out more and more until it had at last wholly surrounded it. From this tree the owner was called Willow-Joseph. He had always lived in the cottage, for it had belonged to his father, who had lived there a long time before. Now Willow-Joseph was himself an old man, and lived in the cottage with his aged wife, who had been ill for a good while, and his two grandchildren.

Willow-Joseph had an only son, Sepp, who had always been a good-natured, but rather shiftless and unsteady man.

Where he was living now, the old parents did not know, for he had gone away from home six years before and little had been heard from him during that time. Sepp had married very early in life, and his parents had been glad, for his wife was the good industrious Constance, whom everybody liked. She was also good-looking and as she went quietly on her way, working conscientiously, she was equalled by few. She kept everything in beautiful order about her husband's house, and Willow-Joseph and his wife had good times as long as their daughter was

with them. She worked from early until late and did not let the parents lack for anything. She said father and mother must now rest, as they had done enough, and they two young people must give the old ones happy days.

Sepp went to work every day on the big farm the other side of the brook and on Saturday brought home a good sum of money. Everything was so well ordered and went on its lovely course in health and happiness that Sepp became a very steady man and had no desire to depart from it.

Three years passed thus in undisturbed happiness, and old Father Klemens, who lived in the long old house back of Altkirch and often came to Willow-Joseph's cottage, said many times:

“Joseph, it is good to live at your house. No unkind words are heard there. Honor your Constance!”

And his kind eyes lighted up with joy, when Constance, neat and trim as she always was, came in and welcomed him with her merry voice, and little Stanzeli in her arms would hold out her tiny hand while he was still some distance away, to Father Klemens. Then he would say again:

“Yes, surely, it is good to live with you, Joseph!”

When Stanzeli was two years old little Seppli came into the world. This was a great joy for all, but soon after the greatest sorrow that could happen came to Willow-Joseph's house. Constance died and left her husband and little children, causing a gap that never more was filled.

From that time on Sepp ran about aimlessly. A restless and unsteady spirit came over him again; he could no longer stay at home on Sunday, as he formerly was so glad to do; it drove him farther and farther away, and at last he decided if he could go away altogether and find other work, far off, it would be better for him. He promised to send his parents from time to time a good sum of money to provide for them and his children; then he went away.

For some time he kept his promise and sent the contribution. Then it ceased and for six years they had known nothing more about him, neither where he had gone, nor even if he was still alive.

Meanwhile both parents had kept growing weaker and poorer. The only small earnings left to them was derived from little baskets which the grandfather wove from the willow twigs and gave every Friday to the dairy man, who carried his cheese to market in the town. The grandfather did not make much from his

baskets and the grandmother had to portion out every slice of bread, to get along from one day to another.

Stanzeli was now almost nine, and Seppli seven years old, and Stanzeli had to help her grandfather in everything he did, for her grandmother had been sick in bed for four months, and could do nothing more. So the grandfather and Stanzeli had to do the cooking together every day, but this was not very extensive for there was nothing cooked but corn-meal mush and potatoes, and very rarely a little coffee. But it needed both of them to prepare the food, for Stanzeli was too small still to lift the pots and the grandfather did not always know how to mix things for cooking, while Stanzeli knew this quite well. So they always worked together in the kitchen, and Seppli usually stood also in the little room where the two could hardly move without getting in each other's way, and gazed in wide eyed expectation at the grand things which were prepared there. And neither the grandfather nor Stanzeli tried to keep Seppli out of the little kitchen, for they knew very well that he would be back again in two minutes, for Seppli had remarkable persistence in many ways.

A beautiful, warm September sun was shining

outside over the green hills around Altkirch. Even a few beams fell through the opaque window panes on the grandmother's bed.

"O God!" she sighed, "is the sun still shining? If I could only go out once more! But I would be still if my bed was not as hard as wood and nothing more in my pillow. And when I begin to think of the Winter, if I must lie here so on the hard sack, under the thin little cover and without a good pillow, I shall die of cold. I am cold already."

"You mustn't worry about the Winter yet," said the grandfather soothingly; "Our Lord will still be alive then; He has helped us many times, when things looked bad, you must not forget that. What do you say if we make a little drop of coffee to warm you up?"

The grandmother was glad to drink a little cup of coffee, and the grandfather opened the door into the kitchen, for you went directly into it from the room where the grandmother's bed stood. A little flight of stairs behind the stove led up to the sleeping room, where the grandfather slept with the children. Then he beckoned to Stanzeli to come, and immediately Seppli followed after, for he had to see what was going to be prepared to eat. Outside the grandfather

took down the saucepan from its place and poured water into it. Then he said:

“Stanzeli, what do you do first?”

“First I must grind the coffee-beans,” explained the child and immediately sat down with the old coffee-mill on the stool and turned it with all her might. But there was something wrong with it, and she examined it in first one way and then another, and finally drew out the little drawer carefully underneath. Instead of the fine powder she ought to have found in it, were big pieces almost half coffee-beans. Stanzeli, in horror, held out the drawer to her grandfather, and showed him the trouble. Her grandfather looked at the damage and tried to keep her quiet, saying:

“You mustn’t make any noise, for your grandmother to hear, or she will be troubled and think she can’t have any more coffee to drink. Just wait a little.”

Whereupon the grandfather went out and soon came back with a big stone in his hand. With this he broke and crushed the coffee-beans on a paper, and then Stanzeli shook the coarse powder into the saucepan. But when the grandmother took her cup in her hand, she exclaimed pitifully:

“Oh dear! oh dear! big grains are floating on the top, the coffee-mill is broken. Oh, if she had only brought it to me. We are not able to buy a new one.”

But the grandfather said in a soothing tone:

“You mustn't make yourself sick about it. With patience many things are made right.”

“Yes, indeed, but no coffee-mill,” complained the grandmother again.

Stanzeli and Seppli each had a little cup of coffee, and some pieces of potato, for they had bread only on Sunday, each a small piece.

Then the grandfather brought out his baskets, which he had finished weaving, tied them together in pairs with a string and placed a little bundle of them in each child's hand. Then he told the children to go along with them, and charged them not to be too late in coming home. They knew where they had to go with the baskets, for every two weeks they went to the dairyman's on such an errand. He lived quite far from the village. They had to go over the hill, past the chapel, up to the woods, where his cottage stood.

The children now started and since Stanzeli always went on her way conscientiously, Seppli had to follow, even when he would like to stop and look at one thing or another. When they

came to the chapel, Stanzeli stood still and said:

“Lay the baskets here on the ground, Seppli; we must go into the chapel and say the Lord’s Prayer. They can lie here until we come out.”

But Seppli was obstinate.

“I will not go in, I am too hot,” he said and sat down on the ground.

“No, Seppli, come. You must come in,” commanded Stanzeli. “Don’t you know that Father Klemens said when you went by a chapel you must always go in and say a prayer? Stand up and come quickly!”

Seppli remained obstinately sitting on the ground. But Stanzeli gave him no rest. She took him quite anxiously by the hand and pulled him up.

“You must come, Seppli. It is not right to do so. You ought to want to pray.”

At that moment some one came up from below to the chapel. Suddenly Father Klemens stood before the children.

Seppli sprang to his feet in a twinkling. The children offered their hands to the Father.

“Seppli! Seppli!” he said very kindly, as he pressed his hand, “what did I hear? You will not follow Stanzeli, when she wants to go into the chapel with you? I will tell you something.

You see, it is not a command of our Lord's, that we should go into the chapel to pray, but it is a privilege that we may pray to Him so. And every time when we do this, He sends us something, which we cannot always see right away."

Then the kind priest continued on his way and Seppli went without further opposition with Stanzeli into the chapel and said his prayer reverently. After sometime when the children had come out again, they heard loud voices and a heavy panting sounded up the foot-path, which descends very steep to the brook.

Then one after another three heads came into sight, first a little girl's head, and then two boys' heads, and then all at once three children stood before the other two and they all looked at one another with mutual astonishment.

CHAPTER SECOND

NEW ACQUAINTANCES

THE little girl who had just appeared was the largest of them all. She must have been quite eleven years old and the larger of the brothers a little over a year younger, while the other was considerably smaller, but very stockily built.

The little girl came a few steps nearer the children and said:

“What are your names?”

The children mentioned them.

“Where is your home?” asked the child further.

“In Altkirch, there. You can see the church tower,” replied Stanzeli, pointing to the red tower between the hills.

“So you have a church too! We have a church like that, but it is closed and we only go in on Sunday. But we have no chapel like that. There stands one higher up. Just see, Kurt, away up in the woods.”

The little girl pointed up with her finger and

her brother nodded to show that he saw what she wished him to.

“I should like to know why you have such chapels here on so many of the hills.”

“So that you can go in and pray, when you pass by,” said Stanzeli quickly.

“You can do that any way,” replied the other little girl; “you can pray anywhere, wherever you are, for the dear Lord hears us everywhere, that I know.”

“Yes, but you don’t think you ought to pray, until you come to the chapel, then you know right away, and do it too,” replied Stanzeli earnestly.

“Now we must go, Lissa,” urged her brother Kurt, for this conversation was too long for him.

But Lissa did not hurry at all, she enjoyed making this acquaintance, and Stanzeli pleased her because she made such decided answers and had just said what Lissa could not deny, for she knew it herself. It was really so: it never came into her mind to pray and thank the dear Lord, when she went out for a walk and was happy, although she had just said decidedly to Stanzeli that you could pray everywhere. All at once the chapel made a new impression on Lissa, for until now she had looked upon it as only a building, standing there merely because it had

been placed there a long time before. She had never thought that to-day it was still making a definite call to every one who passed by. Now it was as if the dear Lord pointed down from Heaven to the chapel and said:

“There it stands, so that you may think of me.”

As Lissa, absorbed in thought, did not speak for a long time, Stanzeli continued:

“And it is not like a command, but rather a favor that we may go in and pray, for when we do so, the dear Lord always sends us something, although we cannot see it. Father Klemens said so.”

“Yes, but I would rather have something I can see,” broke in Seppli, who had remained standing by Stanzeli and had listened attentively.

“Do you know Father Klemens too?” asked Lissa, quite delighted, for he was well known to all the children on the other side of the Ziller brook for a long distance, and their good friend. Wherever he was seen by them, in his long cloak, the big crucifix hanging at his side, they would run to him from every direction to shake hands with him, and he would immediately take out his old pocketbook from his full robe and give a lovely, bright-colored picture to each one. Lissa had already received many of them, with rosy

angels, scattering flowers, and others with a bush full of blooming roses, and a little bird sitting on the very top, and many others besides, so the name of Father Klemens called up the dearest memories.

"He lives near us in Altkirch, up in the old monastery, and he often comes to see us," Stanzeli informed them.

"Yes, and he often brings grandmother a whole loaf of bread," added Seppli, in whose memory this fact stood out very clearly.

"Now we must go, it is still a long way to the dairyman's," said Stanzeli, as she took up her bundle of baskets, and gave Seppli his.

"Will you come to see me sometime, in Rechberg?" asked Lissa, who wanted to continue the new acquaintance a little further.

"I don't know the way. I have never been on the other side of the brook."

"Oh, that is very easy to find, only come early some Sunday afternoon," said Lissa encouragingly. "Then we can play until evening. You have only to go along the path below, and up and up, to the very highest point, and there is Rechberg, and the big house, that stands all alone above all the rest, is our house. So come then!"

Then the children parted. Stanzeli went with

Seppli up the mountain and Lissa looked around for her brothers for she had heard nothing of them for a long while. Kurt had climbed up into the old fir tree, standing next the chapel, and was swinging boldly back and forth on a rotten limb, which cracked suspiciously so that Lissa watched with interest to see whether Kurt would soon come down with the branch, which seemed more amusing than dangerous.

Not far from the tree lay little fat Karl stretched out on the ground fast asleep, and so fast asleep that Lissa's loud calls to get up were entirely lost on him. But now there came something tumbling down the hill that suddenly brought Kurt from the tree and Karl to his feet. It was a big flock of sheep, old and young, big and small: all were swarming, hopping, jumping together and beside them the big sheep dog ran barking so loud and emphatically to prevent any from being lost, that Karl was immediately wakened and sprang up quickly to look at the passing crowd.

The shepherd drove his flock past the children towards Altkirch. The three looked in silent amazement at them as they went by and their eyes could not take in enough of the merry gambols, which the pretty young lambs made beside

their mothers, who looked carefully after the little ones, lest they should run away mischievously from the others and be lost.

When the flock had almost passed out of sight, and only the old sheep were left running after the others, Karl, still lost in astonishment, drew a long breath and said:

“If we only had a little lamb like them!”

That was exactly what Kurt and Lissa thought, and all three were wholly agreed, which was seldom the case. Lissa at once proposed to return home quickly and to beg their papa and mamma to grant their request and give them a lamb. Then she pictured to her brothers how it would be if they could take the lamb everywhere with them and lead it up to the pasture and always see its merry gambols and watch it carefully as the old sheep did; and all three with the prospect of such a possession became so delighted, that they rushed down the mountain with all their might and ran over the bridge, Lissa going first. Behind her followed Kurt, and both bounded so high over the lightly built bridge that it tottered and trembled under their feet, and the loose boards laid on it sprang up and down, so that Karl following after lost his footing and fell in the middle of the bridge, and almost plunged

into the rushing brook. Kurt turned around and pulled him up, and since Lissa had already come to solid ground, the bridge no longer swayed up and down and the brothers came safely to the other side.

The way from there up to Rechberg was quite far, and it took the children a good three quarters of an hour before they came to the last steps and saw the lights from the windows in their house shining towards them, for it had meanwhile grown quite dark.

Already for an hour past the magistrate's wife had walked anxiously to and fro, first from the room out on the stone steps of the house, then down into the garden, looked around and then turned back, and after a little while, took the same walk over again.

She had not seen anything of the children since dinner and they were usually at home by four o'clock at coffee-time or even sooner. Their mother had allowed them to spend the free Saturday afternoon up in the woods, so they had run off all three of them in high spirits directly after dinner. But now it had grown quite dark and still not a sound of the children was to be heard anywhere. Where could they have been delayed so long? Or could something have hap-

pened to little Karl, who was not quite so strong on his feet? Every possible anxiety rose in the mother's mind and she ran more and more restlessly out and in and to all the windows.

But now—there were their well-known voices; they sounded quite excited although still far below. The mother ran out—to be sure, they were coming up the hill, and as the children caught sight of her, they ran pell-mell one after the other, each trying to be the first to tell her their experience, but little Karl was now quite far behind. Kurt and Lissa rushed towards their mother almost together and were about to relate everything at the same time, but at that moment a loud voice sounded from the other side:

“Come to supper! Come to supper!”

It was the voice of the magistrate, who had just returned from his business and had strict household regulations.

When they were all quietly seated at the table, they began their story, but now it was not so easy, for the children had first to explain what had happened that they had not come home at coffee-time as they ought.

Finally it came out that Lissa had found it too dull in the little woods and had proposed that they climb up to the old linden tree. Since from

there they could look down on the old chapel and the Ziller brook and the narrow foot-path, Lissa had an irresistible desire to run there at once and see it all near to, for she had a pleasant memory of the swaying and trembling of the bridge on an earlier excursion there. The brothers consented and the journey was undertaken in haste. Finally it had proved to be much farther than it had appeared.

When the children had confessed the forbidden journey, which was followed by a warning not to carry out such a sudden idea again, then came the whole story in full force, first about the chapel, then the two children, then the flock of sheep and afterwards everything all over again from the beginning and in still greater detail. Finally came the description of the jolly crossing over the brook, and what had happened there. This description naturally resulted in their father's strictly forbidding any future expeditions to the Ziller brook. The swaying bridge was a contrivance, against which the magistrate had long protested, but still the rickety means of crossing remained.

“Karl, the fat, is resting after his day's work, and yours must come to an end too,” said their father, shaking the chair next him a little, on

which Karl had fallen asleep, for he had made a great exertion. But it was not so easy to break this first good sleep, and the father seized the chair, and carried it together with the sleeper into the bedroom, and the other children followed him jumping and shouting at the huge joke. Finally their mother came and had no end of trouble to wake up the one and quiet the others.

From that day on, no breakfast, dinner or supper passed that the children did not break forth one after another and in every tone, with these words:

“If only we had a little lamb!”

Finally the magistrate had had enough of it.

One evening, when the mother was sitting with the children around the table, and little Karl, who was somewhat bored by the studies of the older ones, had just said for the sixteenth time:

“If we only had a little lamb—” suddenly their father opened the door wide and in sprang a real, live lamb. The little creature was covered with curly snow-white wool and the prettiest the children had ever seen. Such shouts of delight, such a noise was raised in the room that not a word could be understood, for the lamb ran bunting and bleating from one corner of the room to the

other, because it could find no way out and all three children ran after it, screaming with delight. But suddenly sounded their father's loud voice:

“Now, that is enough! First of all the little lamb is coming to its brand new stall and you come too, and listen to what I have to say.”

The children went out with the lamb. They wondered very much where the new stall for the little creature could be, and how it looked.

To be sure, there was a little partition of brand new boards put up in the back of the stable, and in it lay fine, soft straw for the lamb to sleep on. A little crib had also been brought in, where they could throw grass and hay for the creature and other good things, which would taste good to it.

When the lamb had been put to bed on the straw, and lay quite still, only breathing a little anxiously, the father said it must now go to sleep, closed the low door, and beckoned the children to follow him.

Inside the room he sat down, placed the three children in front of him, raised his fore-finger high and said earnestly:

“Now listen to me well and think about what I say. I have taken the little lamb away from its mother, to give it to you. Now you must

take the mother's place, watch over it carefully and tend it so that it will be content with you and not die of homesickness. You may take it out in every free hour, to play with you and go to walk with you. You can take it to the pasture so it can crop the grass for itself; you can go with it wherever you like. But never must you leave the little creature alone, not for a moment, for it is still too small to find its way; it would run away at once, and never find its stall and miserably perish. Whoever takes it out of the stable, must keep it under his eyes until he brings it back again to its place. Have you understood me well and will you care for the lamb exactly as I have said, or if you would rather not, tell me and I will take it to-night back to its mother?"

The children all three cried out, that their father should leave the lamb with them. They would not give it back at any price. All three promised from their hearts, and with all sincerity, to watch over it and care for it, as their father required, and never for a moment to leave the creature standing or running alone, and each one assured him that he himself would always bring back the lamb to the stable, when it was time, for that would be the greatest delight. But their father said that would be unsafe; it must be de-

cided that whoever took the lamb out must bring it back again and so it must remain. Once more the children promised to treat the lamb exactly as their father had ordered, and all three gave him their hand on it, and all three were so full of excitement at the prospect of having a live lamb to keep for their own, that they could not go to sleep that evening for the longest time. Even sleepy little Karl sat quite upright in his bed and exclaimed again and again to Kurt:

“Papa shall see that the lamb will come to no harm with us, I will look out for that.”

CHAPTER THIRD

WHAT KEEPING SILENT DOES

THE principal question on the following day, was what name to give the lamb. Lissa proposed to give it the name of "Eulalia," for her friend's cat was called this, and the name seemed to her especially grand. But her brothers wouldn't listen to that, for they thought it too long. Kurt suggested the name Nero, as the big dog he so much admired down at the mill was called. But Lissa and Karl wouldn't have the lamb called by the same name as the dog with the broad nose. Then they consulted their mother about it, and she suggested that the little creature be called "Curly-Head," after its own peculiarity. The children agreed at once to this name, and so it was called from that time on. The pleasure all three took in the pretty white Curly-Head surpassed every other joy and amusement. In every free moment it was taken out of its stall and led around here and there.

Sometimes all three children went out together and took Curly-Head up to the pasture or to the woods, and sat down there with it. Sometimes Lissa would sit on the bench and the little creature would lay its head trustfully in her lap, while Kurt and Karl would run to the nearby clover field and bring some of the fine spicy leaves, which Curly-Head would eat with the greatest satisfaction, first from the hand of one and then from that of the other, bleating very contentedly meanwhile.

At other times one of the children would go alone to take the lamb out of the stable and bring it along to walk, if some errand had to be done at the mill or the baker's or the old washwoman's. Then the lamb always went gladly by the side of its leader, and seemed to understand quite well what was said to it by Kurt and Lissa and especially by its great friend Karl, on these walks. It would answer now and then with an assenting joyful bleat and at the same time look up at its companion so understandingly, that there was no doubt that Curly-Head always took a lively part in the conversation. Every day it became more trustful and affectionate with the children. It would always press close to the one who took it out of the stall, as if its own mother

had come, and the children loved it more and more every day and cared for it and watched over it, and always after their walks and happy conversation brought it back to its little house in the stable, and to its nice bed of straw.

Curly-Head grew so finely with this excellent care that it became as round as a ball, and with its snow-white curly wool looked as pretty and clean as if it were always wearing its Sunday dress.

Thus the beautiful, sunny Autumn came to an end, and November had arrived more quickly than the children had ever known it before. Now they could begin to talk about Christmas, since the festival would be coming in the very next month. Kurt and Karl could easily unite the pleasures of the present to the hopes of the future and bind them into a double enjoyment. So they took a constant delight in their Curly-Head and on every one of their walks told it about all the wonderful times that Christmas would bring them and all the things they secretly expected from the Christ-child. Curly-Head always listened very attentively and the brothers did not fail to give it the expectation of surely having its share in the Christmas presents. All three for the most part enjoyed these wonderful

prospects together and became each day more and more confidential with one another.

Lissa had a little different disposition. When a new and great delight was in prospect she became so excited about it, and all her thoughts were so full of it that the old pleasures were a little in the background.

Now Lissa had a particular friend in the big farm-house on the path down to the brook, the agreeable Marie, who always entered into all Lissa's ideas. Lissa was eager to visit this friend now because she could discuss with her quite otherwise about her hopes and expectations for Christmas-time, than with her brothers, who cherished such different wishes and did not understand hers aright.

Her mother allowed her to make the visit, and on the first free afternoon Lissa was to go. She had hardly patience enough to hold still, while her mother wound around her neck a warm scarf, which the cold November wind made very necessary. Then she ran and bounded away and her mother watched the child until she was half-way down the hill, then went back into the house.

In a moment it occurred to Lissa that the way was rather long and it would be less tiresome to take Curly-Head for a companion, if her

brothers had not already taken her away. She turned quickly round, ran to the stable, found Curly-Head lying quietly on the straw, took it out quickly and ran with it down the barren path over which the wind blew the bright-colored Autumn leaves around her. Their continual running brought them in a short time to the end of their journey. Soon Lissa walked out with her friend, absorbed in deep conversation, back and forth in the sunny place in front of the house, while Curly-Head nibbled contentedly by the hedge which surrounded the garden. The friends refreshed themselves between long discussions, with sweet pears and juicy red apples, which were at hand in rich abundance, for Marie's mother had brought out a whole big basket full of the fruit, and what the children couldn't eat, Lissa was to take home. It had always been so, for on the farm grew beautiful apples and pears in great quantities.

When it was time for Lissa to return home, her friend started along the path to accompany her, and they still had so much to say that they came to the last little ascent to Lissa's father's house, they knew not how. Marie departed quickly and Lissa hurried up the path. It was already quite dark. When she reached the

house, it went through her mind like a paralyzing flash:

“Where is Curly-Head?”

She knew she had taken it along, then had seen it grazing by the hedge, and then had entirely forgotten it and paid no more attention to it. In the most terrible fright she rushed down the mountain, calling in every direction: “Curly-Head! Curly-Head! Where are you? Oh, come here! Come here!” but all was still, Curly-Head was nowhere to be seen. Lissa ran back to the farm-house. There was already a light from the windows of the living-room. From the stone steps she could see very well inside. They were all sitting at the table at supper, father, mother, and Marie, her brothers, the servants, and on the seat by the stove lay the old cat. But nowhere was a sign of Curly-Head to be seen, as Lissa spied into every corner. Then Lissa ran around the house, into the garden, all around the hedge and again into the garden, and then all along the hedge inside, always calling “Curly-Head, come here! Oh, come here!” It was all in vain; there was no sign of the lamb to be seen or heard. Lissa’s anxiety increased more and more. It grew still darker and the wind howled louder and louder,

and almost blew her off the ground. She must go home. What should she do? She did not dare tell that she had lost Curly-Head, because she had forgotten it. But she would tell her mother. She ran as fast as she could up the mountain. At home everything was ready for supper, even her father was there. Lissa came running into the room, so red and hot and disheveled, that her mother said:

“You cannot come to the table so, child; go and make yourself tidy.”

And her father added:

“Above all you must not come home so late! Now hurry and come right back at once or you will have nothing to eat.”

Lissa obeyed quickly. She suddenly felt that she would much rather not return to supper at all, but that would not do. She came back to her place dejected. She was frightfully anxious about what further remarks and questions would be made. But before any one could address a word to her the attention of all the members of the family was taken by a new occurrence.

Hans, the man-servant, put his head in at the door and said:

“With your permission, Magistrate, although the children are all in the house, as Trina said, the little lamb is not in the stable.”

“What?” exclaimed the Magistrate. “Here’s a pretty state of things! Who took it out? Who did it?”

“I didn’t!”—“I didn’t!”—“Surely I didn’t!”—“I didn’t either!” screamed Kurt and Karl so noisily together, that no one could hear whether Lissa kept silent or cried out.

Their mother said to quiet them:

“Don’t be so noisy. It surely cannot have been Lissa. In the afternoon she ran off alone to her friend Marie’s, and only came back a few minutes ago.”

“Then it is one of you two,” quickly spoke their father, as he cast a penetrating look towards the two boys.

A terrible outcry was raised in reply:

“I didn’t do it!”—“I didn’t do it!”—“I surely didn’t”—and both gazed with such big, honest eyes at their father, that he immediately exclaimed:

“No, no, you are not the ones. Then Hans must have left the stable door open, where the lamb was, and it must have run out at that moment. But it seems to me so unlikely, I must go and see.”

Their father left the room, in order to investigate outside in the stable.

When the excitement, the accusations and the defense were over, another impression gained the upper hand. Suddenly Karl laid his head on his arm and sobbed aloud and mournfully:

“Now Curly-Head is lost—! We shall never have it again. Now it will starve to death!”

Then Kurt began. He cried aloud: “Yes, now it is growing colder all the time, and it won’t have anything to eat and will freeze and starve to death.”

Then Lissa began to weep and groan harder than the other two. She didn’t say a word, but one could hear how much keener and deeper than her brothers, her grief was, and Lissa well knew why.

Later on when Kurt and Karl had long been asleep on their pillows and were having happy dreams about Curly-Head, Lissa lay restless in her bed and could not go to sleep. Not only was she mourning for the misfortune to the lamb, now wandering about distressed and neglected in the night, but she blamed herself for it and besides she had kept silent when she should have confessed.

Lissa had indeed not cried out: “I didn’t do it! I didn’t do it!” but she had kept silent when her mother had said confidently: “Lissa cannot

have done it," and the child felt decidedly that she had done the same wrong to keep silent, as if she had told an untruth. Lissa was very unhappy and could find no consolation and no rest, until she made up her mind to tell her mother everything in the morning; perhaps then Curly-Head would be found.

On the following morning there was bright sunshine, and it was at once decided at breakfast, that they would all three go out, as soon as school was over, to look for Curly-Head, for it must be somewhere about. In the afternoon they would do the same, and all were convinced that the lamb would be found before evening. Their mother said to console the children that their father had sent Hans out very early to look everywhere for the little creature, so there was every hope that it would be found again. Lissa was the happiest over this prospect and thought that she wouldn't need to say anything now, and that everything would turn out all right again.

That day the whole of Rechberg was searched for the lamb, and in every home inquiries were made about it, but it was as if Curly-Head had disappeared from the earth. Nobody had seen it, nowhere was any trace of it to be found. For some days further they searched and inquired for

it, but always in vain. Then the Magistrate said they had done enough, and it was useless to hunt any more, for either the poor little creature was no longer alive or else it had strayed far away.

A few days after, the first snow fell, and the flakes came down so big and thick that, in a short time the whole garden lay deep in it, and the white covering rose half-way up the hedge. Every year the children were hugely delighted at the first snow, and always shouted and screamed the louder, the more the flakes whirled around.

Now they were quite still and one would peep here and another there out of the window, and each in the stillness thought of Curly-Head, if it were lying somewhere under the cold snow, or wanted to wade out and couldn't, and was calling in its well-known voice piteously for help and no one heard and helped it.

Then their father came home at evening and said:

“It is a bitter cold night, the snow is already frozen hard. If the poor lamb is still outdoors and not dead already, it will perish to-night. I wish I had never brought the poor creature home!”

Karl broke into such a cry of lamentation and Kurt and Lissa, filled to overflowing with their grief, joined in as if their hearts would break, so that their father left the room, and their mother tried to comfort them as well as she could.

From that time on the Magistrate never spoke of the lamb again, and their mother talked to them about the beautiful Christmas festival whenever they began to mourn for Curly-Head. She told them the Christ-child was coming to make every heart glad, and that this festival was coming soon and would make them happy again too.

When the sympathetic Karl would begin to mourn again on cold, dark evenings: "If only Curly-Head wouldn't freeze or shiver to death outside!" then his mother would say consolingly:

"See, Karl, the dear Lord cares for the little creature. He can prepare a warm bed somewhere for Curly-Head and let it be well with it. And although it is no longer with us, and we can't take care of it, let us be happy and give Curly-Head into the dear Lord's hands."

Kurt listened attentively while his mother was consoling Karl, and so it came about that the brothers gradually became quite happy again, to leave Curly-Head entirely to the dear Lord and

His care, and every day they looked forward more gladly and with fuller expectation to the beautiful Christmas time. But Lissa was not happy with them. On her lay as it were, a heavy weight completely crushing her, and that would never, never more let her be happy. At night she dreamed she saw Curly-Head half starved and frozen, lying out in the snow, and looking up at her with such sad eyes, saying:

“You did this!”

Then Lissa would wake crying and later, when she wanted to be merry with her brothers, she couldn't, for she kept thinking all the time: if the two knew that she had done it, how they would reproach her! She no longer dared look her father and mother straight in the eyes, for she had kept silent when she ought to have confessed to them, and now she couldn't let it pass her lips, for she had let her parents believe for so long that she knew nothing about the matter.

So Lissa never had a happy moment more, and every day she looked sadder and more sorrowful and when Kurt and Karl came to her and said:

“Cheer up, Lissa; Christmas is coming nearer every day, and just think of all that can happen!” then the tears would come at once into Lissa's eyes, and half crying she would say:

“I can’t be happy any more, never, never more, even at Christmas time.”

This seemed too sad to the sympathetic Karl, and he would say to her, quite consolingly:

“See, Lissa, when you can’t do anything more, give everything up to the dear Lord, and then you will be happy again, if you haven’t done anything wrong. Mamma said so.”

Then Lissa would begin to cry in good earnest, so that Karl became frightened and he ran right away, as Kurt had already done before, for it seemed to them very disagreeable that Lissa was so changed.

But Lissa’s altered behavior did not escape her mother. She often watched the child for a long time in silence, but she asked her no questions.

CHAPTER FOURTH

WHAT THE DEAR LORD SENDS

NOVEMBER came to an end. The snow had become still deeper, and every day the cold became more intense. The grandmother in Altkirch pulled her thin bed-covering this way and that, for she could hardly keep warm any longer under it. The room was also cold, for there was only a very small supply of wood, and in this deep snow no brushwood could be found. Coffee was seldom made and the beans had now to be crushed always with stones; the mill was forever useless, and there was no money for a new one. The poor grandmother had much to mourn over and complain about. The grandfather sat most of the time on the bench by the stove, trying to console her misery and weaving his little baskets the while.

As long as it continued to snow, and the deep snow was soft, the grandfather had been obliged to carry his baskets himself to the dairyman, for if he had sent the children, they would have stuck fast in the drifts. There was no road broken

out up the mountain, so the grandfather had trouble to get through, he sank so many times deep in the snow-banks.

But now the sky was clear, and the high snow fields were frozen hard far and wide, so that one could go over them as over a firm road. Not once under the heaviest man did the ice-crust crack. Now the children could be sent again on their errand. Stanzeli wrapped a shawl around her, Seppli put on his woolen cap, and then they started off each with a bundle of baskets on the arm. After a good half hour, when they came to the chapel, Stanzeli laid her baskets down and took Seppli by the hand to go inside. But Seppli was obstinate again:

“I will not come, I will not pray now. My fingers are freezing,” he asserted and planted his feet on the ground, so that Stanzeli should not move him forward. But she begged and pulled him and reminded him what Father Klemens had said and was quite distressed as if Seppli would prevent some great good to them both. Stanzeli had already heard and understood so much about trouble and misery, that it seemed to her a great good fortune and consolation, to be allowed to kneel down and pray to a father in heaven, who would help all poor people. Seppli at last

yielded and they went into the silent chapel. Stanzeli said her prayer softly and reverently. Suddenly a strange plaintive cry sounded through the great stillness. A little frightened, Stanzeli turned to Seppli and said softly:

“Don’t do so in the chapel. You must be quiet.”

Just as softly but cross Seppli replied:

“I am not doing it. You are.”

In a moment the cry sounded again, but louder. Seppli looked searchingly at a place by the altar. Suddenly he seized Stanzeli by the arm and pulled her with such force from her seat, and to the altar, that she could do nothing but follow. Here, at the foot of the altar, half covered with the altar cloth, under which it had crawled, lay a white lamb, trembling and shivering with cold, and its thin little legs stretched out, as if it couldn’t move any longer, from exhaustion.

“That is a sheep. Now something has been sent to us, that we can see,” explained Seppli with delight.

Stanzeli looked at the animal with great astonishment. The words of Father Klemens at once came to her mind, and she did not doubt that the dear Lord, who sends something to every

one who prays, had sent the lamb to-day to them. Only Stanzeli didn't quite understand why it was lying there so feeble and half dead. She began to stroke the little creature, and to show it that it mustn't be afraid, but it could hardly move and only from time to time gave a very pitiful cry.

"Let's take it home and give it a potato: it is hungry," said Seppli, for hunger was the only evil he could think of and this had made him cry.

"What are you thinking about, Seppli? We must go up to the dairyman's," the dutiful Stanzeli reminded him. "But we can't leave it here so alone," and the child looked thoughtfully at the little animal, breathing with such difficulty.

"Now I know something we can do," continued Stanzeli, after a few minutes' consideration. "You watch the lamb here, and I will run as fast as I can up to the dairyman's and come right back and then we will go home!"

Seppli agreed to the proposal and Stanzeli immediately ran off, and shot over the snow field like a doe.

Seppli sat down on the floor and looked with satisfaction at his present. The lamb was covered with such lovely thick wool, that shivering Seppli felt a desire to put his cold hand into it,

and it grew so warm, he quickly put in the other. Then he drew close to the lamb and it was like a little stove for him, and although it was shivering with the cold, its woolen pelt was a splendid means of warming Seppli.

In a short half hour Stanzeli came running back again, and the children in their delight then wanted to take their present home to their grandfather and grandmother. But they tried in vain to bring the lamb to its feet, it was so weak, it fell right over again, when they had lifted it a little and then it moaned pitifully.

“We must carry it,” said Stanzeli, “but it is too heavy for me; you must help me,” and she showed Seppli how to take hold of the lamb without hurting it, and so they carried it away together. They went rather slowly, for it was quite awkward to walk with the burden between them, but the children were so delighted with their present, that they didn’t stop until they reached home and then rushed into the room with their surprise.

“We have brought a lamb, a live lamb, with very warm wool!” cried Seppli as he entered, and when they were wholly inside the room, the children laid the lamb down beside their astonished grandfather on the bench by the stove.

Then Stanzeli began to relate how it had all happened, and how it had happened exactly as Father Klemens had always told them, that the dear Lord sent every one who prayed something, only it could not always be seen.

“But to-day it can be seen,” broke in Seppli with delight.

The grandfather looked at the grandmother to see what she thought about it, and she looked at him and said:

“What do you think about it, Joseph? Tell me.”

After some reflection the grandfather said: “Some one must go up to Father Klemens, and ask him what he thinks. I believe I will go myself.” Whereupon he got up from his seat, put on his old fur cap and went out.

Father Klemens came back with the grandfather. After he had greeted the grandmother and spoken a few kind words with her, he sat down beside the little lamb lying there almost dead, and looked at it. Then he placed Stanzeli and Seppli in front of him and said:

“See, children, it is so; when a man prays, the dear Lord sends him a happy and trustful heart, and that is a beautiful gift, and on that depend many other good gifts. But the lamb here has

lost its way. It may belong to the big flock, which passed by late in the Autumn, and the shepherd will be asking for it. It must have been lost a long time for it is quite starved and almost dead. We may not be able to save its life. First we must give it a little warm milk, and then see what more it can take.”

The kind Father with these last words had lifted the lamb a little and gently laid his hand under its head.

Then the grandfather said hesitatingly:

“We will do what we can. Stanzeli, go and see if there is a little milk left.”

But Father Klemens prevented Stanzeli from going out, saying: “I think you needn’t go. If it is all the same to you, I will take the lamb home with me. I have room enough, and I can care for it.”

This was a great relief to both the old people, for they didn’t want to let the lamb die of hunger, and they didn’t know where to get anything to feed it.

Then Father Klemens took the feeble lamb on his arm and went with it up to the old monastery. Seppli watched him for a long time and grumbled a little.

After a few days the grandfather saw Father

Klemens coming to his cottage, and said wonderingly to the grandmother:

“Why do you think the good Father is coming to us again?”

“The lamb must be dead, and now he will tell us, that we mustn’t expect a penny of reward from the shepherd,” remarked the grandmother.

Father Klemens came in. One could see that he had no glad tidings to bring. Stanzeli and Seppli came bounding towards him to give him their hands. He stroked both kindly, then said softly to the grandfather:

“I think it is best for you to send the children away for a little while, as I have something to tell you.”

This was somewhat disturbing to the grandfather, and he thought to himself:

“If I could only get the grandmother out of the way for a little, so she wouldn’t hear if something unpleasant has to be told.”

He put the tin can on Stanzeli’s arm and said:

“Go now with Seppli and get the milk, and if it is still too early, you can wait at the farm. It is warm in the cow-shed.”

When the children had gone, the Father pushed his chair nearer the grandmother’s bed and said:

“Come a little nearer too, Joseph, I must tell you both something, but I do it unwillingly. Sepp has done something wrong.”

He had scarcely spoken these words when the grandmother made a fearful outcry and said over and over again:

“Oh, my God, that I should live to see this! It was my last hope that Sepp would still turn round and come home, and stand by us in our old age, and now it is all over with. Perhaps we shall have to bear a great disgrace and yet we have lived to old age in honor and good report. Oh, how willingly I would stop grumbling and lie on my hard bed without complaint, and never more have a good drop of coffee, if only this wouldn't have to happen to Sepp! Oh, if only he hadn't brought misfortune and disgrace to himself and us!”

The grandfather too sat there looking very much alarmed and cast down.

“What has he done, Father?” he asked hesitatingly. “Is it something wicked?”

The Father replied that he didn't know at all what it was; he had only learned that Sepp had done something wrong over across the Ziller brook and it had been brought to the Magistrate in Rechberg, who was going to have him put in prison.

“Oh, my God, did it happen up there?” the grandmother broke forth again. “Oh, what will be done to him! He will surely punish him severely enough because he has a different belief.”

“No, no, you mustn’t take it so, grandmother,” interrupted the Father in defense, “that is not so. The Magistrate is not unjust, and he thinks well of the faith. I have myself more than once heard him say: ‘A pious and God-fearing man on this side of the Ziller brook and such an one on the other side both pray to the same Father in Heaven, and the prayer of one is exactly as acceptable to Him as that of the other.’ I have known the Magistrate up there for many years, and I can tell you that I have many hundred times had edifying conversations with him and his wife, as we sat together, and we have understood each other so well that we always get along perfectly and I reproach myself when I haven’t been there for a long time. Now I have it in mind to go there very soon and to see how it stands with Sepp, and to speak a good word with the Magistrate for him.”

Both the old people were very glad and thankful for this plan, but the grandmother began to grieve again and said mournfully:

“If only I hadn’t done wrong, so that this misfortune might not have come to us, because I complained and grieved over little things. But I will surely do it no more and will be patient, Father Klemens. What do you think? Will our Father in Heaven take away my penance and not punish me so hard?”

The Priest comforted the grandmother and exhorted her to keep her good resolutions. Then he rose and promised her to come again as soon as he had been up to Rechberg and could bring news of Sepp.

The grandfather accompanied the Father to the front of the house; then he asked: “And how is it with the little lamb? Is it living still, or is it dead?”

“Not at all dead,” replied Father Klemens gladly, “round and full, and already jumping about merrily, and it is such a trusting little creature, that I shall be sorry to give it up, when the shepherd comes by again. I have sent him word that the lamb is with me, so he will probably leave it until he comes into the neighborhood, and now God bless you!”

The Priest shook the grandfather’s hand and went hastily away, for he had to comfort other sick people who were anxiously waiting for him.

In all Altkirch and far beyond, kind Father Klemens was the comforter of all the poor and sick.

CHAPTER FIFTH

CHRISTMAS

THE longed for Christmas day had come. From early morning Kurt and Karl had wandered in a fever of excitement from one room to another and up and down stairs and nowhere could they find a resting place, for the over-powering sense of the approaching good fortune drove them round and round. By constant motion they had the feeling that they could reach the evening more quickly.

Lissa sat quite still in a corner and gave no response when her brothers came to her and wanted her to join in their exalted hopes. Lissa had never experienced such a Christmas day. Usually how full of happy unrest and burning expectation she was! How full of gladness and joy she was, for she knew nothing more splendid than these hours of expectation and then suddenly their fulfillment! The fulfillment of all the many, many wishes in the brilliant glory of the lights! Now she sat there and wanted to be happy like her brothers. But a pressing weight

as it were, lay on her, stifling every feeling of joy, and although she tried to force herself to throw it off and forget it all, and take delight in the evening, as before, it seemed to her as if she suddenly heard some one coming, who had found Curly-Head dead and knew that she had lost it and forgotten it, and was going to tell her father. Then she crept deeper into the corner and listened hard, and all joy was gone; it came no more into her heart.

Towards evening Kurt and Karl had finally found a moment of rest, or rather the excitement, which had now reached its highest point, had brought them both together on one chair, where in pleasant expectation they only ventured to speak together in low tones.

“What do you suppose about a croquet-set with colored balls?” whispered Karl. “Do you believe the Christ-child will think of that?”

“Perhaps,” answered Kurt softly, “but do you know what? I would much rather He would think of a new sled, for you see the ‘Kessler’ doesn’t go well and then we have only the ‘Geiss,’ and if Lissa gets to be happy again, you will see how she will coast, that I know, and then we shall never have the ‘Geiss,’ and there isn’t room enough for us both on the ‘Kessler.’”

“Yes, but think of the fort. Do you know, Kurt, how many thousand times we have wanted a fort?” reminded Karl, “we would almost rather go without a sled, don’t you think so?”

“Yes, indeed,” said Kurt hesitatingly, for a new thought had come to his mind.

“Or supposing the Christ-child should bring us a box of colors and we could paint the big soldier picture-sheets?”

“Oh, oh!” groaned Karl, impressed with the charming possibility.

Then their mother came into the room.

“Children,” she said, beckoning with her finger, “in there the lights are burning by the piano. Now we are going to sing a song. Where is Lissa?”

In the twilight her mother had not noticed that Lissa was sitting in the corner, nor did her brothers know it. She hadn’t made a sound. Now she came out and all went over to the piano. Then their mother sat down and played and began to sing. Kurt and Karl joined in at the top of their voices and Lissa sang very softly. And when they came to these words in the song:

“Jesus is greater, Jesus is greater
Who fills our sad hearts with joy.”—

Karl sang with such deafening gayety that one could see he had no sad heart at this time. But Lissa had felt what it is to have a sad heart. She sobbed and sobbed and couldn't sing any more. When they had sung to the end of the song the mother rose and said:

"Now stay here quietly until I come back." But Lissa ran after her and cried pitifully:

"Mamma! Mamma! Can't I ask you something?"

Her mother led the child into her sleeping-room and asked what she wanted.

"Mamma, can Jesus make every single sad heart glad again?" asked Lissa anxiously.

"Yes, child, every one," answered her mother, "every one who leans on Him. Only He can't make those happy who cling to wrongdoing and will not give it up."

Then Lissa broke into loud crying:

"I will not cling to it any more," she sobbed. "I will tell you. I took Curly-Head away with me and then forgot it and lost it, and then I kept silent about it, and I am to blame for its starving and freezing and I can't be happy any more, about anything."

Then her mother drew Lissa to her affectionately and said consolingly:

“Now you know, dear child, how a wrong that we keep fast in our hearts makes us frightfully unhappy. You must remember that, and never do so again. But now you have repented, and the holy Christ can and will enter your heart and make you happy again, for to-day He will make all hearts glad. Now wipe your tears away and go to your brothers. I will come to you soon.”

Such a weight was lifted from Lissa's heart, and she felt so light and free, that she wanted to jump over all the mountains. All of a sudden she keenly realized:

“To-day is Christmas! What great things may happen to-day?” Everything in her rejoiced. But one single shadow still rose at times in her heart: Curly-Head! Where could the starved Curly-Head be lying?

When Lissa ran jumping to her brothers, they were very much surprised, but Karl said:

“I am glad you are like this. I thought you would be happy again at Christmas.”

Then Lissa had to give vent to her happy excitement and freshly awakened hopes to her brothers; but in the midst of her eager communications, the door-bell rang louder and louder, and Karl, snow-white with excitement, exclaimed:

“The Christ-child!”

Immediately the mother opened the door and a flood of light came in from outside—the children rushed towards it.

Then it streamed and shimmered and sparkled around, and from its wonderful splendor one could hardly tell what it all was. But in the middle stood a big fir tree with bright, glistening lights from top to bottom on all the branches, and rosy angels and shining Summer birds hovering around the lights, and red strawberries, and shining cherries, and golden pears and little apples hanging from all the twigs, and the children ran in speechless delight to and fro around the tree. But all at once something came running in and suddenly Lissa was almost thrown down; she gave a huge cry of joy and—really there was little Curly-Head! Round as a ball, lively and roguish, it rushed to Lissa and rubbed its little head against her and bleated loud for joy. Kurt and Karl hurried along at the well-known sound and could hardly believe what they saw. Curly-Head, neither hungry nor frozen but quite alive and merry, was there again! They hugged it tight for love and joy.

But Karl now caught sight of something. He gave a high jump to one side:

“Kurt, Kurt,” he screamed, “the fort! the fort!” But Kurt had already jumped to the other side and called back:

“Come here! Come here! Here is the new sled! Oh, what a splendid sled!” And as Karl ran to look, he cried out again:

“Oh! oh! there is the box of colors! Oh, so many brushes in it!”

Lissa kept hugging and caressing little Curly-Head for its return was to her the dearest gift. Oh, how happy she would be now! Everything, everything that had troubled her was past, everything was all right again! How was it possible?

All at once Lissa saw two eyes, wide open, gazing at the shining tree in motionless wonder. That must really be Seppli. Lissa rose from the floor, where she had been squatting beside Curly-Head—to be sure, there was Stanzeli too beside Seppli looking in astonishment at all the brilliant splendor. Lissa went to the children.

“Did you come to see me to-day, Stanzeli?” she asked. “Isn’t the tree beautiful? Did you know the Christ-child would come to-day?”

“Oh, no! oh, no!” said Stanzeli quite shyly and softly, “but your mother brought us in. To-day Father Klemens said the lamb belonged to you, and we might bring it up here.”

“So did you bring little Curly-Head? But where from, Stanzeli? Where was it then? How can it be so well and look so?”

Then her mother came and said to Lissa she would tell her all about it, but now she must bring the children to the table by the window, for the Christ-child had remembered them too. But at first no urging could move Seppli from the spot, for he had never in his life seen such a shining tree with alluring, shimmering, wonderful things on every bough. He couldn't turn his eyes away from it. He took absolutely no step forward although the invitation sounded enticing. Finally Lissa said:

“Just come, Seppli. There by the table you can see the tree quite splendidly, and besides, you can see what the Christ-child has brought you.”

Then Seppli moved slowly and without taking his eyes from the tree. But the table gave him a sight he had not expected. On a plate lay the largest ginger cake he had ever seen, and round it lay red apples and a big pile of nuts. And near these lay a strong knapsack in which he could carry everything he needed for school so that nothing would be lost. And the book, and slate and pencil and everything he would need from

Easter on was inside. Next it lay a good strong jacket for Seppli, such as he had never had before in his life. When Lissa said, "These belong to you, Seppli," he stood as if petrified, by the table and looked first at Stanzeli to see if she believed it was true, and then again at his treasures.

Neither could Stanzeli look enough at the warm little gown and the wonderful fitted work-box, standing together beside the plate of ginger bread.

But now she was frightened, for the Magistrate came straight to her with a man, who had been standing by the door with Hans and Trina, and said:

"Look over there. She really doesn't know you any more."

Then he went away.

The man held out his hand:

"Give me your hand, Stanzeli," he said; "don't be so strange to me! Your eyes look exactly like your blessed mother's. Come, speak, Stanzeli. I am your father and you look exactly like her." And he had to wipe his eyes again and again.

"We have only a grandfather and a grandmother," explained Seppli, who had been watching everything.

“No, no, surely, Seppli, you have a father too, and I am he,” said his father, taking each of the children by the hand. “I will surely prove it to you, but you must know me. Stanzeli, won’t you be friendly with your father? You have grown to be exactly like your mother.”

The man had to keep wiping his eyes.

“Yes, I am now,” said Stanzeli timidly, “but I don’t know you at all.”

The Magistrate from a little distance had been watching the little group by the table, and now he stepped towards them again.

“Sepp,” he said earnestly, “I know a father and a mother too, who are grieved because their son no longer knows them, and has no kind word and no grateful service for them, who have cared for his children so well. But to-day is Christmas; to-day every one must be happy. Go, Sepp, harness the brown horse to the sleigh. You shall take your children home. I will leave the rest to you.”

“May God reward the Magistrate, may God reward you a thousand times!” said Sepp, who could hardly speak from emotion. “The Magistrate shall surely be pleased with me, just as surely as I hope the Lord will be merciful to my poor soul!”

“Good! good! Now up and away, Sepp, and that goes with the sleigh,” and the Magistrate pointed to a big bundle lying next the table by the children. Sepp took it on his shoulders and went out.

Then all the presents belonging to Stanzeli and Seppli were packed together, and the children took their departure, and it was decided that in the Spring Seppli and Stanzeli should come back again the first fine Sunday, and then Lissa and her brothers would also go to Altkirch, for they wanted as soon as possible to visit Father Klemens with Curly-Head, and thank him for his good nursing.

Then Trina took each child by the hand, to tuck them into the sleigh, and the mother called out to her again and again:

“Trina, wrap them up tight in the big sleigh-robe so that they will not freeze.”

In the house, under the Christmas tree, the joy and merriment over the many, many wonderful gifts spread out there, lasted for a long, long time, and above all over the newly returned, merry bleating Curly-Head.

About the time the strong brown horse with the sleigh drove away from the Magistrate's house, Father Klemens was coming down from

the monastery along the moolit footpath. He smiled with satisfaction to himself, as he thought of the visit he had made to Rechberg ten days before, and how it had been shown that Sepp was not so badly off as had been feared.

Sepp had run away from a master, who had treated him badly. The master was a rich and important farmer, who wouldn't put up with this. He made a great fuss and brought action against Sepp, and so the matter came before the Magistrate, but he said the workman should not be abused, no matter who the master was, and Sepp could go his way. This much the Father had learned from the Magistrate himself, and then he told him something about Sepp's aged parents and his two children, and how that Sepp was not bad, only frivolous and how, since the loss of his wife he had got on the wrong road, and if the Magistrate would give him some good advice, he could make an impression on him for the better. The Magistrate had then promised the Father to do so, and afterwards his wife had inquired about Willow-Joseph's household and the children, and so one thing led to another. Finally the Father had told about the lamb that the children had found and was now in his care. Then it suddenly came out to whom the lost lamb belonged,

and that it was Curly-Head. Then the Magistrate and his wife showed great delight and they commissioned the Father to send the lamb over by the children on Christmas day, when they would have a festival with a Christmas tree.

This was an extraordinary joy to the kind Father, but he had not said a word about the Christmas tree, either to the old people or the children, and so he was now smiling quite contentedly to think of their surprise. And as he wanted to see their happy faces, and also hoped the old people would be a little happy, he was going in the darkness to the willow cottage.

As soon as he entered the room, the grandmother called out to him:

“God be praised, that you have come, Father! We shall have a word of encouragement. It is already so dark, and the children are still on the way and have to cross the brook. Oh, I hope nothing has happened to them.”

“No, no, Grandmother,” said the Father in a happy voice, “to-day we mustn’t complain; to-day there is joy and the holy Christ watches especially over the children, and won’t let anything happen to them. Now let us have a good talk; the time will pass best in that way, and you come here too, Joseph, and join us.”

Meanwhile Sepp was letting the brown horse trot so that the sleigh seemed to fly, for he had been seized with such a longing to get home again that he couldn't go fast enough. He had not been there for six years, and whenever thoughts of home had now and then arisen, he had always seen only a great sadness and emptiness, such as he had found when Constance died. In order to escape from these thoughts Sepp had always gone farther away. But to-day, since he had seen his children, everything seemed different, and Stanzeli had brought her departed mother so vividly before his eyes, and all the happy days he had lived with her and his parents in the willow cottage, he thought he couldn't wait until he saw the house and his father and mother again.

Now the sleigh stopped by the willows. Sepp lifted his children out, and threw the thick robe over the brown horse. Then he took Stanzeli by one hand and Seppli by the other and went into the house. He was so overcome, that he ran sobbing to the bed and cried:

“Mother! Father! Don't be angry with me any longer, and forgive me. I will truly do what I can, so that you will see better days. I know very well that you must have had hard times, but,

God willing, you shall be better off from this time forth."

His father and mother had to weep for joy, and his mother said between her sobs:

"Oh, Sepp, Sepp, is it really possible! I never believed our Lord God could so change your heart, but now I will give praise and thanks as long as I have any breath in me."

And the father gave his hand to his son and said:

"It is all right, Sepp, everything shall be forgiven and forgotten, and be welcome. But tell how you happened to come with the children, and how you are."

First Sepp had to press Father Klemens's hand, for he had listened with a quiet smile of satisfaction to everything. Then the old people learned to their astonishment that the Magistrate had engaged Sepp as a farm-servant and had already trusted him with their horse and sleigh. Since Hans and Trina were going to establish a household of their own at New Year's, the place was open for a servant, and Sepp was highly delighted to take it.

"And what a place it is! Such a good master who can advise me like a father and besides such good wages and so much clothing all the year

through, this I know from Hans. But I have begged the Magistrate not to give me any of my wages yet, so that I can't spend any of it but bring it all to you at the end of the month. Now I really have nothing to bring you except good will."

"That is worth while, and may our Lord God give His blessing on it. Amen!" said Father Klemens.

For a long time Seppli had been wandering to and fro heavily laden, and could find no place for his treasures or attract anyone's attention to them. But now he was able to get to his grandmother's bed, and soon had it half covered with his presents, and when Stanzeli saw this she came quickly along and covered the other half with hers. Their grandmother's head looked out from the midst of them as if it was a fair, and she had to clap her hands for wonder, and say again and again: "Is it possible!"

But when Sepp suddenly brought in the big bundle and unrolled it, and three and then four beautiful warm blankets came into sight, the grandmother could say no more from surprise and thankfulness, but kept her hands folded and surely was giving silent thanks again and again.

But the grandfather lifted the hard object

which was placed in the middle of the blankets, from the floor, and the old man's eyes shone with delight, for his own wish was fulfilled: he held up a brand new coffee-mill in his hand. Now at last he could grind the coffee properly and prepare the drink for the grandmother as it ought to be.

Such a Christmas evening, full of happiness and joy was never celebrated in Willow-Joseph's cottage before.

Sepp now experienced the longed for pleasure of having his children sit trustfully with him, Seppli on one knee, Stanzeli on the other, and each wanted to know their father better, for since they had seen how dear he was to their grandfather and grandmother, and belonged so near to them, they also loved him and were aware that they belonged to him.

Now Sepp had to go back to Rechberg, but he knew that he would soon return and could spend every Sunday afternoon with his people, for this the Magistrate had told him.

When he was seated in the sleigh, and was ready to drive away, Seppli ran out and cried:

"Father, wait. I must tell you something!" And when his father bent forward, Seppli said emphatically in his ear:

"Father, when you come past the chapel, don't

forget to go in and pray, for you know the dear Lord always sends something to you there; at first you can't see it, but later on you do."

Seppli had noticed that all the rich gifts of this day were connected with the lamb, which the dear Lord had led into the chapel for them, and he well remembered how he had refused to go in. He would never do so again.

A great intercourse between Rechberg and Altkirch is carried on. Sepp is a faithful and reliable servant in the Magistrate's house, and goes every Sunday afternoon to Altkirch, carrying fresh white bread to eat with the coffee. This tastes so good to the grandmother, as it comes from the new mill, together with other nourishing things from Rechberg, that she has gained new strength. Now she can work around the house again, herself, and receive Sepp cheerfully in the room put in order for Sunday, with the grandfather and the children, and that makes Sepp happy all the week, and he says to himself quietly: "Home is the best place, after all."

From time to time his children go to see him in Rechberg, and then there is always a merry day for all the children together, and Curly-Head is

always by and plays with them, and often when it looks up at Lissa, she thinks:

“Oh, how happy I am once more! Never again in all my life will I conceal a wrong in my heart!”

THE END

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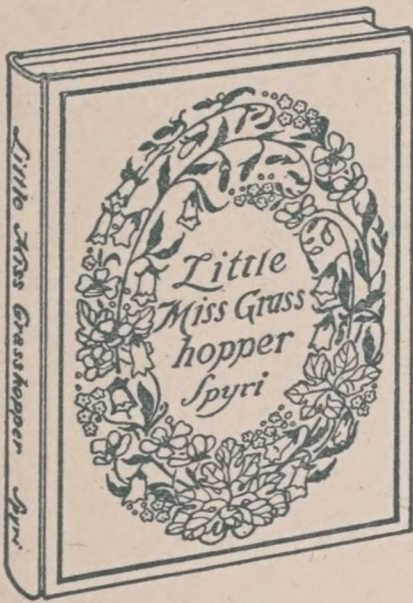
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