

THE TALL MAN.

CHAPTER I.

Herr Leo Librecht, a rich merchant of Frankfort-on-the-Maine, rose from the leather chair behind his office desk, as the clock of the cathedral struck half-past eleven A. M.

He stood like a tower—or like Saul of old, being taller by the head and shoulders than any of his fellows. Librecht had, indeed, a royal and majestic presence; he did not stoop from the neck, or give way in the knees, like many tall men, but he carried himself as a king is supposed to do, and his breadth of chest was equal to his length of limb; altogether, he was a magnificent specimen of manhood.

"Blitterman," said he to his book-keeper, who had been writing on the opposite side of the desk, "it is time to go to our task; and the large saw has been so well set and sharpened we shall get through double work to-day."

"I am always at your command, sir," replied the clerk, in an obsequious tone, whilst an expression of dislike and disgust crossed his face, which he concealed by leaning over the table, apparently to discharge the ink out of his pen into the inkstand.

Herr Librecht left his office on the ground floor, obediently followed by his clerk, who relieved his feelings by a gesture of contempt, which his master neither saw nor suspected. Near the door of the office, where the passage was unobstructed by bales, chests, and cases, some filled and others partly empty, they met the nurse, with a little boy about nine months old in her arms, whilst another, who might be about four years old, was clinging to her dress. Librecht gave the youngest a kiss on his chubby rosy cheek, passed his hand fondly through the curls of the elder boy, and went out through the back door into a somewhat dark courtyard, surrounded on all sides by high fire-proof walls.

Here he took off his coat, hung it carefully on a nail, and opening the door of the wood-house, he brought out a chopping-block, two axes, a double saw, and two blue linen aprons, one of which he put on himself, and handed the other to his clerk.

"How much there is in a habit," he observed in a pleasant tone, as he laid one of the great logs on the block and adjusted the saw, one end of which he put into the unwilling hands of his companion, while he took the other himself. "At first I used to feel absolutely fatigued when I got to my second log, and was quite out of breath, but now I do not feel the exertion, and hope to manage my *Maften* of wood a day like a regular wood-cutter. Exercise like this does one more good than even walking; sedentary men require this peculiar exercise. Dr. Gumbacher maintains that it not only strengthens the muscles, but purifies the blood, keeps down corpulence, to say nothing of its influence on sleep and digestion. But, dear me, Blitterman, how you are panting! pull the saw straight, or the best seat saw will be ruined. If all your breath is gone, let go the saw and rest awhile."

The book-keeper did not need twice telling. He put both hands behind his back, and looked indeed most thankful.

"Why positively, you look quite handsome after your exertions! If you always had such a good color it would be entirely due to this fine exercise."

The book-keeper glanced at his master with a malignant expression in his deep-set eyes, which his master did not notice, but went on composedly with his labor, in his reluctant assistant, after a short pause, again took part. When the logs had all been sawed to a regular length, the business of chopping them into smaller pieces commenced. Suddenly Blitterman let his axe fall with a heavy crash.

"What is the matter?" said his master, looking up. The clerk was going through a pantomime expressive of great suffering.

"I have hurt my hand," he said piteously. "It bleeds—it hurts dreadfully! Oh dear! Oh dear!"

"Ah, we must all buy our experience," said his master, quietly. "I have got used to all that; there is not much harm done; it is only a scratch, and you will become more dexterous in time."

He resumed his occupation, and the wood fell in plentiful chips all around him.

Another, and this time a louder, cry of pain from the clerk started his master. Blitterman had doubled himself up like a clasp-knife, and was holding his legs with both hands.

"What is the matter?" said Librecht, throwing down his axe. "Have you driven the axe into your leg?"

"Oh, no, no!" said Blitterman, writing and speaking as though in grievous pain; but that heavy piece of wood was chopping flew against my leg with the force of a bomb-shell, and has crushed it dreadfully."

"That is not very likely," said Librecht, coolly, "but take off your coat and stocking, and let me see the extent of the damage. I shall be very sorry if your leg is broken, or even bruised; but you shall have a doctor and be well taken care of if there be any injury. But let me see it, that we may know the worst."

"Perhaps it may not be quite broken," said the clerk, who made no attempt to remove the stocking; "but I am sure that it is very badly grazed, so that I shall walk lame, I fear; and oh! my hand! my right hand! I shall not be able to hold a pen for some time. It all comes from this wood-cutting. I am not used to such work, and I hate it."

"I never wished to force you to it," said Librecht, kindly, for he saw that his clerk was frightened if not much hurt. "I asked you with the best intention; I thought the exercise would be as good for you as for me. However, in future, Siegart, the market-servant shall work with me instead of you. It will be easy to him, and he can really help me better than you can."

"Surely you are joking, sir!" said Blitterman; "you can not really intend that your servant should join you in this occupation?"

"Why not?" said Librecht; "you and I worked together in the office; wood-cutting is part of Siegart's work,

which he understands better than either of us. Why should we despise him? I shall be glad to let him teach me. You seem to forget that we are under one who made us all, and gave us each our place and our work."

Blitterman was silent, and sullenly continued to rub his leg. Strange as it may seem, whilst he hated chopping and sawing wood, he felt jealous and aggrieved because his master was about to dispense with him and take Siegart in his stead.

By this time it was twelve o'clock—the hour of dinner. Librecht put away his tools, took off his apron, and resumed his usual neat and scrupulously-arranged every-day costume. He proceeded to the dining-room, followed by Blitterman, who considered himself obliged to limp, as though walking gave him great pain.

The dining-room was a handsome and spacious apartment, substantially furnished. The family was already assembled, and stood round a well-spread table, waiting for the master of the house. Librecht and Blitterman took their places, and the eldest son, a boy of six years old, folding his hands, said grace with a touching voice, and devout manner.

The master began to help the soup. His pretty young wife, Frau Librecht, in her bright chintz gown, wearing a snow-white cap on her dark, glossy, brown hair, and an equally white apron with a bib, passed round the soup plates as fast as her husband filled them. The first to receive her portion was a pleasant-looking, cheerful old lady, Librecht's mother, who occupied the seat of honor near the master of the house. On one side of the table sat Blitterman, who had ostentatiously bound his handkerchief round his hand next to him came the three clerks, according to their seniority; and then the apprentice, a relative of Librecht—he had only lately joined the establishment. The nurse and the two younger children, were seated at a low table placed in one of the window recesses. Two well-painted portraits in oil hung on the wall; one represented Librecht's father, who had died some years ago, and the other was the handsome old lady, his mother, now sitting beside him. The father was drawn with a letter in his hand and a pen behind his ear, denoting his calling as a merchant. The lady in her portrait had a green parrot on her outstretched finger, the original of which still survived, though its plumage had grown somewhat shabby. It was now to be seen in a bright brass cage, which hung near the window.

The clerks and the apprentice ate their dinner in modest silence, but Blitterman, the book-keeper, ventured now and then to join in the conversation that was carried on by the members of the family.

"Will not our dear mother be helped a second time?" asked Frau Librecht.

The old lady declined.

"If our dear mother always ate so little, I wonder how she ever became the mother of so large a son!"

"His father was a fine man," said the old lady, with a loving smile at her gigantic son; "but he was never so fine a man as my Leo."

"Bertram," cried the young Frau Librecht to the apprentice, "do not hold your spoon so awkwardly, we shall have all the blame if your manners are bad."

This appeal caused the young man to blush painfully, and to drop his spoon altogether, which fell with a splash into his soup.

"Was my husband in his childhood fed on his milk, as they say Augustus the Strong was?" asked Frau Librecht.

"He had as much milk, not lion's milk," replied the old lady, simply. A sneer passed over the face of the book-keeper.

"My Librecht, on account of his rapid growth, somewhat outgrew his strength, and the doctor ordered as milk for him, which, as you see, did him a great deal of good."

"How I should like to be as big a man as my father when I grow up!" said Adolphus, the eldest son, "or even bigger; for then I should be a giant, and could show myself for money."

"Indeed, I wish nothing of the kind," said his mother. "For a long time I was afraid of my husband, and even now, if he were not so good and mild, I should die of fear!"

Librecht bent down and impressed a kiss on the fair, pure forehead of his wife, and said, "Thanks, dear one, for thy praise; I will try to deserve it. But, indeed, I should not be sorry to be a little less tall. I find my height is sometimes embarrassing. Strangers look at me as though I were a curiosity; and when I have to pass through any doorway where I have not been, I have to measure it with my eye, and see how low I must bend. At any public place some one is sure to tap me on the shoulder and bid me sit down, when I am seated at the time. Tailors and shoemakers charge me double, for they say I require so much more material than their ordinary customers; and, except at home, no bed is long enough for me. When in a carriage I am obliged to stoop down to be able to sit in it. Indeed, my dear little son, you do not know what you are wishing for!"

"Lord," said the old lady, reprovingly. "It is he who made you what you are. He gives to all the gifts He sees best for them."

"For be it for me," said Librecht; "I only wished to show Adolphus that he had better not wish to be bigger than I am. I acknowledge, with deep gratitude, the blessings God has given me; and you, my dear mother, and my dear wife and children, make me feel thankful all the day long."

A dead silence followed this speech, during which the plates were changed, and the young mistress of the house suddenly exclaimed, "Ah! Herr Blitterman, you seem to have a bad hand; what is the matter?"

The book-keeper blinked his eyes, and looking first at his mistress and then on his bandaged hand, replied, with some constraint, "It is nothing much, only a little painful, which will make it painful for me to write for awhile; but I trust it will soon be well."

"He means he has had enough of wood-cutting," said Herr Librecht, laughing, and he declines to do any more. Siegart, the market-servant,

must help me in future."

"It was no joke to have that heavy piece of wood strike me on my shin-bone," said Blitterman, with asperity; "and if your servant can supply my place, why should you ask me? We can not serve two masters, it is said, and wood-cutting and book-keeping agree as little as being a market-servant would become a book-keeper."

"Every one has his own opinion," said Librecht. "I find wood-cutting for a certain portion of each day a healthful exercise. You will acknowledge when too late, that you would have done better to follow my example."

"I think I shall find out quite the contrary," muttered Blitterman to himself, but he made no reply that was audible.

CHAPTER II.—A GREAT CALAMITY.

About a fortnight later—it was in the autumn of 1737—there was great sorrow in the Librecht household. Leo Librecht, the rich merchant, had disappeared, and no one knew what had become of him, nor could obtain the slightest clue to him. Bertram, the young apprentice, who was the last person who had seen him, said that a boy brought a letter to the office, which he said was urgent; that after reading it Herr Librecht seemed agitated, took his hat, went out, and that was the last that was known of him that dusk autumn evening.

The household had sat up watching for his return hour after hour, but the hours had lengthened into days, and still no information could be obtained, and conjecture was at fault. He was a prosperous man; a religious man, devoted on his wife and family, and so far as was known, did not possess an enemy in the world! It seemed as though the earth had swallowed him up, leaving no trace.

In all this sorrowful time, no one distinguished himself in sympathy and activity so much as the sullen, taciturn book-keeper, Blitterman. He seemed to have changed his nature; but his efforts to discover the lost merchant were as fruitless as those of all the other friends who sought for him. At last the terrible mystery which surrounded his fate was dissipated. A peasant woman handed in at the gate of the merchant's house a letter directed—"To Frau Agnes Librecht (the younger),—Mienagasse No. 6, Frankfort."

"To be given into her own hands," Agnes withdrew into a room where she could be alone to open her letter. It seemed fortunate that the book-keeper should have waited near the chamber door, listening to every sound, for scarcely a moment had elapsed before a sharp cry and a heavy fall were heard within. Blitterman rushed in, and found the young wife senseless on the floor, with the letter in her hand. He took it and glanced over it, and then endeavored to restore Agnes to consciousness. After a short time, Frau Librecht opened her eyes, but seemed to have forgotten how she came to be there with Blitterman standing over her.

"Poor lady!" said a sympathizing voice, "it is a heavy trouble, but bear up; try to endure this sad affliction; command yourself. You have his children, you must wish they should respect their father's memory, and you have your husband's reputation, which you must jealously guard. All—everything, will depend on your courage."

Agnes put her hands before her ghastly face with a shudder. Removing them again, she said, in a choking voice, "Are you, then, aware of the extent of our misery?"

"I only guess it from the few words which caught my eye when I picked up the letter in Herr Librecht's own hand writing. You will do well, lady, to let no one see it."

The paper rustled as she received it in her trembling hand.

"Is it true, then?" she asked. "Is it not a dream?"

Blitterman shook his head in silence. "If I had not read it in his own hand writing, I should not have thought it possible."

"Oh, if he had only known how much we all loved him," said Agnes, "he could never have left us in this dreadful manner."

"He may have had great losses in his business of which I am ignorant," said Blitterman; "but still I can not understand that any distress should so have wrought upon him as to make him forgetful of—of—all he held most dear. But I conjure you, for the sake of your children, to keep this letter a secret, and to hide its contents from all the world. On your courage, on your fortune, depends the future welfare of your children. It is you who must preserve them from the shadow that would rest upon them if the true secret of their father's disappearance became known."

Agnes listened stupefied, bewildered. At length the sound of his voice roused her. "Go! said she; I cannot bear to have any one with me. You have no right to come here. Go away."

"Alas! poor lady, your mind is overpowered with this great calamity."

Agnes had again fallen into a state of stupor, and Blitterman judged it best to leave her alone, which he did, walking away with noiseless foot-steps, and closing the door with an elaborate precaution. His face wore an expression of malignant triumph for a moment until he deemed it prudent to assume a grave and decorous composure suitable to the situation.

Left alone, Agnes gazed at the letter, which contained but few lines. The writing appeared scarcely like that of her husband. The contents were as follows:

"MY DEARLY-LOVED AGNES: Forgive me and do not hate my memory; when this reaches you the waters of the river will have closed over me—you will see my form no more, living or dead. I am miserable. I can endure life no longer—my enormous height of stature is a torment. I know it has kept you in dread of me, and now that poverty and ruin stare me in the face, I will at least relieve you from the burden of my presence. You and your children will be happier after awhile, and it is better for you all that I should die; I should only bring worse evils on you all. My poor mother! comfort her, for she loved you best. In all business matters, you may trust Blitterman. He will be a friend to you; and he knew all my mind. May you be happier than I could ever make you."

"LIBRECHT LIBRECHTDAHL."

To be continued.

Traveler's Column.

INTERCOLONIAL RAILWAY.

St. John, Miramichi, Campbellton, &c.

1877.—SUMMER ARRANGEMENT.—1877.

On Monday, Monday, May 7th, until further notice, TRAINS will run as follows:—

Express leaves St. John at 10 a.m., arriving at Miramichi at 12:30 p.m., Campbellton at 2:30 p.m., and St. John at 4:30 p.m.

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