Walhalla

Rebecca Harding Davis

Table of Contents

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A FEW years ago a young English artist, named Reid, who was traveling through this country, stopped for a day or two at Louisville, having found an old friend there.

He urged this gentleman to go with him into the mountainous region of Tennessee and North Carolina.

"The foliage," he said, "will be worth study in September; and besides, I have an errand there for my brother. He is a house−decorator in London, and when he was in the Alps last summer, he was told that a wood−carver, whose work he saw in Berne, and fancied, had emigrated to America two or three years ago, turned farmer, and joined a small German colony in these mountains. I am to find this colony if I can, and if there is any workman of real skill in it, to offer him regular work and good wages in London. My brother is in immediate need of a panel−carver."

"He could have imported a dozen from Berne."

"Certainly," said Reid, with a shrug; "but Tom has his whims. He fancied that he detected a delicacy, a spirit in this man's work — an undiscovered Bewick, in fact. Where do you suppose the fellow is hidden, Pomeroy? Do you know of any such colony?"

"No, and I hardly can believe that there are any thrifty Germans among those impregnable mountains. Why, access to many of the counties is only to be had on mules, and at the risk of your neck. Your German must have a market for his work; he would find none there."

They were talking in the breakfast room of the hotel. A man at the same table looked up and nodded.

"Beg pardon, but couldn't help overhearing. Think the place you want is in South Carolina. Name of Walhalla. Village. Queer little corner. Oconee county."

"Oh, thanks!" said Reid, eyeing him speculatively, as probably a new specimen of the American. "Any Swiss there, do you know?"

"That I can't tell you, sir," said the stranger, expanding suddenly into the geniality of an old acquaintance. "They're Germans, I take it. Shut out of the world by the mountains as completely as if the place was a 'hall of the dead,' as they call it. There it is, with German houses and German customs, dropped down right into the midst of Carolina snuff−rubbers, and Georgian clay−eaters. I found the village five years ago, while I was buying up skins in the mountains. I'm a fur dealer. Cincinnati. One of my cards, gentlemen?" * * *

To Walhalla, therefore, Mr. Reid and his friend went. They tried to strike a bee−line to it, through a wilderness of mountain ranges, by trails known only to the trappers; taking them as their guides, and sleeping in their huts at night. After two weeks of climbing among the clouds, of solitary communion with Nature, of unmitigated dirt, fried pork, and fleas, they came in sight of Walhalla.

They had reached Macon county, North Carolina, where the Appalachian range, which stretches like a vast bulwark along the eastern coast of the continent, closes abruptly in walls of rock, jutting like mighty promontories into the plains of Georgia and South Carolina.

Reid and Pomeroy stopped one morning on one of these heights, to water their mules at a spring, from which two streams bubbled through the grass and separated, one to flow into the Atlantic, the other into the Gulf of Mexico, so narrow and steep was the ridge on which they stood. The wind blew thin and cold in their faces; the sun shone brightly about them; but below, great masses of cumulus clouds were driven, ebbing like waves, out toward the horizon. Far down in the valley a rain−storm was raging. It occupied but small space, and looked like a motionless cataract of gray fog, torn at times by yellow, jagged lightning.

Not far from the spring a brown mare was tethered, and near it a stout young man in blue homespun was lying, stretched lazily out on the dry, ash−colored moss, his chin in his palms, watching the storm in the valley. An empty sack had served as a saddle for the mare; slung about the man's waist was a whisky flask and a horn. He was evidently a farmer, who had come up into the mountains to salt his wild cattle.

Reid took note of the clean jacket, the steady blue eyes, the red rose in his cap.

"Swiss," he said to Pomeroy. "Where is Walhalla, my friend?"

The man touched his cap, and pointed to a wisp of smoke at the base of the mountain. As they rode on, his dog snuffed curiously at their horses' heels, but Hans did not raise his head to look after them.

"That is the first man I have seen in America," said Reid, "who took time to look at the world he lived in."

When they were gone, Hans lay watching the cloud below soften from a metallic black mass into pearly haze; then it drifted up into films across the green hills. On the nearer plain below, he could now see the white−bolled cotton−fields, wet and shining after the shower; threads of mist full of rainbow lights traced out the water−courses; damp, earthy scents came up to the height from the soaked forests. After a long while he rose leisurely, his eyes filled with satisfaction, as one who has had a good visit in the home of a friend. He mounted the mare and rode down the trail; the sun shone ruddily on the peaks above him, but there was a damp, shivering twilight in the gorges. Both seemed holiday weather to the young fellow; his mare whinnied when he patted her neck; the dog ran, barking and jumping upon him; it was a conversation that had been going on for years among old friends.

Mr. Reid reached Walhalla just before sundown. As his mule went slowly down the wide street, he looked from side to side with pleased surprise.

"It is a street out of some German village," he said. "I have not seen such thrift or homely comfort in this country."

"It is only the hidden contrast to the grandeur and dirt behind us," said Pomeroy. "If you miss the repose and exaltation of the lofty heights which you talked of, you will find scrubbed floors and flea−less beds a solid consolation."

The sleepy hamlet consisted of but one broad street, lined by quaint wooden houses, their stoops covered with grape−vines or roses. Back of these houses stretched trim gardens, gay with dahlias and yellow wall−flowers; back of these, again, were the farms. Along the middle of the street, at intervals, were shaded wells, public scales, a platform for town meetings. The people were gathered about one of the wells, in their old German fashion, the men with their pipes, the women with their knitting.

Reid remained in Walhalla for two or three days. He found that there were several Swiss families and that many of the men had been wood−carvers at home. He hit upon a plan to accomplish his purpose. He gave a subject for a panel, — the Flight into Egypt, — and announced that any one who chose might undertake the work; that he would return in a month (he had found there was access to Columbia by railway through the valley), and would then buy the best panel offered at a fair price, and, if the skill shown in the work satisfied him, would send the carver to London free of expense, and insure him high and steady wages.

The day he left, all the village collected about the well to talk the matter over. Here was a strange gust from the outer world blowing into their dead calm! Most of them had forgotten that there was a world outside of Walhalla. They tilled their farms and bartered with the mountaineers. Twice a year Schopf went to Charlotte for goods to fill his drowsy shop. London? Riches? Fame? The blast of a strange trumpet, truly. The blood began to quicken. Such of them as had been wood−carvers felt their fingers itch for the knife.

"No doubt it is George Heller who will win it," everybody said. "That fellow has ambition to conquer the world. Did you see how he followed the Englishman about? He could talk to them in their own fashion. George is no ordinary man!"

"If Hans had but his wit now!" said one, nodding as Hans on his mare came down the street. "Hans is a good fellow. But he will never make a stir in the world. Now, George's fingers used to be as nimble as his tongue."

Heller's tongue, meanwhile, was wagging nimbly enough at the other side of the well. He was a little, wiry, red−haired, spectacled fellow, with a perpetual movement and sparkle about him, as if his thoughts were flame.

"That's the right sort of talk. Fame — profit! Why should we always drag behind the world here at Walhalla? Plough and dig, plough and dig! The richest man in New York left Germany a butcher's son, with his wallet strapped on his back; and what is New York to London? Just give me a foothold in London and I'll show you what a baker's son can do, let Hans Becht laugh as he chooses!" For Hans, who had come down to the well, was listening with a quizzical twinkle in his eye. He filled his pipe, laughed, sat down and said nothing. Everybody knew Hans to be the most silent man in Walhalla.

The pretty girls gathered shyly closer to Heller; and the boys thrust their hands in their pockets and stared

admiringly up at him. Hans was their especial friend, but what a stout, common−place creature he was beside this brilliant fellow!

"A man only needs a foothold in this world!" George said, adjusting his spectacles and looking nervously toward a bench where a young girl sat holding her baby brother. The child was a solid lump of flesh, but she looked down at him with the tenderest eyes in the world. The sight of her drove the blood through Heller's veins almost as hotly as the smell of a glass of liquor would do. "Oh, if I win, I'll take a wife from Walhalla!" he cried, laughing excitedly, looking at her and not caring that the whole village saw his look. "I'll come back for the girl I love!" He fancied that the shy eye had caught the fire from his own and answered with a sudden flash.

Hans thought so, too; his pipe went out in his mouth. When she rose to go home, he took the heavy boy out of her arms, and walked beside her. Heller's shrill voice sounded behind them like a vehement fife. . . . "Success. . . . money . . . . money!"

Hans looked anxiously down into her face.

"They are good things," she said, "very good things."

Hans's tongue was tied as usual. He dropped Phil in the cradle in the kitchen, and then came out and led Christine down to the garden of his own house.

What was London — money, to home? Surely she must see that! He led her slowly past the well−built barn and piggeries, past the bee−hives hidden behind the cherry−trees, and seated her on the porch. He thought these things would speak for him. Hans clung as closely to his home as Phil yonder to his mother's breast. But Christine looked sullen.

Hans said nothing.

"A man should not be satisfied with a kitchen garden," she said sharply.

They sat on the porch steps. The night air was warm and pure, the moon hung low over the rice fields to the left, throwing fantastic shadows that chased each other like noiseless ghosts as the wind swayed the grain. To the right, beyond the valley, the mountains pierced the sky. They were all so friendly, but dumb — dumb as himself. If they could only speak and say of how little account money was, after all! It seemed to Hans as if they were always just going to speak!

But Christine did not look at sky, or mountains, or sleeping valley. She looked at the gravel at her feet, and gave it a little kick.

"No doubt George Heller will succeed. I hope he will, too!" she said vehemently. "If a man has the real stuff in him let him show it to the world! I'll go home now, Mr. Becht."

That evening Hans's violin was silent. He used to play until late in the night; but he was sharpening his long unused knives, with a pale face. He, too, was beginning a Flight into Egypt.

During the next two weeks a tremendous whittling went on in Walhalla. Some old fellows, who had never cut anything but paper−knives and match−boxes, were fired with the universal frenzy. Why should not Stein, the cobbler, or Fritz, the butcher, chip his way to wealth, fame, and London? There is not a butcher or cobbler of us all who does not secretly believe himself a genius equal to the best — barred down by circumstance. George Heller kept his work secret, but he was mightily stirred by it in soul and body. Twice, in a rage, he broke the panel into bits, and came out pale and covered with perspiration; he walked about muttering to himself like one in a dream; he went to Godfrey Stein's inn and drank wine and brandy, and then more brandy, and forgot to pay. Genius is apt to leave the lesser virtues in the lurch. He kicked the dogs out of the way, cursed the children, and was insolent to his old father who still fed and clothed him.

"He's no better than a wolf's whelp!" said Stein. "But he's got the true artist soul. He'll win!" Now if anybody knew the world, it was Godfrey Stein.

Nobody thought Hans Becht would win but his old mother. She was sure of it. She sat beside him with her knitting, talking all the time. Why did he not give himself more time? The rice−field must be flooded? Let the rice go this year. He spent three hours in the cotton this morning. And what with foddering the stock, and rubbing down even the pigs — . What were cotton and pigs to this chance? It would come but once a life−time.

Meanwhile, Hans, when free from pigs and rice and cotton, sat by the window and cut, cut, and whistled softly. The door of the kitchen stood open, and the chickens came picking their way on to the white floor. A swift stream of water ran through the millet field and across the garden, shining in the sun. The red rhododendrons nodded over it, and the rowan bushes, scarlet with berries. Beyond the millet field, there was a rampart of rolling

hills, bronzed with the early frost; but here blazed the crimson leaves of the shonieho, and there a cucumber tree thrust its open golden fruit, studded with scarlet seeds, through the dull back−ground. Beyond this rising ground were the peaks, indistinct as gray shadows, holding up the sky.

Sometimes Mother Becht caught Hans with his knife idle, looking at these far off heights, or at the minnows glancing through the brook near at hand. There was a great pleasure in his eyes.

"You are a fool to throw away your time," she cried. "Can you cut that red weed or the sky into your wood? You could not even paint them."

"God forbid that anybody should try!" thought Hans.

"Stick to your work! work counts. The things that count in the world are those which push you up among your neighbors."

Hans began to cut a tip to Joseph's nose.

"The things which count in the world — " he queried to himself. He did his thinking very slowly. His blind father sat outside in the sun; he came in every hour or two to hear how the work was going on, and then went to Schopf's shop to report. His wife told him that there was no doubt that Hans would succeed.

"Joseph is good, and Mary is very fine," she said. "But the mule is incomparable. If you could only see the mule! When Hans goes to London, do you think he will take us at once, or send for us in the spring? I think it would be safer to cross the ocean in the spring. But it will not matter to cabin−passengers — no steerage for us, then, father! He will be taking three of us — "

"Eh? How's that? Three?"

"Christine," she said, with a significant chuckle. "Oh, she'll be glad enough to take our Hans, then! She's had to work her fingers to the bone. She knows the weight of a full purse."

"Hans is welcome to bring her home whether he wins or not," said Father Becht. "He earns the loaf, and it's big enough for four. There's not a sweeter voice in Walhalla than Christy Vogel's."

"She's well enough," said Mrs. Becht, cautiously. "Vogel's tobacco brought half a cent in the pound more than ours, and it was Christine's raising and drying. Her beer's fair, too. I've tasted it." She went in and talked to Hans. "Only win; and Christine will marry you. She'll follow the full purse."

"She'll follow the man she loves, and that is not I," thought Hans, and he stopped whistling. His mother's voice sounded on, click−click.

"When we are rich — when we are in London — when we drive in a carriage — "

"She, too?" he considered, looking out thoughtfully about him at the fat farm−lands, the pleasant house, the cheery fire, and then away to the scarlet rowan burning in the brown undergrowth, and the misty, heaven−reaching heights.

Even his mother counted these things as nothing beside fame, London, money. Was he then mad or a fool?

Nobody thought he would win. Yet, everybody stopped to look in the window, with "good−luck, Hans!"

"See what a favorite you are, my lad," said his mother. "There's not a man or a woman in Walhalla to whom you have not done a kindness. Do you think the Lord does not know you deserve success? If He does not give you the prize instead of that drunken Heller, there's no justice in heaven!"

At last the Englishman returned. The decision was to be made that night. Hans had finished his panel that very day. He did not know whether it was bad or good. He had cut away at it as faithfully as he had rubbed down his pigs. He wrapped it up that evening and went down to the inn, stopping at Vogel's on the way. The old people were at the well; Christine had cooked the supper, milked the cows, and now she was up in her chamber singing little Phil to sleep.

Her voice came down to Hans below full of passion and sadness.

"Who is it she loves in that way?" he wondered. He stood in the path of the little yard, listening. Heller, coming across the street eyed the square−jawed, heavy figure. What an awkward figure it was, to be sure. How the linen clothes bagged about it! He glanced down at his own natty little legs and shining boots, and tossed his head jerkily. He carried his panel wrapped in cloth, and came in, banging the gate after him.

"Is that you, Becht? Been whittling, too?" he said, with an insolent chuckle.

Hans looked at him steadfastly, not hearing a word that he said. Was it Heller she loved? If he were sure of it, he would not speak a word for himself. No matter what became of him, if she were content. He was hurt to the core.

Christine came down. She wore some stuff of pale blue, and had fastened a bunch of wild roses in her bosom. She was so silent and cold with both the young men that one could hardly believe that it was the woman who had sung with such passionate longing over the child.

"Now you shall see my panel!" cried Heller, nervously adjusting his spectacles. He set it on the bench and dragged off the cloth.

"Ah−h!" cried Christine, clasping her hands; then she turned anxiously to Hans.

Hans was not ready with his words. His eyes filled with tears. He laid his hand on Heller's shoulder with hearty good−will. The work gave him keen pleasure. In the face of the mother bending over the child there was that inscrutable meaning which he found in the quiet valleys, the far heights. But Heller, oddly, did not seem to see it.

"Yes, very nice bits of chipping there!" pulling at his red moustache. "I shall ask fifty dollars for that."

Christine turned her searching eyes on him.

"Yes, fifty," he repeated, feeling that he had impressed her.

Hans, too, looked at him wondering. How could this paltry sot compel the secret into his work, which to him was but a holy dream? Christine was watching him anxiously.

"Is that your panel?" she said at last.

Hans nodded, hesitated a moment, and then broke the thin bit of wood in two and flung it into the road.

"It was nothing but a passably cut mule," he said.

Heller laughed loud.

"Well, time to be off. Wish me good luck, Christine!"

She smiled and walked with him to the gate. Hans followed, but she did not once look at Hans. As she opened the gate Heller laid his hand quickly on hers; a rose fell from her dress, he caught it and pressed it to his lips. His breath was rank with liquor. Hans thrust him back and strode between them.

"This must end. Christine, you must choose between this man and me."

"I can easily do that," she said, quickly.

Heller laughed. Hans gulped down a lump in his throat.

"Not to−night," he said.

By to−morrow, no doubt, Heller would be known as successful, the man whose purse would always be full. Christine must know precisely what she was choosing. It was like Hans to think of these things. If — in spite of it all — she came to him —

"There is another rose on your breast. Send it to−morrow to the man you love."

"I will." She did not look at him. She was as pale as himself. He went down the street, leaving her with Heller.

Two hours afterward he went to the inn where Reid was, and sat on a bench at the door. Half the village was inside waiting to hear the decision. His heart beat rebelliously against his breast. What if, after all, there had been great hidden merit in his panel? It was only natural that Christine should be won by clap−trap of success and money — she was only a woman. "But no," he answered himself, "what I am — I am. I want no varnish of praise or money."

Out came the crowd.

"I knew it!" "The most worthless lout in Walhalla!" "A drunkard for luck!" "He goes to London next week."

"Then he must come back for his wife," said Stein. "He told me to−night he was betrothed to Christy."

Hans stood up, and nodded good−night to them as he pushed through the crowd. He did not go home. A damp breeze blew up the valley. Down yonder were the far−reaching meadows, the lapping streams, the great friendly trees. He went to them as a child goes to its mother in trouble.

About six miles from Walhalla lies the trunk line of the Atlanta and Richmond railroad. At ten o'clock that evening, the moon being at the full, the engineer of the express train, going north, saw a man at a turn of the road signaling him vehemently to stop. Now, a way train in that leisurely region will pull up for any signal. But this engineer looked out in calm contempt.

"Reckon he don't know the express!" he said. A little child in the cars saw the man gesticulating wildly and laughed at him through the open window.

The man disappeared over the brow of the hill. The road made a long circuit around its base. When the engine came around this bend, the engineer, Hurst, saw on the track in front, a prison hand−car used to transport the

convict laborers from one division to another. The convicts had been taken to the stockade for the night, and the driver of the car was inside of it, dead drunk.

Hurst had been twenty years in his business; he understood the condition of affairs at a glance. He knew it meant death to all those people in the crowded cars behind him, to him first of all. He whistled down brakes, but he knew it was of no use. The brakes were of the old kind, and before the train could be slackened it would be upon the solid mass in front.

"We're done for, Zack," he said to the fireman. He did not think of jumping off his engine. It is noticeable how few common−place men try to shirk death when in the discharge of duty.

The brakes were of no use. The engine swept on, hissing, shrieking.

Suddenly Hurst saw that the car was backing! — creeping like a snail; but assuredly backing.

"Y−ha!" yelled Zack.

Hurst saw the man who had warned him standing on the platform of the car, working it. Now, it required at least four men to work that car.

In another minute the engine would be upon him.

"God!" You'll be killed!" shouted Hurst. The terrible hardihood of the man stunned him into forgetting that anybody else was in danger. At that instant from the train came a frightful shriek — women's voices. The passengers for the first time saw their danger.

It was but a point of time, yet it seemed like an hour. The train did not abate its speed. The man, a short fellow of powerful build, threw the strength of a giant into his straining muscles, his white face with its distended eyes was close in front in the red glare of the engine.

Hurst shut his eyes. He muttered something about Joe, — Joe was his little boy.

The train jarred with a long scrunching rasp, and — stopped. They were saved.

"Great God!" prayed Hurst. "Tight squeak for your life, Zack," he said aloud, wetting his lips with his tongue.

The people poured out of the train. They went up to the car, some laughing, some swearing. But every man there felt as if Death had taken his soul into his hold for a moment, and then let it go.

Three stout men tried to move the car. They could not do it.

"Who is that fellow?"

"A workman on the road?"

"No," said Hurst.

"Where is he?" asked several.

For he had vanished as if the earth had swallowed him up.

"He was a youngish, light complexioned fellow," said Zack. "Most likely a Deutcher from Walhalla."

"Whoever he may be, he saved our lives," said a director of the road. "I never saw such desperate courage. I vote for a testimonial."

The American soul exults in testimonials, and the Southerner is free with his money. There happened, too, to be a delegation of New York merchants on board, who valued their lives at a pretty figure. More than all, there was a widow from California, the owner of millions and of the pretty boy who had looked out of the window. "He saved my baby," she said with a sob, as she took the paper.

The testimonial grew suddenly into a sum which made Hurst wink with amazement when he heard of it. "That fellow will be king in Walhalla," he said.

It was near morning when Hans came home. He went to his room, said his prayers, and slept heavily. The next morning the village was on fire with excitement. The inn was full of passengers from the train; the story was in everybody's mouth. The director of the road had driven over from the station. When Hans went down to the pasture that morning he saw a placard stating the facts and the sum subscribed, and requesting the claimant to present himself at the station that evening for identification by Hurst.

Hans went on to the pasture. When he came back and was at work in the garden, he could hear through the paling the people talking as they went by.

"He will be the richest man in Walhalla."

"The director says the company will give him a situation for life. So they ought!"

Nothing else was talked of. The contests of yesterday and all the Flights into Egypt were forgotten.

"Ah, how lucky that fellow is," he heard his mother say on the sidewalk. "And there's Heller! Some people are

born to luck!" looking over the palings with bitter disappointment at Hans, digging potatoes.

But blind Father Becht listened in silence. He knew but one man in the world brave enough for such a deed. "I give that lad my blessing!" he said, striking his cane on the ground. He, too, turned toward Hans digging potatoes.

"Heller is packing to be off to London," somebody said. "They say Vogel's pretty daughter is to follow in the spring."

Hans stuck in his spade and went to his mother. "I am going to salt the cattle on the north mountain," he said.

"Very well. He does not care to know who this brave lad is," she said to his father. "He's a good boy, but dull — dull. They say there is a woman from California at the inn. She says she must see the man who saved her boy's life. She is rich and has her whims, no doubt."

Night came, but the man did not present himself. The next day the director, who was of a generous, impatient temper, offered a reward to anybody who could make him known. It was certain he had told nobody what he had done, or they would have come forward for the reward. The excitement grew with every hour. Hans returned late in the next day. He went to his spade and began to dig the rest of the potatoes. His mother followed.

"Well," she exclaimed, "he is not found! The story is gone by telegraph to all parts of the country. Here are fame and riches waiting for him. Some people certainly are born on lucky Sundays. There is Heller, the drunken beast, gone off to London. And you must dig potatoes! There's no justice in heaven!"

She clicked away, knitting as she went.

Now I may as well say here that although this happened years ago, the missing man is not yet found. He is the mystery and pride of all that region. The director put the money out at compound interest, but it is yet unclaimed.

Concerning Hans, however, who digs his potatoes in the same patch, we have something more to tell. When he had finished digging that morning he went into the house. The stout fellow had lost his ruddy color, as though he had lately gone through some heavy strain of body or soul. He sat on the kitchen steps and played a soft air on his violin. The earth he had been digging lay in moist, black heaps. He liked the smell of it. How like a whispering voice was the gurgle of the stream through the roots of the sumachs! Yonder was a Peruvian tree, raising its trunk and branches in blood−red leaves against the still air; far beyond were the solemn heights. He had just come from there. He knew how quiet it was yonder near the sky — how friendly. All these things came, as he played, into the music and spoke through it, and a great stillness shone in his eyes.

And at that moment — he never forgot it in all his life — a woman's hand brushed his cheek, and a red rose came before his eyes.

"You did not come for the rose, so I brought it to you," said Christine.

Later in the morning they went to the well together; all their neighbors were there, and it was soon known they were betrothed. Everybody took Hans by the hand. He had never guessed he had so many friends. "There is no better fellow in the world," they said to one another. "He deserves luck."

"That is why I was impatient with you," whispered Christine. "I could not bear to see that miserable Heller carry away all the praise and the money."

"These are not the things in the world that count," said Hans, quietly.

Presently an open carriage drove through the street.

"That is the lady who was in the train," the people whispered. "That is her boy. She says she will not go until she finds the man who saved them."

The lady, smiling, held her baby up that it might see the women. She was greatly amused and interested by the quaint German village. When the boy caught sight of Hans he laughed and held out his hands. The mother nodded kindly. "The brave man who saved us also wore a workman's dress, I am told," she said. "My boy saw him as he passed."

Hans took the child in his arms for a moment, and kissed him. When he gave him back to his mother his eyes were full of tears. Then the carriage drove on.

He stood at the door of the home that was so dear to him. Christine held his hand, the sun shone cheerfully about him.

"To think," said his mother, "that we are not to know who that brave fellow was."

His blind father took Hans's other hand softly in his.

"God knows," he said.

But no one heard him.