Mother's Warm Shawl.

A TALE.

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MOTHER'S WARM SHAWL.

CHAPTER I.

"And can I ever cease to be
Affectionate and kind to thee,
Who wast so very kind to me?
My mother!

"Ah, no! the thought I cannot bear;
And if God please my life to spare,
I hope I shall reward thy care,
My mother!"

THE evening sun was streaming through the window of a neat cottage in the little village of Mayfield; a clean, respectable-looking woman was kneeling on the cottage floor, with a large, old-fashioned cloth cloak spread out before her, from which garment she was evidently planning how to cut another of quite a different shape.

"My old cloak will be a hundred times more useful to Mary than to me," she said, as if

thinking aloud. "I go out so little in the winter time that I shan't miss it so very much; and I couldn't bear to let my girl go to service without some more decent outer garment than she has at present; and times being so bad just now, I really can't afford to buy her one. There's a great deal of the cloth very good in the old cloak yet, though I've had it pretty nigh eighteen years. Eighteen years! I declare it seems but yesterday, when I think of it. Ah! folks were very different *then* to what they are now. *Then* they bought a good article, paid a good price for it, and it lasted them for their lives, as you may say; *now*, all the cry is for something new. And the stuff they make now-a-days isn't to be compared to what it used to be. But there it is—girls must have what's in the *fashion*, as they call it; and a bad fashion it is, I say, that makes poor people set up to ape their betters; for, after all, it is only imitation. They can't afford the *real* thing—of course they can't—and so they buy a sad lot of rubbish, just made for show, and which looks fine for a little while, but has no wear in it, and becomes shabby in no time; and then the cry is

for something new again. For my part, I think dress is the ruin of girls now-a-days; it was very different when *I* was young. Servants then dressed according to their station, and looked all the more respectable for so doing; *now*, although girls get better wages, not one in twenty ever puts by a shilling against a rainy day. Why, when I married I had between seventeen and eighteen pounds in the savings' bank, besides a good stock of under-clothing (another thing that girls never think about now—they pay too much attention to a smart *outside* for that), and this very cloak, which cost upwards of two pounds; and was cheap at that, for I've never had another since. Well, well, I hope my poor Mary will get on in her place, and that God will give her grace to do her duty. She is but young, after all, to go out in the world—barely fifteen; it isn't much of an age. It's older than I was, though, when I got my first place at Farmer Daw's. A hard place it was, too; but somehow I got along. I don't think it any good for a girl to have it too easy at first; they expect it will always be so then. Mary will have plenty to

do, if what one hears is true; and all the better for her. Idleness is the mother of mischief, as my old mistress used to say. But if there isn't John coming home—I'd no idea of it being so late;" and the good woman was busy gathering up her work from the floor as her husband entered the cottage.

"Heyday, wife, what are you after now?" he said in a cheerful tone.

"It will all be out of the way in a moment, John; I have been so busy over it that I little thought how late it was. You see I am cutting up my old cloak for our Mary. She'd nothing of a decent-looking outer garment to wear; and I think I shall manage to get her an excellent cape out of this. It's been a good cloak to me —I will say that."

"And what will you do for yourself, wife?"

"Oh, I'll manage well enough, John. You see I must just stay in a little more this winter, that's all; and, maybe, next year, please God we do well, I shall be able to get myself a warm shawl."

"You always think of yourself last," said John Reynolds kindly. "I hope as how our

Polly will feel as she ought to do about all your kindness to her. It's not many a girl that has such a mother—I will say that for you, wife."

"And Mary's a good lassie, John, although she has her faults, like the best of us; but she's an affectionate girl; and if she is somewhat giddy at times, we old folks must remember she is but a young thing after all, and that we cannot put old heads on young shoulders."

"Where is she?" asked her father. "I should have thought she would have spent all her time at home, now that she'll be so soon leaving us."

"Mr. Maitland sent for her to go to the Vicarage this afternoon, John. I know both he and Mrs. Maitland wished to have a talk with her before she went away."

"There she is now, coming over the meadow," cried her father, watching with natural pride the approach of his eldest daughter, who quickened her pace and hastened up the garden path, as she recognised her father's face at the window.

"Such a beautiful present!" cried the girl, as she entered the cottage, and began untying the string of a neat paper parcel she was carry-

ing. "A Bible, and Prayer-book to match, and a pretty hymn-book," she continued, displaying her treasures as she spoke. "And, O mother! Mr. Maitland spoke so kindly to me, and so did Mrs. Maitland; I am sure I shall never forget it; and they told me they should often come and inquire of you how I was getting on in my place. But what are you doing, mother?" exclaimed Mary, noticing, for the first time, the work on which Mrs. Reynolds was engaged.

"What, indeed, Polly!" said her father; "why, there's your mother been and cut up the only warm thing she has to wear out of doors, in order that you should have a good cape to go to service with."

The tears stood in Mary's eyes. Her heart was still full of what Mr. and Mrs. Maitland had been saying to her. "Dear, dear mother, how good you are!" she murmured in a subdued tone. Then brightening up a moment afterwards, she added, "Directly I get my first quarter's wages, a sovereign shall go to buy mother a good warm shawl—just such a one as Farmer Low's wife wears. Mother, you know you said that was what you should like."

"Thank you for thinking of me, Mary," replied her mother; "but you'd better make no rash promises—you'll find plenty to do with your money at first, child."

"I shall want nothing more till spring comes, mother, now that I have that famous cloth cape. I shall not even have to buy any boots, for Mrs. Maitland has given me a good pair of Miss Ellen's, which she had outgrown. And my wages will be due just in time to send you the shawl for a Christmas-box; or, maybe, I'll get just one holiday at Christmas time, and then I can bring it to you myself."

"That's a good lassie," said her father, with an approving smile; "you never can do too much for such a mother—that's all I can say about it."

To do Mary full justice, she meant at the time every word she said, and really looked forward with pleasure to the fulfilment of her generous project. She was a warm-hearted, affectionate girl; but, unfortunately, wanted firmness and stability of character, and was thus easily led either for good or for evil. Her school-teachers used to say no girl ever formed more

resolutions to do right than Mary Reynolds; but, at the same time, they were obliged to admit that few girls ever broke through so many good resolves as she did. And why was this? Simply because Mary had too much self-confidence; and, trusting in her own strength, instead of seeking for help from God, she had no steadiness of purpose, and was like a reed blown about by the wind.

The truly Christian poet Cowper has beautifully pictured the frailty of man, and his utter inability to guide himself aright:—

"Weak and irresolute is man;
The purpose of to-day,
Woven with pains into his plan,
To-morrow rends away.

* * * *

"Bound on a voyage of awful length,
And dangers little known,
A stranger to superior strength,
Man vainly trusts his own.

"But oars alone can ne'er prevail
To reach the distant coast;
The breath of Heaven must swell the sail,
Or all the toil is lost."

When sailors are what they call "becalmed"—that is, when there is not a breath of wind

to swell the sails of their vessel—they sometimes have to wait for weeks together, unable to move an inch until a favourable wind shall arise. *We* need never fear having to wait for God's help and strength to do what is right. "Ask and it shall be given you." Is it not, then, madness to trust to our own weak nature when we have such a promise as that before us? *Pride* is at the bottom of it all. We do not like to admit our utter helplessness, and so go on floundering in the ocean of rash resolutions, till our frail bark is wrecked on the fatal rocks of self-confidence.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Maitland knew Mary's character thoroughly from her long attendance at the schools; and they were most anxious to talk seriously to her about what they felt to be her besetting sin. Mary had seemed deeply affected by what they had said to her, and had promised to keep a watch over herself.

"Your life will be very different to anything you have known before," said Mr. Maitland; "and you will have many difficulties and temptations from which you have hitherto been free."

"I seem to feel that now, sir," said Mary; "I didn't at first, everything seemed so bright."

"It's better you should feel it, Mary," said Mrs. Maitland, "and not expect all to be bright; though, indeed, I trust, if you try to do your duty, and pray to God for strength, you will be very happy."

"And remember, Mary," said Mr. Maitland, "that if you are faithful in your work, you are working for God; and that thought will help you through the day. Your time, when you go out to service, is no longer your own—it belongs mostly to your mistress; and, therefore, when you idle or waste your time, remember you are robbing her. Servants do not sufficiently think of this. But there is one thing for which you must always endeavour to find time; and that is, to pray to God night and morning. However much you may be hurried in the morning, it will always be possible to find time for a few *earnest words* to ask for God's blessing during the day; and then at night, when retiring to rest, let no weariness prevent your giving Him heartfelt thanks for preserving you in safety through the day.

You must go now, Mary; but I hope to see you again before you leave home, as I shall be passing your mother's cottage to-morrow morning."

Mary had thought over the kind clergyman's words all the way home, and had resolved to try and act faithfully in her new sphere of life. In two more days she would be leaving home; and, as the time drew near, she could scarcely account to herself for the regret she felt. When she had first heard of the situation to which she was going, her joy had been extreme. How delightful to get away from quiet old Mayfield, to be among new people, and see fresh places! It had been entirely by her own desire that she had decided on leaving home; for she was the only girl, and there was a large family of boys, so that Mary was of great use to her mother; but directly Mrs. Reynolds saw her daughter's heart was fixed on going to service, she made no objection whatever to it, although she felt how much she should miss her help. That day, as Mary walked home from the Vicarage, all her mother's goodness and unselfish affection seemed to rise up before her memory; and

when, on entering the cottage, she found her mother actually cutting up for her the only cloak she possessed, it seemed as if she could never sufficiently repay so much love. "However, Christmas will soon be here," thought Mary, as she busied herself getting tea; "and *then mother's warm shawl* will be here too. Dear mother! how I long to see her in it."

Presently all the boys came home: the elder ones—Fred and Harry—from work, and the three younger ones—Tom, Robert, and Matthew—from the village school. Mary was very fond of her brothers, although they often teased her a good deal; and she sighed, as she sat down to tea, to think how short a time she should be with them all. Only two more days! She swallowed her tea very quickly, to prevent the tears which she felt were ready to start.

"I say, Polly," cried her youngest brother, Matthew; "shan't you be sorry, after all, to go away from home?"

Mary filled her mouth with bread and butter, to prevent the necessity of an immediate answer.

"I think Poll will be very glad," said her

elder brother, Fred. "She will be earning a great deal of money, and will soon be quite rich."

"How much will our Poll get?" asked Harry.

"Five pounds a-year to begin with," said her mother, "and six pounds after the first six months—that is, if she gives satisfaction."

"That I know she'll do," exclaimed Fred, warmly. "I'd match Poll against any girl for quickness. All I have to say," continued he, "is, that I hope you won't be coming home dressed up like a peacock, as that silly Harriet Lane did; and then be ashamed to walk to church beside your own father and mother, because they are not so smart as you are."

Mary coloured as her brother spoke—half in anger, and partly from a consciousness that she had secretly envied Harriet's fine dress, when that vain and foolish girl made her appearance at church.

"I don't think our Polly will ever do like that," said John Reynolds, kindly; "at all events, she'd not even have the poor excuse that Harriet Lane had—that of having a bad

example set her at home. Mrs. Lane brought up her girls anything but wisely—every one knows that; whereas you children have had the blessing of a good mother, who has taught you nothing but what was good."

"What will you do with all your money, Polly?" asked Harry, with a wondering look; for to the simple ploughboy, earning only sixpence a-day, the idea of five or six pounds appeared almost incomprehensible.

"I shall put some in the savings' bank," said Mary, who had now recovered her self-possession; "but my first quarter's wages is nearly all bespoke already."

"Why, what are you going to buy?" exclaimed two or three of the boys at once.

"*Mother's warm shawl,*" replied the girl. "Mother has cut up her cloak for me, and I hope to get her a beautiful winter shawl by Christmas-day, so that she can wear it at church."

"No fear of our Poll being like Harriet Lane—is there, father?" said Fred, with a look of affectionate pride towards his sister.

"I hope and pray not," said John Reynolds,

in a grave tone; "I'd rather see her in her grave first."

None of the boys knew that their father had heard from Jane Lane, that very morning, that Harriet's love of finery had led her on from step to step in the downward path, until she had now left her place, and was leading a life of ruin both as regarded body and soul. They wondered, therefore, at their father's serious tone. So did Mrs. Reynolds, who was also unacquainted with the sad news about Harriet. "Come, come, John," she said to her husband, "you will make our Polly quite down-hearted if you talk so seriously." It was no use trying any longer, and Mary's tears were now flowing freely.

"Cheer up, my girl," said her father kindly; "I did not mean to make you cry; only I had good reason for what I said. You've a good warm heart of your own; and, with God's grace, that will help to keep you right."

"And remember, Mary," said her mother, "as there is no greater earthly misery than for a parent to see his child going to the bad, so there is no earthly happiness like that of feel-

ing that one's children are walking in the right way. And now your father and the boys are going to garden for a while, and you and I will clear away the things, and take advantage of the daylight to get on a bit with your cloak."

Mary and her mother sat and worked together for nearly an hour, and Mrs. Reynolds told her daughter all about *her* first going to service. Mary's place was likely to be very different to what her mother's first situation had been; for Mrs. Reynolds lived at a farm-house, where there was a great deal of hard rough work to do, whilst Mary was going as under-housemaid in a gentleman's family, where a large number of servants was kept. Still there was a great deal in the mother's experience which could be very useful to the daughter; and imparted as it was, with so kind and loving a manner, it had double effect.

The days that intervened were mostly spent at home, working with her mother. The cloak was soon finished, and was neat, and warm, and comfortable.

The last day was a trying one to Mary. "Good-bye" had to be said to so many, and to

Mr. and Mrs. Maitland, who both came to the cottage. Mr. Maitland prayed with her, and gave her his blessing; and although Mary cried, there was happiness mingled with her sorrow. The last night came.

"Now, mother, I've done crying," said Mary, as she bade her good-night; "I don't mean to cry a tear to-morrow."

"Good night—God bless you," rejoined her father and mother in the same breath; "God protect you, our very dear child."

CHAPTER II.

THE carrier's cart by which Mary was going started very early in the morning, yet several of her school-fellows were on the spot, to see her off, and so help her, by their cheerful words, to keep her resolution of the previous evening. Her father and mother saw her well wrapped up in her warm cloth cape, with an old shawl to put over her knees; for, although only the beginning of September, there was a frosty feeling in the early morning air. Then her father placed her snugly in one corner of the covered cart. Her brothers and school-fellows stood around, wishing her health and happiness. Once again she leaned forward to grasp her father's hand, and to receive her mother's kiss; and then the driver cracked his whip, and Mary found herself fast losing sight of her home. She stretched her head out of the back of the cart to see the last of them all, and

waved her handkerchief when the distance became too great to distinguish one from another. Many a handkerchief was waved in reply; and as she went along, Mary saw one well-known object after another pass away, until, at length, the country was quite new to her. Then a sense of her loneliness came over her, and for a few minutes she was quite overpowered. The kind voice of Norton, the carrier, aroused her. He had looked into the cart to see how his charge was going on, and had found her crying bitterly. "Come, come, cheer up, little maid," he said, in his rough, good-natured way. "I'll draw back the front curtain, and let you look about you a bit. It will be more cheerful for you," he added; "and you can talk to me as we go along."

These words of kindness restored Mary, and she soon began to take an interest in the new scenes through which she was passing.

"And so you're going to live at Underwood Hall," said Norton; "they say it's a mighty grand place, and they keep a whole crowd of servants. How did a young lassie like you hear of such a situation?"

"The housekeeper at the Hall is related to Mrs. Maitland's cook at the Vicarage; and she heard that they were in want of an under-housemaid, and recommended me."

"Well, well," said the carrier, "some people would say it was a fine start in life for a young lass like you to get into such a family; for my part, I'd rather one of my girls should begin a step or two lower, and work her way up, as the saying is."

"Why would you?" asked Mary, in a tone of surprise.

"It's apt to fill young girls' heads with high notions," replied Norton. "They get to love dress and extravagance, for the upper servants in a great house like Underwood Hall are a very gay set; and, although they earn high wages, you won't find they put much by out of them. I'm pretty nigh old enough to be your grandfather, Mary, and have seen something of the world, I can tell you; and I don't speak without reason. There's a case in point in your own mother and Harriet Lane's mother. They were both of them young girls, a few years older than you, maybe, when I first came to live in May-

field. I remember they both went to service about the same time. Your mother went as girl-of-all-work up at Farmer Daw's at Mill Ford; and Fanny Hunter—that was Mrs. Lane's name before she was married—got into the kitchen at Squire Noble's. Well, every one said what a hard place your mother would have of it; and how much better off Fanny was, going into a house full of servants, and where there would be so much less to do. When I say *everybody* said so, I mean those who didn't look below the surface, and who didn't remember the old saying, 'All is not gold that glitters.' The old folk knew better; and I remember your grandmother (she was a sensible woman was old Mrs. Price) saying to a neighbour who was speaking to her on the subject, 'Those that live longest will see most; and I know quite well that it's better my Mary should rough it a little at first than go where she'd have plenty of time to herself,—

> "For Satan finds some mischief still
> For idle hands to do."'

It turned out your grandmother was right in the end," continued Norton; "your mother

went up to Mill Ford Farm, and stayed there two years, although it was such a 'hard place.' But Mrs. Daw was a good mistress, though a strict one, and trained her servants well. There was no extravagance, neither, to be learned at the farm; and thus your mother had a good foundation laid for habits of industry and economy. At the end of the two years she got a better place as regards wages, and remained in it until she married your father. It was very different with Fanny Hunter. At Squire Noble's her silly head soon got turned by the habits of waste and extravagance she saw around her. All her wages went in dress; and the taste thus early acquired stuck by her through life. It was a bad day for Jem Lane that ever he saw the face of Fanny Hunter. He was taken, as many other young men have been, with a smart dress and a pretty face; and did not stop to ask himself what sort of a wife and a mother a girl was likely to make who hadn't a shilling laid by out of her wages, and who had allowed her old mother to die in the workhouse. A trifle a week from each of her children would have enabled the poor old woman

to keep a home over her head; but they all 'went to the bad,' as the saying is; and I fear the bitterest part of it all to the old mother was the thought that it was their bad bringing up that had had so much to do with it. You may guess the sort of home Jem Lane's has been; and you *know* what a different one you've had yourself. When your mother married she had saved enough to help to furnish the cottage comfortably; and, in addition to that, she was so good and thrifty a manager, that she has always been able to make a pound go nearly as far as many other folk would thirty shillings. You're but young yet, Mary, and there's no saying how you'll turn out; but you know what the Bible says, 'Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.' All you young 'uns have been trained up properly; and it will be your own faults, and the sin will be on your own heads alone, if you go wrong. You'll be thinking I'm a sad croaker, Mary, but I'm only doing as I would be done by; and I would be thankful to any one who would say a word of advice and warning to any of my girls at such a time.

It's of no use 'shutting the stable-door when the horse is stolen,' as my poor old father used to say. God bless him! He was fond of such sayings like, and had a great lot of them in an old dictionary; and there's nothing like 'striking whilst the iron 's hot,'—so I've just told you a bit of my mind, lassie, and I hope you won't take it amiss."

To tell the truth, Mary *had* thought the old carrier rather "*prosy;*" but he spoke in so really kind and friendly a manner, that she could not help paying attention to what he said; and she now thanked him heartily for his good advice.

"One word more, and I've done," said the old man. "Whatever you do, never be ashamed of being poor. Honest, virtuous poverty is no disgrace; and let no sneers or taunts of your fellow-servants induce you to spend more in dress than you can strictly afford; and, above all things, let nothing induce you to run in debt."

Mary earnestly assured her kind friend that she would never do that; and told him of her project of buying a warm shawl for her mother out of her first quarter's wages.

"Well, well, Mary, it's a good resolve, although it's something like 'reckoning your chickens before they are hatched,' as my old father would have said."

"Perhaps I shall get a holiday at Christmas," said Mary; "and if so, I shall bring the shawl myself—that will be better than sending it. Will you find room for me in your cart, Norton?" added the girl, smiling.

"Right willingly, Mary—only send me word the day before you want to come; and may God give you grace to do your duty."

The time passed away very quickly. Norton did not go within six miles of Underwood Hall; but the housekeeper had promised to send one of the men-servants with a spring-cart to meet Mary at the town where the carrier stopped. By twelve o'clock in the day they reached this town, and Mary again felt sad and lonely at parting with her kind friend. As the cart drove into the yard, she heard her name inquired for by a tall, pompous-looking man-servant. Norton helped her down out of the cart; and she went forward with a timid curtsey, and said she was Mary Reynolds. The man looked down

upon her with a contemptuous air; and telling her to wait there a few minutes, and he should not be long, he went inside the public-house. She waited for a long time, feeling very cold and lonely standing in the yard by the side of her box. The carrier had gone away to deliver some parcels; and seeing the man-servant was there with the cart, he had not troubled himself any more about Mary, concluding that she would set off directly for Underwood Hall. So poor Mary waited and waited, feeling tired and hungry. Once, during the time, a woman came to the door of the public-house and asked her to come in and have something; but Mary knew her mother had a great objection to her ever going into such places, so she thanked the woman, but said she should prefer remaining in the yard. At length the man-servant reappeared, followed by the ostler, who in a few minutes brought out a handsome light spring-cart, into which he assisted Mary to mount. He then put her box in after her; the man-servant took the seat beside her, and the horse started off at a quick pace. Mary had never ridden so fast before, and felt quite frightened at first,

particularly as her companion smelt very strong of spirits. He had looked very contemptuously at Mary's quiet, simple dress, and did not seem to consider her worthy of any attention ; so they rode on in silence until near their journey's end, when, as they emerged from a shady lane on to a breezy extent of fine open downs, he pointed to a large house on a hill side, surrounded by fine trees, and told Mary that was Underwood Hall. It looked very grand and beautiful, and Mary said so.

"Yes, it's as fine a place as any in the county ; and it's a fine establishment too, and well kept up. *You'll* feel rather out of your element for a time, I reckon ; but I dare say you'll soon improve," he added, in what was intended to be a very condescending tone.

Mary scarcely knew what reply to make. At last she said she would "do her best to give satisfaction."

The man smiled in a peculiar manner.

"Well, then, I tell you what," he said, "if Mrs. Groves—that's the name of the housekeeper—should happen to ask you what time the carrier's cart reached Ashbrook, you can just

say it was about five minutes before we started for Underwood Hall."

Mary looked as if she did not quite understand what her companion meant.

"I see, you are very 'green,'" he continued; "so I must explain myself. Mrs. Groves is rather fond of domineering over us—you'll soon find that out; and she may think I ought to have been back sooner than I shall be; so, to avoid all disagreeables, the shortest way will be to say the carrier's cart was an hour later to-day on account of being 'heavily laden,' or any other such likely reason. Do you understand *now*, little innocent?"

Yes, Mary *did* understand now; and she answered at once in a low but firm voice,—

"I hope Mrs. Groves may not chance to ask me anything about it, sir; for if she should do so, I cannot tell an untruth."

"That's the way the wind blows, is it?" he said; "and, pray, where may you have been brought up?"

"In Mayfield, sir," replied Mary. "My parents have lived there all their lives; and I think it's a cousin of Mrs. Groves's who is cook at the

Vicarage, and it was through her I heard of the place."

"All right, young woman," continued her companion; "and now you'll please to forget all that I said just now about Mrs. Groves—I did it to try you."

"I'm very glad you did not really mean it, sir," said Mary, greatly relieved.

The man made no answer, except by a significant whistle, and remained silent during the short distance they had still to go before reaching the Hall. On arriving there, they drove into a sort of square, formed by the domestic offices at the back of the house; and Mary felt timid and nervous as the cart stopped at a large door. Several men were loitering about, and one very smartly-dressed young woman came to the door as Mary alighted. She spoke good-naturedly to Mary, and bade her follow her to the housekeeper's room, as Mrs. Groves had left orders for her to go there when she arrived.

"Is Mrs. Groves there?" asked the man-servant who had driven Mary, and whose name was Baker.

"No," replied the girl; "she has been busy

some time showing a party round the picture-galleries."

Baker look pleased when he heard this.

Underwood Hall was what is called a "show place"—that is, there was a fine suite of state rooms, in which was a great deal of beautiful carved oak; and there was also a splendid collection of paintings. Sir Hugh Underwood kindly allowed the state rooms and picture-galleries to be shown to parties visiting the neighbourhood, and it was the duty of the housekeeper to accompany visitors over the house. Mary followed her fellow-servant, who was one of the housemaids, through many long passages, and could not help thinking that she should never find her way about so large a house. At length they came to the housekeeper's room, which was a very comfortable apartment, fitted all round with drawers and presses. There was no one there when they entered; and Susan, the housemaid, immediately began questioning Mary about her home, and whether she had ever been "out" before, and many other things.

"We shall have plenty to teach you then, child," said Susan, when she heard that Mary

had never yet been to service; "and I hope you'll be teachable, and take pains to learn."

Mary replied that she would do her best.

The conversation was here cut short by the entrance of Mrs. Groves herself. She was an elderly woman with grey hair, and looked quite like a "lady," Mary thought, in her black silk dress, and neat but pretty cap. She shook hands kindly with Mary, asked her whether she had had any dinner; and upon Mary replying in the negative, she desired Susan to ask the cook to send up some cold meat into her room for Mary. When Susan had gone to execute this commission Mrs. Groves said,—

"I wished you to have your dinner here, Mary, in order that I may have an opportunity of giving you a few hints and a little friendly advice before you go and mix with your fellow-servants."

Mary thanked Mrs. Groves for her kindness, and already felt quite at home with the good housekeeper, whose manner reminded her of her own dear mother.

Some cold meat and bread, and a glass of beer, were soon brought up; and then, whilst

Mary was eating her dinner, Mrs. Groves went on speaking to her—

"I have heard from my cousin, who, you know, is cook at the Vicarage at Mayfield, that you have been well brought up, Mary, and that made me feel inclined to take you, although you are so young and inexperienced. But every one speaks so well of your mother, that it is but reasonable to hope her daughter may, at all events, be a little like her. I went to service very young myself; and I have now two girls out in the world; and therefore I am well fitted by experience to advise you, who are, of course, utterly *in*experienced. There are many temptations to which so young a girl as you may be exposed, which you may be better able to withstand by being warned against beforehand. I am sure I need not tell you, Mary, that there is but *one sure* way in which you may hope to resist temptation *successfully*—and that is by praying for grace to enable you to do so. We have no power whatever of ourselves to keep out of harm's way; but we have only to 'ask' and we shall surely 'receive.' You will hear a great deal in the servants' hall

which, coming from such a home as you do, will shock you, and which you will *feel* and *know* to be wrong. Long may you continue to do so; never attempt to stifle such a feeling; and remember that it is generally *possible*, even without giving offence, to avoid joining in any conversation we know to be wrong. Think of the blessing our Saviour himself pronounced on the 'pure in heart,' and strive, in God's strength, to keep your thoughts and actions pure. It is a young girl's greatest safeguard. The moment you join in or encourage any immodest jest or any approach to ridicule of religion, that moment you have given Satan a power over you which he will not fail to take advantage of. Another thing I would warn you particularly against, Mary, and that is being led, by persuasion or ridicule, into any extravagance in dress. I am sorry to say you will have a bad example set you in this respect also. Many of the servants here dress far beyond their means; and, although they have excellent wages, they never have a shilling they can honestly call their own; and many of them have parents, whom it is their bounden

duty to assist, but who I know never receive the slightest help from them. You are dressed just as a young servant should be, and just what I should have expected, from what I have heard of your mother. Do not be persuaded into spending all your wages upon your own selfish gratification—even supposing that your parents do not need your help. It is the extreme of folly and extravagance to spend every farthing you earn in dress; rather follow your own good mother's excellent example, who began from the very first to put a portion of each quarter's wages in the savings' bank, and who, in so doing, learned habits of self-denial and economy, which have been invaluable to her through life. Come to me whenever you are in any difficulty, and I shall always have great pleasure in advising you for the best."

Mary had barely time to thank Mrs. Groves for her friendly advice, when Susan entered the room, and told Mary, if she had done her dinner, to come with her and she would show her her bedroom and tell her something about her work.

CHAPTER III.

SUSAN took Mary up-stairs into a comfortable room, in which were three beds. Mary was to occupy one of them, and Susan and the upper-housemaid the other two. There was a roomy cupboard, fitted up with hooks for hanging dresses and cloaks; and Susan told Mary two of the pegs were for her use.

"The sooner you get your things out of that small box the better, child," she said. "I'm sure your best cloak and dress must be sadly squeezed."

"This is my best dress," said Mary, pointing to the one she had on; "and I came in my best cloak, too."

"You'll want plenty of things then before you will be presentable," replied Susan. "How much wages are you to get?"

"Five pounds a-year for the first six months, and then six pounds if I give satisfaction."

Mary was surprised to see what little effect the announcement seemed to have upon Susan; and remembered how differently her brothers had received the news.

"It's little enough," said Susan, in what was meant to be a pitying tone, but which also sounded very much like a sneer; "barely sufficient to keep you decent, child. However, you must do the best you can. I suppose your friends are very poor?"

"Father's never had a farthing from the parish," replied Mary, blushing with a feeling of honest pride; "and he and mother have brought up a large family. I hope not only to be able to clothe myself out of my wages, but also to help my parents a little."

"Why, of course, you help your parents by the very fact of your going to service, don't you? They have one mouth the less to feed; and if that isn't helping them, I don't know what is. They can't expect a young girl like you to do any more."

Mary was, as we have before said, a warm-hearted girl; and as she listened to Susan's heartless speech, her own dear mother's life of

patient toil and devotion to her family rose up before her mind—that mind which still retained the impression made upon it by Mr. Maitland's affectionate advice. One by one, also, recurred to Mary's memory the numberless little instances of self-denial that she had seen her mother practice in order to afford pleasure either to Mary or her brothers; and, last of all, the cutting up of the long-treasured cloth cloak. This time, therefore, Susan's words fell comparatively harmless; it was not always to be so.

"You'll find Mrs. Groves a rare fidget," continued Susan, "and very fond of dictating; but it will be your own fault if you allow yourself to be led by her."

"She seemed very kind," said Mary.

"O yes, certainly; and so long as you fall into her ways of seeing things, she'll make much of you; but we all know a little more about her than you do; and if you are wise, you'll take our advice. As to your dress, I'll manage all that for you, if you'll leave it to me. In about a month or six weeks I shall be able to get you anything you may want from Cottrell when he comes round. He knows me, and

will accommodate you on my recommendation."

Before Mary had time to ask who Cottrell was, or, in fact, to arrive at any clear idea with regard to what her fellow-servant meant, the upper-housemaid, whose name was Hester, entered the room.

"Are you going to keep this girl up-stairs all day long, Susan?" she said ill-temperedly. "I am sure she's had time enough to unpack a dozen boxes."

"I have been giving her a little advice, Hester," replied Susan. "Mrs. Groves got hold of her before I did, though."

"If Mary wishes us in the servants' hall to take any notice of her, she'll have as little as possible to do with Mrs. Groves," said Hester, with a toss of the head.

She was a tall, showy-looking young woman, and wore a cap laden with pink satin bows. Both she and Susan also had black silk aprons. Mary followed them both down-stairs with a strange, unhappy feeling at her heart. She felt, for the first time in her life, half-ashamed of her honest poverty; ashamed of her neat

brown stuff dress; ashamed of her warm cloak, which had been the offspring of a mother's deep love. Oh that false shame, what misery it causes in the world! One-half of the crimes and follies of mankind arise from the feeling of "What the world will say!" "What my fellow-servants will think!" What *God* will think seldom troubles us so much.

There were a great many servants assembled in the servants' hall as Mary and her companions entered. Baker was there; but he stared rudely at Mary, as if he had never seen her before, and then continued his conversation with Lady Underwood's French maid, who was dressed more smartly than even Hester and Susan.

Mrs. Groves's words recurred more than once to Mary's mind, for in the short hour that preceded tea she heard enough to call forth many a blush. Susan addressed a few words to her from time to time in a sort of patronizing way; but at tea-time the cook good-naturedly made Mary sit by her, and talked to her kindly about her family and home. How grateful Mary felt for these few really friendly words. The even-

ing seemed dismally long to the poor girl, who had as yet no fixed duties to perform; and she felt relieved when bed-time arrived. Mary had promised her mother never to go to rest without first reading, at all events, *part* of a chapter in the Bible; and, accordingly, when she reached her bedroom she was about to take her Bible from her box, when false shame again made itself heard. Hester and Susan would laugh at her; she *knew* they would. "I will put it off until *to-morrow* night," she thought. "I shall know them better by then." So whispered *false shame;* but Mary's conscience spoke boldly to her in its turn: "And what if they *do* laugh?" With a sudden resolve, she went to her box, took out her Bible, and quietly moved towards the dressing-table, on which the candle was placed.

"So you set yourself up for a saint, do you, child?" said Hester, in a contemptuous tone, as Mary opened her Bible and began to read.

"O no, indeed," said Mary, with tears in her eyes; "only I promised mother and Mr. Maitland I would never neglect reading a little every night."

"And, pray, who is Mr. Maitland?"

"He is our clergyman at home; and he is so kind."

"You'll soon leave off all those home ways when you have mixed a little more with the world, Mary," said Hester. "All that sort of thing does very well whilst you are attending the Sunday School; but by the time you have been here a few months you will feel very differently, I can tell you."

Mary felt very angry at Hester's words. She knew better; she should never change, let them say what they liked. Little did she dream how true Hester's words would prove to be, and how that very confidence in her own safety would hasten the fulfilment of them. Mistrust would have proved her real safeguard; for then she would have thrown herself upon a higher Power for help and strength. Self-confidence was soon to prove her ruin. Mary read a whole chapter; but none of the words reached her heart. And when, with almost a look of consciousness in her *superior goodness*, she closed her book, and prepared to undress, none of that "peace of God which passeth all understand-

ing" had fallen upon her troubled spirit. She knelt down to say her prayers, and thanked God that she was not like Hester and Susan; and then, as she lay tossing about in her bed, unable to sleep, and listening to a conversation between them concerning a party which was to be given in the village in a few weeks' time, and to which they were invited, she failed to perceive that she had been acting the part of the Pharisee; and the text she had so often repeated—"He that exalteth himself shall be abased"—did not recur to her memory.

She slept very soundly after some hours' wakefulness; and her fellow-servants were nearly half-dressed when she awoke in the morning.

"You'd better look sharp, Mary," said Susan; "Mrs. Groves expects us all to be down by half-past six."

Mary was a very quick girl, and she made extra haste that morning; so that she was ready by the time Susan was dressed. True, she had no leisure for reading; and the "few earnest words" about which Mr. Maitland had spoken were also neglected.

She hurried down-stairs, and was soon busy at her work. Although so young, Mary had been well instructed in many of the duties of her situation. Her mother had been an excellent servant in her day, and had made use of her knowledge in her cottage home, where everything, although plain, bore the impress of neatness and order. Mary had had great advantages in being trained in such a home. In addition to this, Mr. Maitland made a practice of having the first-class Sunday-school girls for a month at a time by turns to stay at the Vicarage, where they were instructed by the housemaid in many branches of household work which they could not learn in a cottage. Hester and Susan were, consequently, not a little surprised to find the "little cottage girl," as they called Mary, very quick and ready at her work; so that they had not much trouble with her. She was very neat and clean, also, in her person; and Mrs. Groves expressed herself much pleased with the lilac print dress, simple white cap without any trimming, and clean coarse apron, in which Mary went about her work. The kind housekeeper took many

opportunities of talking to Mary and giving her good advice, and regretted to see the evident disinclination with which she listened to it. The fact is, by the time Mary had been little more than a month in her situation she had greatly changed in many respects, and that not for the better. She no longer thought Mrs. Groves "very kind," but joined with Susan in calling her "a great bore," and was always glad when she could escape one of her "lectures," as she called them. This was a bad sign; but there were others still worse. Her Bible was scarcely ever opened now; and she would join Hester and Susan in all their frivolous talk about dress and parties. And why did Mary's fellow-servants take so much pains to get her into their way of thinking? In the first place, they found Mary very useful to them in many ways. Strong, quick, and willing, she was always ready to do far more than her own share of the work, and was glad, in this way, to propitiate Hester and Susan's favour. They flattered Mary in return; and finding it impossible, owing to her sharing their room, but that she must be acquainted,

to a certain extent, with all their plans and projects, they thought it the wiser course to spare no pains to bring Mary over to their way of thinking. They succeeded but too well. Poor, silly Mary! when she thought herself strongest she was in reality most weak; and the loan of a smart-flounced pink muslin dress, which Susan shortened for the occasion, and dressed out in which Mary accompanied Hester and Susan to a "party" given by a cousin of the latter, and which had been fixed to take place on an evening when Mrs. Groves was absent from the Hall on a visit to her daughter, completed the evil influence which Mary's fellow-servants obtained over her. Henceforth she was their slave. One lie requires many more to back it. Mary caught a violent cold that evening, through wearing so thin a dress, and had to make all sorts of excuses to Mrs. Groves, who found her in bed on her return the next day, and suffering from violent rheumatic pains in her limbs. The housekeeper nursed her with the utmost kindness, and Mary's conscience reproached her as she felt what a deceitful part she was acting

Once she almost felt tempted to confess all to her kind nurse; for you may be sure Mary was not happy in the new path she had chosen to walk in. The Bible is full of texts which testify to the fact that no one who knowingly and wilfully transgresses God's commandments can be happy. "The way of transgressors is hard," says the wisest of men. "There is no peace," saith God himself, through his holy prophet, "to the *wicked.*"

And thus Mary lay tossing about on her bed of pain and suffering. Hester and Susan watched Mrs. Groves's attention to Mary with jealous anxiety. They knew that Mary was not as yet completely hardened; and they feared that the good housekeeper's attention might make her repent of what she had done, and perhaps confess all, implicating them in so doing. To guard against such a possibility, one or other of them generally contrived to be in the room with Mary when Mrs. Groves visited her; and that kind-hearted person almost reproached herself with the somewhat unfavourable opinion she had formed of both Hester and Susan, when she saw how unre-

mitting they were in their attendance upon their sick fellow-servant. Little did Mrs. Groves surmise the true reason. They succeeded in stifling all Mary's good resolves, and flattered her by repeating what Baker had said concerning her—namely, that he never should have thought Mary could ever have looked so "nice" as she did on the evening of the "party." "It only showed," he said, "what dress could do, and how different she would look when she had earned wages sufficient to get better clothes to wear."

"By the bye, Mary," said Susan, when she had finished the disclosure of Baker's opinion, which she saw had taken effect on Mary's weak mind,—"by the bye, Cottrell will be here next week; and you must consider a little what you will most require."

Mary had long since known all about "Cottrell;" but as my readers may not be so well informed, it will be necessary to explain. "Cottrell" was one of a numerous class of travelling drapers who drive a thriving trade by going about the country making periodical calls, generally once a month. The majority

of their customers are the servants in large establishments, who are tempted by the offer of *credit* to anticipate their wages, and most frequently to spend far more than they can honestly afford. It is no uncommon thing for a girl to have spent the whole of her quarter's wages long before it becomes due ; and in this way she has literally never a shilling she can call her own.

"Look at this beautiful dress," says the draper. "I can assure you it is a positive bargain, and you will never cease to regret it if you let it escape you." "But I really cannot afford it," perhaps a girl will say. And then comes the wily reply: "But, you know, you need not pay for it *now;* we can settle all that when you next receive your money." And the chances are that the silly girl is caught in the snare laid for her, and becomes the possessor of a dress for which she will have to pay far more than it is really worth, and the paying for which will cripple her for months to come. These travelling merchants deal in every imaginable article of clothing,—dresses, shawls, cloaks, stockings, calicoes, boots and shoes, bonnets,

and even books and stationery; in fact, everything that a servant can want to buy. And it is a common thing to hear one of these itinerant traders calculating the gross amount of wages received by the servants in an establishment, and adding the whole sum, in prospective, to his annual receipts; knowing that, sooner or later, it will all be sure to come into his hands. The entire system is most pernicious; and I have known instances where a mistress, who has really the true interests of her domestics at heart, has forbidden these traders to come to the house; but in most cases they are not interfered with. It is true that where a house is situated a considerable distance from a town it is frequently an advantage to be able to procure anything on the spot; but the reckless extravagance to which the credit system gives rise far more than counterbalances any slight convenience which may arise from the visits of these wily traders. Cottrell and his wife travelled over the country in a light covered van. They were well-to-do in the world, and had a thriving shop in a market-town about twelve miles distant. Two grown-up sons managed

the business at home, whilst their parents plied the country trade.

"So now, Mary, you must begin to think of what you will require of Cottrell when he comes," continued Susan; "I know you have no money, and your wages will not be due until just before Christmas. But that does not signify; he will be quite willing to trust any friend of *mine*. And so you can get what you want, and make yourself look a little more 'presentable.'"

This was a very favourite word of Susan's; and Mary scarcely understood the meaning of it. She was much better that afternoon, and was sitting up a little, although Mrs. Groves had advised her not going down-stairs for another day.

"I shall have very little money to spare, Susan, for I want to buy a good warm shawl."

"And make yourself look a little old woman at once," said Susan, laughing. "You'd far better buy a fashionable mantle."

"It is not for myself," said Mary, "but for mother. I promised I would give her a warm shawl for winter wear. She wants one very badly."

Mary did not like to tell Susan that the cloth cape she wore had been made of her mother's only warm out-door garment.

"Then I think your mother is very inconsiderate to ask you to do such a thing out of your small wages."

"Mother never asked me," replied Mary, warmly; "I promised of my own accord."

"The more fool you," said Susan, "to make such rash promises. But your mother knows that you never will be able to fulfil it, for the first twelvemonth at all events; so you need not trouble about that."

"O yes, indeed, I mean to do it, Susan; I have made up my mind mother shall have a warm shawl to wear on Christmas-day when she goes to church."

"And what do you expect to give for one?"

"Farmer Daw's wife gave a sovereign for hers, and I should like to get mother one just like it."

"And how will you manage about your own dress?"

"I can do very well until the spring," said Mary.

"Then, of course, you must give up all idea of going to Headly with us to my cousin's party."

"Unless I can wear my brown stuff dress," said Mary.

Susan burst into a loud laugh.

"You would get finely ridiculed, child, I can tell you; and I really could not introduce you to my friends in such a dress; therefore you must make up your mind either to give up the party or your mother's warm shawl."

Mary did not hesitate a moment; for, with all her weakness, she dearly loved her mother.

"I will buy the shawl, Susan, whatever I have to deny myself."

"I wish you had told me that before," said Susan, in a huff, "and I wouldn't have troubled myself to get you invited."

Susan was not speaking the truth. She had mentioned nothing whatever to her friends about Mary's coming, although she intended to take Mary with her to Headly, as by that means she would have her still more in her power. Mary continued firm in her resolve to get the shawl for her mother; but told Susan she did not want credit for it, as she should not require it before

Christmas, and that her wages would be due before that time.

"I will speak about it to Cottrell when he comes," she added; "and he can bring some shawls of the kind I want when he comes round on his next visit."

And so matters went on, until the day before the expected visit of the travelling draper, when Mary received a letter from home. She had not heard before for some weeks; for the writing a letter was a great undertaking, as neither her father nor mother was a very first-rate scribe. This letter was from her father; and Mary's eyes filled with tears as she read it. Her mother had been ill for some weeks, having caught a violent cold, which had settled on her chest; and the doctor said she must be very careful, and must not think of going out for many weeks yet to come—probably not all the winter. She had a widowed sister living in Mayfield, who had been able to come and nurse her; so that Mary's absence from home had not been felt so much as it otherwise would have been. John Reynolds forbore to tell his daughter that her mother's cold was attributable to her having

gone to church very thinly clad, and being caught in a violent shower of rain. She had had no warm cloak to keep her dry.

"What is the matter, child?" said Hester and Susan, as they found Mary crying over her letter.

Mary told them all about her mother's illness. They made no remark at the time; but the next day, when the arrival of Cottrell's van caused great excitement in the servants' hall, Susan took the opportunity of whispering to Mary—

"If your mother is likely to be confined to the house all the winter, Mary, she will not want her shawl, at all events for some time. It would do very well if you bought it out of your next quarter's wages. At all events, there will be no harm in your coming and just looking at Cottrell's things; they say he has a splendid assortment."

There was great harm in Mary's going to look if she had no intention of purchasing anything, because it led her into temptation; but she really did intend to inquire about her mother's shawl, and so she followed Susan into the servants' hall. The long table was nearly

covered with different articles, all arranged so as to show them off to the best advantage. Susan introduced Mary as a new customer; and Cottrell and his wife bowed very politely to her, which made her blush and feel quite awkward.

"I am not going to buy anything to-day," said Mary, "for I have no money; but next time I should like to look at some dark woollen plaid shawls, if you have any with you when you come round again."

"It is of no consequence at all about the money," said Cottrell; "any friend of 'Miss' Susan's I should be most happy to oblige. I have no shawls with me to-day of the kind you mention; indeed, they are very little worn by 'fashionable' people now; but, of course, if you wish to buy one I would bring some for you to select one."

Meanwhile Mrs. Cottrell was displaying a quantity of dresses, which she declared to be "dirt cheap." They were light checked mohairs, and Hester and Susan both chose one of them. There was a pale blue one, rather a shorter length than the others.

"There, Mary; this would just suit your complexion," she said.

Mary looked at it, and thought it very pretty, but said it was too thin for that time of year.

"Of course it is, child; and that makes it so cheap. Only twelve shillings and ninepence for this beautiful dress! But you see it would do for a party dress now, and would come in for next summer afterwards; so, after all, you would only be buying your summer dress a few months before the time."

"And really, Mary," added Hester, in a half-whisper, "you would be a complete 'ninny' to think of buying a shawl for your mother, when she is not going out the whole winter."

"O Hester, I don't know that; I am sure I hope she will."

"Well, when you hear she is able to go out it will surely be high time to think about the shawl, will it not?"

Mary wavered.

"Baker said you would look so well in blue," suggested Susan.

This turned the scale; still some slight scruple remained: "I promised never to run into debt."

"Good gracious, child, what next? You'll not be running into debt. No one pays Cottrell the same time they buy anything of him."

This was no proof that everybody did not run into debt, though, Mistress Susan; but Mary failed to see through the false argument. I fear she was wilfully blind on the subject.

"Besides, you will have your money ready by the time he comes again," said Hester.

This argument proved conclusive, and Mary was persuaded to purchase the pale blue mohair at eleven shillings and sixpence—a somewhat lower price than the other dresses, on account of its being a shorter length.

Then there was lining and ribbon to trim it with to be bought, and a "great bargain" in collar and cuffs, without which Susan said the dress would be spoiled. At length Cottrell took his departure, and Mary stood gazing at her little heap of finery, which she found, upon reckoning up, had absorbed nineteen shillings of her first quarter's wages.

"I shall only have six shillings left," she thought; and a deep sigh escaped her lips as she turned away from her new purchases.

CHAPTER IV.

CHRISTMAS time drew near; and Sir Hugh and Lady Underwood, instead of entertaining a large circle of friends at the Hall, as they were accustomed to do, were suddenly called away from home by the alarming illness of a married daughter. Before leaving they told Mrs. Groves that they wished all the servants to have a few days' holiday that Christmas to spend amongst their friends, and suggested that two or three of them should go away at a time. Susan had a married sister and also a brother and cousin living at Headly, and Hester and Baker's friends lived in the same neighbourhood; so Mrs. Groves arranged that the spring-cart should take Hester and Susan and Mary and Baker to Headly, whence Mary could continue her journey home to Mayfield by the carrier's cart. Norton only left Headly on alternate days, and the day on which Susan had asked permission

to leave did not happen to be one of them; but she had promised Mrs. Groves that she would take Mary with her to her sister's house, and see her off safely by Norton the following day. Mrs. Groves knew that Susan's sister was married to a very respectable small farmer at Headly; and she therefore saw no objection to the proposed plan. She cautioned Mary, however, not to go visiting about with Susan, but to remain quietly at her sister's until the following morning. "My reason for giving you this piece of advice, Mary," she said, "is that I believe Susan has other connections in Headly, who are not so desirable acquaintances for a young girl as I know her sister, Mrs. Burford, to be."

Mary's feelings at the prospect of her holiday were not those of unmixed pleasure. Some few weeks since, how her heart would have leapt for joy at the thoughts of her dearest wish being thus unexpectedly fulfilled! But now!—she tried to console herself with Susan's argument, that her mother did not really need the warm shawl, now that she was so much of an invalid as to be unable to stir out; she even recalled

her mother's own words, when she had first promised her the shawl, "You'll find plenty to do with your money at first."

All would not do. She had deliberately made a promise, and had broken it to gratify her own selfish vanity. At such times, when Mary's conscience thus spoke plainly to her, she could scarcely bear the sight of her new dress, for it seemed to reproach her with her broken faith to one of the best and most self-denying of mothers. But Mary did not always feel like this. There were times when Susan's flattery, and the glowing description she gave of the party at Headly, which was to take place the very evening of their arrival, filled her head with vain and foolish thoughts. Susan had cautioned her not to hint to Mrs. Groves a word concerning this party.

"She will be sure to find out that you had better not go, or something of that kind," said Susan.

And so Mary held her tongue, although she could not help thinking that Mrs. Groves would never object to a party at Mrs. Burford's, and wondered why Susan had such an objection to

its being mentioned. The blue mohair dress was finished. Susan had cut it out, and assisted Mary a little in the making of it. Mary had been obliged to work at it very secretly, and at such times as she felt pretty sure that Mrs. Groves would not be coming into the servants' hall; for she knew that the housekeeper would question her about it. When finished, it was a very smart, and a very useless dress for a girl in Mary's position; and she felt how little her mother would have approved of her purchase. Susan, however, was never tired of praising it, saying, that *now* Mary really looked respectable, and she should have great pleasure in introducing her to her friends at Headly. Mary wondered more than ever to hear Susan talk thus, for Mrs. Groves had spoken of Mrs. Burford as being so quiet and domesticated that it seemed strange she should think so much of dress. To tell the truth, Mary more than half suspected that the party was not to be given at Mrs. Burford's; but she thought it prudent to ask very few questions on the subject.

It wanted about ten days to Christmas. Mrs. Groves had paid Mary her first quarter's wages,

and had kindly advised her respecting the spending of her money.

"You will really require very little in the way of clothing until spring," she said. "I don't know whether your parents are in want of any help, Mary; but illness always brings expense with it, and a small sum, which you can very well spare, may be of great use to your mother just now."

Mary blushed, and said she should see when she got home how she could best help her mother. She could not tell Mrs. Groves that she had already forestalled almost the whole of the money she had just received.

"Should your parents not require your assistance, Mary, I should advise you to put a sovereign of your money in the Mayfield Savings' Bank. There is nothing like beginning early: and when once you have a trifle laid by, then there is a strong inducement to keep adding to it."

Cottrell came a day or two after Mary had received her wages. He brought some woollen shawls for her to look at; but they were very dear, and quite inferior in quality to the one Farmer Low had bought for his wife at Headly.

Mary did not, therefore, take one; and hoped that before her mother really wanted to wear a shawl she should be able to purchase her one out of her next quarter's wages. She paid Cottrell for what she had had of him the time before, and sighed as she thought of how little power she had left herself of assisting her parents, should they really need her help. That same evening she received a letter from home, which increased her regret. It was from her brother Harry, who had for some time been attending a night-school which had been established by Mr. Maitland for the benefit of those lads who, being employed at work all day at the different farms in the neighbourhood, had no leisure, except at night, for improving themselves. Harry had been trying very hard to improve himself in writing, and a long and very creditably written letter to his sister was the first result of his efforts. Its contents were as follows:—

"MY DEAR POLLY,

"This letter comes hoping you are well and happy, as it leaves me at present. I am sure it will please you to hear that dear

mother is better ; and the doctor says that if so be that the weather keeps mild he thinks she will be able to go to church on Christmas-day. We hope you will get a day or two to come to us then ; and I say, Poll, if you do come, and bring what you said you would along with you, won't it be jolly to see dear mother wearing it the first time she goes out ! Fred and I have saved up all our odd pence, and we have enough money to buy her some good flannel, which the doctor said she wanted sadly, now she has been so ill. So, with your present of the warm shawl, she will be quite set up. We can never do too much for our mother—can we, Poll ? She don't know that I am writing this letter ; but I thought I had better let you know about her being so much better, so that if you can't come yourself you can send the parcel for her to get it before Christmas. But *do* try and get leave to come, Polly—we all long to see you ; it seems a year since you went away. I saw Norton last week, and he said he hoped you would soon be wanting a lift in his cart again. I think a sight of you would do mother more good than anything the doctor can send her. I saw the tears

in her eyes last night when father only spoke of the chance of your getting leave to come home this Christmas. We boys, too, all miss you, I can tell you; for, although we used to tease you a good deal, we are all very fond of you, Polly; and Fred was saying only yesterday you were worth a hundred Harriet Lanes. *She* would never have thought of spending her money in buying *her* mother a warm shawl; *not she.* Every farthing went in dress for herself; and see what she's come to! Dear Poll, I have been nearly a week writing this letter; for, you see, I haven't much time when I come home from the evening school. I hope you will not mind the mistakes. We all send you our love; so no more at present from your loving brother,

"HARRY REYNOLDS."

"What!—crying again, Mary! I'm sure, if I were you, I'd far rather people didn't write to me at all than write such melancholy letters as you always seem to be receiving. What's the matter now?"

"Oh, nothing is the matter, Susan. Dear mother 's better, and——"

"Well, that's something to cry for, certainly," said Susan, laughing.

"You know I was not crying for *that*, Susan. But now mother's better, and will, perhaps, be able to go to church on Christmas-day; she will want the warm shawl I promised her, and I am so sorry I have been so foolish."

"Well, all I can say is that you are a very ungrateful girl, Mary. There have Hester and I been taking so much trouble about you to make you look like other people, and to introduce you to our friends, and then all the thanks we get is that you go and turn round upon us and——"

"O no, indeed, Susan; I know it is only I who am to blame—I ought not to have been so easily persuaded."

"Persuaded, indeed! We only advised you, Mary. What could it possibly signify to us whether you chose to look a dowdy all your life or not. Pray, don't run away with the notion that we had any interest in the matter."

Mary wondered to hear Susan talk so; for she felt that both Hester and Susan had really done their utmost to persuade her to buy the mohair

dress, let them say what they pleased. "It is done now, Susan," she said; "and I hope I shall be wiser another time. But there is one great favour I am going to ask you. I know that Farmer Low bought his wife's shawl at Headly; and it was a very much better quality than those which Cottrell brought with him the other day. If you could only lend me a sovereign until my next wages became due, I could buy mother a shawl as I pass through Headly on Thursday next; and I should be so very, very grateful," she added, with tears in her eyes.

"You must think I'm made of money, to talk in that way, Mary; I shall not have a half-crown left when I've paid some things I owe for in Headly."

"Do you never put any money in the savings' bank, then?" asked Mary in a tone of surprise, for she knew that Susan had twelve pounds a-year. A loud laugh was the only answer to Mary's question.

Mary felt far more disposed to cry than to laugh. "Then you can't help me, Susan?" she said.

"That I certainly can't; and as for a savings' bank, I suppose it is Mrs. Groves who has been putting that into your head. You'll soon find out that it is impossible to put by money, if you wish to make any appearance in the world;" and Susan drew herself up in a consequential manner as she spoke. She had no wish to quarrel openly with Mary just then, for the following reason:—Mrs. Groves was going away for a week when all the other servants had taken their holiday; and Hester and Susan contemplated having a "party" in the servants' hall during her absence from home. The good housekeeper would never have objected to their having two or three friends to see them at Christmas time; but this was not all they wanted. They had determined to invite all their Headly acquaintances—many of whom were young men of anything but good and steady character. The cook, a weak and good-natured woman, had made no serious objections to the proposed party; and the only person likely to be an obstacle in their way was Mary. Notwithstanding all her weakness and all her fellow-servants' flattery, there were times when her home teaching would recur to

her mind; and at such moments she would make many good resolutions. It was then that both Hester and Susan felt a doubt as to Mary being a firm ally. They feared that at the very last moment some scruple might arise in her mind which would prevent her falling into their plans, and, perhaps, lead her to compromise them with Mrs. Groves. This it was that made them so anxious for Mary to be one of the Christmas party at Headly; knowing that after that event Mary's mouth would be completely shut, and they could do what they liked without fear of her attempting to hinder them.

It was a clear, bright, frosty morning when Mary and her companions started in the spring-cart for Headly. Mrs. Groves was very kind to Mary, and had given her a small basket of nourishing things for her mother, and had spoken so affectionately to her at parting, that the girl's heart was very full, and she was more than once on the point of confiding in her kind friend; but she wanted the courage to confess how weak she had been, and so the opportunity passed away.

Mrs. Groves saw plainly there was something on Mary's mind, and determined to speak to her about it after her return from her holiday.

"Poor child!" she thought to herself, "I fancied she would have been half wild at the prospect of going home for a few days, and, instead of that, she looks quite sad and careworn. It can't be that she is so anxious about her mother, because she heard from her brother to say she was much better. I don't know what it is, but I'm sure there's something wrong; and when Mary comes back, I'll try and find out what it is. I was anxious to befriend and advise her as far as lay in my power; but, somehow, latterly she has avoided entering into conversation with me as much as possible. These great houses are bad places for young inexperienced girls; but I'd heard so much of Mary's good bringing-up that I had hoped she would not have been easily led away."

Meanwhile, Mary and her companions were on their way to Headly. Hester and Susan were joking and laughing with Baker as they went along; but Mary sat very silent, and looked,

as Baker said, more as if she was going to a funeral than for a holiday.

How little she thought she should ever feel like that in the prospect of going home! She remembered how she had talked with her brothers, before leaving home, of the bare probability of her having a day's holiday at Christmas, and how the very idea had filled her with happiness; how she had pictured to herself the opening of the important brown-paper parcel, and her mother's look of affection on receiving the "warm shawl," not so much for its own sake—welcome as the gift would be to her—but as the proof it afforded of the self-denying love of her only daughter.

And now all that was over; and although Mary knew that no word of reproach would ever pass her mother's lips, her own conscience, not yet hardened, was incessantly at work, and the "still small voice" made itself heard above all Hester and Susan's merriment and Baker's ridicule. Upon reaching Headly, Baker drove into the yard of the very public-house where Norton the carrier stopped, and where Mary had had to wait so long on the day when she

left home to go to Underwood Hall. They drove up to the back door; and the same woman who had asked Mary to come in and take something now came out and welcomed Hester and Susan very warmly.

To Mary's great surprise, they both got out of the chaise-cart, and prepared to enter the house, telling Mary to follow them.

Mary called to Susan as she was going into the public-house. "I thought we were going to your sister's — to Mrs. Burford's," she said.

Susan smiled. "We shall go there by and bye," she replied; "but she lives more than a mile off, and we are half-starved with hunger and cold. This is my cousin's house, Mary; so you need not be afraid."

"I'm not afraid, Susan; only——"

"Only what?"

"I thought we were going to a party at Mrs. Burford's."

Hester and Susan both laughed loud at this speech.

"You are afraid you will not have an opportunity of wearing your new dress, after all,"

cried Hester. "It's all right, Mary; only come along with us."

Mary was on the point of declaring that her hesitation had nothing whatever to do with her dress, or, indeed, any thoughts about the party; but Baker and one of the men from the yard joined them at that moment, and almost pushed Mary before them into the house.

They all went into the bar-parlour, and Susan's cousin insisted upon them all having "something warm" after their cold ride. But Mary refused to take anything except a small glass of ale and a biscuit. Her companions were not so particular; and they all soon began to talk and laugh very loudly, under the influence of what they had drunk. Mary sat looking on with very uncomfortable feelings; and, to add to her discomfiture, it began to rain very heavily soon after they reached Headly, and she saw very little chance of their getting to Mrs. Burford's that day, particularly as Hester and Susan had taken off their bonnets and cloaks, and seemed to be making themselves perfectly at home. Mary knew no one at Headly, and had no alternative but to

stay where she was, although she felt very uncomfortable, knowing that her mother would not at all approve of it, and remembering also Mrs. Groves's warning to her that morning.

Mary had written a few hasty lines home to say that she was coming, and to ask her brother to tell Norton to keep a place for her in his cart.

Hester and Susan went out of the room with their cousin, and Mary heard them laughing and talking in an adjoining room. Presently they returned without their cousin, and Susan said jokingly to Mary, "What can't be cured must be endured, you know, Mary. I suppose even Mrs. Groves would not advise your going out in this pouring rain for the sake of being introduced to my pattern sister, Mrs. Burford?"

"But I thought we were all going there this evening," said Mary.

"The fact is," said Hester, in a confidential tone, "the party is to be given *here*, Mary, and not at Mrs. Burford's. You know how 'fussy' Mrs. Groves is; so we let her remain in ignorance of the fact, and rather encouraged her in the belief that it was at Mrs. Burford's we

were going to spend the evening. Of course you will say nothing to the contrary; and we shall enjoy ourselves very much, and she'll be none the wiser. Had it been fine, we meant to have walked over to Mrs. Burford's this evening, just to see her, but we can't go in the rain. This place is much more convenient for you, too, than Mrs. Burford's would have been, for I hear the carrier leaves Headly very early in the morning—almost before it is light; so that you would have had some trouble in getting here by that time had you gone to Susan's sister's. Therefore, all things considered, I hope you will put away those 'glum' looks as soon as you can. You are not always so very particular; remember the party you went to some time since, and the pains we took to make you look presentable. We shall have fine fun by and bye; there is to be a fiddler here, and we shall have a capital dance."

There was nothing for Mary to do but to submit; and annoyed as she felt at Hester and Susan having deceived her in the matter, she could not help owning to herself that she had been to blame in having, in the first place,

given her fellow-servants a certain power over her by going with them to the village party unknown to Mrs. Groves, and afterwards by yielding to their persuasions respecting her blue dress. She therefore determined to make the best of it, and to keep herself as quiet as she could. But that was no easy task. After they had dined they all helped to decorate the room in which the festivities were to be held, and then went up-stairs to dress. Mary was naturally a vain girl, and Hester and Susan, in order to "put her in good humour," as they said, flattered her so much, and praised her blue dress, and her whole appearance in it, that by the time she was dressed I fear most of her compunctious feelings had disappeared; and she began to console herself with the idea that it was not so much her fault after all, and that just for once she might enjoy herself.

Wet and cold as the day was, numerous vehicles kept driving up to the "Black Bull," which was the name of the public-house; and Mary could hear the sound of loud and boisterous laughter as the guests greeted each other on their arrival.

When, at length, they went down-stairs, there was such a strong smell of tobacco-smoke and spirits that Mary turned almost sick when she entered the room. She knew no one there; but Hester and Susan were acquainted with nearly every one, and left Mary sitting moping in a corner whilst they were conversing with their friends. There were several young men who stared rudely at Mary as she sat by herself, and she heard one of them ask Baker who she was. He answered in a whisper, but quite loud enough for Mary to hear, "She's one of our new hands up at the Hall."

"How did she come here?"

"We were obliged to bring her, you see; when once they're one of us they can't '*peach;*'" and Baker gave a knowing look towards Mary. "She'll be broken in after to-night, and then we shall have no further trouble with her."

CHAPTER V.

IT was past ten o'clock at night, and all was still in the quiet little country town of Headly, except at the "Black Bull" public-house. There the sounds of music, mingled with bursts of uproarious merriment, sounded discordantly on the ear of Norton the carrier, as he came into the house to make some final arrangements, and to take away some parcels which had been left there for him. He started so early in the morning, that he always packed his cart over night.

He was later than usual on the evening in question, for it being near Christmas time, he had an unusually large number of parcels to take with him on the morrow. Many little tokens of love and kindness were stowed away in that tilted cart,—simple Christmas presents from humble homes; a piece of dairy-fed pork, a basket of apples, a small parcel of grocery

for "mother," with a little snuff and tobacco for "father;" a bundle of warm clothing from a daughter in service to her aged parents in her native village; shoes for little "Johnny" and "Willie" from a well-to-do brother in a distant town; with many a basket from the "old folks at home" to a young couple just beginning life together. Very pleasant and heart-warming are these periodical remembrances; and what time fitter for such proofs of affection than the period when we commemorate the receiving of the most precious gift that was ever made—even our Lord Jesus Christ himself! Surely, when we consider our everlasting debt of gratitude—when we think how "freely *we* have *received*," it should dispose us to *give* freely and liberally to the extent of our power. How many homes would rejoice at Christmas time did every one act upon this principle! and the homes of the givers themselves would be gladdened by the act of giving. Our blessed Saviour never spoke truer words than when He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Let every one who has not yet done so try

the experiment on the first opportunity that offers.

"You seem to have gay doings here to-night," said Norton to the ostler, who was assisting him to carry some of his parcels from the public-house to his cart in the inn-yard.

"You may say that," replied Dan, the ostler; "Missus has her cousin, and a lot on'em from Underwood Hall; and there's half the country round besides. Would you like to take a look at them? they've been a jigging away all the evening."

"No, no," said the carrier, shaking his head; "my tastes never ran much that way even when I was young, and now that I'm old, it don't suit me no better; but if so be that there's any one from Underwood Hall, I'd just like to ask them whether they know anything about a young lassie for whom I'm keeping a place in my cart to-morrow. She's one of the under-servants there, and is going home to see her parents; and she wrote word that she was to spend to-night at Farmer Burford's, and I called there this evening, as I was passing close by, to arrange about our meeting in the

morning, but they had heard nothing whatever of her; and so I'm all at a loss where to find her."

"Do you mean the girl you brought with you from Mayfield some three or four months ago?" said Dan.

"The very same."

"Then she's in yonder, along with the rest of them. I knowed her again directly, because she has such an innocent kind of face like; but she's dressed out now as fine as any of them, I can tell you."

"Seeing is believing, as my old father used to say," replied Norton; "but until such times as I *do* see, I'll never believe that Polly Reynolds would ever dance at the 'Black Bull.' With an anxious look, Norton returned to the public-house, and bent his steps towards the room from whence the sounds of music and dancing proceeded. He opened the door, and walked straightway into the midst of the dancers. He had on his ordinary waggoner's frock, and his boots were covered with mud. His face wore a look of stern reproach, as he hastily glanced round the room. We are not

going to enter into a minute description of all he saw in that brief look. Suffice it to say that the scene was such that no modest girl could look on unabashed. Norton soon discovered the object of his search. Mary was sitting down near the window talking to a young man whom Norton at once recognised as one of the worst characters of the neighbourhood. A portion of the uncomfortable feeling experienced by Mary in the beginning of the evening had worn away; so true it is that our naturally weak and sinful natures so soon become familiarized with what at first we shrank from with disgust. Mary was laughing and talking with her companion, when, lifting up her eyes, she encountered the stern glance of old Norton fixed upon her. She started as if she had beheld an apparition.

One moment he gazed upon her as if to make certain of her identity, for he could hardly bring himself to believe that the overdressed girl before him was really the Mary he had known a few months before; and then in a reproachful voice he said, as he laid his hand upon her arm, "Come away, come away,

Mary Reynolds; this is no place for you." She rose and followed him; and with the exception of the young man with whom she was conversing, and one or two immediately around her, no one was aware of her departure.

"Take off all that finery," said Norton, when they got into the passage, and the room door was closed upon the giddy revellers; "take off all that finery, and dress yourself as becomes John Reynolds's daughter, and come along with me. I'll take you to my sister's, where you'll get a decent bed and a hearty welcome; and I'm only doing for you what I'd hope and believe John Reynolds would do for me, did he see any one belonging to me a-going the road to ruin, as you have been this evening."

"Indeed, indeed, Norton, I did not know until I came here to-day that——"

"Tush, tush, child; the least said the soonest mended, as my old father used to say. Upstairs with you, and make haste, for it's getting late."

Mary obeyed Norton almost mechanically; and experienced a feeling of relief at the

thoughts of getting away from the "Black Bull." Neither Hester nor Susan was aware of her departure, for they had been so much taken up with their friends during the evening that Mary had scarcely once spoken to them; and, indeed, after the few words she had heard Baker utter when conversing with the young man who had inquired about her, she felt no great inclination for their company. Those few words had opened her eyes to the real motives of all her fellow-servants' apparent kindness to her; and, as she thought over the matter, she felt more and more annoyed to think she should have so easily become their dupe. She did not, therefore, require twice telling to go and change her dress; and in little more than ten minutes she was accompanying Norton to his sister's cottage, which was only a short distance from the "Black Bull." Old Mrs. Newland, who had been for many years a widow, had a little assistance from the parish; and that, with the help of her kind brother the carrier, who always stayed with his sister when business took him to Headly, enabled her to keep her humble home over her head. She was

sitting up waiting for her brother when he entered her cottage, accompanied by Mary. "Here, Bess," he said, "I've brought a young lassie to beg for a night's lodging from you. She is John Reynolds's daughter, over at Mayfield; you've often heard me talk of him; and she's going home along with me to-morrow morning to see her parents. Poor as your home is, it's a fitter one by far for a respectable girl than the "Black Bull" up yonder; and I knowed you'd give her the half of your bed, and a hearty welcome besides."

"You were right there, Ben," replied the old woman, greeting Mary kindly as she spoke. "It isn't much I have to offer her, though, in the way of supper."

But Mary did not want any supper; her greatest anxiety was to convince Norton that her coming to the "Black Bull" was really quite unpremeditated on her part. And when old Mrs. Newland had "stirred up the dying embers to a flame," they sat around the fire, and Mary simply explained what had occurred, and how she had been deceived by Hester and Susan. She did not, however, attempt to

excuse herself for the part she had really taken in the transaction—for her gay dress, &c.; but told her tale so humbly, and with so much real sorrow, that the stern expression on the old carrier's countenance gradually relaxed as he listened; and when at length she concluded, he said, in almost his usually kind manner, "I believe you, Mary, for I feel you are speaking the truth; and it's taken a load off my mind to hear that your going up yonder to the 'Black Bull' was not with your own consent. But how did you come to be rigged out in that fashion, girl? I fear me you haven't put the good resolve into practice you told me about. Do you remember what I said to you about not 'reckoning your chickens before they were hatched'?"

Tears of shame and repentance coursed each other down Mary's cheeks as she replied, "I have spent my money upon myself, instead of buying mother's warm shawl, Norton; but my selfish vanity has cost me very dear. I never thought I should feel as I now do about going home. I had looked forward to it with so much pleasure before all this happened, and

now——" Mary's tears prevented her from continuing what she was saying.

"You'll find it the same through life, lassie. There's no peace of mind to be found in doing a bad action—and it's all the better for us; for there's no knowing how far our wicked natures might carry us if it were not for that feeling of remorse, which acts as a kind of check upon us. I never much liked the thoughts of your going into such a grand family; for I know a little about human nature, and I'd rather you had begun in a more humble way at first. Not but what the same good God watches over us just as much in the palace as in the cottage, Mary; only when girls get to love the 'pomps and vanities' of the world, why, such things form a sort of cloud between them and their God. Take my advice, now, Mary—as my old father used often to say, 'What can't be cured must be endured,' and 'What's done can't be undone,' and 'As you sow you shall reap.' You can't undo what you have done—you can't bring back the past; but you can resolve, through God's grace, to do better for the time to come. Have no secrets

from your mother, Mary; she deserves all your confidence. Tell her everything when you get home. Don't spare yourself; but make her your friend by telling her all your shortcomings, and she will advise you for the future. You are not like some girls, Mary; you have a mother, able and willing to give you good advice. And who knows, my girl, but that the shame and sorrow you now feel may be the means of helping you to keep in the right way for the future?"

And the kind old carrier shook Mary warmly by the hand, as he wished her good night, and told her to be sure to be ready for him in the morning.

That night Mary's long-neglected Bible was taken out of her box, which Norton had brought with him from the public-house; and for the first time for many weeks the young girl read a chapter before retiring to rest. Then she thanked God with all her heart for all His mercies, particularly for having enabled her to leave the "Black Bull" that evening. In the quiet of that simple cottage room, with no Hester or Susan to tempt her thoughts to

stray, a great deal of the old home feeling came over Mary; and she felt more than ever how grievously she had failed under her first trial. There are two kinds of sorrow. One is that feeling of regret and vexation which people experience solely on account of the sufferings or annoyance which the commission of a fault may have brought upon them. There is no hatred of the sin for its own sake; and it is this sorrow which the Apostle calls "the sorrow of the world"—a sorrow which "worketh" only "death," seeing that it is a purely selfish feeling, and will never lead to amendment of life. But there is a very different kind of sorrow, called by St. Paul "godly," for it is born of God's Holy Spirit; and it is this sorrow that "worketh repentance unto salvation." Let us all pray God to grant unto us this sorrow, so that our manifold sins may not be our ruin.

"Lord, when we bend before Thy throne,
And our confessions pour,
Help us to feel the sins we own,
And hate what we deplore."

I think Mary's sorrow that evening was a

"godly sorrow," and that God had, in His infinite mercy, enabled her to feel truly repentant, and to ask for grace and strength to lead a new life. Her heart was very full; for in the stillness of the night there stood in array before her memory all her late neglect of God —all her disregard of the parting advice of the kind clergyman at Mayfield, and she felt how she had laid herself open to temptations by neglecting all the appointed means for enabling her to withstand them. And thus she lay mournfully musing on the past, when suddenly there burst upon her ear loud shouts of drunken mirth from some of the midnight revellers at the "Black Bull," who were setting out on their way home. There was a noise, too, as of violent quarrelling and disputing; and Mary shuddered as she thought that, but for Norton, she might even then have been in the midst of all the uproar.

Very early in the morning, long before it was light, Norton knocked at the door, and told her it was time to get up. Kind Mrs. Newland insisted upon rising and getting some breakfast for her before she started; and by

the time Norton had been and harnessed the horse, and brought the cart to the door, she was quite ready. She thought the old carrier looked very grave; but he said nothing until they had got quite out of the town, and then he told Mary all that he had heard that morning from the ostler when he went to the inn-yard for his horse.

"You have double cause to be thankful, Mary, that you left the 'Black Bull' as soon as you did last night," he said, drawing back the curtain in front of the cart as he spoke, and bidding Mary come closer to him, so that she might hear all he said. "There was a terrible row there about twelve o'clock. Baker, the footman from Underwood Hall, got quarrelling with some other young man about something that one of your fellow-servants had said, and both of them being the worse for drink, soon got to blows. There was a dreadful fight, and Baker was seriously injured. The police came in, having been sent for by a next-door neighbour, and took the young man into custody. He will be brought before the magistrates this morning; and both Hester and Susan will have

to give evidence, as they were both concerned in the quarrel. It will, doubtless, cost them their situations, as Mrs. Groves will be sure to hear of it; and neither Sir Hugh nor Lady Underwood would keep servants in their employ who could so far forget themselves as to spend an evening at such a place as the 'Black Bull.'"

Mary sighed. "*I* was there also, Norton, you know."

"Yes, child, but you left before the beginning of the fray."

"Thanks to *you*," Mary replied.

"I'm right glad to have been of any service to you, Mary, for your father and mother's sakes as well as your own. It would go well-nigh to break their hearts if anything went wrong with you, I know."

"Have you seen either father or mother lately?" asked Mary.

"I saw your father yesterday morning as I came through Mayfield," replied the carrier; "he was waiting to see me pass, in order to tell me you were coming by me to-day. He looked right down pleased about it, I can tell you;

and he said that your mother was much better again, and hoped to get to church on Christmas-day."

Mary sighed deeply, as she thought that her mother would have nothing warm to wear when she went out. What would she not have given to have been able to recall the past. The very thoughts of her smart blue dress made her miserable. She was indeed reaping what she had sown.

Norton observed her silence, and well understood the cause. Presently he spoke again,—

"I have often wondered, Mary, at your mother sending you away from home at all. The only girl amongst so many boys, one would have thought she would have been but too glad to have kept you at home to help her."

"That was all my fault, too, Norton," said Mary, ingenuously; "I was very self-willed, and wanted to get to service; and dear mother never thought of herself, but gave up to me, when she saw how full I was of going from home."

"The young 'uns always think they know best," said Norton, "and they often buy their experience very dear. I was only a-saying to my

old woman the other day, that where there is but one girl her place is at home, particularly if she has many young brothers. But God knows what is good for us better than we know it ourselves, Mary; and He has permitted you to have your own way in this matter for some good end, though we mayn't clearly see it yet a while."

CHAPTER VI.

THERE were so many baskets and parcels to be delivered at the different villages through which Norton passed, that it was after twelve in the day when he reached Mayfield. Two hearty, honest-looking lads, evidently on the look-out for some one, were standing at the corner of the lane which led to John Reynolds's cottage. They were Mary's two eldest brothers, Fred and Harry, who had come down from the fields where they were ploughing in order to welcome their sister when she arrived. They had an hour's leisure for dinner; and it so chanced that they were at work very near the lane along which the carrier's cart must pass, so that they had not far to come. They were eating their simple dinner as they stood.

"I say," said Fred, "I do so hope they'll be here soon. I wouldn't miss seeing our Poll give the warm shawl to mother for a week's wages—that I wouldn't."

"But Poll didn't say a word about the shawl in her letter to me, you know," observed Harry. "I almost wonder she didn't."

"She was in a hurry, you may be sure," replied Fred, whose faith in his sister nothing could shake. "Besides, there was no need of saying anything; you knew all about it beforehand."

"Yes, that's all very true, Fred; but——"

"It's all right, Harry, you may be sure; so don't you croak."

Harry could not help smiling at his brother's words. He was not quite of so sanguine a disposition as Fred; and he could not help thinking it strange that Mary had not mentioned the shawl in her letter.

"There's the cart," cried Fred, darting forwards.

And sure enough there was the old bay mare coming, "jog, trot—jog, trot," along the lane, drawing behind her the tilted cart, which was still well stocked with packages, notwithstanding all that had been delivered on the road.

"Hurrah! hurrah!" cried the boys.

Mary put her head out of the cart at the sound of their voices.

"There's our Poll! Welcome home, Poll," they cried.

Then the cart stopped, and Mary was lifted out by Fred, whilst Harry took her box on his shoulder; and, having wished Norton good-bye, the brothers and sister turned down the lane.

"Let us look at you, Poll," cried Fred, as he stopped and looked full in Mary's face. "You don't look as rosy as when you left home—that you don't; and your face is thinner. I suppose that is the grand living at Underwood Hall; and I think you're taller, Poll, than when you left us. We're right happy to have you again, I can tell you. And wasn't it lucky Harry and I happened to be ploughing in the High-acre field to-day, so we were able to get here during our dinner hour? We wanted to take you home, Mary. Mother is so much better; and she has been making a cake for you; and Farmer Low sent her down two bottles of elder wine yesterday as a Christmas present; and we've bought her three yards of flannel at the

shop; and Tom and Bob and Matt had tenpence between them, and they wouldn't spend a farthing of it upon sweets for themselves, but have bought mother a quarter of a pound of tea for a treat; for she hasn't had any for a long time, as things are so dear this winter, and the doctor's bill is heavy."

Fred was so excited with all the news he had to tell, that he did not notice Mary's quiet, silent manner; but Harry, who was walking behind carrying the box, felt sure that something was the matter.

Their cottage home was now in sight, and Mary almost fancied she could distinguish her mother's face at the window.

"You'll think me very conceited, Poll," continued Fred, "to be talking about such trifles; but you see they ain't trifles to us. *We* can't afford to do much; *we* can't buy mother a *warm shawl*, for instance," he added, looking with pride at his sister as he spoke; "but we do the best we can, Poll, and are proud of our good, generous sister, as we ought to be."

Mary could bear no more.

"Oh, *don't, don't* speak so, Fred; when you know all, you'll hate me as I hate myself."

She burst into tears as she spoke; and drew Fred aside, so that a barn by the roadside partially hid their cottage from them.

"Hate you, Poll! No, no; there's no fear of our doing that. But what's the matter, sister? Have you offended Mrs. Groves, and——"

"O no, no, Fred," sobbed Mary. "But I've got no warm shawl for mother—and it's all my own fault; and all that you have been telling me about your presents to dear mother went to my very heart, and made me feel how differently you have acted to what I have done."

"Haven't they paid you, then, Poll?" asked Harry, bewildered by his sister's manner.

"Yes, Harry, I have had my money, but I have spent it nearly all on myself. But, oh, don't think it has been any pleasure to me! I have had nothing but sorrow ever since; and now this coming home is the worst of all."

Harry looked very grave. He couldn't understand how his sister could spend so much, or

what seemed to him so much, money on herself; but Fred cried out in his warm-hearted, impetuous way, "If you only had told us, Poll, when you wrote to Harry, we wouldn't have said a word about it; and though maybe Harry or I would have been at the corner to meet you, you shouldn't have heard a word about the flannel or the tea either. Don't think we did it out of unkindness, Polly dear; and as to hating you, we love you too dearly for that; and besides, Poll, if you are so very, very sorry—and I'm sure you are, by the look of your face (and it is *that* which has made you look so ill)—you will never be so foolish again. I know you won't, Polly; and as to our mother, she's not the one ever to remind you about the shawl—not she. It was only the other day, when I said something about it, that she said she did not think you would be able to afford her one just at present, whatever you might do afterwards; and she begged us to say nothing to you about it when we wrote."

"But I couldn't help it, Poll," said Harry; "I had thought so much about your bringing home the parcel, and our seeing it opened; and

then," he added, seeing his sister's distressed look, "you'll be better another time—I know you will."

"I hope so, dear Harry," said Mary; "and now let us go home."

How different were now her brothers' looks to what they had been before they knew about the shawl. Mary noticed it, and grieved over their disappointment. Dear, kind, generous Fred suddenly found out that it was time for them both to go back to High-acre Field; "they should only just have time to put Mary's box down inside the cottage," he said, "and then they must be off." He felt that Mary would prefer being quite alone with her mother whilst she told her all that had occurred; and he was right. Mary felt truly grateful for his thoughtful kindness.

They opened the little garden-gate. Her mother was not at the window; and Mary was ill-prepared to see her look so changed by her late illness. She was sitting in an arm-chair by the fire, and had heard nothing of her children's approach until they entered the cottage. For one moment Mary gazed on the loving

face, still pale from recent suffering; the next, she was encircled in her mother's arms.

Then Fred and Harry said they must be off.

"You'll not be dull now Poll's come home, mother," were Fred's last words as he left the room.

Mary followed old Norton's excellent advice. She told "all" to her mother, and did not spare herself; and that mother's kind and gentle words of admonition and advice had far more weight with the really penitent girl than angry reproaches would have had. Mary had still much to suffer in consequence of her fault. It required all Mrs. Reynolds's persuasion to induce her husband to look with leniency on his daughter's conduct. He had Harriet Lane before his eyes; and it was a severe blow to him to find his "Polly," of whom he was so proud, giving way under her first temptation. But Mary bore all her father's displeasure so humbly, and expressed so much sincere contrition, that in time John Reynolds's sternness relaxed, and he owned that Mary had given proofs of her determination to act differently for the future. It was some

time, however, before she again left home. As Norton had anticipated, the account of the whole affair at the "Black Bull" reached the ears of Mrs. Groves, who felt it to be her duty to communicate with Sir Hugh and Lady Underwood on the subject. They at once ordered her to dismiss from their employ any servant who had joined the party at Headly; and Mary being one of the number, she received her discharge. Except for the circumstances under which it had taken place, neither Mary nor her parents much regretted her leaving Underwood Hall. Mrs. Reynolds almost felt that she had been to blame in exposing so young a girl to the temptations inseparable from so large an establishment; and Mary was more than ever convinced that she had done wrong in leaving home, and that her mother had a first claim upon her services. Mr. and Mrs. Maitland, to whom Mary likewise confessed all her past weakness, highly approved of her resolve; and, with God's blessing on their good advice, the somewhat wilful girl became gradually the dutiful and affectionate daughter, and the kind and forbearing sister.

One little scene that took place on Christmas Eve, and our story is finished.

Mary had been assisting her mother in stoning some plums which Mrs. Maitland had kindly sent them, along with a good piece of beef, for the Christmas dinner, when that kind lady drove up to the cottage in her little pony carriage. Mary ran out to the gate as soon as she saw her. Mrs. Maitland was alone, but there was a large bundle on the seat beside her.

"We wish to see your mother at church, to-morrow, Mary," she said; "but it would not be safe for her to venture unless well wrapped up."

Mary sighed and coloured deeply. Mrs. Maitland knew all about her broken promise to her mother.

"There is a shawl in that parcel," continued Mrs. Maitland, "which I have had for many years, but in which there is still a good deal of wear; so will you give it to your mother from me, and tell her I shall have real pleasure in seeing her wear it at church to-morrow."

"O ma'am, O Mrs. Maitland! how can I

ever thank you sufficiently?" cried Mary; "you have taken such a weight off my mind."

"Be a good girl to your good mother, Mary, and I shall be more than repaid."

The next day was fine and bright; and Mrs. Reynolds, fortified against the cold by Mrs. Maitland's kind present, walked to church, leaning on her husband's arm.

Mary followed with her brothers. Her feelings were those of mingled regret and thankfulness—thankfulness that her mother had a warm shawl, and that she was not, therefore, the innocent sufferer for her daughter's shortcomings; and regret, deep and lasting, that the shawl had not been of *her* procuring.

The lesson then learned was remembered through life; and if ever in after years she felt tempted to over-confidence in herself, or to any undue extravagance in dress, she remembered the sorrow which had arisen from her early fault, and the history of her

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