



BLACK MARIA



TORONTO

WILLARD TRACT DEPOT



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CHAPTER I.

 ONE day, in the spring of last year, as I was slowly sauntering up Newgate Street, endeavouring to pass a dull half hour before I was due at my lawyer's, I was roused by a scampering past me of ragged boys, one of whom shouted as he ran, "Here she comes! Hurray! Black Maria for ever!" I turned round and looked about me, half expecting to see some poor negress, and moralising to myself as I did so on the fondness that all street boys have for tormenting any creature at all weaker than themselves. No negress, however, appeared in sight, and I walked on, idly wondering meanwhile what the boys were exciting themselves about, when I heard a heavy rumbling of wheels behind me, and a grim-looking vehicle, something the shape of an omnibus, only without windows and painted black, drove quickly past me. A policeman, somewhat more imposing than the generality, as he wore the city arms in front of his helmet, was driving, and another policeman, similarly decorated, stood on the step of the van, as if guarding the door. What merchandise does that van contain? I mused; for I was not long returned to my native country, and this sight was strange to me. What could there be within to require such careful guarding; could it be gunpowder or ammunition of any sort? At this moment the carriage turned in through the wide gates of Newgate Jail, and it suddenly flashed upon me that this

was none other than the prison van. And I was quite right in my surmise. It was but little more I could see. On reaching the entrance of the jail, the policeman jumped nimbly off the step, and threw open the doors of the van. It opened in the middle, and the two panels formed so effectual a screen that even the feet of the inmates were not visible to the crowd at the gates. Out of the black van they disappeared into the grim grey prison, and no one could do more than conjecture as to who had been the passengers in that mysterious carriage. The doors were speedily slammed to, and the van drove away much more quickly this time, since it had been lightened of its heavy load.

I too was turning sadly away, when my attention was arrested by hearing a fresh child's voice near me exclaiming, in an awestruck voice—

“O mother! how dreadful to be a prisoner; I hope I may never go in that black cart. You won't let me, will you, mother?” and a little lad of about six years of age clung tightly to his mother's hand as he spoke.

“No indeed, Willy, boy; I trust you never may. Mother prays every day to God to keep you from all sin and wickedness; and then, you know, we needn't fear jails, nor policemen, nor anything at all—need we, Willy?” answered the mother, as she drew her little son closer to her.

“That's a wise woman, and a good one too, I feel sure,” I said to myself, as I went on my way. “There would be less wickedness in the world if all mothers would teach their children thus—if every one who has to do with the young would but realise the fact that

· As the twig is bent the tree's inclined.”

Just then the old clock tolled, and put a stop to my moralising. I hurried to keep my appointment, and thought no more of prisons or prison vans, until some weeks afterwards

I happened to hear the story of one who had once been an inmate of that van. It may interest some, at any rate I will tell it; and if it is not as exciting as tales at the present day are generally required to be, it will give, I trust, some little idea of what life really is inside the dreary walls of a prison.

It was with a heavy heart that Robert Ellis heard the prison door slammed behind him, and realised at last that, after several remands and delays, his sentence was finally passed—"Five years' penal servitude!" After those words he had heard and understood nothing else. He felt like a man oppressed with an evil dream. Five years' penal servitude! five years' penal servitude! the words *would* keep ringing in his ears: they fitted themselves to the music of the bells of a church he used to attend when a little lad. Do what he would to forget them, they kept on ringing. Five years! Five hours had scarce passed since he knew his fate, and how could he endure five years, each with its three hundred and sixty-five days to run? The very thought seemed to madden him, and those bells repeated it in a sort of mockery. Five years' penal servitude! Ah! how well he remembered those quiet, innocent Sundays, when the bells' voices seemed to say, "Good people, make haste to church," instead of this dreary, maddening "Five years' penal servitude!"

How came he to this place? He was not the sort of man one pictures to one's self as the ideal of a convict. He had no dark lowering brow, no retreating forehead: none of the usual characteristics of the prisoner. Robert was a tall, well-built man, about nine and twenty years of age, with intelligent features, and a kind, almost gentle expression on his face. How came he to this house of guilt and shame?

His is indeed a sad tale; a young life wrecked by one sin—reliance on self, instead of reliance on God. He began

life firmly intending to do his best in the world. He would strive and struggle, and make a name for himself—men should honour him: these were his constant thoughts. Right enough as far as they went; but all was to be done in his own strength and by his own right hand, and surely we cannot be surprised to find that sooner or later these earthly props failed him, and the house that he had built upon the shifting sands of worldly fame crumbled to pieces, almost crushing him in its ruins. Perhaps now—when scorned by his fellow-man as an outcast and the inmate of a felon's cell—perhaps at this very time, Robert was nearer the kingdom of heaven than he ever was in the days of his prosperity. Humility and repentance have for the first time found a shelter in his breast, and they are useful visitors. They sweep out its inmost recesses, and make it fit to receive other Christian graces.

Robert Ellis was about fourteen years of age when his father died. This latter was an honest, respectable man, a carpenter by trade, and Robert being his only child, he was determined to give him “plenty o’ book larning;” so the boy was sent to a good school, and kept at it until death took away the bread-winner, and Robert had to look out for some way of earning a living.

The lad settled this point for himself. Directly after his father's funeral he bent his steps towards Mr. Littleton's, the great solicitor in the Square, and applied for the vacant place of errand-boy. This place he easily got; his intelligent face and tidy mourning took the fancy of the head clerk, and as the boy received an excellent character from his schoolmaster, he was speedily engaged at a salary of six shillings a week.

“A shilling more than we have ever given any of the lads before,” the clerk condescendingly explained; “but as you seem a tidy boy and your mother's a widow, I've made it a shilling extra, so take care you deserve it.”

Robert made his best bow, and went away feeling that now he had his foot on the first rung of the ladder, and he meant to climb to the very top. His mother, a kindhearted but foolish, vain woman, encouraged the lad's ambition.

"Mind, Bob," she said as they sat late over the fire that same evening, discussing his prospects and making most flattering pictures of his future greatness, "don't you get idling with those other lads in the office. Keep yourself to yourself. You've no father now to back you, but never you mind that; just hold yourself well up, and show people you're not to be trampled on, though you are an orphan."

Yes, Mrs. Ellis, right enough for the boy to keep his head up; but how about his knees? Should not they sometimes be bent low in prayer, for help and guidance, to Him who is the Father of the fatherless?

Well, I must not linger over those early days of Bob's career; he started on the battle of life without the heavenly armour, and how could he withstand the fiery shafts which the devil aims so stealthily at those whose only shield is that of respectability? "Whatever you do, keep respectable," Bob's mother was constantly impressing on the boy, but she never urged him "to walk humbly with his God."

At first, however, all went well. Robert was both industrious, intelligent, and extremely obliging; the clerks, and in course of time even the great Mr. Littleton himself, found out the lad's abilities, and step by step he passed through the various grades of the office, until in fifteen years' time he was the managing clerk of the business where previously he had been but the errand-boy.

His mother's pride in him was now unbounded. She knew it all along," she confided to her great friend, the grocer's wife at the corner shop, who in early days had rather patronised Mrs. Ellis, but now was too glad herself to be patronised, and to visit the widow at her cosy little

house, and to enjoy the hot muffins and other delicacies which Mrs. Ellis dispensed with no niggardly hand.

"I al'ays knew my son was meant for a gentleman; as a little lad he were al'ays that genteel. And it's all along of his own doing too; for, as you know, Mrs. Jones, he were but a child when his father died, and just now see what the lad's done—worked early and late, taught hesself Latin and French, and goodness only knows what beside!"

Ah! he is a son to be proud of!" chimed in Mrs. Jones, helping herself to a third slice of seedcake as she spoke. "And keeps you like a lady—don't he now? Why, that silk of yours is as thick as a board; it would stand alone, as the saying is, and must have cost a sight of money."

"So it did, so it did!" replied the gratified and delighted mother, heaping her visitor's plate with fresh delicacies. "My Robert can't abide me to wear no common clothes; and as for work, I assure you, ma'am, it's all I may do to dust the parlour or to straighten his room a bit, and if he finds me at it, he says so quiet like, 'Now, mother, I won't have you slaving; those days are over. What's the servant for but to save you trouble?' And so steady he is, never out late, but always so respectable," concluded Mrs. Ellis, finishing up with her favourite virtue, "and all his own doing, for he never had no help from no one."

Still the same ideas, you see, that were instilled into Robert as a boy—"His own doing;" "No help from others;" no recognition of the God whose guiding hand had, though disregarded, led the widow and the orphan into these pleasant paths. Well, if we will not learn the needful lesson of trust in our heavenly Father by gentle means, He teaches us by the hard iron hand of adversity; if prosperity and honour do but harden us in our own conceit, the great Schoolmaster sends shame and disgrace to drive us into the narrow way.

Temptation came. The house Robert had so long rented for his mother changed landlords, and the new owner determined upon selling the place to a builder who was anxious to run up a chapel on the site of the pretty little house. This was an unspeakable grief to Mrs. Ellis. "Leave the house her boy had made so nice for her! Never! She couldn't do it; she should never be happy in no other house. How could she? Why, her Bob had chosen everything, even the very papers of this one, and had the gas fixed just to the side of her armchair, so that she could read the paper of a night as handy as in the daylight; and the cupboards—he had 'em all put up just wherever she wished." And here Mrs. Ellis usually broke down, and floods of tears would finish the conversation. It was in vain that Robert brought accounts of other and better houses, and promised, if she would but choose one of these, to have the same papers that her old eyes had grown accustomed to; and that the gas and cupboards should be fixed in their old places. Nothing would content his mother. "If she had to leave her home for a new one she should die, she knew she should, and then she supposed Robert would be satisfied." And, as the days went on, she fretted and moped and refused her food, so that her son became seriously uneasy about her, and himself grew morose and melancholy before the unexpected difficulty.

As the time drew nearer for leaving, Mrs. Ellis became more unreasonable than ever; and one morning, after Robert had been urging her to settle which house he should take for her, she gave way to a paroxysm of grief, and declared that if Robert "was so mighty anxious to move her, he might carry her out feet first in her coffin, for no other way would she leave."

Robert made no answer, but setting his face till it seemed quite grey and stern, he left the house, closing the door behind him with a gloomy bang.

Mrs. Ellis sobbed a little longer, and then, finding that he did not return immediately, as she had half expected he would, the woman began to feel ashamed of her outburst of temper towards her son. "Poor lad, perhaps I was a bit hard on him; after all, the fault's none of his," she moaned, as indeed it was not, and it was a pity she had not thought so sooner. However, rousing herself, she called her servant, and between them they spent a busy day sorting and packing and getting things ready for the move.

As the evening advanced, and the time was close for Robert's return from the office, the widow became quite cheerful with the efforts she had made to please him, and pictured to herself his delight at her change of mind. The usual hour, however, passed and brought no Robert. Nine and ten o'clock struck, and at last, unable to bear the suspense any longer, Mrs. Ellis was just putting on her cloak to see if he was still at the office, when his heavy step was heard in the hall.

"Oh, my boy, how thankful I am you're come! I was afraid I'd vexed you with my stupid ways this morning. But there! you don't mind nothing your old mother does, do you, Bob? It's all right now; me and Keziah have been as busy as bees packing all day, and we'll be ready to move whenever you wish. Won't we, Keziah?"

"I am sorry you should have troubled to do that, mother," answered Robert slowly; "for this house is yours—your very own. I bought it for you to-day, and no one now can turn you out of it."

"You never have!" exclaimed the delighted woman. "Well, there! I always have said and always shall say, you're a son for any woman to be proud of!—a deal too good for a cross old woman like me," and here she relapsed again into the tears that come so easily to aged eyes.

"Don't, mother," said Robert, and his voice sounded harsh and stern; "don't call me good."

"I shall, though, all my life through," interrupted his mother stoutly; "to think of spending all that money just for a whim o' mine. It must have cost a power of money—mustn't it, Bob?" she added anxiously. Are you sure you can afford it, boy?"

"Of course I can, mother," answered Robert gaily; "what am I to work so hard for if I can't buy my old mother what she takes a fancy to? But I should like a bit of supper after it all, for I've had a hard day's work."

"Dear, dear! of course you have; there'll be something ready in a minute," and away bustled the old woman, whilst Robert, left for a minute to himself, grew stern again, and, sighing heavily, dropped the careless air he had previously assumed, and, throwing himself into a chair, pressed his hand to his brow. How hot it felt, and how it throbbed! Ah! well it might; it had a load of crime to bear since he left home that morning.

He had gone out stung to the quick by the complaints and reproaches of his mother, and as he walked moodily to his office the evil thought came to him, that out of the various securities in his charge he could easily manage to raise the few hundreds that he wanted for the purchase of his house. He put the thought away angrily enough when first it occurred to him. He, Robert Ellis, steal! No, indeed; was it likely! But the thought came again and again to him, and each time he repulsed it more faintly. Poor Robert! he was trying with his own weak force to do battle against the king of all evil, and what wonder that he was conquered! He forgot, when temptation assailed him so fiercely, to call on Him who in all our temptations will make a way to escape; and so it came to pass that the man who all his life through had prided himself on his honesty and respectability, in a weak moment became a thief!

I forget now, at this lapse of time, the exact amount he took,

or whether it was gold or notes or bonds, but at any rate he took from the safe in the strong room, which was in his keeping, what enabled him to outbid the builder and become the owner of the house.

"Of course he would pay it all back as soon as possible. He would work harder than ever, and spend nothing till then," so he reasoned with himself, and tried by such thoughts to quiet his uneasy conscience. "No one would be the wiser, and no one should be the loser. He would make it all right in a little while."

For a time it did seem as if everything was to happen as Robert wished.

Mr. Littleton had long been in ill health, and was now but seldom at the office; for he trusted in his steady clerk, who, though young, was nearly as good a man of business as himself; and when the doctors recommended a journey to Madeira as the surest means of restoring him to health, he readily consented, and left everything during his absence to Robert's care.

This was a great load off the clerk's mind. There was now no fear of detection; long before the warmer days should have brought Mr. Littleton to England again, everything should be straight, and the money restored. He felt so happy as he returned from the station, whence he had seen his master off to Southampton, that he was almost his old self again; but his happiness was of short duration. Man proposes, but God disposes—the ship in which Mr. Littleton took passage never reached her destination. She caught fire, and though no lives were lost on that occasion, for there was room in the boats for all, yet two nights in an open boat in the Bay of Biscay proved fatal to Mr. Littleton's delicate constitution, and on his death, in the following month, his business passed into other hands, and of course, when the accounts were gone into, Robert's dishonesty was speedily

discovered. The heir, a hard grasping man, prosecuted the defaulting clerk with great rigour, and cases of commercial dishonesty having, unfortunately, been extremely frequent at that time, the judge felt it necessary to pass a heavy sentence; and so, to make a long story short, after numerous remands and heart-sickening delays, Robert Ellis found himself transformed from the trusty clerk to the despised inmate of a felon's cell.

CHAPTER II.

THIS part of Robert's life has taken long in telling, but its chief events passed rapidly through the man's mind as he stood with the other prisoners in the stone passage of Newgate Jail, waiting for the warder to marshal him to his cell. First of all, however, he was marched downstairs, instead of up—as he had expected; and there he had to strip off his own clothes and put on the convict's dress, a coarse striped shirt, and a suit of rough grey cloth, with a sort of Scotch cap. It was surprising how the clothes changed the appearance of the man—certainly if fine feathers make fine birds, prison clothes soon make a man look a prisoner; and Robert felt fearfully miserable and depressed in his new garments; as he walked heavily after the warder to his cell on the top landing of the jail.

A cell was now, alas! no novelty to him, for he had of course spent several weeks in prison, during the trial, before his sentence was finally passed; but, for the sake of my readers, I will describe it. A small room, with walls dazzling with clean whitewash; a table, with flap to let up or down, fastened against the wall; a stool, and three shelves, on one of which was a Bible, prayer-book, and hymn-book, on the second a plate and tin mug, a salt box and a piece of soap,

and on the third a neat roll of bedding, tightly strapped up. Perhaps you will ask, "Where was the bedstead?" There was none; instead there was a hammock stretched across the cell, and fixed in its place by leather straps fastened to clamps in the wall. The bedding consisted of a bag bed, pillow, two good blankets, and a rug. A wash-hand basin, with a tap over it, completed the furniture of the room. All was spotlessly clean, and everything that could be polished was brightened to its utmost extent; as for the floor, which was of black asphalt, it shone almost like a looking-glass. There was, of course, a window, with iron bars to it, and a heavy door with numerous bolts and a little hole, covered with fine wire, to enable the warders to see what the prisoner was doing, without his being at all aware that he was watched. This cell and all the furniture had to be kept by its inmate in its present state of order and brightness; every morning the floor had to be polished and every article in the room cleaned.

The first night was a very wretched one. Robert found it almost impossible to sleep; a fierce hatred of his own folly and dishonesty seemed to burn him up. He pictured to himself what he should, in former days, have thought of a man who had placed himself in the position he now occupied—how he would have scorned and despised him, and believed him incapable of any further good. And yet I almost doubt if any one could have judged Robert more harshly than he was now judging himself; the utter loathing he felt for himself was almost madness, and had there been means within reach, he felt as if he could have taken his own life. Why should he care to live? he angrily asked himself. But then the thought of the life to come flashed across him, and he felt afraid to meet his God. Of course he could not hope for forgiveness from God, when he found it so impossible

to forgive himself: so reasoned the poor fellow in his ignorance and folly; for Robert, though so clever a man of business, so quick at figures, so ready at languages, was strangely ignorant of the best learning. He honestly believed that it was only those whom his mother would have called "respectable" people for whom there was a place in heaven. He forgot, or he never really understood, the love of God for sinners—not alone for the tidy, decent, church-going folks—but for the thief, the robber, the adulterer, and any and all who would believe only! He had forgotten, too, about the joy in heaven over one sinner that *repenteth*.

Fierce angry thoughts raged within him, till at last, worn out with self-reproach, he fell into a violent fit of sobbing, which shook his big frame with agony; and yet the tears did him good—they softened his anger against himself, and he was no longer inflamed with that maddening remorse which caused Judas to go and hang himself; but instead, he felt something of the heartfelt sorrow that filled St. Peter when, after his great sin, "he went out and wept bitterly." As he lay there in his prison hammock, he first really prayed—no grand lengthy prayer, but the words of the publican seemed to come to his mind, and with heartfelt earnestness he said, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

And the prayer was answered: first of all only in a bodily sense, for our Father cares for our bodies as well as our souls, and to this weary sorrowful man He now sent sleep—deep, refreshing sleep—which indeed he sorely needed, for the suspense of the last weeks had utterly broken his rest, and if he had slept, fearful dreams had disturbed him, and rendered sleeping more horrible even than the waking; but now he slept the sweet sleep of a tired child. He did not awake for some hours; day had dawned, and the rumbling din of the London streets could be distinctly heard. It was not, however, six o'clock yet, and as he waited for the noisy bell to summon

him to rise, he resolved, and this time he asked God to help him to keep his resolution, to try to do his best during the weary months of his imprisonment; and when the time came for him to be free again, he would try to begin life in a fresh spirit, trusting less in himself and more to his God.

Now the great bell rang, and rising quickly he dressed himself, and then applied himself to the task of folding his hammock and bedding into the neat rolls he had found them in on his arrival. This was always a work of some little time; for though, whilst awaiting his sentence, a warder had instructed him in the proper way of strapping the bedding, yet it was several weeks before Robert could readily manage to give them the stiff precise look which was expected. This done, he next had to clean and burnish the various articles in his cell, and then to polish the floor. He was still engaged in this latter business when a step outside his door caused him to look up. The little trap-door was opened, and his breakfast pushed through—a pint of gruel and a piece of bread—that was all; and when he had finished eating it, it was time to get ready for chapel. Marching to chapel was a very formal affair, though of course the chapel was in the same building, and the march was only downstairs and through long stone passages. Each man on leaving his cell had to turn round with his face to the door, to take his Bible and prayer-book in his hands, and to hold them behind him, and in that position to await the order to march. When the chapel was reached, it seemed strange and unchurchlike to Robert, with its separate divisions for different classes of prisoners, and the closely-curtained gallery behind which were the women prisoners; and he did not at all like the feeling of being locked into his seat. However, the service itself was short and simple, and Robert felt the better for it, and sorry when it was over and he had to return to his cell.

Just before breakfast some thick pieces of old rope had

been thrown into the cell by a warder, who, however, made no remark as he did so, but Robert could pretty well guess what he was to do with them, though how he was to convert this tight-twisted rope into oakum rather puzzled him. He lifted up one of the pieces, and looked curiously at it, then threw it down, for Robert was very particular about cleanliness, and the rope was certainly not overclean. Poor fellow! he knew well enough there would be no allowances made for fastidiousness in his present position, and that probably he would have quite enough handling of that and other ropes before he was free again; and so it proved. Immediately on his return from chapel, a warder entered his cell, and prepared to instruct him in the mysteries of oakum-picking. First of all the rope had to be divided into separate strands, and how many of them there seemed to be in that one piece of rope, when it was finally untwisted: they made quite a little heap as they lay on the floor. But this was not nearly all; each strand had to be combed out, with the help of a long bent nail—not quite such easy work as it may sound, and Robert made but slow progress through his heap.

“You’ll have four pounds of this to pick every day you’re here,” remarked the warder when he had finished his instructions. Robert did not answer, indeed he hardly knew what answer to make, for he felt that at the rate he was now progressing, it would take him all night as well as all day to accomplish the required four pounds. Still, true to his resolution to do his very best, however irksome he might find prison life, he applied himself diligently to the distasteful task; but soon his thumb and fingers were sore from the rasping of the nail, and though all his muscles ached with the unwonted strain, yet little more than half the quantity was done after a hard day’s work. Late in the evening the task-master came round again, and Robert felt very uneasy when he saw that he had weights and scales with him, and

at once weighed the quantity of picked oakum. It was, as Robert had feared, scarcely two pounds, but perhaps the warder had not expected so much for the first day, as he knew by experience that some prisoners are strangely awkward, and cannot do more than a few ounces at a time, for the first week or so. He did not, of course, tell Robert this, but merely said, "Two pounds short; you must do more to-morrow, or else you'll lose your dinner," to which Robert quietly answered, "I'll try, sir," and felt quite relieved when the man slammed the cell door and left him.

There was one thing that had rather surprised him; he had been expecting all day to have had his head shaved, but no one had as yet been near him for that purpose. He fancied he had heard that cropping was always the first thing done after a prisoner's conviction, and a faint (very faint, however) hope crept into his heart that for some unexplained reason he was to be allowed to wear his hair as he had always done. This hope was doomed, however, to be disappointed. The next morning a warder appeared, followed by a prisoner, who did the haircutting and shaving for the jail, and Robert had to sit down and submit to the "prison cut." He was not a vain man (though his poor mother had done her best to make him so), but he could not help a lump rising in his throat, as the short auburn curls, which were poor Mrs. Ellis's pride, fell thick and fast on the asphalt floor. He was thankful she was not there to see him, especially when the barber proceeded to shave off his whiskers also, and at last left him "as smooth and smug-faced," Robert bitterly thought, "as any burglar or murderer."

Twice a day, Robert, with the other prisoners, was summoned into the yard for exercise. Till he had actually experienced this, Robert rather liked the idea of being in the open air again, and seeing something more than the four

walls of his cell. He was, however, heartily tired of it, long before the hour's tramp had come to an end; he did not find the four brick walls of the yard much more pleasing to the eye than the whitewashed walls of his cell, and the so-called "exercise" itself was wearisome in the extreme. It consisted in each man (separated from his fellows by a distance of about three feet) marching in single file round and round a close court, narrowly watched the while by warders to prevent the possibility of any conversation between the prisoners.

The utmost precautions were on every occasion exercised to hinder the prisoners from holding any intercourse with one another, but, in spite of them all, a vast amount of conversation was carried on amongst them. In chapel it was a frequent custom for a man and his neighbour to chant questions and answers to each other, instead of the Psalms or Canticles; and though this habit was known to the warders, and severely punished when detected, yet it flourished to a very great extent. It was extremely difficult to discover that a man, who bent his eyes reverently on his book and was apparently singing with great devotion, was in reality chanting such words as "Got any baccy about you?" or other less harmless observations. Even in the cells, too, a regular conversation would often be kept up between a man and his neighbour by a series of knocks and taps on the wall; and it was wonderful how quickly a new-comer would learn to understand this prison language.

Robert, however, did not lend himself to any of these practices. He was so heartily ashamed of himself for his one great act of dishonesty, that he was anxious to make reparation in any way in his power; and, besides, his good education and his natural refinement prevented him from wishing to hold intercourse with the other prisoners, nearly all of whom were habitual thieves, or men of even a lower class.

On returning to his cell, after the morning's exercise, Robert's dinner was served—if, indeed, "*served*" is the right expression; perhaps it would be more exact to say—was pushed through the trap-door. Dinner, indeed any meal, is the great break in the prisoner's life, though the meals themselves are neither luxurious nor too plentiful. For breakfast Robert had a pint of cocoa—rather thick and floury, but still wholesome and comforting; and for supper a pint of gruel, or "*skilly*" as it is usually called, and sufficient bread with both these meals. There was more variety in the dinners. Robert's to-day was a thick lump of suet pudding, weighing a pound; but this dinner only came once a week: on the other days the prisoners had two or three ounces of meat with potatoes, or else a pint of soup thickened with vegetables of various kinds.

One morning Robert had a visit from the chaplain. He had been expecting, and, indeed, rather dreading this; for, knowing little of the ways of the clergy, he feared lest he should be overwhelmed with reproaches, or reminded that he was only suffering the well-merited punishment of his own wickedness. It was not that Robert did not feel this; indeed, he felt it every hour of the day, and so keenly that he could not bear the thought of speaking of his disgrace and shame to any one. All his fears proved groundless. A tall, bright-eyed man entered the cell, and seating himself he invited Robert to do the same and to go on with his work. After a few trivial remarks the chaplain, who had meanwhile been eyeing keenly Robert's slow and awkward attempts at oakum-picking, rather startled him by breaking into a merry laugh, which sounded strange enough in that dull place.

"Look here, my man," he said in his deep, cheerful voice, "you will find this a quicker way of getting through your task," and suiting the action to the word, he bent down, and,

reaching several strands, rubbed them well together for a minute or two, until they were soft enough to be easily unpicked. "That's a quicker way than yours, isn't it?" he said, handing Robert the picked oakum; "though I daresay you little thought to learn oakum-picking off the chaplain of all people!"

"No, indeed, sir," said Robert gratefully; "I did not expect to see a gentleman soil his fingers to help a prisoner like myself," he added somewhat bitterly.

"Why not?" answered the chaplain cheerily. "I daresay I'm not so much better than you, or if I am it is only by God's grace, so there is nothing for *me* to be proud of. Don't despair, my man," he added kindly, noticing Robert's downcast look; "you are young, and may probably have a long life before you, and you may yet make an honoured name for yourself both in this world—and the next," he added softly.

Robert did not answer for a minute or two; he felt strangely stirred by the kind, manly words of the chaplain. At last he raised his eyes, and looking earnestly at him, he asked, "Do you really think, sir, that when once I am out of this awful place, there will be a chance for me to begin life again? Won't every one fight shy of me, and be afraid to employ a prisoner? I know I should have felt so in the old days."

"That is, true enough, the feeling of the greater part of mankind, but not of all, I trust and hope," answered the chaplain. "There are some men even now in the world who, remembering that their Great Example did not refuse to believe in the sincerity of repentant sinners, are both ready and anxious to lend a helping hand to those who have fallen from the right way, and I think I may promise that employment could be found for you when your term of imprisonment is over. However, that won't be yet a bit; more's the pity, I know you'll say; so let us be practical, and

not make resolutions for a future life, and forget altogether about the present. Just now you are in jail, and you do not want me or any one else to tell you how hard a life this is. Well, suppose you resolve to take all these hardships and trials bravely and without rebelling against them. Don't misunderstand me in this. I do not mean to warn you against outward acts of rebellion; your own sense would tell you that such behaviour would not be only wrong but foolish, and would result in nothing but stricter discipline. What I mean is, try to bear everything as patiently as you can, and I think I can promise you that in this way you will rid yourself of one of the greatest miseries that a prisoner has to suffer—I mean the maddening feeling of longing to resist all authority."

"Oh, sir," interrupted Robert, "indeed that is true enough. If people could only know how fearfully aggravating it is to be ordered how and when to do every simple action of your life, I am sure they would endure anything sooner than be shut up here. I think a day in jail would do more to keep people from dishonesty or any other sin than all the laws or policemen in the world. It's an awful life," added Robert passionately. "I cannot think how I came to do what I did. I could almost kill myself when I think that by my own act I have shut myself up to endure this living death." Robert could not go on; his voice failed, and he turned quickly to his oakum-picking to hide his emotion. The chaplain also was silent for a space.

"I know what you say is true enough," he said at length; "I have heard it from others, and, of course, it is just the loss of liberty which makes the punishment of prison life. It is not the coarse food, for many of the poor have far worse; nor is it even the work, distasteful as it is; but never to be allowed a will of your own, to be always at the beck and call of others, and, above all, never to wander where the will takes

one—these are evils it is impossible to exaggerate. Still there is a little comfort left for you. To begin with: it is not for ever—yours is a short sentence compared to many under this roof; and then I think I can tell you that by and by you will not feel the loss of liberty in quite so terrible a way as you do now. You will, I daresay, never cease to long for the hour when you will be free; but, as the weeks roll on, you will find the time passes more quickly than you would have at one time thought possible, and if you get a character amongst the wardens for being quiet and giving no trouble, there are many little ways by which they can render the discipline less irksome to you. And then there is another view you may take, if you will, of your prison life. I read somewhere of illness being described as ‘*God calling His servant out of the crowd to speak to him alone.*’ Perhaps this imprisonment is to answer the same purpose to you that sickness has to others; perhaps in the busy life of the world you did not listen to the ‘still small voice’ of God, and so He has called *you* out of the crowd to speak to *you* alone. Do not, then, shut your ears to His voice.”

Here the chaplain stopped—he did not believe in too much preaching—and rose to go. “Thank you, sir,” said Robert, rising respectfully, and he said no more; but the chaplain did not think the worse of him for that. He had often heard torrents of resolutions and promises of amendment from men who, once out of jail, never thought again about them, and he felt more inclined to believe in the sincerity of a man who promised nothing.

The cell doors clanged to, and Robert was alone again. “I do believe the man’s right,” he said to himself. “I never did seem to have time to think of God or the next world whilst I was so busy in this one. I’ve time enough now to think of anything,” he continued sadly. “I do feel that I should like to lead a better life, when once I get out of

this place. I wanted all the time he was speaking to tell him so, only I couldn't. I remember hearing that all prisoners 'gammon up' the chaplain, and I couldn't bear him to think I was one of that sort, so I said nothing. Perhaps, too, I am deceiving myself; may be I only have these sort of thoughts because I am shut up and can't get to my usual work. Anyhow I'll remember what he said about taking things patiently; it will be hard enough sometimes, I know; but I shall see by that if I am in earnest, or whether it's only because I'm mopish that I wish to do better. Somehow I can't trust myself a bit after what I've done.'

Perhaps he was none the worse man for that; such mistrustful feelings are more wholesome than the self-satisfied ones he had cherished during the greater part of his life. When once we begin to distrust ourselves we look for some one on whom we can lean, and if then we are brought to turn to Him who has promised "never to leave us nor forsake us," we need not fear even for the weakest and frailest amongst us.

There was one person, namely, his mother, who was seldom for long absent from Robert's thoughts; and bitterly did he feel the impossibility of being with her, and he was constantly picturing to himself her shame and grief at the disgrace her only child had brought upon himself. However, poor woman, fortunately for her, she never seemed able to realise what had happened. She knew, of course, that something was wrong with Robert, something that seemed to stupefy her and make her "silly-like," as Keziah, her devoted servant, termed it. Mrs. Ellis took to her bed, and though suffering from no actual disease, she seemed too weak to care to get up. "She'd lie here till her son came to her," she told Keziah, who would sometimes try to coax her out into the more cheerful parlour. At other times she would cry and moan that "her son had forgotten her, and didn't care to see

her whilst she was sick and ill;“ whilst he, poor fellow, was wishing every hour of the day that he could be with her, and soothe and comfort the mother who, with all her faults, had ever so truly loved him.

Death at last released the poor woman ; and on the next occasion when the prisoners were allowed to see visitors, Robert was summoned to the long room, where, behind a double grating, stood poor Keziah, covered with crape, and with her honest face red and blurred with tears.

“She’s gone, Mr. Robert,” said the poor girl, “and I’ve come to give you her last messages. She got a deal better in her mind towards the last, and quite sensible. She said she knew she shouldn’t be long here, and when she was gone I was to give you her dearest love, and she was so sorry you couldn’t be spared to see her. She always thought you were kept at the office, sir, same as you were in election time, you remember; and I was to tell you what a nice home you’d always kept for her. And then she said something about ‘many mansions’—you know the verse in the Bible, Mr. Robert; many a time lately I’ve had to read that chapter over and over again. And then she just said softly, ‘God bless my boy,’ and she was gone! Oh dear!” and here poor Keziah’s sobs became uncontrollable, and a kind-hearted woman led her away, and Robert had to return to his cell, feeling, if possible, more desolate than ever. He had so longed to see his mother again, and now that could never be; he could not so much as stand by her lifeless body—nay, she was even buried before he heard of her death. Oh, how bitter, how galling, was this imprisonment! How he envied even the most wretched beggar in the streets, who still possessed the priceless boon of liberty, which he had so madly forfeited. “O mother, mother!” groaned the unhappy man, “if I could but just have seen you only for a minute, I should not feel quite so wretched.”

CHAPTER III.

IT was well for Robert that the time had arrived for his removal from Newgate to one of the great convict jails, for he mourned so deeply for his mother that his health was beginning to suffer. However, change of scene is one of the best cures for diseases of the mind, and so to some extent it proved to Robert; though in this case, alas! it was only exchanging one prison for another.

One morning, without having received any previous intimation, Robert was desired by a warder to go down to the entrance hall. He obeyed, wondering much what was to happen to him. He found many other prisoners standing there, and soon learnt that they were on their way to Millbank. One of the head warders now read out to each man his crime and the term of his imprisonment, and when that was over a far more disagreeable ceremony had to be gone through, namely, the fastening on each man the handcuffs, or, in prison language, the "Darbies." How Robert hated the warder as he approached him with the loathsome bracelets; he felt as if he must knock him down, and do something or other to relieve the passion that was swaying at his heart. In a moment, however, better feelings followed; he remembered how foolish and useless it would be to attempt to defy the prison authorities, and he remembered also his resolution to bear patiently all the trials and troubles his imprisonment might bring. After all, as he sadly thought, he had brought this all on himself, and was only suffering a sentence which he himself well knew to be just. He was surprised, though, to see how utterly unconcerned the rest of the prisoners were at the disgrace which he him-

self felt so keenly. Anything that promised a change seemed welcome to them, and they even laughed and joked as the handcuffs were fitted on them. At last all were ready, and the order was given to march into the yard, where three or four Black Marias, or prison vans, were drawn up in readiness. All were soon packed inside, each in his separate division, from which he could see nothing of his neighbour, the warder mounted the step, and they were soon rattling quickly through the London streets on the way to Millbank. It was true enough that it was not possible for Robert to see any of the inmates of his van, but he could hear them plainly enough, and indeed he would have been stone deaf if he had not done so, for on both sides of him a prisoner was shouting, stamping, and singing, or more properly roaring, with a noise which rose even above the din of the crowded streets.

At last Millbank was reached, and the first thing on entering the jail was to free each man from his handcuffs. Right glad was Robert to have again the use of his hands. Then the prisoners had to be arranged and classified according to their sentences; and when this, which took some time, was finally settled, the chief warder, a fine soldierly-looking man, addressed the prisoners, and after giving them a few words of advice, he explained the system by which it was possible for them, by earning their full amount of marks, to obtain some slight remission of their sentences. This remission only began after the first nine months of a man's sentence had passed; after that time it was possible for an industrious, well-conducted prisoner, to obtain three months' remission out of every twelve that he might be sentenced for.

Robert's heart felt lighter as he understood this, and he resolved that it should not be his fault if he did not obtain all the marks that could possibly be had. Before he was conducted to his cell he had first of all to undergo the inevitable bath, and then he had to go before the doctor, who made a

thorough examination of him, and had him weighed and measured before dismissing him to his cell. Robert would have liked to question the warder who conducted him thither, but he seemed a surly sort of fellow, and he durst not accost him, but followed silently through numerous doors and passages, and up several flights of stairs, until, at the very top storey of the building, Robert (or rather number 37,417, for he was no longer known by a name, but only by his prison number) was handed over to another warder, who showed him to his cell at the end of the long corridor. As the warder was leaving, Robert summoned up his courage to ask the question he was so anxious to learn, and saluting the officer in military style he said, "Please sir, could you tell me what sort of work I am to be put to?"

"We'll make a tailor of ye—they are all tailors on this landing," replied the warder, and his words were a great relief to Robert, for tailoring is a quiet, clean occupation; and though he had, of course, had no previous experience of the trade, yet he felt sure he should infinitely prefer it to bootmaking, weaving, or mat-making, all of which trades are taught at Millbank, or even to doing the baking or cooking, which is also undertaken by the prisoners.

Robert took his first lesson in his new trade on the following day, and found it almost a pleasant change after the perpetual monotony of oakum-picking, which for the last few months had been his sole occupation. Do not imagine, however, that he became a tailor by magic, far from it; for some days it required the exercise of all his energies even to thread his needle, and to keep his thimble on his finger; still, as the months rolled on, Robert by patient perseverance became a fair "botcher," as those are called who, previous to entering the jail, had learned nothing of the trade.

Robert remained about a year at Millbank, and then, with

a large number of the other prisoners, he was drafted off to Dartmoor. The journey there was in itself a great delight to those who for so many months had been shut up from all intercourse with the outer world; but it too had its drawbacks, chiefly caused by the agonising fear in Robert's mind that any of his former friends should recognise him at the station. All the prisoners were of course handcuffed, and in addition to this they were also chained to each other, and the warders in charge of the party were heavily armed, so that they attracted no little attention at the Paddington station, and numerous were the glances cast into the large third-class carriage into which the whole party were packed. No one, however, appeared to recognise Robert, or indeed any of the prisoners; but it was nevertheless an intense relief to him when the train at last steamed slowly out of the station, and, increasing quickly its pace, soon fairly flew past the streets and villas, till it reached the open country, just then bright with all the riches of a bounteous harvest. Robert's seat was next the window, and as he feasted his eyes on the glorious sight, his heart felt almost breaking, to see other men working cheerily in the fields, or dining under hedges with the hearty enjoyment that honest labour gives to food, and then turned his eyes to the carriage full of the cunning or base-looking prisoners to whom he was chained, and to whose society he was, by his own act, doomed.

What would he not give to be free?—even though freedom might mean breaking stones for bread; anything so as he could be his own master once more, and shake off this horrible restraint. But he felt such thoughts to be useless, and was thankful when Plymouth station was at last reached, and they were all packed into the omnibuses which were to convey them across the hilly Devonshire country to the heights of Dartmoor. After the town had been well left behind them, the prisoners were allowed to get out and walk up the

steepest of these hills, and this exercise was most delightful to feet that had so long paced the dreary flags of the exercising yard. After ascending the last hill, the gloomy pile of Dartmoor appeared against the sky; and shortly afterwards all were safely within the buildings, and the handcuffs were off, and a good tea supplied to the tired travellers.

There are a great number of prisoners at Dartmoor, and some of the work done by them is indeed "hard labour," so that Robert felt thankful when he found that he was again told off to the tailoring gang. The other gangs were composed of road men, the granite quarry men, farm men, gardeners, cleaners employed in scrubbing the jail passages, &c., blacksmiths, carpenters, stone-cutters, shoemakers, and many others; in fact, almost all the trades of a town are represented within the jail.

We have not space here to chronicle Robert's career through the two years and more that he passed at Dartmoor; the man kept steady to his determination to do his best, and he gradually found a certain degree of favour with the warders as one likely to give no trouble. He gained all the possible marks, and thus reduced his sentence by more than a year. How thankful he felt as the weeks and months rolled by, and at last, three months before he was liberated, came the welcome permission to grow his hair and beard; and no vain young officer could have felt more pride in his budding whiskers than did Robert, for here was one tangible sign of his coming freedom.

The day long wished for, long prayed for, came at last, though the hours of the last week seemed almost as long as the previous years, so earnestly did Robert long for liberty. A warder accompanied him to London, and on obtaining his ticket-of-leave Robert went straight to the Prisoners' Aid

Society, where he met, by appointment, his old friend, the chaplain of Newgate, who proved, indeed, a friend to Robert, and by his influence he procured a situation in a merchant's office in Western Australia. Here, in a new country and amongst utter strangers, Robert began the world again, and this time in a humbler, better spirit.

His life was, for the first few months, far from an easy one, for his salary was only just enough to keep him; however, Robert was thankful for his situation, humble as it was, and he toiled industriously on, hoping for better things in the future. He was fortunate, too, in obtaining a lodging in a very respectable boarding-house, kept by a Mrs. Simpkins, a good old soul, who took quite an interest in her young men boarders, looking after them in almost a motherly way. Her house was chiefly frequented by the steadier young men of the place—the fast young fellows soon tired of the homely ways of the Simpkins' establishment, and were not long in removing to less particular boarding-houses, where they could keep late hours, and indulge in other practices which were not in favour with old Mrs. Simpkins.

Robert soon became one of her prime favourites, and he, on his part, was very fond of his kind landlady, whose fussy ways often reminded him of his mother. One evening, she met him with a troubled expression: "O Mr. Ellis! I wish you'd help me a bit; the young man who used to do my accounts for me is gone up country, and I thought I'd try and manage them myself; but I can't get on a bit, the figures don't add up twice the same, and I want you to put me straight, if you will."

"To be sure I will," said Robert pleasantly. "Give me your books, I'll take them up to my room, and soon get them ship-shape for you."

"Well, I'm sure I'll be grateful enough if you will; but don't take them upstairs—just step into my room here, and

then, when Fanny's come home, we'll all have a bit of supper together," and so saying, she led the way into a cosy little sitting-room, somewhat littered now, it was true, with all the various bills that had so distracted poor Mrs. Simpkins, but still to Robert's eye more comfortable looking than anything he had seen since he left home. He set himself at once to work, and indeed there was plenty to do, for Mrs. Simpkins' affairs were, as she said, "in a rare muddle," and Robert had got little more than half through, when in bustled the good woman again. "Now, Mr. Ellis, me and Fanny are just going to sit down to a bit of supper, and you must come along and have a bite with us; I'm sure those nasty bills must be done by now."

"No, Mrs. Simpkins, they are not 'done' yet, I fear; but another evening's work will, I think, put them quite straight, and then, if you like, I will just look in every evening after office hours and keep your books for you. I shall be very glad to do it, for you know how many kind things you are always doing for me."

"Indeed, I know nothing of the sort," responded the old woman; "but I shall be glad enough of your offer, though it seems a shame, too, for you've enough of sums all day at the office, I daresay. However, I shall set the bookkeeping against your board and lodging—and now, come along, for Fanny gets hungry with teaching all day."

Fanny was Mrs. Simpkins' only child—a quiet, lady-like girl of twenty—she had been thoroughly well educated, and was now a teacher in one of the best schools in the town.

After supper Fanny played on the little piano in the sitting-room, and she also sang two or three ballads with a fresh, sweet voice, which thrilled Robert as no music had ever done before.

The end of the story is easy to guess. Robert continued

to come evening after evening, and Mrs. Simpkins' accounts were better kept than they had ever been before; but every evening he also fell deeper and deeper in love with Fanny. Mrs. Simpkins was often in the habit of dropping asleep whilst Fanny sang, so perhaps she hardly noticed the eager way in which Robert listened to the young singer; but at length Robert himself began to realise that this state of things could no longer go on—he knew he loved Fanny, and he loved her too truly and too unselfishly to suppose it possible she could marry a man who had been a convict. He lay awake many a night thinking what he should do, and at last he decided to go away; he could not stay near Fanny and not love her, and yet he felt so unworthy of her love, that one evening, before Fanny's time for returning home, he went to Mrs. Simpkins and told her he must leave.

“Dear! dear! What's up with the lad?” interrupted Mrs. Simpkins. “Leave us! You and Fanny haven't been quarrelling, have you? Now I'll just speak my mind, Robert—old women may do that. I've seen a good deal of you lately, and I like you, and if you and Fanny were to be man and wife, I'd not stand in your way. I know you're not rich, but you're steady, and I should like to see my girl married to an honest man before I died.”

“Mrs. Simpkins,” said Robert hoarsely, “God knows how I should love and treasure Fanny, if I could win her; but I'm not fit—I'm not the honest man you think—I've been a convict, sentenced to five years' penal servitude, and I know I'm not a fit husband for Fanny; so I am going right away, only I must say good-bye to you first,” and Robert grasped her hand, whilst burning tears would force their way down his cheeks.

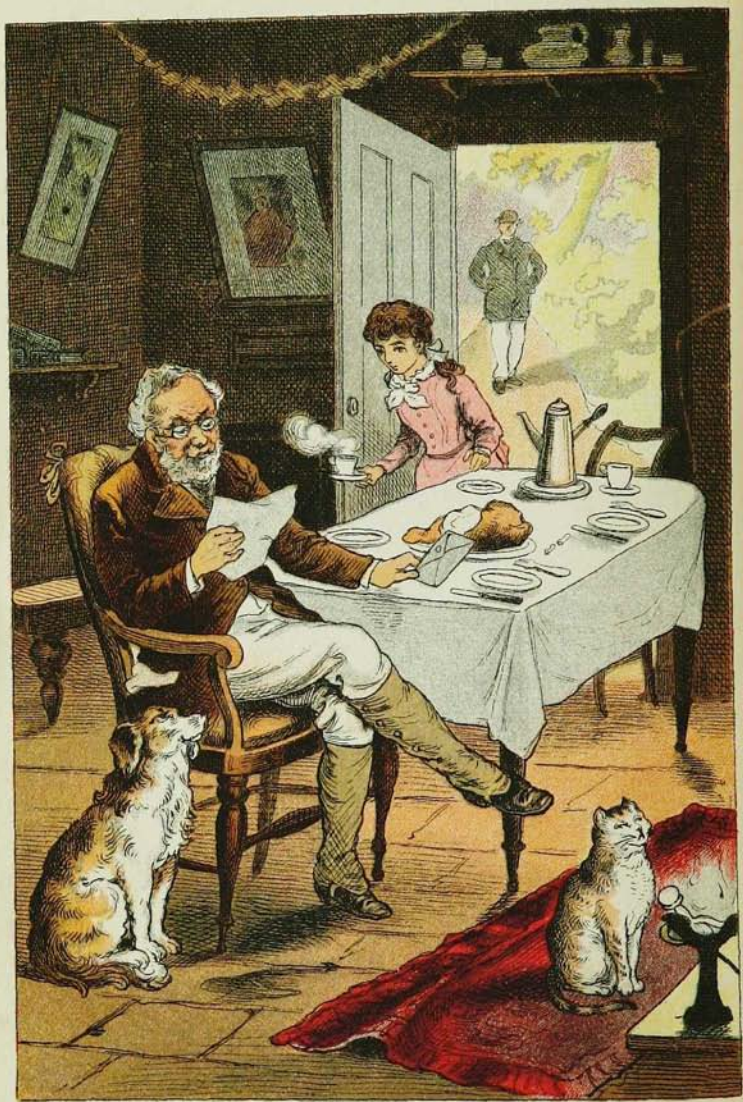
“Oh, dear!” moaned Mrs. Simpkins, fairly confused, “I never should have thought it—there, it's long ago, Robert—

don't take on so. I wish Fanny would come. Let's hear what she says. Dear, dear, I hardly know what I'm saying."

What Fanny did say will not be told in these pages. Suffice it to know that Robert was not compelled to leave Mrs. Simpkins' house, and that not very long after the painful disclosure of the sins of his past life, an innocent happy girl was content to take him for her husband.

She never repented of this step. No wife could be happier than Fanny. Robert worked early and late to make her a comfortable home, and Mrs. Simpkins was happy in the happiness of her children. In the course of years Robert became prosperous, but how to get on in this world was no longer his *only* thought; he did not forget to find a time in every day to think of the world to come, and though he never could again bring himself to speak of his time of shame and sorrow, yet the resolutions made in those unhappy moments of his prison life were not forgotten, but were acted on.

He took a larger view of life than he had ever done before; it was no longer a term of seventy years, perhaps, in which to grow rich and respectable, but it was the short yet anxious preparation time for a long and happy eternity.



ON THE HAZEL.

ON THE HAZEL.

CHAPTER I.

“ LETTER for Charlie! What's the lad up to now, I wonder, to be having folks writing to him of all people! Can you tell who the letter's from, Faith?" and Farmer Flower handed the document in question to his pretty daughter.

"To be sure I can," was Faith's reply, "but I shall not tell you, father, till you have told *me* what day it is!"

"Wednesday," retorted the farmer, taking up the large brown-handled carvers and beginning to cut a slice from the great pink ham before him on the breakfast-table.

"And what else?" persisted Faith, coming round from her end of the table to bring her father's cup of tea.

"Sandford's sale? Is *that* what you mean, child? But I say, where's that fellow Charlie? I must see him before I go, and I must be sharp too, if I mean to have a good look round at the beasts before all the ruck comes in!"

"O father! how stupid you are this morning! you have not answered my question even now!"

"Well! what am I to say? I have told you all I can think of, except that it is May 6th. I've got it now. Our Charlie's birthday! Bless the lad, how stupid his old father is getting, to be sure! To think now

how I should have forgotten *that* ! And he twenty years old to-day ! Dear, dear, my poor Mary's boy twenty years old ! How time flies ! Why next year we must have a bit of a spree, Faith, clear out the old barn, and make the fiddlers set all the young folks' feet a-dancing."

"And the old ones too, father ! and we will have tea in the best parlour, and supper out here, and "——

Faith's brilliant imagination was checked by the clicking of the farm-gate, and the sound of firm brisk steps coming up the bricked path to the door, noises which caused her to hasten out into the sunlit porch, to greet the advancing figure of a young man with "Many happy returns of the day !"

The pair, as they stand in the porch, just within view of the farmer at the kitchen-table, were a pleasant sight for a father's eyes to rest on.

Charlie Flower is a fine young man. His well-knit figure, his bright complexion and clear, grey eyes, his ready smile and easy manners, make him a good specimen of the young English yeoman.

So far for his outer man ; does the inner go with it ? In many points yes, for he is a good son, his father's right hand in business, and in good report with his fellows, as being upright, honest, capable, and having his eyes well open to the time of day as regards farming matters. He is openhanded too, like his father before him, and with a buoyant, easy-going nature, likes to swim well on the top of that treacherous wave, the good opinion of his neighbours. Most treacherous indeed for all frail mortal barks to trust to, and specially so for Charlie Flower ; for is not self-love lurking within the hull of his boat, and vanity the gay pennon that floats from his mast ? And how will the craft breast the storms of life without the aid of those strong seamen, "the love of God" and "Christian purpose ?"

Old Mrs. Brown, the farmer's housekeeper, used to say,

"I'd rather have Faith's simple yes or no any day, silly little girl as she is, than all Charlie's fine words and protestations put together." But then she was only an old countrywoman, and what should she know of such matters?

Faith has another earnest admirer, too, though he is one who hardly ventures to place himself in that category; for is not Faith "Miss Flower, Farmer Flower's only daughter, who will have money by and by, when the old farmer is carried up to the churchyard?" While he is only Harry Upton, a bookseller's assistant *now*, and not long since an errand boy, travelling hither and thither with the Medington and Ingham papers, and cleaning out Mr. Esop's shop in the market-place at Ingham. He and Charlie had been school-mates and friends at the Hazelburn National School, and had this boyish friendship been still in full force, matters might have looked more hopeful; but the waywardness of life had carried the lads in different directions, and their present intercourse was mostly confined to an exchange of nods as Charlie rode or drove through the town on market days.

"He is a good, steady chap," Charlie gave out on one occasion to his chums at the "Bush."

"But he isn't quite up to the mark, is he, old fellow?" rejoined one of the company, adding with a laugh, "Belongs to the old women's tea-drinking business in Church Street, and wouldn't show his nose inside the 'Bush' to save his life. Well, every one to his own mind, I say!"

Such was the judgment passed at the "Bush," and Charlie fell in with and echoed it, though, somehow, he did not quite like to hear his old friend spoken of in that fashion. But *was* this every one's opinion of Harry? What had his master, Mr. Esop, to say of him?

"As steady and trustworthy as old Time himself is my errand boy, and that dark head of his holds as good a set of brains as you would find anywhere. Why he can keep the

books now and take stock as well as I can myself. There's no late hours with him, no drinking about at public-houses of an evening, but just a quiet sensible hour or two at the Reading Room, or a good walk out into the country to get a breath of fresh air, or a bit of fishing in the Hazel."

The afternoon of Charlie's birthday bid fair to be as lovely as the morning. The sunbeams crept in at the window between the young vine leaves to mock at stay-at-homes, and the birds were shouting a chorus of praise of the spring and sunshine to the Giver of all good things.

"Going to Medington, father?" asked Faith, as she followed him out to the gate and stroked the soft nose of Dapple, the old grey mare, while the farmer took his seat in the gig and picked up his reins.

"Ay, lass, that I be! I promised the parson as how I would go over to old Sharp the lawyer about that bothering trust deed."

"Then Betty must keep house this afternoon, as it is much too beautiful to stay at home, and I have a lot of things to do in Ingham. Don't be surprised if I am a bit late."

Faith stopped many a time on her way, sometimes to pick a pale, dainty anemone, or a frond of young fern, just uncurling, sometimes to listen to the birds, or to watch a shy rabbit whisking away into a hole at sight of her and Tip. Tip was too staid and well-trained a dog to condescend to notice rabbits, or else that expedition through the woods might have been a sore temptation to him. So Faith's walk to Ingham took more time than she had expected, and she was glad to think she had told the farmer not to expect her back to tea. It left her free to accept the invitation from Mrs. James, the chemist's wife, to come in and join their evening meal before she started on her way home, and Mrs. James had so much to say over and after the cup of tea, that the sun was getting low when she said good-bye.

Faith was not, however, to have a solitary walk, for Harry Upton had seen her as she went from one shop to another, and had noticed her come out of Mrs. James's door, which was just opposite Mr. Esop's, and turn up Church Street on her homeward path. He had hoped that she would have wanted some book or paper, that would have brought her to their shop; he longed for the pleasure of a few words with her, and a very disappointed pair of eyes followed her as she went up the street. He quite started at Mr. Esop's voice, the moment after.

"Upton, are you inclined for a walk this fine evening? I have a parcel for Mr. Jeune at Hazelburn, and I don't want to send the boy out again."

There was a sly twinkle in the old man's eye, that told he had read the meaning of Harry's wistful look, which his apprentice might have seen, had he not been in too great a hurry to notice anything.

"I'll look to the closing of the shop and all that," said the kind-hearted little bookseller, "so you can go as soon as you like, and tell Mr. Jeune if you see him."

"Bless the lad!" exclaimed the old man, as he leant against the counter chuckling till he set himself a coughing, for the message to Mr. Jeune was left behind, and Harry was already out of sight.

He soon overtook Faith, but being hot and out of breath, he felt awkward and embarrassed, as is often the way when one wishes to appear at one's best.

After the first greeting the two walked on side by side in the mossy path, Harry, poor silly fellow, feeling that those beechwoods were little short of paradise.

Faith found her tongue first.

"You don't often come to Hazelburn now, Harry," she said.

"No," said Harry, "I can't very often get an out."

"And when you do, you never come near the old farm!"

"There's no chance of seeing you," answered Harry, "you're always so busy with one thing and another, and the farmer don't care to see me, that's plain enough, so it ain't no use my coming to the farm."

"Well, you see," Faith said, apologetically, "father has so much to do just now."

"No, it ain't that. I know I'm not a jolly sort of chap, that can come in and have a glass, and crack a joke over it. And besides that, he can't help seeing what I've got in my heart."

Faith interrupted quickly, feeling that the conversation was growing dangerous when it turned on hearts—"You and Charlie used to be such friends."

"And so we are still as far as I am concerned, but poor Harry Upton putting up Mr. Esop's shutters ain't a fit friend for young Mr. Flower."

Harry spoke rather bitterly. In Faith's presence the inferiority of his position pressed hard on him, and was very difficult to bear.

The colour rushed into the girl's face. "That's not fair of you, Harry Upton, Charlie is not at all the sort of person to throw over old friends because they may not be well to do in the world. You can't say that of him."

"No, nor I won't, and I don't believe it's for that reason we see less of each other. We have never been so thick since I took the pledge, though I don't see why that should stand between us. I do wish Charlie would have done it along with me, he was very near it, you know."

"Perhaps he doesn't need it," said Faith with a little toss of her head; "if folks can keep steady without it, I don't see what good it is."

"I think he would have found it a help."

"Perhaps he doesn't want help."

"Faith," said Harry, "you'll be vexed with what I am going to say, but I can't help it. I think Charlie does want it. I've heard from one and another that he's more at the 'Bush than is good for him, and has some friends there that he'd better be without."

Faith's eyes were bright and her cheeks warm. "It's not like you, Harry Upton, to listen to spiteful gossip against our Charlie. Folks are always backbiting and making mischief, and I wish they'd mind their own business."

"There now, I've made you angry with me," said Harry despondingly, "and it's only because I'm fond of Charlie, and couldn't bear to hear folks say things against him, that I made up my mind to tell you what I heard."

"Then I can tell you that it's quite untrue," declared Faith very decidedly, more decidedly than she could have spoken, if she had thought it over.

"I'm glad and thankful to hear you say so, and I'm only sorry I should have flurried you by saying a word about it. You know I'd sooner cut off my right hand than vex you."

There was an unmistakable earnestness in his voice that did much to take away the girl's indignation, but she was not going quite to let the young man off.

"I must say, you don't make yourself very agreeable, Mr. Upton."

"I'm so sorry, Faith; won't you forgive me?"

Silence, they say, gives consent, so we may suppose that Harry was forgiven, as Faith made no reply. There was a pause for a minute by the stile, and then Harry summoned up his courage and began. "Faith, I'm a poor fellow, not good enough for you to put your little foot on. I have nothing to offer you, except an honest heart full of love to you, and I know that the farmer would not hear of me for a son-in-law, as I am anyhow. But if I thought

that you cared the least little bit for me, I'd work early and late, year after year, and never lose hope or patience, till I got to be the very happiest fellow in the world."

Silence again, except for the nightingale; and Faith's face was in shadow, so Harry could read nothing there.

"I must make haste home," she said at last in a voice that trembled, and as he helped her over the stile and held her hand in his, she added in a whisper, touched perhaps by the wistful look in his eyes, "I think I do like you just a little bit, Harry."

CHAPTER II.

FOR long days after that magical May evening, doubts and fears found no hearing in Harry Upton's heart, but as time went on, the poor young fellow sometimes desponded when he thought how long it might be before he could win a position worthy to be shared by Faith, and how likely it was, how almost certain, that another would in the meantime carry away the prize. Those few last whispered words by the stile seemed but a weak anchor to stay hold by, and he sometimes doubted if he had not altogether misunderstood their meaning, and flattered himself with a hope that had no foundation.

So when he saw young Deanly from Medington, whose father was a big timber merchant there, walking home with Faith on Sunday, a rosebud in his coat which Harry's jealous eye knew at a glance had grown on the bush by the porch at the Croft, or when he noticed Martin Crawley's cob, whose owner had a good farm of his own, fastened to the

railings outside the farm on summer evenings, Harry would go back to Ingham miserable and restless, his heart full of jealous misgivings and bitter discontent.

There was always plenty to do at the Croft, but June with its hay-making was a specially busy month. Faith had not much time for thinking, she would say (as one could not think unless one were idle), but Harry sometimes crept into her head as she made up the golden pats of butter or sent out the great cool cans of cider to the mowers, and then a dimple would come into her cheek and a light into her eye that were not provoked by butter or cider either.

Father was often late in coming home in those days, and Charlie too, for the hay-making was early this year, and there was a splendid crop and right royal weather for making it, if only it would last.

One evening, the old farmer made his appearance in high displeasure, startling Faith out of a day-dream in the porch by a roughness of language which he generally restrained before his little daughter. Charlie, too, who came in with him, seemed equally angry and indignant, so that it was some time before she could make out what was amiss. Her father prided himself on having the best set of mowers that could be found anywhere about Hazelburn. "I gives good wages," he would say, "and expects good work." So he was all the more indignant when he found that three of the best men whom he was just going to set on to mow the twenty-acre meadow by the river, the best of all his grass, had gone off to work for Squire Smith up at the Hall.

"He don't give no beer, but there's lemonade and tea and all sorts of messes going on from morning to night, and no end of victuals besides, and he's fool enough to pay the lazy hounds by the day instead of by the acre, and a pretty long job they'll make of it, he may be sure, and serve him right, say I, for bribing off another man's men."

But "the twenty-acre" left unmown was a terrible worry to the old farmer, and he fretted over it.

"By Jove!" he said, "if I was a younger man I'd do it myself. Ay! you may smile, Faith, but I could mow with the best of them twenty years ago."

Charlie listened in silence to his father's grumblings, and Faith almost blamed him for want of sympathy, and felt quite vexed with him when he went yawning up to bed as soon as supper was done.

It haunted her even in her dreams till she woke with a start, for some one was calling her name very gently.

It was very early morning, and she heard that minute the old wheezy, eight-day clock on the stairs strike two. It was still quite dark, the short sweet June night held its sway, and not even the most wakeful bird had begun to stir in the ivy or chirp a good morning from its nest.

"Faith, Faith!" repeated the voice at the door.

"What is it, Charlie?"

"There, now, don't make a row. I want you to let me out quietly."

"Where are you going?"

"Never you mind! after no mischief."

She rose up, threw something round her, and opened the door, and in the dim light saw Charlie's great strong figure standing outside.

"Come on," he whispered. "Don't wake father, I've no time to lose."

They stole down the stairs into the kitchen, where Tip, though roused up from his sleep before the hearth, at a whisper from Faith lay down again with a peaceful wag of the tail.

Faith asked no more questions, but when she saw Charlie catch up a whet-stone that lay on the dresser, a light dawned on her and she gave a little cry, "The twenty-acre, Charlie!"

"Hush up!" he said, "yes, that's it."

"You ain't ever going to do it all alone!"

"No, I ain't, but I don't know what father would say to my mate."

"Is it Johnson?"

"Not he! I wouldn't have one of those chaps at any price. No, it's Jack Dance, he's a boy to work when he's a mind, but father's so set against him ever since there was that row with the keepers. There, I can't stay, or Dance will think I'm skulking work, and am off my bargain. Shut up the door, and be off to bed again, and keep father about as late as you can in the morning, for the later he is the more we'll have got done."

"I wish I was a man," the girl said to herself as he left, "to go out and mow with Charlie; and to think that I should have fancied that he did not care and was sleepy and selfish last night! and to think that Harry Upton should have said things against him!"

Charlie was a hero in those days, you may be sure. Before Faith was dressed in the morning (and that was early enough) Betty burst into her room open-mouthed and breathless with a great many—"well I nevers!" and "who'd a-thoughts!" before she came to the wonderful news, that "young master was a-mowing down twenty-acre along of Jack Dance."

Faith had to have all her wits about her to prevent the farmer from hearing of it then and there, and could hardly hold her tongue when he asked where "that lazy fellow Charlie was," and added that "he didn't use to be such a lie-a-bed when he was a youngster;" but she was amply repaid for her self-control, when the old father went grumbling out to have a look round. At the orchard gate he stopped and glanced across to the twenty-acre by the river, and then he gave a sudden exclamation and rubbed his eyes

as if the sun dazzled them. Faith laughed softly to herself, and coming forward slipped one of her little hands under her father's arm, and led him across the intervening field, teasing him softly as she went.

"Where's that lazy fellow, Charlie, eh, father? You didn't use to be such a lie-a-bed when you were young, did you now?"

The farmer was, as he expressed it, dumb-founded; and when he came to the twenty-acre and saw the goodly piece that was down in thick swathes, and the two strong, young fellows with their scythes going like clockwork, his feelings were almost beyond expression.

That mowing of the twenty-acre was a feather in Charlie's cap that he wore for many a day, and was a story that lasted the farmer for many a market-day. Faith was proud of the feat, and so were the farm men and the Hazelburn folk and Charlie's numerous friends. Harry Upton even heard of it in Mr. Esop's shop, and was glad for his old friend's sake, and still more for Faith's. But bright as those days were, Faith always dated from them the beginning of the troubles that came afterwards, for it was then that Charlie and Jack Dance were thrown together, and it was through Jack Dance that Charlie knew Lawrence Garth.

Jack was another old schoolfellow of Charlie's, but since those days their paths lay apart, and Jack's soon took a downward direction. He fell into drinking habits, and was strongly suspected of poaching.

He had also become intimate with a low, sporting set at Medington, and attended most of the race meetings within reach. Farmer Flower had a special dislike to him, but on this occasion he did not say a word to Charlie about the mate he had chosen, and when the twenty-acre was down, he clapped Jack on the shoulder, with a hearty "Well done, lad," and offered to set him on another job, if he liked to take it.

As for Charlie, he was delighted with Dance. "He's first-rate company, Faith, and he's seen a deal of life. Oh, yes, he may be low, but he makes a fellow laugh with his stories till his sides ache. I'd as soon smoke a pipe with Jack Dance, as with any chap I know."

Medington races were coming on, and the farmer was vexed to find Charlie full of them, and bent upon going. It was a busy time, and he could ill be spared, but after the grand feat of the twenty-acre, his father had not the heart to object, and when he was a lad, he liked a jaunt to the races as well as any one.

Martin Crawley was going, and he called for Charlie on his way, and drove him in his dog-cart, but in the evening, as Faith was on her way to the village on an errand, she met Martin Crawley coming back alone, and he told her in a surly, offended way that Charlie would not come back with him. He had fallen in with a lot of friends, and one of them would give him a lift home.

This was a great vexation to Faith, and the farmer, too, who, when his supper and pipe were done, went grumbling up to bed.

Faith sat alone in the kitchen waiting for her brother. It was very quiet, only the ticking of the old eight-day clock on the stairs to be heard, together with the soft fall of the wood ashes on the hearth, and the chirping of the cricket on the warm bricks. Tip came and laid his head on the girl's lap, as she sat on her little stool, and she stroked his shaggy ears, or bent down her soft cheek to rest on his head. The clock struck eleven and twelve, and yet Charlie did not come, but at last Tip suddenly pricked his ears and gave a low growl, and Faith started to her feet.

"Hush, Tip!" she said, "it's only Charlie."

But Tip was excited, and bristling, and sniffed at the door in a suspicious manner, so that Faith grew fearful,

and, when a tap came at the door, she opened it very cautiously and peeped out.

"It's you, Charlie, isn't it?"

But the dark figure standing in the porch was not Charlie, and Faith gave a little start of terror, and Tip an irrepressible growl, as they recognised Jack Dance.

"Hullo there!" he said, "is the master to bed? Oh! it's Miss Faith. Beg pardon, miss."

"What is it?" she asked anxiously. "Where's Charlie?"

Jack jerked his thumb over his shoulder. "He be coming on, but lookee here, miss," and he peered behind her into the dimly-lighted kitchen, "is the master to bed?"

"Yes," she said, "this long time. What's the matter?"

"Then just you go too, miss, if I may make so bold. It's all right, there ain't nothing wrong, but I'll see the young master up to bed."

Faith got more and more frightened and puzzled. "I don't understand," she said. "Where's Charlie?"

"Don't trouble your head about him, Miss Faith, best leave him to me. He'll be all right to-morrow, and no one need be the wiser." He put his hand on her arm roughly, but not rudely, to turn her towards the stairs, and suddenly the meaning of it flashed on her mind, Charlie was the worse for drink; she shrank away from Jack's touch, and, covering her face with her hands, sank down for a second in bitter shame and grief.

Then hearing the sound of the stumbling, unsteady footsteps in the porch, her courage failed her, and she fled to her own room, throwing herself on her knees by the bed, hiding her face in the clothes, to stifle the passionate sobs that burst from her, and as she knelt there she heard the name "Lawrence Garth" repeated several times over by Charlie's unsteady voice in the next room.

CHAPTER III.

THIS new friend of Charlie's, whose name Faith first heard in such misery that June night, took up his abode, some six weeks later, at the "Jolly Angler," where he was soon in high favour with Mrs. Alford, its bustling hostess, who pronounced him to be quite the gentleman, and as she had been housekeeper in very high families, she was generally allowed to be an authority on such points.

"I should have liked to have had him stop here," Charlie said to Faith, "but he is used to things being done very differently to what we have them, and I should not like to ask him to rough it like we do. And I say, Faith, I wish you would not be always slaving about so, just like a servant. I'm sure there's no need for it. Why don't you make Betty do more of the work?"

But this was too much for Faith; she tossed her pretty head and tucked up her sleeves above the dimpled elbows, and said, "that if Mr. Garth was too fine to take them as they were, he had better keep away."

But when he had once been to the farm, he seemed to have no intention of keeping away, and if he was not used to things being done as they were there, he did not appear to object to the change, and he had the good taste to admire Faith quite as much in the dairy with her dress tucked up under her big apron and her little feet clacketing about in pattens, as in her neat afternoon dress, which she put on earlier in the day than usual now, in consequence of Charlie's expostulations.

Lawrence Garth's eyes followed her about with such evident admiration, that even Betty giggled meaningly, and the old farmer pinched his little daughter's ear and talked of "sparks" and "smart young beaux."

You must not think that Faith was untrue to Harry Upton, because she was flattered by Lawrence Garth's attentions. She was only a girl after all, just eighteen, and he was a clever man, and knew how to please her without alarming her. He had read and travelled a good deal, and could talk of many things that interested and amused her, of which even Harry Upton knew nothing, and yet Lawrence Garth never treated her as if she were ignorant or uneducated. So never a day passed without Lawrence Garth coming to the farm, and Faith always felt and looked pleased to see him.

The farmer was the one who cared least about his visitor, though he joked Faith about him. He was so bluff and downright himself, that he got impatient of the fine manners that impressed Charlie and Faith so much. Still, any friend of Charlie's was always welcome, and if Faith was pleased so much the better, though for his part something a bit plainer was more to his taste.

Faith's pleasure was not, however, to be long lived, as a whisper soon reached her of how the visitor at the "Jolly Angler" had been talking of Farmer Flower's pretty daughter somewhat too freely, and of the nice little fortune she would have by and by. After this she did not look so kindly on Mr. Garth as before; she even began to think that his refined manners were put on, and that after all he was not half as agreeable as Harry Upton. She did not feel sure either that Lawrence Garth's influence was good for Charlie, since he was nearly always late home at night now from smoking at the "Jolly Angler," or playing billiards at the "Bush" in Ingham, and when Faith crept down to let him in, he was either noisy and excited, or stupid and surly. Once again too, since the Medington races, Dance brought him home quite unfit to take care of himself. Faith could have forgiven that first fall, though Charlie never could be quite the same to her again afterwards, but the experiences

of every night now added to the sickening disgust that changes love and esteem into sorrowful pity.

"Faith," Charlie said one morning, "have you any money? I'm awfully short, and I don't want to ask the governor."

Faith produced her little silk purse. The butter money was her property, and the proceeds of the poultry-yard too, so she had generally a little hoard to buy what the farmer called "gimcracks" with.

"I'll pay you when I get my money," Charlie went on, "how much can you let me have? I owe Garth a lot."

"Whatever for?"

"Oh, billiards, of course. You don't suppose fellows play for nothing! I call it a shame to keep one so short as I am, it makes a fellow look so small not to be able to pay up little debts, and these are debts of honour, you know."

"Why don't you ask father?"

"I have once, and I don't like to do it again. Is this all you can give me? It's not half enough. Can't you coax father out of some more? Say you want a new gown, or a bonnet, or something?"

Faith turned and looked at her brother in surprise; he laughed it off. "Of course I was joking, but can't you manage to scratch up a little more, for I really am in a fix and don't know where to turn?"

Faith gave him all she had by her, but only two days after he came to her again. He had been horridly unlucky at the "Bush" last night. Garth, too, was short of money, and had not received some remittances he expected from London, so he had asked Charlie if he could make it convenient to pay the trifle he owed, "and I had no idea, Faith, how much it was till he showed me the paper."

"Go to father, Charlie," Faith said very gravely.

"I tell you I can't. He don't like Garth overmuch

now, and he's likely enough to turn crusty on him, if he knows about this, and it would make it horridly unpleasant for me. Faith, I do wish you would be a little pleasanter to Garth when he comes here. You liked him well enough at first, and now you'll hardly look at him."

"I'm sure I'm always civil to him, what more does he want?"

"Well, he was speaking about it the other day, and he said he had offended you somehow, but he didn't know how; and Faith—I think if you would be a little pleasant, he would let the money stand over a bit."

The blood was burning in Faith's cheeks now. "So much for your nice friend!" she said indignantly. "I'll try and get the money for you, Charlie, if I can; but I'm not to be bought that way."

She got some money for Charlie that afternoon by collecting some butter money that was due to her, and meeting Garth on her way home she passed him with a hurried word, and a face that was so tell-tale, that he could read in it plainly the aversion that was growing in the girl's heart for this false friend of her brother.

CHAPTER IV.

Do you know what it is to sit up at night waiting for any one? If so, it will not be difficult to you to picture Faith in the old farm kitchen, as the autumn days shortened and the nights grew longer. Alone with sad thoughts of Charlie's changing behaviour, and starting nervously at every crack in the old farm furniture, and every unexplained noise in the house. It would not be half so dismal out by the gate, in the quiet night, with the stars for company; so

ran her thoughts, and with a soft "Come along, Tip," she opened the door and went lightly down the path.

How still it all was! nothing to break the silence, but the soft flutter of a dropping leaf, or the occasional stamp of a sleepy horse in the stable! Yes! but there *was* another noise now surely! and a footstep too, not a bit like Charlie's, but stealthy, coming across the rick-yard. Tip had heard it too, and had dashed through the gate with an angry growl, which brought a low exclamation in a man's voice, most certainly not Charlie's, of "Lie down, you brute, can't you." The speaker moved closer to the gate, and now Faith could hear the crackling of the straw and twigs as they gave way beneath his feet.

"Who's there?" she faltered, and the step stopped short.

From the shadow of the nearest rick a dark figure advanced in answer to her call, and Lawrence Garth's voice exclaimed, "Miss Flower! *you* up at this time of night!"

"Yes," she answered eagerly, "where's Charlie?"

"Charlie! how should I know! Isn't he at home?"

"No," Faith faltered, the wish to screen her brother quickly coming to her. "What brings you here?" she added; "is anything wrong?"

Lawrence Garth was close to her now, and even in the darkness she was conscious of something strange in his dress and manner.

"Yes!" he answered hurriedly. "A great deal is wrong, I'm afraid. Fire at the Hall! and all hands wanted up there to help. Are any of your men hereabouts?"

"Only Reuben; but I will wake him and father, and do you rouse the men in the cottages at the bottom of the lane," she cried back to him, as she ran back to the house.

"There must be some mistake, child," exclaimed the farmer, as he hurried out at the porch some twenty minutes later; "it can't be fire! there's not a sign of it anywhere

in the sky, but I'll step up to the Hall, and see if ought's amiss there, and you'd best come too, Reuben. Where's Charlie? Gone on before, eh?"

Where indeed! Faith was thankful that the flickering candle-light did not betray her tell-tale face to her father, and that his hasty departure prevented his wanting an answer to his question, or noticing that she had not been to bed.

It was a relief to bustle about and light the kitchen fire, and try to forget Charlie's absence in wonders about the fire, and hopes that he might be in before the farmer's return. But these hopes were not to be gratified. In less than half an hour Farmer Flower and his man were back, the former grumbling at having been roused for nothing,—“leastways nothing that neither of us could help about. The Hall has been broken into, yes! but the thieves had got clear off before we came.

“Fire! bless you! there wasn't a sniff about the place, and I felt a regular old gabey up there. Where could that fellow Garth have got hold of the idea?—and why on earth come bustling up here?—There, let's get to bed again, child!—we can't do nothing to help catch the rogues, that's pretty clear, and I only hope there's not so much gone as they think. The blackguards can't have got far, that's one comfort.”

But the next day showed that “the blackguards” had got far enough off not to be traced, and also, that they had taken a quantity of valuable jewellery belonging to the Squire's lady. Suspicion pointed to the servants, but then most of them had long been in the Squire's employ; still, who save those on the premises could have known where these valuables were kept?

All the walls and sign-posts in the neighbourhood were soon alive with notices of “The robbery at Hazelburn Hall,”

and "£100 reward to any one who will bring information to the Police Station at Medington."

But as the days passed on, and no new light was thrown on the matter, public interest began to die out, and even the fact that the matter was in the hands of the authorities in Scotland Yard ceased to be thought and talked of.

Charlie was more at home than he had been earlier in the autumn, and though this cheered and comforted Faith, still somehow *something* was wrong with him—what, she could not say. Lawrence Garth had left the neighbourhood, and to be quit of his attentions to herself, and to know that Charlie was not with him, was an approach to rest. Faith's mind was not easy regarding this young man. What was he doing in the rick-yard on the night of the Hall robbery? why was he so odd in his manner? and why had he gone off without one word of good-bye to any one? Did she, could she be so base as to fancy he was in any way mixed up with the affair? By and by, however, it appeared that she was not the only person to suspect him, and it was whispered about that the authorities in Scotland Yard had their eye on the young man known as Lawrence Garth, or at least would have had their eye on him if he had not unaccountably disappeared.

"You cannot touch pitch without being defiled," is such a trite saying, that one almost hesitates to quote it; but it held good at Hazelburn, for, from talking of Lawrence Garth, folks fell to talking of those who had been with him of late, more especially of that fellow Jack Dance, and the old farmer's son, Charlie Flower.

CHAPTER V.

"PLEAS 'm, Cowslip's calf come last night. Reuben have put them both into the shed down in the twenty-acre, as being more handy, than driving of 'em both up here."

"Very well, Betty ; then I suppose, since they cannot come up here, I must go there to see them."

So in the afternoon Faith crossed the orchard and fields to the old shed standing in the twenty-acre, which Charlie and Jack Dance had worked so hard in that dewy morning in June last. Cowslip lowed a soft welcome, when she heard her mistress's approaching footsteps, and the interview between them and the introduction to the new calf were satisfactory to all parties.

So, too, was the survey of the shed as a nursery, and Faith was raising the latch to pass out, when she noticed a heap in the further corner. Stepping across, she found it was nothing but dried leaves and bracken, and she was again turning to leave when her eye was caught by something white among the litter, and hardly knowing why she did so, she stooped to see what it was. Paper ? No, linen ! —a handkerchief. How strange ! it could not belong to any of the farm men or Reuben, as they always had red and blue spotted ones, nor to Betty, or Charlie, or father ! She would have known theirs anywhere ! Drawing it forth, from its folds there fell at her feet a leather jewel-case.

A jewel-case in the old shed in the twenty-acre ! How could it have come there ? Picking it up her glance fell on the letters, E. J. S., and with the glance there shot through her mind the memory of some of the words in the advertisement of the Hall robbery : "A purple morocco jewel case, with E. J. S. embossed in gold on it, containing a diamond and emerald bracelet."

How very strange! what could it all mean? The jewel-case here! The thieves must have been here! might even now be watching her! With a terrified glance round into the dark corners of the shed she dropped both case and handkerchief again on the heap, and pushing the leaves over them, made her way out of the shed. Once in the open air again she set off running as fast as she could, with a constant feeling that she heard hurrying steps behind her, and——

"Why, Faith, wherever are you going, charging along at that pace? It's a good thing I'm pretty firm on my legs, or you'd have bowled me over altogether!"

Faith's progress through the orchard had been a headlong one, and the turn of the path round the ricks in the yard had landed her right in Charlie's arms, to which for the first moment she could only hold on fast and gasp out a few unconnected words.

"O Charlie! is that you? Oh, I am so glad! You will call Reuben or some one this very minute, and go down to the shed, won't you? for I've found it down there, and"——

"Found what? Here, child, do wait a bit till you've got your breath. I suppose whatever you have found won't run away till you've told a fellow what it is. It must be something very awful, for you look as white and as skeered as if you had seen a ghost."

"Oh, don't laugh at me, Charlie, for I am dreadfully frightened. I've found," and here Faith involuntarily looked round and lowered her voice, "I've found the jewel-case!"

"What!"

"The jewel-case, Mrs. Smith's case with the bracelet!"

"Whatever do you mean? Where?"

"Down in the shed in the twenty-acre."

Charlie's face was ashen white, whiter even than Faith's

with all her terror, and his voice sounded strange and unnatural. "What were you down there for?"

"I went to see Cowslip and her calf, and there—but Charlie, Charlie, what is it? what is the matter?" for Charlie had her firmly by the arm.

"Hush!" he said; "don't say a word about this to any one. I must try and think it over. Oh, what a miserable fool I've been! and I don't know how to cope with that villain, and I've no one to give me a word of advice!"

"Charlie! dear old Charlie, let me help you."

"You! child! I've given you trouble enough already. Are the things covered up, so that that oaf of a Reuben won't see them?"

Faith nodded.

"Then don't say any more about it. Most likely they'll be gone to-morrow, and you must try and forget all about it, if you can."

"Not tell father! Oh, I must!"

"No! promise me! you *will*, you must promise to keep it quiet, at any rate for the present, till I give you leave to speak. I can't tell you what depends on your silence," and he held her tight as if he would compel her to obey him.

"But if any one else should find it! what *could* I say? I'm quite sure it is all wrong to keep quiet."

"Everything is wrong," said Charlie gloomily; "and I don't see how it can ever get right again, and if you go and make a fuss, it will bring I don't know what all about my ears, ay, and father's, too, for that matter."

Faith thought she could never forget the look of Charlie's face a few days later, when he came in between the lights and told her that Jack Dance had been taken up for the Hall robbery, and Lawrence Garth was wanted.

"He is a regular practised hand, the men from London

say, and it is not the first time he has slipped through their fingers. They made sure they had him yesterday evening, as he had been seen about the place during the day; but he was one too many for them after all. That poor fellow Jack, his tool, is taken, you see. There are others they say in the village that the police have an eye on."

Faith did not think much of Charlie's words at first, but they came back with startling clearness to her mind, when no brother was forthcoming one morning, and Betty came rushing in to say that "his bed had not been slept in, and that his drawers were open, and part of his clothes gone."

"Whatever do it all mean, dearie? There's men asking for orders, and the master off to the fair, and so I run up to see what the young master were about, so long in bed, and he never been in it."

So through Betty and the farm lads, Charlie's mysterious disappearance was a well-known fact in Hazelburn before the afternoon, and though none in the village would have said in so many words that Charlie Flower had had a hand in the Hall burglary, still there were mysterious looks and shrugs, till it was the received opinion, that he knew more about it than he liked to say, and that he had gone off to be out of the way of awkward questions.

The next morning was Sunday, and Faith said she had a headache and would not go to church. Indeed, she looked very ill, with dark circles round her eyes, and a languor and weakness that she could not conceal. She would not let her father or Betty stop at home with her, for would not the absence of both be quickly noted, and set cruel gossiping tongues talking?

She could not rest in the house herself, she wandered into the garden, there for the first time in her life shrinking from an approaching step—Harry Upton's.

"You frightened me, Harry," the girl gasped, and then

she made a great effort to recover herself, and tried to smile and force herself to say something of the weather and of not being quite well, but her quivering lips betrayed her trouble, and the next minute both her hands were clasped in the young fellow's, and he was saying, "Faith, let me help you!"

She would have wrenched her hands from his grasp and have got away, but she was so giddy that she could scarcely stand; she had to sit down on a felled tree.

"Let me help you," he still pleaded.

She shook her head. "You can't."

"If any one in the world can, I can, for no one loves you like me."

Still no response.

"Is it Charlie, Faith, that you're fretting about?" Faith started and put up her hand to stop him, looking round with a shudder.

"Hush!" she said, "don't speak of him. It might be heard!"

"Faith," said Harry, eagerly regaining possession of her small cold hands, "I think I could find him if I tried. He told me that night, don't you remember? when the Hall was robbed"——

"That night," she interrupted, "not that night."

"Yes, he was with me then till very late. He was telling me of his suspicions of that scoundrel Garth, and of how he meant to break loose from him, if he could pay off what he owed him."

"He said so?"

"Yes, that very night, and I'm as sure of it as that I stand here."

"I cannot understand," said Faith, passing her hands over her eyes, as if to sweep away mists from before them, "but folks are saying that Charlie had a hand in it."

"In what? In the burglary? and you believed it for a

moment of Charlie ? ” He spoke fiercely, looking indignantly down at Faith.

“ Yes,” she said miserably, “ and he is my brother, and it has broken my heart.”

His anger was all gone then, or at any rate all turned against Garth, and there was nothing but the tenderest love and pity in his heart for his unhappy darling. Somehow from that moment the heaviest burden was gone from the girl’s heart, and the despair melted away in the tears that rained down, as she sobbed out all the bitter story.

“ What am I to do ? ” Faith ended. “ I *must* tell some one about the jewel-case ! ”

“ Of course you must. I will go at once to the police, and it may lead to the settling Mr. Lawrence Garth’s business in no time.”

“ But suppose Charlie were really mixed up in it ? ”

“ Suppose that the moon should fall out of the sky.”

“ But Charlie told me not to say a word till he gave me leave.”

“ I don’t think Charlie was wise about that, and I think it’s easier to think him foolish than wicked, don’t you, Faith ? It is all out of your hands now, child, and you must just go home and let Betty nurse you till we bring Charlie home.”

CHAPTER VI.

“ I CAN’T quite say to-day, Mr. Flower, about Miss Faith,” was the doctor’s verdict, “ but I am afraid she is in for a touch of fever. She has been fretting of late, Betty tells me ; she has had a cold too, and been listening to all the stupid gossip. I hope it won’t be much, but her temperature is

too high to-day, so you and Betty here must keep her as quiet as possible. Don't let her see any one at all till I have been again, and give her only milk and beef-tea. You'll be able to send over this afternoon for some medicine."

The doctor's prohibition against seeing people was not taken off for a month, and neither was the farmer nor Betty allowed to tell Faith of what had been doing in the matter of the Hall Robbery. Once the farmer forgot himself, and the little doctor was in a rage.

"If you wish to have your daughter about with you again soon, you really must put a padlock on that mouth of yours, Mr. Flower. What's the use of my medicine and Betty's care, if you will upset it all by talking?"

"But if she asks me about things what am I to say?"

"Bless the man! why can't you just put her off? Say there's nothing fresh, and change the subject; and if you can't do that keep out of the room altogether."

Down stairs, out of hearing of that little room where Faith was lying, much was talked of, specially Charlie's defection, and the farmer learned from Harry Upton of the conversation he and Charlie had had on the night of the robbery, and of Charlie's desire to mend his ways if he could. "I've more than half a mind," he said, "to take a leaf out of your book, Harry, and turn abstainer!"

"Ah! did he say that now?" said the farmer. "But how do that help us to find him, lad?"

"Wait a bit, I'm coming to that. He said, Charlie did, 'I've a mind to cut the whole business and go off and enlist.'"

The farmer started, and Harry went on quickly, "I persuaded him out of that, you may be sure, and then he said, there was some one he knew in London, a brother I think he said, of Mr. Giles, the bailiff, up at the Hall. 'He's one of your sort, Harry,' he said, laughing (for he

was always chaffing about the Temperance business), 'and he'd put me in the way of getting something to do.' I remembered him very well, for I'd seen him with Mr. Jeune once, and I know he's a good sort of man. Well! we went on talking ever so long, till it was so late I persuaded him to stop where he was that night, so he had my bed, and I made shift with the sofa in the sitting-room. Charlie, he plucked up heart a bit and said, perhaps after all he needn't go away, as he shouldn't like to vex you."

"Ay! ay!" said the old man, "a good lad to his father he always was!"

"Then came the robbery and all the talk about it, and I thought no more about Charlie and our conversation, till I heard he was missing, and then it all came back to me. I'll go up to-morrow to Mr. Giles and get his brother's address in town, and I won't rest till I've found Charlie. Trust my word for it, farmer, I'll bring him home."

CHAPTER VII.

A LARGE, double white hyacinth was filling the best parlour at the farm with fragrance one afternoon in January, and Faith's canary in the window was shrill in its welcome to the New Year's sun that looked in, and the sweetness and sunshine and song were all very pleasant to Faith, as she lay back in the large arm-chair by the fire, wrapped up in shawls, and with the screen drawn closely round to keep off every breath of draught. There was not much more colour in her cheeks than in the waxen bells of the hyacinth, for this was the first day she had come downstairs since her illness, and she was still very weak and fragile. But strong

or weak she was bound to be with the family, for this was a great day at the farm.

"Don't let her get over excited or tired," said Dr. Brooke, and the farmer tried his very best to restrain his own excitement, and to appear quiet and composed, though it was as much as he could do to resist jumping up every minute, to go to the door or look out at the window.

Tea was spread out on the table, in all the glory of the best china and the silver teapot, and Betty was busy preparing a certain hot cake, "as he always had a fancy for, from a baby, bless him!"

Tip was as fidgetty and expectant as the farmer, and after settling himself down at Faith's feet, with his nose between his front paws, and a sigh of satisfaction one moment, would start up the next, with pricked ears, and eyes watching the door with eager attention.

"That bird of yours, my pretty, do make such a clatter," said the farmer, "there's no—ah! there he is!"

No mistake this time, the wheels were coming up the road, and almost before they stopped, there was a quick step on the brick path, that the farmer would have known among a thousand, and then, two strong young hands were grasping his, and he could not see Charlie, for his eyes were dim, and he could hardly hear his words, for his heart was singing so loud a hymn of thanksgiving.

When Charlie saw Faith's little white face he nearly broke down altogether, but Tip's frantic leaps of joy and sympathy happily diverted attention from him.

They were all better in a few minutes, and then Charlie said, "We've forgotten all about Upton, I declare!" and the farmer went out to find him.

I do not think Faith had forgotten him, whatever the others might have done, and Harry was richly repaid for the slight disappointment he had felt as he waited outside, by

the farmer's hearty words as he brought him in, "I'm growing old, Harry, and I think another son won't come amiss."

Faith's cheeks were flushed a faint sweet red, as he put her little wasted hand into Harry's, adding, "God bless you, my lad, be good to my little maid."

I do not think there was a happier young fellow than Harry Upton that day by the Hazel, or by any other river in the world.

From the peaceful scene of reunion and happiness at the Croft Farm, it 'is necessary to turn back a little, as there are other characters to take leave of besides the farmer and Charlie, Faith and Harry Upton.

The news of the recovery of the jewel-case was, at the request of the police, kept as quiet as possible, as they said the same hands that put it in the shed would probably want the handling of it again before long, or if the little game their owner was after, was to implicate Charlie Flower, some further steps would be certainly taken in the course of a few days. Watching and waiting do wonders, and the police in this case had not long to exercise either.

Dusk was becoming darkness about ten days after Faith fell ill, and the man appointed to watch the shed was stretching himself, and thinking he should not be sorry when his comrade came to take his place, when round the corner of the shed a rough countryman appeared, and looking cautiously round advanced to the door. With a swift step the watcher was at the shed, the door closed, and Lawrence Garth was at last in the hands of justice. "To think that we should have him at last," said the Scotland Yard man: "why, we have had our eyes on him for ever so many jobs, and this won't be the first time as he has seen what Portland is like."

It was a great trial to Charlie to have to appear at the

Spring Assizes as a witness against his former friend and companion, but it really did more to set him right in public opinion than anything else. It was necessary that all should be brought to the light now.

As Harry had said, Charlie had been wanting in wisdom. Garth had obtained such power over him, that though he had once or twice got an insight into his real character, he had found it almost impossible to throw off his influence. His debt to Garth over billiards at the "Bush," and card-playing, held him, too, in a vice, which only tightened as he struggled to get clear.

Then came the affair of the burglary, and instead of facing suspicion, in the strength of his innocence, Charlie foolishly ran away, to be recalled happily by his old friend Harry Upton.

The end is soon told. Garth was in for a long sentence, Dance for a shorter one, and Charlie went back to his quiet home, a sadder but a wiser man, feeling that there are certain pleasures which carry a sting with them, notably gambling and drinking, and bad companions, who, though they may tell a story well and be ready with a joke, are deficient in honour and even honesty.

