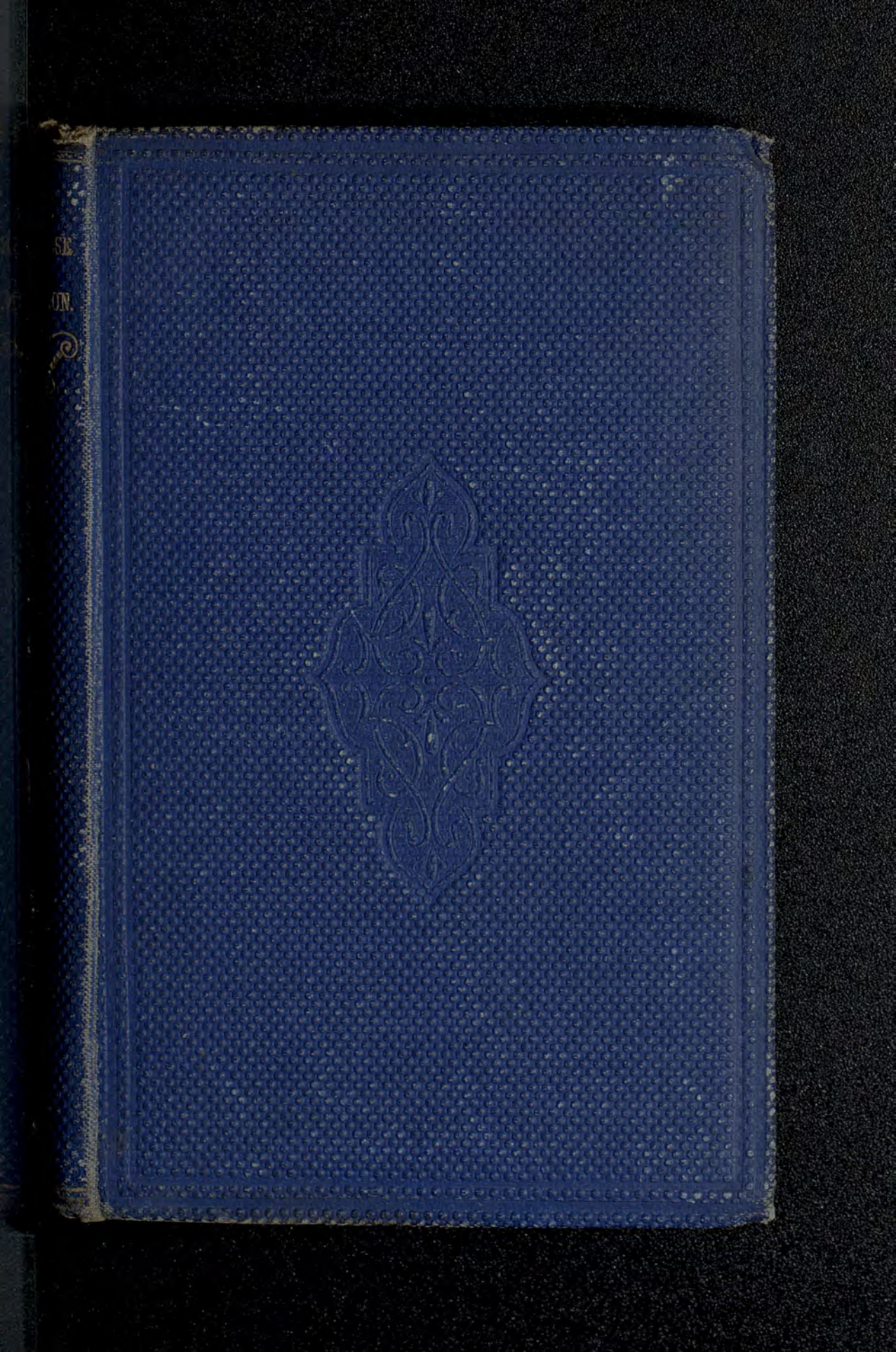
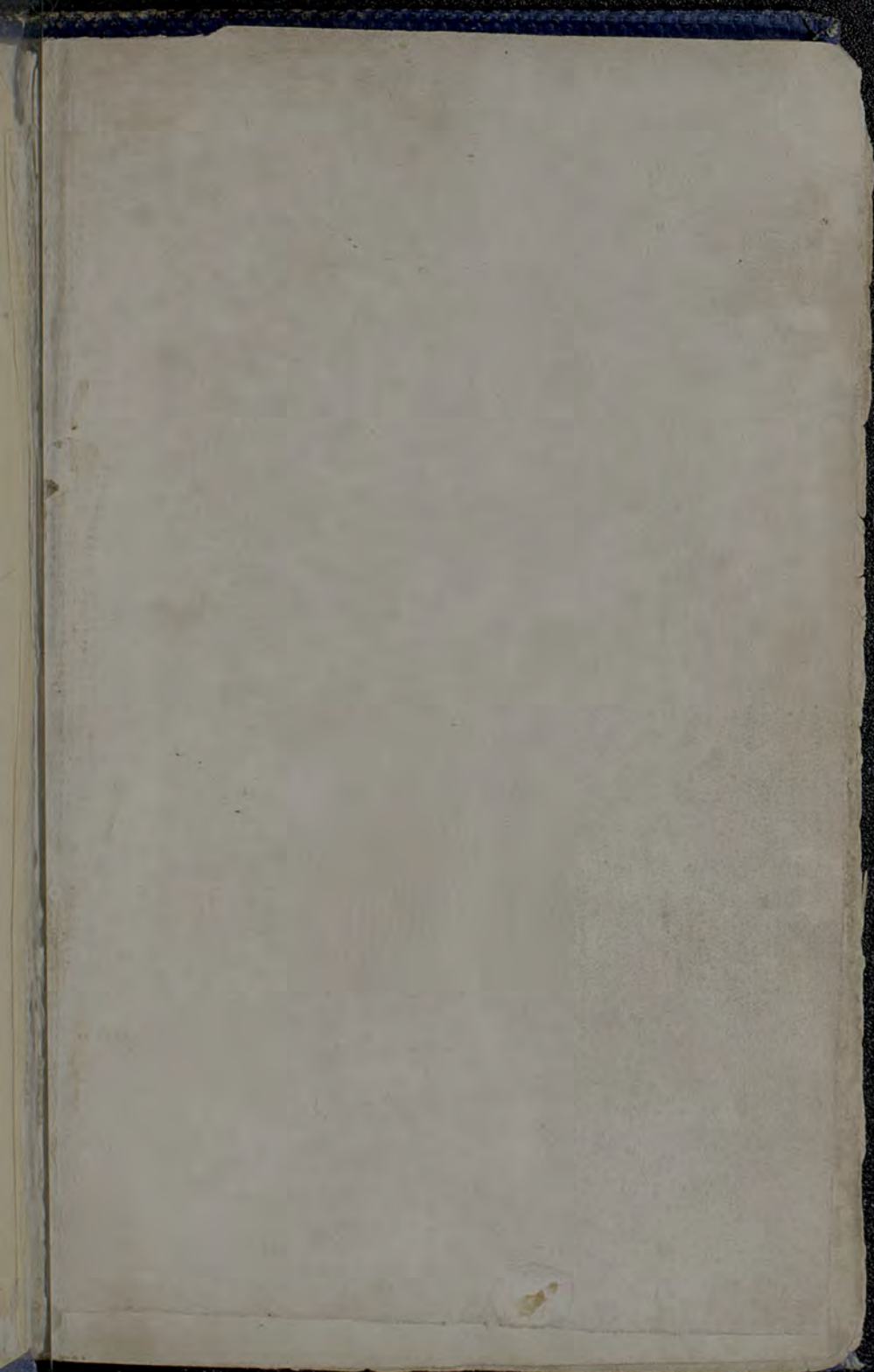




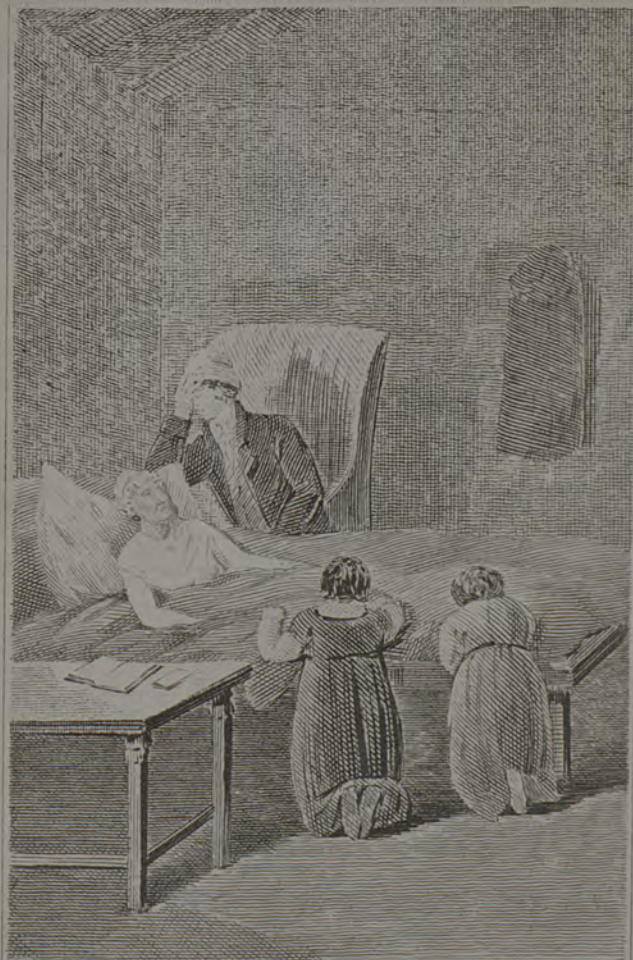
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FRONTISPIECE.



The little girls &c. See page 7

THE WORKHOUSE

OR

A RELIGIOUS LIFE THE ONLY HAPPY ONE

BY MRS. CAMERON

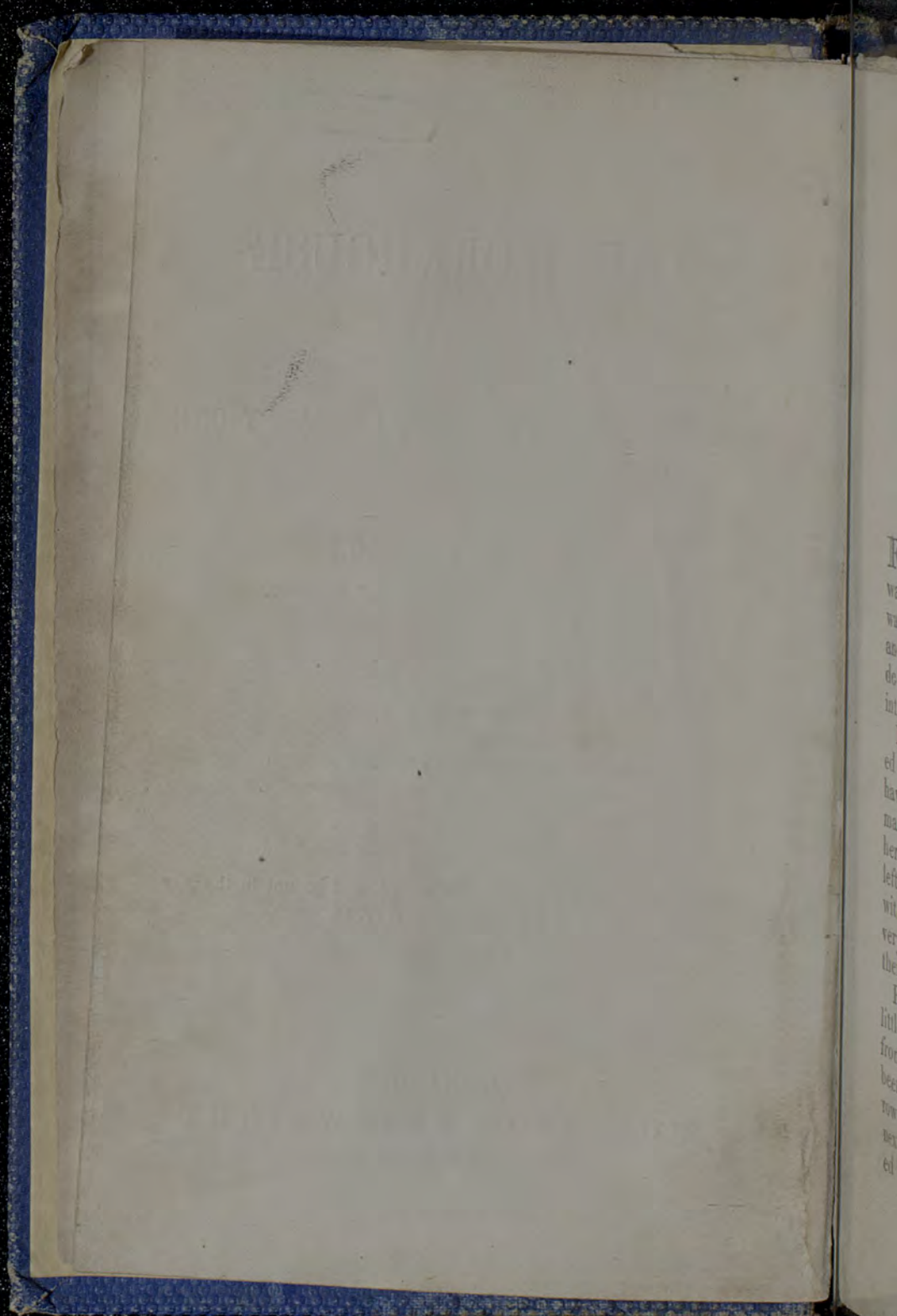
AUTHOR OF "MARGARET WHYTE," ETC. ETC.

NEW EDITION.

REVISED AND CORRECTED BY THE AUTHOR.

"Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way
of evil men."—PROV. IV. 14.

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THE WORKHOUSE.

CHAPTER I.

FRANCIS HALL lived many years ago; he was born in the northern parts of England; he was a sober, good young man; industrious, and kind to his parents. After their death, I do not know for what cause, he took a journey into the southern counties.

In the city of Gloucester he became acquainted with Anne Ray, a decent, pious, well-behaved young woman. He soon afterwards married her; and, as she did not like to leave her aged mother, and Francis had few friends left in the north, they took a small cottage, within half a mile of Gloucester. So it was a very short walk for Anne to go and see her mother, who lived at the end of the city.

Francis Hall's cottage was at the foot of a little woody hill, with a small garden in front, from whence the city of Gloucester might have been seen, if it had not been hid by a thick row of elms, which grew at the bottom of the next field; but the tower of the cathedral raised itself over their heads.

Francis got his bread by working as a labourer, and Anne earned a little by spinning. Never, I believe, was a worthier or happier couple. They had two little girls, Susan and Esther, of very mild and gentle tempers, who were the delight of their parents.

While Francis was out in the day-time, Anne used to love to teach them to read, and to instruct them in their duty to God. As soon as she had cleaned up her house, and made herself neat, she would sit down by the door, or, in the winter, by the fire-side, with her spinning and knitting; and the two little ones sat at her feet: and then they listened to her as she talked to them about the Bible, and told them stories out of it; for she had been very well taught.

At night she received Francis with pleasure; and they sat down to a cheerful supper, always ending the day with prayer, and a hymn to God, Anne having a very pretty voice.

On Sunday they always went to church at Gloucester, and endeavoured to spend the day as Christians ought to do.

About twelve years passed away in this comfortable manner. Being both young and stout, they had but little sickness, and scarcely any trouble, except the death of old Mrs. Ray, who was nursed with the greatest attention by her children in her last illness.

Susan, their eldest girl, was just turned eleven years of age; a very dutiful and obedient child, grave and shy in her temper. Esther

was two years younger; she meant well, but was very giddy, and often in mischief: yet they both promised to make good women, for they had been early taught their duty to God.

At that time these little girls caught the small-pox; but they both recovered, and all might have been well, had not their parents, soon afterwards, been seized with the same disorder, and in a short time, after a severe illness, they both died. It was no misfortune indeed to them, for they had made their peace with God, through our blessed Saviour, and had endeavoured to be found watching, doing his work, when his day should come.

Anne died first; but as her illness was very violent, she was scarcely able to take leave of Francis and her children. The little girls knelt by her bed-side at the time of her death. She smiled upon them and her husband, who had then strength enough to leave his bed; and having stretched out her hands towards them to bless them, she called upon her Saviour, and expired.

This stroke was too much for poor Francis, who also was very ill: and though he endeavoured to resign himself to the will of God, knowing that he provides best for his children by taking them to himself, yet he could not but feel his loss very severely; and the tears and distress of his little girls added greatly to his grief.

About three days after the funeral of poor Anne, it pleased God to call away Francis to

himself. He perceived that death was coming upon him; and calling Susan and Esther to his bed-side, "My children," said he, "you will soon be without your parents, and you will no longer have a comfortable home. I had wished that we could have lived to have brought you up in the fear of God, and put you out into the world; but since this must not be, we will not murmur. You have a heavenly Father, who will provide for you; put your trust in him, for you are going at a very early age into many temptations. You will have no kind friend to take care of you, and must entirely depend upon the parish for support. But, O my children, remember your Creator; for the Lord is a *strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat.*" (Isaiah xxv. 4.)

Francis's voice now became very faint. He could say no more; but he took each of their hands, looking earnestly at their sorrowful countenances; and soon afterwards he sunk into a kind of sleep, from which he never awoke.

Poor Esther and Susan were now left in the greatest distress; but they had been taught to put their trust in God, and they called upon him to have pity on them. Immediately after their father's death, they went to the house of a poor woman in the neighbourhood, who promised to take them in for a short time; and her husband employed himself, according to the last request of Francis, in selling the furniture of his little cottage, which was scarcely suffi-

cient to pay the rent that was due, the doctor's bill, and other expences.

The time was now come that Susan and Esther were to leave the house of their friends, who could not afford any longer to maintain them; and they were to be taken to the parish workhouse. They took their leave of them with much sorrow, and many thanks for their kindness; and, hand in hand, with very heavy hearts, took the road towards Gloucester. As they passed by the cottage where they had formerly lived, they stopped; and, finding the gate of the little garden open, they went in. Their tears broke out afresh, and they sat down upon a bench by the door, where their mother used to sit on a summer's evening; and for some time they were unable to speak.

At length, Esther, with many sobs, said, "Dear sister, we have now no home, no kind parents; but we will always love one another."

"Yes," answered Susan; "yet, although our dear father and mother are laid in their graves, we must remember that we have a Father in heaven, who will take care of us, if we love and serve him for the sake of our dear Saviour who died upon the cross for us."

Then the little girls knelt upon the grass; and having prayed God always to make them good children, that so they might at last be restored to their dear parents, they arose; and bidding farewell, with many tears, to their dear home, they took the road to Gloucester.

When they reached the town, they went, as they were directed, to the house of the overseer,

who, taking each by the hand, led them through many long streets and narrow alleys to the workhouse. It was the hour of dinner; and the people belonging to the house were all seated at table. The overseer gave the little girls into the care of the mistress, and left them. She bid them sit down and eat their dinners; but they could only cry still more, for they were shocked at the place to which they were brought. Many of the people about them were swearing, and others scolding each other. Some of the young girls, when they saw these two children crying so bitterly, pointing and staring at them, burst into loud laughs: however, they did not trouble them any further during that day. At night, the mistress took them into a very small room, where there were only two beds, one of which was to be theirs.

As now, for the first time, they were alone, they sat down at the foot of their bed, and began to talk over all they had seen and heard since they came into the house; when the door was burst open, and there came in a woman and her daughter, whom they had not remarked before. The mother was a tall elderly woman, pale with drinking, but of a fierce and bold aspect. Her daughter seemed more good-natured; but the two children felt no less afraid of her, for she had large black rolling eyes, which she fixed upon them; and, as she came into the room, she burst into a violent fit of laughter. She was also very dirty; and her long hair hung uncombed upon her shoulders.

"Hey, mother," said she, "who would have

thought of our having these little whining gypsies with us!" and putting her arms on her sides, she stood staring for some minutes at them; and then going up to Esther, and clapping her on the shoulders, "Why, what is the matter, child, with you? what, are you afraid of us all? Come, don't be a fool, and make this whining; we have rare fun here, I'll assure you."

Esther made no answer; but the tears ran down her cheeks.

"What do you make that noise for, Nell?" cried the old woman; "leave the brats to themselves."

"I shan't," replied Nelly.

"But you shall," said the mother; "I tell you, I have got a dreadful head-ache."

"I know how that came about," answered Nelly. "Hey, mother, two penny'ths extraordinary of Mr. Tomkins's gin——"

"Take that for your impudence, Miss," replied the mother, striking the daughter.

"And take that too, mother," said the daughter, suddenly raising her clenched hands towards her. However, she did not strike her; and the old woman, looking passionately and swearing at her, turned from her, and hastened into bed.

Esther and Susan were too much frightened to be able to speak; they sat trembling till the mother and daughter were both asleep; then falling on their knees, they said their prayers to God. During the greater part of the night they wept bitterly, thinking of the happy days they had spent during the life of their dear

father and mother, and of their altered state, and the wicked company they were now obliged to keep. At last, however, being quite tired, they fell asleep.

They were awakened early in the morning by the loud voices of the mother and daughter, who seemed to be quarrelling, as on the night before.

The little girls, as soon as they were dressed, knelt down by the bed-side to say their prayers, unheeded as they thought by their companions. But no sooner did Nelly see these two innocent children saying their prayers, than she called out, "There's a rare sight, mother! Well, upon my word, we are wonderfully pious!"

Then again she laughed; and continued to stare at them, and mock them, till they rose from their knees. Susan and Esther felt ashamed to be thus laughed at; for which they were much to be blamed; for we must never suffer wicked people to laugh us out of our duty, for the Lord Jesus Christ himself says, *Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.* (Mark viii. 38.)

After breakfast, all the family met in the work-room. While Susan and Esther employed themselves as their mistress bade them, they were grieved to hear around them so much swearing, quarrelling, and vain talking. Seeing them look very grave, their companions laughed

at them; and, mocking their serious manner, asked them why they looked so sullen; and wherefore they did not talk and laugh like themselves?

They answered, that they had not been used to hear such wicked words and vain jestings.

This increased the mirth of those about them; and from that time poor Susan and Esther became the jest and mockery of all the bad young people in the house. Sometimes Nelly would take their part, and would drive away their tormenters from them; and sometimes she would join in the laugh against them.

Day after day passed in this manner. By slow degrees the little girls began to get more used to their new companions; particularly Esther, who was more lively and thoughtless than her sister; but as they began to feel more easy here, so did their good resolutions and habits wear away.

The laughter of Nelly made them ashamed of being seen to say their prayers; and they resolved to say them in bed. But then, being sleepy, they hurried them over, or perhaps entirely missed them. In the morning it was the same thing; so, during the day, thoughts of God and of death became unpleasant to them:—they joined in the wild laughter of their companions, and soon were brought to hear, without being shocked, the wicked things which were said:—and now these little sisters began to feel less happy in each other's company; for they did many things which they were ashamed

to own to each other. Their tempers also began to change very much for the worse; for alas! our hearts are by nature so very corrupt and full of sin, that when we cease to pray and watch, even for a very short time, a thousand seeds of evil spring up within us, and choke all that we had thought to be good.

Susan, who was naturally more grave than her sister, soon became sullen and fretful; and Esther, who had very high spirits, was hasty and saucy. When their parents were living, they had never loved to be apart for a moment; and were always willing to yield every thing to each other. Now they quarrelled about every trifle; for they knew that they were both doing wrong; and when we are discontented with ourselves, we are disposed to be angry with every one else.

It was now about a year since Susan and Esther had left the cottage of their parents; and how much were they changed, even in outward appearance, since that time! They had once been thought very nice-looking girls; but now, instead of looking lively, clean, and good-tempered, they became slovenly, dirty, and ill-tempered in their appearance.

One evening, as they were sitting in their room, a little before bed-time, Nelly came running in to them. "Who has a mind for a bit of fun?" said she.

Now it happened that Susan and Esther had been quarrelling, and were much out of humour with each other.

"What is it?" asked Esther.

"Why, you must know," replied Nelly, "that there is a fortune-teller in town; and we are making a party to go and see him to-morrow night."

"O, I will go with all my heart," said Esther. "At what time to-morrow night?"

"Ay, that's the best of it," answered Nelly, laughing: "why, you must know, the old fellow does not begin till after eight o'clock."

"Then," said Esther, "we cannot go; you know we must not be out after eight."

"Must not," cried Nelly, "I never mind must-nots. Liberty for me! I'll do what I like, in spite of all the masters and mistresses in the world. We have contrived it finely," added she, laughing again.

"Well, what do you mean to do?" asked Esther.

"Can you keep a secret, girls?" cried Nelly.

"O yes," said Esther.

"And what dost thou say, child?" added Nelly, taking hold of Susan's arm.

"Nothing," returned she, peevishly.

"Hey day!" cried Nelly; "what, art in the sulks?"

"Be quiet," said Susan.

"You little ill-tempered peevish creature," answered Nelly, "I'll give you a beating, if you don't answer me."

"Let her alone," said Esther; "she won't tell of you, I am sure. Come, don't be in a passion."

Nelly, having sworn at Susan for some time, became a little quieter.

"Well, Hetty, and what dost say, child?" she asked again, "Wilt be one of us?"

"I love a little fun dearly," said Esther; "but I don't know quite what to say to it; what is it you are going to do? I should not like to make my mistress angry."

"Don't be a fool, child!" returned Nelly; "tell me in a word, or I won't stay."

"You are going to see a fortune-teller," said Esther; "I should like very much to have my fortune told; but how can you manage it?"

"Leave that to me," answered Nelly: "I warrant you we shall manage it easily enough. Come now, speak, or I am gone."

"Sister," said Esther, "will you go?"

"I hate fortune-tellers," replied Susan, very sulkily.

"But will you tell of me," said Esther, "if I go?"

"Not I," answered Susan; "it is all the same to me whether you go or stay."

"Truly, you are very civil, sister," returned Esther.

"What if I am?" said Susan.

"Why, I shall be very glad to leave you at home," replied Esther, "if you are to be so cross."

"Very well, sister," returned Susan, "as you please; I don't want your company."

"Nor I yours," said Esther; and, laughing heartily, she took Nelly's arm, and went with her into the next room to settle the plan with their companions.

Most truly did the holy St. Paul say, in one of his Epistles, *Evil communication corrupts good manners.* (1 Cor. xv. 33.)

During that night and the day following, the two sisters did not speak to each other. Susan continued to be sulky; and Esther tried to conceal, by joking and laughter, the uneasiness which she inwardly felt. Nor could the thoughts of the entertainment she hoped to have in the evening, by any means make her happy, because she was conscious she was doing ill. So true are these words of the wise man, *Enjoy pleasure; and behold, this also is vanity. I said of laughter, It is mad; and of mirth, What doeth it?* (Eccl. ii. 1, 2.)



CHAPTER II.

AS evening drew on, Nelly bid Esther prepare for the fortune-teller. "Not a word," said she, "of what we are going to do. There are only a few of us in the secret; and if we are suspected, it is all over with us. Be as still as possible before my mother; the old woman will go to sleep quietly upon her gin presently, and then all will be safe."

They went to bed as usual: but as soon as all was still in the house, and the old woman was asleep, Nelly called to Esther softly, and bid her get up and dress herself. Esther did as

she was desired; and they both went into the outer room, where presently there gathered together, one by one, a party about eight in number. The last who appeared was a tall sly-looking boy, swinging a key in his hand.

"Here," said he, "now we shall do; the old boy's asleep; and now, now for fun."

"Ay, quick, quick," cried Nelly, running to open the door.

"But mind you tread softly," returned he, "or we shall be heard."

So down they all went; but while the boy was opening the street door, Esther, who now began to be frightened, whispered to Nelly, "Where are you going? I think I cannot, I dare not go with you."

"Hey day! what's the matter with you, child?" replied Nelly. "Come, no being off now."

"Oh!" said Esther, "but if we should be found out!"

"Why, what then?" answered Nelly; "why a hearty scolding and a little hard work. Who cares?—but more fools we, if we are found out."

"But how could they get the key?" asked Esther.

"That boy there," returned Nelly, "who sleeps in the master's room, stole it from under the pillow; and he'll mind to put it back again while he's snug."

The door grated very much as it opened, and the night was dark and cloudy.

"Oh!" said Esther, "I wish I was up stairs

again, and out of this scrape. Nelly, let me go up again, I pray you."

"Ay," answered Nelly, "to tell your ill-natured tales about us? but that won't do. So come now, hold your tiresome tongue." With that, she took her by the arm, and pulled her after her, as they went into the street.

They were all silent while they passed under the windows of the workhouse; but when they got into the next street, they set up a violent noise of screaming and singing. Tom Smith, who had got the key, bid them be quiet: but they did not mind him; and they continued to make this noise till they had reached a more public place.

Here Tom stopping, said, "I tell you, if you will not be quiet, I'll lock you out; and you shall all get a handsome dressing."

"And who cares for you?" returned Nelly.

"Hold your peace," said Tom.

"That I won't for you," cried she, swearing.

"But you shall," replied he, "or we shall be taken up for rioting."

"I don't care," answered Nelly; "I'll do what I choose, in spite of your impudence."

"Get home then," said he, giving her a push.

"If I stir,—" said she, with an oath, raising her clenched hand, and giving him a blow.

"Come," said their companions, getting round them, "let one another alone; why, we shall be too late."

"Don't wait for them," said one. So they left them, and went on.

"Do you think," said Tom to Nelly, "that I'll stand still to be beaten? No, in good earnest I won't." So saying, he gave her a blow on the nose, which covered her face with blood.

Esther, who alone had stayed with them, was extremely frightened, and began to cry violently.

At that moment the watchman was heard coming towards them. "I'll not be caught here," said Tom; "so good-bye to you; I shall go and look for the others;"—and off he ran.

"Oh! what shall we do?" cried Esther; "what shall we do?"

Nelly would have run after Tom; and in her passion she swore, and called him many bad names: but Esther caught hold of her gown, and begged her not to think of following him.

Nelly was at length persuaded by her; but still Esther's distress was not lessened. Nelly's face was covered with blood; and it gave her great pain. Esther would have tied it up; but they were in the midst of a wide street; and they could perceive, by the light of the lamps, several people coming towards them.

"Oh! do, do go home," said Esther, "don't wait here; we shall be taken up! indeed we shall."

"What are you afraid of?" answered Nelly; "I will call upon these people to seize that vile lad."

"No, pray, pray don't," cried Esther; for now she was so extremely frightened, that she would have given any thing to be at home. She wept and prayed; and taking hold of Nel-

ly's arm, dragged her into the next street. At last, Nelly recovering a little from her passion, consented, in order to quiet Esther, to return towards home, and there to wait for their companions. There was a flight of steps at one of the doors of the workhouse; and here Nelly was glad to sit down, for her face pained her very much.

The moon peeped now and then from behind a cloud, and gave Esther just light enough to bind up Nelly's face; but the moon was soon hid in dark clouds, and a brisk shower of rain came on.

Esther wrapped her gown round her head, and sat down on the lowest step; and Nelly sat on the step above her, frequently groaning deeply. They remained here nearly two hours, the rain still pouring upon them. Very heavy was the heart of poor Esther during this time. She thought of the happy days when she had kind parents and a comfortable home; but above all, when she strove to please her God, and delighted to make her sister happy. And she called to mind the comfortable trust of the righteous person which her father had pointed out to her in the Psalms; *The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters.* (Psalm xxiii. 1, 2.)

But Oh! how different was her present situation from that of her early days! She was now forlorn and friendless, in fear of punishment in this world; and, what was still worse, she was

neglecting all her duties, she was disobeying the word of God, and slighting the mercy of her Saviour; and she could no more look upon God as a kind and tender Father, but as an angry Judge, who was preparing far worse punishment for her in another world.

As she thought over all these things, she wept bitterly.

Suddenly she felt some one give her a slap on the cheek; and raising her head, she perceived Jenny Yates, a slovenly red-haired girl, one of her companions.

"How now?" said Jenny; "have you been such a fool to stay here with that quarrelsome girl? We have had such fine fun; troth, I am quite in spirits; and Tom has treated us with a taste of something comfortable, to warm us this cold night."

Here a noise of singing and loud laughing was heard.

"Be quiet, you noisy creatures," said Nelly.

"Hey!" replied Jenny, shrugging up her shoulders; "what you are to be our mistress, are you?"

"I tell you," called out Tom, who was yet at some distance, "you'll all get into a fine scrape if you are not quiet. But I'll be hanged if I will not take care of myself."

The party had now reached the door of the workhouse; and Tom, having in vain begged them to be silent, ran hastily up the steps, and unlocking the door, while his companions were so busily talking that they did not perceive

what he was about, he opened it softly, and, taking off his shoes, went quietly into his own room; and there laying himself down in his bed, pretended to be fast asleep.

In the mean time, when the party below stairs perceived that he was gone, they began to be very much frightened. Many of them, however, finding that he had left the key in the door, followed his example, and stole up to their own rooms. Nelly, however, being enraged with the pain she felt, and also at the trick which Tom had played them, remained storming and raving below. In vain did Esther pray her to follow the rest of her companions.

"Indeed, indeed," she said, "you will be found out, and all the blame will be laid upon us."

"I don't care for that," replied Nelly, "so that I could be revenged on that vile Tom; and revenged I will be."

Esther having now opened the street door, they went gently into the passage. While they stood here, consulting what they should do with the key, a door leading to the staircase was burst open, and the mistress herself appeared in a long dark bed-gown, holding a candle in her hand.

"Hoity toity!" said she in a loud and shrill voice; "so this is the cause of all this fine disturbance! Let's see who we've got here."

Then stooping down her head in Esther's face, and looking keenly at her through her spectacles for some minutes, she soon dis-

covered who she was, and called out, giving her at the same time a violent box on the ear, "What, it's you, Miss Fine Airs, is it? I suppose your daddy and mammy in the country taught you such tricks as these. Come, come, I shall teach you another lesson. Well, and who have you got with you? Ah! Nelly: always the first in every mischief!"

"Not in more mischief than my neighbours," answered Nelly, pertly.

"No impudence, you vile hussy," said the mistress, stamping with fury, "or you shall pay a fine price for it, I promise you. Get you gone, you wicked sluts, to bed," added she, driving them up stairs before her; "and to-morrow I'll pay you for your tricks as you deserve."

Nelly, muttering, and Esther, sobbing, went to their beds; but sleep they could not: one was kept awake by rage and pain; and the other by grief and remorse.

The next morning Susan was just awake, but quite ignorant of all that had passed; when her sister and Nelly were called to appear before the master and mistress, to account for the uproar of last night, and receive the punishment they deserved.

Nelly did not fail to mention the names of all her companions in this wicked scheme; and had the pleasure to find they were all punished, not excepting Tom Smith, with all his cunning ways.

And this is one great difference between

good and bad people:—good persons are always mindful of the love of their Saviour in dying for them, and forgiving them, and for his sake they love all their fellow-creatures, and never wish to bring any pain or disgrace even upon their enemies, unless as a means of making them better and happier in the end; but wicked people are selfish and unforgiving, and love to bring even their friends and companions, if they have been offended by them, into sorrow and distress.

CHAPTER III.

II NEVER heard in what manner these boys and girls were punished, though, I believe, pretty severely. When the punishment was over, and they were at liberty to return to the work-room, they were met in their way there by a girl, who bade them make haste into the room; for there was one of the funniest sights there she had ever seen. It would make them die with laughing, she said.

“La! what is it?” cried Jenny Yates.

“Come and see,” said her companion, laughing again.

Now, hearing this, they all pushed eagerly into the room. By the fire they saw a number of boys and girls collected together; and, making haste to join the party, they discovered that they were surrounding an old woman, quite a

stranger to them. She was afflicted with the palsy, and her face was very much wrinkled.

Esther, upon hearing it was an old woman with whom they were diverting themselves, was greatly shocked with their wickedness; for she was not yet so corrupted as to take a pleasure in mocking the infirmities of age;—and now, feeling more serious than usual, she sat down quietly at some distance; till, being often called upon by the rest to come and look at the old woman, she consented to follow Nelly, who, pained by her face, had sat till now in a corner of the room.

“La!” cried Nelly, in a loud whisper, as soon as she saw the old woman, “how her head shakes!” Then laughing violently, she asked, “How long has she been come?”

“Not above an hour,” answered another girl.

After looking at her earnestly, Esther found that this old woman, though poor and feeble, was very neat and clean, and had a very pleasant countenance.

For some time *she* contented herself with smiling or looking good-naturedly upon these wicked young people around her, wishing rather to make them love than fear her; but finding that they did not cease to mock her, she said gravely to them, “My children, I am very sorry to see that you take such pleasure in mocking the infirmities of old-age. I do not speak to you on my own account, because God, in whom I put my trust, will always be my friend in my sorrows. But it grieves me to

find that you are not afraid to disobey God, who has commanded his people to *rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man.*" (Levit. xix. 32.)

Most of those who heard these words, drew back; for they were struck with awe at the serious yet gentle manner of the old woman. A few remained, who scorned to appear ashamed; but Esther, vexed that she should have joined this crowd, sat down on the floor, at no great distance from the old woman, covering her face with her apron.

A call to dinner was then heard, which all obeyed but the old woman, who had dined before she came, and was desirous to have a little rest from the persecutions of her tormenters,—and Esther, who was so distressed that she could not eat; and was, besides, afraid to meet her sister, whom she had not seen since the uproar of the last night had been made known to her.

When the old woman was left alone with Esther, she said to her, after being silent a few minutes, "What is the matter with you? Poor thing! are you not happy?"

Esther, unused for some time to be spoken to with so much kindness, was surprised, and raised her head; but made no answer but by her tears.

"If you have any sorrow, my dear," added the old woman, "put your trust in God; be sure that he will never forsake the dutiful child and affectionate sister."

"Ah!" answered Esther, "I am very un-

happy; but God will not comfort me; I am very naughty too."

"If you are sorry for your faults," said the good woman, "you must try to mend of them, and then God will comfort you."

"I do not know how to be good," replied Esther; "I have no friend to teach me; every body is wicked here."

"Poor child! have you no parent, nor brother, nor sister, in this place?"

"Yes," said Esther, "I have a sister here."

"And does she not love you? or is she naughty?"

"We are both naughty," replied Esther. "When we lived with our dear parents, we were good, and loved each other; but now we quarrel."

"But if you will love your sister," answered the old woman, wiping away the tears that ran down the little girl's cheeks, "you should leave off quarrelling. Come, do you begin, and try to make friends with your sister again."

"Indeed," said Esther, "I don't see why I should begin; for, I assure you, my sister behaved as ill as I do; and, besides, she is a great deal more sulky."

"As you have been so good as to listen to me," added the old woman, "will you attend to me a little longer? Many children talk as you do now, that it is not for them to yield first; that they have a right to such and such things; and that they will not be put upon; and they quarrel, and complain, if their wishes are not granted.

Now, surely, if these children would think seriously, they would remember what the Lord said unto Peter when he asked him if he should forgive his brother, who had offended him, till seven times; Jesus answered, *I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven.* (Matt. xviii. 22.) Did your parents ever teach you these things, my child?"

"Yes," replied Esther, "my parents loved to teach us, and to see us good girls."

"Then," added the old woman, "you must very well know, that it is our duty to be humble and lowly-minded, even as our Saviour, who, though Lord of the whole heaven and earth, was meek and lowly as a little child. Will you then delay a moment to try to be friends with your sister, although it may be that she has been more to blame than yourself? but, to make it more easy to you, I will talk to your sister a little first, if she will listen to me; and I shall hope to see you soon friends. And be sure, my love, that, if you behave well, you may be tolerably contented even here, or in any other situation. I have known many sorrows; but God has supported me under them all; and, as the holy Apostle says, *I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.*" (Phil. iv. 11.)

The old woman had not done speaking, when, the dinner being over, the family returned to the work-room.

"Shew me your sister," said the good old woman, "that I may talk to her."

"See, that little girl with light hair," answered Esther; "she is smiling now; that is my sister."

At that moment the mistress called Esther, and set her to do some work in the hall, which she did not finish till it was almost dark.

After her task was done, she remained alone, sitting on a little box by the window, looking at the moon and stars, beyond which, in some happy place, she believed were the souls of her dear father and mother; and she wished that the time was come when she might go to them, for she felt very sad.

While she was thinking of these things, the old woman came into the hall, leaning upon the arm of little Susan. "I am come," said she, "to restore two dear sisters to one another."

The two little girls, with one accord, ran forwards, and put their arms round each other's necks. Neither of them could speak; but they sobbed aloud.

The old woman looked at them with pleasure; and then, lifting up her eyes, she prayed to God to bless these sweet orphans.

This was the happiest moment these two little girls had known since they left their dear home; and the old woman now thought that she was well repaid for the mockeries that had been made of her in this place, by her having been made the means of doing good to these little ones. She sat down on the box, placing the two little girls at her feet, and gave them much good advice. Susan and Esther felt

ashamed of their past behaviour; and, as they listened to their kind instructor, they formed many good resolutions for the future.

They were now all called to go to bed; and the two children gave a parting kiss to the old woman, went to bed with light hearts, and fell asleep side by side.



CHAPTER IV.

THE next morning, Susan and Esther got up resolving to be very good during that day. Susan, feeling her own weakness, wisely kept out of the way of her wicked companions; but Esther, thinking that nothing would ever make her naughty again, did not try to avoid them; and it was not long before they tempted her to be almost as naughty as she used to be. She was even persuaded to laugh with them at Mrs. West, which was the name of the old woman who had been so good to her.

Just as Esther was laughing at a wicked jest upon her infirmities, the old woman came into the room where they were, and overheard what they were saying.

Esther was now indeed extremely vexed at what she had been induced to do; but, instead of begging Mrs. West to forgive her, and confessing her sin and folly to her, as she ought to have done, she resolved to keep out of her way as much as she could; for she was afraid to speak to her.

Towards evening, as she was going along the passage, she met Mrs. West; and, unable to avoid her, she stood still and stooped her head. The old woman took her hand, and smiling upon her, "My child," said she, "how do you do? you have not spoken to me to-day!"

"I am not worthy to speak to you," replied Esther, crying.

"If you are sensible of your fault, my love," said the old woman, "I am ready to forgive what is past."

"Do not cry, sister," said Susan, coming up and taking her hand, kindly wiping the tears from her eyes.

Still Esther cried; and Mrs. West led her, followed by Susan, into her own room, where she bade her sit down on the bed by her side.

"Do not, my dear, avoid me," said she, "because you think you have disobliged me. I know how it is; you have been led by the young people about you to say things which you did not mean, because they teased you. But you must try to keep out of their company as much as you can; for we are such weak creatures, that we are very apt to be led into mischief."

"Ah!" said Esther, "how is it possible for us to be good, when there are so many bad people about us!"

"If," said Mrs. West, "by our own faults we place ourselves among bad people, who tempt us to do wrong, we must expect to become like them; but when God thinks fit to

put us in such a situation, as is the case with you, then, if we will strive and pray for his help, he will keep us from harm."

"Oh!" said Susan, "you don't know what it is to be laughed at and teased as we are."

"Yes," said Mrs. West, "I do. When I was a young girl, not much older than you, my parents, who had been used to live in a very pretty way, failed in their trade, and I was obliged to be put out to service in the family of a very rich merchant, who kept a vast many servants. But in this house they did not know the fear of God; their conversation was light and vain, and sometimes worse. They seldom went to church; and thought of nothing but dressing and playing at cards when their business was over.

"They took great pains to make me as bad as themselves; but, though I was laughed at and mocked by all, yet I thankfully remember that I was enabled to continue faithful to my God; till at length my companions ceased to laugh at me; and, finding I was willing to help and oblige them, they became tolerably civil to me, really respecting me, I believe, more than they did each other; for they often quarrelled among themselves; and I have reason to think that my example was of service to some of the younger servants."

"But what methods did you take," asked Susan, "to endure their mockery and railing with patience?"

"In the first place," answered Mrs. West, "I

never neglected to say my prayers, and ask help of God, *who is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make a way to escape,* (1 Cor. x. 13.) and, surely, no persons who hope for God's blessing, omit to pray for it!"

Here Susan and Esther coloured very much. - Mrs. West went on.

"I had been early taught, that the true Christian is never ashamed of his God, or his Redeemer; and whenever I heard their names used lightly, I always shewed that I was displeased; not by scolding or cross looks, but by being serious, or perhaps by giving some gentle reproof. And if they laughed at me for this, or for going to church, or for taking care of my master's or mistress's goods, for being modest in my deportment, or for doing any other part of my duty; and if they called me precise, and foolish, and affected, I strove to bear all they said with good-humour, and never to return railing for railing. Sometimes, indeed, it went to my heart, when I found that I could not serve my God and please my companions at the same time; and I sometimes almost wished to give up my duty, to gain the favour of these wicked people. But, I thank God, I never yielded to this temptation; for what is the favour of a few vain and sinful mortals, when compared with the eternal and glorious rewards which await those who continue to serve their God amidst all the trials and temptations that surround them!"

As Susan and Esther listened to their kind friend, they resolved in their hearts that they would try to follow her example.

At length Susan said, "Our dear father and mother spared no pains with us. Let us not, dear sister, disappoint their hopes. We will be as good as they wished us to be."

"Yes," replied Esther, "we will never forget what they taught us."

"Sweet babes," said Mrs. West, kissing them both, "may God Almighty bless you, and give you his grace, that you may become indeed his dear children! But remember," she proceeded, "that you have corrupt and evil hearts, and that you cannot of yourselves please God. Remember, too, that you have offended God by your past disobedience; and therefore, my dear little ones, let the first thing you do, be to ask his forgiveness for your dear Saviour's sake: and beg him to strengthen you for every trial you may meet with. And you must ask him for help, not only when you say your prayers at night and morning, but many times in the day; whenever you are tempted to do wrong, you must ask him for help, either by saying a few words with your lips, or by looking up to him in your hearts: and you may be sure, that the Saviour who loved you so much as to die for you, will not fail to hear you, and give you the strength you want; and, what is more, to comfort and refresh you in all your sorrow."

It being now late, the little girls were called to bed; and when they came into their own

room, they knelt down by the bed-side, as they had resolved to do, to say their prayers to God. Before they rose from their knees, Nelly ran into the room, and threw herself on a chair which was nearly opposite to them, where she sat laughing till they got up.

"Hey!" said she, "this is something new. What you've been praying, have you? Vastly good, to be sure!" Then she began to laugh again.

"What is there to laugh at?" said Esther, a little sharply. "It would be as well if you would say your prayers too."

"So you are to be pert, are you, Miss?" cried Nelly, giving her a box on the ear. "That comes of saying your prayers, does it?"

Esther was going to answer again, when Susan begged of her to come to bed and say no more.

"Were you not wrong, dear sister," said she, when they were in bed, "to talk so to Nelly? you know Mrs. West advised us to be kind and gentle. It is very wrong, indeed, to be cross; besides, if we are ill-tempered, it will make people think that we are not the better for saying our prayers."

"Indeed, sister," replied Esther, "I was wrong; but Nelly makes me so angry, that I cannot help saying something to her."

"It is a hard thing for us to become good all at once," said Susan; "but we must pray to God to help us: and I hope in time that we shall improve."

Then the little girls fell asleep. The next day was better spent than any had been for many months.

Some time now passed away, in which these two children became better and better every day. Esther was more gentle in her temper, and could now bear, nearly as well as her sister, the provoking ways of the little boys and girls around them.

According to Mrs. West's advice, they kept as much apart as possible from those bad people who had formerly led them into so much mischief; and as Mrs. West was so happy as to have a very small bed-chamber to herself, they passed their pleasantest hours in this place, with their kind mother, for so they called her; and whatever leisure time they had, they spent in reading their Bible.

One Sunday, it being a very wet day, Mrs. West called the two little girls, when they had put on their clean caps and tippets, to say the morning prayers with her, and read the lessons.

While they were so employed, one of the girls opening the door, peeped in, and instantly ran away.

When they had finished reading, they returned into the room where they usually dined. Susan and Esther went in, hand in hand; their innocent hearts were filled with holy thoughts, which made their countenances look glad.

As all their companions were gathered round the fire, laughing and talking loud, no one saw them come into the room except Jenny Yates,

who was standing with her face to the door, lolling over the back of a chair, with her hands under her apron, and her long red hair hanging scattered over her shoulders.

She seemed watching for something, as she stooped her head forwards very much; and as soon as she perceived the two children, half laughing and leering at them, she gave one of her companions a pinch, saying in a low voice, "Here they are."

Suddenly they all rose up, and with a loud laugh called out, "Here comes Miss Pious and her sister."

Susan and Esther stood still, colouring.

"What! been praying with the old woman?" said one.

"Pretty good dears," said Jenny, with a sneer, and in a drawling voice. "Surely, you don't laugh at them for being so mighty good and pious! why if they like to mope themselves up with the old lady, it's very pretty of them."

"Great fools!" cried Nelly, putting her arms on her sides, and staring in their faces, "why, they have neither life nor spirit."

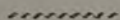
Other speeches more ill-natured and profane were made. Esther's colour rose very high, and she was about to have said something very passionate; but her sister perceiving it, checked her. Then, exerting all her courage, and looking gravely, though very mildly, at these wicked people, "You do not, perhaps, recollect," said she, "that you are making a mockery of our great Creator himself, when you make

a sport of his creatures for trying to serve him."

They all seemed for a moment abashed by the steady and gentle manner in which these two poor children dared to confess their God before so many who mocked his holy name; and they were all silent, while Susan and Esther turned from them and left the room.

But their awe was very soon at an end; and, perhaps to hide the shame they felt, they presently burst into a loud laugh.

This sudden attack upon the two little girls had been caused by some one having seen them at prayers with the old woman; and she had instantly told her companions; and Nelly also had related how, in spite of the jests made of them, they said their prayers every morning and evening;—and then all the wicked party resolved to try to laugh them out of their precise ways, as they called them. For, in truth, the good conduct of these two sisters was wont to make them all uneasy at times; for although they were too hardened to strive to mend their faults, yet their consciences often smote them with the difference between themselves and these poor children.



CHAPTER V.

SOME time after this event, there was a merry-making in a neighbouring house; to which Susan and Esther were asked, and many of

their companions. But although their master and mistress gave them leave, yet Susan and Esther, following Mrs. West's advice, did not choose to go, because she told them that many things would pass there which they would neither like to see nor hear.

On the day on which this merry-making was to take place, several of the boys and girls complained of being unwell, particularly Nelly: however, they were not to be persuaded to stay at home. So, accordingly, ill and well, they all went.

It was late when they returned home. Susan and Esther were both awakened by Nelly's coming into their room. She seemed as if she had drank more than usual; for she sung and laughed, mixing this behaviour with vain and even profane jests. Yet she complained of a head-ache, and soon became so faint that she was obliged to throw herself into a chair. Susan and Esther arose to assist her, although they felt very much disgusted at her behaviour; for, sick and ill as she was, they could not persuade her to go to bed, so high were her spirits.

She spent a restless night; and in the morning was in a high fever, and complained besides of a sore throat.

As these complaints were made by many others in the house, the doctor was sent for; who immediately declared that their disorder was a putrid fever, which raged at that time very much in the country.

Nelly heard this news with dreadful impa-

tience; and her illness continued daily to get worse.

Esther and Susan, now forgetting the ill treatment they had met with from them, spent all their time in going from room to room, watching over their sick companions, paying them the greatest attention, and exhorting such as would listen to them to repentance of their sins.

Very little kindness indeed did these poor creatures receive, except from the two sisters.

Among these unhappy people, poor Nelly was in the worst state. Her disorder was very violent, and gave her a dreadful appearance. She was covered with purple spots, her fever was exceeding high, and she was parched with very great thirst. But what was worse than this, was the restlessness and impatience of her mind, which she expressed by rolling her eyes fiercely about, and even by uttering shocking curses against her God, who had seen fit thus to chasten her.

As she was in greater danger than any of the rest of the family, Mrs. West, Susan, and Esther, by turns, always watched beside her; but she shewed no gratitude to them for their kindness.

Those people who have never seen the sick-bed of the wicked, can form no idea of the despair and misery which they feel, and the terrible fears which they have of death: *but the righteous*, as the wise Solomon says, *hath hope in his death.* (Prov. xiv. 32.)

While poor Nelly lay in this shocking state,

which the doctor said must soon put an end to her life, Esther was seized with the same disorder. Mrs. West carried her to her own room, and treated her with the kindness of a mother.

But in how different a state was the mind of Esther to that of Nelly! Her illness had come upon her while she was doing her duty: she submitted patiently to the will of God, and was mild and thankful to all who waited upon her. She was now in the height of her disorder, when Susan, who was watching by her, was called to the bed of poor Nelly, whom every body supposed to be dying.

This miserable creature was now so exceedingly weak, that she had not power to move; and the difficulty of her breathing was so great, that every moment she seemed as if she would be choaked.

She knew that death was coming on very fast; and the horror and dread she felt of it, she could now only express by shocking looks of despair.

After lying some time in this terrible state, this unhappy girl, cut off in the midst of her sins yet unrepented of, gave up her soul into the hands of the Judge of all the earth.

Susan was very much shocked at the death of Nelly. She fell upon her knees, and prayed God to give her grace so to profit by this awful warning, that she might apply her heart unto true wisdom; that so, when her own hour should come, she might be found watching.

Early on the next day every thing was made

ready for Nelly's funeral. From the window of the long passage Susan saw it pass slowly from the workhouse-door towards the church. As she looked at the coffin, which was attended only by a very few people, and heard the great bell of the church toll deeply, she could not help crying, and felt very sad indeed. She thought, that the most melancholy thing that could happen, was the death of a sinful person. She now saw truly that there is no friendship among the evil-doers; for those persons who used formerly to laugh and jest, and take *wicked counsel* with poor Nelly, now shewed no sorrow at her shocking end.

And what made Susan still more sad on this poor girl's account, was these words of the holy prophet, which came into her mind: *Behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.* (Mal. iv. 1.)

In a short time after Nelly's funeral, Esther's disorder took a happy turn; for which she did not fail to return hearty thanks to God. The rest of the sick persons also seemed in a fair way of recovery.

Susan and Esther were greatly profited by the awful lessons they had lately received; all their good resolutions and habits were strengthened, and they now dreaded nothing so much as becoming wicked.

And now they began to find themselves more comfortable than they had ever yet been in this place; for, besides that their conduct in general procured for them that peace which the world cannot give, they received, upon the whole, more kindness from many of their companions, who had not forgotten their attention to them during their illness; and Mrs. West also was treated so affectionately by her two children, as she called them, that she found her situation far less unpleasant than she had at first expected it would have been. I must not however conceal, that sometimes Esther was less watchful over herself than Susan was, and that her thoughtless and giddy disposition occasionally brought herself and her friends into trouble; but as she always seemed very sorry when she had done wrong, Mrs. West hoped that as she grew older she would be led to see the evil, and get the better of this dangerous fault.

In this manner the time passed away, till Susan was turned sixteen.

And now Mrs. West, becoming anxious to see these young people in some way provided for before her death, wrote to a friend at some distance, to look out for a proper service for Susan, whom she described as a neat, steady, pious girl.

In a short time she received an answer from her friend, who had met with a very suitable place in a good clergyman's family; and, as it was too far off for Susan to go there by herself,

it was agreed, that a trusty farming man in that country, who was to come in about a fortnight to Gloucester fair, should bear her company on his return home, to within a few miles of her new place.

When Mrs. West shewed Susan and Esther the letter, they both felt very thankful for what she had done for them; yet neither of them could help crying when they thought how soon they must part.

But Mrs. West tried to comfort them; and, while they were busied in getting every thing ready for Susan's journey, Mrs. West gave her the best advice to fit her for her new place.

The evening before she left Gloucester, she asked leave to take a walk into the country with Mrs. West and her sister, to visit the cottage of her dear father.

When they reached the little garden, poor Susan and Esther began to cry, thinking of their dear father and mother; and Mrs. West, taking their hands, bade them sit down by her side on the bench before the door, the people who lived in the cottage being from home.

She was silent for some time; the grief of these two sisters affected her very much, and brought to her mind many sad thoughts.

Soon afterwards, having bid them take comfort, "O my dear children!" she added, "in this place where your beloved parents first taught you the fear of God, let me now call upon you to remember his laws, and serve him faithfully in all the trials of your life. He alone can

give you true peace; he will be your friend in trouble, and assist you in every temptation. O, seek first to please your God: think of your Saviour's dying love, ask for his forgiveness whenever you do wrong, and pray for his help in every trial; and in every change and chance of this world, he will be a refuge unto you. *Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is; for he shall be as a tree planted by the waters.* (Jer. xvii. 7, 8.) And though you may be called to great trials in the path of patience and obedience to his holy will, yet your light affliction, which is but for a moment, will work for you an exceeding weight of glory in that blessed place where your dear parents are gone before you; and where *God shall dwell with his people, and shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.* (Rev. xxi. 3, 4.)

When Mrs. West had finished speaking, and the two sisters had thanked her for her kind advice, which they promised never to forget, they got up to return:—but not before Susan and Esther had taken a parting look of the woody hill, where in early days they had gathered cowslips and violets, and the meadow shaded from the hot sun by the spreading elms, where on a Sunday evening they used to walk with their father and mother, and listen to sweet stories which they told them out of the Bible.

It was late when they reached home; and they went to their beds very sad at heart.

Early in the morning the countryman called for Susan. She did all in her power to appear cheerful; and hastened to take leave of her master and mistress, and her companions, who all seemed sorry to part with her; and many of them followed her to the door. This she bore pretty well. Her parting with Mrs. West, whom, perhaps, she might never see again, was indeed a sorrowful one; but when she came to take leave of her sister, who had never ceased to cry during the whole of the morning, it melted the hearts of all who beheld them. They stood upon the steps, and hung upon each other's neck, while their cheeks were covered with tears. They had never before parted; and never but once had any thing disturbed their sisterly love.

Here they would have remained all day; but at last they were obliged to part. Esther, leaning her head against the door-frame, and sobbing aloud, watched her dear sister, who, with an aching heart, and eyes overrunning with tears, often turned back to look upon her, till at length they could no longer see each other.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN Esther had recovered her spirits, after losing her sister, she and her good old mother, Mrs. West, became daily more com-

fortable, by the increasing good-will of their companions. Several of their old enemies left the workhouse, and among these was Tom Smith; being sent for by his uncle, an old man, very wealthy for his station, who now began to repent himself of his neglect of his nephew.

About three years after Susan's departure, Mrs. West's health began very much to decline. Esther paid her the greatest attention; and although the good woman now became urgent with her to strive to get a service in the country before she lost her only protector, yet nothing could prevail upon Esther to leave her in so infirm and weak a state.

She used sometimes to reply to Mrs. West when she talked to her on this subject: "You have been a tender mother to me, when I had lost the best of parents, and shall I leave you now in your old age, without a friend to take care of you? I will do my duty to you now, and trust in God to be my Friend hereafter."

At length Mrs. West's health became so very bad, that she required something more nice and comfortable for her food than was provided in the workhouse. She did not herself make any complaints; but it was very easy for Esther to see that it was so. This caused her much anxiety how to relieve the wants of this poor old woman; and, after she had thought over many schemes for the purpose, it at length came into her mind, that if she could get a place in the town, she might be able to earn a little money, and by this means provide Mrs.

West with the comforts she needed; while at the same time she would be at no great distance from her. This thought pleased her very much, and she resolved to enquire for such a service as would suit her.

In the next street to that in which the workhouse stood, there was a large brick house, remarkable for its number of sash windows to the front, and a flight of steps to the best door. This was a lodging-house for gentry, kept by Mrs. Roberts, a woman who bore a very decent character. Besides two or three servants which she kept, it was her custom, at the busy season of the year, to have a young woman some part of the day to assist in what might be wanted, and whom she hired by the week. It happened that, just at that time, this place was vacant.

This news soon came to Esther's ears, who was delighted with it; and being a lively girl, and rather giddy, as I have before said, she went in quest of the mistress of the workhouse, who was at that time in the kitchen overlooking the dinner.

As soon as the old lady heard Esther's voice, she put on her spectacles, and, calling her to her, asked her what she wanted. Esther made known her request, begging that she might be permitted to enquire at Mrs. Roberts's boarding-house for work.

Esther spoke so humbly, and was, besides, in the habit of doing so many little services for the old lady, that she knew not how to refuse

her, but stood still for some minutes, stooping forwards, and eyeing her keenly. "I am always for mistrusting you girls," answered she; "there is seldom much good in any of your hearts."

"Pray do not deny me," said Esther, with earnestness.

"No good at all in you!" added she; "but you may try for a little while, or so: but mind that, when you come home, your other work is not neglected."

"O, no!" answered Esther. Then, thanking her mistress for the leave she had given her, away she ran; and, putting on her best hat and cloak, made haste into the street, and repaired to the lodging-house.

The door was opened to her by a pale, surly little boy; who, when Esther asked if Mrs. Roberts was at home, said his mother was in the back parlour. He shewed her into it: and here Mrs. Roberts was sitting by the window, with a round table before her covered with jars of sweetmeats, which she was tying up. She was a tall lusty woman, in a round cotton gown, a cloth apron, and a bonnet of white tarnished silk. When Esther came into the room, she looked at her for a minute with very great curiosity; then fixed her eyes on her work, and took them off no more, but busied herself with the sweetmeats; while the boy, humming a tune, sat down opposite to Esther, eyeing her all the time with a great deal of coolness.

Esther courtseyed.

"Do you want any thing with me, young woman?" said Mrs. Roberts, in a haughty voice, and not turning towards her.

When Esther, who was a good deal frightened, had told her errand, "I thought, by your appearance," added she, "that you only applied for a low employment; you do not seem very capable."

"I will endeavour, Madam, to do my best."

"May be;—but what character have you?"

"I hope not a bad one," answered Esther.

"If you please, Ma'am, you shall apply to my mistress at the workhouse."

Mrs. Roberts, having asked some further questions, added, "If you hear nothing more from me, come to my house to-morrow morning."

Esther thanked her and retired, not indeed much pleased with her new mistress; but glad to think that it might now be in her power to be of some service to Mrs. West.

As soon as she got home, she ran to Mrs. West, who was sitting in her little room with her Bible in her hand. When the old lady saw Esther come in, she raised herself up in her arm-chair: "My child," said she, "where have you been? I have not seen you for a long while."

"I have not been neglecting you, my dear mother," answered the kind-hearted Esther: "I would give all I have, to see you comfortable."

"You do make me comfortable, my love,"

replied Mrs. West. "God has blessed me with two kind children. But what, my kind Hetty, can you have been doing for me?"

"I will tell you all," returned Esther; "and I pray you do not be angry with me."

So saying, she related to her all that she had done concerning her new place. When she had finished her account, Mrs. West was silent for a moment; then wiping away a tear from her eye,—*"My dear girl,"* said she, *"I could have wished this otherwise. It would have been much better had you asked my advice: it has long been my wish, although you have kindly opposed it, to see you in a good place, which I should, I have no doubt, been able to procure you. But I cannot approve of the service you have chosen for yourself; for,"* added she, *"you are very young, and I may say rather giddy for your years; and in a house where there is so much company, I fear that you will be exposed to many temptations, and will find much prudence necessary."*

"But, Oh! my dear mother," replied Esther, *"I could not bear to see you in want of any thing."*

Mrs. West having thanked her for her kindness, added, *"But now that you have engaged yourself to Mrs. Roberts, you must not break your promise. Behave, therefore, with caution, my dear; and I hope still, before I die, to see you better provided for."*

She then proceeded to give her further instructions respecting her conduct in her new

place; while Esther employed herself in repairing some of her clothes.

Early the next morning, Esther, having taken leave of Mrs. West for the day, went to Mrs. Roberts's house, where she was received more civilly than before, as her mistress was satisfied with the character she had heard of her.

But, that I may not lengthen my story too much, I will only say, that for some time nothing went amiss. Esther worked hard, and pleased her mistress; and was very happy in being able, by God's blessing, to relieve the good Mrs. West, whose health seemed now gradually to amend.

One morning, when she went as usual to Mrs. Roberts's, her mistress sent for her into the parlour. "Hetty," said she, "Squire Whitehouse, from a distant part of the country, has just been here to take lodgings for the winter, till his new house is fit for him: he will be here in a few hours; and we are all so full of business that you must go and put the best room to rights, and make it ready against he comes.

Esther instantly obeyed: and just as she had finished her work in the best room, and was standing at the door, which was open, looking if every thing was in its right place, she heard some one coming up stairs: it was no other person than the Squire's man carrying his master's portmanteau.

As he had the portmanteau on his shoulders, he stooped so forward, that Esther could not see his face. "Young woman," said he, as

soon as he reached the top of the staircase, "be so good as to shew me my master's room."

"This is it," answered she.

"Hold open the door for me," said he, "if you please."

She did; and he, having put down the load, turned towards Esther, and, staring at her, cried out, "Do I not see Esther Hall!—Well, a good meeting: I did not think to have found you here."

So saying, he took her hand in one of his, and clapping the other upon it, "Upon my word," added he, "you are finely grown."

Esther was at first startled by being so freely spoken to; but she soon perceived that this stranger was no other than Tom Smith who used to live in the workhouse, and was one of those who had so often laughed at her and her dear sister. But he was now so altered, that she would scarcely have known him. He had on a fine suit of brown cloth, turned up with yellow, and trimmed with lace. His hair was powdered; and his whole appearance was so smart, that poor Esther hardly perceived that he had by no means lost his sly look, and was also become more bold in his manners. However, she drew away her hand, and, colouring highly, made only some short answer.

"Do not be so shy," said he: "what! are you afraid of an old friend? Come, come, I see we shall soon be better acquainted. My master is come to lodge here for the winter; and many a pleasant hour may we pass together!"

Esther made no answer.

"Do you bear malice against me," added he, "because I used to laugh at you formerly? In truth, pretty Esther, I have no cause to laugh at you now, except for hanging down your head, and for not speaking to me."

"My mistress will want me," interrupted she.

"No, no," answered Tom, "she will not want you."

He then put on a very gentle manner, and asked her several questions:—How her sister went on, and how long she had been in this place. To which Esther, half fearful to offend so fine a gentleman, and half desirous to leave him, replied, although colouring and almost trembling.

He then ventured to tell her she was much improved in her looks, and need not be ashamed of herself.

Esther had been taught that vain talking and jesting are hateful in the sight of God; and she had read in the Proverbs of the wise king Solomon, *Go from the presence of a foolish man, when thou perceivest not in him the lips of knowledge.* (Prov. xiv. 7.) Yet on this occasion she neglected to think what she ought to do; and listened with too much pleasure to the flattering words of Tom Smith.

While they were talking together, a step was heard in the passage.

"Ah!" said Tom, "there is my master."

"Your master!" cried Esther: "Oh! let me go: w^h t will he think of me?"

She ran hastily towards the door ; but, before she could reach it, she met the Squire himself. Her blushes drew his attention ; which Tom perceiving, said to his master, " An old acquaintance of mine, Sir. I have been only asking her a few questions."

Esther perceived that the gentleman turned, and, looking upon her, smiled ; and being vexed to the heart at her own giddiness, she went into the next room, where, thinking of the disgrace she had brought upon herself, she burst into tears.

CHAPTER VII.

IT would have been very right if Esther had confessed to Mrs. West the fault which she committed in staying to hearken to Tom ; but this she neglected to do, although she had fully intended to do it at the time.

When she went home at night, Mrs. West asked her, as she often did, how the day had been spent ? She told her of the arrival of Mr. Whitehouse, and Tom Smith his man. But as Mrs. West seemed more unwell than usual, she was unwilling to trouble her, by telling her of her own foolish behaviour.

The old woman, after hearing that Tom Smith was at Mrs. Roberts's, remarked to her, that she had never liked the character of that young man.

"It is true," added she, "that he may now be altered for the better; and as you have been long acquainted with him, you must of course be civil to him: indeed it is not right to be sour or crabbed to any one. But be upon your guard, and be cautious of trusting yourself too much in his company. Be watchful over yourself, my dear:—do not suffer him, or any one else, to enter into idle and unprofitable discourse with you. Though you may dread to indulge a wicked thought, or to hear an evil jest, yet the heart is so deceitful, that, if we once allow ourselves to trifle with sin or sinners, we cannot say into what wickedness we may be led. We can none of us be too vigilant, *because our adversary the devil goeth about seeking whom he may devour.* (1 Pet. v. 8.) He tries to ensnare us with flattering words, and entices us with the love of pleasure; but, as the Holy Scriptures say, *The friendship of the world is enmity with God.*" (James iv. 4.)

As Mrs. West finished speaking, Esther thanked her for her kind advice; but she sighed, and the tears came into her eyes. Mrs. West took notice of this, but said nothing.

For two or three days Esther followed this good advice very exactly. On Saturday, as she returned home earlier than usual, on account of Mrs. West's illness being rather increased, the good woman resumed their last discourse, and asked her opinion of Tom Smith. "I shall be glad, my dear," said she, "to hear that he behaves better."

"I hope,"—replied Esther,—*"I hope that he is improved. He is very kind and good-natured to me."*

"I do not wish to seem suspicious," answered the old woman; "but it is no proof that he is reformed, or that he is really kind and good-natured, because he is civil to you. How does he behave to other people? Is he kind and good-natured to every one?"

"Not always," answered Esther. "Sometimes, indeed,—I must not hide it from you,—he swears a little; but I hope he will lay aside that wicked habit. I always let him see I am displeased with him."

"My dear," replied Mrs. West, "I do not wish to distress you; but I must once more exhort you to be very cautious in your behaviour."

"I will try to please you, my dear mother," interrupted Esther, hastily; "and indeed I have been more cautious since you last spoke to me."

Mrs. West smiled, and holding out her hand to her, "I am now," said she, "thank God, happily drawing towards the end of a long life. I am very old; and have done with all the cares and pleasures of this world. I have seen what is the end of these things; and that they are altogether vanity. But at your age they often appear in a very different light. But however they may seem, remember, that whenever worldly pleasures oppose themselves to our duty, they must be withstood:—*She that*

liveth in pleasure, is dead while she liveth."
(1 Tim. v. 6.)

"May God give me his support!" said Esther, raising up her hands to Heaven. "But, O my dear mother, tell me what you would have me do. Have I been so much to blame?"

"I hope not, my dear," answered Mrs. West; "and I do not doubt your wish to do right: but I fear lest you should fail in prudence and proper caution. I will only add a few more words of advice. Remember, if any one is kind and civil to you, and very quarrelsome with other people, you have no reason to think that he is good-tempered. He will soon treat you with as little kindness as he now does others. Nor must you expect lasting affection from any one who disobeys the commandments of God, and takes his holy name in vain. He who neglects his duty to God, will be sure to fail in that which he owes to his fellow-creatures."

"Ah!" said Esther, after some minutes of thought, "this is a world of hard trial."

"It is, indeed, my dear," replied Mrs. West; "but can we say it is too hard, when we remember, that, through the merits of our blessed Saviour, an eternity of unspeakable happiness awaits our patient continuance in well-doing here?—It is the most glorious sight on earth, and one most pleasing even to our heavenly Father, to see a young person in the bloom of life, while pleasures tempt him on all sides, while no pains nor sickness compel to remember his end, while his self-denial draws

down upon him the mockery of his companions, withstanding every temptation to evil; but this is no light task:—one which can be performed only by prayer and the help of God's grace, which he has promised to those who faithfully ask it in his Son's name."

Esther promised that she would never forget this excellent discourse.

The next day being Sunday, she went to church twice, as was her custom when her mistress could spare her. During evening-service, as she listened to the last psalm, which was a very fine one, her soul seemed raised to heaven. She thought that she should never more find any difficulty in doing her duty; but, alas! as was too common with Esther, she forgot her own weakness: she fancied her sin was subdued, and neglected to ask for a strength not her own; and in this frame of mind she returned to Mrs. Roberts's.

As soon as she had done her business, she asked leave to go home, which being granted, she went into the kitchen to fetch her cloak. Just as she was ready to set out, the kitchen-door opened; and Tom, who had been out all the day with his master, came in.

"Esther," said he, "you are not going, surely?"

"Yes," answered she, "but I am."

"Nay, but indeed you sha'n't."

"Let her go," cried one of the other servants; "she always returns home early on Sunday."

"And what for?" said Tom; "to pray by her

old mother? But she has had enough of that, I dare say. I'll wager she has been at church twice to-day. Have you not, Esther?"

"For shame," replied Esther: "let me go."

"Good Christian that you are," answered Tom, "are you so unforgiving, that you will not pardon me for this crime?"

"Indeed," said Esther, "you do not behave well."

"Do you really think so?" replied he, as he seized both her hands, and looked earnestly in her face. "Come," added he, seeing that she was indeed displeased, "I am really sorry for what I have said, though, upon my word, you are too squeamish. In truth, no one but you should deny me the liberty of speech."

Esther, instead of being angry, as she ought to have been at the last part of this speech, was rather pleased than otherwise, although she scarcely knew it herself. She made no answer; but stooped her head and blushed.

"Ah!" said he, "I see that you will forgive me." Then he smiled, and, looking still more earnestly in her face, continued to ask her pardon; till, being confused and frightened, she consented, at last, to forgive him.

With that, he led her back to the fire, and seated her upon a chair.

"Now," said he, "if you really forgive me, you will stay a little while longer: you must not go indeed."

"What a piece of work you are making, Hetty," said the kitchen-maid, a bold staring

girl, who had been watching her for some time: "If I had been you, I'd have stayed at the first word."

Esther coloured, and was now so frightened that she did not dare to make any more attempts to go.

They soon laid a cloth on the little round table by the fire, and they all sat down to supper.

Tom Smith placed himself by Esther, and tried to laugh her out of the uneasiness, which she could not but feel, knowing that she did wrong in staying.

At last, being ashamed to be the jest of all the servants, as well as of Tom, she tried to persuade herself that she had not been so much to blame. She began to talk, and soon to laugh, and to be as merry as usual; yet a rising sigh sometimes broke in upon her laughter.

Tom was in very high spirits: he did every thing he could think of to please Esther; and encouraged the rest of the servants to be as merry as himself. Many things were said, of which Esther did not approve; but she did not dare to shew her anger, because she could not help feeling that her own behaviour had not been right.

At last Tom called out suddenly, "Who sings among you all?"

"I can sing," said the kitchen-maid; "And I," said Captain Dawson's man.

"A song then," said Tom.

"On a Sunday evening!" cried Esther.

They all now burst into a loud laugh, except Tom, who smiled, and seized Esther's hand. "Come," said he, "do not make us laugh at you again. Pray, my dear Esther, what more harm can there be in singing on a Sunday than a little jovial talk such as we have just had?"

Esther knew that this was very true; for the jovial talk, as Tom called it, was such as she had been taught it was very wrong to listen to.

"It is getting late," replied she, "I cannot stay any longer. Pray let go my hand."

"Nay," said he, "stay a few minutes, and then you shall go."

Esther feared to offend him, and consented—But while one of her fellow-servants was singing, she was very much grieved, and said to herself, "Ah! if I can but get away now, I hope I never shall allow myself to be drawn again into such mischief."

Before the song was finished, and Esther had arisen to go, a step was heard in the passage, and Mrs. Roberts herself came into the kitchen. She seemed very angry; and after standing a minute looking fiercely around her, "A fine disturbance," said she, "on a Sunday evening!—What are you doing here, giving such offence to the gentlewomen who are my best lodgers? Go about your business, all of you. And, Esther, what brings you here? did you not ask leave to go home two hours ago?"

She then turned and looking at Tom,—
"These parish girls!" added she—"Go home, you are an impudent hussy."

Esther instantly obeyed, deeply lamenting in her heart her sin and folly, in being so easily persuaded to stay, and severely blaming herself for having neglected, in her difficulty, to ask God's assistance. She had forgotten that *Whosoever will call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered.* (Joel ii. 32.) Happy would it have been for Esther, had this circumstance brought her to a full knowledge of the deceitfulness of her own heart, and taught her always to mistrust herself.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE next morning Esther went into Mrs. West's room, fully resolved to tell her what had happened the evening before. But she found her so ill, having passed a very bad night, that she felt unwilling to distress her by informing her of such an unpleasant affair; and, perhaps, listened too much to her own fear and false shame; and therefore foolishly resolved to defer doing so a little longer.

The old woman cheerfully answered to Esther's kind enquiries after her health, that she believed she should soon reach her journey's end; for that she thought nothing but those delicate and nourishing things which the rich only can afford, would keep her alive many days. "But," added she, "I am very well contented and thankful without them. I have a comfortable

hope, that my blessed Saviour has made my peace with my offended God, and that his fatherly corrections are preparing me for his presence, and I look forward to death without alarm; my only care is on your account, my dear Esther. But that I may, if possible, see you in a creditable place before I die, I will write this very day to one of my friends at a distance, to look out for one for you; and you must not try to persuade me against it."

Esther made no other answer to this speech but by her tears; and as it was then time for her to go to Mrs. Roberts's, she took leave of Mrs. West, promising to return to her as soon as she could in the evening.

When she came to Mrs. Roberts's, her mistress called her into the little back-parlour, and, giving her a piece of work to finish, bade her remain there that she might keep her work clean. She then left her, to go and overlook the cooking in the kitchen: but she did not mention to her the disturbance that had happened the last night.

When Esther was alone, the remembrance of her faults the evening before came into her mind. She thought of the hard trials we meet with in this world, and our own weakness without God's support. She then recollected that she should soon lose her dear Mrs. West; and, as she called to mind the sad situation in which she had left this dear friend, she allowed herself to wish that she was rich and great, that she might buy deli-

cate and nourishing food for her dear old mother.

"Ah!" thought she, "had I not been a poor and friendless girl, I should not have met with such heavy trials as I now do." And thus, by degrees, from useful and penitential thoughts respecting her conduct, she wandered into vain and idle wishes for those things which she thought would make her happy.

She continued to think in this manner, till her tears fell upon her work. While her thoughts were employed in this discontented and sinful manner, of which she afterwards bitterly repented, some one came softly into the room. As she believed it to be Mrs. Roberts, she did not raise her eyes from her work till the person stood just before her; when, looking up, she saw that it was Tom Smith. At first she was so confused, that she could hardly speak; but soon recollecting herself, she said in a low voice, "Do you want any thing with me?"

"Nothing," replied Tom, "but to ask your pardon, that I led you into trouble last night. Pray, say that you forgive me."

Esther had been in her own mind murmuring against God, who had been pleased to place her in a humble state, instead of feeling thankful to him for his goodness, or praying for his blessing. And now it would have been very difficult to escape the snares which were laid for her, for God will not give us his help unless we hourly ask it, and try to use it.

Esther was pleased that Tom seemed sorry

for what he had done amiss; and she did not think that he had only put on this sorrow to gain her favour.

"Forgive you!" repeated she, "I do forgive you; but pray do not stay now."

"Only a moment," said he, "and I will go."

"But if my mistress should come?"

"Do not be so fearful, Esther; your mistress is not now in the house: and, besides, what harm can there be in your saying a few words to an old acquaintance? And tell me now, I pray you, why do your tears fall upon your work? what is the matter?"

"Nothing," answered she; "only I beseech you to go."

"Not till I know the cause of your grief."

"Indeed," said Esther, "you only grieve me more by staying."

Esther now burst out afresh into tears.

"Oh!" said she, as she arose from her seat, "if you do not leave me, what will become of me! My mistress will soon be here."

"Tell me then, Esther, what distresses you? I will not leave you till I know."

"To satisfy you then," replied she, "if you will promise to go; I am unhappy because poor old Mrs. West is very ill, and because—"

"And because what?" asked Tom.

"Nothing else. You must indeed go now."

"And what were you going to say besides?—tell me, and I will promise to leave you. Indeed, Esther, you do not treat me well! What have I done, that you should refuse to tell me

what I am so very desirous to learn? I will always be your friend; and I am sure you must know that I would do any thing in my power to make you happy."

At that moment he spoke true;—for although in his conduct he was often sly and artful, and to some people unkind, yet just then he really felt very sorry for Esther; although on another occasion he would very gladly have led her into mischief.

Esther was affected by Tom's speech, and frightened too by his earnestness; and replied hastily, without considering what she ought to have done: "My dear Mrs. West is very ill; and it is not in my power to procure her any help."

"But it shall be in your power," said he eagerly, taking from his pocket half a guinea, and putting it into her hand.

"Half a guinea!" cried Esther, with surprise; "O! Tom, I cannot take this; indeed I cannot."

"But you must," said he; "I am in no want of it."

"Oh! I never can take it," replied Esther.

"I assure you," replied Tom, "that I am in no want of it: in truth, I am very rich. My uncle, when he died, left me a good sum of money, and a good house withal; and I only went into service this winter, because I thought I should like the change. I can very well spare half a guinea."

Esther stood for a few moments in doubt

what to do ; at one moment the thought of her sick mother inclined her to keep the money ; and at another, she called to mind how very wrong it would be to receive a present from a young man.

"And now," added Tom, seeing that Esther was puzzled what to do, "I will distress you no longer. I will leave you ; and fare you well till we meet again, for I am going out for a few days with my master."

"No, stay," cried Esther, following him, "I am much obliged to you for your kind offer ; but I cannot accept it."

"Well, then," replied he, in a gay manner, "I will only lend you the money ; and when you are able you shall pay me again."

Esther stood still for a few minutes, so frightened, that she scarcely knew where she was ; till hearing her mistress's voice in the passage, she hastened to her seat, and took up her work again as if nothing had happened.

Mrs. Roberts came into the room soon afterwards ; and when she had examined Esther's work, "Has any body been here?" said she. "Did I not hear the door clap just now?"

"I do not know, Madam," replied Esther, in a low voice, and colouring at the same time so highly, that Mrs. Roberts fixed her eyes keenly upon her ; but however said nothing.

Esther remained close at her work till near dinner-time, when Mrs. Roberts told her that she should have nothing more for her to do that

day; and therefore she might, if she pleased, go home.

As soon as she had left the parlour, she ran into the kitchen, and asked hastily, not thinking of what she was doing, if Tom Smith was there; thinking that she would return the half-guinea to him.

"Tom Smith!" said the kitchen-maid; "he has been gone with his master these two hours."

"Gone!" repeated Esther, in a sorrowful voice.

All the servants now bursting into a loud laugh, reminded her of what she had been saying; and vexed to her heart at her giddiness, she turned away, and instantly left the house.

As she walked slowly along the street, she found herself now more perplexed than she had been before; and her spirits were so hurried, that she was scarcely able to think at all. She was fretted too with the sport that had been made by her fellow-servants; and she said to herself, "What good shall I do if I keep this money till Tom returns, and restore it to him then? It will not save me from more of the same ridicule which I have met with to-day. He does not want the half-guinea; and I do not see why poor Mrs. West should not be the better for it. Another time, when I am richer, I may pay him again."

Esther did not stay to examine whether these thoughts were right, although she might easily have known that it was a very wrong thing to receive Tom Smith's money, even although she

put it to the best use. But, instead of asking herself what it was her duty to do, or looking up for direction, she ran immediately to a spirit-shop which was at no great distance from the workhouse.

She had scarcely asked the shopkeeper for what she wanted, when she heard a loud female voice behind her, calling out, "A penny'th of your best Hollands, Sir;" and at the same minute Jenny Yates came and stood by her side.

As Jenny was very eager in her demands, the shopkeeper served her first; and Esther was willing to wait, in hopes of her soon leaving the shop; but instead of which, as soon as she had thrown down her penny, she lolled upon the counter, stooping forwards her head, which she leaned upon one hand, and, pushing aside her long red hair, that she might watch Esther the better, she looked at her with a sly and malicious simper; but turned away her eyes whenever she saw that Esther perceived them.

"Young woman," said the shopkeeper, "you asked for a bottle of my best wine."

"If you please, Sir," replied Esther, very sorry that Jenny should hear what she said.

As soon as she had received the bottle, she gave the half-guinea to the shopkeeper to change; and having paid the money, she put the bottle under her apron, and made haste to leave the shop, hoping that Jenny would suppose she had come on an errand from her mistress: but no sooner had she taken the turning towards the workhouse than Jenny overtook

her, and stopping as she came up to her, "Going this way?" said she.

"Yes," said Esther, somewhat peevishly.

"I thought you had been going to Mrs. Roberts's," returned Jenny.

"No," answered Esther.

"You get fine wages there, don't you?"

"So much a week," replied Esther.

"I don't mean from Mrs. Roberts," said the bold girl, with a sneer.

"What do you mean then?" asked Esther, colouring.

"Nothing," answered Jenny, glancing her eyes on the bottle; "only I suppose you are not so poor as you used to be when you lived always with us."

Esther turned and looked at her, upon which she burst into a loud laugh, adding, "Come, leave the matter as it is. I do not find, for my part, that those who would be thought so over and above good, are any better than their neighbours."

"I don't understand you," cried Esther, almost trembling: "what do you mean?"

"There's no need of putting on ignorance," said Jenny, in a louder voice. "But," added she, with an oath, as she gave her a look of anger, "don't think that you will fare better than other people: for, in sooth, those that put on such sober looks are never a whit the better when the truth comes to be known; nor will they meet with what's better," cried she, in a still louder voice.

Esther was so hurried and frightened that she burst into tears; which Jenny seeing, again began to laugh loudly; and as they were now very near the workhouse, she went forward, and calling to a young woman, one of her friends, who was on the other side of the street, they walked on together, sometimes singing an idle song, then talking loud, and turning to laugh at Esther, who was behind. She, however, made the best of her way to the house-door, and ran hastily up stairs, into the room where she usually slept.

CHAPTER IX.

HERE Esther, sitting down, leaned her head on her arm, and began bitterly to lament her own faults and folly.

She called to mind all that she had done wrong that day and the evening before;—and as she thought of these things she wept bitterly. But although she felt some sorrow for her faults, and prayed to God to forgive them with some degree of earnestness, yet she had not courage to confess them to Mrs. West. She allowed herself in a very sinful fear, that this good woman would be angry with Tom Smith for his sinful ways; and she resolved, for the present at least, to conceal the affair. The real truth was, though she did not own it to herself, that she could not resolve to deny herself and follow

the narrow path of duty, where she knew it would lead: she could not resolve to give up this unprincipled young man. But a secret feeling that she was doing wrong darkened her mind and filled her with continual sorrow. When she attended upon Mrs. West, she was almost always in tears; and when she was at Mrs. Roberts's, she was grave and silent.

"Ay," said one of her fellow-servants to her, one day, "we know well enough what ails you, Esther. If the Squire would come back, and bring his man with him, all would be put to rights presently."

On hearing this, Esther was very angry; and, instead of taking herself to task, for having given reason, by her foolish behaviour, to these jests, she returned a very peevish answer, and said she did not know what she had done to have such things spoken of her.

Nor had poor Esther any comfort in seeing that the wine, which had cost her so dear, was of much service to Mrs. West; for the good old woman got worse and worse, and nothing which she eat and drank seemed to benefit her. When she first tasted the wine, she asked Esther from whence it came.

Esther coloured, and answered, that it had been given her by Mrs. Roberts.

Mrs. West looked hard at Esther, as if she mistrusted something; yet she did not like to accuse her of telling an untruth.

Thus was Esther, from one fault to another, drawn on to tell a dreadful lie; and now, in the

grief of her heart, she wished that she had remembered these words of the wise man:—*Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding: in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.* (Prov. iii. 5, 6.)

The consciousness of this last dreadful fault made Esther still more miserable; and she was at length so very unhappy, that she resolved to confess all her faults to Mrs. West, and ask her advice and forgiveness before death for ever parted them in this world.

When Mrs. West had heard the sad account of Esther's faults, of her indiscreet behaviour at Mrs. Roberts's, and the several falsities which she had told, thus grievously offending the Lord, who *hateth a lying tongue*, (Prov. vi. 17,) the poor old woman could not help weeping for sorrow; for she had hoped better things of Esther. However, she kissed her dear child, and commended her for having at length owned the truth. She then, in the spirit of meekness, as St. Paul says, reprov'd her for her faults, and admonished her how, for the future, to avoid the like, exhorting her to humble herself in the sight of the Lord. (*James* iv. 10.) "O! my dear Esther," added she, "be henceforth watchful over yourself. Many young persons who, like you, have meant to do well, have fallen into the snares of the devil, because they have been light-minded, and have failed in frequent prayer to God for help;—without which none can stand. Wherefore, be ever mindful

of these words of St. Paul: *Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand—praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance.*" (Eph. vi. 13, 18.)

After this discourse, Esther felt much more happy than she had done for many days. She mourned her faults, and humbled herself before God; and soon she once more tasted some degree of that peace of mind which the world cannot give; for, as the holy St. Paul says, *godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation, not to be repented of.* (2 Cor. vii. 10.)

One evening, when Esther returned late from Mrs. Roberts's, she was told, as soon as she entered the workhouse, that Mrs. West lay almost in a dying state, and, it was thought, would not live many hours.

Esther hastened to her room, and watched her during the night. Towards the dawn of day, the poor old woman seemed a little to revive; and she spoke to Esther, and was sensible of what passed about her,—which she had not before been for several hours.

About six in the morning some one knocked at the door. Esther arose from her seat at the foot of Mrs. West's bed; and, opening the door, was surprised to find Jenny Yates there, dressed in her best clothes, as she could see, although it was not quite day-light.

"I came to ask how the old lady does," said Jenny.

"Indeed," answered Esther, "I cannot give you a very good account: I think she will hardly see another day."

Jenny made no answer for some minutes: at length she said, "Why, Esther, you won't like to leave her to-day, as she is so very bad, surely?"

"No," replied Esther, "if any thing should happen, and I not be with her, it would grieve me to the heart."

"To be sure it would," said Jenny; "but what do you do about your mistress?"

"Perhaps she will excuse me this one day."

"Ah, that I am sure she would; but then she will have her house full of company to-day, and that will make it inconvenient."

"How do you know that?" asked Esther.

"Because,"—answered Jenny,—“la! I know it very well. Why, do you think I don't know Mrs. Roberts, when my mother washed for her before I was born? and I was thinking she would not be able to do without help to-day, if she has company.—Dear me,” added she, after a short silence, “now, could I not go to-day in your place? and to-morrow we shall see how things are;—and, as I was just saying, I know Mrs. Roberts, and all the ways of her house, as well as you can do. Why, she never had any other washer-woman than my mother before we came into the workhouse.”

"I thank you," answered Esther; "but I do not know what I ought to do. If you will

stay one moment, I will ask Mrs. West, if she is awake."

"Well, do as you please," said Jenny. "I only spoke out of good-nature; and it is not worth disturbing the old gentlewoman about. I thought, perhaps, as she was so near her end, that you might not like to leave her; but you must please yourself after all.—So, good bye."

"Nay, stay," said Esther; "I think I shall accept your offer. I must not leave Mrs. West to-day."

Jenny seemed so mightily pleased when Esther consented that she should go, and ran down stairs in so much haste, that Esther began to think there was something more in all this civility than Jenny would have her think; and she was almost sorry that she had suffered her to take her place, even for that one day.

But she had not time to think any more of this during the rest of the day; for in a short time Mrs. West was so much better, as to be able to talk to her; and, as the old lady knew that she must very soon die, she profited by this her last opportunity to give her some good advice, which might be of service to her when she was no more.

She shewed Esther a letter which she had received the day before from her friend, to whom she had written to get her a place. This friend had had very good success, and had the promise of a place for Esther, in the family of a very worthy lady, provided she could have a good

character from Mrs. Roberts; and to this place Esther was to go in about a month's time.

When Mrs. West gave Esther the letter, she thanked God for his goodness in thus taking care of her dear child, when she should be no more: but Esther, although she tried to feel thankful to God, yet could not think of leaving Gloucester without grief.

Mrs. West guessed the reason why she seemed sad; and having looked at her for some time with pity, "My dear child," said she, "although I am drawing near to my last hour, I have not forgotten the hard trials of my early days. But, believe me, that one of the greatest comforts I now enjoy, is the remembrance that, with the grace of God, I was enabled, in some degree, to overcome the world.

"May you at the close of life be blessed with the same proof and evidence of faith in your Redeemer, by a living union with whom we can alone bring forth good fruit:—to give up the world and its pleasures, and to do our duty through all trials, is, indeed, very hard at your time of life; but in that hour, *when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away*, (1 Pet. v. 4;) and then will you rejoice that you have not yielded to your present temptations."

"O!" said Esther, "God grant that I may do his will with holy patience. But what is it," added she, looking earnestly at Mrs. West, "that is now particularly required of me?"

"Since you ask me, my dear child," said

Mrs. West, "I will not hide from you what I think is your duty. If you love God, as you say you do, you must break off all acquaintance with that young man, who has already led you into so many faults; and I hope that you will, with the Lord's blessing, find this no very hard task. In a few days I hope that you will get a good character from Mrs. Roberts; and when you are in a creditable family in the country, you will have no cause to fear the young man will trouble you any further.

"I shall leave a few things behind me, which, if you will sell, will I hope bring you enough money, with your own little earnings, to repay the half-guinea;—which I beg you will take care to do as soon as you can, remembering that such debts are a dishonour and shame to those who owe them."

Then Mrs. West proceeded to point out to Esther, that even should the young man mean to marry her, yet that she could not expect any thing but ruin and misery from such a marriage. "Remember, my child," said the good old lady, "what the apostle St. Paul has said: *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?*" (2 Cor. vi. 14.)

"And yet," said Esther, in a sorrowful voice, "I cannot think but that he would treat me kindly."

"O! my beloved Esther," answered Mrs. West, "how can you deceive yourself so much?

how can you think that one whom you know to be unmindful of his duty to God and his Redeemer, will fulfil his duty to his wife! I have myself enquired into the character of this young man, and I know that he is in the habit of committing very wicked actions; such as are spoken of by God with anger and hatred, although many men and women also are so blameable as to pass them over as trifling faults.

"But those who fail to shew their hatred of wicked actions, or who keep company with wicked men, must expect that God will not love them. They have forgotten what is written in the Bible: *If sinners entice thee, consent thou not; if they say, Come with us,—walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path, for their feet run to evil.* (Prov. i.)

"But you, my dear Esther," added Mrs. West, "will not, I trust, be one of those guilty creatures who, for a few days of pleasure, fail to shew that they abhor that which is evil. No; you will rather give up all that is now dear and pleasant to you than offend your God; and your heavenly Father who seeth in secret, will reward openly every sacrifice made secretly to him."

"O!" answered Esther, "I hope I never may think any sacrifice too great to make to my God;—and what signify these few years of trouble? If I do my duty in this present life, it will not be long before I shall be received, through the merits of my blessed Saviour, into that happy place, to which my dear father and mother are gone before me."

Soon after this discourse, the good old woman fell asleep; and while Esther watched by her, "Ah!" thought she, "this will soon be the sleep of death; how happy will that sleep be! O blessed hour! when I too shall have done my earthly task, and shall lie down to rest, in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection from the dead."

While these thoughts passed in her mind she felt sorrowful indeed; but holy hope and trust in the sure mercies of God, afforded her that consolation which He alone can bestow.

CHAPTER X.

IN the course of that day Mrs. West received the sacrament with deep humility and lively gratitude to God. Before it was administered, she expressed a deep sense of her own unworthiness, her firm and entire confidence in the merits of her blessed Saviour—her thankfulness also for that goodness and mercy which had followed her all her life long, especially for that love which had redeemed her from the punishment of her sin, and purchased for her the hope of glory; she declared likewise that she fully forgave all her enemies, even as God for Christ's sake had forgiven her. Towards the close of the day, the good woman gave Esther her last and solemn blessing. She took her hand within hers, and, looking up-

wards at the same time, she said in a very soft voice, "Give me your other hand, and let me fancy it Susan's. God bless both my children, and reward them for their kindness to me, by saving them from sin, the worst of all evils."

Some time afterwards, she begged to return her thanks to the mistress and all her companions, for their kindness to her. Little indeed had the kindness of some of them been; but those who are truly humble, and know how little even the best of us deserve in the sight of God, will be thankful even for the smallest favours.

She gradually became weaker and weaker, and died that same night without a groan, calling upon God her Saviour. Esther continued to watch her till she was laid in her coffin. She then shed flowers over her, and resolved never, never to forget the wise and holy lessons she had received from her.

Esther also followed her to the grave. She was buried near the place where poor Nelly, a few years ago, was laid in the ground. When Esther thought of this, she could not help lamenting that the end of that unhappy girl should have been so different to that of the good old woman just departed this life. *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints*, (Psalm cxvi. 15,) saith the holy Bible. *When a wicked man dieth, his expectation shall perish.* (Prov. xi. 7.)

The day after the funeral, Esther, not without many tears, opened the box, in which the

good old woman had kept the few things which she had remaining of former better times. She found in the box a Prayer-Book and the Bible, in which she had so often read to the poor old woman, and in which were the names and ages of her children, all of whom she outlived; and also a few lace caps and cotton mittens, which she had valued as having been given her by her former mistress on her marriage.

These Esther locked up again, having shewed them to the mistress of the workhouse.

The same evening she prepared herself to go to Mrs. Roberts's again, where she intended to thank Jenny Yates for her trouble, who had all this time done her work for her; and to tell her that she would take up her time no longer, as nothing now prevented her serving Mrs. Roberts till the day appointed for her going to her new place. In the mean time she thought Mrs. Roberts could suit herself with a servant to her own liking.

When she reached the lodging-house, the door was opened by Mrs. Roberts's son. The boy seemed half doubtful whether he should shut the door upon her, or permit her to come in. However, he held it open till she passed him.

She went into the kitchen; where she found Jenny and the kitchen-maid sitting idly over the fire.

Jenny winked at the other when Esther came in; then leaning forwards, with her elbow upon her knees, "What! come again, Esther?" said she.

"I did not wish to give you more trouble than was necessary," replied she.

"And hadn't you another reason?" asked the kitchen-maid.

"I am much obliged to you for your kindness, Jenny," said Esther, not seeming to hear what the kitchen-maid said.

"Much obliged, in truth," answered Jenny, laughing.

"Is my mistress within?" asked Esther.

"Yes," said another of the servants, "you will find her in the back-parlour."

On hearing which, Esther went and knocked gently at the parlour-door.

"Come in," said Mrs. Roberts; and Esther opened the door. Jenny at the same moment, following her into the room, busied herself in searching for something in the corner-cupboard all the time that she stayed.

"When Esther entered the room; Mrs. Roberts was alone with her little boy. She looked coolly upon her, and said, "So, it is you. I did not expect to see you again."

"Ma'am!" replied Esther, somewhat surprised.

"I tell you," repeated Mrs. Roberts, "that I did not expect to see you again. Jenny and I agree very well; and I have no further need of your services."

"I am afraid," answered Esther, "some mistake——"

"No mistake," interrupted Mrs. Roberts.

Esther was very much grieved and surprised

at this. After a moment's silence, she said, "You will, perhaps, have the goodness, Madam, if you have no further occasion for me, to write a few lines to a lady in the country, who is willing to take me into her service, if I can have a character from you."

"A character for what must I give you?"

"I hope you will not think me undeserving, Madam, of one for steadiness, honesty, and sobriety in your service?" said Esther.

"O! the bold-facedness of these parish-girls!" cried Mrs. Roberts, lifting up her hands.

Jenny now turned and laughed slyly at Esther.

Mrs. Roberts, laying down her work, looked up in her face,—“And can you,” added she, “have the confidence to ask me for a character?”

“Surely, Madam,” said Esther, “I have been misrepresented to you. Indeed, indeed, I have endeavoured to be faithful to you. Never, to my knowledge, have I done any thing dishonest by you.”

“No answers;—don't be saucy,” interrupted Mrs. Roberts, in a louder voice; “and now listen to me:—deny what I say, if you can. Have you always told me the truth? Was it nobody that came into the parlour and gave you half a guinea the other day? Ay, ay, you may well redden; but don't interrupt me, I'll be heard out; and the half-guinea went to the gin-shop. Here's sobriety and honesty! and who knows what of mine has gone there too!”

"Indeed, indeed," interrupted Esther,——

"No, no, hear me out; and then such noise, such romping too on a Sunday evening with Tom Smith; and all of your own seeking! The lad is a quiet lad enough when you are not here.—Steadiness, in truth! Mercy upon us, what times are these! But I am almost sick of these parish-girls, I tell you: I'll get rid of you all, and have a decent person about me."

"Oh! Madam," cried Esther, "I have been very cruelly falsified to you."

"Can you deny what I have said?" asked Mrs. Roberts, in a voice of passion.

"But if you will only hear me,——"

"Hear you! No, no; I know very well all you will say to me;—but go about your business. I know your ways as well as you know them yourself, and wish I had known them sooner, though I did suspect you."

"Oh! if you will but hear me!" repeated Esther, bursting into tears! "I have indeed been to blame,—but——"

"Ay, ay, you'd better confess it.—Come, come, don't stay lingering here. I owe you nothing; and you may get a character where you can."

Esther burst into tears, and earnestly besought Mrs. Roberts to listen to her: but she only grew more enraged; and, taking Esther by the arm, led her to the door, and shut it upon her.

CHAPTER XI.

AS soon as Esther got into the passage, she sunk back against the wall, and, covering her face with her apron, gave way, for some minutes, to her grief.

Jenny soon followed her into the passage, and as she passed by her, "Fine things these!" said she. "Ay, one always mistrusts these over-righteous ones.—No great good in all this praying and canting."

Esther made no reply; but now finding that the servants began to gather around her, some laughing at her, some pitying her, she wiped her eyes, and without speaking (for indeed she was unable to speak) she left the house.

As she was almost as much afraid of returning to the workhouse, and of the questions of her companions there, as of the ridicule and mockery of the people she had just left, she turned, scarcely knowing whither she went, down another street which leads towards the church-yard.

She walked slowly along, endeavouring to conceal the tears which still fell from her eyes. As she passed through the church-yard, she stopped, for a few minutes, beside the fresh grave of Mrs. West. "Oh!" cried she, as she looked upon it, "when, when will the troubles of this life be over?—when, when shall I be at rest?"

She had no sooner finished these words than

she felt some one take hold of her hand; and turning round, she saw, by the faint twilight, Tom Smith, who was out of breath with running.

Esther started, and tried to draw away her hand. "Let me go!" cried she; "I must not stay."

"One moment only!" said Tom.

"Oh!" replied she, "you have been already the ruin of all my hopes. Oh!" do—do let me go."

"And do you give way to this sorrow, to these tears," returned Tom, "because that ill-natured and foolish woman has dismissed you from her service? What can such a woman's ill-will signify to you? I, who dearly love you, Esther, will provide for you, and take care of you, and you shall be happy. I would die to make you happy, and furnish you with all you want."

"O, heavenly Father!" cried Esther, in a most earnest voice, "guide me to do what is right, and deliver me from these snares!"

Then again trying, in vain, to get away from Tom, she gave way for a few minutes, in silence, to her very great sorrow.

I will not here repeat all that Tom said, in the hope to comfort her, the promises he made her, and the wicked arts and persuasions he made use of to try to mislead her.

Esther, at length, dried up her tears, which had, till now, prevented her from speaking; and, turning towards him, in a serious and

steady manner, she said, "You have drawn me into some faults, which will, I fear, be the means of my ruin in this world; but, with the help of that God who has, in mercy, granted me warning of my danger, before it is too late, I will never be tempted to an act of sin, were I to gain the whole world. I will remain steady to my God; I will turn away my ears from your wicked persuasions; and I will *cast my burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain me.*" (Psalm lv. 22.)

As she finished speaking, trying all her strength, she drew away her hand from Tom, and ran, with the utmost speed, towards home: and although he followed her, and called to her in the most earnest manner to stop, yet she would not look back; nor did she cease running till she had reached the workhouse.

When arrived there, she hastened into the room that had been Mrs. West's, where she was sure of not being interrupted, as her companions did not venture yet to go into it at night.

Here she gave way for some time to her grief; but as soon as she was sufficiently recovered, she fell upon her knees and prayed God to give her comfort, and to be her Friend in her distress.

Although her heart was somewhat lightened by having trusted herself to the care of her best and most powerful Friend, yet she passed the greatest part of the night in tears.

The next morning she called to mind, that

as she had lost all hopes of a good place, she had no means of getting her bread but by returning to work with her old companions; and having earnestly prayed to her heavenly Father to support and preserve her blameless through all her trials, she tried to return into the work-room with an appearance of cheerfulness.

As she opened the door and walked into the room, she heard her own name whispered by several of the young women, and looking up, she saw Jenny Yates, with a number of the young people gathered round her, who seemed to be hearkening, very earnestly, to some tale she was telling them.

But no sooner did they see Esther, than Jenny ceased from talking; and one of the young women cried out, "Here comes our preacher. Hey! Esther, what! is it come to this? Where is your grimace and piety now?"

"Truly!" said another, coming forwards and peeping in her face, "it is a fine thing to have a sick old woman to whine and cant over, when one can have such nice means of furnishing her with dainties."

Esther was cut to the heart, but she made no answer; she wiped away a tear which ran down her cheek, with the corner of her apron, and sat down to her spinning-wheel. The faults of which she had been guilty, had humbled her in her own sight; and she resolved, as the best way of shewing her repentance, to bear with patience the railing of her companions;

and, as the holy apostle St. Paul commands, to *recompense to no man evil for evil.* (Rom. xii. 17.)

"But," said Jenny, winking to her companions, "'tis time for me to be off. Good-bye, Esther. Have you any message for Tom?"

Esther made no answer.

"But, perhaps, Tom won't have any more to say to you," added Jenny. "Ay! Esther, how is it? No more half-guineas to be had to buy some good white wine—no more songs on a Sunday evening.—Shall I tell Tom how sad you look?"

Esther raised her eyes to heaven,—but still was silent.

Jenny took her leave; and, after she was gone, some few of the young women seemed disposed to pity Esther, and to blame Jenny as a mischief-maker and a tell-tale; but the rest of the party burst into a loud fit of laughter, and continued to make a mockery of Esther till the master, coming in, called them all to their work.

In this manner was Esther treated for some time; but, having got leave of the mistress to sleep in the little room which was once Mrs. West's, she sometimes shut herself up there when she was troubled by the wicked and cruel jests of Jenny or others of the young women. Here she found time and opportunity for saying her prayers, reading her Bible, and thinking of good things.

She continued to grieve for the faults of which she had been guilty, and but for which

she might now have been in a creditable and comfortable place.

When Esther had often called to mind the things which had happened, and Tom Smith's behaviour, not only at Mrs. Roberts's, but also before he left the workhouse—when she remembered how, even when quite a boy, he used to swear and take God's name in vain, talking profanely, idling and romping with Jenny Yates, with poor Nelly, or any other bold girl who chanced to come in his way;—that he never went to church unless he was forced to go;—particularly, when she recollected what Mrs. West had said concerning him in her last illness, she was quite convinced that she ought never more to see him or to think of him, if possible, much less to have a thought of marrying him, unless she was resolved to run into ruin and misery.

Accordingly she determined to keep out of his way; or, if by chance she met him, not to enter into discourse with him: and with God's help, for she every day prayed for God's help, she kept her resolution for some time.

Although Tom Smith often loitered about the workhouse, talking and jesting with his old acquaintance, in the hopes of seeing Esther, yet she always kept out of sight; and if by chance he met her when she was going on an errand for her mistress, or to church, she always spoke gravely, and behaved very reservedly and shyly to him.

It was now about a month since Esther had

been turned away from Mrs. Roberts's; and by selling the few things which poor Mrs. West had left her, she made up the half-guinea again, part of which she had spent in buying the bottle of wine.

She now began to be very impatient to pay this money; and she resolved to wrap it up neatly, and to get her mistress to give it him when next he came to the workhouse. As her mistress knew that he had lent her the money, she also thought it would be well that she should know that it was repaid.

It would have been happy for Esther if she had kept this resolution also;—but one evening, before she had had an opportunity of paying the money, Jenny Yates came home from Mrs. Roberts's, and told one of the young women, in her hearing, that Tom was going very soon from Gloucester.

"What!" said Esther, "have he and his master disagreed?"

"Disagreed!" said Jenny; "no, surely: he only came to live with the Squire for a change; and now he is going to live upon his means. He has money enough for himself and for other folks too," added she, "without working for it—half-a-guinea now and then to spare.—Ay, Esther?"

"I am very sorry," said Esther, "that I ever took that money from him; I was very much to blame, and I have been punished for it. I should have trusted my dear Mrs. West to the care of God, and not have borrowed money

from that young man; but I hope to be able to pay it before he goes."

"Must make haste then," cried Jenny laughing, "for he goes out of town very soon; and it's a chance if ever you see him again."

When Esther heard that Tom was going to leave Gloucester, and she thought that he might never, perhaps, return, she was so foolish as to allow herself to wish to see him once more before he went. "I should like to say Good-bye to him before we part, never to meet again," she said to herself. "Surely, there can be no harm in my just speaking to him when he comes again to the workhouse, or when I chance to meet him in the street; and it, perhaps, would be as well if I were to give him the money myself: then I shall be sure he has had it."

Thus Esther tried to deceive herself, and to make herself believe that there would be no harm in seeing the young man once again: but still she knew that she was doing wrong. She felt dissatisfied with herself; and when she went to bed, she did not take any pleasure, as usual, in saying her prayers, but she hurried them over, and went to sleep without thinking of God, or daring to examine her own heart.

CHAPTER XII.

THE next day was Sunday. Esther's thoughts were so fixed upon what Jenny had said the

night before, that she was unmindful of her duty at church.

After evening-service, instead of coming home immediately, as was her custom, she took several turns in the church-yard. It was nearly dark before she thought of returning to the workhouse; and it happened, that, just as she reached the gate of the church-yard, she met Tom Smith himself. She had ceased to call upon her God for his assistance: she trusted in her own strength; and, alas! she fell into the snares which were laid for her.

When she saw Tom Smith she was much frightened!—although she had just now wished to see him. But, instead of turning away, as she ought to have done, she stood still till he came up to her.

"My dear Esther," said he, "how long it is since I have seen you!" Then taking her hand, and looking very hard at her, "You have been very cruelly used, very cruelly indeed. O! if I had known sooner," he added, "the vile ways of that Jenny Yates, I would have taken care to have punished her well for them." Then he swore a dreadful oath; and he declared that it was owing to her wicked stories that Esther was brought into such disgrace at Mrs. Roberts's.

"But I have found her out," continued he; "I know well enough what she is driving at, and I will disappoint her. But why do you draw away your hand? Nay, Esther, you must not leave me: what have I done to offend you?"

"Oh!" said she, "what will be said of me, if I should be seen here with you? I must leave you. But before I go," she added, "I will pay you this money; and, thank God, I am now able to do it. I am much obliged to you for the kindness of your intention in lending it to me; but, alas! it would have been better for me if I had never taken it."

Tom Smith made no answer for a few minutes: at length he said, "Oh! Esther, this is too much: you have made me ashamed of myself! I have treated you ill; but if you can forgive me, and forget what is passed, I will do every thing in my power to make you happy."

Then he offered to make her his wife, and called his Maker to witness that he would do his utmost to repair his unkind usage of her. He was so earnest in his suit, (and really at the time intended to do well by her,) that she forgot her stedfast purposes, and doubted what answer to make him.

She called to mind the last advice of Mrs. West, the bad opinion she had of Tom Smith, and all the evil she herself had seen in him. Nevertheless, her own forlorn state, without friends, or a comfortable home, or indeed without any present hope of doing well in the world, and the strong persuasions of Tom, in a short time overcame the sense of her duty; and she gave him, at last, her promise to marry him at the end of a fortnight; at which time, he told her, he should be at liberty to leave his master.

Tom would also have engaged her to meet him again the next day, at the same hour; but this she was discreet enough to refuse. It was, therefore, proposed by him, that Monday fortnight should be the day of the wedding, and that they should go immediately afterwards to Thornbury, the town where his uncle had lived. He seemed very desirous to leave Gloucester as soon as possible, and also that every thing should be managed very secretly.

Esther was somewhat frightened by all this hurry; yet she persuaded herself that she was now gone too far to withdraw her consent.

When they parted, Tom took leave of her in the most kind manner; and Esther hastened home. When she reached the workhouse she joined the rest of the family, who were gathered round a large fire in the hall; and although their discourse was such as was not befitting a Sunday evening, yet she would not leave them, nor withdraw to her own little room, as she often was wont to do, because she could not bear to reflect upon what she had done; for she knew very well that she ought not to have listened to the offers of this bad young man, however forlorn and friendless her state might be. If she had put her trust in God, and patiently done the thing that was right, God would have caused her present troubles to work for her good, and, in his own time, have delivered her from all her sorrow.

It was found out by one of the young women belonging to the workhouse, that Esther had

met Tom Smith in the church-yard; and as the subject of their discourse was not known, she was more than ever tormented by the coarse jests of the family.

Jenny Yates, in particular, was more rude and violent than the other young women, when she was told of what had happened; and there was no name which she thought too bad for Esther.

On the Sunday evening before the day fixed for the marriage, Esther went privately to her mistress, and told her of her plans: begging as a very great favour, that she and the master would go to church with her the next day.

The mistress gladly granted the request; for, as Tom Smith had some money, she thought that this marriage would be a fine thing for Esther,—never considering the young man's character.

Early in the morning Esther made a small bundle of her few clothes, her Bible, and Prayer-Book, and one or two more books; and taking a farewell, not without some tears, of the little room where she had spent so many happy days with her dear sister and Mrs. West, she followed her master and mistress to the parish-church, where Tom and one of his companions were waiting for her.

When the wedding was over, Esther bade a kind farewell to her master and mistress, thanking them for their goodness to her, and begging them to give her love to all her companions. Tom, who was very impatient to leave

Glocester, took her up behind him on a horse he had provided, and they rode as quickly as possible out of the town.

The road lay very near the little cottage where Esther's dear father and mother had formerly lived: a pleasant field parted it from the highway. The smoke of the fire was just seen above the green trees, and reminded poor Esther of those early happy days of her childhood, when her dear parents were living, and when they used to begin every morning with a prayer and hymn to God.

The tears fell down her cheeks; and she would have offered a secret prayer, that she might be always mindful of their example; but a bitter feeling that she had now been taking a step which neither her heavenly nor her earthly parents could have approved, checked her faltering prayer.

She looked back on the beloved tower of Glocester, which now shone very bright in the morning sun; and when she could see it no longer she sighed deeply.

During the journey, Tom did every thing in his power to please and amuse her. They dined on the road, and in the afternoon they reached the pleasant town of Thornbury; but as Tom's house was not ready to receive them, they passed the evening at the Swan Inn—though in a manner not very pleasant to Esther; for Tom, as soon as he was arrived, collected all his old companions about him, and feasted them plentifully with ale.

The next morning he took Esther to see his house, which stood in a small garden, nearly at the end of the town; and he gave orders for repairing it, and for fitting up the front room as a shop; and likewise sent for a stock of such goods as he intended to sell.

In the mean time, too much of his money was wasted in drinking and making merry with the idle young men about the town. He likewise took Esther to several dances at the public-houses, it being Christmas time; but the company she met with in these places were such as made her determine never to go to any more of them, if she could possibly avoid it, when she was once settled in her own house.

She was, indeed, by nature, of a very merry temper; but the wickedness she saw in these places vexed and grieved her very much.

The Sunday after her arrival at Thornbury, she made herself ready to go to church; and seeing that Tom too had dressed himself very smartly, she hoped that he intended to go also; and when she was preparing to set out, she asked him if he would come with her.

"Truly," answered Tom, "I am not such a dull fellow as to spend this fine weather in praying with women and children: I am going to take a fine walk into the country, and you will be wise if you do the same."

But seeing that Esther looked grave at this speech, he burst into a loud laugh, and pinching her cheek, added, "I have been to church once to please you, my pretty Esther, and that

must do for the present, till I begin to be bent down with years."

So saying, he took up his hat, and calling to Jack Wilkins, on the other side of the street, they both took the opposite road to that which leads to the church.

Esther was very much shocked by this behaviour, and hurt by the recollection of the manner in which the last week had been spent: but she trusted that when they were settled in their shop, Tom would become more steady; and that then she should be able to persuade him, by degrees, to leave off his bad ways, and to attend upon the worship of God.

She went twice to church, and spent that holy day as becomes a Christian; but in the evening, as she sat reading her Bible, two young men brought her husband home from a country ale-house so tipsy that he could not stand.

Although Esther was very much grieved on this occasion, yet she tried to comfort herself with the hopes, that she might, in time, be the means of improving, by her good example, this wild and sinful young man.



CHAPTER XIII.

IN about a fortnight's time the shop was furnished, and the goods were laid in. Tom seemed pleased with the new business.

The first morning the shop was opened, Esther brought her work and sat by the counter. Tom followed her in, and as he was looking over one new thing and then another, she said, "The fitting up this shop has cost you a good deal of money."

"Yes," answered Tom.

"Well," added she, "it is a comfort to think that it is one expence and over: if we pay proper attention to our business, I dare say that we shall do vastly well."

"Hope so, too," replied Tom, unrolling a piece of pink ribbon. "Then," added he, "I'll cut off a yard or two of this for you; your black hat is too plain."

"I am much obliged to you," returned Esther. "Do you like reading?" said she, with a smile, after having been silent for some minutes; "for now, as our business will keep us at home a good deal, some books will be very pleasant to pass away the evening, when the hurry of the day is over. I have a few good ones which belonged to my father."

Tom only answered by staring in her face; and soon afterwards, complaining of cold, left the shop.

In a very little time he grew tired of his business, particularly of keeping the accounts. He was seldom or ever in the shop; and when he was there, he would loll upon the counter, talking and laughing with the young women who came in, and helping them to ribbons, and such things as they wanted.

The hopes poor Esther had formed, that Tom would become more steady, were sadly disappointed. He scarcely ever spent an evening at home; and he often wished his wife to go with him to the neighbouring merry-makings, to which she consented, more from the wish to please him, than from any pleasure she found in them. She often took occasion to persuade her husband, in a most kind and gentle manner, to lead a more sober and regular life, for the sake of his worldly concerns as well as of his immortal soul.

But Tom seldom answered her but by laughing at her gravity, and telling her that she was an old woman before her time.

When Esther had been married more than a year, and had been blessed with a fine little boy, she found that the care of her child and the attention to the shop, which lay entirely upon her hands, required that she should pass the greatest part of her time at home; and she resolved to spend no more evenings at merry-makings, unless her husband particularly wished it; and indeed he was now very careless whether she stayed at home or went out with him: she found, too, that when she accompanied him from home, she could not now restrain him, in any degree, from drinking or bad company, as she had hoped to do; she therefore felt herself at liberty to do as she liked.

She now began to despair of persuading Tom to mend his wicked life: his evil habits grew daily upon him; and at the same time his

love for her seemed to lessen; he would often neglect her,—and was sometimes even rude to her.

In the grief of her heart she called to mind the last advice of Mrs. West, which she had slighted. She reviewed her own conduct, and the motives of it; and began to see, in its full extent, the evil of her heart, out of which had risen those sinful imaginations which had led her so widely astray from the path of duty to her God. Therefore, humbling herself beneath the mighty hand of God, she prayed for his pardon of her sins, through the merits of our Saviour Jesus Christ; she acknowledged his mercy and his wisdom in chastening her for her faults; and she prayed him to assist her in all her trials, and also to inspire her husband with a sense of his evil life.

Although Tom had hitherto turned a deaf ear to all she had said to him; yet, the welfare of his soul was so near her heart, that she resolved, whenever a proper occasion offered, still to urge him fervently, though gently, to consider his salvation while there was yet time.

“How,” said she to herself, “at the great day of judgment, shall I answer to my God, if I have neglected to warn a person with whom I am so nearly connected of his danger? And, Oh! that I had well considered this in our early days, when we first became acquainted with one another! How many times have I encouraged him in idle jests, vain talking, and other evil habits, by my thoughtless smiles!

Surely, surely, those who encourage their fellow-creatures in any, even the least fault, by their own inconsiderate behaviour, must in a high degree displease their God, who says in his Bible, *Whosoever shall break one of these commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven.*" (Matt. v. 19.)

One day, when she had been thinking of these things, as she was at dinner with Tom, he told her that she must sit up for him, for he should be out very late that night.

Esther promised that she would; and, as she thought he seemed in a particular good humour, she led the discourse, according to her former resolutions, to that important subject of his becoming a better man; and she prayed him, in the gentlest and tenderest manner, to *work the works of Him that made him, while it is day, before the night cometh, when no man can work.* (John ix. 4.)

Tom sat sulkily silent for some minutes: then rising from his seat, "Esther," said he, brutally, "you forget that I married you out of pity, a poor parish girl without a reputation; and most truly," added he, with an oath, "shall I repent the day, if ever I hear another word of these preachments from your lips." And so saying, he left the room, and did not return till late at night, or rather early the next morning.

Esther, according to his request, sat up waiting for his return. She made up the little fire,

and prepared a small supper, in case he should like one. She resolved to receive him kindly, and never, however he might provoke her, to return one angry word for another.

As she rocked the cradle of her little baby, who lay sleeping at her feet, and employed herself with her needle, she called to mind the directions which St. Peter gives to those women who are so unfortunate as to have unbelieving husbands. *Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear.* (1 Pet. iii. 1, 2.) She prayed, too, for patience to bear the trial laid upon her; one, alas! which her own sins had led her into.

In this manner did Esther employ herself till her husband came home in a state scarcely able to know where he was; yet indulging himself in brutal and riotous mirth.

When he rose the next day, his spirits were as low as they had been high the night before. He was extremely sulky, and vented his ill-humour upon poor Esther, who bore it with all Christian patience. When he had eaten his breakfast, he desired her to bring him some money out of the till; which she gave him, reminding him at the same time that they were but low in the world.

Among other distresses, which the wickedness of her husband brought upon her, was the

fear lest their affairs were not in a very good condition. She knew that Tom had been possessed of a handsome sum of money at the death of his uncle; but his expences were, and had been for many months, very great; and he had likewise several large debts unpaid. But, as the only means of preventing or deferring their ruin, she determined to be more than ever attentive to the shop, and to be as frugal as possible in the management of her house.

When Tom had received the money from his wife, he put on his hat, and left the house; and she, going into the shop, sat down to work behind the counter.

It was not long before an old woman, called Patty Jones, came into the shop to buy an ounce of tea; which having done, she sat down upon a stool by the counter, no one else being present, and in a low voice, with a very important look,—“Pray, Mrs. Smith,” said she, “do you know the young woman that came to lodge last Tuesday at Betty Giles’s?”

“No,” answered Esther.

“Lackaday, don’t you? Well, I wonder at that; for they say she comes from Gloucester. That was the town, I think, that Mr. Smith brought you from.”

“Gloucester!” repeated Esther, earnestly; “what is her name?”

“*Somebody* can tell,” answered the old woman, in a mysterious voice. “Well, but,”

added she, "it sha'n't be said of me that I am the person to make mischief between man and wife."

Esther was silent; and the old woman presently proceeded: "Mr. Smith came home very late from the Swan, I suppose, last night?"

Esther now began to guess what the hints of the old woman meant; and, however uneasy she might feel, and however desirous to know more of the affair, she determined to ask no questions of her neighbours, and to allow no person to speak to her of her husband's faults; therefore, trying to appear composed, she only answered, "If this young woman is an acquaintance of mine, and Mr. Smith should have met with her, he will inform me of it, I dare say."

She then turned away to serve a little girl who was just come into the shop.

The old woman, seeing that Esther was not inclined to ask any more questions, added, as she walked slowly towards the door, "Ay, they danced together all the night. Why, it was quite the neighbours' talk:—and more's the pity, say I."

As soon as Esther was alone she burst into tears; and so great was her trouble and her anxiety during the morning, to be acquainted with the entire meaning of her neighbour's hints, that she could with difficulty attend to the business of the shop.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN the evening, Tom not being returned, Esther went out into the town upon some business, which could not be deferred: and, the night being dark, she took a lantern with her.

As she returned home, she perceived two persons earnestly talking together, standing by the gate of her little garden. She was frightened; and, as she drew near to open the gate, she raised her lantern to discover who they were. She perceived immediately that one of them was her husband. He seemed confused and angry at this interruption, and hastily withdrew into his own house. The other person returned with as much speed towards the town; but as they passed one another, Esther recollected her to be Jenny Yates.

She was so shocked at this discovery, remembering at the same time what the old woman had said in the morning, that she was obliged to lean upon the gate for support. After remaining in the air till she was much recovered, and earnestly praying to Almighty God for his help, she went into the house, and tried to behave to Tom with composure. She could not always conceal her tears, but no reproaches proceeded from her lips.

He, however, was very sulky, and scarcely spoke during the evening.

Some time passed away in this manner. Tom grew every day more unkind and sullen in his

behaviour to Esther: he was seldom at home, and spent abroad the money which his wife got by the shop, while she was often in want of a dinner; and when he returned at night, he was generally in liquor.

Although Jenny Yates never came to the shop, and did not put herself in her way, yet Esther had many opportunities of seeing her, and indeed of hearing that she was come to Thornbury with very wicked designs; that she was enticing her husband further and further into the ways of sin, and hastening, by her odious arts, his ruin both in this world and the next.

However Esther might try to conceal it from her husband and her neighbours, the distress of her mind daily increased. She saw, with the deepest affliction, that it was not in her power to do her husband any service by her most kind and earnest prayers to him to mend his life; but that, on the contrary, he was enraged by them, and hardened himself against them. But she was resolved not to give up an attempt of such great importance; and she therefore applied to the good clergyman of the parish for his advice, and made him acquainted with her troubles.

This kind gentleman gave her much good advice, and promised to talk to her husband whenever he had a proper opportunity for the purpose.

It was not long before he found a seasonable one: but Tom received little benefit from his

good discourse; for, besides his long evil habits, with which he had to contend, he was so entangled with Jenny Yates, that he could not have forsaken his sinful life, without exposing himself to her rage, and thus bringing to light her own and his wickedness.

In the former part of this book, it is related how many arts Jenny made use of to get into Mrs. Roberts's service; and when there to injure Esther's character; and how fearful Tom Smith was, lest his marriage with Esther should be known; and how desirous he was to leave Gloucester privately.

These were very wicked young people; as Mrs. West had great reason to think, when she told Esther that Tom's character was a very bad one; and Tom was afraid that Jenny should know of his intention to marry Esther, whom she hated, because he liked her better than herself.

This wicked girl was almost mad with rage when she heard that Tom was really married and gone away; and some time afterwards she followed him to Thornbury, confirming him in all his sinful habits, and consuming that money which ought to have supported his family.

It was now three months since Jenny arrived at Thornbury. Poor Esther was now reduced to very great poverty, and her troubles daily increased upon her; yet in all her afflictions she put her trust in God, and he enabled her to support them.

Her husband's creditors were continually coming to the house; but Tom put them off, from time to time, promising them that in a little while they should be paid.

The time now drew on of the great fair which was generally kept in the course of the spring months.

Early in the morning of the fair-day, a traveller, one of Tom's creditors, came for a debt of ten guineas, which had been long owed him. Esther went up stairs to her husband, who was in bed, to inform him of his demand; and he told her, that in the course of the day he should receive that sum, which should instantly be paid to the man. Esther took the message to him; upon which he left the house, saying that he would call the next morning.

When Esther had made ready Tom's breakfast for him, he asked her, as usual, in a commanding voice, for what money there was in the till. It chanced there was not above half-a-crown; and as she gave it to him, she said, with a sorrowful smile, "It is well that you expect to receive some money to-day, for I really have not another sixpence to buy a loaf with."

As Tom heard these words, he turned towards Esther with a look of grief and pity, such as she had scarcely ever seen in him before; the tears started into her eyes, and stooping over her little boy, who sat smiling on her lap, she let her tears fall on his flaxen hair.

Tom stood a moment, in silence, looking at

them, and then, sighing very deeply, "God bless you!" said he, in a low voice; and, taking up his hat, hastily left the house.

Esther was so touched by this instance of gentleness and feeling in her husband, so unlike his usual brutality, that it recalled in a moment all her love for him, which his conduct of late had cooled; and she felt so painfully her anxiety concerning the dangerous state of his soul, that she could not help bursting into tears; and she remained weeping till some one knocking at the shop-door brought her to herself.

She arose instantly, and, wiping away her tears, prayed to God to have mercy upon her unhappy husband; and then, trying to seem cheerful, went to her business in the shop.

In the course of the morning, as she was serving her customers, she was very much surprised to see Jenny Yates come in, smartly dressed, and with a still more bold look than usual. "How do you do, Mrs. Smith?" said she. "Is Mr. Smith at home?"

Esther was scarcely able to answer that he was not.

Jenny glanced slyly at her, and having looked round the shop, left it in great haste.

Esther was so busy all day, that she did not think any more of what had happened in the morning. Towards night, however, she began to expect her husband home, and sat up for him till a very late hour; but finding he did not return, she went to bed, supposing, as was

commonly the case, that he was at the Swan, and that he would come back in the morning.

At nine o'clock the next day, the traveller called for his money; and as Tom was not yet returned, Esther went herself to seek him at the Swan; but the master of the inn told her he had not been there; and she received the same answer at every public-house where she enquired for him.

She now began to be very much frightened; for no person could give her any information about him. At last, at a small pot-house about half-a-mile from the town, she was told by the host that a young fellow, one Tom Smith, came to the house the evening before with a recruiting party, with whom he sat drinking for some time; and that the young man willingly enlisted himself into the king's service; that he was followed by a young woman who had a small bundle in her hands, and whom he called his wife; and that as soon as the moon was risen they all set off together. But the inn-keeper could not tell what road they had taken, though, from some words he had overheard, he supposed they were going to the nearest seaport, to embark for the East-Indies.

Esther's distress was very great on hearing this news. The story was soon spread through the town, and all her acquaintance gathered about her; and while some of them tried to comfort her, others increased her trouble by telling her every idle tale they had heard of her husband. Patty Jones, among the rest, told

her that Jenny Yates had left her lodgings the evening before; and that Tom Smith had called upon her there a few hours before they left town.

Every attempt that was made to find out the place where the wicked young man was gone, proved quite vain; and Esther at last began almost to think it best that he should not be found; for in a very little while the house was filled with his creditors, who threatened to seize him if he could be discovered.

Thus were Esther's hopes of happiness in this world at once completely blighted. But in the depth of her affliction she kissed the rod, and acknowledged that God had acted most justly, and according to his never-changing way of dealing with the children of men, in depriving her of happiness when she had sought it in the path of disobedience; a truth which, sooner or later, every wanderer from the ways of God must feel. Happy those! who, like Esther, willingly and humbly bend beneath the conviction of this, and wait not till they are broke by its force, as we shall, alas! find was the case with her unhappy husband.

As soon as the good clergyman heard of her distress, he came to see her, and comforted her with his kind discourse, bidding her to put her trust in God in all her afflictions. He called to her mind these words: *The Lord will not cast off for ever; but though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multi-*

tude of his mercies; for he doth not afflict willingly. (Lamentations iii. 31, 32, 33.)

According to this good gentleman's advice, she took her child in her arms, and went to the bailiffs and creditors, who were met together in the shop. She told them how greatly she was grieved by what had happened; and, as she found her husband's debts were much larger than she had supposed them to be, she only begged leave that she might take a few clothes with her; and she promised that early the next morning she would leave the house and goods to them, hoping that, when they were sold, there would be enough for every one.

To this request all the creditors granted their consent.

It was Esther's intention to go to the little village in the New-Forest; where her sister, she believed, still lived in the rector's service. She had not, indeed, had any account of Susan since she came to Thornbury, for she had not acquainted her with her marriage to Tom Smith; but she doubted not but that her dear sister would receive her with kindness, and, perhaps, might assist her in finding out some method by which she might earn her bread.



CHAPTER XV.

ACCORDINGLY, the next morning, at an early hour, poor Esther, carrying her little boy,

and also a small bundle of linen, and her Prayer-book and Bible, took her leave of Thornbury.

Her kind friend the clergyman had given her a few shillings; which was all the money she had for her journey; for she would not defraud her husband's creditors of a farthing.

This worthy gentleman also promised her that he would undertake to look into her husband's affairs, and would see that justice was done on all sides. Esther was truly thankful to this good gentleman, and promised him that she would always remember him in her prayers.

It was not without many tears, and a very sad heart, that she began her journey. The morning was fair and pleasant. When she reached the top of the hill above the town, and looked back upon it for the last time, she thought how happy she might have lived in this pleasant place, if her husband had been a sober, good young man, and had known the fear of God. Many sad remembrances rushed upon her mind, and the recollection how grievously her once-beloved husband had sinned against God, how far he was now wandering in the paths of sin, with the dreadful prospect of eternity before him, filled her mind with the deepest distress. She burst into tears, and sobbed aloud. At last, after spending a few minutes in prayer, she became more composed, and was able to proceed on her journey.

Many were the hardships which Esther en-

dured in her long journey; but herself and her dear baby often met with unexpected friends and refreshments in the course of it; so that she would often exclaim, in the words of holy David, *The Lord is merciful and gracious: he will not always chide, neither will he keep his anger for ever.* (Psalm ciii. 8, 9.)

She had now reached the New-Forest, and had travelled some miles through it, in the road which she was told led to the village where her sister lived.

Having slept one night at a small inn which lay near the highway, she arose early the next morning, being Sunday, and began her walk, in hopes to reach the end of her journey before it was time to go to church; for she was told it was at no great distance from the place where she had slept.

The road for two or three miles having been very narrow, and made very shady by the tall trees on each side of it, at length opened into a wide green in the midst of the forest, which grew thick all around it.

In this green was the pleasant village, in which poor Esther hoped to see her dear sister, who was now almost the only friend she had in the world; and it really seemed to be a most lovely place: the houses were low and white, and had each a small garden; and on a rising ground was a spire church, standing among tall trees. The sun shone fine and warm, and the bells rang merrily for morning-service.

As Esther did not know where the rector lived, she went into the church-yard, through a neat wicket-gate; and sat down to rest herself on a tomb-stone, in the front of a sunny walk, which led round the church-yard, waiting till she should see some person who might direct her to the house.

It was not many minutes before she saw a young man, of a ruddy and pleasing countenance, with brown curling hair, seemingly not thirty years of age, walking briskly along. He passed her several times, looking earnestly at her.

At last she took courage to ask him the name of that village; and being informed that it was indeed the place she was in search of, "Thank God!" said she, "that I have reached the end of my journey." And she then asked him where the rector lived.

"Look," replied he, pointing to the place; "at that neat white house, with shrubs about it: the garden runs up close to the church-yard; it is there that our good rector lives."

"And pray, Sir," said Esther, "does not a young woman, one Susan Hall, live in his family as servant?"

"Why?" replied the young man, eagerly, while he was leaning upon an oak stick he had been carrying in his hand; "surely, you don't know her?"

"Know her!" cried Esther; "O! she is my sister, and almost the only friend I have upon earth; and I am come from a great distance to see her."

"Heaven bless you then," said the young man, "if you are her sister; and I am truly sorry," added he, as he rubbed his eyes with the back of his hand, "if you are in distress."

"I am much obliged to you, Sir, for your kindness; but I pray you be so good as to tell me if she still lives in the family."

"Why," replied he, "I can't say she does."

"And where is she gone? why did she leave her place?" asked Esther.

"For no bad reason, I hope," answered the young man, smiling. "Her good report in her last place, her modesty and discretion, made her to be sought for by a young man, who desired to have a wife who feared God. He married her not many months since; and truly he finds his comfort in her piety, charity, and prudence; for which Christian virtues he chose her."

"And is she gone from hence?" asked Esther, with a sigh. "Has she married a deserving man?"

"To the last question," replied her companion, looking down, "I can only say, that he is a young man who is striving, by God's grace, to do his duty; that he has been taught to serve God from his childhood; and is not, I hope, ill-reported of in this village, where he was born, or you may be sure so good a young woman as Susan Hall would not have accepted his offers; and I can only answer, that it is his firm resolution to do his duty by her as long as he lives."

Esther made no answer; but these words went to her heart; and she sighed deeply.

"As to the distance from hence to where she lives," added he, "that is trifling: not so great but what you may hope to see her to-day."

Esther then begged him earnestly to shew her the house where her sister lived.

"Why, look," said he, "the rector is just going into church. You will do well to thank your God first, for his mercies in bringing you to a place of peace and comfort; and then I will willingly take you to the place where your sister lives."

"And shall I see my sister at church?" asked Esther.

"No," replied he; "for I know certainly that she is engaged in attending a sick neighbour part of this morning."

Esther stood still, doubting for a few minutes what she would do; but at last she followed the young man into the church. Here, while her child slept in her arms, she employed her heart and lips in offering up fervent prayers and praises to God.

As soon as the service was over, the young man came up to Esther. "Well," said he, with a merry air, "I suppose you are not unwilling to follow me now; for, truly, you and your child must be in want of a warm dinner."

"O, if my sister will but receive me!" said she.

"Do not fear," answered he, "but she will rejoice to see you, if you have done nothing to

be ashamed of;—if you have, God grant you repentance. But come," added he, seeing the tears in her eyes, "I will not grieve you now; let us be walking."

So saying, he led her through the church-yard into the green, where, having passed many neat houses, they stopped at a small cottage with an orchard behind it, and in front a garden very delightful to the smell, with violets, cowslips, primroses, and other spring-flowers, with savoury herbs, and several trees of old-man, as the children call it.

When the stranger opened the little gate, and his steps were heard in the garden, the door of the cottage was opened, and a young woman neatly dressed, and of a very pleasing and modest appearance, came out to meet him.

This was no other than Susan. But no sooner did she see her sister, than, instantly recollecting her, she ran forwards and put her arms round her neck, while the tears ran down her cheeks.

Esther's joy on being restored to her sister was very great; yet the remembrance of what had happened since they last parted mixed with it so much grief, and she was also so weary with her long journey, that she almost fell to the ground. But Susan kindly supported her, led her into the house, wiped away her tears, and, as she perceived by her altered appearance and manner that she had met with some affliction, she bid her be comforted, and promised that she would always be a friend to her.

Then she took the little rosy boy in her arms, and tenderly kissed him.

Esther was soon able to speak, and thanked her sister for her kindness.

"O my beloved Susan!" said she, "how can I be grateful enough to you for the sisterly welcome you have given me! When you know all my story, you will be sorry for me. I have indeed been very imprudent; but my God has in mercy chastened me."

"You shall tell us all your story," said Susan, kindly, "and we will give you our best advice and comfort."

Esther was just beginning to reply, when, raising her eyes, she saw that the young man, who had brought her to her sister's house, still remained there. He was leaning over Susan's chair, and listening to every thing that passed with an air of very great attention. But as Esther believed that he was a stranger, she coloured, and immediately became silent; which the young man perceiving, smiled. "You do not know," said he, "that I am the master of this house, and your brother."

Esther looked at him and at Susan with surprise.

"You may well be surprised," added he, smiling again, "that I did not before tell you who I am; but by and by you will know me better. But, though I dearly love a little innocent mirth, I cannot bear an idle jest, as my beloved Susan will answer for; and, truly, you shall find in me a kind brother;

for it is my earnest desire to be the disciple of that Master who commands us to be harmless and gentle, and to do good unto all men."

Esther was much pleased that her sister's husband was so good a young man; but, as she was faint for want of food, Susan would not suffer her to tell her story, but hastened to get ready the dinner; after which, as Esther seemed much fatigued, Susan insisted upon her lying down to rest herself till the bells called them all again to church.



CHAPTER XVI.

WHEN service was over, she walked out with her sister and brother-in-law, Harry Gay, on the green, beneath the shade of a row of some handsome poplar trees. The lambs were bleating in the fields, and the hawthorn hedges smelt delightfully pleasant.

Here Esther told her sister every thing that had befallen herself since they parted at Gloucester. She did not hide any of her faults; and when she had finished, she added, that she considered the sorrow she had met with, as a just punishment for her faults, and thanked God, who had led her to a knowledge of the sin and corruption of her heart, and of her own helplessness without the grace of God.

"Dear sister," replied Susan, "I hope that

now you may enjoy many years of comfort, and be a faithful and useful servant to God."

A very small room, with a clean straw bed, was got ready for Esther and her child.

As soon as she recovered the fatigue of her journey, she began to think of some way of getting her living; and, on account of her little boy, she was unwilling to return to service. Susan undertook to consult Mrs. Hume, the rector's lady, who used to take delight in visiting the poor, giving them money, or assisting them with advice.

When this excellent lady knew Esther's story, she proposed that she should take in plain work; and as her brother and sister wished her to remain with them, it was agreed that she should pay them a small sum weekly for her board; and, to encourage her, Mrs. Hume sent her a set of shirts to make for her eldest son.

By the recommendation of Mrs. Hume, Esther was kept in full employment; and had it not been for the remembrance of past days, and her grief about her husband, she would now have been very happy.

The worthy family with whom she lived, always rose at an early hour; and before Harry went to his work, he called his family together, and prayed to God for his blessing. After breakfast, Susan busied herself in cleaning the house, while Esther sat down to work at the door, during the summer time, her little boy playing on the turf before her; or, if he was asleep, she would sit beside him, singing some

holy psalm, or the beautiful cradle-hymn, which she remembered to have heard her mother sing.

Soon after twelve, Harry came in to his dinner, which, however small and plain, was clean and nicely served up. Susan was always neat, and ready to receive her husband with pleasure and good-humour.

Their discourse was innocent and cheerful; they were thankful to God, and kind one to another. Harry was never at a loss for a harmless joke; but whenever he rejoiced in the blessings and comforts of life, he did it soberly, and was always mindful that God is the Giver of all good things.

Or, if any ill befel them, any loss in the garden or poultry, or any of those little sorrows and mischances which so often trouble us in this present evil world, he would never murmur; but would often say to Susan, "Do not let us be cast down: if we lose in one way, God can make it up to us in another. Let us do our duty, and take no unnecessary anxious thought for the morrow; but remember the words of the Bible: *Trust in the Lord and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land; and verily thou shalt be fed.*" Or he would point to the flowers in the garden, and say to his family, "Look at these blue-bells and primroses, how they seem to rejoice in the warmth of the sun! and how God provides them with beautiful clothing! Truly, as our blessed Saviour said, *Solomon in all his glory was not ar-*

rayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? (Matt. vi. 29, 30.) "Besides," he would sometimes add, "we are sinful creatures, and, like thoughtless children, we are continually wanting correction to remind us of something we have done amiss, or some duty we have left undone; and we should strive to be the better in our hearts and lives for any little worldly loss we may meet with."

Susan was no less pious and contented than her husband; so that in this house were never heard any of those wranglings and complainings which disturb the peace of many families.

After dinner, when Harry went again into the fields, Susan, having put the house in order, sat down to work by her sister, till her husband returned to his supper. The day was always ended by a hymn and prayer to God.

When Esther found how happily her brother and sister lived, and that their comfort was entirely owing to their piety and firm trust in God, she again lamented, with bitter grief, that she had sought for happiness in marrying a man who was a stranger to God.

"Oh! how often," would she say, "are those people mistaken, who suppose that the wicked are the most cheerful and pleasant companions! It is true, that they are sometimes in very high spirits, and talk, and sing, and laugh loud, for they do not love sober thought,

and never put any check on themselves; but at other times they are gloomy, sullen, and peevish, discontented with themselves, and hating every one about them; for the apostle says, *Destruction and misery are in their ways.* (Rom. iii. 16.) while he who is walking in the ways of God, is kind unto all his fellow-creatures, and will always be cheerful and composed in his temper: because he looks up to God as a kind Father who will provide for all his wants; and is continually bearing in mind the great love of his Saviour in dying for him while yet an enemy; for the Lord God *will keep that man in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on him, because he trusteth in him.*" (Isaiah xxvi. 3.)

Esther passed several years in this manner with her good brother and sister. In the mean time her child became a stout healthy boy, and was taught by his mother to serve and fear God. She remembered the sins of his father; and she did not spare reproof or instruction to keep her son from the same faults:—*Withhold not correction from the child, says the wise man, for if thou beat him with the rod he shall not die; thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell.*" (Prov. xxiii. 13, 14.)

Harry was a father to the boy, and treated him with as much kindness as he did his own children.

In the mean time, nothing was heard of poor Tom Smith; Esther often thought of him with

sorrow, and daily remembered him in her prayers.

The Christmas following her arrival at Susan's house, the good clergyman sent her word from Thornbury, that all her husband's debts were paid; but he was sorry to say that nothing would be coming to her; however, this charitable gentleman sent her, in a letter of good advice, a handsome Christmas-box to be some comfort to her.

Twelve years were now gone since Esther had left Thornbury. It was now the season of autumn, when the weather is often stormy; and at this time a report reached the village that a ship had been wrecked upon the coast near Southampton; and, as further enquiries were made, it was found that the ship belonged to an East-India fleet bound for England. The names of the crew also became known; and among them was that of one Thomas Smith, late in the King's service, who had with difficulty been brought on shore, and who lay, confined to his bed, at a small pot-house near Southampton.

No sooner did Esther hear this, than she resolved to go herself, to see if this unhappy man was really her husband; and she immediately set out, Harry Gay having kindly offered to bear her company.

When they got within a short distance of the place, Harry went forwards to the house where the sick man was said to lie. He asked of a sergeant, who was smoking his pipe

at the door, if one Thomas Smith lodged there?

The sergeant answered that he did, and likewise told Harry that he had enlisted the young man at Thornbury about twelve years ago; since which time they had been in the East-Indies, where Tom, being given to hard drinking, was thrown by the violent heat of the sun into a very bad state of health.

"Ah, poor fellow!" said Harry—

"There's no great cause for pity," said the sergeant. "It is all his own seeking that he is now as good as a dead man, for he would hear no reason; but drink he would, although I told him how it would end. But there is no persuading any of those fellows."

By this time Esther had come up to the door of the public-house: and Harry having repeated to her what he had heard, in as kind a manner as he could, led her into the kitchen.

As she stood waiting in the kitchen to speak to the hostess, she observed several sailors sitting by the fire, mixing their loud talk with dreadful oaths. A woman sat in the midst of them, laughing loud, swearing, and drinking by turns with each of them.

While Esther looked at these people, thinking with grief that these had been the companions of her husband, the woman turned round, and she saw with horror that she was no other than Jenny Yates. Her long red hair streaming below her night-cap, and her sly and impudent face, although much bloated with drink-

ing, were instantly known again by Esther. Jenny was however become very fat, but frightfully pale and sallow.

The wicked woman seemed to know Esther again, for she started with a look of terror when she first saw her; but soon afterwards she pointed and stared at her and her brother-in-law, uttering a profane and bold jest. Esther and Harry were shocked at her wickedness; and, turning from her, they followed the mistress of the house to the sick man's chamber.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE room into which they were taken was very small and dirty; and on a very wretched bed lay poor Tom alone, and quite neglected and forsaken by all his old companions.

Esther remembered the time when, after a few years absence, she had met him at Mrs. Roberts's, so gay, so smart, and so admired by all her fellow-servants; but now, how changed was his state! to what sorrow, disgrace, and pain, had his wickedness brought him! He was wasted, almost to a skeleton, and was so pale that he seemed as one dead,—had it not been for the sad and mournful expression of his black eyes, sunk in his head, and a deep hollow cough with a great difficulty of breathing, which convulsed him every moment.

Esther, all in tears, sat down by his bed-side,

and taking his hand said, "My dear Tom, do you not know me? Have you forgotten Esther?"

He looked hard at her, but made no answer.

She spoke to him again; but still he did not seem to know her.

She then raised his head on his pillow, and opened the window to give him air; trying every means to make him more easy: and while she was thus kindly employed, Harry Gay went in search of a doctor.

But when the doctor came, he could give Esther no hopes. "The poor man must die," he said, "and that very soon." He, however, gave him a medicine to still his cough, and to put him to sleep.

It was now the only wish of Esther that her husband should die penitent, and truly sorrowful for his wicked life. And Harry kindly undertook to fetch Mr. Hume, to pray by the unhappy man.

Tom had just awakened from a kind of sleep, when Harry returned with the good rector and Esther's son.

"Well, my friend," said Mr. Hume, as he went to the bed-side, "how do you find yourself?"

Tom shook his head.

"Do you know that young woman?" asked Mr. Hume, after a short silence, pointing to Esther, who just then came forward, inviting him to taste of something nourishing and good, which she had got ready for him.

Tom looked up to her for a few moments,

then covering his face with his hand, said, in a low voice, "Esther, Esther!"

"Do not be grieved," said she, in a kind manner. "I thank God for having brought us together again at this time." Then seeing him greatly disturbed, "I pray you," she added, "do not think of what is past."

But not to dwell too long on this sad scene; it is enough to say that Mr. Hume took this opportunity, when the poor man's heart was touched by seeing his wife again, whom he had used so ill, to awaken him to a sense of his wicked behaviour to her, and of his more grievous sins against God.

The poor sick man sometimes appeared deeply sensible of his sins, and afforded Mr. Hume a hope that he tasted real repentance; at other times he seemed stupid and unmoved, even when talked to in the most solemn manner. Mr. Hume held out to him the hopes of pardon, through faith in a crucified Saviour; and strongly urged him to cast himself at the foot of the mercy-seat, as the chief and vilest of sinners; and, in deep humiliation, to look to the cross of Him who was wounded for our offences, and smitten for our wickedness.

Tom listened to these declarations of mercy to the penitent sinner with apparent attention; but the continual interruption of his dreadful cough, and dying agonies, seldom permitted him to utter many words together.

Mr. Hume visited him several times in the course of the few days he lived; but he dared

not give Esther much comfort respecting the state of his soul; though he did not venture to pronounce that he felt no hope.

The poor man took very little notice of any thing that passed, and scarcely ever spoke; once, when he thought Jenny Yates was coming up stairs, he tried to raise himself in his bed, and cried, "Go, go." And another time, when Esther brought her son to his father's bed-side, asking kindly of him, if he remembered their little William, he put his hand upon the head of the boy, who was crying bitterly, and, after looking at him for some minutes, in a very mournful manner, he drew a very deep sigh, and said, in a low voice, "Poor child! God grant that thou mayest be a better man than thy father has been!"

The last time that Mr. Hume visited Tom, he found him quite insensible; and, after sitting in silence for a few minutes, by his bed, he turned to Harry and Esther, who, with William, had constantly attended upon the sick man, and said, solemnly, "It is a sad thing to defer repentance, which ought to be the work of our life, till a death-bed, when we have enough to do to bear up with the pains and infirmities of a dying body. I remember," continued he, "many years ago, attending the sick-bed of a worthy parishioner of mine, who had, from his childhood, been preparing for death; and, as the joy of his spirit was struggling with great bodily pain, he said to me, in a manner which I never can forget, 'This bed of death is a

season for reaping, but not for sowing. It is a hard thing to be sowing the seed when we ought to be gathering in the fruit.' "

Harry thanked Mr. Hume for what he had said; and Esther begged him not to go till he had offered up some prayers with them for the unhappy man.

Poor Tom Smith never became sensible again; and the same day, soon after the clock of the great church at Southampton struck three, he was seized with a violent convulsion, and died in the arms of his wife.

A few days afterwards, Harry and Susan Gay, Esther, and her son, attended him to his grave. Esther mourned over him, and, to her last hour, she cherished a hope that her prayer for her husband had been accepted, and that he had felt some genuine repentance for his sin.

Some of his old companions followed the coffin into the church-yard, but shewed no signs of sorrow: so truly is it said, That there is no friendship among the wicked. Nor even did Jenny Yates, who had, in a great measure, caused the untimely end of poor Tom, take his death at all to heart, or by any means profit by so awful a warning.

And now that I am speaking of this wicked woman, I will tell, in a few words, the manner of her end. She did not long outlive Tom Smith, but soon after his death fell into a bad state of health; and although the judgments of God seemed to be coming on her, yet she did not forsake her evil practices. The following

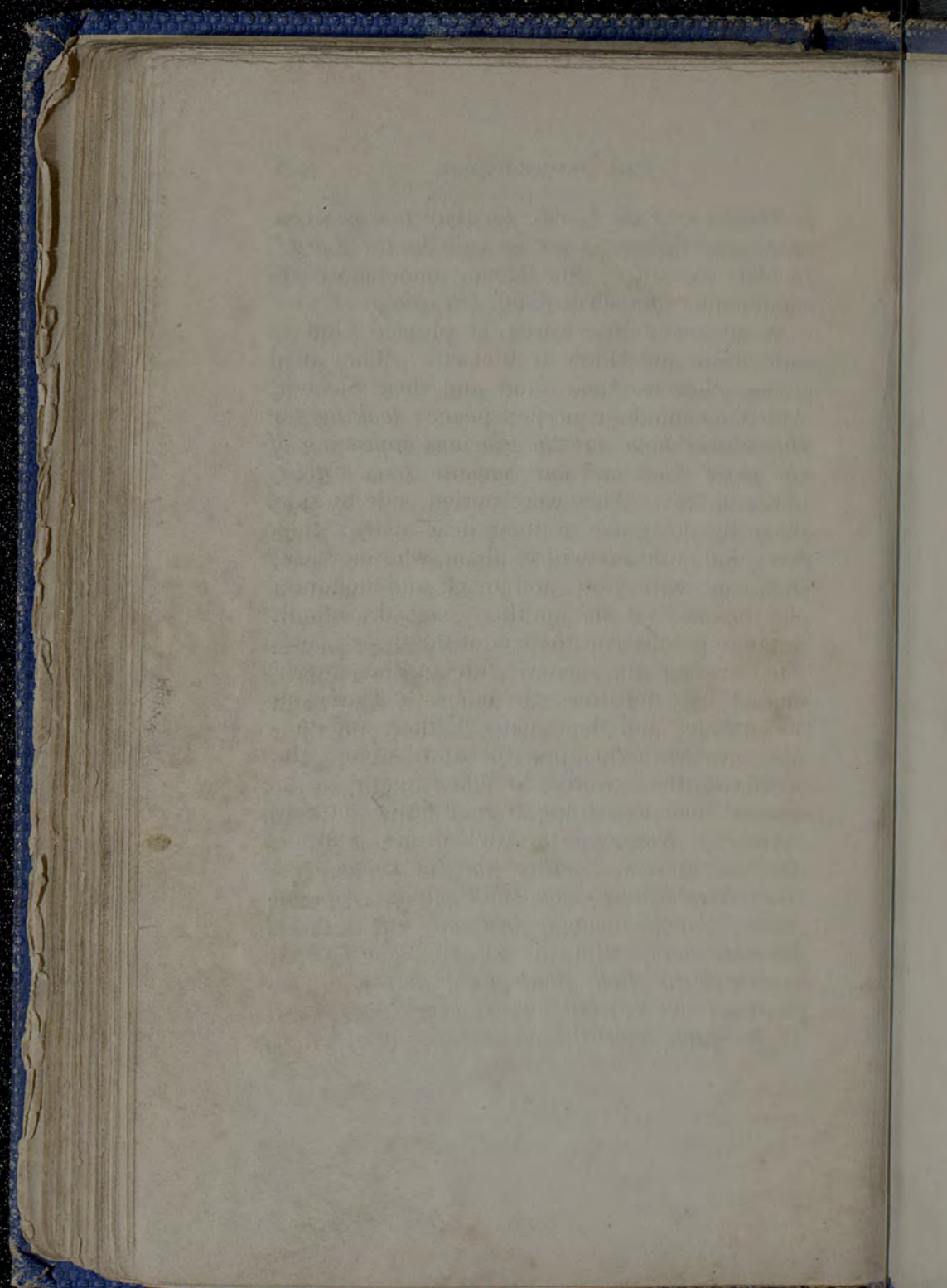
summer, being a very hot one, as she was travelling towards Hull, in company with part of a ship's crew, the heat and fatigue, together with too large a dose of gin, threw her into a violent fever; and her companions, bestowing no care upon her, left her at a small ale-house on the road, without money or a friend to take charge of her, where she died, cursing the hour when she was born, and blaspheming the name of her Creator. But as it is very painful to dwell upon the memory of these wicked people, for whom God has reserved the fury of his wrath, I will relate the very different ends of Harry and Susan Gay, and their sister Esther.

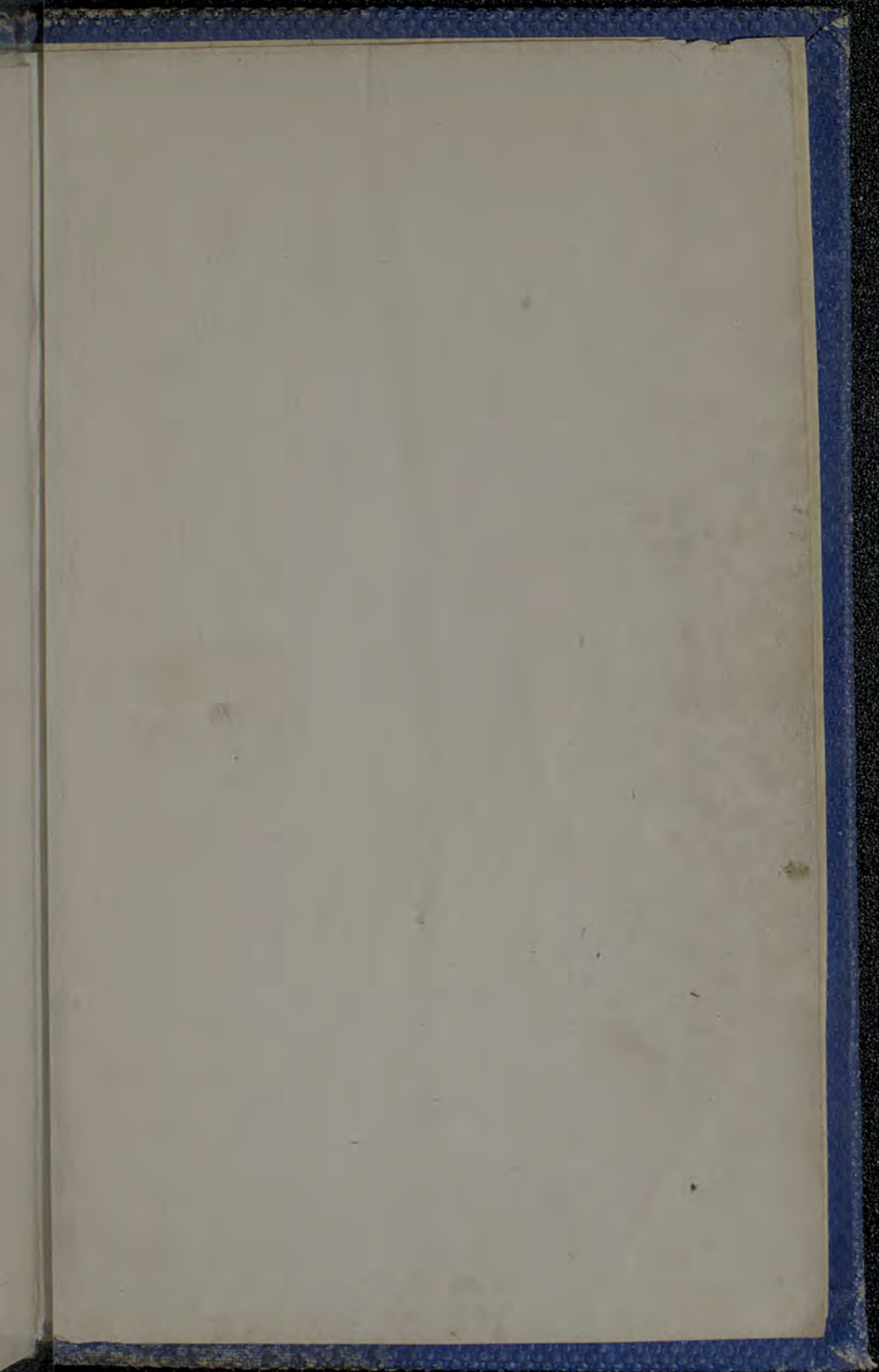
A few years after the death of Tom Smith, his son William was put apprentice, by the recommendation of Mr. Hume, to an honest tradesman in Southampton; for this worthy clergyman was always a most kind friend to him, because he was a good young man, who trusted in God, was very dutiful to his mother, and had taken warning by the dreadful example of his father, to *hate the congregation of evil doers, and not to sit with the wicked.* (Psalm xxvi. 5.) Esther was very thankful to God for having given her so kind and so good a son, and for having raised up such a friend to a poor fatherless child. But she did not live long enough to see him comfortably settled in the world; for, not many years after her husband's death, she was seized with a disorder which carried her off in a very few months. It was generally thought that her anxiety and

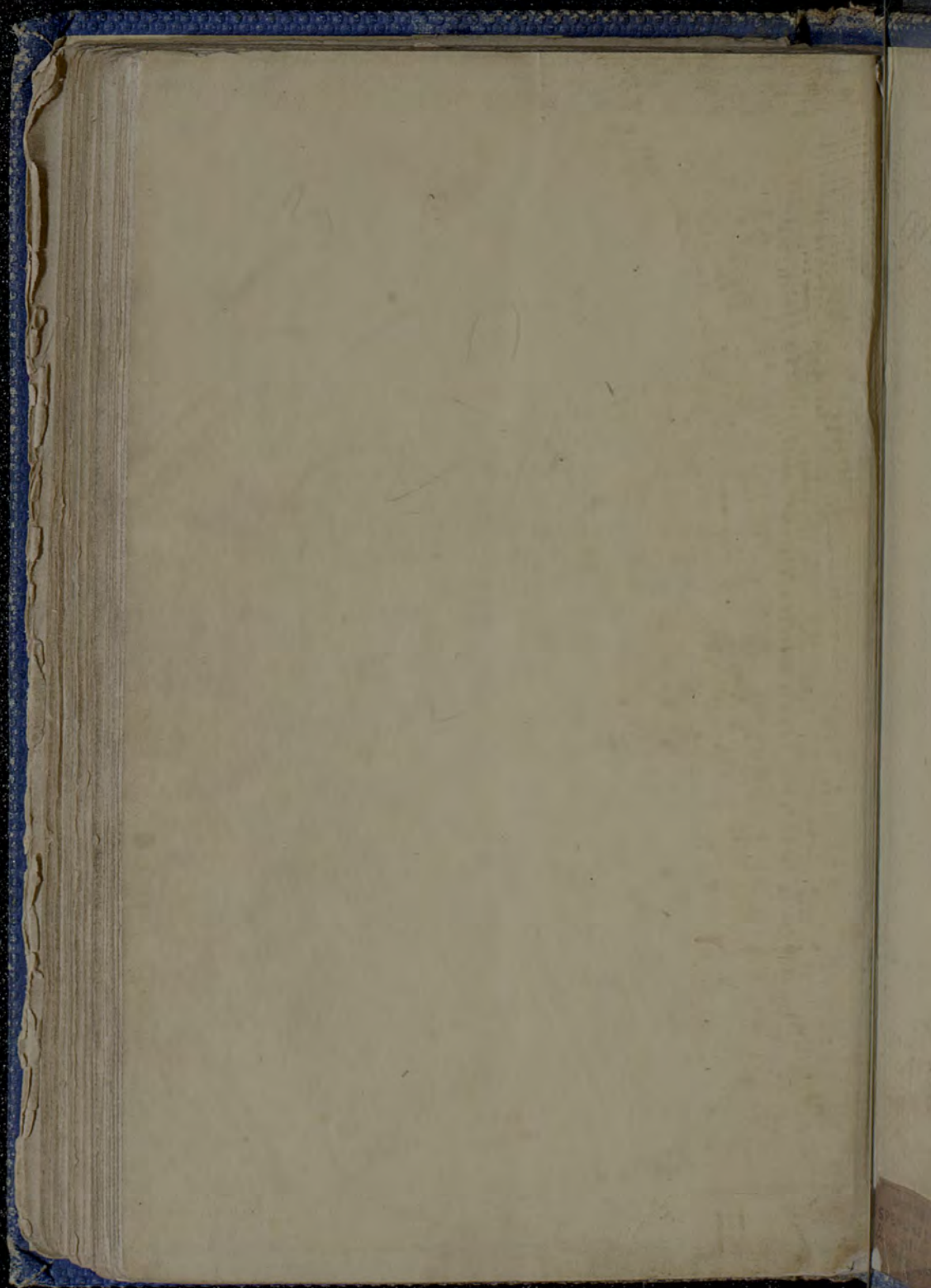
grief on account of her husband, were, in some measure, the cause of her untimely end. Thus, even unto her last hour, did she feel the bitter effects of her early faults. She bore all the pains of her illness with great patience; she never uttered a murmur; and, whenever she was able, employed herself in preparing for the great change she was soon to undergo. She often said to the kind friends who tried to comfort her under her afflictions, "Blessed be my God, for his righteous dealings with me, and the excellent hopes of pardon of my sins and everlasting life, which he has granted me, through the merits of my heavenly Saviour. *Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*" (2 Cor. iv. 17.) When she lay on her death-bed, surrounded by her beloved relations, she declared to them her comfortable assurance, that God had accepted her repentance, and that, through the merits of her Redeemer, she should obtain an inheritance eternal in the heavens, where she hoped to meet again with all those her dear friends who had departed this life in the faith and fear of God. She then prayed earnestly that those who survived her might take warning, from her danger and her faults, to fly deceitful pleasures and all fellowship with wicked men, whose ways end in death. Then adding these words, in a feeble voice, "Remember, my beloved friends, what the holy apostle has said to you: *Be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding*

in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Cor. xv. 58.) She having once more recommended herself to God, *fell asleep.*

Many years afterwards, it pleased God to call Susan and Harry to himself. They died giving glory to their God and their Saviour, with their minds in perfect peace; *looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.* (Titus ii. 13.) They were buried, side by side, close by the grave of their dear sister: their five good children, with William, who increased in favour with God, and loved and honoured the memory of his mother, caused a tomb-stone to be raised at the feet of the three graves. They are on the eastern side of the church, shaded by a tall tree; the names of Harry and Susan Gay, and their sister Esther, and their ages, are wrought upon the tomb-stone. Beneath are these words: "They fought, in the time of their mortal life, a good fight, and were enabled to overcome the wicked one; and now they are at rest, *looking for the Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change their vile bodies, that they may be fashioned like unto his glorious body,* (Phil. iii. 20, 21.) *For he that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.*" (Gal. vi. 8.)







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BOUND BY
SPENCER & SONS
17
Olden, or Garden

