

THE  
H E D G E  
OF  
Thorns.

BY MRS. SHERWOOD,  
Author of "The History of the Fairchild Family,"  
"Little Henry and his Bearer," &c.

LONDON:

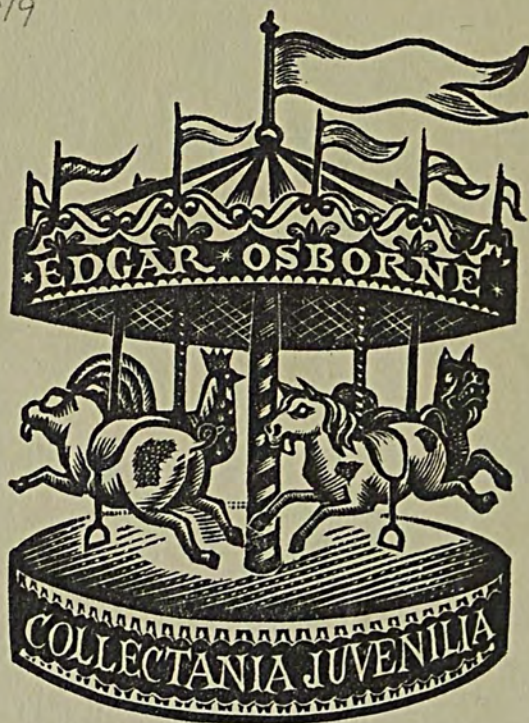
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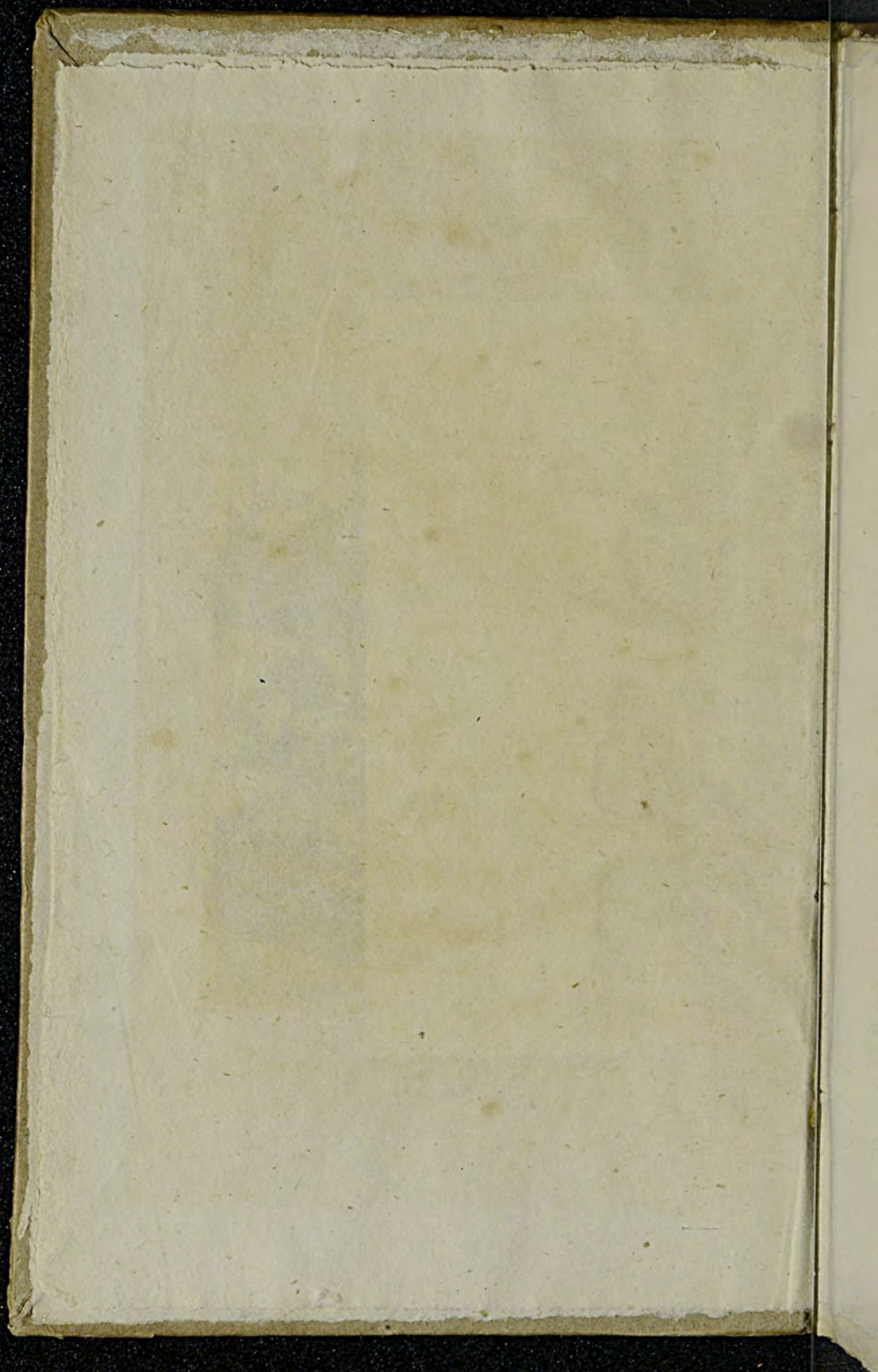


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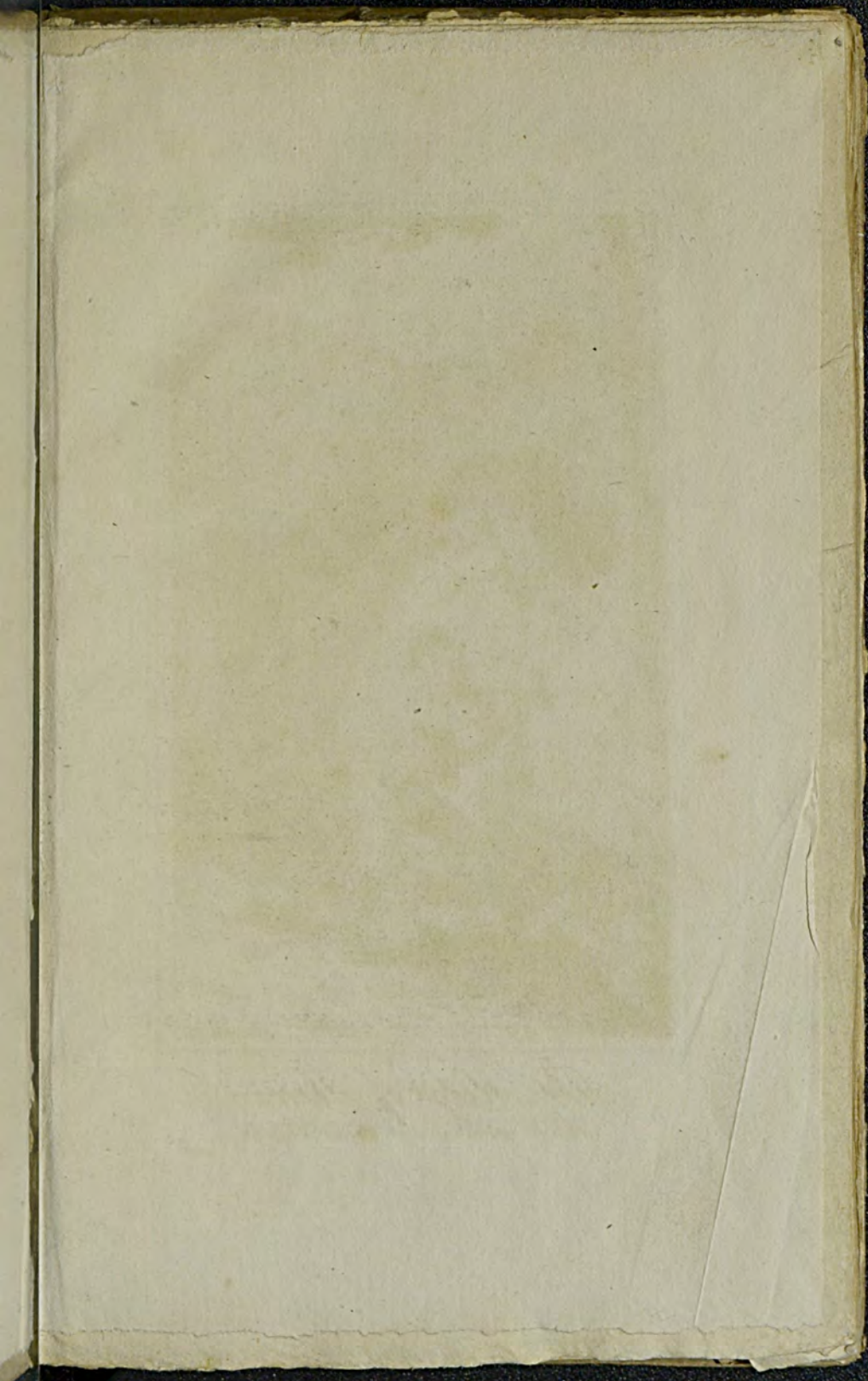
Edgar Osborne

in memory of his wife  
MABEL OSBORNE













*A. Mills Delin*

*J. Mills Sculp*

# *The Hedge of Thorns.*

*little Bell attempting to get through the Hedge.*

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THE

Hedge of Thorns.

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My name is John Carrol. I was born not very far distant from the city of Carlisle, in a lone cottage, situate on the southern side of a woody upland.

My father was by trade a gardener, and was employed in va-



rious gentlemen's families in the neighbourhood; he was also the parish clerk—a man much beloved in the country, being endowed with a mind as lovely as the flowers which he was employed to cultivate; for he was, as I can have no doubt, early chosen of God, and precious in his sight, and enabled, by the power of his Holy Spirit, to overcome, in a great measure, the original depravity of his nature, and to seek “whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatso-



ever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report." Our house was exceedingly old, and so low, that the thatch at the back of it sloped nearly down to the side of the bank which rose above it: it was however roomy, and at the front was a porch of carved wood, with a bench on each side, and a space between, sufficiently large to admit my mother's spinning-wheel.

The cottage stood in a large garden: here, besides every kind of useful vegetable, were a beauti-



ful woodbine, which had crept all over the porch, and two rows of flowers on each side of the straight path which led to the garden wicket.

There were snowdrops and crocuses in their season, marigolds, daffodils, pinks and pansies, violets and polyanthuses, and there grew the heart's-ease in her fairest proportions.

In this sweet retirement, under the care of poor but pious parents, I was brought up; and



every means was used, both of salutary chastisement and pious instruction, to train me up in the way I should go. (Prov. xxii. 6.) My parents fulfilled their duty in an exemplary manner towards me; the greater, therefore, indeed will be my condemnation if in the end of days I am not found standing in my lot. (Dan. xii. 12.)

The first event of my life which made any impression on me, was the birth of a little sister when I was in my fifth year: it was on a Sunday, in the month



of June. I was playing in the porch, when my father, dressed in his best clothes, came smiling to me, bringing something wrapped carefully up in my mother's red cloak; and stooping down, he opened the cloak, and showed me a little sister.

I remember kissing her soft hands; and from that time my little sister became the object of my tenderest love, and I waited with anxious expectation the happy time when she would be able to play with me in the porch.



She received at her christening the name of Anna Bella, joining in one the names of her two grandmothers; but I always called her my little Bell.

At length the long-wished-for period arrived when my little Bell could play with me in the porch, and I was trusted to take her out into the garden and lane: then what store of small shells and coloured pebbles did I find for her, and how happy I was when I had taught her to repeat her first prayer! When little Bell was



about four years old, a school was opened in a village, which was nearly half a mile distant from us, by a person of small fortune but superior education, who, being a holy woman, was willing to give herself up to teaching the poor. The name of this excellent person was Waring; she was considerably advanced in years, but was still active. My parents were desirous that we should benefit by Mrs. Waring's instructions; my mother undertook to take in washing, in order to make up the



money which might be laid out in schooling.

O, how little do children know what parents sometimes endure for their sake! otherwise they would bless every affliction which might lead them to show piety at home, and to requite their parents, for that is acceptable to God. (1 Tim. v. 4.)

We were accordingly sent to school; and as the distance was considerable, we used to carry our dinners with us in a basket, and



did not return till the evening; when we always found our tender mother ready to give us our suppers, and our dear father to talk to us about God, and to hear me read the Bible.

From the cottage in which we lived, to the house of our governess, was a lane extended, which we thought very long, enclosed on each side with a quickset Hedge. Little Bell and I, as we walked to school, often looked at this Hedge, and considered what could be beyond it. On that side which was



towards the east, we saw many trees, and heard birds singing in them: these trees were covered with leaves, for it was autumn when we first began to go to school; and amongst the leaves we could distinguish apples, some of a bright gold colour, and some of a beautiful red. Beyond these trees, where their branches opened, we saw blue hills, the tops of which rose high towards the clouds: on the other side we could see nothing over the Hedge but the sky itself, and in the evening the sun setting sometimes in a clear



bright sky, and sometimes amongst glorious clouds of a gold and purple colour, resembling what I had pictured to myself of the gates of heaven; for my father, as I have just mentioned, every night had been used to take me and my little sister on his lap, and talk to us about heaven. Though, as I said before, he was a man of mean condition, yet, from constantly reading the Bible and thinking of holy things, being no doubt taught of God the Spirit, he had such sweet sayings, as made my heart burn within



me when I heard him speak; and thus we had such ideas put into our young minds as few poor men's children are acquainted with. Thus the Holy Spirit of God entereth into the hearts of the poor among men as the rain cometh on the earth where no man is, on the wilderness wherein there is no man: it fills and satisfies their untaught minds with heavenly thoughts, and enables them to bring forth the fruits of holy words and works as the rain satisfies the desolate and waste ground, and causes the



bud of the tender herb to bring forth. (Job, xxxviii. 25.)

But to return to my story. From day to day little Bell and I, as we came to and from school, talked about the Hedge, and expressed our anxiety to know more of what was beyond it; and I, being the eldest, made myself very busy in pointing out to my little sister what I supposed would be the advantages which would follow, if we could but get through the Hedge. Perhaps I said, "If it was not for that



naughty Hedge on one side, we might get to the top of those hills, and then we should be as high as the clouds; or we might find apples fallen from those trees; or, if we could but break down the Hedge on the other side, we might perhaps see the end of the world, and the place where the sun goes at night."

I remember talking in this way to my little sister for many days as we were creeping backwards and forwards to school; and I remember, also, how she



used to wonder at what I said, and no doubt thought me very clever. Our schoolmistress was a good woman, one who really feared God, who knew and deeply felt the state of mankind on earth, and the depravity of our nature, who knew the corruption of children, and set her whole heart, with God's help, to do what in her lay to overcome it; but her pupils, not having the same views with their faithful teacher, of course thought her too strict; they could not feel the necessity of the restraint under which they



were frequently laid, and they naturally revolted at it. It is the Holy Spirit only that can prepare the heart to submit to salutary discipline.

As Mrs. Waring's house and garden stood in an open place, and as I could trace the Hedge so much hated, beyond it, I one day formed a plan with Bell to go, after school in the evening, and see if we could find any opening by which we might get round to the apple-trees; but our good governess was too watchful



to allow our plan to succeed. As she sate at her window, she observed which way I went, and calling me back, she asked me where I was going, and why I did not as usual return home immediately; and as I could not give any good account of myself, she chastised me, and sent us off again, and watched us closely till we had proceeded a good way along the safe and narrow path which I so much disliked.

When, by the winding of the way, we were out of our govern-



ess's sight, I sat down on the bank under the hedge, and began to cry very bitterly. My little Bell took her blue pinafore and wiped my eyes and kissed my cheek, and put her arms round my neck, begging me not to cry; and in this manner she comforted me for a while, and we returned home.

But when I lay down in my bed that night, I was not happy: my wicked will rose up against the Hedge of Thorns. I could not think of heaven or of any



good thing. I had no pleasure in saying my prayers, but I cried till I fell asleep.

The next morning I awoke in the same disposition, and resolved that I would that very day endeavour to break through the Hedge.

At the usual time I set off to school with my little Bell: when we came opposite the apple-trees, we looked upon the fruit, and I thought it exceedingly beautiful. "O Bell," said I, "if we could but get through this Hedge, we



could easily reach some of that fruit."—"Or, perhaps," she said, "we might find some apples under the tree; but we cannot get out of this lane, brother, because of the Hedge."—"Here," I answered, "is a gap in the Hedge; if I could make it but a little larger, we could creep through; you could go first, because you are the least, and I would follow."

My little sister was over-ruled by me, and we settled, that, as it was Saturday, and we were to have half a holyday, we would



complete our naughty plan when we came home.

So we went on to school, and at twelve o'clock we were set free. I hastened with Bell to the place in the Hedge opposite the apple-trees; it was the very place where I had sat crying the evening before, when my little sister wiped my eyes with her pinafore, and comforted me so sweetly.

I climbed up the bank, and working with my hands, made a gap in the Hedge, as I thought,



large enough to push my sister through; I then came down, and lifting up my little Bell, said, "Now, sister, try to get through the Hedge first, and I will help you; and when you are through, I will come after you."

"Brother," she said, "I am frightened; I think we had better not try to get through the Hedge; perhaps our mother will be angry with us for it." Whilst she spoke, she looked red and trembled; but I persuaded and encouraged her, and at length she put her head



into the gap which I had made, whilst I pushed her with all my strength. But whilst I was thrusting her forward, she cried out in great agony, " My brother, my brother, the Thorns, the Thorns !" I was alarmed by her cries, and hastened to help her out of the gap, and lifting her down the bank, set her on her feet ; but I was terribly frightened when I looked in her face ; it was scratched deeply in three or four places, and the blood poured down upon her neck, and the blue pinafore



which had so lately been used to wipe away my tears.

I now, in my terror, cried louder than my sister, and our screams reaching our cottage where my mother was ironing, she came running into the lane to see what was the matter: finding her little girl covered with blood, she snatched her up in her arms and ran home with her, whilst I followed, in an agony of mind which I can hardly now bear to think of. My mother soon, however, stopped the blood, and having bound



up little Bell's face, she made me sit down on my low chair and take her on my lap, and then she insisted on my confessing how all this had happened.

I thank God that he gave me grace to confess the whole truth, and to own how I had been tempted to wish to break the bounds which were set me, and to lead, and almost compel, my little sister to commit the same sin.

My mother answered, " You have confessed your fault, and you



have brought upon yourself a very severe chastisement, though not so great a one as you deserve; and now, therefore, I shall inflict upon you no other punishment than to look at your sister's bleeding cheek, and to consider that she bleeds for your disobedience; and remember also," she added, "that this sin of disobedience to our heavenly Father, and the wicked wish of breaking the bounds appointed by Him, is the very crime that made it necessary, in order to save us from hell, for the Son of God to lay



aside his crown of glory, and put on one of thorns." My mother said no more to me at that time, but left me quietly to reflect upon my sin, and to hold my little sister in my arms till my father came in.

When my father had heard the account of what I had done, and saw the marks on my sister's face, he looked sorrowfully, which hurt me more than if he had said a great deal to me; and the next day after morning service he took me by the hand, and led me out



to the lane, and this is the manner in which he talked to me. First he spoke to me upon a subject on which he had often before held discourse with me,—namely, on the exceeding depravity of our nature, which extreme vileness, said he, we did not receive from God, who doth all things well, but we inherited it from our first parents, by whose disobedience sin was brought into the world, and the whole human race was rendered utterly corrupt. Then he went on to show, that all mankind, without the excep-



tion of one single person, have in all ages, and at all times, been so exceedingly vile, and their inclinations so wholly depraved, that without the especial interference of their heavenly Father every individual of the sons of Adam, without fail, would run himself into hell.

When he had made me understand so far, he next pointed out in which way our heavenly Father had interfered, and continually does interfere, in securing the salvation of sinful men. "First," con-



tinued my father, "he reconciled himself to us by sending his Son to bear the punishment due to our sins, and to pay the debt due to divine justice; 'for God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' (John, iii. 16.)

"2dly, He interferes for our salvation by sending his holy Spirit to cleanse the heart, to change the vile nature of man, and endue him with that holiness



‘ without which no man shall see the Lord.’ (Hebrews, xii. 14.)

“ And 3dly,” added my father, “ our heavenly Father interferes in effecting our salvation, by securing to us the benefits of his Son’s death, by his providences, and his ordering of outward matters, and of things temporal.”

As I was then but nine years old, although I had been much accustomed to converse with my father on religious subjects; yet, as may be supposed, what he was now saying required much expla-



nation before I could understand it. I answered my father, that I thought I partly understood what God had done for us by means of his Son; that is, that he had sent the Lord Jesus Christ to stand in the place of sinful men, and to be punished in their stead; and also, that I had some notion of what the Holy Spirit does for us:—namely, that this holy Person cleanses the heart, and will in the end take sin quite away from the hearts of those who are saved. “But your last words, father,” I added, “are quite dark to me. I



don't know what you mean by saying, that God saves us by his providences and his ordering of outward matters."

"I did not say, my boy," answered my father, "that we can be saved by any outward thing that can happen to us, any more than by any exertions we can ourselves make. God forbid that I should speak of any Saviour but of Christ himself; for there is no salvation in any other; and 'there is none other name under heaven given among men where-



by we must be saved.' (Acts, iv. 12.) But this I meant to point out to you, that every little outward event and circumstance of a man's life is ordered by God for his good, as is seen in the cases of those who humbly submit themselves to the will of their heavenly Father; for we cannot doubt that all things work together for good to those that love God." (Rom. viii. 28.)

I still found it hard to understand my father, though his words fixed themselves on my memory.



I did not receive the sense of them at that time, neither did I fully understand the lesson which they conveyed for many years afterwards.

My father, perceiving that I did not comprehend him, went on in this manner, endeavouring to make his words pleasant: "Our heavenly Father," added he, "having pity on his poor creatures, and having provided for them a means of salvation, disposes their affairs in life in that way which he sees will best work towards the attainment of this blessed pur-



pose, that is, their salvation; he knows the way they ought to go, and he puts, as it were, a hedge on this side and on that side, to keep them in that way: some are hedged in by careful and vigilant parents, some by strict or hard masters, some by sickness, some by poverty, some by dying friends, some by unkind relations, some by the frowns of the world, and some by the infirmities of their own minds. Nay," added my father, "I could not count half the means which the Almighty uses to restrain his poor people from sin:



but there is one thing to be observed, that the thorns in the hedges placed on each side of us by our almighty Father are seldom felt by those who patiently walk in the paths appointed them, without attempting to break from them, either to the right or to the left; on the contrary, these fences often abound with fragrant flowers and pleasant herbs, which do greatly refresh the pilgrim as he passes between them in his way to everlasting glory."

My father then went on to tell me, that as grown people are



often kept from doing wicked things, which they wish to do, by poverty, sickness, or other afflictions; so I, who was but a little boy, had been kept perhaps from destroying myself or my sister by those Hedges which I so much disliked. He then climbed up on the bank on the right hand, and having helped me also up, he raised me so high in his arms, that I could see over the Hedge; and then I perceived that there was exactly on the other side a deep ditch full of black stagnant water.



“Look,” said my father; “what do you see?”—“A black ditch, father,” I answered. “That ditch,” said my father, “is deep enough to drown little Bell; and had you succeeded in pushing her through the Hedge, she might have been dead before you could have got through after her to get her out.”

When I heard these words, I trembled from head to foot, and cried out, “O my sweet little Bell!”



“What means,” said my father, “did God use to save your sister?”—“The Thorns, father,” I answered, “the Thorns in the Hedge.”—“Are they not blessed Thorns, then?” said my father. “Do you not now thank God for this Hedge of Thorns? I trust, my son, that the time will come when you will thank God for every affliction, however bitter, which he makes use of to keep you from sin.”

My father then took me to the Hedge on the other side, and



lifting me up, showed me a deep precipice, over which, had we got through the fence, we might have been dashed to pieces. So I looked awhile, after which my father bringing me down from the bank, walked with me towards home; and as he went along, he said, "Do not, my boy, attempt to break through those Hedges, and you will never feel their Thorns. 'Thorns and snares are in the way of the froward; but he that keepeth his soul shall be far from them.' (Prov. xxii. 5.)



“Moreover, my son,” he added, “when the summer comes, these Hedges, if you walk by their side, will afford you a refreshing shelter from the heat of the sun: although they now look so brown and withered, they may then blossom with fragrant hawthorn, and honeysuckles, and wild roses.”

This conversation (although, as I before said, I did not at that time fully understand it), together with my evil conduct which had given occasion to it, was never forgotten by me; and as I thought



upon it, and talked it over with my father, by the blessing of God the meaning of it became plainer to me.

I continued to go to school every week with my little Bell, after this accident, till I was fourteen years of age: by this time, by the care of my excellent governess, added to the private religious instruction of my father, I had acquired an education superior to my station: I had a clear knowledge of the leading doctrines and history of the Christian reli-



gion, and my habits were moral ; but the seat of my religion was yet rather in my head than my heart. My parents and teachers had done what they could. Paul planteth and Apollos watereth, but it is God which must give the increase.

I now left school, and went out to work with my father ; and as I could soon earn almost as much as he did, we began to feel ourselves in very abundant circumstances for our station. My father then took occasion to sup-



ply my mother with such things as he thought she stood in need of. She was equally anxious that he should be provided: after a time, as we still continued to earn a good deal, a spare room which was used for seeds was cleared out for me, and I bought myself a new bed to put in it. In this room was a window, commanding a view of our village and church (half a mile distant), standing on a green interspersed with trees; and beyond, at a considerable distance, I could distinguish the towers of the ancient castle of



Carlisle, with some other buildings of the city: many other beautiful objects also were to be seen from this window—meadows and coppices, flocks of sheep and herds of cattle, farm-houses and cottages, and hills faintly visible at a great distance. My father had taught me to admire every thing that is lovely in the works of God; and when he came into my newly prepared apartment, and saw all the comforts of it, with the beautiful prospect from the window, his eyes brightened with pleasure, and pointing to the open case-



ment, "My dear son," he said, "have you forgotten the Hedge of Thorns, and all I said to you upon that subject? It is very sweet to me," added he, "to think that I and my children are walking within the bounds which our Father has appointed, that we are where he wishes us to be, that he hedges us in to the right and to the left, compasseth our paths and our lying down and our rising up: if this thought, even under the hidings of his face when our path is strewed with thorns, is so exceedingly comfortable, how much



more should it be when he crowns us with blessings as he now does, when he makes our way to blossom as the rose, when the sun shines on all our paths?

“O my son,” added my father, “if you wish to be happy in this apartment, *or in any other place or situation whatever*, sanctify it to God—seek to do his whole will in it—enjoy with a thankful heart the refreshments he gives you by the way, the beautiful prospects, the healthful breezes, the quiet hours, the sweet



opportunities of communion with himself, the intercourse with dear relations ; but recollect that the moment you attempt to break the bounds appointed by God, you will be pierced through with many sorrows ; you will then find the thorns in the very place, where, while you walked on in the path of duty, roses only seemed to abound."

These words of my father fixed themselves, by God's blessing, in my memory, but did not reach my heart ; and for this reason,



that I had formed plans of happiness quite different from those which he pointed out to me: I had lately entertained an idea that I should like to go from home and see the world, and I was impatient of the gentle control which my beloved parents exercised over me.

The next Sunday at church I saw a young man, one of my former school-fellows, named William Croft, dressed in a new handsome suit of clothes, which filled my mind with admiration. Immediately after service I joined



him, and he informed me that he had been bound apprentice to a mercer in Carlisle for some time; and he gave me a very glowing account of the happiness of his life, and the pleasures of the town: he invited me to come and see him some Sunday when I could get liberty; but added, that I must not appear in the suit of clothes I then wore. My father coming up, interrupted our discourse, but not till I had drawn in a great deal of poison from the conversation of this young man. As we walked home, my father



talked to us in his usual lovely manner; but I remember that I was sullen and reserved, little foreseeing that this would be the last time when our family would walk all together from church. That very evening, whilst I was planning how I should save money to procure a suit of clothes in which I might visit the young man in Carlisle, my father complained of being ill, and during the night he had a stroke of the palsy, which deprived him entirely of the use of one side.



This affliction came upon me utterly unlooked for ; all my schemes of pleasure disappeared ; the maintenance of the family now depended upon me, and upon what little my mother could earn ; for my sister, who was not more than fourteen years of age, was entirely engaged in attending upon my father. My heart rose against this affliction, yet I was so far restrained by a merciful God working on me by the means of natural affection, and the shame of not being thought a good son, that I did not draw back from my duty,



but worked hard, and brought in all my earnings to my mother; neither did I allow myself ever to express my uneasiness, excepting to my sister, not considering that her trials were as great as mine, and that she set me a glorious example by her patient and pious deportment; for, although she was so young, she never left our dear parent, but continually watched him by day and night, being always ready to supply him with any thing he might want, and her Sundays were devoted to reading and praying with him,



Notwithstanding I had this pattern set before me by my dear sister, I ventured, more than once, to express to her my uneasiness, and to lament that I was condemned to work so hard, or to see my parents starve; and that I had none of those pleasures which other young persons of my age enjoy. She smiled when I spoke, and gently taking my hand, "Dear brother," she said, "let us walk patiently in the path of duty marked out for us by God, and not attempt to break through the



Hedge, lest we find the Thorns again."

In saying this the tears came into her eyes, and I never saw her look so lovely. I could not answer her, but felt anxious to prove by my behaviour, that I wished to follow her advice. Our dear father continued under the affliction of the palsy for four years, but evidently ripening all the time for glory. His death was a blessed one; but our tears on his account were scarcely wiped away, when our mother was taken very



suddenly from this present world, to unite with her beloved husband in singing the praises of the Redeemer, in whom they both had so entirely trusted. Thus my revered parents were both removed to that land of joy and peace, where "the mountains and the hills break forth in singing, and all the trees of the field clap their hands; where instead of the thorn comes up the fir tree, and instead of the brier the myrtle tree." (Isaiah, lv. 12, 13.)

But I should have told you



that before my mother died, finding that she was about to leave us, she sent for Mrs. Waring, and solemnly recommended her children to her kind regard; at the same time requesting us to consider her as a parent, and to take her advice in the management of our affairs. This last request of my mother's was highly acceptable to my sister, but not so to me; as I well knew the strictness of Mrs. Waring's sentiments, and feared they might interfere with some of my plans; I however had too much feeling of respect to



my dying parent to allow what passed in my mind to be known to her: I therefore promised deference and obedience to Mrs. Waring, and my mother expressed herself as being much comforted by the assurance.

My sister and I were now left together, and should have found ourselves in easy circumstances, had not the sicknesses and funerals of both our parents so immediately following each other, forced us to incur some debts which lay heavy on my mind, and which, I feared,



it would be long before I could pay; and one was so pressing, that we thought it would be necessary to sell some of our furniture in order to discharge it. My spirit was then high and unbroken, and the thought of selling our furniture hurt my pride. Whilst I was in this strait, Mrs. Waring being obliged to leave her house in the village, and finding herself too old to keep school, proposed to come and lodge with us. I would gladly have been excused receiving Mrs. Waring into the house: I had early imbibed a great awe of



her, though I loved her much, and I felt that it was not pleasant to have such a person always observing my actions; not considering that there was One ever with me who "is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow; and a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the hearts." (Heb. iv. 12.)

The pressure of my debts, however, compelled me to receive Mrs.



Waring; and respect for her and for my mother's memory, made me behave with deference to her, even at the time when I found myself under a painful restraint from the strictness of her manner and the spirituality of her conversation: for this excellent woman seldom spoke of worldly matters; her conversation was in heaven; from whence she looked for her Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ. (Phil. iii. 20.)

By the help of Mrs. Waring we soon paid our debts, and my



mother had not been dead a year and a half, when I had found means to save money enough to procure myself a suit of new clothes; and now, it being the summer season, I resolved to execute my long intended plan of a visit to Carlisle. For this purpose I determined to make a holyday on the next Monday and Tuesday; and as my Carlisle acquaintance often spent his Sunday in our village, and returned home by daybreak on Monday morning, it was my intention to accompany him back to the town.



The Sunday before this plan was to be executed, I dressed myself in my new suit, and having fastened a handsome nosegay in the button-holes of my coat, and examined myself well in a glass which hung up against the wall in my room, I walked down with the intention of asking my sister to accompany me to church; but seeing her humble dress, and that Mrs. Waring was ready to go with her, I went out of the house by myself, and took my way to the village. It was a fine morning, the church bells ringing, and every



thing around me looking gay, whilst my own mind was in that state of self-complacency which prepares for the commission of any sin: for God resisteth the proud, but he giveth grace to the humble. When I got into the village, and was taking my way towards the church, I saw three persons at a small distance, coming towards me with their backs to the church: it was William Croft, and with him two young women belonging to the village—persons whom my father had



guarded me against, and forbad my sister ever to converse with.

After our first salutations, I was going on to the church, when William Croft, catching me by the arm, said, "Well, but you are not leaving us?"—"If you are not going to church," I answered, "I certainly shall leave you, for I would not omit attendance at church upon any account."—"But we are on our way to church," said one of the young women, smiling. I saw William Croft look at her, but he said nothing.



“Well, then,” I said, “turn about; the church is behind you.”

“No,” replied the young woman, “we are taking a walk to the next parish to the church over the wood, and you must bear us company.” So saying, she laughed aloud. William Croft, now taking her meaning, said, “O yes! we are going to hear the parson of the next parish, and he is a wonderful preacher; so, John, you must come with us, you must indeed:” thus he persuaded me to go with them, “as an ox goeth to the slaughter, and as a fool to the



correction of the stocks." (Prov. vii. 22.)

And now that I was, for the first time in my life, in so glaring a manner breaking the bounds of duty, and destroying the encompassing fence which my heavenly Father had put on the side of my path, I felt the thorns of conscience strike to my soul. However, with much fair speech, my companions drew me on, "and forced me with the flattery of their lips." (Prov. vii. 21.)



I proceeded with them till we came into a thick wood, where it was proposed we should sit down and rest on the trunk of a tree which lay by the way. I had not sate here long before I found out what manner of company I was in: I felt uneasy, but knew not how to return, being held back by false shame. At length, jumping up, I said, "Where is this church you were talking about? I know of no church hereabouts: let us be moving, or we shall be too late for service." William Croft laughed aloud, but the



young women, seeing my uneasiness, proposed that we should go on; and we sauntered on till we came out into an open place beyond the wood, where I saw an old church, looking little better than a barn, standing in a field, with a few gravestones about it; but there was no bell ringing, nor sign of any service.

“There is our church,” said William Croft; “but where is the parson?” Upon this the young women smiled, and one of them said, “I suppose this is not the



parson's Sunday, for he comes but once a fortnight." William Croft joined in the laugh, and replied, " We are very unlucky not to come the right day ; but we must try to make up our minds to the disappointment."

I now lamented that I had allowed these foolish and wicked persons to deceive me ; but I felt at the same time that I was myself the person to be most blamed. This sense of sin as yet, however, worked to no good purpose. Instead of turning back and going home, I



permitted my wicked companions to lead me on to a public-house which stood just at the skirts of the wood; there we dined; and I was led to drink to so great a degree, that on going home I fell down by the wayside, and lay on the ground all night, in a state of insensibility unworthy of the pity of the vilest of my fellow-creatures. But though I had thus degraded and debased myself lower than the brute beasts, yet my Father which is in heaven still looked upon me, and had mercy upon me. “O the depth of the



night had so affected my limbs, and otherwise so materially injured my health, that I have never since recovered either; but I have had reason to cry, "O blessed sickness! O happy affliction! O welcome pain! by which I was restrained in my career of sin, and made to pause on the brink of destruction." But it must be understood that I was not brought to a state of resignation to the will of God till after a considerable time. No: on the contrary, when I found my situation, and that with my utmost



exertions, and with great pain, I hardly was able to hobble along at the slowest pace; I was like a lion caught in the toils; and the sense that this affliction was brought upon me by my own crimes, only seemed to aggravate and increase my rage and indignation. I called myself a fool and a madman, and uttered loud invectives against those who had tempted me to sin. In this state I remained until about six in the morning, when a man passing by with a cart in his way to our village, I persuaded him to take me



up, and he conveyed me as far as the end of the lane which led from our cottage to the village: there, as his business took him no farther my way, he set me down; but I was still half a mile from home, and my illness every moment increasing. Having, however, procured a strong staff, I made my way, slowly indeed, but in such a state of mind as would have inclined me, had I been in health, to have taken leave for ever of my home, my beloved sister, and my native village, and gone to seek my for-



tune in the wide and wicked world. The more I reflected on what I had done the day before, and the manner in which I had spent my Sunday, the more shame I felt. I had always prided myself on my high morality: I considered that I had been a good son and an excellent brother, and I even thought I had been pious; I had made lies my refuge, and under falsehood I had hid myself. Isaiah, xxxviii. 15. My shame, therefore, was exceedingly great, to think how much I must fall in the esteem of my friends, when



they should become acquainted with the sins which I had committed the day before, and as I before said, had I had the use of my limbs at that time, instead of going home I should probably have gone off to Carlisle, where I might have been led into fresh sins, and perhaps never more have found inclination to return home; but my heavenly Father had hedged me about that I could not get out; he had made my chain heavy, he had enclosed my ways with hewn stone. (Lamentations, iii. 89.)



I was now obliged to return home, notwithstanding my unwillingness to meet my friends : thus do poor sinful mortals often submit with reluctance to that which is their greatest good. With much labour and difficulty I made my way along the lane, till at length, coming to the place just opposite to the apple-trees, where I had attempted to push my sister through the Hedge, I sat down on the bank, being in great anguish of mind and body, and scarcely able to drag myself any farther. Here, as I rested my



head upon my knees, and as many things were passing through my mind, particularly the conversation which had there taken place between me and my father, I heard a quick step, and in a moment my sister came up, and putting her arms round my neck, "My dear brother," she said, "Heaven be praised that I have found you again." For a moment I could not speak, but looked up to her in great anguish of spirit, being also very ill. She took up her apron and wiped my damp forehead, and then kissing me af-



fectionately, begged me to take comfort, assuring me that whatever might have happened (for she saw something was amiss), she would do every thing to console me.

This little circumstance brought to my mind an event long passed, how my little Bell had wiped my tears and comforted me, when once before I had been prevented in my attempt to break the bounds prescribed me by superior authority. My heart was suddenly touched by this affecting remem-



brance, and my eyes filling fast with tears, I said, "O sister, ever lovely sister, I have again attempted to break through the Hedge, and have found the Thorns." My sister sweetly replied, "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth, for the Lord will not cast off for ever; but though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies, for he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." (Lamentations, iii.)



“ O sister !” I added, “ I do not presume, wretch that I am, to cast any blame on Providence ; I deserve all I now suffer, and much more.” I then explained to her how I had spent the Sabbath, and in what state I had found myself in the morning of the present day. She was much affected, and endeavoured to comfort me ; but the comfort I then required was from on high, or rather I would say, I was not yet fit to receive comfort ; it was no time to say Peace, peace, to my soul, when there was no peace.



(Jeremiah, vi. 14.) I was also in great pain of body, and by this time in a high fever. After some minutes I got up, and being assisted by my sister, dragged myself to the house, when I immediately went to bed, and there was confined for more than four months. I can give little account of what passed in my mind during the former part of the time, so great was the tumult and confusion of my thoughts, and also the pain of my body. “ My way was now indeed hedged up with thorns, and with a wall, so that I



could not find my path." (Hosea, ii. 6.) "I was made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights were appointed me." (Job, vii. 3.) But all this was necessary, and little enough to bring me to a sense of sin: nor would these afflictions have had the least effect, excepting, perhaps, to have hardened me more and more, had they not been accompanied by the powerful influences of the Holy Spirit of God. My feelings of thankfulness to God were also strongly excited by being told that William Croft had run away



from his master, after having robbed him of a large sum of money. I felt that, if not restrained, I might have been led to have been the partaker of the sins of this poor young man; for by nature I felt that I in no wise differed from him: but I forbear to enlarge on these subjects. Suffice it to say, that whilst I lay on my bed I was brought to a strong sense of sin. I was led to know myself to be a miserable sinner, one fit only for hell, and led to praise my heavenly Father for that tender mercy which had withheld him from



cutting me off in the midst of my sins.

After a while the Saviour also revealed himself to me, and I began to understand, although as yet darkly and imperfectly, the nature of redeeming love. I now found the greatest comfort from that which was formerly the most unacceptable to me; namely, the piety and motherly attentions of dear Mrs. Waring: she not only supported us by sharing with us her slender income, but she provided me with every thing that



was required in my sickness ; she read and prayed with me, and strengthened and consoled me with her sweet and spiritual discourse. She often spoke to me of the blessed tendency of afflictions, if rightly received ; she pointed out to me, that at the fall the will of man became contrary to that of God, and that in the case of every individual it is necessary that it should be brought back to submission to the divine power, before the soul leaves the body or can enter into glory. “ Inasmuch,” added she, “ as that the happiness



of a future life will consist in union with Christ, and that this union cannot exist where the will is not conformed entirely to that of God ; every thing then," continued she, " which tends to the breaking of this stubborn will, is a step to glory. On this account the saints rejoice in tribulations, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope ; and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost which is given to them. (Rom. v. 3—5.)



“To this end, therefore,” continued this excellent woman, “our heavenly Father hedges our paths with briers, and giveth us our bread even out of the thorns (Job, v. 5), until our proud minds are utterly subdued, and it is our will to follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. (Rev. xiv. 4.) Therefore, my son,” she said, “rejoice in your present troubles, and praise that merciful Providence by which your rebellious will was subdued, and glorify Him for those afflictions by which you were restrained from forsaking



the way which leads to blessedness. Have patience, my son," added she; "wait on your Saviour, be as a lily among thorns, meekly follow the leadings of Providence, and the Hedge of Thorns will mark your way to a crown of glory."



The above account of John Carrol, which seems to have been broken off abruptly, probably by the approach of his last illness,



was found in the leaves of his Bible some time after his death. During the winter which followed his first attack of illness, not being able to go out, he was observed to spend many hours in writing. In the return of spring he had a second attack of fever, which brought him to his grave in the twenty-second year of his age.

The messenger of death, it is humbly believed by his friends, found him with his lamp burning, awaiting the coming of the hea-



venly Bridegroom ; as he had for many months given evidence of a humble spirit, a subdued will, and entire dependence for salvation on the merits and death of his Saviour. The cottage in which he was born and died is still inhabited by his sister, who some years after the death of her brother, so much beloved and deeply regretted, married a pious young man, the nephew of Mrs. Waring. Mrs. Waring still continues to live in the family ; and it is humbly hoped, that the inhabitants of this little cottage continue, after the



example of those gone before them, to walk in that narrow path, where, although the traveller may find a few thorns, he has the blessed assurance that it will certainly lead to everlasting happiness; for the path of the just is as the shining light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day. (Prov. iv. 18.)

THE END.



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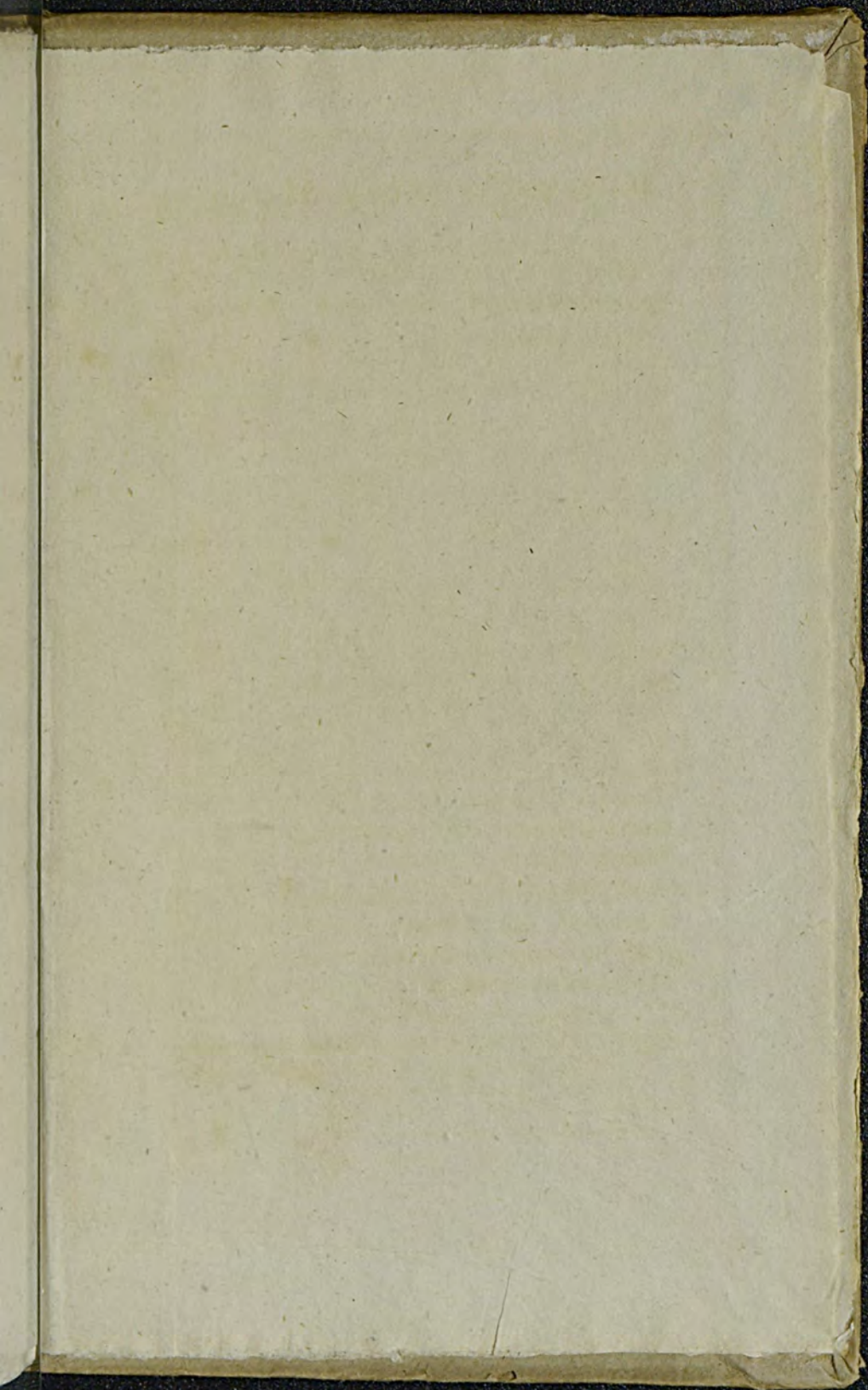
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