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A NEW ZEALAND COURTSHIP

AND OTHER

WORK-A-DAY STORIES

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WORK-A-DAY STORIES

BY

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'JONATHAN MERLE' 'ZACHARY BROUGH'S VENTURE'

ETC. ETC.

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FOR HONOUR'S SAKE

PART I

IT was a summer evening. The high winds that blow so often, in summer, over the plains of Canterbury, New Zealand, were lashing themselves into a gale. A heavy bank of cumulus cloud, like vast heaps of snow resting on their own grey shadow, swept majestically along the sky over the Port Hills, catching the higher crests as it went by, and swathing them in its level folds. The tops of the hills were dark and purple in the shade it cast. Farther down, fitful gleams of sunshine chased the shadows over the great, bossy slopes, and touched the dark plantations and stretches of yellow tussocks on the plains below.

Through the district of Rakawahi (which means

'Sunny Corner') a little river winds its way towards the sea. In the distance it looked, then, like nothing but a winding bed of water-cress, so choked was it by that imported pest of New Zealand watercourses; but walking along its banks, you discovered clear pools and spaces where the obstreperous plant had failed to cover it. A little below the so-called 'township' (a few houses not quite as far apart as the rest were) the river flowed past a wilderness of Maori-heads. Over scores of acres, the ground was full of thick stumps of peaty earth, two or three feet high, each bearing a crown of long, coarse, drooping grass, like unkempt hair. The effect was that of a forest of oaks new-pollarded, standing deep in a lake of earth instead of water, wearing wild wigs. The stumps are like peat; the people cut them, and use them for fuel. The soil, when cleared, is rich in the extreme. I dare say that waste of Maori-heads has long been cleared and brought under the plough. Twenty-five years ago, their hard yellow locks streamed and rattled in the wind, a contrast to the mild weeping-willow on the other side of the stream, flinging its soft green leaves as the blast directed, with only a whispered remonstrance.

Not far from the willow, a little boy lay on the bank, in an agony of grief and rage. It was more

than a childish passion that transported him. Grief, such as sets its mark upon the rest of life, wrung out those heavy sobs convulsing the childish frame. Then he would lift himself, and tear handfuls of grass from the tussocks, kneading them on the ground in his impotent wrath.

'I'll kill him. I'll have it out of him, I will. I *will.* I'll serve him out—beast! Oh, mother—mother. *Father!*'

It was his birthday, and his father was dead. He was hired out for the summer — poor little man, only eleven years old that day; but workers were scarce in New Zealand then, and any bright boy of eleven had his price. This was a Saturday. He had been promised, ever since he came, that he should go home this evening and stay over Sunday with his mother, and the other boy on the farm had tricked him out of it.

It was a horrible thing to do, and it was done so cunningly. A good neighbour who was driving in to Christchurch that evening had offered to take him. Davie had been up at four o'clock to hurry his work, in a fever all day for fear of being late when Mr. Lawson came to the cross-roads. He could hardly pretend to swallow his tea. The clock had stopped; he had to ask Mrs. Foster what was the time by her watch, and on the third time of asking she was cross and said,

'Bother the child, you have lots of time. Just do the knives and fetch in another bucket of water, and then you can get ready. You'll be long before time, then.'

Davie had not been used to sharp words at home, and they frightened him very much.

'I'll mind the time for you — see,' said Ned, the other boy, two years older than Davie, who rejoiced in an old silver watch which went occasionally. He pulled it out now and displayed it, without saying that it was twenty-five minutes behind time.

'I'll do your knives. Come and have a bathe —there's lots of time,' he said.

Davie was surprised, for Ned was not usually inclined to do a stroke of work that he could avoid. But being very ready to trust his fellow-creatures, he fetched his Sunday clothes to dress in, after his bathe, and took up his bucket. Ned took another, and they ran down to the pump at the riverside, filled the buckets, and left them standing while they went a few hundred yards up the stream to a bend sheltered by willows, where was a stretch of water comparatively free from cress. Davie plunged in: he could swim like a duck, and though he meant to stay in only a minute, the cool water was so delicious that he lingered, plashing and swimming round a clear

space. He thought Ned was on the other side of a mass of water-cress.

'I'm coming out now,' he called. No answer. Davie swam to the bank and came out, shaking himself like a dog. Not a sign of Ned was to be seen, nor of his own clothes either.

The poor little fellow called and searched wildly, —in vain. He had soon looked into every place where clothes could be, on that side of the river. Then he remembered thinking, when Ned answered him — from the water, as he supposed — that he must have swum quite over to the other side. He could never have swum at all. With a sudden thought, Davie plucked up courage — glided between the willow-stems, and shot along an open bit to where a plank was laid across the stream— crossed it, and hid himself among the Maori-heads on the other side. The ground between them was soft, after recent rain. Davie spied a foot-step; he darted to it, his little bare feet hardly touching the ground, and tracked in and out among the stumps, in terror and despair, till a glimpse of white calico caused a bound of hope. He sprang towards it. There were his clothes all right, rolled together under the drooping grass on a low stump; and clothes are liberty! clothes are power!

With trembling hands he threw them on,

hindering himself by excess of haste—wiped his little feet with his soiled socks, and put on the clean ones. But he dared not stay to take the working clothes back to the house; the risks were too dreadful. He rolled them into a bundle and set off, plunging over the rough, uncertain ground, to where the high-road ran through the waste. This was his nearest way to the cross-road where Mr. Lawson was to pick him up.

The roads, in that level region, are more than Roman in their straightness. As the boy scrambled up the highway side he saw a buggy draw up where the roads crossed, hundreds of yards away. It was a moment of agony, yet of exultation also, for he was sure Mr. Lawson would wait for him. But scarcely had the buggy stopped, when a small figure sprang in. Mr. Lawson drove cheerfully away with the wrong boy, pleased to be doing a kindness, and Davie was left alone upon the bank.

He shouted and ran, but only for a moment; it was so plainly useless. Then, for a cruel half-hour, he waited at the corner, nursing a faint hope that that buggy was not the Lawsons'. He knew it was, all the time; he knew the make of it and the grey horse at any distance; and that must have been Ned who got in. Davie had not learned the language of swearing, but the spirit of

it was in his heart. He wished he did know any words bad enough to curse Ned with.

It was of no use to sit there. With a child's instinct for seeking help from his elders, Davie took up his bundle and toiled wearily back by the way he came. The wind rose higher and higher, and whistled through the tossing Maori-heads. They thrashed to and fro in the gale; so did the weeping-willow beside the plank. Davie liked the storm; it felt something like thrashing Ned.

But as he reached the farther side of the stream the anguish of his loss overpowered him; he threw himself on the ground and cried till he had no tears left. Then he sat up, shivering, and pressed his hands tightly to his throbbing head. What would his mother think if he did not come? She might think he had done something wrong, and was being punished for it.

Stung into new life, the child started up, determined to walk home. The distance was twelve miles; but someone might give him a lift. He had to do the knives, though, and to tell Mrs. Foster what had become of Ned. Mr. Foster had gone off on a long round, early that morning, to be absent till Monday, when Davie was to have returned with him.

The boy's knees trembled as he walked back to the house. He could not help knowing that he

V.U.C.

was tired out; but he was going to walk home, none the less: the longing for his mother was unendurable.

'Why, Davie! Mr. Lawson will be gone by,' exclaimed Emmie Foster, as the weary child entered the kitchen carrying one of the water-buckets. How heavy it had grown!

'He is gone,' said Davie in a trembling voice. 'Ned hid my clothes away and went instead of me.' Somehow, as soon as he began to speak in the presence of Ned's aunt, fear took the place of indignation.

'What nonsense, child! Why, Ned was here only this minute,' said Mrs. Foster.

But on calculation it proved that the minute was a long one, and Ned had not been seen since he walked off with Davie.

'It *was* him, I know,' said Davie quietly.

'Then it was too bad of him,' Mrs. Foster admitted. 'But what a little silly you must have been to let him get off with your clothes!'

The child's pale face flushed crimson. It was what he had felt most keenly all the time—Ned had successfully made a fool of him.

'I'm going to walk home, Mrs. Foster,' he said.

'No, you're not,' she answered sharply. 'Who ever heard of such a thing? Why, you'd kill yourself, and never get there! Your mother

would be very angry if you tried, so just stop here and do your knives. Such a storm coming up too.'

A darker storm was gathering in one little heart, but it made no outward sign.

'Whatever have you been doing to your best suit?' exclaimed Mrs. Foster, discovering that he had it on. 'Why, look here, Emmie! Dirt all over it, before and behind. How ever did you get it like that? It'll never be fit to be seen again.'

She had the child by the shoulders, turning him round and exclaiming. Davie's throat swelled. He nearly choked with his efforts not to cry, but the big tears rolled down in spite of him. They softened her.

'Well, don't fret, child,' she said. 'You shall go home another day, I promise you; and you shall stay up to supper to-night, for you hardly ate a bit of tea. I don't know what you'll have to go in, though,' she added, with a hopeless look at his clothes. She would have said more, but for a lurking fear that their condition might be owing to Ned.

'Never mind, Davie. It will brush off when it gets dry,' said Emmie kindly.

Davie made no answer. It was a climax to this day's humiliations, to have spoiled his Sunday

suit—the clothes his mother had made for him, and put in his box with so many tender counsels about taking care of them, for she could not afford to get him any others. He had never once thought about having them on, when he rolled on the ground in his fierce distress.

He went quietly to the room he shared with Ned, and changed to his working suit again, seeing with a sinking heart the ample cause there was for Mrs. Foster's observations. Anger was quiescent now; he was crushed under that utter despair of self which makes the griefs of childhood so intolerable. And he could not get to his mother.

It was no small thing to him that this was his birthday — the one proud day in a child's year when he is the centre of attention in his home. It was the first birthday without his father, and his mother had asked, as a special favour, that he might come home for it, as it fell on a Saturday. Again, the fear of her thinking he was in disgrace cut his heart. Or she might be afraid something had happened to him.

That was the first thought which turned his mind from his own overwhelming grief. She had trained her children never to sit down and fret over a trouble, if anything could be done to mend it; and now, at the thought of her anxiety, his

fainting energies revived, and he made a little plan. He came out of his room—cleaned the knives and brought up Ned's bucket of water—then stole out across the paddocks to the high road. There were often pleasure-parties riding or driving back to Christchurch about this time on a Saturday evening. Somebody might be going down the Coxley Road who would take a message to his mother. The post went out from Rakawahi only twice a week in those days, and he wanted her to hear that very night. He was much too eager to feel any fear or shyness about stopping a stranger. This was like a matter of life or death to him.

First came a man on horseback; he was not going to Christchurch: then a buggy full of lads and girls; they were going by another road. The darkness gathered fast, under the brooding storm. Davie's last hope was beginning to fail him, when a pony-carriage came in sight, with three little girls in it—a dark-bearded gentleman driving. They were going quickly. Davie stepped forward in the wide road, and held up his little hand, saying, 'Hi.'

'Hallo, my little man. Have you lost your way?' said the gentleman, pulling up.

'Are you going to Christchurch?' asked Davie.

'Yes, we are.'

'Down Coxley Road?'

'No, quite another way.' But the great distress in the child's face moved the gentleman to say, 'What is it you want, my man?'

'I want somebody to tell mother I can't come home. I couldn't help it,' said Davie, his voice quivering.

'Is she expecting you?'

'Yes. It's my birthday,' said little Davie; and breaking down altogether, he sobbed out, 'And they said I should go home, and now—I can't.'

Not for worlds would he have owned the shameful reason why. With a quick movement, the gentleman drew him up into the low pony-carriage and held him between his knees. Davie laid his head upon the kind shoulder and sobbed there, pride forgotten in the luxury of having someone to cry to, at last. All the little girls were crying too.

'Could you come if I take you?' the stranger asked.

'No, I mustn't,' said Davie. The law-abiding habit of his life constrained him; and he had remembered, too, that there was no one else to milk the cows, now that Ned was gone.

'What are you doing?'

'I'm on a farm.'

'What does your father do?'

'He's dead,' said Davie, with another burst of sobbing. The father drew him closer.

One of the little girls had a great bunch of roses in her hand. She held it out to Davie: it was all she had to offer. He looked awkward, not knowing what to do.

'Who is your mother?' asked the gentleman.

'Mrs. Marriott,' and Davie added a somewhat confused address.

'We'll drive round there and tell her,' said the gentleman. 'Do you see my little girl wants to give you her roses? Take them.'

Davie obeyed, doubtfully.

'Now they are yours,' said the gentleman. 'Wouldn't you like to give them to your mother? I'll take them to her, if you would.'

Davie opened his eyes wide with sudden pleasure; but as his extremity abated self-consciousness returned; he hid his face again on his new friend's shoulder, overwhelmed with shyness.

The stranger friend held him close again for a moment, and kissed him.

'Now you must jump down,' he said, releasing him. 'Good-bye, my little man. God bless you! We'll be sure to find your mother and give her the roses.'

He drove off, the little girls waving their hands

to Davie. The boy watched them out of sight, and turned slowly back again to 'Fosters',' a wondrous thrill of comfort in his heart. He had not found his mother, but he had found love—drunk deep of it, for those few minutes; and the sweetness would linger long.

The clouds swept lower and lower down the hills. With a howl and a rush the storm broke, and rain came down in torrents upon the umbrellas in the pony-carriage. The little girls were in terror lest their father should take them home before he drove on to Davie's mother. He passed the homeward turning, and all their hearts leaped up. Long before they reached Coxley Road it was quite dark. The father drove slowly, trying in vain to make out any of the landmarks Davie had given him.

A door opened, and a woman's figure stood out dark against the light behind her, peering into the gloom.

'That's his mother looking out for him, depend on it,' said the gentleman. 'Jump out, Millie, and ask her if she is Mrs. Marriott.'

Millie dashed through the rain, carrying the roses under her umbrella. With a sudden 'Ah,' the watchers saw the nosegay change hands. The mother was found, and three much-relieved little people were driven home to another anxious mother.

When Davie awoke next morning, the first thing he saw was his Sunday jacket, all streaked with mud. He slipped out of bed, stiff and sore after yesterday, and gently rubbed the cloth together. The mud turned to powder, and fell on his bare feet.

'It *does* rub off!' he thought joyfully. 'She said it would, when it was dry.'

It was quite a discovery. Hope revived once more. Davie dressed himself and went out to light the fire and milk the cows. Emmie spoke kindly to him when she appeared; and after breakfast they gave his clothes a good brushing, and the 'clean dirt' all came off, leaving hardly a stain upon them. Davie was able to go to Sunday school in the afternoon looking respectable, and with no Ned to tease him.

'Ned will catch it when Mr. Foster comes home,' he thought with satisfaction.

But when Mr. Foster drove up, on Monday, there was Ned beside him, as cool as possible. He had told his uncle that Davie did not care about going home, and went away to bathe, so he went instead. It happened that he had had reasons of his own for wishing particularly to be in town on that Sunday. He had counted on going in with his uncle, and was much disgusted to find his plans frustrated on Davie's account. The plot to

supplant him had not been premeditated: it was suggested first by Davie's innocent acceptance of the wrong time, and the hiding of his clothes was an afterthought, to complete the business.

Mr. Foster blamed both the boys for not obeying orders, but was most displeased with Davie. Davie was too much astonished to say a word, but Emmie spoke up for him, and described how Ned had made off with his clothes.

'Ha, ha!' Mr. Foster had laughed heartily before he was aware. Then he hastily pulled a grim face, and told Ned he was a rascal, and if he ever carried on like that again he should hear of it; but the laugh had sunk too deep into the minds of both boys for the rebuke to make any impression. Ned walked off triumphant, though with enough prickings of conscience to make him vicious towards Davie. Davie bore away a bitter, burning sense of injustice, mingled with his intense, helpless mortification and abasement.

'Sharp chap, Ned,' said Mr. Foster to his wife. 'It was too bad of him, though. I'd give him a flogging, if it wasn't that he would only take it out of Davie.'

And Mrs. Foster, who had no son of her own and was very fond of Ned, agreed in any view of the case likely to spare him punishment. The consequence was that Ned actually mounted the

high horse, and twitted Davie for having been so easily 'done.' He found himself armed with quite a new power to hurt the little boy; a safe one too. He might have been punished himself for using bodily violence, but he could wound and lacerate the spirit with impunity.

Davie endured in silence, too proud to complain. When Ned imposed upon him, he did the work without shirking one stroke; but all the time a burning sense of outrage and wrong consumed his little heart. He was to go home for Christmas, and he laid fierce plots how he and his brother would devise to serve out Ned.

PART II

DAVIE'S father had been a much-respected tradesman, carrying on a small business in Christchurch. Calamities of the kind that no foresight can avert came upon him; and before he had time to recover from them he took a fever and died, leaving five children, the eldest a boy of fourteen, and his affairs encumbered with debts. They were honest debts, such as come in the order of trade, and would have been cleared as he went along, but for his misfortunes. The chief creditor held a mortgage on the business and stock, which passed into his hands; the smaller claims were left—no one thought of pressing them. Kindly men felt for the widow, and hard ones said it was no use trying to draw blood from a stone. All agreed that Marriott would have done well and paid up, if he had lived. The widow gave up everything but the necessary furniture of a humble

dwelling — left her comfortable home, and went with her children to a lean-to, on the edge of the town.

In England, we add lean-tos to houses already built. In the colonies, they begin with a lean-to, and leave space in front to build the house, when they have prospered and can afford it. Some people never do prosper, and go on living in lean-tos.

Mrs. Marriott's had ground behind it as well as before, and a well at the back which never failed. These, with the comparatively low rent of an unpopular suburb, were her attractions to the place, since she had decided to try laundry-work. It was very different from anything she had been brought up to expect, for her father had been a substantial shopkeeper in a country town in England, and her husband's prospects were very bright when she married him. But the work could be done in her own home, with her children about her. There was a demand for it; it was highly paid, and, as a rule, very badly done in Christchurch, then; and she had the appliances her husband had bought for her own use in their happy home. There was nothing else which she could do as well, which was equally well paid; so she brought her mind to it.

But when she left the dear and pleasant home

of years, and came with her children to the three-roomed shed with a little wash-house at the back, her heart almost failed her. The children came running up to her, crying, 'Mother, where *shall* we sleep?' 'Where can we put this or that?' For a moment she turned her face away from them, leaning on the mantelpiece, and wished she could lie down and die. The battle was too great for her.

'Our things never will get in here, mother,' said George despairingly.

Then a thought came to her, like the cake baken on the coals which the angel showed to Elijah when his heart fainted.

'That's what I said to father when we went into our little cabin on board ship,' she answered, 'and he said, "Oh yes, they will,"—and so they did. This place is not home; it is only our little cabin on the voyage *Home*, where he has gone on first; but he would want us to put it tidy. Has the cart gone, George?'

'Yes, mother.'

'Shut the door, then, and let us kneel down together before we touch a thing, and ask God to be our Father here, and tell us what to do.'

Her burden overwhelmed her; she could not bear it any longer without help. They knelt down among the packages, and she began—

'Our Father, which art in heaven.'

There her voice failed: she could only pour out her tears before the Lord, her children sobbing round her. But again she quieted herself, and the sound of her voice stilled their weeping, as she prayed—

'O Lord God Almighty, come to us and be our Father here. Bless us in our little cabin. Tell us our duty, and make us strong to do it. Help us to earn our daily bread. Make us faithful here, and bring us all safe Home at last, for our dear Saviour's sake. Amen.'

They rose, and the four children clung round her. Davie was not there; he had gone to Rakawahi the day before.

'We'll make it home, mother,' said George.

'We will try, dear,' she answered. 'Now open the basket, and you shall have dinner before we do anything else.'

Children's tears dry quickly. The little ones were soon laughing over the picnic meal. They had scarcely finished when an old friend looked in to see if he could be of use. With the help of his strong arms, the goods were pushed into place; and as the rooms assumed a habitable look, with the remnants of her old home arranged in them, the strong temptation which had assailed the mother to loathe the place and feel she could

never do anything but hate it, vanished away. She had come there, feeling as if they had nothing before them but one grinding struggle for bread; but while she prayed that load was lifted. The Lord Almighty had taken charge of it. Bread would be given them, and water would be sure.

She began to take an interest in making the best of her little place. Friends had been kind, and she had a small sum of money to lay out in fitting up her wash-house. She spared a few pence for flower-seeds, and by Christmas they had sprung up.

George went to work in a gentleman's house and garden, with leave to help his mother on Mondays and Saturdays, when clothes had to be fetched and returned. He sometimes had plants given to him, and the front garden became quite gay. Already, Mrs. Marriott's house was not like other lean-tos down that unfashionable road; it had a character of its own, derived from its mistress.

So had her washing. It was hard work, even harder than she expected; but week after week, when she arranged her piles of linen white as snow, daintily ironed and got up—though every bone in her body ached by Friday night, she had the pleasure of *success*. She knew that her

customers were satisfied, for more and more work came in. Nellie, the eldest girl, had left school to help her, and even the two little ones did their part; but the work became too much for the family, and yet not enough, as yet, to pay for constant help. The mother toiled on from day to day, pleading her daily prayer, 'Tell me my duty, and make me strong to do it.'

Saturday was her day for home, when everything was rubbed up and set in order; and on the Saturday morning before the Monday which would be Christmas Day, cleaning was interspersed with a great many looks down the road, to see if Davie was coming.

The kind stranger had never found his way to the house again. He had once driven down the Coxley Road seeking it, but failed to find it. He always thought that he would try again, but whenever he remembered it he happened to have something else to do, until months and years passed on, and it was too late to take up again the little link which had been forged by his meeting with Davie. The lives of two households had touched for an hour, and parted again for the rest of life. We are always forming such links and dropping them, along life's crowded way. If we tried to hold them all fast, they would strangle us;

enough if they are links of loving-kindness for the hour they last.

The stranger had come as an angel of mercy indeed to the boy and his mother. Sore as Davie was, he would have been much sorer still, but for that brief touch of love.

As Christmas approached, Ned had tormented him by telling him he had another card up his sleeve, to 'do' him with. Davie silently resolved that, whatever the card might be, if it were played, he would run away and never come back. He vowed heroic vengeance and defiance; and when the day came, everybody looked him up only too assiduously, and he found himself bowling along, on a glorious summer morning, his little legs dangling from the back seat, and Emmie, in the highest spirits, chattering to her father in the front. They were going in to buy good things for Christmas Day.

The Maori-heads were a wilderness of tawny gold, the sunshine glancing on them as they shook in the passing breeze. The beautiful tui-tui grass —like pampas grass, only taller and more graceful —stood guarding the streams. Skylarks poured out their song in the blue sky, and Mr. Foster grumbled at them, and said they were ruining the farmers; but he laid his head back to watch the black speck high above, and made Emmie

and Davie see it too, for the sake of dear old England.

As they drew near the town, they drove for miles past pleasant houses standing far back from the road in their own grounds. Girls were in the gardens, picking lilies and roses for Christmas, and currants and raspberries for Christmas pies. Here and there a sweet scent of hay came wafted from some English-grass-sown paddock.

'Christmas *is* awk'ard, coming just in the press,' said Mr. Foster. 'All got to go skylarking, when we ought to be pegging away.'

He took Davie to his mother's very door, and called to her, 'Brought him all right this time, you see, and I never had a better little boy. Here,' reaching down to put an envelope into her hand. 'Good day, and a merry Christmas to the young 'uns.'

He would not wish *her* a merry Christmas, this year; but he had brought her what she hungered for—her boy. And at first she thought him a picture of health and spirits, all rosy and joyful as he was; but there was a clutch in his clinging hold of her, a quiver in his little face, that spoke of something too deep for a child to feel. Then she remembered that this was his first home-coming to find no father—and to this poor little place.

The linen-baskets stood waiting, and Davie was soon very busy and important, for George had extra work to do at his master's that day, and Davie took home the clothes in a hand-truck, Lily trotting along by his side to show him the way. His mother was astonished to see how his muscles had gained in strength with the ten weeks' out-door work. She was very busy herself with her preparations for Sunday and Monday, and had little talk with him through the day. It needed a strong courage for the tired woman, with a widow's aching heart, to rouse herself to make any sort of Christmas for the children; and Davie's eager little face helped her to do it.

The active work was all done by tea-time, and after tea she sat down to sew. The children gathered round her, full of rejoicing that Davie was there too.

'How was it you could not come last time, dear?' she asked.

Davie coloured up and did not tell, which made her anxious. She passed the matter over at the time; but when he was in bed, before George had followed him, she went to his side in the dark, and drew the story out, her own heart shrinking and bleeding as she heard it. Davie had forgotten all his troubles in the bliss of being at home again, but they came back in all their vividness as he told

his tale, and her arms held him closer and closer the while.

The story ended, and still he nestled to her, his cheek against her neck, and wished she need never put him down. She held him a long time in silence, then parted from him with a close, tremulous kiss, and he wondered to feel a tear upon her cheek.

The ice once broken, his brother and Nellie heard his troubles, and great consultations went on among the three. They went to church and school as usual on Sunday. After tea, they all gathered round their mother again, and Nellie broached the subject on their minds.

'Mother, *need* Davie go back to Rakawahi?'

The mother started, and pressed her hand tightly upon her heart. Davie's pleading blue eyes looked into hers.

'I could take all the clothes home, mother,' he said.

'I know you would, dear,' she answered.

There was a silence. The children heard their mother's hard breathing, and waited, afraid.

'I have been thinking of it,' she said at last, 'and I see the time has come to tell you something none of you know, but George.'

Five eager pairs of eyes were fastened on her.

'You know—you elder ones—that your father died in debt,' she continued. 'It was not his fault. He *had* to get things, to carry on the business, and he never lived to pay for them. There is money owed that he had not even an account for, except what he kept himself. His word was his bond, and everyone knew that. There's not one of his creditors has pressed me for the money. One of them said, "We all know what your husband was, Mrs. Marriott, and we shan't trouble *you*, now. Don't you be afraid." They know I have given up everything but just what we *must* have to go on with, and they let us alone. But they've got the claim upon us, all the same. And if they hadn't, I know what it means to forgive debts. I should have money enough from your grandfather to pay every penny owing of your father's, and start something for ourselves beside, if other people had paid him what they owed. There were some that wouldn't, and some that couldn't. But those that couldn't—that came to him in distress, and he took what little they said they could give him then, and crossed off the rest —I know what it was to see them afterwards, dressed so as *we* never were — going out for excursions and holidays *we* never took; we couldn't afford it—and never offering to pay up a pound. And I know what my father felt, when

he saw his wife or children ill, and wanting things he couldn't get, because he couldn't pay for them, when those that owed him pounds and pounds that he had never crossed off seemed as if they could have anything they wanted. Would you like anyone to feel that of you?'

There was no answer, except from the little earnest faces upturned to hers.

'As long as we haven't a thing that we could do without, I shouldn't feel it,' Mrs. Marriott continued. 'But if we are prospered, and get on a little—every pleasure we took, every new thing you went out in, I should feel there were those that had a right to say, "There goes *my* money. I bore with their father, because I knew he would pay if he could. They're not their father's children."'

Again there was silence.

'Reach me down the Bible, George,' said Mrs. Marriott.

George obeyed. It was her father's family Bible, and the names of his brothers and sisters were written there—then his own children's—then, in David Marriott's writing, the names of the five children now looking at the page.

'You see those names—and those?' said Mrs. Marriott, laying her hand upon the first two sets. 'There's not one of them owed any man anything. They suffered by those that didn't pay

their debts to them, but they paid their own. Would you like to be the first lot in the book to let your father lie in his grave with debts to his name?'

'No,' broke from every child.

'I have thought of this from the day when he was laid there,' Mrs. Marriott continued. 'I couldn't say anything till I saw whether I could so much as get bread to put into your mouths without coming upon anyone to help us; but from that day I have asked Almighty God that I might pay those debts, sooner or later. And I have one debt of my own.'

She paused, and drew from her pocket the envelope Mr. Foster had given her.

'In your father's illness,' she said, 'Mrs. Barton lent me a pound. I have never been able to pay her; and her husband has been ill, and the children had measles, and she must want it, I know.'

She took from the envelope a one-pound note and two half-crowns.

'That must go for your boots, Davie,' she said, laying down the silver. 'This'—taking up the pound-note—'this is the first money I have had since that day, that I was not *obliged* to spend directly I got it, for something we couldn't go without. What shall I do with it, Davie?'

'Pay her, mother!' exclaimed all the children.

The widow's eyes kindled. 'I knew you would say it,' she said. 'I knew you would rather do that than have Christmas presents. We can't have a merry Christmas this year, but it will be a happy one, if we pay off the first of our debts. And Davie has earned the money.'

Davie's heart swelled with mingled pride and awe.

'It is four months now since we were left,' said Mrs. Marriott. 'It is a little over ten weeks since we came here. I have never spent a penny I could help. I felt I must have black for myself, but I have not bought even that for you. Friends were kind, and sent me the things you are wearing. And already, in these ten weeks, we have earned more than we need to spend for our keep and clothes. It's the new things I have had to get in starting the laundry that have kept us back. I think we are pretty well set up now. And if we can do as well as we have in the first ten weeks, we ought to do better as we go on. I believe God has heard my prayer, and that He means to help us to pay up all we owe.'

Another pause.

'Will it take long, mother?' asked Nellie.

'That's according to how we get on,' said Mrs. Marriott. 'Some day I will tell you older ones

more about what there is to do, but not now. I wouldn't have brought this up on a Sunday, only we have so little quiet time, all together; and it does belong to our duty towards God and our duty towards our neighbour. But how we are to do it belongs to the week's work; and if we don't want to get like so many others, all taken up in getting money, we must keep it out of our Sundays. We won't settle, to-night, what is right to do about Davie. Leave it till to-morrow. See, it is just upon church-time, and we have not sung any hymns. Whose turn is it to stay in?'

'Mine,' said Ellen. She and George took it in turns to stay at home with the little ones on Sunday evenings, while their mother went out.

'There would be time for a short hymn,' said Mrs. Marriott.

'May we have "O God of Bethel," mother?' asked George.

For a moment she shrank before it, feeling as though her voice must fail her; but only for a moment.

'Yes, dear,' she answered. 'Get the book for Lily and Tottie; the rest of us know it. We'll stand up to sing *that*.'

They stood round the Bible open at the family page, and sang, in their little corner of the new

land, the words which have been sung from generation to generation in God-fearing households in the old country.

'Our vows, our prayers, we now present
Before Thy throne of grace:
God of our fathers, be the God
Of their succeeding race.

Through each perplexing path of life
Our wandering footsteps guide:
Give us each day our daily bread,
And raiment fit provide.

O spread Thy covering wings around,
Till all our wanderings cease,
And at our Father's loved abode
Our souls arrive in peace.'

The widow walked to church with her two boys, and in the service that same hymn was sung. It came like a seal on their resolve.

Next day came Christmas—'Christmas Day all in the morning,' and such an early morning, exactly at midsummer! No fumbling in the dark to feel if little stockings had filled out in the night; it was all broad daylight, and the sunshine streamed over roses and strawberries in leafy gardens.

No little stockings were hung up in Davie's home; nevertheless, five happy faces gathered

round the cheap breakfast of porridge and treacle. Milk was scarce and dear in the towns, in those days.

Mrs. Marriott had long dreaded Christmas Day; and after poor little Davie's outpouring to her she had wept through the long night-watches, not knowing how she could ever rise and meet the children with a cheerful face again. But on the day itself she awoke with a feeling of perfect peace. The gift of gifts had come to her—Christ's peace, on this poor, dark earth. She lay thinking what it really meant, for the Lord Himself to have come and lived in a poor home, with parents who had to struggle and work hard; and that He had childish memories of His own, when He took the little children in His arms and blessed them! Surely He would be taking hers this day.

The light of peace was on her face when her children greeted her that morning; they all felt it.

Nor was it long before they had tokens that earthly friends were very far from forgetting them on this Christmastide. Baskets and parcels arrived at the door, with gifts to keep and gifts to eat—roast ducks all ready for table, mince-pies and strawberries. They joyfully peppered their modest bit of beef, put it away, wrapped up in muslin, and

all went off to church. The pudding had boiled before, and would only have to boil up again when they came back.

They had moved a long way off from old friends and neighbours, and Mrs. Marriott was glad of it. It is often said that in the colonies people can do any kind of honest work without losing position; and so they can—except taking in washing. Ladies may do their own washing, and do other people's too, for love, but not take it in for a livelihood, without being very much pitied—at least they could not in those days. Mrs. Marriott had thought of all that when she chose her occupation, and yet she made the choice. She could no longer be on equal terms with her friends in outward things, do what she might: a little more or less difference hardly signified. She had never had time or means to keep up a large circle of acquaintance, or even to become very intimate with the few valued friends she had. These had grown nearer and dearer in the time of trouble, but not near enough for love to make all things equal now. Her chief concern was not to become dependent on their kindness; and George, who had most to suffer in the change, felt just as she did. He could bring his mind to meeting his old schoolfellows as he wheeled home the clothes, but not to carrying notes to their parents, asking for

help either in money or in some kind of employment which would be given for the sake of helping the widow. Washing was in demand; people were glad enough to get it done. Still he and Nellie were not sorry to live away down the Coxley Road, now. They missed the river, though; and after their Christmas dinner they locked up the house, and the whole family walked to the beautiful part of the town where the Avon flows past the College buildings, under the large weeping willows said to have grown from cuttings brought from the willow that grows beside Napoleon's empty grave in St. Helena. Mrs. Marriott left the others by the riverside, and took Davie with her to Mrs. Barton's.

The mistress of the house let them in, looking pale and careworn. Her husband, a banker's clerk, was at his post again, and able to go out with the children this afternoon; but he was still far from strong.

'And how are *you* getting on?' she asked, when she had answered her friend's inquiries.

'Better than we could have expected, for a first beginning,' said Mrs. Marriott. 'And having a holiday to-day, I thought we would come ourselves, and bring you back what you were kind enough to lend me in my trouble,' handing her the envelope containing the pound note.

The sudden flash across Mrs. Barton's face betrayed how glad she would be of a pound, but she drew back, exclaiming, 'Oh, my dear, I don't like to take it. You can't spare it yet, I am sure.'

'Yes, thank God I can,' said Mrs. Marriott. 'My little boy has earned it.'

Mrs. Barton laid her hand on Davie's shoulder. 'Thank *you*, dear,' she said, the tears coming into her eyes. Then she took his mother's hands and kissed her.

'You are the last person I ever should have thought *could* help me,' she said. 'God bless you! It comes just like a gift.'

Then Davie was sent into the garden, and the two women shared their griefs and comforts together.

'Oh, how you have lifted me up!' said Mrs. Barton, when they parted. 'If the Lord can help you so through your troubles, mine can't be too much for Him.'

'There *is* nothing too hard for *Him*,' said the widow; and she and Davie went their way.

When tea was over and put away, once more the children clustered round their mother—Nellie and Lily with garments of Davie's under repair in their hands; for they could not afford to play all

Christmas Day long, when he was near coming to rags for want of stitches in time.

'And now about you, Davie,' said Mrs. Marriott.

He was sitting on the ground at her feet, his head resting against her knee. He raised it, and looking up with his wistful eyes, said, 'I don't want to stop at home, mother.'

The mother's heart throbbed with a sudden pride, relief, and pain, all strangely mingled. Now the brave child had made up his mind to go, she longed so to keep him.

'I'm afraid that is right, Davie,' she said, laying her hand round his neck. He drew it close without speaking.

'It is not only for the money,' she continued. 'Mr. Foster knew nothing about us, except by being your father's customer,—and he came and offered to take you for the summer, just out of kindness, to help us in our trouble. It wouldn't seem right to take you away, now you have learned to be some good, in the busiest time, when he mightn't get another boy.'

'Yes, mother,' said Davie. Mr. Foster's word of praise had been a great deal to him, although it made his sense of injustice all the keener.

'But couldn't we do something about Ned, mother?' asked George. He wanted to do a father's part by his little brother.

'I have been thinking that over,' said Mrs. Marriott. 'Get the Bible, dear.'

He did so, and the children, who had no father on earth to guide them, waited to hear the Heavenly Father's word.

'There are three different places where the Lord says Himself how we are to behave to those that serve us badly,' said Mrs. Marriott. 'You shall read them to us, Davie.'

She gave him chapter and verse, and he read first, from the 5th chapter of Matthew, the passage ending, 'Whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.'

'That is just exactly what you have been doing by Ned,' said Mrs. Marriott. 'He did you out of your holiday, and you did all his work for him.'

'I had to,' said Davie, opening his eyes wide.

'But you never made any fuss about having to, did you?' said his mother.

No, on reflection Davie could say that he had not.

'Then that was what Jesus told us to do, when we can't help ourselves,' said Mrs. Marriott. 'When we must be put upon, we are to take it cheerfully, for His sake. If we *can* help it, that mayn't always be the right way. Read on to the 44th verse.'

Davie read, 'Love your enemies, do good to

them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.'

'Do you think it was good for Ned to get off without being punished?' asked Mrs. Marriott.

'No!' exclaimed the two elder children, as if a new light broke upon them. Davie only looked up, puzzled.

'No, it was *not*,' said their mother, her needle flying, in her agitation. 'If it had been George—there, I hope, for the Lord's sake it never could have been! But if it had, I would have prayed on my knees that he might be thrashed *well* for it—thrashed so as he would never forget it. It would be the best thing to happen to him. And the worst—the very worst—would be to get let off. You don't do good to them that hate you by letting them prosper in wickedness—if you can help it. Look in the 18th chapter of Matthew, Davie, and see what it says there.'

Davie read the passage beginning, 'If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone.'

'"Thy brother"—that would mean your equal—someone you could deal with,' said Mrs. Marriott; 'and you are not to put up with anything wrong he does, without trying to stop it. If he won't stop, it doesn't say that it is your place to punish him: you might be very kind to heathen men and

publicans; but you can't make a friend of him or trust him any more, unless he says he is sorry, or does something to show it. We are not to punish our enemies. Over and over it says, "Avenge not yourselves." That is the Lord's work. We couldn't be trusted to do it rightly. But, all the same, we are not to sit down and encourage anyone in doing wrong, *if we can help it.* You can't help it, Davie. It wouldn't be a bit of use your speaking to Ned, —nor to his uncle either, unless he does something against orders that *ought* to be told of. If he does, you tell his uncle of it before his face—not behind his back. But I know just how Mr. Foster would feel about his going off that Saturday. He would think, "It's something between the boys, and I don't know what led up to it: I'd better let it alone." And the way Ned has gone on since, which I call worse—it's nothing to tell about at all. The only thing you can do is to go on doing your best by him, no matter what he does by you.'

'He thinks I do it because I am afraid of him,' said Davie.

'Well, so you have to be,' said Mrs. Marriott sadly. 'He has the upper hand, and he knows it, and so do you. You must just do like a girl I read of in a story. She was a witness in court, and the lawyer examining her asked her a question

that put her blood up so, she would have knocked him down for it rather than answered, if she could. But in a court of justice you *have* to answer: you must. So she just turned her face away from him, and looked up at the judge, that everyone might see she was answering to him, not to that lawyer, and said what she had to say; and it was very well for her that she did! Look away up to the Judge, Davie. It's not His will that Ned should be unkind, but we all see it clear that it *is* His will for you to stop there and suffer it; so, for His sake, you are going to bear it, and do more than you are compelled.'

Again a sense of awe filled Davie's heart. George bent over the Bible, and turning the leaves, read, 'Thou couldest have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above.'

'Ah! and look on a little farther, George,' said Mrs. Marriott.

'I know!' exclaimed Nellie; and she repeated reverently, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'

'Do you think that Ned loves his mother like you love me, Davie?' said Mrs. Marriott, laying her caressing hand again upon his neck.

'No, I know he doesn't,' said Davie energetically. 'She whacks him when he hasn't done anything.'

'That is what Ned says,' said Mrs. Marriott

correctly, 'but we can tell, by his saying it, that he can't feel the same as you do about your home. He didn't know what he did to you. Poor Ned!'

'Ah!' Something between a pitying groan and a triumphant sigh broke from the children.

'Davie wouldn't change with him, would you, old man?' said George.

For answer, Davie proudly drew his mother's hand close round his neck again.

'No, yours are not the worst sort of troubles, after all,' she said fondly. 'You are not the first that has had something to put up with, Davie, and you won't be the last. Many a hard word I have heard said to your father; and he felt them, too; but he would only give a civil answer, and afterwards look round at me in his sly way, and say, "It'll all rub off when it's dry."'

Davie's little face brightened wonderfully, for he remembered his Sunday clothes. His father's name brought to mind the object he worked for, and he asked, 'Will my money always go to pay the debts, mother?'

'That will depend on how we prosper, Davie,' she answered. 'I hope it will, as long as you earn it. But you are only to stay for the summer, you know. You must go to school again in winter, and work hard enough to make up for lost time, or you

will be sorry for it all your life. That's three things I have settled with myself. We are not obliged to pay this money by any particular time, and we won't work for it so as to hurt your future, or hurt our health, or forget our God. And out of every pound we earn, above what I pay out for help, and the rent, we will take sixpence for God. Perhaps we can do a little more after this year; but that we will do from the first, if He prospers us beyond what we *must* spend, to keep going.'

'Do you really think we can do it, mother?' asked George. He could see the difficulties better than the younger children did.

'I can only tell you what someone else did, George,' said his mother. 'I told you the other side, last night. Now hear this. There was a young man left our town owing debts that came to over nine pounds, all together. Some of it was to my father. He had been a bad-living young fellow, and your grandfather said it was what we might have expected. But by and by the Lord changed his heart; and then he remembered the money he owed. I don't know what he was earning then, but I know at one time he had only eighteen shillings a week, and a wife and four children to keep. And yet he saved up nine pounds. It took him years to do it. And he came back and paid up every debt; and then he preached

in the market-place, and all the town turned out to hear him. If he could do that out of his money, we can pay our debts, in times like these, out here, if our health and strength are spared to us, and God prospers us. At any rate, we'll try.'

There was a chorus of 'Yes, mother.'

Then Mrs. Marriott said they must have a story before Tottie went to bed, and George read, from one of the dear old shabby books she had kept, the delightful story of 'The Kind Man who Killed his Neighbour'—of course, with kindness.

Next morning, a happy little boy went jogging out of the town on the top of the coach that passed through the Rakawahi. The clothes in his bundle were all mended, and the wounds in his heart bound up with ointment that was healing and tonic also in its qualities. He had a reason for enduring hardness; he worked for the honour of his father's name. And he was going to try if he could kill Ned.

In this, I am sorry to say, he never succeeded. Ned's ill-will would sometimes appear to have had a death-blow, but it always came to life again. Before the end of the summer, however, Mr. Foster had quite made up his mind which of the two boys was the better worth keeping through the winter, and he offered that Davie should stay on, going to school at Rakawahi. His mother consented, on

condition that he came home for Sunday once a month. Ned came back the following summer; after that, he went 'for good.' We will hope it was so, and that he came to a good end after all. If he did, I am sure he had what was equivalent to sundry good thrashings first. As Luther says, 'Hard heads need sound knocks.'

PART III

THE New Year brought answers from England to the letters telling of Mr. Marriott's death. His wife's relatives were anxious to help her, though their own means were limited. Mails came and went only once in a month, in those days. By the time the return mail left it was evident that a laundry, well managed, ought to be a success. Mrs. Marriott asked her brothers if they could buy the piece of land on which her lean-to stood, letting her pay them five per cent. on the cost as rent for it, with leave to purchase it from them if she became able to do so. This would make her literally 'sure of her ground,' without loss to them.

They consented gladly—bought the lean-to into the bargain, and would take no rent for the first year. By the time Christmas came round again, all the little debts owed to poor people were paid off. Then came a hard struggle. It was

necessary to add to the building, and to employ more helpers, at four or five shillings a day each, and food. Even at that price, good workers were hard to find, for respectable women were in constant demand for washing in ladies' own houses. As time went on, however, good helpers came, one by one. Mrs. Marriott always said that God sent them. Some were widows like herself, or women with sick husbands, and her sympathy in their heavy task attached them to her.

As the third year rolled on, the workers began to ask each other how it was that a woman with a flourishing business like hers still lived so frugally, and never took a pleasure that would cost money. 'You can't say as she scrimps us,' said a candid washerwoman, 'but she do scrimp herself and them children!'

And 'them children' felt it sometimes, when they saw the children of women who came to wash dressed much more smartly than they were, and going out for jaunts and excursions they never thought of taking. They had their moments of sharp mortification; everyone must, who will not spend money as his neighbours do; but locked in the desk their mother had brought out from England was something that made up for it all—a little packet of receipted bills, lying beside the accounts still unpaid.

There are men and women who would gladly renounce or suffer anything to have that word 'Paid' stamped upon their bills, who will never live to see it—borne down by sheer misfortune, or the wrong-doing of others. Let not this story wound their wounds.

At last,—it must have been about the end of the fifth year of her widowhood,—Mrs. Marriott had but one more bill to pay. She had left it to the last, as the sum was large, for her,—nearly twenty pounds,—and the creditor, a corn merchant, was well to do.

Davie was still at Mr. Foster's, and very happy there. He was trusted like a son, and, fortunately for him and her parents, his friend Emmie had embarked on a long engagement which kept her at home. He earned good wages now.

There came a Saturday night when he brought home his month's money, and the family sat round to reckon what they had in hand and what expenses lay before them, and decided that, without imprudence, they could afford the luxury of paying that last bill.

It was a moment they had waited for, prayed for, longed for, all these years; and now, except that their hearts beat fast, there was nothing to mark it. The girls had their sewing in their hands, just as they had on that well-remembered

Christmas Day. George, grown into a fine young man, sat with his account-books open before him; the mother had her desk on her lap, and was looking over the papers in it.

'Yes, we can do it,' she said. 'And you have every one helped towards it.'

'Except me, mother,' said little Rhoda,—the Tottie of former days,—looking up with tears in her eyes. 'I have never earned anything to pay the debts.'

'Oh, but you've helped!' exclaimed her brothers.

The mother put her arm round her. 'My little, good girl,' she said, 'there is no one could have done more than you, for you have done all you could, always. You have run about and helped us all to earn. And it is not only the earning that has done it, either; it was your not fretting to spend all we earned. Oh, I've felt it for you—you know I have!—what you have all had to give up, and *not* to do—and to live plainly and go shabby, that we might do this. I don't think I could have gone through with it, if you had been all coming round me, "Mother, do let us have this," "Mayn't we do that?" or "go there?" I haven't had *that* to bear. We have been of one heart and one mind all through; and if the bigger ones have earned most, Lily and Rhoda have done the most to make

a pleasure of the trouble. You have been our little sunbeams.'

She turned to kiss the little daughter at her side, and said, 'You shall pay this debt, dear—the last. This clears your father's name. Thank God!'

Her voice failed. She had looked forward to this hour, and thought how she would kneel down with the children and thank God for granting the desire of their hearts; and now she could not. She had mastered her grief to lead them in prayer in the time of trouble, but this joy was too much for her; the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving went up from their full hearts unspoken.

The corn merchant sat in his office on Monday afternoon. He had heard incidentally that the Marriotts were paying their debts, but never thought of receiving anything from them himself. He had never sent in his account a second time, simply writing it off as a bad debt when he learned the circumstances of David Marriott's death.

It was a warm afternoon, and the door stood open into the outer office, which was empty, his clerk having gone out. A knock sounded at the outer door, and when he said 'Come in,' in came a little girl in a pink cotton frock, with a well-worn straw hat upon her head.

'And what do you want?' he said kindly.

'Please, mother sent you this,' she answered, putting an envelope into his hand.

The corn merchant opened it, and there was his long-standing account, with notes in full for payment.

It was he who told me the outline of this story, and he said, 'I never shall forget the look of pride on that child's face when she gave me the money.'

That was the last I ever heard of the family. I have often longed to know what has become of them all since.

A NEW ZEALAND COURTSHIP

A THICK, drizzling rain was falling over the Canterbury plains. It does sometimes drizzle there, in July and August; though, as a rule, when it does not rain outright in that part of New Zealand, it shines; and when it rains, it 'pays attention to it,' as the Irishman said.

Sallie Chuckers stood in the back entry, with a great pitcher in her hand, looking towards one of the outhouses, whence sounds of hammering proceeded. Ducks waddled along the green slope before her, enjoying the rain.

'It's as wet as wet!' she said, not agreeing with them. But no one else coming in sight, she caught up her calico skirts, and ran down to the well to fill her pitcher for dinner. She had reached the back verandah again, when a man, roughly clad,

but with a fine, well-knit frame and pleasant face, came striding after her.

'There now, Sallie, why didn't 'ee wait for me to do that for you? You might as well ha',' he said, in a tone of fond reproach that brightened the colour in her sunburned cheeks.

Sallie was a plain girl, with a round, plump face all freckled and burned, bluish-grey eyes, and brown hair and eyebrows neither light nor dark. Her mouth was wide, her nose insignificant, and her hands almost as rough as nutmeg-graters and as red as tomatoes. But she had a broad, smooth forehead, with no lumpy 'fringe' to hide it; and when her eyes met John's, he thought (and it was true) that never lass need give a nicer look. That was worth a great deal more than being only nice-looking. There was a shadow, though, to-day, in her honest eyes. She looked ready to cry.

'Why, what's the matter?' he asked. 'Have you got wet?'

'It's you who are wet, John,' she answered. 'Look at your sleeves! Won't you come in to the fire, for once?'

'No, no, thank you,' said John, smiling. 'That's coming it *rather* too strong, my girl.'

Sallie had lived with her uncle and aunt ever since she was left an orphan at twelve years old. She had to work harder than most servants do,

even on colonial farms, and had less money than she could have commanded in almost any other house in the township where a servant was kept—for her worth was known. But she never complained of that. What she did mind was that when her John came carpentering on the premises, she might never ask him in to dinner. Sometimes, as a great favour, she was allowed to carry him out a cup of tea in the back verandah; but John did not like that. He would never have swallowed a drop of old Chuckers' tea, but for his regard for the feelings of Sallie, and of the good old auntie who could hardly be restrained from feeding him on the sly.

He and Sallie had been engaged four years; and it speaks something for their honour that, in spite of all Chuckers' unreasonableness, they never had done anything on the sly. They had their little talks in the back regions, of course; but John took care to come in audibly and make a noise when he went out. The four years had been a happy time. Young lovers full of hope, who waste no energy in doubting one another, can put up with a good deal from other people. And although their conduct appeared to make no impression on the churlish uncle, it had raised them high in the esteem of all their friends and neighbours. They had been respected from their youth

up, for hard work and dutifulness; now, they were admired.

John was a good-tempered fellow, and cared very little for Chuckers' rudeness on his own account; but he felt it for Sallie. There was so much he wanted to do for her, and he could not! He lived himself in a happy home, with a dear old mother, and a tribe of loving brothers and sisters whom he had fathered tenderly ever since his father died. He was king of the castle there; and Sallie slaved on, up at Chuckers'!

She knew that he felt it, and generally contrived to keep a very cheerful face for him. But when she saw him wet and cold, and he was too proud to go in and dry himself, when the dinner he would not be asked to taste was on the table, something choked her. The tears stood in her eyes.

'Why, bless the girl, what is there to fret about?' said John.

'Uncle's so nasty to you,' said Sallie.

'Well, if he is—I ain't married to him,' said John independently. 'No more are you. Look ye here, Sallie,'—by this time he had her comfortably in his strong arms, and he made her lift up her face,—'you've only got to say the word, and before this time next year you shall be mistress instead of maid.'

'Oh, John, no. We shan't have enough,'

exclaimed Sallie, very red and fluttered, and hiding her face again.

'Bless you, how much are you going to want?' asked John. 'I didn't know you had such an eye to the main chance.'

'Oh, John! You know I only meant not enough for your mother too,' said Sallie quickly.

'Now you don't think I haven't counted for that,' began John; but a harsh voice called from within—

'Sall, how much longer'll you be drawin' that water?'

Sallie sprang from her lover, seized her jug and hurried into the front room, spilling a little water on the way, for her hands shook. The dinner was but just taken up, she knew, for till the last two minutes she had been watching for the sound of its coming off the fire; but Chuckers was not likely to lose the chance of finding fault with her.

'That's the way,' he said gruffly. 'Get a young man in to do anything, and you get no more out of the girls. They're good for nothing but to run after *him*. What have you splashed all that wet for? Your eyes were in the back of your head, looking behind you.'

Sallie grew scarlet, between her modesty and her indignation; but her heart bounded up with a silent defiance. 'This time next year, John will be my master, not you,' she thought.

She wiped the floor, and sat down to dinner. It was a very nice dinner—thick mutton steak, fresh from the fire, and bountiful heaps of good floury potatoes and winter greens. The fire burned brightly. John must have had a waft of the warmth and the nice smell of dinner as the door opened and shut—and there he was, eating his dry, cold bit of bread and mutton, out in the scullery! But again her heart beat fast to think, 'Only next year, and he will be my master, and I shall get dinner for him.'

John had not heard Chuckers' insulting speech, for Sallie shut the door; but he heard the sound of the gruff voice, and heard it again during the meal; and each time he thought triumphantly, 'Before a year's out, she shall be mistress instead of maid.'

The Rakawahi, where Chuckers lived, was a district of small farms and scattered cottages, interspersed with tracts of waste land and swamp. The high-road which crossed the swamp ran past the boundary of his farm: the 'lot' behind his belonged to Mrs. Harkiss, John's mother. She had been left a widow with seven children when John, the eldest, was only sixteen, and serving his time to a carpenter. His master let him off in the busy season for farm work; at other times he worked

on the land before and after he went to work at his trade. All the children did their share. When their father died, there was still a heavy sum to pay up on the land he had taken. Within eight years that was cleared off, the farm well stocked, with good buildings and a cosy dwelling-house, and the second son, six years younger than John, was old enough to take charge, under his mother. Then Mrs. Harkiss and John thought it was time for him to think about doing his duty by Sallie.

Those were times of depression in New Zealand, and great men were failing on all sides; but the little men held on their way—married, and wanted houses for themselves and their stock—all of wood, in that land of slight shocks of earthquake, where brick or stone houses are liable to be irretrievably damaged at any moment. A carpenter who could put in such a day's work as John Harkiss did, never wanted for employment with high pay. In two years, John had saved enough to build a house for himself, and leave a nice little sum behind in the bank. The farm was thriving in his two young brothers' hands. One of his sisters was well married—the others honourably employed at home or abroad; and all agreed that John ought to take his seventh part of their sixty-acre lot, and settle as fast as he could.

The soil of the district bordering the swamp in

Rakawahi is among the richest in the world. The country is so flat that a rise of two or three hundred feet puts you in a position to shake hands with every wind that blows, and gives quite an extended view over the long Canterbury plains—once treeless, now dotted all over with rows and clusters of English or Australian trees. On such an eminence John meant to build.

He took Sallie to the spot on Sunday afternoon, and told her his plans, sitting on the wood he had had carted there already, for fencing. They were both teachers in the Sunday school of the Methodist chapel which was the only place of worship in Rakawahi; but once a month someone gave an address to the whole school, and if they chose, they could take a holiday. When first they were engaged, they had been sorely tempted to give up their classes. Sallie's time out in the afternoon only just allowed of hurrying to school as fast as she could, and back again, without a moment for lingering along the way. But teachers were hard to find; there was no one to take their place; so they stayed on; and from that time they began to see the first little tokens of real impression made on their discouraging pupils. Whether the boys and girls had sentiment enough to appreciate the sacrifice—whether the teachers improved one another—or whether it was simply that God blessed

their faithfulness—there was a difference. The seed, patiently sown, began to find a lodgement in two or three young hearts, and the interest, once roused, spread through each class. Now, both to John and Sallie, it would have been more a sacrifice to give up teaching than to go on; and their work had one advantage they had not thought of—all these long years they had never worn out each other's subjects of conversation. There was always something fresh to talk over, either in their lessons or their pupils, to save them from all temptation to spend their time in harping on Uncle Chuckers' disagreeable ways.

John had been counting on this monthly holiday. He had made up his mind to have an understanding with Sallie then, and their little talk at the back door had led up to it unexpectedly. He explained to her, now, how he could make time to get forward with the fencing, and dig the foundation, before the next busy season; then, as soon as harvest was over, he could be ready to build. And then—while the winter evenings were long and cosy still, he wanted her to come and 'missus it' over him and all he had.

She sat by him in the warm winter sunshine, looking away to the great Port Hills that shut the plain from the sea, and felt what wonderful joy it would be to see her own little home rise up in

this dear place, and to have a right to live for John.

'Well—if you think I know how to keep house to your mind by this time,' she said demurely.

John's heart was so brim full, for once it very nearly ran over. Words did not come easily to him, but he *could* have told her, then, what he felt about her hardships and her patience—her cheerful, never-failing patience. But, just as he was opening his mouth, she said, 'John, what is the time by your watch?' And when, reluctantly, he showed it, she started up, exclaiming, 'I must cut along, or auntie will catch it as well as me.' She had nine cows to milk and all sorts of things to do besides, before evening chapel.'

'Then all the sweet speech he had fashioned took flight,' for he must be a desperate lover who could manage to pour out tender words while striding along, post haste, over rough tussocks, beside a sweetheart with nine cows on her mind. No matter. His chance was coming to let actions speak louder than words.

The still, bright, winter days flew by—days of clear sunshine and frosty nights. Rain came sometimes—as much as was wanted. The days lengthened out again, and the gorse hedges were a blaze of gold. Spring and summer were hurrying

upon the land, with all their toils,—shearing and haying, and harvest, and all the men to feed. Sallie's heart had been wont to sink a little when the leaves came on the trees, and she knew what a load of work and scolding would descend on her before they dropped off again. This year, she sang for joy to see them. One summer—only one—and John would be her master! Let it come—quick, quick; and let it go—and then!

She had never worked so fast in her life: she wanted to do well by her uncle this last year. Chuckers had no power to stop the wedding. He could have helped the young people very much if he had chosen, but he could not hinder them; they could do without him. The one reason for being very anxious to keep the peace with him was 'auntie.' Poor, dear auntie, she would fret for Sallie. And she would never get another girl to work as hard for her, for the money. Sallie knew that, and felt what an awful thing it was to be married to Timothy Chuckers.

The shearers came—not for long, happily, with Chuckers' little bit of shearing; but you never saw anything like their appetites! And one of them grumbled at his food all the time, and that would have taken the heart out of Sallie, if anything could. She did not mind slaving if they were content, and said the meals were good; but one

grumbler is like a sickly sheep, and 'infects the flock.' Many a cry had the poor girl had, in bygone years, on those driving days of work, when every nerve was strained to the utmost from early morning till the short night, and someone grumbled after all. This year she was vexed; she could not help that; but the men were not worth crying for.

Shearing would be over before Christmas, and Sallie was to sing in the chorus at an entertainment in the schoolroom on Christmas Eve. Those wonderfully energetic colonials find strength to do a sixteen-hour day's work, and hold entertainments besides. The show-piece was to be 'The Psalm of Life,' and Sallie sang snatches as she dressed in the morning—ran down to the well for water, and came up across the dewy grass, singing at the top of her voice—

> 'And our hearts, though stout and brave,
> Still, like muffled drums, are beating
> Funeral marches to the grave.'

She cooked the breakfast, and ran out to feed the fowls; came back to all that scene of breakfast things, which she washed up like magic. Then out she scampered again to cut cabbages for dinner, and came skipping back with her arms full, singing away—

> 'Funeral marches to the grave.'

She was in reality attending the funerals of all

her old bugbears: no wonder the 'Dead March' went merrily. Every hard pull accomplished was the last of its kind. 'De last one he come again, Hurrah! de last one,' as the coolies sing when they are unloading cargo, and the last bag of rice comes up.

She would probably have to work just as hard another year, but not on the same terms.

Only one shadow sometimes flitted over her sunny heart. Long ago, long before John came to be her sunshine, a glory had shone across her rigorous daily lot, with the thought that her faithful service to her hard uncle was rendered to a higher Taskmaster. But now that her heart was always throbbing and dancing to the music of that sweet burden, 'John will be my master,' the other, higher thought seemed less needful; it slipped out of mind.

'And it's so mean,' she thought, 'just when He is giving us so much.'

At last, one evening, in the little break before harvest, Laura Wren, who used to be her teacher, came to see her. They walked across the 'paddocks,' as the great colonial meadows are called, to look at the site of the new house, and Sallie's fear found utterance.

'But would you *like* John to be your master if

you thought he would ever want you not to serve the great Master?' said Laura.

Such a state of things was quite beyond Sallie's imagination. She paused, trying to realise it.

'Would you ever have had him if he was likely to do that?' continued Laura.

Sallie was quite puzzled; the idea that she ever could have refused John was so utterly inconceivable. Suddenly her face brightened.

'There wouldn't have been him to have,' she said.

'Of course there wouldn't,' said Laura, amused. 'He wouldn't be John if he did not serve that Master; and when either of you wants to please the other, you have to think first what would please the Lord.'

That was perfectly true, though Sallie had never recognised the fact before. It made her very happy to do so now.

They had reached the brow of the little slope, with its fine view of the Port Hills on one side and the wide, broken plain on the other. The garden fence was up already, and some of the beds marked out.

'There'll be a lot to do,' remarked Sallie, as she leaned on the fence, looking at the unmade garden. 'But you see,—I shan't mind *anything*; and sometimes that makes me quite afraid.'

'Why, Sallie,' said Laura, 'one would think your God was a very cross Master, who grudged giving you anything pleasant to do.'

'No, I never thought that,' exclaimed Sallie eagerly. 'When uncle used to call,—he always did if I was stopping a minute to speak to John, —I used to run, and think of that verse you said to us, "How sweetly doth 'My Master' sound—My Master!" I never thought *He* was hard.'

'And now you have only one word to change,' said Laura gently.

'How sweetly doth *our* Master sound—our Master!
As ambergris yields a rich scent
Unto the taster,
So do those words a sweet content,
An Oriental fragrancy—our Master.'

A beautiful light came into Sallie's little rough face, glorifying it as the sunset flush was glorifying the dismal yellow-grey of those Port Hills. 'A sweet content' indeed was in her eyes.

'I shan't be afraid any more,' was all she said. Perhaps in her heart she recognised that John's way of being masterful was more agreeable to the Great Taskmaster than her uncle's.

Harvest was nearly over—quite over, on Chuckers' land. The extra hands had gone, and Sallie and her aunt could take breath at last, and

think about the wedding clothes. Sallie had done a little sewing for herself in the winter; but in a land where silverfish devour cotton goods as much as moths do woollen ones, it is discouraging to get very forward with one's trousseau.

The rough summer winds were dying down, leaving a foretaste of the glorious Canterbury autumn weather—warm, cloudless, windless days, with peaches hanging ripe on the trees, and 'red-hot pokers' blazing in the flower-beds. One day, Sallie went through her morning work with great despatch, and set off directly after dinner, leaving auntie to wash up, for a walk of nearly four miles and back, to see a dressmaker who lived in another part of Rakawahi. The 'Frisco' mail was just in, and was sure to have brought Miss Hill the newest fashions. Sallie had no intention of being made such a guy as the ladies in the fashion-plates, but your true colonial girl likes to be up to date all round. If she is going to have a new gown at all, it may as well be moderately in the fashion.

Sallie had a hot walk, past the chapel, and a mile and a half beyond, to where the road passed by Mr. Wren's farm. The house stood back a long way, but as she plodded on she thought she would treat herself to going up there on her way home.

A light cart came jingling towards her. A

well-known voice called 'Hi!' and there was John, pulling up his horse and jumping down to greet her.

Here *was* felicity—to meet by surprise, far out of sight and sound of anybody who could call them up to work! They sat on the grass at the roadside, and could hardly have torn themselves away, if the horse had not been so fidgety. He grew tired of standing, and there was no convenient place for tying him up. John had to start up and run after him at last, and jumped in while the cart was moving on.

How it happened, Sallie never understood. She only knew that one minute John was standing in the cart, looking back and waving his hand to her: the next, he lay full length on the ground, still, senseless, deathlike, and never moved nor spoke, nor even moaned.

'John, John!' she cried in her agony. The closed eyelids never stirred; there was not a quiver on the face. How strange he looked!

'*John!*'

Sallie had no experience of illness, but she had heard of feeling the pulse. She seized his wrist, and a throb of life came back to her own poor heart, for she found a flutter there. He lived!

But how much longer would he live, if no one helped him? And how leave him there alone to

look for help? The horse and cart were far down the road already. Not a soul had Sallie met along that lonely way. The only living creature to be seen was a pony putting his head through a gap in the gorse hedge, attracted there, probably, by the company of the horse now running away. Oh, if one human being—anyone!—would come in sight! The straight, level road stretched far on either side, white and empty. The only hope was that someone might meet the runaway horse, and follow up its track.

Suddenly the pony pricked up his ears—tossed his head and disappeared, his gallop dying away on the turf. Someone must have called him.

Quick as the thought, Sallie was scrambling up the steep bank under the hedge—not by the pony's gap,—that was too difficult of approach,—but near it. The hedge was higher than she thought: she could not look over it.

'Help! Coo-eh!' she called. She pushed herself under the prickly gorse, and looking between the stems, saw, at the farthest corner of the great paddock, a little old lady in black, holding out something to the pony over the slip-panels. Sallie's heart sank. That must be Mrs. Wren, and she was almost stone deaf.

But she might see. Oh, that thick gorse! The close-twined stems barred the way. With frantic

efforts, Sallie forced herself into the hedge, but through, she could not. She tore off her hat, pushed it through an opening, and shook it wildly, uttering involuntarily a long, piercing, agonised cry. The deaf ears heard it not, but the pony did. He turned from the tempting apple offered to him, and looked curiously across the field.

'Sirrah! Little Sirrah! What is it?' said Mrs. Wren, surprised. The creature came up to her again—turned, with an anxious whinny which she saw, though she could not hear, and moved off towards Sallie, looking on, and then looking back beseechingly at his mistress. Her eyes followed his, and she saw the signal.

She was an investigating little body at all times, and she at once divined that something serious must be happening now. In two moments she had come over the six panels like a schoolboy, and was hurrying across the paddock, the pony beside her, trying to put his nose into her can, now that his mind was relieved by seeing matters in proper train.

Sallie, wedged among the gorse stems, looked from the approaching figures to John's prostrate form, and back, wondering how she could make Mrs. Wren understand.

The little old lady made straight for the signal knelt down and pushed aside the boughs, grasping the outstretched wrist.

'What, *Sallie*!' she said, peering through the stems. 'What is it?'

Sallie could not get near enough to answer, for Mrs. Wren could hear nothing that was not shouted close into her ear; but she managed to reach the old lady's head with her hand, and turn it towards the spot where John was lying.

'Ah!' sighed Mrs. Wren. Then, as the bearded, foreshortened face grew clearer to her, with a cry she uttered, 'John! Not John? Oh, my dear, is it?'

Sallie's clutch at her hand replied. She loosed it, starting back, and ran to the pony's gap.

'You can't! You can't get down there!' shouted Sallie, as though shouts were of any use. By a desperate struggle she freed herself from the hedge, and emerged, holding by the stem, just in time so see the little old lady tumble neatly over the low place, and land, somehow, safely upon her feet below. She hastened across the road to John's side. Sallie scrambled heavily down and followed her, a little relieved by this kind human presence, but in cruel fear of the verdict she might have to give.

Mrs. Wren bent over John, and felt his head, his hands, his pulse. She looked up, distressed, but not despairing.

'We must get him out of the sun,' she said.

'We can't. We should hurt him,' shouted Sallie into her ear.

'Then break off some furze,' said Mrs. Wren. Sallie obeyed, and they twisted the boughs into a screen.

'Hold it, dear, while I fetch some water,' said Mrs. Wren. A brook flowed near, and she took the can which she had not failed to empty at Sirrah's feet, and filled it with cool, fresh water.

'*Could* you leave him with me, and go for the doctor?' she asked, returning. 'Dr. Grant is in the township this afternoon, at the Smallmans'. You might catch him. I'm afraid I couldn't.'

Nimble though she was, she knew that her sixty-eight years would tell against her in such a rush. Sallie knew it too, though it was terrible to her to leave the spot.

'Yes, I will go,' she answered.

One moment yet she knelt by her lover's side.

'John,' she said pleadingly.

There was no answer—no glimmer of response in the strange, livid face. Sallie bent down and kissed his unconscious brow; then she rose, and girded her soul to leave him.

'I won't be long,' she said.

Mrs. Wren opened her arms, and drew the girl close to her for one loving kiss.

'The Lord make your feet like hinds' feet,' she said. 'He will.'

Then Sallie speeded on her breathless chase, and the watcher and the watched were left together, with Death, a third, beside them. How near he might be the little old lady could not tell, but she knew he could not be far off; and she was going to fight him hand to hand.

She first loosened everything in her patient's clothing which could cause pressure. She made a wet compress of her handkerchief and a little woollen kerchief she wore, and wrapped it round his head; she tore grass from the tussocks, and made a pillow of it. Then she piled up her furzy screen till it stood alone, sheltering him from the sun. His feet were beyond the shadow —she took care of that; and sitting on the ground beside him, she took off his boots and chafed his feet and hands by turns—her eyes all the time intent upon his face—her heart borne up in one consuming prayer.

She was not asking for his life. She had seen the life-light fade out of her own son's eyes, and never asked to keep him; she said he was wanted 'up Above.' And now, if John was wanted up Above, there was not a word to say: Sallie and everyone else must give him up. But, with an agony that only the deaf can know, she cried,

'If he speaks—if his last word comes to me—let me know it by the moving of his lips.'

There was one word that she was quite certain she would know—it was 'Mother.' But would she know 'Sallie'? or the Name that is above every name? Again and again she framed those words, with her fingers at her own lips, trying to feel how they would look. Then she would bend forward and feel the pulse. It was just perceptible; so was the breathing. Once or twice a longer breath made her heart stand still, lest it should be the last. She had torn a scrap of thin paper from an English letter in her pocket, and fixed it so that it moved a little as he breathed. Each time, the slight, almost invisible motion went on again, and she thanked God.

It was very solemn, waiting there, with Death and the angels. If they would but be content with her instead of John! The glory had died out of life for her when sweet sound went; she longed to go, and have those deaf ears opened to the singing 'up Above.' She and her dear man had had their day together; it would be so natural for one of them to go! But oh, what an emptiness would be left if this dear laddie died! 'Would God I might die for thee! Would God! But He knows who He wants. I am not worth enough, maybe.'

The breeze rustled through the gorse; cattle lowed in the pastures near. She sat there, in the great silence that her calamity had shed around her, and two scenes were before her eyes—Jesus weeping at the grave of Lazarus: Jesus sighing as He said, 'Ephphatha' to the deaf ears. There was nothing more to weep or sigh for, in the griefs before Him. From them, He brought complete deliverance. Surely He was burdened then, with the grief of other weepers beside young lives struck down—other sufferers, bearing the long, lone silence of the unhearing ear.

'Ephphatha!' 'Be opened to Me!' Once more His voice pierced the silence, and told that He watched with her. He would never have appointed her this task, if John was to perish for want of any help that she would not hear how to give.

She bent over her charge again, and dipped the handkerchief afresh, laying it on with soft caressing touches on his thick brown hair. How strong his frame! How good and trusty he always used to look! Ah, Sallie! And his mother. But she had other sons. John was all in all to Sallie.

'Lord, remember Sallie. Remember Sallie!' she pleaded, her tears trickling down on John's beard. She wiped them away, and sat down once more to her patient watch.

She had had eyes only for John, and the road by which the doctor was likely to come; but looking round she saw her pony standing by the hedge, with his nose just above the prickles, intently watching her.

'Good Sirrah. Dear little fellow,' she said. It was quite a comfort to have one live thing near that could hear; and the company of dumb creatures is pleasant to the deaf. There is nothing to lose in a conversation with them.

Sirrah's name was Sir George Grey, but his coat being brown, he could not take his surname alone, and the whole name was too long for practical purposes—hence the contraction.

The sun moved round; the shadows lengthened and stole over the two figures at the roadside. Mrs. Wren began to think that Sallie must have missed the doctor at the Smallmans'.

She had. She rushed and panted across the fields, only to find that he had left ten minutes before she arrived. But he had mentioned that he was going on to the Lawsons' on the Christchurch road. The Smallmans had a sick house, and there was no one whom they could send on after him, but they saddled their pony and put Sallie on it, in hopes that she might overtake him.

She was as little used to riding as a colonial country girl ever can be, and in the hurry she

went off without a whip. The pony was not a bad beast, but he was accustomed to a touch of the whip as an intimation that he was to quicken his pace, and without it he subsided into a slow, deliberate walk, which put her in an agony. She clapped him, she implored him — in vain. In desperation, she struck him smartly with the ends of the reins. The pony, mortally affronted, set off at a gallop, merging into a rough, rapid trot. Sallie, breathless and shaken to pieces, flying into the air, and continually astonished to find herself duly bumped down on the saddle again, yet saw with infinite relief that every object near was rushing past her: she was clearing the road.

The Lawsons' house came in sight, a gig standing at the gate. The road sloped up a little, and the pony slackened his pace. A man came out of the gate and jumped into the gig.

'Stop! Help! Dr. Gra-ah-ahnt!' shrieked Sallie, at her highest pitch. The wind blew the sound the wrong way. Once more she tore off her hat and waved it frantically, at all risks of being thrown from her steed in the act. The doctor did not see—he was driving rapidly off and round the corner—but someone else did. Sallie saw a figure start above the farther wall of the garden, gesticulating. The doctor's hat, just seen over the wall,

stopped, turned, and came swiftly round the corner again. She had him.

Then, for the first time, her strength gave way. She slipped off the pony at Mrs. Lawson's gate, in such a fit of sobbing that she could not speak.

'Now, now—this won't do,' said Dr. Grant sharply. 'Tell me who it is, and where, and never mind the rest. Get her some water,' he added in a quick parenthesis, to the Lawson boy who had brought him back.

'John—Harkiss. In the road—by Wren's,' gasped Sallie!

'Oh, doctor, it's her young man!' exclaimed Mrs. Lawson, holding up her hands. 'Oh, Sallie——dear Sallie!'

Dr. Grant waited only for the water. He dashed some of it in Sallie's face, and made her drink the rest. 'Now jump up, and don't try to speak a word unless I go the wrong way,' he said. 'Don't be frightened. I shouldn't wonder if you find him walking about by the time we get there.'

'Whose pony is it?' shouted the Lawson boy, as they drove off.

'Smallman's,' answered Sallie; and a voice called after her, 'We'll take him back.'

The doctor's professional tone had quieted her already. She leaned back, trembling, indeed, but with the sudden, wonderful sense of rest and hope

that comes to the ignorant with the feeling that one who knows is taking their case in hand. She tried to put away that terrible vision of John lying helpless in the road. Naturally her thoughts went back to what had come before, and with that, tears —her first tears—began to flow, and the scorching horror in her brain was allayed. Only, as the dark spot became visible, far down the straight white road, her heart beat suffocatingly. There were more figures—men standing—oh, could it be John? No, a figure moved, and she saw still the prostrate form, and the little old lady by its side. The first sight of Mrs. Wren's face told that John lived still.

'Here we are,' said the doctor, leaping down. He made his examination, Mrs. Wren telling him all she knew, and Sallie, kneeling at John's side with his nerveless hand in hers, putting in a few words.

'It's a nasty business, but I don't see why he shouldn't pull through,' was Dr. Grant's verdict. He shouted it into Mrs. Wren's ear, and added, 'You couldn't have done better for him. Nobody could. I hope you have saved his life.' Then turning to the two men standing by, he added, 'How about getting him home?'

Mr. Wren and his son had come in to tea, and found none prepared—no fire, no kettle on.

Inquiring, they found that the mistress had been seen, hours before, going down the paddocks to feed her pony. In some alarm they went in search of her, and faithful Sirrah by the hedge had guided them to the right spot. They hastened back to fetch their buggy—a vehicle something like a magnified butcher's cart on springs, with a seat set in notches across the middle of it, and room, when the back was let down on its chain, for a man to lie almost full length in the bottom. The seat was lifted out while John's tall form was cautiously laid there, Sallie sitting beside him with his head on her lap. Then young Wren drove him gently home, the doctor pushing on to prepare Mrs. Harkiss. He spoke cheerfully, but he sorely feared that John would die upon the way.

They brought him home living, but still unconscious. Many hours passed. The doctor had been away and come back again, before John slowly opened his eyes and met his sweetheart's agonised look.

'Why, Sallie? What's the matter?' he asked. His eyes shut again before the answer came; but his hand closed firmly over hers, and Dr. Grant said, 'He'll *do*.'

And so it proved. The wedding was delayed for a couple of months, but when it took place

John was as well as ever again. Uncle Chuckers let his wife buy a new gown for the occasion, and presented Sally with one of the nine cows.

'All along o' my broken head,' said John.

He had discovered during his convalescence that Mrs. Wren could hear his voice better than almost any other—much better than her husband's; and when he was able to go to chapel again, he used to sit next to her, and make her hear the hymns. She was at the wedding, of course, in a front place; and when the knot was tied and the ring put on, and a hymn was given out, John stepped from his place beside his bride—took the little old lady's book, and sang his wedding hymn into her ear.

IN SEARCH OF CONQUEST

CHAPTER I

MRS. HARKISS sat by the kitchen window, making buttonholes in the body of a pretty brown dress, spun from New Zealand wool. Warm weather had lingered late, and she had on her summer afternoon dress of grey linen, with a black ribbon in her white cap. She could not go on wearing her widow's garb of black, except on state occasions—black dresses spoil too quickly on the dusty Canterbury plains, under the glowing sun of New Zealand. She liked a washing grey, and she wore it with a certain air, as a woman may, who has come out victorious from the struggle of widowhood with seven children and a mortgage on the farm, beholden to no one but herself and

her own brave sons and daughters. She had received a great deal of neighbourly kindness by the way, and had been able to return it handsomely. And now that the farm was free, and her younger sons grown into fine young fellows, able to work it without keeping John from his trade—although times in the colony were very different from the times of twenty-five years ago, and the average struggle of life had increased, she had a pleasing sense of being even with the world—able to pay her way comfortably—to have the working-party in her turn, and take a table (which means, in the colonies, to supply it) at school and chapel tea-meetings.

Her spirits were higher than usual this afternoon, because Madge, her second daughter, was at home, and they were all busy dressmaking for Annie, the eldest, who was happily married to a tradesman in Christchurch. Madge had been 'out' for eight years, and had had only two situations in all the time. She had just left the second, and was feasting on all the delights of home.

'You can't call it holiday exactly, if you set us all up with dresses,' said Cherry, a bright girl of sixteen, with merry dark eyes, and lilies and roses which had resisted abundant exposure to sun and wind. She was working the machine while her sister cut out and tacked.

'It all seems like holiday here,' said Madge, 'when we work together. Somehow, at home the work always seems to get through, and leave a bit of time over for doing what we like.'

'Well, dear, suppose you stay here, since you like it so well,' said her mother. 'I am sure the boys would have no objection, nor Cherry either,' and Cherry chimed in with enthusiasm.

'It seems lazy, rather, for two of us to be at home, living on the boys,' said Madge.

'You earn your keep; it all comes off the farm, nearly,' said Mrs. Harkiss; 'and you could dressmake for friends to make a little for yourself.'

Here her cheerful face grew brighter still, for her firstborn came in sight. John had been settled in his own corner of the farm with his little wife for nearly six months.

'Well, mother, what's wrong?' he asked, stopping outside the window; for she had sent him word that she wanted the carpenter.

'Something out here,' she answered, rising and turning towards the back regions.

'How is Sallie?' asked Madge.

A shadow came over John's good-tempered face. 'Not as well as she might be,' he answered. 'I did think she would have done with old Crump' (his name for her uncle Chuckers) 'when I got her home; but no—as long as he can worry auntie

he can worry Sallie. Their girl has left again; they will never get one to stay; and there's Sallie, instead of sitting down to rest when her own work's done, going over to help auntie, till she is done up altogether. It'll be the death of her, I believe.'

Madge looked up startled, for John's voice quite shook. It was so unlike him to make a trouble of anything; she hardly ever remembered seeing such a look of distress upon his face.

'Why do you let her, John?' exclaimed Cherry. 'Sallie was always talking about your being her master, before you were married, but really I don't see it at all now.'

'Well, I like a girl to have her own way in reason,' said John. 'Don't you think you will want yours, when you get married, Miss Cherry?'

'Only when I was right,' said Cherry; at which they all burst out laughing.

'You may laugh,' she persisted stoutly. 'I say a man wouldn't be worth having at all if he couldn't make me knuckle down when I was in the wrong.'

'And when would that be?' asked John. 'When is Cherry in the wrong, Madge, by her own account?'

They laughed again, but John saw Cherry colour up, and said kindly, 'And what's odd, I

think she mostly *is* right, when her mind's made up.'

He went round the verandah to meet his mother at the back, and did not return. Mrs. Harkiss came in, looking very grave.

'I'm afraid it's serious about Sallie,' she said. 'John says it's the shock she had with his accident, and the worry and work all those years, are telling upon her now. It's not that she wouldn't stop at home if he made her, but he is afraid the fretting would hurt her more than going. She has got auntie on her mind; that's the way it has taken her, and she doesn't seem able to help it.'

'But how silly of her, when she knows she oughtn't to,' said Cherry; and Madge added, as her mother left the room, 'It comes hard upon John.'

'I should think it did,' said Cherry indignantly. 'The fact is, John is too much married, and Sallie isn't married enough.' And they sat working on, and talked over poor Sallie's errors of judgment, and the various ways in which she had shown a want of strength of mind, as even affectionate relatives sometimes will, especially when two branches of one family are established in opposite corners of a sixty-acre lot.

'Is Sallie down at Chuckers' now?' asked Madge, when their mother returned.

'No; she promised John she would stay quiet this afternoon,' said Mrs. Harkiss, 'but he knew he would find her quite in a way when he got home. I said I would go over and talk to her, but I've just remembered Mrs. Smallman was telling me of a girl she knew over at Riccarton, wanting to go out, and I should do more good going to see if I could get her for Mrs. Chuckers.'

'Then I'll go to Sallie. You don't want any more machine-work yet, do you, Madge?' said Cherry, jumping up in some compunction, as she thought of John's kind word.

She went by the road, and on her way met her old deaf friend, Mrs. Wren, who stopped to make inquiries. Cherry had the family gift of clear utterance, and soon made the little old lady understand that Sallie was very naughty, and hurting herself with fretting over auntie's troubles.

'Ah, dear, don't blame her for that, if you want to be cared for yourself when you grow old and weak,' said Mrs. Wren. 'It's harder to go off the stage with a grace than to come on, Cherry. We want good children and grandchildren to help us do it. And the worst of all is to be left standing on the stage with a part too hard for one. That's poor auntie now; and she has been like a mother to Sallie.'

Cherry looked impressed, but walked on, still

full of virtuous sentiments which she was going to bring out for her sister's benefit. But when she arrived, and found good, patient Sallie crying in her low chair, she forgot them all, and only came behind and put her arms round her neck, saying, 'Why, Sallie, what's the matter?'

The answer was not quite what she had expected. A certain doctor, after investigating a case of nervous breakdown, remarked, 'The bottom of it all is conscience.' Conscience had taken aim at Sallie's overwrought nerves, with her aunt and her husband both in its quiver, and it was hard to say which rankled most. She was distracted to find that John's commands could ever contradict her sense of duty.

'Suppose he knows best?' said Cherry archly; but she found she must leave the arguments on that side to her mother. Sallie firmly believed that John was infallible, whenever he had full materials for judgment; but in this case she did not think he had, and persisted, 'He doesn't know. Nobody can, that hasn't lived there.'

'Suppose I go and see,' said Cherry. 'Then I could help auntie a bit, and tell her that mother has gone to see about getting her a girl.'

To do her justice, this was not the first time that Cherry had made a similar proposal, but John had always set his foot upon it.

'No, no,' he said. 'If you once begin that, there'll be no end. You're not to slave for old Crump for nothing, when he has lots of tin to pay with; and you *shan't* take his money for it.'

This time, however, Cherry felt that an exception must be made, for once; and having set out vigorously determined to preach the subjection of wives, she next found herself marching off to 'auntie's,' in flat disobedience to the lord of this corner of creation.

As she went in at the gate, Chuckers came out of the front door, and banged it behind him.

'How do you do, Mr. Chuckers?' said Cherry. 'Is auntie at home?'

'Yes,' in his surly voice, without an offer to show her in.

'Can I go in and see her?'

'No.'

'Is anything the matter?' asked Cherry bravely.

'The matter is, if you want to know, she's up to her eyes in washing, and you'd better keep clear on it,' and Chuckers walked away.

Cherry stood still till he was out of sight, round the house, and then walked round the other side to the back, where Mrs. Chuckers stood in her little wash-house, washing and sighing. Half-past three on a Thursday afternoon, and washing still!

'Why, auntie, you *are* busy,' said Cherry, looking in.

'Oh, my dear, I think I must give up!' said Mrs. Chuckers. 'Nineteen cows in milk, and I did them all this morning. I said I would, if Jupp might do it all this afternoon, and give me a chance to get through with the washing. He don't come soon enough to do them all in a morning. And here I'm not done, and it'll be dark before I could get the things out; and I did want 'em dry to-morrow, to be ironing.'

'Oh, there's time for them to dry a lot, now, this hot day,' said Cherry. 'I'll hang them out.'

She turned up her sleeves, pinned up her afternoon dress, and seized the basket full of clothes. Wet linen weighs heavy. Cherry panted a little, as she struggled off with her load. At that moment Chuckers must needs come by.

'What be you after there?' he said, roughly taking the basket from her and setting it down. He turned towards his wife and called out fiercely, 'Is this what you've come to? Get your washing on to this time o' day, and when a friend comes to see you, set her carrying a gurt heap o' clothes like that? What be you thinking on?'

This was very mild language for him, but Cherry's presence was some restraint.

'Oh, Chuckers, you know I've got no help, and I can't get through without,' said his wife piteously.

''Tain't help you want, it's sense. If you had the wits of a flea, you wouldn't be in this 'ere caddle,' said Chuckers.

He subsided into grunts, and Cherry said, 'It was I ran off with the basket, Mr. Chuckers. I beg your pardon if it was a liberty. But if you wouldn't mind taking the other end, we could carry it easy enough, and I'd like to.'

Chuckers stood and stared at her in amazement for a moment; then, not seeing what else to do, deliberately stooped and took a handle. Cherry took the other, and off they walked with the basket between them. Mrs. Chuckers left off washing to look. Jupp, the man who worked on the farm, stopped also, and grinned after them through the wire fencing. To see 'old Crump' lend a hand was astonishing.

They reached the drying-ground, where the lines were ready. Cherry thanked Mr. Chuckers, and he shambled off to his work in the field hard by. As he grubbed away, clearing a patch where he was going to put in a crop, he stole glances at the young, light figure in the pretty pink cotton frock, flitting to and fro between basket and lines. Cherry could not outdo her sister-in-law in energy

and deftness at her work, but she had a prettier way of going about it.

What pleasant work it was, shaking out the clothes and hanging them up, under the blue sky, in the sweet, warm air of the summer afternoon—a couple of hens with their downy broods clucking round, with a vague hope of picking up something to their advantage. The clothes were not pretty at all, but they were all fresh washed and rinsed, and smelt of cleanliness.

By the time the basket was empty, Mrs. Chuckers had rinsed and wrung out the last of her wash. Cherry hung it all out, and helped to get the tea—then slipped off before Chuckers came in, and ran round to Sallie, to report progress. Sallie looked a different creature already, and gave her such a kiss that Cherry's heart was pricked by the remembrance of certain remarks she had made this very afternoon. When Chuckers stormed at his wife without putting out a hand to help her, conscience had cried out—

'This man's but a picture of what I might be.'

How was she superior to him, if she took occasion from other people's troubles to sit up and say how much better they ought to have managed, instead of trying to help them? She would not have spoken in his ferocious way ('Thanks to my

friends for their care in my breeding,' she thought), but Sallie would mind a very few words from John's sisters more than a cycle of storms from Chuckers. And, what was more, his scoldings would only raise, not damage her, in other people's eyes, while Cherry's—the girl suddenly grew hot all over to think what she had said to Mrs. Wren. If it had been to anyone less kind, less fond of them all, what mischief she might have made!

She ran home very penitent, and found that her mother had returned from Mrs. Smallman's, with the news that the damsel at Riccarton was snapped up already at eight shillings a week. Chuckers would not give more than six.

'He will never get one worth anything at that —not with things so uncomfortable as they are there,' said Madge.

Twenty years ago, he would have had to pay eight or ten, even for the rough, unkempt sort of maiden who would take such a place as his; but times have changed, and everyone has less money to spend.

'You know it's very much auntie's fault,' said Frank, the second son, cutting fresh slices from the great home-made loaf. 'She has always given in to him, and that's enough to make any man a Turk.'

'You mustn't say that before Cherry,' said Madge. 'She's going to look out for somebody who will keep her under.'

'I'd like to see him try,' said Willie, the next boy.

'I'd like to see old Chuckers try,' said Frank. 'It would have been "Greek meets Greek," wouldn't it, if he had had Cherry?'

'Suppose I give him a chance,' said Cherry.

'*What?*' cried everybody.

'Well, he wants a girl, and you won't want me here if Madge comes home,' said Cherry, colouring as she spoke.

'You don't mean go and be slavey over there?' said Frank, opening his eyes.

'No, I don't want to be slavey. I want to see if I can make a conquest,' said Cherry gaily, but blushing redder and redder. 'I made a beginning this afternoon;' and she described the scene of the clothes-basket in a way that made them all laugh. But when she repeated her proposal in sober earnest, her brothers would not hear of it. She would be letting herself down, and all the family with her. She would be a fool, for she ought to know what she would have to put up with. If she thought she could tame Timothy Chuckers, let her have a try first on Smallman's bull; he was not half such a tough customer; and so forth. Cherry

answered back merrily, but all the time she was waiting with rather a beating heart for her mother to speak. At last a pause came, and she said softly, 'Mother?'

'Did you want to go out, dear?' said Mrs. Harkiss.

'I only thought of it this afternoon,' said Cherry.

Madge broke in that Cherry was not to be sacrificed for her, and Frank, who had put on great airs, as head of the family since John's marriage, declared there was no necessity for either of them to go out, unless they chose. Mrs. Harkiss would not say much till she could be alone with Cherry. She wanted to know if the girl had counted the cost.

'Yes, mother, I know it will be pretty hard lines over there,' said Cherry. 'But if I could do it just for this year, it might make such a lot of difference to Sallie, and auntie too, I would go in for putting up with it. And I know I would never let Mr. Chuckers serve me like he did Sallie.'

'I should hope not,' said Mrs. Harkiss; 'but nothing could alter its being a very hard place, and very dull to what you are used to.'

'That's it, mother,' said Cherry. 'I've never had any but good times yet, and Sallie has had such hard ones.'

'And you think it's time you took up the cross,' said Mrs. Harkiss.

'Oh, mother!' Cherry shrank from the word. When she thought what the very cross had been, it shocked her to give such a name to bearing a little rough work and rough living for a few months.

'Take up *your* cross, I mean, dear,' said her mother.

'Yes,' said Cherry. 'But don't say that to the boys, *please*, mother. Don't let's talk about crosses to them, or they won't like me going. Let's tell them I want to make a conquest, and like the fun —and so I shall,' she added, with a courageous gulp.

Mrs. Harkiss told her to sleep upon it.

The two sisters slept together, and when they had read their usual chapter that evening, and Madge knelt down to her prayers, Cherry turned the leaves of the Bible and read, 'Thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.'

It would be a great self-denial to go to the Chuckers'—how great, she realised more and more as she thought of it. But she must never say so

—least of all to John and Sallie. She must tell them—what was quite true—that she thought it was time she earned something of her own to put by, and would like to stay near home. She need not pretend that the wish to help them had nothing to do with it; but they must not know how she would hate the everlasting 'caddle' in that house —nor the secret hankering she had to see something of life beyond the Rakawahi, if she left Sweet Home at all. They must think that the plan had advantages for *her*. And so it had—not least because she did not like it. She and her younger brother Hugh had never felt the pinch of the struggling time; they were the youngest, and the others had always spared and petted them. She sometimes saw the consequences in Hugh to his disadvantage, and she had sense enough to know that other people would be likely to see them in herself. A little touch of 'hard lines' would do her no harm. She was just the one to bear them, as strong as a pony, and as gay as a lark.

Besides, the meeting with Mrs. Wren that day had brought back the time of John's accident, and Laura Wren's address to the school, on the following Sunday. Laura had told how the pony had been God's messenger, calling her mother, through all the silence in the poor deaf ears, to the place where He had work for her to do; and

then she went on to speak of all the voiceless wants around us—the griefs and needs, unknown to man, well known to God, that we might succour if we knew; and she said, 'Should we not each pray, morning by morning, "Lord, say, Ephphatha—Be opened—to *my* ears this day. Let me not be deaf to any call of Thine. And if there is sorrowful sighing going up, too low for anyone to hear, then send a little Providence to show me the sorrow and tell me what to do."'

Cherry had listened, her heart soft with her untold thankfulness for John's life spared, and thought she could never forget to pray, every morning, 'Lord, say Ephphatha to me.' But she *had* forgotten, after a time—until this afternoon. As she ran home across the paddocks, with the family difficulties on her mind, she had prayed that little prayer again; and when she heard that the Riccarton girl could not be had, the call came—as plainly as any call to the mission field—to go over into the next lot, and do what she could towards taming Timothy Chuckers, who was certainly the most savage old heathen *she* knew.

She looked on a little farther, and read the promise to the twelve: 'It shall be given you in that same hour what ye ought to say.' That must be as true for everyone who goes where God has sent; and she could claim that it would be given

her, all in a minute, what to say to the boys, and John, and Chuckers himself, when she went over. To be sure, the words she wanted would be mostly jokes and nonsense to carry it off, that she might 'appear not unto men to fast'; but God could give merry words just as much as He could grave ones, when they were wanted. Who else taught the kittens to frolic and the birds to sing?

She could not quite succeed in 'appearing not to fast unto' John: he knew too well what she might have before her, and would never have let her do it, if she had not convinced him that she would go with her eyes open.

'What will it matter?' she said. 'I ain't going to marry him, as you would say. It would be a pretty deal more trouble to have Sallie knocked down than to put up with being there for a year or so.'

'A year?' said John.

'Well—if I stop through the winter, I don't see how I could leave just before shearing, and harvest, and all,' said Cherry. 'It would look so shabby.'

'Well, you're a trump, you are,' John said, after a pause, and gave her a hug and a kiss that paid her beforehand for any sacrifice that this might cost.

'Mind, you've got to settle Sallie: that's your part,' she said. She had been bent on settling it

all before telling John anything about it, and how glad she was, now, that her mother had not allowed that!

'She won't feel it like we do,' said John.

'And, mind, you must give me a fair chance,' said Cherry. 'If you come prowling round to see how I am getting on, Chuckers *will* be savage. Stand clear, and let him and me fight it out. And don't make a favour of it, for goodness' sake, or you'll ruin my conquest.'

John looked so doubtful at that, that Cherry determined to trust no one but herself, and, with her mother's leave, walked over alone to make the offer of her services. She saw that Chuckers did not like it, and even his wife was more than half afraid of having her; but their difficulty was too real for them to refuse. Mrs. Chuckers said she was afraid there would be too much work.

'I ain't a bit afraid of work—I'm used to it,' said Cherry, looking first into the mistress's face and then into the master's. 'And I'm used to minding orders, too. We've all got to do that at home.'

Chuckers was looking her over, from the bit of white edging at her neck to her neat little shoes, with a mortal presentiment that from the hour when this smart young damsel entered his door he would have to be on his best behaviour, and never

again rage and scold in peace. It was a very serious prospect—in fact, a dreadful one. But when she looked up at him so brightly, and said, 'I'm used to minding orders,' it crossed his mind that he might bring *her* under, instead of she him, and such a conquest would be a very agreeable and unexpected feather in his frowzy cap. So, by way of showing his colours at once, he turned upon his wife and said fiercely—

'I dunno what you do mean by talking about work. There ain't *none*, not to what other women's got to do ; and if you wasn't a caddler out and out, you wouldn't want no girl. No children,' he continued, turning to Cherry, 'no man in to meals all the winter, a room of your own, and plenty of everything. That's what we give—and six shillings a week. You may take it or leave it. I can't give no more, and I won't, neither ; and if you don't take it you'll lose a good bargain.'

'Thank you, Mr. Chuckers. I'll tell mother, and see what she says,' answered Cherry, rising. 'Madge says wages are higher in the town, but I would like to stay near mother, if she thinks it enough.'

Of course her own people did not think it enough for her worth, but Cherry's earnestness overruled their objections. Mrs. Harkiss went round and

settled the bargain, not a little to 'the boys'' disgust.

'I met your conquest coming out of town to-day, Cherry,' said Frank. 'My word! if I wanted a victim, I'd go in for a handsomer one.'

'Don't insult my choice. I won't have it,' said Cherry.

'I suppose you intend to look very meek to start with,' said Willie. 'Pretend to knuckle down to him to get your own way.'

'Call him "sir." That'll fetch him,' said Hugh.

'*No*,' said Frank; and Cherry exclaimed—

'No, I won't. What's the good of a conquest if you only get it by making a fool of a man? I shall behave just the same to him as I would to anybody else, and not try to get over him with mean ways.'

She was sweeping the verandah next morning, with a crimson-bordered kerchief twisted over her bonnie dark hair, when John came by with Frank.

'Hallo, Cherry! Are you going to put that on for Timothy?' said Frank—for the effect was really bewitching.

'To be sure. Don't you think it ought to finish him?' said Cherry.

'He'll never see it,' said John, walking on.

'He may feel it, though, perhaps,' said Cherry, and added to Madge, when he was out of hearing,

'I'm sure that's one thing that made him worse to Sallie and auntie — they were always such drabs about their work. I mean to keep up a little.'

'You are quite right, Cherry,' said her mother, in the doorway. 'Use enough aprons to be decent, and if it makes too much washing, you can always bring them over here.'

'Ah, that's the difference between Sallie and me,' said Cherry afterwards to Madge. 'I shall have home at my back. She never had any. If things were too much, she had just to go without—nobody helped her.'

So the brave little woman packed her box. Frank took it round in the cart; and when the stars began to twinkle, and the night-air was frosty after a brilliant, summer-like day, the two sisters walked quietly over together, and parted at the gate.

CHAPTER II

MADGE went back to the pleasant home, and Cherry entered the dull, untidy room, with one lamp burning dimly and smelling dreadfully, where auntie was 'caddling' still, and her husband dropping asleep over the newspaper. The Cross was high in the heavens without; Cherry could not help thinking that, after all, it was fitting to begin her task under that sign.

Mrs. Chuckers was very kind, and showed her up the staircase—like a ladder with a rail to it, against the wall—to the boasted 'room of her own'—a small boarded loft under the roof, very hot and stuffy in summer, and cold in winter.

'Shall I stop and put my things away before I come down?' said Cherry; and when auntie agreed, and left her, she discovered the absence of any nice places to put them in, such as she had at home. And there was no brother to call, who

would put her up a shelf or a curtain; no one to laugh with, and make fun of her contrivances. Cherry had never been away from home before, except on pleasant visits. A sense of extreme loneliness came over her, as though the dear little home were a hundred miles away already, and she could have sat down and cried.

But that was just what Willie declared she was sure to do; so she plucked up spirit and went down again, planning how she would soon make everything different.

Chuckers was on the watch to take her down at the beginning, if she gave herself airs. He could not say that she did; but Cherry felt instinctively that the enemy was ready for battle; she must be on her guard.

And how was she to mount guard, poor little maiden who had never known any atmosphere but that of love and trust? She had marched to the field, so sure of triumph, and now—it was not so easy, this conquest—she found herself without an idea how to set about it. Then she turned to her Bible again, and read, 'When I sent you without purse, or scrip, or shoes, lacked ye anything? And they said unto Him, Nothing.'

'Yes,' she thought, 'He *did* send me—I am sure of it; and I shall lack nothing. It will be given me, every hour, what I ought to say.' And she

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crept into her uncomfortable little bed and slept soundly till morning.

The first day seemed like a week, and yet how all the work squeezed into it Cherry could not think. She had gone over with grand ideas of pulling things up to a much higher standard than Sallie had: at the end of two days she was lost in admiration of Sallie for having ever got through the work at all. So much that the boys did at home fell upon the women here. Twenty-six cows, and all but five or six of them to be milked morning and evening! Cherry loved all live creatures, and thought she loved milking too; but you must love it very much indeed to maintain the sentiment when you come to your eleventh cow, and know, moreover, that ten times eleven other things have to be done before milking-time comes round again. That was the worst of it; it was always coming round. As to having any spirit left to fight with Timothy—she found herself flying to anticipate his every wish, for fear of a battle she had not the heart to wage. Chuckers, on his part, found himself exceeding well served. This trim little girl was as willing as Sallie, and more clever and smart about it.

After the manner of his kind, he showed signs of increasing the labours of the willing horse. Cherry could almost have wished that home *was* a

hundred miles away, she had so little to boast of when her 'evening out' came round.

'I *do hope* I shan't make out a better story than is true. I know I shan't win, for a judgment on me, if I do,' she said to herself as she dressed. Already the nervous, strained sensation which poor Sallie knew so well was creeping upon her.

However, home was generous. First came the welcome; then, 'Have you made an impression, Cherry?' said Frank.

'Of course I have,' she answered. 'I don't know whether it's the right one, though,' she added honestly.

'Has he jawed you yet?' asked Willie.

'Oh no,' said Cherry. At this they all clapped her, and she felt quite herself again directly, and equal to anything.

'I'm very polite to him, you know,' she said truthfully.

'Auntie told Sallie it's all so peaceful, she feels as if there must be a death coming,' said Madge.

There was a shout of laughter, and then the brothers went off somewhere, and the mother and daughters had a sound, practical talk over ways and means.

'The men ought to help you more, and you ought to have better things to work with,' said

Mrs. Harkiss; 'but that must come by degrees. It's too soon to begin asking.'

'You see, if I begin a fight, I must win it or go; and I don't want to go,' said Cherry.

'That's right,' said her mother; 'but don't begin doing anything you can't go on with without hurting yourself. That wouldn't pay.'

The boys came back, and they laughed and sang, and had their family prayer together; and Cherry walked back with two brothers to escort her, as brave as a lion again. When she had left Chuckers' house, its roof seemed to fill the world; now, it had dwindled into a very small place, and a year spent there would be quite a small piece out of a whole, bright, eager life—and well worth giving.

Perhaps her aspect was less meek next day; at any rate, Chuckers thought it time to show his authority, and when she went out to feed the fowls in the afternoon he ordered her to empty a sack of Indian corn into the bin.

'I'm afraid it's more than I can manage,' said Cherry pleasantly.

Chuckers glared at her. 'It's got to be *done*,' he said, and walked out. Cherry filled her bowl, and followed him. Jupp was just outside; he must have heard.

'*I* won't ask him to do it, though,' she thought.

'And I'm not going to do it myself, with two great men about.'

Sallie would have opened the sack, and dipped out the corn with her bowl till she could manage to tilt it up.

Two days and nights that sack stood there, inviting rats to nibble. On the third morning, Cherry scraped the bin of the last grain of corn, and left it open. All this time Chuckers was silent and surly, but not offensive, and she showed him all her usual attention. She looked in on her way to milk, in the afternoon ; the sack stood there still. The fowls were waiting to be fed : she let them wait, and went to the cows.

As she sat milking, she could see, through a small window, the door of the outhouse, and presently saw Jupp walk into it. She stopped to listen, and distinctly heard the sound of grain shooting into the bin.

'Hurrah! Bossy, we've won, we've won!' she said to her cow, smothering the words against its warm side.

Jupp came out and walked towards the cowshed with a grin on his face, as though he was coming to have a joke with her at the master's expense. Cherry snatched up her stool, and, with a leap and a dart, retreated behind the farthest cow. There would be an end of her conquest if anyone but

herself ever crowed over it. Besides, Mr. Chuckers *was* her master, and she was loyal.

The cows looked round, astonished at being taken out of their turn. Cows are such Tories. Cherry, milking away, saw, underneath them, Jupp's feet and shadow come in at the door—and go out again.

She never named that sack to anyone but her mother. She was of the mind of the American woman who said that if women wanted any rights, 'they had better take 'em and say nothing about it.'

Chuckers knew he was beaten, nevertheless, and he did not like it. And he had been on his best behaviour long enough to be mortally sick of it, and hate the restraint that his respect for this young girl imposed. Cherry felt sure that a storm was brewing.

It burst. Chuckers was harnessing his horse to take the milk to the butter-factory, when a strap broke, and he called for help to patch up the damage. Cherry happened to be making a noise herself, and did not hear the first call. Then roared the storm!—such a torrent of rough words as she had never heard before in her life—winding up with, 'Come out, I say. Come when I want you, or I'll teach you, I will. Deaf you are!'

Cherry heard perfectly; she would have been

deaf indeed if she had not; but she went on quietly doing something that made no noise at all.

'Come out, will you?' roared Chuckers. 'Do you think I can stand here all day? What do you mean by it? *Cherry!*'

'Yes, Mr. Chuckers,' said Cherry, running out instantly. 'Did you want me?'

'Haven't I been calling you this half-hour, you'— Chuckers caught sight of something in her face that stopped him just in time.

'Oh, I *beg* your pardon!' said Cherry, quite shocked and surprised. 'I thought you were speaking to the dog. Oh dear!' looking at the fracture. 'You want some string, don't you, and a piercer? I've got a skewer will do.'

She ran off for it, and in five minutes had made things fast, as neatly as possible, speaking as pleasantly as though she had not heard a disagreeable word. Chuckers watched her sullenly, excusing his collapse to himself by thinking that he must get off with the milk now; he would teach her her place next time.

He never roared at her again: Cherry had conquered, so far.

And now it befell that, as little by little it became clear that she had gained her proper footing, and the excitement of her enterprise subsided, she was very nearly conquered herself by

its utter dreariness and dulness. What was the use of pushing on with the work and arranging it better, if Mrs. Chuckers did not know how to sit down when it was done? She had slaved so long that, unless she wanted to go out somewhere, she had no object in getting through her tasks before night. I suppose that is one reason why very hard-worked people find time to go out more than their leisurely neighbours do: they have forgotten how to rest at home. Cherry had been accustomed, as a rule, to get through each day's round, and have a piece of time left for something that made progress from day to day. She could make a little time for such things, even here, in winter; but how could she enjoy her book or her sewing, with Mrs. Chuckers 'caddling' on? She tried to coax her to sit down and sew, but her sight was poor; the lamp burned wretchedly, in spite of improved trimming; and the sewing-machine was always getting out of order. Three things were clearly necessary to domestic joy—a new lamp with a shade, a pair of spectacles, and a repaired machine.

Failing these, Cherry bought candles for herself, and would sit up in her loft in a spare hour; but it was bitterly cold there, and dreary too. She had been used to such happy evenings! and sometimes the tears came dropping unawares, in the lonely, cheerless loft. Then she would turn to

her unfailing cordial: it was to read over Paul's words to Timothy: 'Thou therefore, my son, endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ'; and then to read the list of Paul's own sufferings—the perils of robbers, the perils of waters, the fastings and scourgings—in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft; and long before she reached the end she was ashamed of having made a trouble of anything she had to bear.

'"Thou therefore endure hardness." That means, for me, "Cherry, don't you make a fuss,"' she thought; and she would trip downstairs to get the supper with a happy face.

She began talking about the lamp and spectacles, and Mrs. Chuckers, who had no money allowance of any kind, asked for them one day. Timothy replied, in a favourite formula of his, that when her extravagance had ended in driving them out of house and home she would be satisfied.

'Are you so *very* poor, Mr. Chuckers?' asked Cherry in a sympathetic tone.

'Poor? I could buy up *your* brothers, and more like 'em,' he answered indignantly. 'Who told you I was poor?'

'Nobody,' said Cherry. 'People say you must be making a pile. I was only afraid, by what you said, that perhaps something had gone wrong.'

'I never said nothing of the sort,' said Chuckers.

'Only about the expense of auntie's having glasses. And indeed they would soon pay for themselves, with the work she would be able to do, with glasses and a new light.'

Chuckers grumbled, but yielded, and the evenings were very much better from that time.

'I'm really training auntie to sit down and enjoy herself, at any rate when he's asleep,' Cherry said triumphantly, at home. 'And he has had a bad thumb, and wanted a lot of waiting on, and that was all to the good, for me.'

'Ah! it made him like you better, I expect,' said Frank.

'It made me like *him* better, anyhow,' said Cherry, 'and that's most of the battle. If only I could! I *am* sorry for him, very often, for being such a kill-joy to himself and everybody else; but then he goes and does something so nasty, I can only keep from getting angry by not caring either way.'

'What does he do?' asked Willie.

'That's no business of yours,' said Cherry. It cost her nothing to hold her tongue about such things; they were not pleasant topics; but it *was* a little hard to keep back all the delicious jokes they might have had out of Timothy, had conscience

allowed her to make him a family laughing-stock behind his back.

So the winter passed, and Chuckers certainly improved on the surface, though Cherry feared the old crab stock was unchanged below.

CHAPTER III

OCTOBER came—the green April month in New Zealand. The summer was coming on, and the master had made no sign of giving the women folk more help, when, one bright morning, Willie ran in with news which caused auntie to leave all her work, and tie on her sunbonnet with trembling hands.

'Don't hurry back, auntie; I'll manage,' said Cherry.

She was almost too busy to think or feel, all the morning. Chuckers came in to dinner, and asked for his wife.

'She is over at John's,' said Cherry. 'Sallie is very bad. Mother has been with her since eight o'clock last night, and they wanted auntie.'

Chuckers' brow clouded ominously, but he did

not speak. When dinner was over, Cherry was obliged to say, 'Please, Mr. Chuckers, if auntie doesn't come back, I shall want Jupp to help with the milking.'

She knew the men's own work was pressing now, but it could not be helped.

Chuckers stood and glared at her, then went out, muttering something she did not hear. Her heart misgave her, but she worked on.

It was drawing near milking-time when, looking out, she saw him pushing through the wire fence into John's paddock. He was going to fetch auntie home!

Cherry rushed to stop him, and then stopped herself, with an instinct that this battle must be left to stronger hands than hers.

Chuckers walked straight into John's house without knocking, and turned into the kitchen. There, as it befell, his wife stood alone, hurriedly making up the fire. Her back was turned to him; her tears were falling on the fire-irons, and she did not observe his step.

'What are you after here?' said the harsh voice of her husband.

She started as if she had been shot, and dropped the shovel on the hearth.

'Oh, let me stay, Chuckers!' she cried, turning and lifting her hands beseechingly. 'She's all the

child I have, and her so ill, and clinging to her auntie.'

'You just come back and do your milking. That's what *you've* got to do,' said Chuckers. There was an evil light in his eye.

'I can't.'

It was the first time she had ever resisted him in her life, and it maddened him.

Sallie had heard him. From the room within, her voice pleaded faintly, 'Auntie, come back. Let auntie stay with me.'

'*You come*,' said Chuckers.

'Auntie.' Again the feeble voice was heard, and then the voice of Mrs. Harkiss, soothing and reassuring. Mrs. Chuckers turned towards the bedroom door. Her husband strode after her and laid a heavy hand upon her shoulder.

'You come home to your *duty*, or it'll be the worse for you. Mark my words!' he said, in a tone of suppressed fury.

There was a sound of movement in the next room, and John came out, with a set look in his blue eyes.

'Will you come outside with me a minute, Mr. Chuckers?' he said.

They stood still and faced each other. John had the name of being 'as easy a fellow as any going,'—no match at all for an old tyrant like

Chuckers; but it was the tyrant's eyes that fell. He turned towards the house door. John opened it for him, and, turning, signed to Mrs. Chuckers to go back to Sallie; and she obeyed.

John went out and shut the door behind him. The two men walked a few paces from the house and stopped.

'Mr. Chuckers,' said John, 'my wife has served you like the best of daughters. You know best how you have served her. Auntie is all the mother she has had, since she lost her own; and now, when God only knows how many hours she has left to live, you want to part them; and I tell you, you shan't do it. Your wife's under my protection, and if you put your foot across my door to get her away'—

He stopped short, and set his teeth. 'I'm a younger man than you,' he said thickly, 'and I've remembered it. If you do *that*, I shall forget it. That's all.'

He turned quietly and walked back to the house, shut the door and bolted it. Chuckers stood rooted to the spot for some minutes; then slowly moved away, but not out of sight. A hundred yards or so from the house, some logs were lying, and he sat down on one of them. John looked out and saw him.

'He's watching for her. Brute!' he thought.

'But so long as he doesn't come in it won't matter. Auntie can't see him.'

The window of the bedroom looked the other way. The young husband's heart was there; he had soon forgotten Timothy Chuckers.

The time wore on. The cows came up, and stood in their places to be milked. Jupp came too, of his own accord, and he and Cherry milked in silence. No talking to the great, bossy cows—no light laughter at their wilful ways—the only sounds, their munching or moving, and the steady bubbling of the milk into the pails. Cherry set out the tea, and watched; no master came. Hugh looked in, ran over to Sallie's, and brought back the last report.

The day declined. Shadows stretched long across the green grass and the beds full of young green things growing. Chuckers sat still upon his log. He knew that it was past his tea-time; he was thirsty, but he did not move. Something stronger than any physical want possessed him. Was it the thirst for vengeance? or—*remorse?*

He saw the doctor's buggy drive up, and John come out and put up the horse. The shadows were growing very long, when, flitting across them, came a little black figure. Mrs. Wren had been coming that way, and saw the doctor drive past in

haste. She followed him, and seeing Chuckers, hurried towards him.

'Tell me, how is she?' she said.

'Very bad,' he shouted. His loud, rough voice was pleasant to her; she could hear it.

'Ah!' she said sadly, and added, 'I won't go in. I'll sit here and wait with you.'

The chill of the cold Canterbury nights was creeping on. She wrapped a little shawl round her, and sat down to keep the watch of life or death for the wife, as she had kept it, in the year before, for the husband. The west behind her glowed and faded; the stars grew bright above, and still the two sat there in silence. Mrs. Wren was used to silence. She never felt it so little as under the stars, for they all seemed to speak to her. Sometimes lights and figures were seen moving in the house, and she watched feverishly; again all was still, and her eyes turned to those friendly eyes above—Sirius and his companions, friends of her youth in the old country; the great Ship filling a large tract of the south-eastern sky, the Southern Cross low down, and all the other groups of light she loved so well.

Presently there was moving in the house again. Someone put in the horse, and the doctor drove rapidly away.

'Stop him! Ask him!' cried the little old

lady, starting up in an agony, and running like a girl across the grass.

'All right. Tell her,' called the doctor, as his lights flashed on the two figures and were gone.

Chuckers bawled in her ear, 'All right.'

'Thank God!' Unawares, the old lady was kneeling on the path, her face upturned to those bright, bright stars, softly uttering her thanks. She heard not a sound herself, and did not remember that anyone else might hear; she hardly knew that she was speaking, in the fulness of her heart.

When she came to herself, and saw the figure near her in the darkness, she hurried to Chuckers' side, and seizing his hand gave him joy in torrents, without an idea that he could have been watching because of anything but love.

'Now we may go in for a minute,' she said, and turned towards the house, talking to him all the time, so that he had scarcely a choice but to walk with her. She pushed open the door and caught his sleeve, in her eagerness to drag him in and safely close the door. Then cautiously she opened the kitchen door and peeped.

Beside the fire sat the proud grandmother, cooing over a small flannel bundle in her lap. In still greater haste, Mrs. Wren's little fingers

clutched at Chuckers, and pulled him in. The door was shut, and he stood within it, his tough heart beating strangely for once in his life.

Lightly as the bird whose name she bore, Mrs. Wren crossed the room, caught up the bundle, and turning in triumph, laid it in the man's rough arms. Of course no one could stop her; anyone so very deaf can never be contradicted. Chuckers had to take the baby, and as it touched his arms he felt a thrill through a strong fibre which had been stirred before—long long ago, when just such another bundle had been laid in his young arms. Then, as now, he said nothing. No one ever knew how the dumb heart swelled and yearned within him for a few proud hours; and then it was all over, and he knew that his babe would never want anything but a little nameless grave. His wife mourned openly, and everyone comforted her. No one said a word to him, nor he to them.

He had never held a little child in his arms since, until this moment. Mrs. Wren uncovered a tiny red face and fists. Chuckers put his finger into a little velvet hand that closed upon it. Just then the inner door opened, and out came John, with rapture in every line of his face.

'Hallo, uncle!' he exclaimed—walked straight up to him, and grasped his hand with a vigour which Mrs. Wren thought simply proper to the occasion.

'To think of your getting hold of the brat already,' said John, beaming all over, as he covered the precious little face again.

Chuckers held out the bundle, and John could not help taking it; to feel it in his arms was so delicious. He carried it close to the fire again. Chuckers followed, and with a fresh impulse John laid the little one back into his arms. Something in the old, hard, withered face before him moved his good heart. He remembered hearing of that babe that died.

Chuckers took the light burden in silence, but with a little furtive pressure that John saw; it brought tears to his happy eyes.

'Which is it?' asked Chuckers.

'A BOY,' said the proud father. 'Shall we call him Timothy? eh, uncle? Timothy John; that doesn't sound bad. Hey, auntie!'

For Mrs. Chuckers emerged, and stood transfixed to see the baby in her husband's arms.

'Shall we name the brat for uncle? eh?' said John, and began to laugh so audibly that Mrs. Harkiss hastily interposed, and dismissed the assembly. Mrs. Wren had been going about with forefingers uplifted, lest anyone should try to speak loud enough for her. She saw the dismissal without any need to hear.

'"Stand not upon the order of our going, but

go at once,"' she exclaimed. 'Good-night, Mrs. Chuckers. You're staying, I suppose?'

Mrs. Chuckers looked at her husband, and he said, 'Stop, if you like.'

'Thank you, uncle. We were up all last night, so it will be really a help,' said John heartily. 'I'll see she gets some rest. How will Mrs. Wren get home?' he added, discovering that she was gone already.

'I'll see to that,' said Chuckers.

A few minutes later, Cherry, looking out for the hundredth time, beheld, to her amazement, Mr. Chuckers bringing home a lady to supper. She had heard the news. Hugh had been watching for the doctor, and came to tell her; but Mrs. Wren's second edition quite surpassed the first. She poured it all out, too much excited to eat, having seen more than most people with ears would have heard. Chuckers had no need to speak well of himself, for in her narrative he figured admirably. He listened with a vague sense of having had a great escape. He had gone out resolved on evil, and 'o'ermastered yet by high behest,' he had had to be good after all.

And Cherry was so pleased with him! If he had had any power to analyse his own feelings, he would have discovered that he had grown very fond of her. When he thought he hated her, it was really her disapproval that he disliked.

Mrs. Wren's family were all away at a meeting nine miles off, so that she was indifferent about getting home any time before midnight; but Chuckers insisted on going out before he had eaten half a supper, to harness the horse and drive her home.

He could not help driving back rather slowly. It was so many, many years since he had felt happy—since he had felt anything very keenly, except anger and covetousness—he was not in haste to go to sleep and forget it all. The hard crust upon his heart was pierced at last, and he felt the flowing of sweet waters underneath. Pain was there, indeed, and regret and shame, but love triumphed over all. Love, new-wakened, reached out to the little babe, and to all the rest, who were so ready to love him. He did not realise yet how generous it was of them; the moral sense was but half awake, even now; but the faculty it lives by was stirred. He who has never practised the power of loving on his brother whom he hath seen, *cannot* love God whom he hath not seen; he has no faculty alive to do it; and it is only in loving that we see Him, and learn the meaning of righteousness and sin.

Shearing and harvest were over. Chuckers had hired a strong boy, who did a good deal of the

work which used to make the women's lives so burdensome. Cherry's year was up, but she was staying on a little longer, just till they should all see what was best to do.

John and Sallie, looking the very picture of a happy young couple, stood in the front garden, where the portulaccas under the window were a perfect blaze of beauty in the sun. Chuckers was walking about with the baby crowing in his arms, and Sallie went after them.

'You've made your conquest, Cherry,' said John.

'No, it wasn't me,' she answered softly. 'God did it, John—and little Tim.'

NACKIE

A LITTLE boy, with a thin, eager face and very bright blue eyes, stood on the wharf of a London dock, looking up at the black side of a huge Australian liner making ready to start. An older lad darted down the gangway and put a sixpence into his hand.

'My first tip. Go and get dinner there,' he said breathlessly, pointing in the direction of the grand big coffee-house inside the dock gates, and was back again before he was missed.

They were brothers. Bob, the elder, was working his way out to Australia as an under-steward on the big ship, leaving his little brother to fight the world alone, with no work and no prospects; but Nackie was far too much excited to think of that. His little voice rang in the cheer that rose

as the vessel moved. He wanted the people to cheer again and again. The ship moved slowly out into the lock. Nackie, as he was called (his name was John Smith), climbed on a pile of wood to watch her. Directly he began to mount, it seemed as if an iron hand clutched hold of his chest inside, to throw him down again; but he mastered that, and reached the top, with all the world before him.

His mother had died when he was a baby, leaving him and an older brother and sister to the cruel mercies of a drunken father and stepmother. Yet their childhood had not been all sad. The inspector swept them into school by day; the Band of Hope and Ragged School got hold of them in the evenings and on Sundays, and gave them happy hours. Nackie, the youngest and most helpless, had the worst of it. As the others grew old enough, they both escaped, and earned their own living bravely, keeping in touch with one another and Nackie at a mission-room where they held trysts. Nackie dared not know where the others lived, for if the parents could have found out, they would have swooped down upon them and taken their hard earnings; but the people at the mission knew, and when the boy was twelve years old he too ran away, and went to Bob. Blows, starvation, the daily terror of violence, and

agonies of suspense over the chances of getting food, had done their work; he was stunted, subject to bronchitis, with the beginnings of organic disease in his heart. Yet he was a bright and dauntless little fellow, inured to hardness, and fired with a wild ambition to earn his own living —not to snatch it, and catch it, and pick it up, like the cadgers, but steadily earn it, as his brother, and James Morris, his sister's sweetheart, had risen to do.

Bob was employed at a coffee-house near the docks, and Nackie went to work there too, and had his food in return. The woman where Bob lodged let them turn in together at night. For one year the boy was happy, intensely happy, without a care in the world. But the dreaded time was drawing near when Bob would be eighteen, and must either be turned off or spend his young manhood in working for boys' wages. A chance of getting out to Australia was too good to be lost: he took it, hoping that Nackie would get promotion; but the coffee-house people said he was too small, and turned him off altogether.

His sister Louisa, who had been working away steadily as a maid-of-all-work, was now married, and lived in Stepney. Nackie had her roof to shelter him, sixpence in his pocket, hope—and an

appetite. He watched the ship out of sight, and then made his way to the coffee-house, where, for the sum of fourpence-halfpenny, he had a sumptuous dinner (he called it 'scrumptious'), and felt himself the proudest young man in London, especially when he paid the reckoning. This done, he walked boldly up to a man who seemed to be in charge, and said: 'Please, sir, do you want a boy?'

'Do you want a master, eh?' said the man.

'Yes, sir.'

The man shook his head. 'I've got boys enough,' he said, 'and I'm afraid you wouldn't be smart enough for me if I hadn't. That is, not strong enough,' he added kindly. 'You'd be as smart as you could, I'll believe you; but you see, we can't afford to give people a dinner like that for fourpence-halfpenny, and keep any cats about but what can catch mice in double-quick time.'

Nackie looked down, abashed at his own presumption. The big man was sorry for the little fellow's disappointment.

'Look out for something not quite so stiff, to begin with,' he said. 'You'll be getting bigger and stronger every year. Keep up your heart, and you're sure to come into your luck one of these days,' and away he walked, whistling

'There's a good time coming, boys, Wait a little longer.'

Nackie had to pause a moment, to get over the sickness of that hope deferred, and the sudden rush of longing for Bob that came over him. Then he walked off, very upright, with his hands in his pockets, and whistled 'There's a good time coming,' like the manager. He had a very sweet and tuneful little whistle, though after that man's it was like the crow of a bantam compared with a Brahma cock's.

James and Louisa wanted to hear all about the embarkation.

'And now, what are you going to be after, young chap?' said James. 'You'll have to make a fight for your bread, you know.'

'I'm going to,' said Nackie. It was rather sore for him to feel that James thought he must have done badly where he was, or he would have been kept on. He had tried to explain, and he could not go over it all again. James was kind, but he wanted to make a man of him — perhaps rather too fast.

For ten sad days Nackie tried for work, and James, and Will Parker, Bob's chum at their lodgings, tried for him: and no one would give him any, because he was so small and frail. On the tenth night he came in late, but with sparkling

eyes — he had found employment as 'boy' at a small public-house near, with board, lodging, and eighteenpence a week.

'A Band of Hope boy go to a public-house!' said James.

Nackie's face flushed up, but he answered bravely, 'That's why they want me, because they think I shan't get tight.'

James had seen too much of child-drunkenness to laugh at that. 'You might have tried a bit longer for something better,' he said.

'I've tried all round. I ain't good enough for anything better,' said Nackie, and in spite of himself the tears started into his eyes. 'At least, not yet,' he added stoutly. 'I must take what I can get, till I'm bigger.'

It seemed to him rather hard that James should insist so much on his getting to work, and then look down upon the only work that offered. He felt discouraged, and went out to tell the news to Will Parker.

'I wouldn't mind so much if he wasn't to sleep there,' said Louisa.

Her eyes and her husband's both turned involuntarily from the month-old baby on her lap, to the place under the shelves which served as a dresser, where Nackie had been sleeping on a doubled-up rug. Both were thinking the same

thing, and thinking, too—they could not help it—that if they took him in altogether, the burden of his illnesses and breakdowns must fall upon them; and this little baby, and perhaps others after it, would have to suffer. Yet James could not look at his own child and say that the boy who had never known a father's love must go out and fend for himself.

'I'll just step round and see what the place is like,' he said.

The baby was in the cradle when he came back, and Louisa sewing by the little lamp.

'Well, I've settled it,' he said. 'He is to have three shillings a week and his dinner there, and sleep and get the rest of his tuck with us. That's what I've let *you* in for, old woman.'

'Oh, James!' Louisa drew his face down for a long kiss.

'They won't give him any more, because they say he could sleep there if he liked,' said James, 'but I wouldn't have that. But whatever trouble comes of it, you'll get the worst of, old girl.'

'Oh, perhaps it will be the other way,' said Louisa cheerfully. 'They say doing anything like this brings luck.'

'I've not seen it,' said James. 'As far as I see, doing a kindness mostly lets people in for a

lot of trouble, and that's all *they* get. But if it turns out well for the boy, that's what we want.'

It was rather a blow to Nackie's pride to find that he was not to be quite independent, after all; but when he lay down in his corner that night, he could not help feeling a deep sense of relief that it was his own, now. One place in this dear little home belonged to him.

James got wood and canvas, and knocked up a stretcher bed, which was made up for Nackie at night. He had a box of his own to keep his things in, and a peg for his coat and hat. It was grandeur, after sleeping in his clothes or on them, for fear of their being pawned for drink. Even in the last happy year he had never had a place of his own for anything — only half of Bob's.

He was to pay Louisa eighteenpence a week. She assured him that that would cover all he cost her, out of pocket; and in her anxiety to make this come true she began developing that marvellous power of making a little go a long way which marks good housewives among the poor, and seems miraculous to those who are called their 'betters.' She had not been trained to this, and while she had only herself and James to think of, she could get on without working miracles;

but now that she wanted to feed up poor Nackie and make him very comfortable, without costing James a farthing, a miracle was wanted, and she gave her mind to finding out how to work it, with the help of a Mothers' Meeting, and of wise neighbours who had done as much before her. James had regular work on the Great Eastern Railway, but he allowed his parents a shilling a week; and after the rent and the sick-club money were paid, what remained was no more than they could very well have spent as it came in, though they felt bound to put by some of it every week towards the time when their expenses were likely to be greater. And James was a fellow who hated pinching and paring and having to give hard pulls to make the two ends meet: he would have liked to see them, as Dora Greenwell says, 'not only meet, but tie in a handsome bow.' And yet he took in Nackie.

Louisa tried to make it up to him, and succeeded so well that, with only Nackie's eighteenpence towards it, they were actually able to put by more than they had done before. Every day since her marriage she had prayed, 'Lord, make me a good wife to my good husband.' James did not know how he was opening the way for the answer to that prayer, when he did this kindness to her little brother.

That was all the luck that Nackie brought; and as no one gave him the credit of it, he was generally regarded as a misfortune to the family, especially when winter came, and he had turns of illness which compelled him to lose his work for several days together. People were apt to sigh when his name came up, though they commonly added, in a hopeless sort of way, 'Well—you will have your reward.'

James shrugged his shoulders at that. The only reward he did it for, or ever hoped to get, was to see Nackie well on his own feet, respectable and good.

And Nackie, all the time, was fighting his desperate fight for bread and independence, with a spirit that deserved respect, if ever pluck and patience did; but alas, the world judges not by effort, but by *success*; and try as he might, he could not be as smart as other boys, for want of breath. Other boys could jump when they were called, without feeling that vulture's clutch upon the heart. Nackie felt it every time, and yet he jumped. In his years of work, he bore the pain of a hundred battle-wounds, and never thought he was a hero—only 'a poor tool.' As long as he could struggle on, he was happy. He dragged through each long day's work, whistling cheerfully when he had any breath to spare—enduring in

silence when he had not; and he went home—yes, *home*, to a warm supper and kind words.

As winter drew on, how he prized the warm, cosy place to sleep in, where a fire had burned all day! On cold nights, James would throw up the cinders at bedtime to make it burn a little longer. Then, when the lamp was out, and the walls lit up with a still, red glow from the dying fire, and it was all quiet, save for an occasional noise outside, or the sound of a cinder dropping on the hearth, Nackie lay on his stretcher bed; and while his aches and pains subsided under the warmth and rest, and the nervous tension of the day relaxed till sleep became possible, he dreamed dreams. The landlord's son took in the *Boys' Own Paper*, and let him share it: he devoured it and every other adventurous reading that came in his way. In the witching firelight the stories enlarged, like the shadows on the walls, and he was part of them. He went out hunting wolves upon the plains; he climbed precipices, leaped gulfs, rode madly to give warning of prairie fires, on a horse that went faster than any butcher's pony he had ever seen; he slew Turks and rescued young damsels — till delicious dreaminess of another kind overpowered his waking dreams, and he slept until his cough woke him, and he started up to choke and struggle and prop himself up against

the wall, all in the dark and cold, with the fire out. But he had no more sense of revulsion in waking to find himself a little, coughing, breathless, pot-house boy than a child has when called away from its make-believe play. It was hard to quit the make-believe, because it was so delightful in itself; but there was always the confidence that it would go on again to-morrow, quite independent of circumstances.

That was a long, hard winter. It seemed as if the warm weather would never come. Late in the spring, Nackie went to an old scholars' party at the dear old mission-room, and after tea there was a show of dissolving views. One was of a caravan in the desert, men and camels ready to sink on the burning sand, and an effect of mirage in the distance,—palm trees and a cool blue lake towards which the travellers' longing eyes were turned. The speaker explained that it was not water—only a vision quivering in the hot desert air; the thirsty wanderer, seeking it, would find still the same dry, burning sand.

That slide was taken out, and the next one bore the words, 'The mirage shall become a pool' (Isa. xxxv. 7, R.V. margin). So many of our hopes and dreams are mirage, now, the speaker said: the palm trees vanish as we draw near; but it

will not be so for ever. One day we shall come up to the blue waters and feathery palms of our desire, and find them all real. 'Delight thyself in the Lord, and He shall give thee the desires of thy heart.'

Nackie drank in those words. He was fourteen now, and he could not quite live upon dreams. He had whistled 'There's a good time coming, boys,' all the year long, and was as far as ever from any sign of 'coming to his luck,' as the coffee-house man said he would. He went home that night and told James and Louisa that the Bible says, 'all our mirradges—that's things what we'd like to have,' he explained, 'are to come true.'

'That must be in kingdom come, I think,' said James drily.

'Well, that's what we ask for every day, isn't it?' said Louisa, 'so I suppose we expect to get it. The Lord wouldn't have told us to say, "Thy kingdom come" unless it was to.'

Nackie curled down in his little bed that night very happy. It was so much easier to wait, if one could make sure that *some* good time would really come. Of course he did not expect ever really to go out hunting and sailing and mountaineering, as he did in his stories; but he had caught hold of a confidence that somehow, somewhere, he would feel the glow, the glory and the rush of life,

the passion and zest that his stories figured, and that he would never find—no, never—while he toiled and panted on in Stepney, where the winters were so long, and the summers so short and dim. He did not exactly know what it meant to 'delight thyself in the Lord,' but he knew he wanted to do whatever would make the Lord pleased with him, so he thought he might claim the promise about his 'mirradges'—the desires of his heart.

There was one definite hope of bringing some of them to pass—if he went 'beyond seas.' Bob had not come back in the big ship; he found work in Adelaide, where the sun was even too hot; and when the chary sunshine poured down on Stepney, and Nackie basked in it, and felt almost well while it lasted, he thought about 'beyond seas.'

He had hoped to get more money by this time, but in the autumn he had a bad attack of bronchitis, and it left him so weak that he was obliged to accept shorter hours instead of higher pay—thankful not to be turned off altogether. They were all ill, in the course of that winter, but not all at once. James had a bronchial attack. He managed to pull through without losing a day's work, but the experience greatly increased his respect for Nackie; it taught him something of what the little fellow had to bear. Often at

night, when, just as the baby settled off, Nackie's cough would begin, and it was so distressing to hear him, Louisa felt as if it would send her distracted if he did not stop ; James would get up and go to see if he was warmly covered, and had his cough-stuff by him. He knew the boy was grateful, but never guessed how his heart swelled at the token of love from a brave runner in the race of life, where he felt himself so sadly far behind.

The winter passed, and in the spring another little daughter came. Nackie struggled on, with aching bones and tugging heart, living on hope ; but instead of coming to his luck, in the late autumn he took a chill and fought too long against it. When at last he dropped, he had to be taken to the hospital. There for weeks he lay with Death at his pillow ; and when the scale slowly turned, and Death went a little farther off, it took him all the rest of the winter to struggle back to life. But as soon as the extremity of suffering relaxed, he began to enjoy the long leisure for reading and dreaming. Such fine 'mirradges' the books he read conjured up ! The long rest and good food gave him a sense of physical comfort such as he had scarcely known before in all his life ; and the leisure for reading and dreaming was a delight. He was sure he would go out better

than he came in, after all this rest; but in time he began to be home-sick, and longed for work and friends. He was glad when the doctor told him, one morning, that he would soon be discharged.

A little later, he saw the doctor speaking to the sister of the ward, and heard him say, 'Yes, next Thursday, I should say. But he will never be good for anything again.'

When the sister came down the ward, she said cheerfully, 'The doctor thinks you will be going out next Thursday, Nackie.'

The boy's heart died within him. He had been trying to think they had not been speaking of him; there was hardly a doubt about it now. Never good for anything—except the workhouse! And he had made such a brave fight for his bread! Where was that promised luck? He had waited so long—*so long* for the good time, and it was not coming.

His friend, the landlord's son, had brought him his beloved *Boys' Own Paper.* It lay on his bed now. For once, he could not read it; he could not lose himself in a story yet.

Getting-up time came. He struggled up, and sat forlornly in a strip of sunshine where the nurse had placed an easy-chair for him.

'Hallo, little Whistling Thief—where's your luck to-day?' said another convalescent kindly.

'I've lost it,' said Nackie, with a rueful smile. The man saw only the smile, and passed on.

Nackie drew a book from his locker, to avoid observation by seeming to read it. Two or three letters lay beneath it—one, a Christmas letter which he had found under his pillow on Christmas morning, when he was too ill to take much notice of it. As he saw it now, however, he seemed faintly to remember that it was about being good-for-nothing. He opened it, and read—

'Poor, weak, and worthless though I am,
I have a rich, almighty Friend:
Jesus the Saviour is His name,
He freely loves, and without end.'

Nackie hardly ever cried: he met his troubles with a laugh and a whistle instead; but when he read those words a lump came in his throat, and the tears to his eyes. He winked them away desperately, not to be seen, and sat down again in the sunshine, with the letter open within his open book; he wanted to learn that verse to say to himself at night. All the rest of the day he had to master that rising in his throat, and whistle 'Lily Baker, oh,' or anything else the men called for; but at last night came; the lights burned low, and he could pull up the bed-clothes round him and weep over his doom, all secretly. Never good for anything! Nothing before him but the

workhouse, or being a drag on poor working folks like James and Louie! Ah, but one Friend was rich!

He had heard all about that Saviour and His free love—heard in Sunday school, when he used to be swinging his restless heels and looking to see if the superintendent was not soon going to ring the bell; but the sweet words had been lodged in his strong memory unawares; they came back now—now that he knew he was good for nothing. And mingled with them was a strain of music which had come floating through his long fevered dream of suffering at Christmastide. It was the voice of a lady singing in the ward—

'He was despised—despised and rejected. Rejected of men—a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief.'

Rich, almighty,—yet He had been despised. He knew all about it. Rejected,—men told *Him* He was not good enough to suit them. Acquainted with grief!

From the day when his sister and brother took him in, Nackie had felt a sort of reliance in belonging to a household who lived respectable and feared God. But now, in his extremity, a share in the family claim upon a Father in heaven was not enough. His griefs were his own. It was he who had to bear them—keep them as much to himself as he could, and go out into the

hard world without a chance of being fit to face it. And straight upon that word of doom had come the message: 'I—*I* have a rich, almighty Friend.'

There were Bibles in the ward, and he had taken one to bed with him. With the first daylight he was awake, devouring the gospel story. He had heard it often, but it all seemed to come new, and belong to him. This Friend—*his* Friend—had really lived and walked about, and done carpentering. And He looked out for the weak ones. The heroes in story-books were always splendid strong fellows. They would stoop to pick up a weak fellow very kindly, but they could not be stopping about with him, going his crawling pace. Jesus the Saviour loved the weak ones best, and seemed to know just how they felt —like the doctors!

Nackie had suffered the loneliness of ill-health year after year, without thinking about it. He was not like other boys—he could not be. It was of no use trying, and he never expected others to understand it, thankful if they only despised and did not blame him. In hospital, the doctors and nurses *did* understand! It was a great surprise, and he liked it. In hospital, sickness made your value; it was the well who were rejected and had to go. Outside, it would be so different! And he was going out; but this great Physician was

not bound to the hospital; He was *so* great that He could stay with the sick and yet go out with every poor soul sent forth to begin again his unequal battle with the world.

It was a great mystery. 'But *He can*,' thought Nackie, 'and if He couldn't, He wouldn't be much good to me.'

He read through the four Gospels, every word, and could not find 'He was despised.' One of the nurses showed him where it was, and he read over and over that wonderful chapter, and feasted on the glorious visions before and after it—*such* good times coming! and such plain, straight words of comfort for the time between. He was past existing upon 'mirradges.' He could not have lived on any prospects, not even heavenly ones, without some succour for each hard day now; and here it was. 'Fear not, thou worm Jacob.' He put in his own name and took the promise, 'For I the Lord will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not, I will help thee.'

Thursday came, and among the discharged patients one little, frail, wasted figure went forth, hand in hand with One who is mighty, whom the porter did not see.

It was a beautiful, bright spring day, and when Nackie walked away from the hospital, it felt so exhilarating to be out in the fresh air again, and

get into the stream of people in the main road, where the dark blue trams were running,—he said to himself, 'See if I don't dish the doctors, and be good for something after all!'

Louisa could not come to fetch him, because the baby was teething, but she had his dinner ready, and a welcome. James came in to dinner, shook hands, and said, 'Oh, you'll soon be as hearty as ever. Tuck in now, and get your strength up.'

His old place was open for him. They had tried in every way to get him something better, but in vain. There had been several boys in his place at the Green Man; one stole, one drank, one was 'as lazy as he was high,' the landlady said, and sauced her too; she was quite looking out for Nackie. It was something to be wanted, even at a Green Man. The brave spirit rose up again. Nackie rested a few days, and then went out once more to fight for his bread.

He never knew how right the doctor was until he went to work. Each day was a martyrdom—every active hour one long struggle for breath. Every weight he lifted brought that vulture's grip at his heart. Yet he held on, and never let them know at home how hard it was. Twiggy, the landlord's son, helped him all he could. Will Parker was rising in life, had good, steady work,

and had dropped him long ago: but Twiggy was staunch. He gave Nackie the keep-still work, and ran about all day long himself. It was one of the finest summers on record, and the merry sunshine helped. Somehow each desperate day's fight was fought, and the brave boy dropped on his stretcher bed, and slept from sheer exhaustion. He did not cough much while the fine days lasted. The autumn was long and warm. Then cold came suddenly, and Nackie was stricken. He was taken to the hospital again, and went through sharper suffering, and a slower, more painful recovery than before.

When he was able to read again, pleasures began. He got hold of some Australian stories, and in the bitter, gloomy winter days he would lie with his eyes shut, and see himself landing on that far-off shore. He saw the masses of scarlet cactus open to the sun; he smelt the orange blossoms (he supposed they would smell pretty much like oranges), and felt the hot sun striking down upon him.

March had come, and he had not yet left his bed, when a letter from Robert arrived.

'MY DEAR BROTHER,—I am in Reseat of a letter from Morris, telling me that You are down again, and likely In for another hospital winter.

This won't do, old Chap. You may do that Trick once to orphen. And I write to advise that you Pack up your traps and come over to me. I have had a rise Since August, and can help you till you get something. Since August I have saved £3, & hear it is towards your Passage. A new chum hear says the Emigration Society in —— Street will tell you How to go about it, & if they pass your case they Will pay your passage & all. But you Have to do something towards it. Bring the best Kit you can for cloths are deer out hear. It is Piping hot now, just what you like. Won't I pitch up my hat to See you coming orf the Ship. Your loving Brother, 'ROBERT SMITH.'

Nackie sat straight up in bed, grasping the letter tight in his hand. IT WAS COMING TRUE! Never in his wildest moments had he really, truly expected that any one of his dreams would actually be fulfilled—and it was happening!

Then the vulture gripped him—awfully! He had never felt it as bad before. The nurse ran to help him, and stacked up his pillows. Gradually, the iron claw relaxed. He sank back, with his head upon her arm, and gasped out, 'I'm — to go — to Australia. I've got — a brother there.'

A curious look glanced over her face, unseen by

him. But a hospital nurse is used to seeing patients survive almost anything. She said cheerfully, 'Well, I should think that would suit you, for it's a sunny place.'

If the excitement had killed him, he might as well die happy, she thought.

But when the first effects of the shock subsided, Nackie began to revive in a way that astonished them all. All his life long he had been like the Irish girl, repressing a sigh to know that 'there were such good times in the world, and he wasn't in 'em!' Now, for the first time, he had a plain, well-grounded hope of coming *in*! What lovely dreams he had, as he lay there and felt strength stealing back! 'No more fatigue, no more distress.' Perhaps he hardly went as far as that,—but no more hospital winters; no more dreadful summers, struggling in anguish for dear life. He did not know how hard it had all been, till he lay and revelled in the prospect of deliverance. And Jim—dear old Jim, and Louie, and the children! He would send home money and bring them all out to that sunny place.

It seemed a long age before visiting day, when James came to see him and they could talk over the new proposal. James fell in with it heartily. He had some little savings still, and Nackie should have a pound out of them—two, if necessary

—to help towards his passage and outfit. He would soon be able to pay it back.

Nackie devoured more books about Australia, and asked all the other patients if they had friends there; but a little lurking doubt withheld him from speaking of his plans to the doctor. Had he not earned his bread for a whole summer after the doctor said he would never be good for anything? He was not going to have another extinguisher dropped down upon him.

In April the weather was like summer, and he came out. The sun shone in at the great windows in the corridor; he saw the blue sky, and the pigeons flying about, and whistled softly, 'There's a good time coming.' There really was.

The distances were terribly long in that hospital. By the time Nackie had reported himself, he was obliged to sit down for a minute and rest.

'I ain't strong yet,' he thought. 'It doesn't matter. "I have a rich, almighty Friend." He has taken me through all these hard times, and He'll take me on now to Australia.'

What a thing it was to enter the familiar door, a man with prospects! Louisa was looking out for him, and Essie, the eldest child, came dancing to meet him, crying, 'Nattie, Nattie!'

'Why, Essie, do you remember me?' he said. 'How much do you love me?'

'Oh, all wound a net,' she said, putting up her little arms to suit the action to the word. Nackie took her on his knee, and that cruel claw gripped him as he lifted her; but he forgot it while she loved him round the neck. He had to be introduced to a new baby—the first boy. Louisa had been very ill, and there had been heavy expenses which it would take a long time to get over; but she did not speak of that.

Some weeks passed before Nackie was strong enough to apply at the Emigration Society's offices.

In a room on the first floor, at a long table covered with papers, behind a very large desk, sat a straight, dark-haired, compact man, who gave an impression of taking up remarkably little room in proportion to his importance to the situation. He heard a sound of hard breathing on the stairs; the door was pushed open, and there stood the shadow of a boy, white, breathless, but with eyes that shone like coals fixed on the man behind the desk. The man wished him good-day, and looked him over with the impassive expression that secretaries adopt when examining a case — impassive as Jove; and he *was* Jove, just then, to the

trembling boy before him — the arbiter of his fate.

'Where do you want to go?' he asked, when Nackie was seated.

'Australia, sir.'

'We never send anyone to Australia or New Zealand, unless they have either relatives who have invited them, or work to go to.'

'I have, sir—my brother;' and Nackie told the story, surprised to find, as the questioning proceeded, how many things he did not know about Bob, which this man thought essential.

The secretary made notes, summed up, and said that he would investigate. 'What are you doing for a living meanwhile?' he added.

'I'm with my sister and her husband, sir. I've not done anything yet, but I'm going to.'

'You can't do a day's work,' said the secretary shortly.

'Not yet, sir; but I might do a half a day.'

The secretary dropped his official look. 'You are the stuff for an emigrant,' he said, 'if this opening is really a suitable one for you. That we must find out. I am going away for my holiday next week. Ask your brother-in-law if he can come up and see me before then.'

He fixed a time, and shook hands with Nackie,

saying kindly, 'Get strong, and don't try to work too hard yet.'

Nackie went downstairs with his bright hopes a little clouded. 'What a lot of things they want to know before they'll send you!' he thought.

On his way he passed a piece of ground—once a waste bit where rubbish and dead cats were thrown—now transformed by the vicar of the parish into a pretty little public garden, with trees and a fountain, flowers, and a house where pet monkeys lived. These monkeys had got loose, and were careering over the garden, two curates, the sexton, and the gardener all trying to catch them and not succeeding. Nackie stood and laughed to see the clerical figures darting about, leaping, climbing, stretching, and the monkeys away off to the top of the next tree, making game of them.

'Go it, monkeys. Now's your time,' he exclaimed. Once let him get on board ship, he would feel just like them.

His old work was gone. It was partly his own doing. He and Twiggy both hated it so, and the landlord's son had influenced his father to throw up the trade, at last, and take a situation that offered, as manager to a coffee-house in a country town.

It was of no use for Nackie to try for whole-

day's work: he could not do it. At last he found an eating-house where a boy was wanted for three or four hours in the middle of the day, to peel potatoes and wash up. For this he had his dinner and a trifle of payment.

'If you ain't strong, it's good luck to be small, so as you can take boy's work,' he said, and sallied forth, more weak and worthless, more suffering than ever, but dauntless still. He missed Twiggy dreadfully. These new people did not care anything about him, only about getting their own living. But he could *feel* God's hand helping him, every time he had a heavy pile of plates to lift.

The secretary had found his statements correct, of course, and had written to Robert. Nothing more could be done until the answer came.

It was a cold and cloudy summer. Nackie struggled on, with the grip at his heart and the mountain on his chest. His limbs tottered under him; but still, if there was any sign of a break in the clouds, he would look up and whistle to the leaden sky, 'There's a good time coming.' Before winter he would be off and away.

With September, fogs began, and he was in the hospital again when Robert's answer arrived — one to him, one to the secretary. The letter to Nackie was very kind, and full of hope that he would soon be all right, if he could have sun

enough. The boy lived upon it through another two months in the ward, and then came out—better, on the whole, than when he went in, but much worse than when the secretary had seen him last, in June; so much worse that that personage put on his impenetrable face, and said there were still points for consideration, and the boy must call again. The fact was, he felt it his duty to write to the hospital doctor for a health report.

It came. From the state of John Smith's heart, he was liable to die at any moment, and ought never to be left alone. A warm climate might lessen his suffering, but nothing could cure him.

That was what the secretary had to act on, when Nackie toiled up the stairs again, with his eager face. They were very good friends by this time, and the boy was accustomed to be told to walk round the end of the long table and sit by the fire while they talked.

It was always hard to dash the hopes of would-be emigrants who had any good stuff in them, however clear it might be that this was the truest kindness. The secretary could turn his face to steel as well as any man, but Nackie was too much for him: the boy saw that something hard was coming, and braced himself for it.

'I'm afraid, John, you are not strong enough to go,' said the secretary.

Nackie looked up eagerly. 'I'd be all right, sir, in a sunny place,' he said.

'The doctor is afraid not,' said the secretary; 'and you know that your brother has no home to receive you in: he lives where he works. There would be no one to give you the care you ought to have.'

'I would—be all right,' faltered Nackie, and there his voice failed, and he sobbed outright.

'But if you were not—what would become of you, and your brother too? I have to think of what is fair to him,' said the secretary, very gently.

Nackie only sobbed. He had lived on that hope so long—how could he let it go?

'I know you want to go very much'—

'Yes, sir,' sobbed Nackie.

'And I did want to send you. I am not quite sure, now, that I can't,' the secretary continued, against his own judgment, 'but I couldn't do it without writing to tell your brother exactly how you are. I have not given him any idea of—of what the state of your health really is. You wouldn't wish to lead him to act under a false impression?'

'No, sir.' Nackie felt a little better, for he was sure Bob would never throw him over.

'Will you be brave now, and understand that we want only to do what is best for you? I can

send you out any time, if it should be clear that it is right to do it, and really good for you to go. And if I can't send you, I'll try and find you something to do here.'

If he could know what suffering it meant to Nackie to have something found for him to do! The boy's heart almost failed him. Then, with a supreme effort, he girt his courage up, looked into the secretary's face, and said—

'Yes, sir. Thank you.'

'Perhaps I can find some place nearer than Australia where it is a good deal sunnier than London,' said the secretary. 'I shan't give you up—you may be sure of that. I'm going to look all round and see what we can do for you, while the next answer from your brother comes.'

Nackie could not smile. Nothing would make up to him for losing his heart's desire. But he managed to say, 'Thank you, sir,' and rose to go. The secretary rose too, and took the boy's cold, trembling hand in his.

'You are a very brave boy,' he said. 'Come and see me again next week, and hear if I have thought of anything for you.'

'Thank you, sir.'

The secretary went with his visitor to the head of the stairs, and shook hands again at parting, saying kind, hopeful words. Then he came back

and lit his gas,—for a black fog was coming on,—finding it hard to put this case out of his head and turn to the next in hand. He had killed such bright hopes! And what had he to offer in their place?

The fog met Nackie like a strangling cord as he went out of the house. He could only just see the garden railing. The monkeys were all caught long ago. He wondered how they liked it now.

The walk to the tram seemed endless; the step up into it cost a mortal throe; but once there the brave heart began to pluck itself up again. After all, it was only three months more to wait; and if the gentleman got him away into the country somewhere, he might be a good deal better in that time. Or he might get brush-making or something that he could do at home in the warm room. By the time he reached home he could manage to put on a quivering smile for Louisa; but she saw through it.

'Well, *I* don't want to part with you, Nackie,' she said. 'Lie down now. How tired you are! I'll get out your bed.'

He did not move to help her—always a sign that he was far gone. She covered him up, and put a hot brick to his feet. The children came round, wanting him to play with them.

'Don't bother Nattie. He's tired,' said the mother; and he did not gainsay it.

James came back in the evening, and heard the bad news.

'Don't get up to tea, Nackie,' he said; 'I'll bring it to you;' and he waited on him like a sister.

'Oh, now, Nackie, don't give it all to her. Come away, Essie,' said Louisa, seeing the little one stealing round to be fed.

'It will do her more good,' said Nackie. He did not seem to want it.

Louisa took the children to bed after supper, and James came to sit by Nackie.

'Never mind, old chap,' he said. 'You shall stay here till we hear from Bob. You shan't try to work this time.'

'Yes, I shall,' said Nackie. The old spirit flashed up once more.

'No, no.' There was a womanly tenderness in the strong man's voice. 'You *have* fought for your bread, Nat. You must give in now. The Almighty will never let us be poorer for the bite you get.'

Nackie's old smile flitted across his face, for at the name he thought of his rich Friend. *He* could make it up to James and Louie.

The baby was fretful, and James took it while Louisa went on with her sewing, when she came

back. By and by it fell asleep, and the parents sat silent, thinking. Nackie lay and watched their sorrowful faces. A little sound came through the stillness—the faintest whisper of a whistle, broken for want of breath: they could just make out the notes—

'Good time coming, boys,
Wait a little longer.'

The tears stood in James's eyes. At bedtime he made up the fire with precious coals as well as cinders. The glow was red on the walls when Nackie fell asleep, and when he awoke it glowed still. All his old fancies came out and thronged the room. He dozed off again, and thought he was in a sultry desert, with palm trees and a blue lake in sight. He was afraid they might be all a 'mirradge,' but he struggled towards them, nevertheless—oh, how wearily! and as he drew near they did not vanish. The trees grew plainer and plainer—he had his feet on the soft grass, and was stretching out his hand to the water—real, cool water—when again he woke.

When James came in next morning Nackie took no notice. He was either sleeping or away in the sunny place.

'Ah, he is very bad again!' said James.

'*Must* he go to the hospital?' asked Louisa pitifully.

'Wait a bit and see,' said James. He felt as if he could not send him away.

That was a Saturday. The secretary went out to see his friends, and consulted them about Nackie, but no one had anything to suggest. Convalescent homes would not take in patients in danger of sudden death.

The fog had put everything out. James had had to work an extra shift, and it was near midnight when he again reached home. His first look was towards Nackie's corner, and instead of the boy he saw his two little daughters sleeping there.

'What! gone?' he exclaimed.

'*Gone*,' said his wife, with a burst of tears. She pointed upwards. Then James knew that Nackie had taken a longer voyage than any other emigrant, without money and without price.

'When?' he uttered.

'This evening—near eight o'clock.'

'Oh, why couldn't I get back?' James laid his head upon his arm and wept for Nackie.

'He never missed you,' sobbed Louisa. 'He never took notice of me or anything; only once or twice he talked about blue water.'

Another long, deep sob shook James's chest. 'It was the disappointment killed him,' he said, 'and the fog.'

He rose, saying, 'I must see him.'

They went together to the other room—and there was Nackie, all the lines of sorrow smoothed away from his wasted face. It wore the look of one who was absolutely, entirely satisfied—every longing wish fulfilled. The mirage was a pool at last—a spring of living waters. The black fog had been God's dark angel, to bid him to the Sunny Land.

THE STORY BEHIND A SHOP

'All may have,
If they dare try, a glorious life or grave.'—*George Herbert.*

IT was a small grocer's shop in a dingy street; what, in those days, was called, I think, 'a chandler's shop,' since brooms and brushes, string, tin pans, and many other things not strictly groceries, were sold there; and Miss Martin had lived behind or over it all her life long.

She had never known full health, and scarcely youth. She was the eldest of the family, and all through her sickly childhood had toiled like a little, motherly, careful woman for the many brothers and sisters that came after her. Her back, never strong, grew rounder and rounder, from constant holding of the baby; her childish

days were one long ache; but she only loved the babies better for the pain she bore for them, and shed bitter tears when the eighth child proved too heavy a burden for her weary arms, and she could nurse no more. 'Curvature of the spine,' the doctor said, and at fourteen she was doomed to lie for years—perhaps for life—on her couch in the little parlour behind the shop—one care more to the care-laden parents—and see the little ones get into mischief for want of her, when her mother could not be everywhere at once.

That was the turning-point of Hannah Martin's life, when the deep waters rolled over her head, and no human eye could tell whether it was for baptism or for burial.

Her mother was a woman of great strength of character, who ruled the household well and wisely, and toiled early and late for her children, but was slow in giving outward tokens of affection. It was to Hannah and the father that they all had turned for sympathy and caresses. There were elements of softness and poetry in Mr. Martin's nature which gave him no assistance whatever in selling tallow candles, but made him a captivating father. His children were the joy of his life, the one treasure of beauty which the Heavenly Father drops into little dark rooms

behind dingy shops as freely as into kings' palaces. Nay, I was wrong about the tallow candles, for even these, and 'The Very Best Green Treacle,' were hallowed in his eyes by the consciousness that he weighed them out in order to gain things needful for the children. He had endless devices for amusing the little ones, and it was not until they grew old enough to enter into his cares, that they learned that their best play-fellow was himself a man of a sorrowful spirit, and would have sunk long ago, but for the strength that comes of pure love, and the unfailing energy and courage of his wife.

Hannah had made that discovery early, and when she found herself stricken down, a burden on the struggling family, and her father's heart half broken for her, her chief sorrow was for him. Then a spark of her mother's dauntless spirit fired up in the girl's heart, and she thought, 'Why must I be only a care? There must be something left for me to do.'

This was long before the days of Board Schools and compulsory education, and 'schooling' was a very difficult question to small shopkeepers, since the schools philanthropists had opened would not hold nearly as many children as should have been in them from households of the Poor with a capital

P; and it was thought a little shabby, as well as undignified, for 'the tradespeople' to take advantage of them. And yet even the cheapest private schools were dear to people like the Martins, and gave a very poor sixpennyworth for the sixpence. Hannah had been sent to one for a few months, where she was expected to learn grammar by standing up with the other girls, saying what they did. 'Nouns have number and person, gender and case,' they repeated; and 'Verbs have number and person, mood and tense.' Hannah informed her mother that 'Nouns have a number of persons in a general case,' and 'Verbs have a number of persons moving tents,' and asked what that meant.

By dint of home explanations, however, she had managed to pick up some acquaintance with moods and tenses, and other branches of 'English' as then taught. She had her old school-books—her father's Lindley Murray and Blair's *Catechism*, a spelling-book, and a First Reader, with really pretty readings in it—the Enfield Speaker, an old geography, and an aged atlas, in which Australia was called New Holland, and almost the only place marked on it was Botany Bay. And she had the large old family Bible, inherited from her great-grandparents, with wonderful pictures in it, which Mr. Martin showed to the children on Sunday

afternoons. With such a school library, and four slates in the family, Hannah thought she might set up a family school.

The two boys, Matthew and Mark, who came next to her in age, went out to school. Then came Martha, a bright little girl of nine, who had to be taken from school when Hannah broke down, to help her mother. But now, in the long waking hours of Hannah's painful nights, instead of crying, she planned quite a system for dividing her own former tasks among her brothers and sisters, so as to leave time for home lessons. The scheme was discussed and passed, with amendments, in full conclave; it was then sent up to the Lords (*i.e.* the parents) and ratified; and with the greatest possible importance each child took up his or her own share. Of course all the little new brooms did not go on sweeping with unabated vigour, but gradually a sense of individual responsibility for the general good grew into the family religion, and whatever each one could do or learn was cast into the family treasury, 'as unto the Lord, and not as unto men.'

Hannah gave the younger children all the schooling they ever had; and gave them withal a love of knowledge, and of all things high and noble, which they never lost; and this in spite of

incessant suffering, and the wear and tear of nerve caused by lying all day in the same dull room, which could never be kept quiet, since the children were always in it. But a great deal of hero-worship went on in that back parlour. The stories of brave deeds, brought home in books from the Sunday school library, were Hannah's change of air; and the children sat and ate up the stories with their eager eyes while she told them again and again.

After the first twelve months, Hannah began to improve. She was able to sew again, and would soon have made herself as ill as ever by working incessantly, had not her mother interfered.

'But, mother, it's all I can do, and I want to help you,' she pleaded.

'Never mind, child. You are worth more to me than your work, any day.'

Those were precious words from Hannah's mother, and the daughter never forgot them. And as she grew stronger she could sew more, besides teaching her little sisters to sew beautifully. Every one of those boys and girls turned out well, and handed down to the next generation the refinement, the love of beauty and of literature, which the deformed elder sister had taught them.

So passed the years. One more little sister was added to the flock, and four years afterwards there came a day when Hannah had to leave the shelter of the back parlour, and steal shrinking out, with her bent back and uneven shoulders, into the broad light of day. It was a terrible day for her; but all the family made a gala of it. Her father left the shop to go with her himself on her first walk out, and neighbours high and low came up to congratulate, and welcome her back to the outer world; and so the fear and the bitterness passed away, and Hannah went back to normal life, with a keenness of pleasure in its little changes such as only ex-prisoners know.

'The children' were growing up by that time, and the turn-out of the family attracted attention, and led to Hannah's being offered the post of mistress in a small infant school which was opened in Queen's Road, where the shop was. School-teaching in those days was looked upon rather as the perquisite of lame or deformed people, who could not earn their bread by muscular exertion. This time, the appointment made scope for a veritable teacher's genius. The little school overflowed its bounds. Large new schoolrooms were built, and as Government had nothing to do with them, in those peacefully

benighted days, Hannah—Miss Martin now—was able to govern the infants without a certificate. 'More were the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife,' for every little scholar was taken home to her motherly heart; and many were the queer little love-letters, with extraordinary writing and spelling, which she received from them. Her own brothers and sisters grew up and scattered; then her parents died, and Matthew took the shop; but she still lived on, in her old room above the back parlour, 'passing rich' on her forty pounds a year, with her room rent free, and her family treasures crowded into it.

There, one sunny Saturday afternoon in April, she sat with her window open to the double row of back yards below, sewing away at a dress she was turning, and thinking over the story of her own life, ever since the lilacs bloomed that spring when first she walked abroad after her captivity. Old memories seemed to come floating in with the smell of lilacs. Sorrow was in them, and yet the serene light upon her face was hardly shadowed, only softened, by those pensive thoughts.

There was much more of cloud, just then, on the young face of one whose story was all to come, and who felt so very much afraid of what it might be, that she decided to walk down and call

on Miss Martin, by way of encouragement to herself.

Queen's Road was at the bottom of a hill, in an outlying London district. Along the sides of the hill, and at the top, stood rows of pleasant houses, their common gardens lying between.

On that Saturday afternooon, some thirty years ago, while Miss Martin was conning memories and turning her brown merino, Gertrude Hope stood at the window of her little bedroom, high up in one of the terrace houses at the top of the hill, and looked down on the young green and the opening blossoms in the garden below, without any pleasure in them. She was thinking how soon this fresh beauty would be all gone, and the slightly dingy look that belongs to London gardens in summer would be stealing on.

'People place youth and age opposite to each other as the light and shade of life. But has not every day, every age, its own youth—its own new, attractive life, if one only sets about rightly to enjoy them? Yes, the aged man who has collected together pure recollections for his evening companions, is manifold happier than the youth who, with a restless heart, stands only at the beginning of his journey.'[1]

[1] From *The Home*, by Frederika Bremer.

At least his happiness is more assured. The young have their bounding springtides and their corresponding ebbs; and when the ebb comes they are apt to feel as if it would stay for ever, with long flat mud-banks showing. It seemed to Gertrude on this afternoon as if life always was at ebb, and always would be; and yet this was her May-time! That was the worst of it. She appeared to have everything which ought to make a young person happy and contented—a home with every comfort, kind parents, sisters and brother, fair average health and abilities, pleasures found for her, and approval when she tried to do anything useful, such as teaching in the Sunday school. To be dissatisfied was monstrous; but satisfied she was not, and it did not mend matters to feel that it must be all her own fault. Poor Gertrude felt herself already a failure, and predestined to be one for life. It sounds absurd; and yet, while so many lives are failures, it would be hard to prove that there is nothing reasonable in the kind of shrinking dejection which so easily besets the young, as they look forward to life, with its fairylands and howling wildernesses, and fear to miss the track.

Just now, Gertrude had two particular grounds for discouragement. One was chronic. Nature had left her a full share of those small deficiencies

and inefficiencies which good mothers repair by constant correction—a process remembered with infinite thankfulness after the cure is accomplished, but terribly depressing while it lasts.

The other—it was not very sensible, but one must tell the truth—was that both her elder sisters were engaged to be married—the second within the last few days; and Gertrude, at the mature age of nineteen, had never had an offer, nor the smallest reason to suppose that she had even been admired. Neither her glass nor her memory had one flattering tale to tell Life stretched out before her, such as it was to single women thirty years ago, when they were only just beginning to think of having careers, and the pioneers in that direction had a hard time of it. Gertrude never dreamed of anything so strong-minded. The life she contemplated was that of an orthodox old maid of the olden time—the somewhat aimless existence of a young lady at home prolonged into middle age; and then the inevitable break-up, and the choice, if choice there were, between utter loneness or hanging on to somebody else's home: valued (if she were good enough) for what she might do in the family, but not for what she could be. And one would have to be very good indeed,—yea, a saint, like the old maids in books!—to be valued

at all, not to mention being happy, under such conditions.

There were the Poor, to be sure, and Gertrude cared for them intensely in the abstract; but to visit them personally was a terror to her shyness and inexperience, and she dreaded her class of unruly children in the Sunday school all the week long. Surely it must be a higher as well as a brighter vocation to have power to make one fellow-creature utterly happy by a smile. And those whose hearts were stirred to the depths by that strong human love must learn, too, how to love God better. 'To him that hath shall be given.' Gertrude felt that very acutely, and wondered how it could be fair that natural disadvantages should cut one off from so much of goodness and usefulness as well as pleasure.

She was religiously going out this afternoon, while her sisters were delightfully walking abroad with their lovers, to accomplish the penance of hunting up an absentee Sunday scholar—a very naughty child with an effusive and plaintive mother, whom, for her own pleasure, Gertrude would have been thankful never to see again. She always left that house feeling that whatever she had said and done was all wrong. It occurred to her that Miss Martin must know this family,

and would be able to advise her. Ah! Talk of drawbacks! If ever a woman had had to face the limits of an adverse, cramped, distorted life, it was Hannah Martin; and she had wrought out a beautiful success. That was a triumph; and a strong desire sprang up in Gertrude's mind to know how it was won, and whether Miss Martin had ever had a stage of hopelessness and expecting to be a *failure*.

The Sunday scholar would make an excuse for a visit; so it befell that while Miss Martin was basting her skirt-lining a tap came at her door, and Miss Gertrude Hope entered, and insisted on helping to overcast the seams while they discussed Jane Fellows and her parents. And from the difficulties of doing good it was natural to pass on to the difficulties of everything in general; and Gertrude found herself drawn on, as she rarely was, to speak of just what was uppermost in her mind.

She had first made acquaintance with Miss Martin during the previous winter, when the schoolmistress had some ailment affecting the eyes which made it a kindness to go and read to her. Gertrude had gone several times, and felt the charm of 'the poems in that soul'; but their conversation had never become intimate, and she had not

ventured to repeat her visits after the eyes were well. To-day, however, her inner things seemed to flow out spontaneously,—even to the confession (which followed naturally after telling of her sister's engagement) that she did not believe 'her turn,' as people called it, would ever come, and feared lest life should be shallow and useless, without the house-mother's definite duties and strong affections.

'Of course yours is not,' she added hastily. 'But then you have your school, and such a gift for it. And I hate teaching!'

'Ah, but it's not the school that made my life,' said Miss Martin. 'It *is* a great thing for a single woman to have a work—a trade, as one may say; and I know teachers who say their work is everything and all the world to them; but that's not me, Miss Gertrude. The school goes a long way down, but not to the bottom.'

'Does anything?' exclaimed Gertrude, with interest. 'I mean—is it—can anyone feel *life* down to the bottom without being married?'

'Well, my dear, as I never was married, I can't say,' answered Miss Martin laughingly. 'I know by my own father and mother that there is *that* in belonging to one another in that way that's like nothing else. But as to feeling'— She

paused, and her grey eyes turned and rested with a lingering look on a pot of lilies of the valley in full bloom which stood on the window-sill, just out of the line of sunlight which slanted in.

'I can't say, of course,' she said slowly, 'but I could hardly think that even mother felt some things more than I did; and as far as eyes can see, there's many a wife and mother has never felt anything so much. I believe it comes, sooner or later, to everyone that has got a heart to feel it—something that breaks up the deeps, and there they are!'

'Then it came to you?' Gertrude ventured timidly.

'Yes, Miss Gertrude. They say every old maid has a history, and I've had mine; though it wasn't a love-story, as they are called. There was love enough in it.'

Something in her wistful look seemed to give Gertrude leave to say, 'And does anyone know about it?'

'My brothers and sisters know the outside,' said Miss Martin. 'And just a few besides know bits of what was behind. But it's curious how it has all been coming back to me this afternoon, before you came in. I suppose it was the lilies,—and the

lilacs smelling so sweet. Look at them, down in the yard.'

'Are they in the story?' asked Gertrude shyly, colouring as she spoke.

'Only because I've smelt them every year as it all happened,' said Miss Martin. 'It's a long story and a sad one.'

'Oh, do tell it to me!' cried Gertrude; and the lonely woman's heart felt a strong fibre vibrate to her young sympathy.

'Then I must begin at the beginning, if it won't tire you out,' she answered. She put her work from her, and sat for a moment, gazing out of the open window, as though her eyes saw far beyond the house-backs which shut in the prospect there.

'It began and ended in this house,' she said. 'There have been six love-stories here behind the shop, Miss Gertrude, besides my father and mother's, that was a sweet story from beginning to end; and I used to think I got the cream of them all—and the skim too, for I heard all about them, good and bad. I believe there came a time with every one of my brothers and sisters when I was first. I don't mean that they loved me more than father and mother, but I *was* more to them, for the time. And then it went by; one after another

got to stand on their own feet, as was right. But then another would come on; and as sure as the courting began, every one of them came back to me. Hannah was wanted *then*—until the course of true love got settled quite smooth, and then—I wasn't anyone so very particular.'

'And didn't you mind?' asked Gertrude.

'Not as much as I should now, I believe,' said Miss Martin. 'There was always another to come on, and I belonged to them all. Only, when I began to see that Effie's time was coming, my heart did fail me, at first.

'My little Effie! She came when I was sixteen, two years after I was laid on my back, so I never nursed her, and I was afraid she wouldn't love me as much as the other little ones did; but, instead, she loved me best of them all. She was the flower of us,—pretty, and with such winning ways! and clever too. She was five years old when I got my first school, and she would trot along by my side to school with me. We called her our "summer child," for by that time the worst of the struggle with the family was over. The boys and girls began to work for themselves, and all did so well; and we felt we had come to a pleasant place in our lives. Father and mother got to look quite young again, to what they had been, when the strain was

off them; and whatever partings came, there was always Effie, the little sunbeam, left at home—Effie and me.

'She was away for one year, though, at a training-school, and came back to be second teacher of the girls where I had the infants; and it was all planned out so nicely for her to rise to be first teacher in a new school one of these days, when Matthew must needs bring home a very fine young man from Underwood Brothers, where he worked—Harold Hunter—Hal, he was always called—and you can guess what happened next. He was an orphan, with no one belonging to him but one brother out in America, and no home to go to; so Matthew thought it would be kind to give him a Sunday out (they were in the house, both of them, at Underwoods'), and I believe he loved Effie from the first minute he set eyes on her. She was just eighteen then; and before her next birthday they were engaged.'

'And you lost your last one!' said Gertrude.

'Ah, but it wasn't as I expected,' said Miss Martin. '*He* loved me. All the rest of those that loved my girls and boys were very good to me, always, and are to this day; but Hal Hunter *loved* me. He always said I came next to Effie, and I believe it was true. You see, Miss Gertrude,

having nobody of his own, this was like his home; and our two boys next above Effie went out to his brother in America (which turned out a very good thing for them), so Hal was all the boy we had left, for Mark was married before then, and Matthew had been thinking about it for nine years, and it wasn't long before he did it.

'Well, he got to be more and more to us all—Hal, I mean. He was a lad you couldn't help loving—nobody could; and yet I wasn't satisfied. Father was; and mother never let me know till afterwards that she was not. Hal went to church, and had been confirmed; he had as much religion, outside, as our own two younger boys, and Underwoods gave him the highest character; but I just felt, with him and Effie both, they hadn't the joy that no man taketh from you. And if I tried to say anything of that, Hal would put his arm round my old round back and say, "But, Hannah dear, if we were all such crack Christians, who would there be left for you to do good to?" And Effie would say, "You dear old thing, I shall never be as good as *you*;" and I minded that more than anything. How I prayed for them! I couldn't rest till they had the best, the very best that God could give them. Nights and nights, when my darling lay in her happy sleep on that little bed in

the corner there, I lay and prayed for my children —my dearest children of them all.

'Well, the time went on. They had been engaged going on for two years, when one night, when Effie was out, Matthew came with a grave face. He knew she would be out, and he'd come to tell us he had reason to fear that Hal was in danger of going wrong through drink. Mat had been moved up, in a different department from Hal, before he married; and of course afterwards he wasn't in the house, so that he didn't see much of him; and when he was gone, little by little Hal got more with a set that he had kept him out of; and one night he came in so much the worse for drink that he got a caution for it, and the manager told Mat, knowing the cause he had to be interested in him. So then Mat asked questions, and found it had been so before, and not been known. Everybody liked Hal, and tried to shield him, but they couldn't deny it; and Barton, a very good young man who first asked Mat to take notice of Hal, confessed he had done it then because he was afraid for him about the drink.

'So Mat spoke to Hal most plainly, and offered to sign the pledge with him; but Hal wouldn't. There was always beer for the young men with their dinner, and he said he couldn't be different

from the rest. No doubt he felt it would be like owning his weakness. But he promised and vowed he would never slip again, and would break with the old set, if Mat wouldn't tell father; and Mat gave him a trial; he took that responsibility, because he knew how Hal loved Effie. But ah, my dear, drink is stronger than love. He went wrong again—not so badly—it wasn't known—but Mat heard of it, and then he felt that father and mother must be told. There had been time already for Hal to have told us himself, if he had meant to.

'When mother heard it all, she said he must do one thing or the other—give up the drink out and out, or give up Effie. She would never risk her child being a drunkard's wife. You may think it sounds hard, but down here we see what comes of drink, and how the little slip goes on to the great ruin; and neither father nor I could say a word different.

'Then we had to tell Effie, and she cried, and wouldn't half believe it; and then she said, "Let *me* speak to Hal!" And mother said, "Right, my child, you shall;" for Hal had a hot temper, and we thought he would take it best from her. But my mind misgave me.

'He was coming Saturday night that week. I

came up here, and mother went into the shop with father, as we'd done so many times before, to leave them alone together. Then, by and by, I heard mother go through into the parlour; and very soon after poor Effie came running up to me and cried out, "Oh, Hannah, go down. Do something —do!"

'I asked her how he had taken it, and she said, "Oh, he was so angry, and said it was all that sneak Barton who had been making up stories to Mat; and I couldn't go on. How could I?"

'Then my heart went like a stone, for I felt that mother was right; if Effie daren't say a word to Hal when he was her lover, she would never guide him when he was her husband.

'"He said if I thought such things of him, he would go away," she said, and sobbed again. "And then mother came in, and oh"— She sobbed too much to speak, and that minute the parlour door burst open; there was a heavy step, and the street door banged; and Effie gave one cry,—I hear it now, I shall hear it to my grave,— for Hal was gone.

'I ran for my life downstairs and into the street, and called "Hal! Hal!" but he was gone. Father called me in to mind the shop, and went out himself to look for him, but he couldn't find him.

Ah, my dear, the tea and sugar I weighed out that night were heavier than lead to my fingers; and yet, when I saw the drunkards' wives and drunkards' children come in to get their little two and three pen'orths, I felt that mother was right.

'She had spoken out to Hal, but he told me himself afterwards she couldn't have done it more kindly. What stung him was, he knew it was true; drink *was* his snare. He was in a passion, and went off; but oh, I know he would have come back again,—but directly he got outside, there were the public-houses everywhere. He couldn't go back to Underwood's before his usual time, for fear of the other lads asking questions. And he'd had a guilty conscience that made him uneasy about coming here that night. He knew Mat had been asking for him, because Mat meant to have spoken first to him; but Hal would not give him a chance; he slipped out of the way, and Mat couldn't put off telling us any longer. Hal thought he might have been telling, and drank on his way over, to get up his courage; so that was working in him, and he went in somewhere, and drank till he had to be brought home by a policeman. Of course on Sunday he woke up desperate, and with all the craving on him; he slipped out and drank again, and Monday morning he was dismissed.

It was the third time, you see; they couldn't overlook it.

Matthew never knew it till the end of the day, and he went up and pleaded and begged for him, till they said, for once, for Matthew's sake, they'd take him on again at the bottom of the list, in a fortnight; but when Mat went to tell him that, he was gone, and all his things, and nobody knew where he had gone to.'

'But Effie—did he not tell *her*?' exclaimed Gertrude.

'Never a word,' said Miss Martin. 'You see, he was ashamed. Day by day we watched and listened, and our hearts jumped into our mouths at every man's footstep that came into the shop; and he never came nor wrote. If my child had known from the first that he would not come back, she might have borne it and lived: the watching killed her. I saw her get thinner and whiter, and her sad eyes deeper, and I knew she'd had a death-blow. Ah, my dear, I knew then what love and sorrow mean! Day and night I prayed for Hal—for Hal, and for my poor, poor lamb that I saw a widow indeed and desolate. I went to my day's work, and moved and spoke, as one has to; but down underneath was a sighing and crying to God that never ceased—"Lord, save Hal. Lord, help

my darling." It seems to me I scarcely breathed without praying for them, all those two long years we never heard of him. But long before the end the bright light in the cloud had begun to show. When my child was torn away from every hope on earth, she looked to God. The prayers I had prayed for her ever since she lay a little baby in my arms, on my pillow, were heard in the day of her anguish. Instead of thinking hard thoughts of God, she came to see there was only One who cared for Hal more than she did, and would go after the lost sheep *until* He found him.

'And then—oh, it broke my heart to see her, more than if she had rebelled and murmured. She went about her work, my patient lamb!—behaved and quieted herself like a child that is weaned of its mother, and waited on us all; but most of all on mother, for she knew that mother felt it so, because it was she that did it. She has been called a hard woman, sometimes, mother has, but those who thought that of her never saw the way she watched our Effie then, and planned and schemed for anything she thought would give her a minute's pleasure. Everyone expected that Effie would have an illness, but instead it was mother who took ill, and was ill a long time, and Effie nursed her.

'It was in the autumn that poor Hal went off. When the next autumn came, mother was better; but in January there came a hard frost, and Effie began to get a cough. We feared for her all that winter, but she kept on somehow, up to the summer holidays; she gave up then, and never taught again. Winter came soon, that year. We had hard frost again in November, and thick fog, when there came a letter—a letter from Hal to me!

'He had been going on badly, off and on, all those two years—mending, and thinking he would get on a little and then write, and then going back again, till at last he met with an accident, and was taken to the hospital; it was from there he wrote to me. There was something to be done to him in a day or two that would be dangerous, in the bad state he was, and he couldn't face it till he had written to beg me to give his dearest love to Effie, and if I could forgive him, to go and see him once more.

'I did but just look to see what the letter was, and gave it to Effie to read. *Poor* lamb! All the life came back into her face. She stood up and said, "*I'll* go to him, Hannah. I'll go to-day." Miss Gertrude, I was in a sore strait, when I looked at my child, with her short, hard breathing

and her burning cheeks, and then at the cold, thick fog that lay between her and the man she loved.

'I went for mother. She was never one to show her feelings much; but it seemed as if all the love she had kept to herself for twenty-three years came out in her face that minute. She put her arm round Effie, and said, "Child, if we knew that Hal would die, you should go to him this morning; but it mayn't be so bad. Let Hannah go first and see, for if he lives you must live too, for his sake."

'That was a Wednesday—a half-holiday. How thankful I was! So I went off directly after school in the morning. Ah! I can't tell you about the meeting with Hal; he was so broken down, poor fellow. But I left him with a happy heart, for I thought he had come to the turning-point at last. And I saw the house doctor. He had given orders that if I came I was to be let see Hal at any time, and he told me, now the load was off the poor lad's mind, he was likely to do well, and go out again as hearty as anybody.

'There was bright news for me to take back to my darling! Though when I saw her face as I went in, I was afraid it came too late to save her. But she began to get a little better directly, and when

the frost went she got on more. The wish to live had come back.

'Hal went on as well as possible for two or three weeks. I used to go and inquire, and so did Matthew, but we mightn't see him for a fortnight. After that, I saw him several times, and I felt it was a real change that had come to him. That was our Indian summer, those two or three weeks when we had hope for Hal, and for our summer child. Then he took a chill, and the doctor shook his head, and told me it was one of the things they dreaded with patients that had been hard drinkers. "If the lungs are touched, they burn away like match-wood," he said; and so it was. The cold had come back again by that time, and when I went again they all knew that poor Hal had caught his death.

'I had to tell Effie. She listened, and only said, "Do they give *no* hope of his getting well?"

'"None," I said. She lay back in her chair, and a sweet smile came into her face. Then I knew that she felt it was the same with her; and my soul consented. It was best they should go together. God was very good.

'Hal lingered on into the new year, and the hospital people were very kind, and let me see him whenever I could go; and while the holidays

lasted I went every day. And there came a spell of milder weather, and then Effie asked us to let her go, just once, to see him again. "I *would* live for you all if I could, Hannah dear," she said. "It would be a happy life, now. But it's no use. I get weaker and weaker, and I do want to see him once more on earth."

'So I went to father and mother, and begged of them to let her go. Poor father, it was hard for him, for he clung to hope, and always thought Effie would get better in the spring. But mother said, "Let's never have to think that the child wanted a comfort that she might have had, but for our will;" and he gave way. We settled for her to go with me the next day, if it was fine, and I wrote to the sister of his ward, to say we were coming. I was going to get a cab, but that evening Mat came in, and said no, he should order a carriage for her. "It's the least *I* can do, Hannah," he said, and the tears were in his eyes. Poor Mat!

'He went over to the livery stables. We knew the man that kept them, and Mat was telling him he wanted a very easy carriage, and why, when a gentleman that happened to be in the yard, giving some orders, touched his arm. "Mr. Smith will excuse my taking this job away from him," he said. "Name your time, and my carriage shall be

at your door, to take your sisters to the hospital and bring them back. I know Miss Martin."

'Mat asked Mr. Smith his name afterwards, and it was one of our school committee. And next day the most beautiful carriage and pair came round to the door, and a foot-warmer in it, and fur rug and cushions, all for my darling to go as easy as it could be made. It was *so good*. I'll never forget how happy we were, that ride. And when we got to the hospital the porters brought a chair and carried her all up those long stairs and galleries into the ward. The sister had put a screen round Hal's bed. It was the same as if "there stood no man near" when those two met again.

'I stayed in the ward and tried to talk to the other patients; but all the while my heart was beating time to the minutes—the last minutes of joy my darling would ever have on earth, as it seemed; and they slipped on and on, till I was obliged to go and look round the screen and call her.

'She was sitting with her hand in his, and there was a light on both their faces that made me stand still. I had never seen the like before.' Softly Miss Martin added, 'I *think* I must know a little how they look in heaven now.

'And instead of clouding, poor Hal's face lit up with a smile to see me—as it always did—and he drew me down and held me for such a kiss! Then they parted, without a tear, and Effie was carried down again to the carriage. She looked up at me as we drove off, like a child that has had a happy holiday, and said, "It has been so nice!"

'I don't know what I answered, but I must have said something about their parting, for she said, "It's only for such a little while, you know." And when I didn't speak, she said, "You *will* be glad, for my sake, won't you, Hannah?"

'I looked at her dear face, and knew the life of my heart would go with her; but I said I would. And I was. Father, I *am* glad!—I am!'

Miss Martin's head went down upon her hands, and Gertrude waited reverently before trying to falter out such poor words of sympathy as she could find—poor indeed, but they brought a gentle answering look to the kind face lifted from the hands.

'It was all right, my dear,' said Miss Martin. 'Right for me too. The Lord fulfilled my *best* desire for them both. How could I murmur at anything He took away?

'It was that same day, when we had got home,

and Effie was in bed, she said to me, "We never had such a happy time together before, Hannah."

'She was very tired then, and her breath was short, but I couldn't stop her. "Do you remember," she said, "how you used to tell us there was something better than all we had? And we used to think—what could you know about it? Now —*I know.* I have known this long time what Jesus can be in sorrow—and for sin. Now I know that He is altogether lovely; and His presence—and nothing else—can make even our joy in one another *altogether lovely* too."

'And then, with a look that is painted on my heart so that I can never lose it,—to all eternity, I hope,—she put her dear hand on mine, and said, "And now—*dear* Hannah—it's my turn to say to you—for yourself—*He is enough.*"

'"Yes," I said, "He is." And I felt it. It was given me, then,—a sight of my lot and my inheritance such as carried me through all the days to come. All my life rose before me, and I saw how rich I had been in being loved and trusted; but I was like Ruth with her six measures that Boaz gave her; it wasn't a perfect number, because he had settled to give *himself* to her, and that would make the seventh. I'd had my six measures, as perhaps not many ever have; and yet they were

all short measure for the can; but all the time there was One more, and that made up the seven. Before I was laid upon my back, when I was just a little tired child drudging about the shop, the Lord began to give Himself to me; and the seventh measure flowed over and filled up all the rest,—good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over. And when Effie had what I never had, nor look to have—You say you don't, either, my dear,' said Miss Martin, her rapt face suddenly changing to its wonted kindly look. 'Well, that will be as He pleases. But Effie had it; and she learned *that* was only six measures; it wasn't perfect till God gave the seventh.'

'Thank you. I shall remember that always,' said Gertrude softly. Then, fearing lest Miss Martin should be drawn away from her own story, she hastened to add, 'But tell me—did they ever see each other again?'

'Never, on earth,' said Miss Martin. 'It was the last time. But that did not matter. It had been enough. The change there was in poor Hal when I saw him again! I told you he had had the turn before. I knew he had found the Saviour, and been found of Him; but sins like his leave a black shadow. Poor lad, he fretted so to think of the sorrow he had brought on all of us. To the last,

he could never get reconciled to that; but from the day he saw Effie he was able to give it up, and trust the Lord to give us double for all *his* sins. Father and mother both went to see him, and Mat and Mark: but he clung most to me. I dreaded the end of the holidays; and, after all, he died the Sunday of the very week that school began, and father was with him.'

'He never lived to miss you,' said Gertrude.

'No. I thank God for that,' said Miss Martin.

'And then there was nothing left but to see my darling fade away. Ah me, we talk of fading, as if human creatures died like flowers; but it's through pain and lowness and struggle of body that we sink down into our rest. I watched her suffer till I prayed and longed for the hour that should part me from her. It was so hard to leave her every day for my school; but we had prayed so much to be together at the last, I felt the Lord would grant it; and He did. She died on a Sunday morning, just as Hal did. The day he always used to come to her was the day she went to him, to begin the long, long Sabbath together.'

'And you were nearest, to the end,' said Gertrude.

'No,' said Miss Martin. 'It was father held her up in his arms, all her last hours—father and Mat.

And mother had her hand at the last. I've always been so glad of that. But my name was her last word. It just happened so. She lay on father's shoulder, and we thought she was gently sleeping herself away, when her eyes opened again a minute, and she said, "Don't stand, Hannah."'

Suddenly the speaker's tears welled up, and she and Gertrude cried together.

'I oughtn't to be crying now,' said Miss Martin, smiling a quivering smile through her tears. 'I could weep my eyes out for what went before, but it's her marriage day that I have to tell of now. She was beautiful in her life; but *after*, she was altogether lovely. I looked at her, my love, that had shed such tears and borne such pain in life, and longed with such sore longing for things she never had; and something in her face said, "I have it all now. He has satiated the weary soul." She lay, like a bride adorned for her husband, with white flowers all about her, and a plant of lilies blooming by her side. The flowers were left at our door. I never knew who sent them, but I think it must have been the same kind friend who sent the carriage. I wish he could know the joy it gave me to have flowers for Effie's bridal.

Those days were as days of heaven to me. I couldn't weep for her—only once, when Mat came

up; and how he cried! I never saw a man cry like that—and he was like mother, never one to show what he felt. "Oh, Hannah," he said, "to think if we'd done at the first what we did at the last, none of this need have been!"'

'But God brought good out of the evil,' said Gertrude.

'Yes, but not the good that would have been,' said Miss Martin. 'My dear, it would be a sin to say that *everything* is for the best. You may bring the blackest thing that ever was to God, and He will do with it the best that *even He can*; but by the laws that He Himself has made, there are fruits of sin that never can be anything but bitter on this earth. He may put things right in heaven, but not here. He could take my Effie and her love to glory; but *what* went off the earth with them, that might have been! That was what Mat said. And, dear lad,' his sister added in a trembling voice, 'he said, "It's worse for you than anyone, Hannah, for the old folks will go to her." And it was true. I could see they felt, like Effie with Hal, it was only for such a little time.'

'And you might have half a lifetime left to live without her,' said Gertrude.

'Yes; but I didn't feel it at first,' said Miss Martin. 'I was so happy to think, when I went

out to school, I left her in glory, instead of suffering here. Then I got a strange feeling of wanting to have letters from her, like we did from the other girls when they were married and settled away. It seemed to give me a pang when the postman went by; and it grew and grew, till I couldn't tell how to bear it, to know she was gone, and never a word or token could come back from her to me. I searched my Bible through for every word about the life she had gone to—and it ought to have been enough for me, but it wasn't. I longed so to go and see her, and know how she was getting on; and there was no voice, nor any that answered. I saw father and mother setting their faces heavenward, and waiting, cheerful, for the call to come for them—when the posts go out, as Bunyan said; but what long years *I* might have to wait, before that great silence broke for me.

'The spring came, and the sunshine, but *my* sunbeam was gone. The young leaves came out, but there was no Effie to see them. Mother would try to get me out, sometimes. I had no heart for anything that wasn't a duty; but one beautiful Saturday afternoon in May—just such a day as this, only the trees more forward,—to please her, I went for a walk to Kensington Gardens. I went listless down the paths, thinking of the times I

used to go there with Effie, before her troubles began, when every little thing was such a treat to her. *I thought I couldn't enjoy anything*; but when I sat down to rest, all among the May trees, red and white, and dark fir trees showing through the young green of the elms beyond—it was *so beautiful.* And I looked up at the blue sky, and the white clouds piled up like snowy mountains behind the trees, and thought, "This must be a little, just a little, like what Effie sees now."

'Then came the thought, "But she hasn't got to the new heavens and the new earth yet. You don't know that there are trees and flowers where she is." Oh, the cold, thick cloud between us! I felt it again. Then, on a sudden, I seemed to hear her dear voice, saying that little hymn I used to teach her—

> "All things bright and beautiful,
> All creatures great and small,
> All things wise and wonderful,
> The Lord God made them all."

Just in her childish voice! as plain as if the Lord had sent her out of heaven to point with her own dear little hand to the pretty things she used to love, and say, "These are God's thoughts. Every pretty blossom, and leaf, and colour in the sky, was in His mind before ever it was made for eyes

to see. And that's the mind of Him I've gone to live with, Hannah dear, and I'm looking into it—Hal and I are—with our heavenly eyes, while you are seeing as much of it as poor earthly eyes *can* see, down below."

'And so the silence broke. I hadn't so long to wait, had I?' said Miss Martin, with a tearful smile.

'That was your letter,' said Gertrude softly.

'Yes, my letter in Effie's little writing that I taught her,' said the elder sister, brushing away a tear, 'to remind me that the same Lord made heaven and earth. He is Master of the house where Effie is, and my dear Master too. And ever since, whether it's flowers, or stars, or the light on the clouds—"All things bright and beautiful,"—and things wise and wonderful too, that people do—all seem as if they came to say that the posts go out from Above, and these are the letters to tell us what is in the heart of Him with whom our loved ones dwell.'

There was a long silence. Gertrude broke it by asking, 'But when the dark days come—when you have only the backs of those houses to look at, and a rainy sky, and nobody does anything nice—do you feel as if you had no letters then?'

Ah, the dark days and the rough times never

make it sad to think of her,' said Miss Martin. 'From the beginning, *they* made me glad for her. My little tender lamb, that I couldn't shield from sorrow with all my trying! The Good Shepherd has her now, where the cold winds will never blow on her again. No, the snare, to me, would have been to sit and think and dream about the past, and the meeting to come, and not put my heart into what was going on about me. But I got a word for that too. God sent it.'

She paused a moment, as if girding herself to tell what would be hard to utter.

'It was a good while after,' she said, 'I don't remember exactly when—I read a story of a poor laundress, a widow, who lost her only daughter; and the day after the funeral she brought her minister twenty pounds for the missionaries. At first he would not take it, he said it was too much for her to give; but she begged him—and when still he would not, at last she said, "When my child was born, I thought, 'She will be married some day, and she will want a portion. I must begin to save up for it.' So I began that day with sixpence, and it went on to what you see here. You know what happened last week. The Lord Jesus has taken the bride; and it's only fair that He should have the dowry."

'Oh, when I read that, I thought, if Effie's wedding had been coming, how I would have sewed my fingers to the bone to get her things ready, and planned day and night how to get everything good and pretty I could think of, for her home; and how all my spare time would have gone to her, and her little ones, if she had had them! And I knelt down by her little empty bed, and asked the Lord, would He take the dowry? All the love and thought and care, and bits of money savings too,—would He send, by the hand of whom He chose, and take it all; never let the love dry up and wither in my heart, but from that night to my life's end send me them who should want it every bit, and let me give it, whether they were pleasing to me or not, for His sake.'

'And the answer came?' said Gertrude.

'It did,' said Miss Martin. 'As I lay awake that night, I thought of things that were wanted for one and another: quite little things, for the big ones were beyond me; but I thought, "I'll begin to-morrow with sixpence." And from that day forward, one by one, things came to do, and people to be done for. Mostly the sort of things I had done before, only I put more heart into them; but some were new, for loving poor Hal made us

all love sinners as never before—father and mother, as well as me. There have been some laid on that bed that I couldn't tell *you* of, my dear; be thankful it is not for you to know of some things yet. And they were saved. Thank God!'

Gertrude looked with a kind of reverence at the little patchwork-quilted bed; but the utter self-negation of such a life oppressed her.

It was very beautiful,' she said; 'but could it be the same as doing things for Effie and Hal?'

'No, it could *not*,' said Miss Martin. 'Not the same. I felt that, when father and mother were gone, and I longed to have my own flesh and blood to work for. I had always been used to it. Home had been first always, and my work second. But it was just *that* I had offered to the Lord, when I asked Him to take Effie's dowry. All the world is His flesh and blood, since He has taken upon Himself our nature; and now He has got all my treasures safe, it's only fair that all that belonged to them should go to Him and His. And you mustn't think it's all giving out. Good measure comes back, while it lasts: only of course it can't go on, as one's own folks do.'

'Do you mean that people go away and forget you?' exclaimed Gertrude indignantly.

'No, my dear, far from it; but mostly they

outgrow you, just as my own brothers and sisters did. You are all the world to them for a bit, and then they go off; and with this difference from your own kith and kin—they owe you no duty, except for love's sake, so that when they get to stand on their own feet and make ties of their own, every tie that brings a duty comes before yours. They don't forget, but they could no more hold on to you with the old clinging, than anybody in a boat that's set going could cling to the tree it was moored to when it came in out of a storm.'

'But how dreadful for you! You can't unlove them again, just because they don't want you,' said Gertrude.

'No, my dear, no more than they unlove me,' answered Miss Martin; 'but I have to learn to get them off my mind, and turn to those that want me next.'

'I couldn't bear it. I should be afraid to love anybody,' said Gertrude.

'You couldn't help it if it was ever so,' said Miss Martin. 'I thought once I ought to try, and love only with the love that doesn't care for being loved again, and can't be pleased, nor suffer; but that wasn't Effie's dowry. And then the word came to me, "Go thy way, eat the fat and drink the sweet

(and the bitter); and when the change steals on, and you are left as one for whom only a little piece is prepared—not enough to live on—then you shall sit down under My shadow with great delight, and My fruit be sweet to your taste." Oh, we couldn't bear it!—to love *so*, and yet be ready to let go whenever our part is done, if there wasn't ONE nearer and dearer than all to turn back to. It's just as it was with the children. I hadn't to take care of them alone, only to help mother; and now, it's the Lord who is out seeking the lost and the broken-hearted, and when He wants me, He calls me to help Him. And when my work is over, and the poor lamb is either put in good pasture or away beyond where I can reach, the place is ready for me to sit down and rest with Him. Just as after the weddings and winnings, when one and another got a new start in life and left us, and father and mother and I sat down together, they were nearer of kin to me than all that went away, and I was satisfied. And still it's the same. I sit up here alone with Him who is nearest; and He is enough.'

Gertrude was silent, awed. This back room was indeed the presence-chamber of the King.

'But you mustn't think that everybody goes, my dear,' Miss Martin went on brightly. 'I've never

been really left alone altogether. Only it will happen, sometimes, that those you cling to most are the ones to go, and perhaps to change the most. But that's no fault of theirs. It's the Lord's will that those who would have taken us up too much should go on, and we be ready for the next. That's our little perquisite—we that have got no husbands or children to take up our time year in, year out—we can make room for anyone that comes along. They're all Mr. Rights to us, and Mrs. Rights.'

'And all the little Rights for you,' exclaimed Gertrude. '*That is one thing that stayed*, Miss Martin—your school.'

'And a fortune it has been to me. You must have been a lone woman with an infant school yourself, to know what it's worth to have the little things to run to you and cling about you,' said Miss Martin, her eyes kindling with a mother-light. 'You wouldn't believe what it is to me. Our family were always like mother about showing love, all but Effie and Hal. My dear Mat, I know how he loves me; but I think he'd expect the ceiling to fall down if I ever put my arms round his neck, as his own girls do. Ah, I miss my Effie's loving ways. It's a foolish thing, but sometimes, to this day, I cry for her to come and kiss me. There's many to love and trust me, but few, besides

the little children, that care to cling round my neck and get hold of my hands—my empty hands—now.'

'Oh!' With a little cry Gertrude was kneeling beside her, her head on the lonely woman's shoulder, the hard brown hands fast in hers; and Miss Martin laid her cheek against the young head, and loosed a hand to stroke it tenderly; but all the while she knew that this love was not like Effie's, and never could be. There are loves that can spring up anywhere—blossom in an hour and bloom for the rest of life; but the love of brothers and sisters flows through tendrils that clasped when they were young and soft, and grew old and hard together. Rend them, and no other plant will ever twine into the same embrace. Fresh leaves and sprays may hide the rent, but behind them the old, twisted wood is found, 'the scars remaining,'—never to gain its complement again until the day of Restitution comes. This young life had its own links clasped already, more than it was aware.

Still, the love of the young is very precious to those whose youth is past. Gertrude was dropping sweet drops into that wounded heart.

'I may come again, mayn't I?' she asked, raising her head.

'That you may, my dear, whenever you want to.'

'I shall always want to,' said Gertrude; and fancying she saw a doubt even in the tenderness of Miss Martin's smile, she added quickly, 'I have no one else to go to.'

Again the lone woman's tender smile covered her hidden thought. She was used to being sought by those who had no one else to go to.

'Your life ought to be full, my dear,' she said, gently stroking back the girl's brown hair.

'It isn't,' said Gertrude.

'Then something must be wrong,' said Miss Martin. 'Do you think, because you can't be clerk of the kitchen for anybody, and rule the roast, that you've been neglecting to go off with those little perquisites that belong to you?'

'I'm afraid I have. I have been turning up my nose at broken victuals,' said Gertrude, somewhat ruefully; 'so I suppose it will serve me right if I come to want them some day.'

'There are two ways of looking at everything in this world, my dear,' said Miss Martin. 'You may call the same thing broken victuals or nice bits, according to how you take it. I had to learn that,' she added, smiling, 'after being mistress in this house, next to mother, all my life, and mistress altogether the two years after dear mother was gone—when father was taken too, and Mat

and Laura and their children came. This room is mine; father left it me in his will, and all the things in it. They could spare it, for they kept the two top rooms that we used to let off; and all their wish was to make me happy here. But it was a great change for me, and it took some prayer and fasting—"fasting from thoughts of self"—to settle my mind that the best *they* had to give me wasn't broken victuals at all; it was a very worthy portion for a crooked old maid to have.'

'I should have thought they would love you so much,' said Gertrude.

'They do, I'm sure,' said Miss Martin; 'but they are all so much to each other, there was no great *want* for me, except in times of trouble; and I had been used to be the right hand and right arm. However, we all shook down together very lovingly; and if I am sick, or want anything, they all want to do for me. Only, one's own flesh and blood are not always the easiest to give the dowry to, if they happen to want the very bit you'd like to keep; and what you long to give, and other people would jump at, they mayn't care for.'

Gertrude looked thoughtful. 'I see,' she said, 'it is just as important to know how to take as

how to give. I will try to be more pleased when the others do anything to please me. I can do that, even if I am too stupid to please them.'

'The Lord won't leave you stupid, my dear,' said Miss Martin. 'Trust in Him, and He will give you knowledge of witty inventions to make happiness for them you love.'

'And for my school-children. Oh! Jane Fellows!' exclaimed Gertrude, starting up. 'The time is all gone.'

On this, Miss Martin insisted upon taking the visit to Jane Fellows on herself, for which Gertrude was infinitely beholden.

She walked homewards up the hill again, past the square gardens, where the late afternoon sunlight slanted low across the white and purple lilacs, and felt that life was changed for her, almost as much as it had been for her sister this very week, on the day of betrothal. A new love is a very wonderful possession, but a new truth may be greater still, for it means a further look into the mind of Him, 'in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life.' Nor is it only through great upheavals, when the rocks are rent, that eras can be made in the spiritual life; the glance of a sunbeam on treasure hidden by the wayside may enrich it just as much. Such a glance had shone

for Gertrude, and shown her the way into new treasuries filled with the unsearchable riches of Christ. And at the same time a sweet new human love had sprung up, and shed new fragrance on her way.

At the gate she met the new pair of lovers, looking very felicitous.

'Here has Gertrude been going, so good, to look up her Sunday school children, while we have been out pleasuring,' said the kind-hearted sister Fanny.

'No, I have not seen one of my children,' said Gertrude. 'I have been out pleasuring too.'

That was thirty years ago. Gertrude is very nearly as old now, as Miss Martin was then. She has neither married nor had a 'career.' Her life has been spent very much after the manner of an old-fashioned old maid's, but greatly advantaged by the higher estimate and position won for single women through the careers of some among them, and the wider choice of work and interest for the 'half-timers' which these leaders have opened out. She has had no such vicarious love and sorrow compressed into one page as came to Hannah Martin; but passages in her life have come very near it, and made her heart grow tender and deep.

God has greatly blessed her in her chosen friends, not one of whom has been false to her through life; and, what is better still, her own sisters and brother and their families have become close friends as well as kindred to her, through the mutual practice of those sweet fine arts of considerate affection which bind families together in love. She has had her share of disappointment, but less than many; having set out in life with modest personal expectations, she has wholly escaped that 'melancholy embitterment which is the consequence of all excessive claim.' And that 'little perquisite' of the unmarried has grown so dear,—if, at this late period of life, any opportunity should come for entering on a different vocation, it would have to be very tempting indeed to make her willing to exchange it for her own. Nevertheless, she would say with Miss Martin that these good things would have been 'all short measure for the can,' but for the Seventh Measure; that has 'overflowed and filled up all the rest—good measure, pressed down and running over.'

Miss Martin is altogether lovely now. She has dropped the burden of mortality, and the beauty of the Lord is upon her, unveiled. She worked on in her old place till superseded by a great Board School; then, pensioned and honoured, she went

to live with her sister Martha in a sweet country village, helped in the school there as long as she was able, and there lived out her bright remaining years, sharing the love of her sister's children and grandchildren, and delighting in the beauty of woods and wild flowers with more than childhood's joy. She is buried in the churchyard there; and though the young are drifting away from that village, as from all the rest, I think it will be long before no lover is left to put fresh flowers on her grave.

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